



# HUMMIN'

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Palos Verdes/South Bay Audubon Society

Vol. XLIV #1 January/February 2022

## “Birding in Costa Rica,”

opens our 2022 series of on-line (and in-person, we hope) programs. On Tuesday, January 18th, at 7 via Zoom,



**Randy Harwood** will show photos from a number of the spectacular places in that country, including San Jose Province, Savegre Valley, Cano Negro in the Arenal Conservation Area, Guanacaste Province and the La Selva Biological Station. Of course the majority of the photos will be of the many wonderful birds and some other animals found there.

A retired dentist and clinical instructor, Randy is a board member of the Palos Verdes Peninsula Land Conservancy, chairs the Stewardship Committee, leads nature walks and monitors the endangered California Gnatcatcher and the threatened Coastal Cactus Wren for the Conservancy. He is a certified California Naturalist, has pursued underwater and wildlife photography, and was president of the Los Angeles Underwater Photographic Society for over 20 years.



## “Birds Control Pests--and Save Farmers Millions,”

will be presented on Tuesday, February 15th, at 7, via Zoom by **Greg Breining**. Across America and beyond, farmers and vineyard and orchard owners are enlisting wild birds--from raptors to songbirds--in a sustainable battle against pests. They erect nest boxes, install raptor perches, or plant inviting native cover--all of which offer less expensive natural pest control than other traditional methods and avoid the use of pesticides.



Greg writes about travel, science, and nature for Living Bird, National Wildlife, Audubon, The New York Times, Pheasants Forever and many other

publications. His books include the travel memoir *Wild Shore: Exploring Lake Superior by Kayak*, and *Paddle North: Canoeing the Boundary Waters - Quetico Wilderness*.

In addition to writing, Greg teaches magazine and travel writing at the Loft Literary Center in Minneapolis, a nationally renowned organization to support and train writers and support the literary arts. He says, “I still hunt, fish, camp, and paddle canoes and kayaks--usually with my wife, Susan. We split our time between home in St. Paul, our cabin in Fifty Lakes, Minnesota, and traveling where the birds fly, the fish bite, and the rivers run free.”

That Jaz

## Gone Birding

By Jazmin Rios



Like many of you, I started the year doing solo hikes or with only one or two people, but my favorite part of birding is sharing my walk and what I see with others. Thankfully, my solo birding trips turned into group birding mid-year and, with that, some of the most enjoyable sightings. When you bird in a group, other people spot birds you might have been unaware of. Some of the highlights this year include the pair of Great Horned Owls at Angels Gate Park, a Western Meadowlark peeking through the grass at Madrona Marsh, Cactus Wrens hiding in the cactus at Alta Vicente, Snowy Plovers running back and forth to feed at Hermosa Beach and Dockweiler Beach, the Nuttall's Woodpecker pecking at a tree in Debs Park and, most recently, seeing a Northern Harrier swoop down and eat a songbird at Point Vicente Bluffs.

My fondest moments birding are when I am able to share them with others, which is why I am delighted that we were able to resume our birding groups at Ken Malloy Harbor Regional Park, on the first Sunday of the month. As of October, we started a Birding for Kids walk that is open to children and beginners at Madrona Marsh Preserve

and Nature Center. Together we cover the basics of bird watching, including how to use binoculars, which we provide. Participants can walk away, both a more confident birder and, starting this month, with a collectable bird pin. Each time a birder comes for one of the walks they will receive a small pin to add to their collection! Birding for Kids and beginners is held every fourth Saturday of the month. The next birding for kids and beginners is Saturday, January 22nd, at Madrona Marsh. For further information and to sign up for a bird walk, please visit our website.



In addition to leading birding groups, I have continued presenting and recruiting students at a couple of schools. We want to make sure we are creating programs that are relevant to students so that they can have a deeper connection to nature and local wildlife. Working with James DeMoss, the Science and Design STEM Coordinator at Rolling Hills Prep, hands-on restoration work on 10-acres has resumed. Students weed, plant and gain a better understanding of the importance

of creating habitat for our endemic Palos Verdes Blue butterfly. At Esperanza High School in East Los Angeles, I started a conversation with students about the importance of native plant gardens and I am hoping to create a small garden in their community or school. There is already interest from a handful of students after only one visit!

