



HUMMIN'

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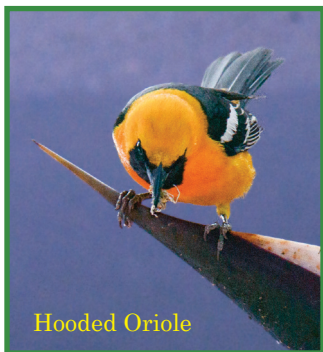
Palos Verdes/South Bay Audubon Society

Vol. XLII #5 Aug./Sept. 2020

Migration

By Jess Morton

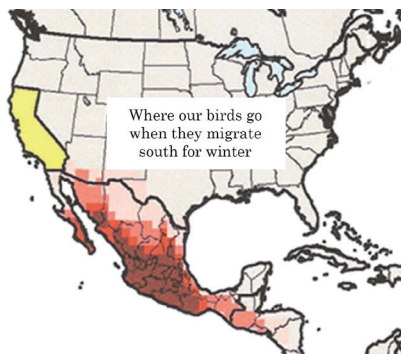
Every bird is affected by the changing seasons. Some can adapt their behavior to changed conditions and may remain where they are. For the others, the migrants, they must find an alternate home to the one where they have spent the breeding season. They move, and now their fall migration will grace us again as they travel between their breeding grounds and where they will complete the rest of their annual life cycle. So, where do they go? It depends on the bird.



Hooded Oriole

One large group of migrants is typified by our own Hooded Oriole, like this one that nested in my yard last spring. They breed in California and move south for the winter months. These migrant species don't all go to the same place, of

course, as each will have its own habitat requirements. However, as a group, bird banding over the last century has let us track where they go, Mexico and Central America for the most part, especially along the Pacific Coast. In the map below, the heaviest concentrations of migrants



are shown by the darkest hues.

Southward migration does not necessarily mean south of the border. For birds like the White-crowned Sparrow, the



White-crowned Sparrow

Palos Verdes-South Bay region is south enough to meet their needs. These are birds that have bred as far north as the Arctic and as far upward in elevation in our mountain ranges such that they can find the

colder climate they need for breeding success. Our most common winter season warbler, the yellow-rumped warbler, is another that will be here today and gone next summer.

There are other migrations, too. After the breeding season, Heermann's Gulls and shearwaters move northward, the latter often in huge numbers. Consider the case of Sooty Shearwater which breeds around Australia and New Zealand. They are California's most abundant bird while they are passing our coastline heading north on

their annual circuit of the Pacific Ocean. Another odd migrant is the Phainopepla. These birds often migrate westward from nesting grounds in the desert to the coast, sometimes breeding in both places in a single year.



Phainopepla

From the Editor



The Climate Crisis

By Jess Morton

It is unconscionable that America has not taken decisive action to minimize the environmental damage climate change is bringing to our planet. The threat has been well understood for decades, even though the magnitude of the harm to human societies cannot yet be predicted. What is known is that the dislocations caused will range from devastating for some to catastrophic for all. And yet, nothing significant is being done at the federal level, except in negative terms, and only a few states have acted on what climate science deems necessary.

We all know why this is so. Forty years ago, a healthy environment, for decades a bipartisan undertaking, was turned into a politically divisive matter by a political elite that saw this as part of a grand strategy to take control of the political arena. Issue after issue was converted into us-versus-them bones of

contention, largely aided by the FCC dropping the Fairness Doctrine, which required TV and radio stations to give equal time to opposing views. It was a recipe for future ills.

The role of science in decision making was relegated to third tier. Economic judgements had always had primacy, but now science dropped far below partisanship in importance. For the climate crisis, this was a guarantee that no action beyond the purely cosmetic would be undertaken. The full effects of climate change were seen to be far in the future, and, therefore, no political price would be paid by the current class of divisive politicians for being dismissive of the scientific realities involved.

The same cannot be said of covid-19. Here was yet another issue of common concern hijacked for political gain. Ignore the science, and the problem goes away. Which, of course, it doesn't. Responsible handling of the pandemic has been a test case for that kind of politics, and zero has already been awarded. Everyone can see the societal cost this time. And it is tragic.

