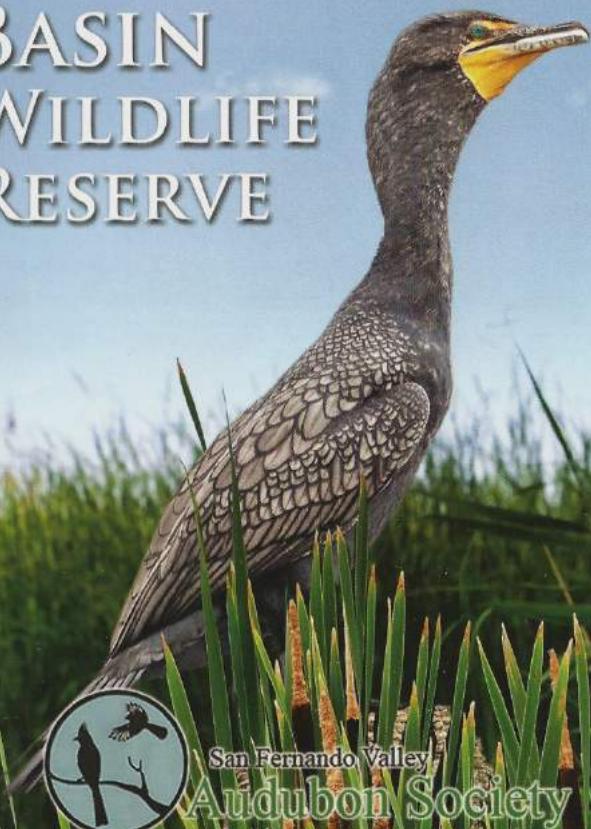


BIRDS OF THE
SEPULVEDA
BASIN
WILDLIFE
RESERVE



San Fernando Valley

Audubon Society

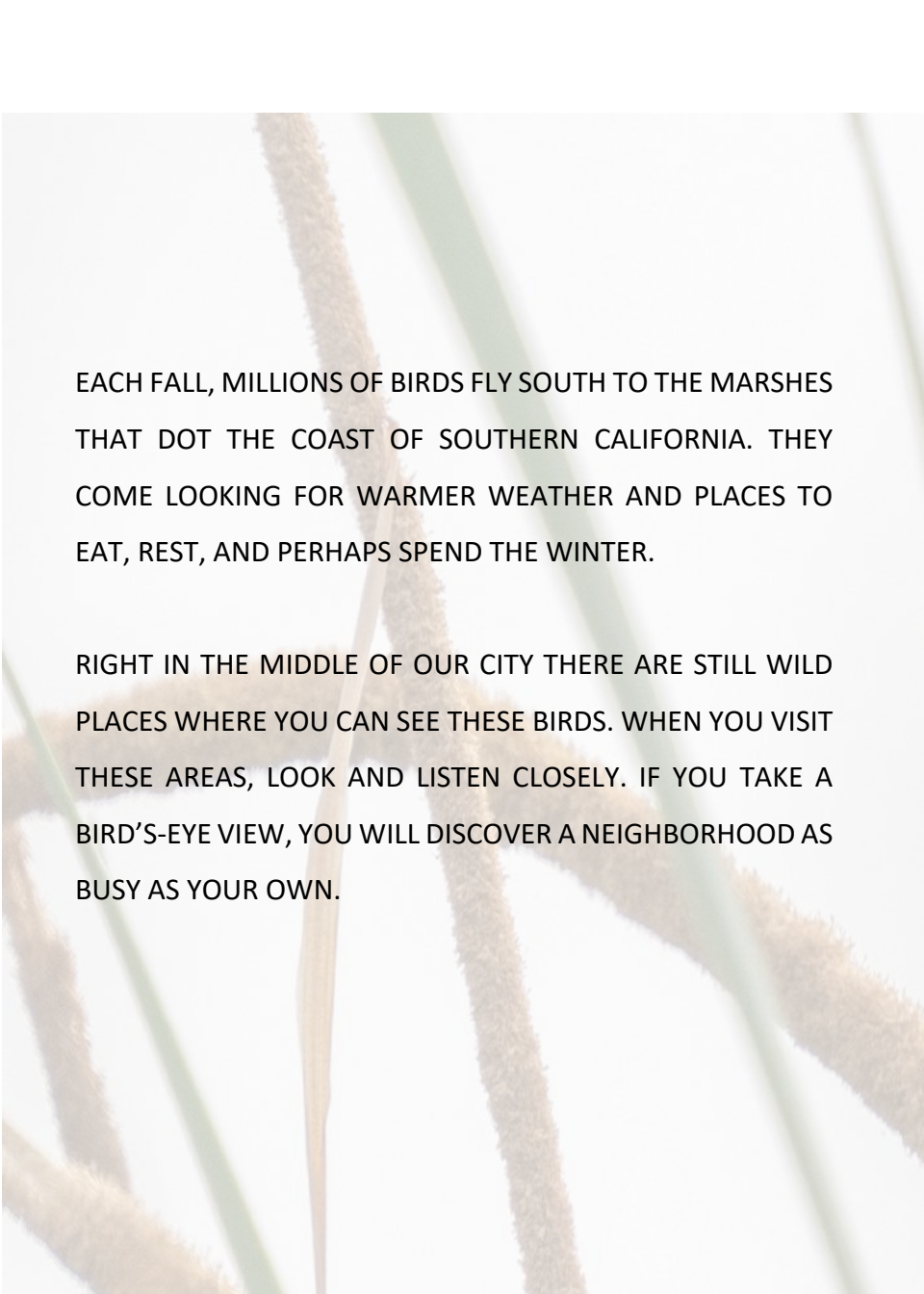
For Nature Education and the Conservation of Wildlife