Along with Palos Verdes Peninsula Land Conservancy and California Native Plant Society we are continuing to plan and implement habitat restoration at one of the few dune habitats left in Los Angeles basin, the Malaga Dunes. We have created and turned in a proposal to the City of Palos Verdes Estates, and will build on these efforts by creating partnerships with the neighboring community and local organizations.

Watch for new partnerships with Madrona Marsh this year, including night walks and a leadership program for LA high school students. Also, I now have a physical working space at Madrona Marsh, and plan to be there on Thursday and Friday mornings! Come visit me and the marsh.



Jeremiah George helps with plans for Rolling Hills Prep PVB project.



ASK ALLEN

# Juncos

by Vincent Lloyd

**Vincent:** Allen, what is this bird that looks like a little black phoebe with a pink bill?

**Allen:** It is the Slate-colored Junco, the eastern form of the Dark-eyed Junco. It is commonly known as the “Snowbird” because in the eastern United States it is a common winter visitor. A few winter along the Pacific Coast.

**Vincent:** I’m just familiar with the Oregon Junco.

**Allen:** Yes, that’s the West Coast form with black or grey hood, pink bill, solid colors, and long tail with white outer tail feathers.

The Dark-eyed Junco belongs to the sparrow family Passerellidae, although it mostly lacks the stripes and streaks of typical American sparrows. “Junco” is the name of the genus; it is the word for “rush” or “reed” in the Romance languages. This name is a bit odd, as juncos are birds of forests rather than wetlands.

Whatever the reason, the juncos, like the Phainopepla, have not been endowed with an English name like most birds. There are eleven or so distinct populations of juncos that are currently divided into five species. The juncos are interesting because they exemplify evolution in action. They all clearly share a common ancestor, but it’s a bit arbitrary to say which forms have differentiated enough to be considered good species and which are merely subspecies.

They are found in North America as far south as Costa Rica. The Dark-eyed Junco nests in the coniferous forests of Canada and the mountain West. They nest on

the ground or in bushes. Like other sparrows, they eat mainly seeds, usually foraging on the ground. They winter all over the lower 48 States and the Alaska Panhandle.

Rick Wright in his Sparrows of North America divides the Dark-eyed Junco into seven identifiable forms or subspecies. Today they are all considered to belong to the same species, but in the days of Peterson’s first Field Guide to Western Birds they were regarded as separate species because they looked so different. After it was realized that they interbreed freely where populations met, they were all lumped into one species, the Dark-eyed Junco (except for the Yellow-eyed Junco of the Southwest and Mexico). Nevertheless, Peterson’s classification is still useful today. He divided the juncos into two major groups depending on whether they had grey sides or rusty sides.

*(Juncos continued on page 10)*



Forms with gray sides		
White-winged	uniform gray	white wing-bars
Slate-colored	uniform gray	no wing-bars
Gray-headed	rusty back	pale upper bill
Red-backed	rusty back	black upper bill
Forms with ‘pinkish’ sides		
Oregon	rusty back	black head
Pink-sided	brownish back	gray head

## Birds of the Peninsula October-November

By Vincent Lloyd

October and November continued to be warm and dry. Barely a quarter-inch of rain fell at Madrona Marsh, while the temperature climbed to 89 in November. The star migrant of the period was the **Bay-breasted Warbler** that

**Townsend's Solitaire** at Wilderness Park. Could this have been the same bird that visited there two years ago? Jonathan Nakai came across a **White-winged Dove** at Alta Vicente Preserve in PV on October 29. Visiting from the mountains, a **Band-tailed Pigeon** wandered to Harbor Park on November 21 (Johnny Ivanov). **Costa's Hummingbird** is the desert