Will we learn anything from this? Let us hope that the recently released *Congressional Action Plan for a Clean Energy Economy*

and a Healthy and Just America is a beneficiary of the lessons we are learning all too painfully from the pandemic. The plan "calls on Congress to build a clean energy economy that values workers, centers environmental justice, and is prepared to meet the challenges of the climate crisis. With the devastating consequences of climate change growing at home and abroad, the United States must harness the technological innovation of the moonshot, the creativity of our entrepreneurs, the strength of our workers, and the moral force of a nation endeavoring to establish justice for all."

We will need nothing less than that. It is time for Americans to stop acting like a bunch of spoiled third graders in a sandbox. Especially ours, so full of quicksand.



WHO WERE THEY?

William Gambel

by Vincent Lloyd

After the annexation of Texas in 1845, the Mexican Cession in 1848 and the entrance of California into the Union in 1850, the United States had added vast new western provinces to its domain. In 1852 John Cassin (see Hummin', April/May 2020) published the first account of the birds of the Far West in *Illustrations of the Birds of California, Texas, Oregon, British and Russian North America*. Important for California and New Mexico were the specimens brought back from an expedition to the West by William Gambel (1823-1849). In a letter from 1845, Cassin wrote, "Eureka! — Gambel is here with his California birds and others — not very many, but some of the most magnificent specimens I ever saw — he has four new species... decidedly the gem of the collection is a most superb specimen of *Leptostoma longicauda*, a beautiful cuckoo-like bird which walks on the ground... He and I have done little else for two afternoons & evenings — last evening 'till 12 o'clock & now I am going to meet him again."

Even Cassin, who never saw the living bird, was entranced by the Roadrunner.

William Gambel was the first naturalist to spend an extended period collecting over a wide

area in California. It must have been a thrilling opportunity for a young man. His tragedy was that he was fated to die here.

It all came about because Gambel had the good fortune to meet the great biologist Thomas Nuttall, who previously had spent a couple of months in San Diego in 1836. Gambel's father (also named Willam) was an Irish immigrant who settled in Philadelphia after the death of his first wife. He remarried in

18, young William decided to head out West by himself.

Travelling from Philadelphia to Los Angeles was not an easy undertaking in 1841. California and New Mexico were still Mexican territories. The railroad was 27 years in the future. Starting out in March, he headed to Independence, Missouri, where he joined a group of travellers on the Santa Fe Trail. By June, he was in Santa Fe, where he spent a couple of months collecting.

Here he discovered the Mountain Chickadee (*Poecile gambeli*), as well as the oak tree that now bears his name. Continuing on the Old Spanish Trail through Utah, he came upon the delightful Gambel's Quail (*Callipepla gambelii*). In November he arrived in Los Angeles. He headed up the coast to

Monterey, collecting along the way. Here his money ran out, so he hired on as a clerk on a U.S. Navy ship where he spent the next couple of years roaming the Pacific. He sailed to Mexico, Hawaii, Tahiti, the Marquesas Islands, and at last Chile. In March 1845 he left Chile, sailed around Cape Horn, and returned to Philadelphia, bringing with him his collection of specimens.

On his return, he became something of a hero and got to meet not only Cassin but also Adolphus Heermann, Spencer Baird, and even the aging Audubon. He described his discoveries in the Proceedings of

(See Gambel continued on p.5)



1822 and William Jr. was born the next year. The father died of pneumonia when young William was nine years old. His mother became a schoolteacher to support the family. She encouraged the boy, who did well in school. His interest in natural history no doubt led him to the Academy of Natural Science in Philadelphia, where Nuttall had taken up work after his return from California. Nuttall took the youth under his wing. William accompanied Nuttall on collecting trips to the Carolinas, Massachusetts, and Maine, during which Nuttall must have enthralled the youth with tales of far-off lands. So it was that when he was going on

BIRDS OF THE PENINSULA

May – June 2020

by Vincent Lloyd

In May, the spring wave of migration slowed to a trickle. The last **White-crowned Sparrow** was seen on May 12, the last **Townsend's Warbler** on May 16, the last **Western Wood Pewee** on June 1, and the last **Wilson's Warbler** on June 2. At Harbor Park, a **Warbling Vireo** lingered into July.