This booklet is our gift to the children who participate in the Sepulveda Basin Environmental Education Program's class field trips to the wildlife reserve. It is given as a keepsake of their experience in nature. ©2022

San Fernando Valley Audubon Society
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The background of the page is a soft-focus photograph of marsh vegetation. It features several vertical stalks of reeds or grasses with long, thin, green blades and brown, fuzzy seed heads. The lighting is bright and even, creating a clean, natural aesthetic.

EACH FALL, MILLIONS OF BIRDS FLY SOUTH TO THE MARSHES THAT DOT THE COAST OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA. THEY COME LOOKING FOR WARMER WEATHER AND PLACES TO EAT, REST, AND PERHAPS SPEND THE WINTER.

RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF OUR CITY THERE ARE STILL WILD PLACES WHERE YOU CAN SEE THESE BIRDS. WHEN YOU VISIT THESE AREAS, LOOK AND LISTEN CLOSELY. IF YOU TAKE A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW, YOU WILL DISCOVER A NEIGHBORHOOD AS BUSY AS YOUR OWN.



Map provided courtesy of The River Project/Wildling Design

SEPULVEDA BASIN WILDLIFE RESERVE

One hundred years ago, the San Fernando Valley was a wide open plain, dotted with farms and crisscrossed by the Los Angeles River and its streams. The Valley's wetlands provided a haven for millions of birds traveling between breeding grounds in Canada and Alaska and wintering grounds in Mexico and Central America. Today the Valley is home to almost two million people, and most sections of the once-wild river have been enclosed in cement walls. But the Wildlife Reserve still provides important habitat: home, food, and shelter—for a variety of birds.

The Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Reserve is land that the City of Los Angeles has set aside for the protection of native animals and plants. This 108-acre refuge includes a lake, large open areas, and a flowing creek. Geese, ducks, and songbirds eat plants while other birds hunt for fish and small animals or eat insects.

More than two hundred species of birds have been seen at the Sepulveda Wildlife Reserve. This guide will introduce you to some of the more common ones.



Birds spend much of their day looking for food. In this guide, we have given names to some of the ways birds go about finding food in order to help you find and identify them. Ask yourself, “What is that bird doing?” and you will be on your way to knowing which bird it is.



Stabbers and Grabbers wade in shallow water, stretching out their long necks to grab fish with their long, pointed bills.



Surface Divers swim on top of the water, then dive to catch fish or pull up plants.



Plant-eating Swimmers eat from the surface of the water or on land to feed on plants and tiny animals.



Plunge Divers and a Surface Scooper. Plunge Divers spot a fish from the air, then dive headfirst into the water to catch it, while American White Pelicans stay on the surface and scoop up fish.



Shorebirds use their bills to find tiny animals near the edge of the water. The length of their bill determines whether they can reach below the surface and how deep.



Birds of Prey and Scavengers. Birds of Prey are hunters. They have strong claws with which to nab their prey and sharp, hooked beaks to help them eat it. Scavengers do not have strong claws and eat dead animals and other leftovers.