/ **Red-breasted Sapsucker** hybrid. A lost pair of **Acorn Woodpeckers** sought acorns in vain at Sand Dune Park on October 3 (Lynzie Flynn, Ann Flower). Los Angeles is a good place to be a flycatcher. Will Sweet found a late **Ash-throated Flycatcher** at Ernie Howlett Park on November 2. The **Tropical Kingbirds** at Entradero Park along the L.A. River continued thru the end of the period. Johnny Ivanov was surprised by a **Scissor-tailed Flycatcher** at Willow St. on October 24. **Vermilion Flycatchers** appeared at Madrona Marsh, 22nd St. Park in San Pedro, and Magic Johnson Park. Another insect eater, the **Loggerhead Shrike**, popped up at White Point on October 27 (Brian Daniels). A late **Purple Martin** divebombed Harbor Park on October 8 (JI). Jonathan Nakai came across a **Red-breasted Nuthatch** at Portuguese Bend on October 28. Gavin and Colin Drummond spotted a wandering **California Gnatcatcher** at Madrona Marsh on October 27. Peck Park hosted a **Phainopepla** on October 1. A mountain sparrow, the **Green-tailed Towhee**, visited a feeder at a home in Torrance on November 1. The **Slate-colored Junco** is the eastern counterpart of the **Oregon Junco**; fairly common in the winter in Northern California, but scarce here. Bobby T and



Bay-breasted warbler Photo: Manuel Duran

stopped by Harbor Park for a few days in early November (Chris Hinkle). The breeding male has a deep red crown and chest, a color called “chestnut” by nut lovers and “bay” by horse lovers. Fall Bay-breasteds are rather plain and notoriously difficult to distinguish from the more common **Blackpoll Warbler**, but the experts agreed that this bird was the buffier Bay-breasted. Early in December, Adam Johnson spotted an unusual

counterpart of **Anna's Hummingbird**. Occasionally one wanders over this way. Clayton Borzini came across one such at White Point on November 26. Young James Wagner spotted a **White-tailed Kite** at Cornerstone School in RPV on November 5; others appeared at Entradero Park, Harbor Park, and along the L.A. River. An unusual sapsucker was seen by many at Harbor Park on November 6, apparently a **Red-naped**

Naresh Satyan found one at Friendship Park on November 13. Will Sweet had a **White-throated Sparrow** at Malaga Dunes on November 2. **Clay-colored Sparrows** like to spend the winter at Madrona Marsh; Gerry and Linda Baade spotted the first of the season on November 5. Also at Madrona, the wintering **Black-and-white Warbler** continued thru the end of the period. **Palm Warblers** were seen at DeForest Park, Harbor Park, and Cabrillo Beach. **Hermit Warblers** continued at Franklin Park, Wilderness Park, and Peck Park. Leslie Loomis spotted a **Lazuli Bunting** at Polliwog Park in Manhattan Beach on October 26, while a rare **Painted Bunting** visited a home in Manhattan Beach on November 5. The L.A. River continued to host unusual visitors, including the continuing **Little Blue Heron**, a **Cattle Egret**, a **Common Loon**, a **Ruff** and a **Red-necked Phalarope**. Jeff Boyd found a **Cackling Goose** at Golden Shores at the mouth



White-winged Dove: Photo: Jonathan Nakai

of the river on October 17; three more appeared at Entradero Park in early December (Kevin Kosidlak). Seldom seen away from the ocean, a lost **Brandt's Cormorant** found refuge in the sump at Madrona Marsh on November 5. In the sea bird department, Dick Barth espied **White-winged** and **Black Scoters** and a **Long-tailed Duck** off Dockweiler Beach from November 1. The **Manx Shearwater** was last

spotted at Redondo Canyon on October 15. Naresh S. came upon a **Craveri's Murrelet** in the Catalina Channel on October 10. Meanwhile, the booby invasion continued with a **Red-footed Booby** in the Catalina Channel on October 10 (NS), a **Brown Booby** at Redondo Canyon on October 5 (Jon Feenstra), and a **Blue-footed Booby** at the river on October 5 (JB).