May saw the northward migration of **Sooty Shearwaters** reach a peak. On May 25 at Pt. Vicente, Jonathan Nakai counted 100 shearwaters per minute passing by. Bobby T. spotted the first **Elegant Tern** at Harbor Park on May 18; Dave Moody found another on May 27 at AES Wetland. A **White-faced Ibis** visited Harbor Park on May 21 (Johnny Ivanov).

Among unusual summer visitors was the **Common Loon** that visited Harbor Park on May 5. A group of 30 **Long-billed Dowitchers** were at the Los Angeles River on May 8 (Meryl Edelstein). The intrepid team of Jeff Boyd and Dick Barth found 6 female **Wilson's Phalaropes** at the river on June 14. Jeff and Dick found three **Neotropic Cormorants**

there on June 28. The river also hosted a group of 8 **American White Pelicans** from late May through June. Dick came upon a group of 20 **Black Skimmers** on June 28.

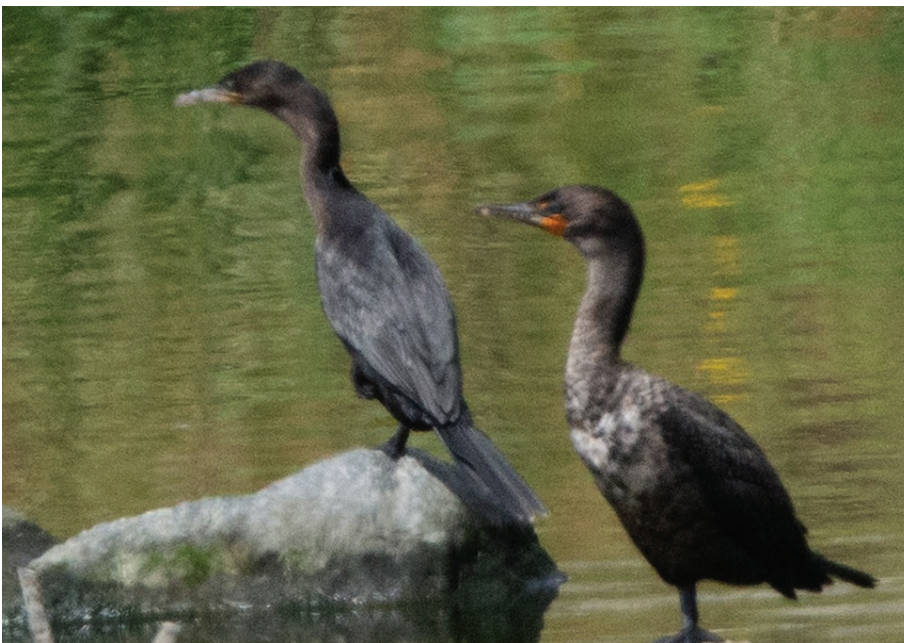
Although it lacks an English name, the **Northern Parula** is undeniably colorful.



Northern Parula:
Photo Jonathan Nakai

Many birders saw a pair of them, discovered by Anonymous eBirder at Ernie Howlett Park, during the last two weeks of June. Birders likewise thronged to see the lost **Red-eyed Vireo** at Harbor Park on May 11 (Bobby T) as well as the **Tennessee Warbler** at the Madrona Marsh Nature Center on May 19 (Kevin Kosidlak). Jonathan found a handsome male **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** at Malaga Dunes on May 27.

The **Turkey Vulture** spotted by Marvin Nelson at Harbor Park on May 12 was a somewhat unusual summer visitor. The family of three **Acorn Woodpeckers** continued at Roosevelt Cemetery (Dave Moody). Locally endangered **Cactus Wrens** appeared at Ocean Trails Reserve, 3 Sisters Reserve, Tramonto Trail, Alta Vicente, and



Neotropic Cormorant

Photo: Kim Moore



Red-eyed Vireo
Photo: Kim Moore

Pt. Vicente. **Rufous-crowned Sparrows** were seen at Pt. Vicente and Forrestal Preserve. Mike Coulson espied two **Phainopeplas** on May 17 at Harbor Park. Finally, the exotic Eurasian **Tree Sparrow** was still hanging out in Wilmington Marina on May 24, having been there for at least three years.