GENERALISTS such as gulls will eat almost anything that comes their way, from fish to french fries.

SPECIALISTS feed only on very specific things. We group them by the kinds of things they usually eat.

- **Seed eaters** have strong, short bills with which to crack open seeds.



- **Insect Eaters** eat only or almost only insects. Some eat insects in the air, others eat insects on plants or on trees.



- **Insect and Seed Eaters** eat insects in warmer seasons and mainly eat seeds when insects are scarce.



- **Insect and Fruit Eaters** eat mostly insects or berries and other fruit, depending on which is available.



STABBERS AND GRABBERS

These large wading birds have long, pointed bills which they use to spear their prey or to snatch it up. Their long legs help them to stay dry while they make their living stalking fish and other small animals in streams, marshes, and ponds.



Great Blue Heron, *Length 46"*. Standing still as a statue, the Great Blue Heron waits for a fish to swim by, then quickly strikes out with its long, pointed bill. It tosses the fish into the air, catches it, and swallows it headfirst.

Black-crowned Night Heron, *Length 25"*. The Night Heron often sleeps in the daytime and does most of its fishing around sunrise and sunset.



Green Heron, Length 18". Our smallest heron, the Green Heron hunts for fish from the water's edge. It can be hard to see as its coloring blends with the plants.



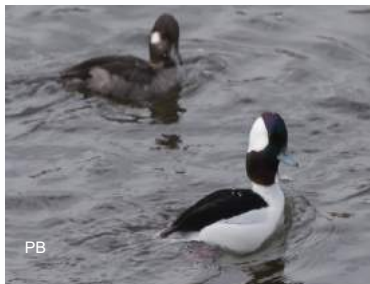
Great Egret, Length 39". The Great Egret slowly stalks its prey in shallow water. With its long neck, it can strike quickly to snatch up fish. Early members of the Audubon Society helped to pass laws to stop the killing of these graceful birds for their plumes.

Snowy Egret, Length 24". The Snowy Egret hunts for fish in shallow water. This member of the heron family may stand in one spot waiting for a fish, or it may walk along stirring up fish with its bright yellow feet.



SURFACE DIVERS

You must be quick to see these champion swimmers between their dives from the surface of the water. Sometimes, they come back to the surface surprisingly far from where they dove.



Bufflehead, Length 13½". The male Bufflehead has bold markings while the female is much plainer. Her drab colors help protect her and her eggs from hungry predators.

Ruddy Duck, Length 15". The Ruddy Duck is a diving duck that uses its large, webbed feet as paddles and its stiff tail as a rudder. It uses its bill to pull up plants and tiny animals from the soft mud at the bottom of a pond or lake.



Eared Grebe, Length 13". Eared Grebes dive to catch insects, fish, and other small animals. In the breeding season these birds develop beautiful, golden feathers over their ears. As is true of all birds, you cannot see their ears!

Pied-billed Grebe, Length 13”. This small grebe dives to catch fish and can sink low in the water to hide. The Pied-billed Grebe often catches surprisingly big fish.



Double-crested Cormorant, Length 32”. Cormorants are expert at fishing, using their webbed feet to move swiftly through the water. When they get back on land, they open their wings for them to dry. Cormorants nest in trees on the island of the wildlife lake.



PLANT-EATING SWIMMERS

These birds eat mostly plants on both land and in the water and some tiny animals. These geese and ducks cannot dive under the water. They sometimes dabble, feeding by tipping tail-up so they can reach deeper into the water. Their feet are webbed. Coots eat plants like these ducks and geese, but their feet are not webbed.



Canada Goose, *Length 25-45"*. The goose resembles a large duck. Some spend the entire year here, while others migrate north at nesting season, returning in the fall. When you hear their musical honking, search the sky for a flock of Canada Geese flying in a V-formation.

Mallard, *Length 23"*. Mallards are ducks that mainly eat plants. They also strain tiny animals from the water with their bills. In the springtime, look for the female Mallard with a line of ducklings swimming behind her.



You may hear the Mallards quacking.

American Wigeon, *Length 19"*. American Wigeons are another kind of duck. They are quick to sense danger and may sound a two-note, whistled alarm that warns other birds nearby. They eat underwater plants and graze on grassy places near shore.



American Coot, *Length 15½"*. American Coots communicate using loud squawks, body postures, and splashy runs across the water. They sometimes dive to pull up decomposing plants from the bottom of the lake. Try to get a look at their big, greenish feet and long toes.