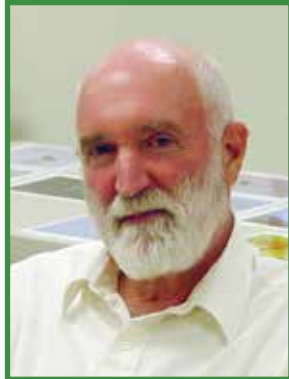


Sunrise, Cape May

Photo: Jess Morton



## From the Editor



By Jess Morton

### Shirley and the Goldfinches

The goldfinches are unforgettable, some two hundred of them, bright in sunlight and gleaning seed from a patch of scrubby lawn. Their image remains with me, a drifting, shifting, golden patchwork on the ground, busy, busy. I had seen nothing like it before. Indeed, until that morning fifty years ago this February, I had hardly noticed birds at all. These goldfinches were my introduction to birding, and to the South Coast Botanic Garden,



Shirley Wells, and a lifetime now of involvement with Audubon and conservation.

I and three friends had pulled into the parking lot off Rolling Hills Road at 8 AM, in answer to a newspaper notice about a bird walk at the garden, something none of us had attended before. I had become interested in natural history after the first Earth Day, but other things than birds had held my attention until that morning. The botanic garden back then had only recently been established on the site of a closed landfill. There were a couple of small buildings housing the equipment and headquarters, and most of the property was still covered with low, ruderal scrub and foxtails. Walking paths were confined to the eastern side where the landscaping that would become the garden we enjoy today was first being established.

We joined the dozen or so others that were gathered for the bird walk. Most had binoculars. We, an old pair to share among us. But we would find the other walkers generous, so we all had good chances to see what was there. Shirley Wells, our leader, was a tall, bright and charismatic woman. She greeted everyone and gave a short introductory talk, outlining what birds could be expected during the walk, and providing a little information about the garden. She said quiet was best as we went, but that we should not hesitate to ask questions. Shirley took great care



to see that we did not miss what she was seeing. And hearing!

It had never occurred to me that one could identify a bird simply by listening to it, though that became immediately clear once the walk commenced. Shirley's ears were just as astounding as her eyes when it came to birds, and her knowledge of them seemed inexhaustible. Perhaps more importantly in a walk leader, she was able to describe to those of us new to birds, where and how to look for what she was seeing and hearing. The next three hours were utter magic for me, and it began with the goldfinches.

A small expanse of ground near the parking area was alive with a couple of hundred small birds. A yellow, black and gray patchwork shifted through the stubble as the birds searched for seed. Shirley identified



them as Lesser and American Goldfinches, pointing out the differences between them so that we beginners could pick them out ourselves. Then she stopped and looked more closely, becoming quite excited. She had just spotted a Lawrence's Goldfinch in among the rest, a bird seldom seen on the peninsula. Her excitement was contagious, of course, and even though the other birds we saw were new to me, this one had that unexpected element of uniqueness, a revelation that the world of birding was far more open ended than I had thought it could be.

Shirley, as all first-class leaders do, made sure that everyone got good looks at the bird, pointing out what set it apart from the others. The goldfinches established the pattern for the morning as Shirley led us along the garden's paths. She helped us to find and hear each of the birds as she identified them whenever we were not already looking at it or had not distinguished its call from among the sounds around us.

Only once was I left perplexed. While we were looking at sparrows and finches along the east side of a gully that would

later be the stream through the middle of the garden, I heard a gorgeous song in the distance. I held off asking about it while Shirley was discussing the birds close by, and then forgot about the song, so absorbed was I in what she was saying. It would be three weeks before I heard the song again, this time at Shoreline Park: a Western Meadowlark.

But Shirley had heard the bird, too, as I discovered years later. That morning, as was done at the end of every botanic garden walk, a checklist of the day's birds had been made up. The lists were kept in a notebook in the garden office. When finally I got around to looking, there on the list for the day was a checkmark by Western Meadowlark, as there was for all of the other forty species seen than morning. Neatly written in at the bottom, since it was not on the preprinted list, was Lawrence's Goldfinch.