The author seeks reports from readers about unusual birds you see in our area (the area west of the Los Angeles River and south of I-105.) Send them to stephenvincentlloyd@gmail.com.

(continued from Gambel, p.3)

the Natural Academy of Sciences under the title Remarks on birds observed in Upper California with descriptions of new species. Meanwhile, he had to earn a living, so he enrolled in medical school, getting his degree in 1848. Whereupon he got married.

By this time, gold had been discovered in California, which was now part of the United States. Gambel saw an opportunity for a young physician and headed for California once more, hoping to send for his wife after getting settled. He left Philadelphia in April 1849 with a friend, Isaac Wistar, who led an expedition that set out from Independence. Wistar, however, was in too much of a hurry for Gambel's taste — he needed time for collecting. So Gambel joined a slower wagon train. This decision turned out to be a mistake. Misfortune dogged this group. A drought left little forage for the animals. Wagons were lost; most of the livestock died; by the time they reached California in October, early snows had closed the passes — a situation ominously reminiscent of the ill-fated Donner party of three years before. By December,

a small party, including Gambel, managed to get over the pass and down to the mining town of Rose's Bar on the Yuba River in Sierra County. Here Gambel found a typhoid epidemic raging in the camp. Gambel did his best to treat the sick, but 1849 was a couple of generations before medicine embraced the germ theory of disease. On December 13th, Gambel himself succumbed, only 26 years of age, having lived a short, but exciting and productive life.

Gambel left a legacy that includes four California specialties: the California Thrasher, the Oak Titmouse, Nuttall's Woodpecker, and a funny little bird he called the "wren-tit." Anyone who has ever tried to observe or photograph this little fellow will appreciate Gambel's description:

"It was difficult to be seen, and kept in such places as I have described, close to the ground; eluding pursuit by diving into the thickest bunches of weeds and tall grass, or tangled bushes, and uttering its grating Wren-like notes whenever approached. But if quietly watched it may be seen, when searching for insects, mounting the twigs and dried

stalks of grass sideways, jerking its long tail, and holding it erect like a Wren, which, with its short wings in such a position, it much resembles."



Illustrations: *Gambel's Quails* (p.3) and *Wrentit* (above) by Wm. E. Hitchcock, from *Illustrations of the Birds of California, Texas, Oregon, British and Russian North America* by John Cassin. Public domain.



Blue Grosbeak

The Upside of Covid-19

By Evi Meyer

On two recent birding trips a couple of my friends and I wanted to explore some of the, at least partially, re-opened state parks in Los Angeles and Ventura counties. The COVID-19 restrictions were loosening up somewhat, and we were hoping to enjoy some solitude in those places that would normally draw a big onslaught of summer visitors. Not only did we do that, but we had some pretty remarkable bird sightings as well.

All of us have felt the downsides and restrictions into which the COVID-19 pandemic has catapulted us for quite a while now. We live by the “Safer at Home” mantra, and if we have to go out we wear masks and stay six feet away from other people. It’s the only way we can stay safe at least temporarily. That’s

why visiting wide open spaces seemed like such a treat, even if we still had our masks and social distancing in place. We were delighted to find out that the wildlife had not been affected by the pandemic at all. To the contrary, many furry and feathered animals that used to stay away from wilderness parks frequented and often overrun by people had taken advantage of their undisturbed landscapes.

Our first stop was Malibu Creek State Park. We were at the gate at 8am and found easy parking, even though only one lot was open. It was eerie how nobody else was at this popular summer destination. We strapped on our gear and headed towards the creek. But before we even got there we were stopped in our tracks by a beautiful, melodious bird song. We were debating what bird this could be, when it flew to a bush only a few feet away from us.

This was the closest sighting of a male Blue Grosbeak that any of us had ever had. This bird is normally only seen at a distance, as it flies away when it feels disturbed. But our quiet presence did not seem to be a threat and the bird just kept on singing until the missus showed up as well. This was like starting a meal with dessert!