PLUNGE DIVERS AND A SURFACE SCOOPER

Plunge divers search for fish while they fly. When they spot a likely meal, down they go, splash, headfirst into the water. Surface scooping is a unique feeding method used by American White Pelicans.

Osprey, Length 22". Ospreys are our only plunge diver that dives feet first. They search for fish by flying high over shallow water. They often hover briefly before diving feet first, to grab a fish. Sometimes you can see an Osprey's catch in its talons as the bird carries it back to a perch to carefully eat it.



Caspian Tern, Length 21". Terns are related to gulls, but their wings and bills are more pointed. The Caspian Tern is the largest of the terns. Its red bill is distinctive. When fishing, Caspian Terns hover and dive, often coming up with a fish in its beak.





Belted Kingfisher, Length 13".

The Belted Kingfisher searches for fish in lakes, lagoons, rivers, and ponds. Its call sounds like a loud rattle. Kingfishers can dive for fish from a perch, or hover and then dive headfirst to catch fish in their beak.

American White Pelican, Length 48–64", Wingspan 9'. These very large birds swim on the water's surface, dipping their bill into the water and scooping up fish in their pouch. As they cannot dive to catch fish, they often hunt cooperatively, lining up in a circle and driving the fish toward shallower water. Sometimes you can see the group all turn tail up to reach as deep as possible.



SHOREBIRDS

Shorebirds spend most of the time along shores, walking on land or in very shallow water. Their food is insects and tiny animals, which they find on and in mud, soil, or sand. Their beaks have different sizes and shapes. Their bodies and legs also have different sizes and shapes. These differences allow feeding at different depths in the mud, so they avoid competition for food. These birds rarely visit the Wildlife Lake because of the steep slope of the shoreline.



Black-necked Stilt, *Length 14"*. The Black-necked Stilt searches for food in water that is too deep for birds with shorter legs. It uses its thin, black bill to pick insects and snails out of the water. Their very long, pink legs are why they are called "stilts."

Greater Yellowlegs, *Length 14"*. This large shorebird has very long legs, a long neck, and a long beak. It walks across mudflats and marshes with a distinctive high-stepping gait, occasionally running to chase small prey.





Spotted Sandpiper, *Length 7"*. These are smaller shorebirds with medium length beaks. In winter when these birds visit California, they do not have spots. They have a distinctive habit of teetering, bobbing their tail and rear up and down. They eat small animals, mostly insects.

Killdeer, *Length 10"*. Named for its noisy call, Killdeer spend their hunting time walking along the ground, stopping, and walking again. They eat insects and other small animals from the surface with their relatively short beaks.



BIRDS OF PREY AND SCAVENGERS

Birds of Prey are the mighty hunters of the bird world. They are known for their powerful talons (claws) and their hooked beaks. The talons are used for catching and holding their prey, and the bills are for tearing apart the meat. Scavengers eat animals that have already died as well as other leftovers.



Red-tailed Hawk, *Length 22"*. Soaring overhead or peering down from atop a high perch, Red-tailed Hawks search the ground for rodents and reptiles. The young hawks are fully grown when they leave the nest, but their tails do not become red until they are two years old.

Cooper's Hawk, *Length 14-20"*. A crow-sized hawk of the woodlands, it feeds mostly on birds. It hunts by stealth, approaching its prey through dense cover and then pouncing with rapid, powerful flight. The females are larger than the males.





American Kestrel, Length 10½”. Kestrels are known for their speed and agility in flight. While hunting, kestrels can hover over a spot on the ground by flying into the wind at the same speed at which the wind blows. Kestrels catch small mammals, small birds, reptiles, and insects.

Turkey Vulture, Length 27”. Turkey Vultures are scavengers. Unlike most birds, Turkey Vultures have a good sense of smell which helps them locate their food in flight. Turkey Vultures hold their wings up in a shallow “V” shape and rock back and forth as they soar.



GENERALISTS

Generalists eat many kinds of food. They tend to have a typical bird shape. Their beaks have shapes that work as general “tools” for getting and eating food.



Great-tailed Grackle, *Length 15”*. This bird found its way to Southern California recently. It eats almost everything, from insects and small animals to plants and garbage. It also steals food from other birds. The male is larger and glossy black, while the female is smaller and brown.