Shirley was an amateur scientist in the best sense, dedicated to her subject and highly competent. She knew all birds, but hummingbirds were her specialty, and she had been documenting the recent arrival and spread of Allen's Hummingbird on the mainland from the Channel Islands. She was a wonderful walk leader, an ever available source of information, and an inspiring teacher of bird lore who brought up a generation of teenage birding enthusiasts, some of whom went on to be well-respected biologists. She was a conservationist before the category existed. Among other efforts, she advocated for the preservation of Madrona Marsh, and provided the data that the Arrowsmiths, Betty Shaw and many others would

use to achieve that goal, though some years after her death.

In sum, Shirley touched many lives in ways that spread inspiration, good humor, and a desire to emulate her dedication to bettering the world. It is guidance I, for one, have followed. Like the paths in the garden long ago, my path has been a winding one,



going through long service with our Audubon chapter to six years on the national board of directors, to working with endangered species and to supporting several land conservancies in various ways. There is still much to do, but, for me, it will always come back to that morning fifty years ago. They are still there. The goldfinches, I mean. Hundreds of them moving in sunlight on a long ago lawn as an intense Shirley lifts her binoculars for that crucial close look. The one that makes all the difference.

*Photos clockwise from top: Shirley Wells pointing out a hummingbird's nest, American Goldfinch, Lawrence's Goldfinch, Lesser Goldfinch.*



## Dipper

By Randy Harwood

One of my (and John Muir's) favorite California birds is the Water Ouzel, now called the American Dipper. For such an unassuming little bird, it is quite amazing. It has the most unusual foraging strategy of any North American songbird. It flies along mountain streams, wades in the water and disappears beneath the surface, foraging for small fish and invertebrates. It has much larger oil glands than other perching birds, scales that close nostrils while underwater and eerie-looking membranes over its eyes, all adaptations for an aquatic life. I have found these birds repeatedly near the Sierra Buttes in the Tahoe National forest. They often nest under a bridge along Haypress Creek in the Wild Plum campground. This area of the Sierras and the nearby Sierra Valley are great places to enjoy birding, especially in the summer.



## Spill!

By Paul Blieden

For several years I have been a Snowy Plover volunteer. After the October oil spill, I and all of the other volunteers were asked to ascertain the extent of damage to our beaches. I was assigned to survey the beach between the Hermosa Beach and the Manhattan Beach piers. On three Mondays I walked the beach and looked for signs of oil on both the beach and the birds on it. Fortunately, I saw none, but I did see birds, the most I have counted on this beach in such a short time, 22 of them Snowy Plovers.



## Transformations

By Jess Morton

There are magic moments in which ordinary places and creatures are transformed by our imaginations into something quite extraordinary, leaving an indelible memory behind. This one, for me, occurred early on a February morning in Point Fermin Park. At the point, a rocky promontory that drops 100 feet to the waves crashing below, gray rough cliffs bastion the walkways bordering them above. In spring, before they migrate north to breed, clusters of Pelagic Cormorants roost here, clinging to jutting crags and ledges on one east-facing wall. The morning this photo was taken, a single, pensive cormorant hung there as the rising sun painted the rocks with rose and orange hues. Ever since, I have felt as if, through that cormorant's eyes, I were viewing a world into which I can never go.



## A Tale of (Pin)Tails

By Evi Meyer

Pintails have long been my favorite ducks. Floating on water, they exhibit an understated elegance. Sticking their tails up when eating, they create a rather comical picture, a contrast I always enjoy.

At the end of October, 2020, my birder friend Sara and I drove from Pacific Grove to Portland. It was the middle of COVID season, so flying was not an option. We took turns driving. To sweeten the deal Sara had found “Birding off of the I-5”, a book of birding destinations within a short drive of the Interstate. The Sacramento NWR was a spot we chose.

We were not surprised to see tens of thousands of Snow and Ross's Geese. It was in season for them, but perhaps early for ducks. I remember how we drove around a bend and saw a distant lake with a brown spit of land sticking



out into it. At first I thought this was just dirt speckled white by some light-colored rocks, but as we drove closer and picked up binoculars, we realized the “spit” was a carpet of Pintail Ducks huddled together. What an incredible sight it was!