And as if this wasn’t enough of a great start already, we were still completely absorbed by the grosbeak song and sighting when we heard some really loud, harsh notes and whistles. This one we were pretty confident we knew, and sure enough, a Yellow-breasted Chat landed in close proximity to the grosbeak. This is a bird that is usually heard before being seen, and if seen at all, then at a distance and half-hidden by vegetation. What was going on here? Why were these normally shy birds so easy to observe? Could it be that the “Stay at Home” order for us was a blessing for them?

As we progressed with our walk along the creek we all agreed that this was a really “birdy” day. We had lots of House Wrens jumping in and out of their cavities and serenading us from their perches. There were many Yellow Warblers flying by like little yellow darts, and even some Lazuli Buntings showed off their plumage, exploding in color.

After about an hour and a half of this birding bliss hikers

gradually started to show up along our trail and the birds became quieter. By noon groups of teenagers rushed up to the Rock Pool to jump from a high rock into the pool of water below. Even the family of Canada Geese that was



California Thrasher

hanging out at that pool was getting a little annoyed by the noise and wandered off. So did we. The difference in comfort level of the birds vis-à-vis humans at the beginning and the end of our trip was a stark reminder of how our presence impacts everything around us.

The following week we headed out for an early start at Point Mugu State Park. Like Malibu Creek State Park, this park was only partially open. Some campground sites were taken, but the people

who camped there were still drinking their morning coffees and warming up from a night in their tent. So we had the trail to ourselves again, at least until the first mountain bikers showed later on.

This was enough time for us to have some pretty amazing birding experiences. Before we even saw a Northern Mockingbird that morning, we had a California Thrasher sing on a high, open perch and stay there for quite some time. Around the bend a gorgeous Black-headed Grosbeak was doing some intense preening, while warming up in the morning sun. A little further up the trail we heard the famous “chi-CA-go” which emanated from a covey of California Quail in the grassland next to the trail.

While we saw the adults rushing between bushes, we did not see what we believe were a number of young “quaillets” vocalizing in clumps of grass. The highpoint of this trip was a family of American Kestrels with three young perched and begging for food from their parents. It had been rather difficult to

see even an individual kestrel lately, and so we were thrilled that at least this family seemed to be doing well.

By now mountain bikers were coming up the trail in pretty good numbers. One of them told us about a baby Puma he had just seen close to the trail we were on. The parent(s) must have been in proximity, too. Our experience with birds in undisturbed areas seemed to extend to mammals as well here. It really does not seem to take much for wildlife to expand its territory.

It was noon by now and time for us to turn around and head out to lunch. Along the way back we were looking for



Black-headed Grosbeak



American Kestrel

only to combat the SARS-CoV-2 virus, but also to renew our country to the point where “the common good” lives up to its full potential and does include nature and its wildlife. We have a virus to conquer and huge societal problems to tackle, but the value of the natural world and its profound influence on people and their health has to be part of the equation as well and cannot be ignored. If we do this right, there could indeed be

the Pumas, but did not see them. Perhaps it was getting too warm for them as well. As a consolation prize we were escorted out of the canyon by several cohorts of screeching Nanday Parakeets, which had taken up residence in the canyon a long time ago.

On the way home we talked about how animals will quickly adjust to changing conditions, especially if they are beneficial to them. Unfortunately, in our pre-COVID-19 lives, we have encroached on more and more open spaces and often reduced or destroyed much needed habitats. Among many other things, the current pandemic has brought a temporary halt to that. More importantly, though, it also gives us a chance to think ahead to what changes are needed not

for a new start found in the COVID-19 pandemic. In the meantime, let’s put on those masks and get some take-out from one of the delicious ice cream parlors



Nanday Parakeet

close by. That way life could at least be a little sweeter for a while.



Wrap up after the rigors of a day out birding with friends Bonnie and Jess. Ginger’s!



The Physics of Flight

At the triple point where wind, cliff and breaker
imply the wild sway of their native alliance
the analyzing eye of the black oystercatcher
zeroes the place to insert her crimson probe.