American Crow, *Length 17½”*. The crow’s strong beak helps it to eat a wide variety of foods. It is sociable and smart. The males and females look alike. Listen for its loud “caw.” Do you see them in your neighborhood?





Western Gull, Length 25".

This is the largest of the gulls that visit the Wildlife Lake. Gulls have webbed feet which help them swim. Western Gulls are carnivores that eat many kinds of fish and other creatures from the animal world. They also eat carrion and natural garbage. Unfortunately,

they sometimes eat plastic and other food wrappers that can kill them. How we discard our food wrappers and other trash is important.

Acorn Woodpecker, Length 9".

Although they are omnivores (eat many different things), their diet is largely half acorns and half insects. They harvest acorns in fall and store them in holes they drill in trees. In winter when food is scarce, they can come back to their store of acorns for a meal and eat them. Maybe you will hear its loud call, "wake-up, wake-up."



SPECIALISTS

Birds that are specialists excel at eating one or two kinds of food. They can rarely eat other things because their beak is a specialized tool. These bird groups are specialists.

SEEDEATERS

Most seedeaters crack seeds open with their heavy beaks. Others swallow seeds whole.



Black-headed Grosbeak, Length 7". Grosbeaks are named for their very thick beaks. Their thick beaks are a good example of a seed-cracking tool. This bird leaves our area and migrates south for the winter.

House Finch, Length 6". House Finches also have thick beaks that help them to crack seeds. They hardly ever eat anything other than seeds and other plant material. The males are brown with bright red or orange on their heads and chests. The females have brown stripes which make them harder for predators to see.



Lesser Goldfinch, *Length 4½"*. This little seedeater has bright yellow feathers on its underside and dark ones on the top side. The name goldfinch is for their yellow color.



Mourning Dove, *Length 12"*. Named for the sad sound of its cooing, this dove's beak is not designed for cracking seeds. It swallows them whole and lets a part of their stomach, called gizzard, grind them up. You may see Mourning Doves throughout the year in most city neighborhoods.



INSECT EATERS

Insects make up almost the entire diet of these birds.



Common Yellowthroat, *Length 5"*. The Common Yellowthroat belongs to a group of insect-eating birds called warblers. Yellowthroats live in reeds and tall grass near water, where they pick off insects from the plants. The male looks like he is wearing a black mask with white trim.

Black Phoebe, *Length 6¾"*. The Black Phoebe belongs to a group of birds called flycatchers. From its perch on a branch, post, or fence, the phoebe darts out to snap up a flying insect, often returning to the same perch to eat it.



Barn Swallow, *Length 6¾"*. These graceful flyers sweep back and forth hunting for flying insects. Very fast flyers, they capture the insects in the air while continuing to fly.

Barn Swallows arrive here from far south when the temperatures are rising in the spring and insects are hatching.

Cassin's Kingbird, Length 8½". Like most flycatchers, the Cassin's Kingbird mainly eats insects, but occasionally they eat fruit such as elderberries.



Nuttall's Woodpecker, Length 7½". This small woodpecker eats insects found on oaks, cottonwoods, and willows. They use their strong beak to probe into tree bark to reach insects. Occasionally they eat fruit including elderberries and blackberries. You may see all these trees and plants when you visit the Wildlife Reserve.

INSECT AND SEED EATERS

This group of birds mostly eats insects and seeds. Their beaks are thick and strong for eating seeds.



Song Sparrow, Length 6¼". Song Sparrows live in bushy vegetation near water. The female sings only before nesting, but the male sings all year round. Although they have a strong, seedeater's bill, Song Sparrows also feed on insects.

White-crowned Sparrow, Length 7". Often you will hear a White-crowned Sparrow singing before you see it. Young birds have a brown crown (top of the head), not white! In Southern California, this sparrow may be spotted from late September through April.



California Towhee, *Length 9"*. An almost all brown bird often found



in bushy places, the California Towhee eats both seeds and insects from the ground. They often jump forward and scoot back to move the fallen leaves that hide their food. The males and females look similar.

Red-winged Blackbird, *Length 8¾"*. Spring is nesting time for these and most birds. That is when the male Red-winged Blackbird shows off his bright red shoulder patches. He sings and displays the red patches to defend his breeding territory and to attract a mate. The females are more camouflaged and do not have the red patches. They mostly eat seeds in winter, but they largely eat insects in the warmer seasons. Why do you think the males and females look different from each other?



INSECT AND FRUIT EATERS

Both insects, berries and other fruits are important foods for these birds, with insects being more important in the warmer months.

Northern Mockingbird, *Length 10"*. The mockingbird mainly eats insects and fruit. They can imitate songs of many different birds as well as other sounds. Sometimes they sing all night long! These noisy birds often lift their tails and wave them around.



California Thrasher, *Length 12"*. Another bird that imitates other birds, the thrasher also mainly eats insects and fruits. It uses its long beak to thrash leaves, turning them over to find food underneath.





Western Bluebird, Length 7". This small bird watches for prey like insects and worms from a low perch, then drops to the ground to eat them. In winter it eats berries. Bluebirds make their nests in old woodpecker nest holes in trees. When those are not available, bluebirds may use a nest box made by humans.

Allen's Hummingbird, Length 3¾". These tiny birds are amazing flyers. They can hover or fly straight up, forwards, backwards and even upside down! Hummingbirds have



very thin bills that they use to sip nectar from flowers. They also catch tiny, flying insects. When sipping nectar, they often bring pollen from one flower to the next, pollinating them.



Yellow-rumped Warbler, Length 5.5". Most kinds of warblers migrate farther south in the winter to find enough insects to eat. The Yellow-rumped Warbler spends the winter in our area because they can eat berries as well as insects. They are one of the most

common little birds you might find here in the wintertime

CHECKLIST

Stabbers and Grabbers

- Great Blue Heron
- Black-crowned Night Heron
- Green Heron
- Great Egret
- Snowy Egret



Surface Divers

- Bufflehead
- Ruddy Duck
- Eared Grebe
- Pied-billed Grebe
- Double-crested Cormorant



Plant-eating Swimmers

- Canada Goose
- Mallard
- American Wigeon
- American Coot



Plunge Divers and

A Surface Scooper

- Osprey
- Caspian Tern
- Belted Kingfisher
- American White Pelican



Shorebirds

- Black-necked Stilt
- Greater Yellowlegs
- Spotted Sandpiper
- Killdeer



Birds of Prey and Scavengers

- Red-tailed Hawk
- Cooper's Hawk
- American Kestrel
- Turkey Vulture



GENERALISTS

- Great-tailed Grackle
- American Crow
- Western Gull
- Acorn Woodpecker



SPECIALISTS:

Seedeaters

- Black-headed Grosbeak
- House Finch
- Lesser Goldfinch
- Mourning Dove



Insect Eaters

- Common Yellowthroat
- Black Phoebe
- Barn Swallow
- Cassin's Kingbird
- Nuttall's Woodpecker



Insect and Seed Eaters

- Song Sparrow
- White-crowned Sparrow
- California Towhee
- Red-winged Blackbird



Insect and Fruit Eaters

- Northern Mockingbird
- California Thrasher
- Western Bluebird
- Allen's Hummingbird
- Yellow-rumped Warbler



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The mission of San Fernando Valley Audubon Society is to preserve and enhance the natural habitat within our territory, to increase the public's awareness and appreciation of bird life and the natural environment, and to create a social environment that encourages individual development and participation. We have endeavored to fulfill some of these goals by the publishing and distribution of this new version of "Birds of the Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Reserve."

This booklet was originally published by National Audubon Society. San Fernando Valley Audubon Society has revised it to reflect changes to the Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Reserve and the birds seen there and added color photographs to illustrate them. Project managers for this re-publication were Muriel Kotin and Carolyn Oppenheimer, former Sepulveda Basin Environmental Education Program (SBEEP) chairs. Rebecca LeVine edited their work and vastly improved the layout. Suggestions from Barbara Heidemann and general support from Pat Bates and the current SBEEP chair Paula Orlovich were essential.

We are grateful for the efforts and vision of Melanie Ingalls and Daniel Kahane of National Audubon who created the original booklet and its structure.

Photographs from our local photographers were crucial to this update. Their generous contributions allowed us to illustrate the birds in color. The initials on the photographs are coded as follows:

- GP** Gary Park
- DB** David Barton
- PB** Pat Bates
- NK** Nurit Katz
- AK** Allan Kotin

San Fernando Valley Audubon offers special thanks to the individuals and organizations that have generously provided funds to make SBEEP possible.

We thank our partner, the Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains for so ably organizing the 30 annual SBEEP field trips at the Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Reserve. This booklet is given to all the students who participate in these field trips to keep and share with their families.



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