Bent through the lens of the petals' spellbinding lobe
the solitary bee sees the orchid's stamen
as the one possible line of convergence.

The pressure of darkness falling into their cave
explodes the blind bats out on compressions of light.

Unaware that two objects cannot coexist
the white-throated swift hurtles at tall rock
where a fissure must open to accept it.



The scarlet-faced hummingbird chasing the hawk
surrenders to Newton's laws no limitation
certain the momentum of his charge is nerved
in the fury of his acceleration

Symmetries of the Sun's red coming and going
may be gauged in the pulsating thick strings
of the red-winged blackbirds coming and going.

Whenever one measures the physics of flight
who is more changed, the observer or the observed?

From Shorelines, by Jess Morton

MEET, LEARN, RESTORE, ENJOY

Chapter Calendar

Please note that all events will be subject to the restrictions in place at the time due to covid-19.

Visit our website at pvsb-audubon.org for cancellations, meeting location, or live streaming instructions.

EVENTS

September 15th, at 7PM at the Madrona Marsh Nature Center or online via Zoom, **Phil Barnes** will show us “**How Flies the Albatross**” in a talk that considers the flight mechanics of dynamic soaring, a mode of maintaining or gaining altitude from horizontal wind gusts, something the albatross uses to fly huge distances searching for food for itself and its family. Phil’s career in flight performance analysis and computer modeling at Northrop Grumman spans more than three decades, and he has made two Antarctica trips photographing and studying the flight dynamics of these huge birds.

FIELD TRIPS

Aug. 2nd and 16th, and Sep. 6th and 20th. First and third Sunday bird walks at 8 at Harbor Park. Meet in the parking lot above the ranger station, located between Anaheim Street and Vermont Avenue.

August 12th and September 9th. Second Wednesday bird walk at Madrona Marsh, led by Bob Shanman

August 9th and September 13th. Second Sunday bird walks at the South Coast Botanic Garden led by David Quadhamer. Meet in the parking lot at 8. There is an entrance fee to the garden for people who are not SCBG Foundation members.

August 16th and September 20th. Third Sunday bird walks at Ballona Wetlands led by Bob Shanman. See Bob’s website <[www.wbu.com/redondo beach](http://www.wbu.com/redondo%20beach)> for details.

Every Tuesday morning: Tour de Torrance with Tommye Hite. Meet in the Madrona Marsh Nature Center parking lot at 8:30.

Harbor Park, Madrona Marsh and most birding locations are open, but restrictions may apply. Please follow the guidelines at each location when there for your next birding expedition. The South Coast Botanic Garden is open by appointment. For tickets go to: <<https://southcoastbotanicgarden.org/buy-garden-entrance-tickets/>>



Observations

By Ann Dalkey

Life

is brutal, beautiful, awesome, and complex.

While conducting a butterfly survey, I spotted a red-tailed hawk soaring above the bluff above the ocean. When it landed on

a knob high on the cliff, I could see it was a juvenile. After a few moments, it swooped down to the lower bluff face to quickly grab a snack. It lifted off the ground and then landed on a fence for a few moments.



This short-lived event signaled the end of one life and a tasty snack for another. As I continued looking for butterflies, I thought about what it meant, this small moment of life in the wild.

The Palos Verdes/South Bay Audubon Society and the National Audubon Society, of which PV/SB Audubon is the local chapter, are dedicated to the understanding and preservation of our natural heritage. Within the framework of National Audubon Society policies, we seek and implement ways to preserve indigenous flora and fauna, especially that of our local area, and provide educational services to the region's communities with respect to birds, wildlife, ecology and conservation.

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Photos by the author unless stated otherwise.

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THIRD TUESDAY PROGRAMS

7 PM AT MADRONA MARSH

3201 PLAZA DEL AMO, TORRANCE

Join us online
(or possibly
in person)
for the next
PV Audubon
program ----



September 15th, at 7 PM, flight scientist and bird photographer Phil Barnes, in a program titled “How Flies the Albatross,” describes the physics and life history of these fabulous birds.



Palos Verdes/South Bay Audubon Society
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Time-sensitive
material
Please deliver promptly

AVIANTICS

By Evi Meyer