We generally don't get too many Pintails here, but, now, whenever I see them, I remember this wonderful experience I had, birding off the I-5.

*(Juncos continued from page 3)*

The Oregon Junco was first collected by John Townsend in Oregon, but the several subspecies of the Oregon junco group breed along the Pacific Coast from the Alaska Panhandle to northern Baja California.

Hoffman, in his classic *Birds of the Pacific States*, writes: “All through the pine forests the bright jingle of the Junco’s song is a familiar sound in spring and early summer.” In California, they move down from the mountains to spend winter in the lowlands. The White-winged Junco breeds in the Black Hills of South Dakota. The Red-backed Junco breeds in Arizona and New Mexico. These last two rarely are seen in California. Of the other forms, the Slate-colored, Pink-sided, and Gray-headed Juncos winter in California in small numbers. The Slate-colored is distinctive.

**Vincent:** Allen, how can I distinguish the Oregon, Pink-sided, and Gray-headed Juncos?

**Allen:** The wise man puts them down as “Dark-eyed Junco.”

**Vincent:** I wanna try to tell them apart anyway.

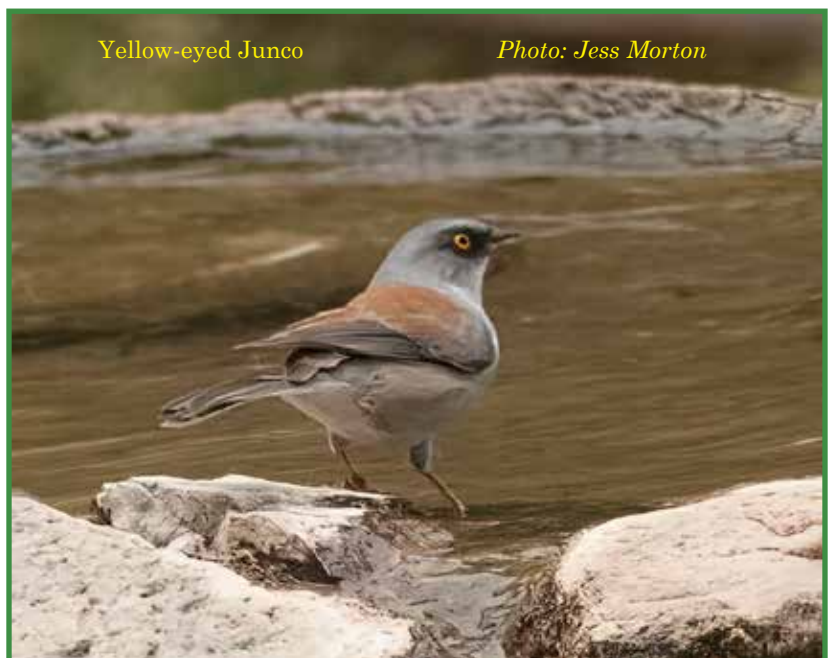
**Allen:** Ok, it’s your funeral. The Gray-headed Junco is the most distinctive. As Peterson said, pay attention to the grey flanks. Both Gray-headed and Pink-sided Juncos have grey heads. The tough problem is telling the Pink-sided Junco from the female Oregon Junco. They both have grey heads and pinkish sides. They say that the sides of the Pink-sided are pinker, but color is difficult to judge. More important is that the pink sides are wider and nearly meet in the center of the breast. Perhaps the best field mark are the lores (the small area between the eye and the bill), which are blackish (in this regard the Pink-sided resembles the Gray-headed).

**Vincent:** Thanks. Kimball Garrett has warned us to be careful, as the Pink-sided Junco is perhaps the most frequently mis-identified bird locally. Anyone who

claims to have seen one should be prepared to provide photographic evidence. Juncos are highly variable and hybrids are common. In many cases, even the experts can’t precisely identify a junco by sight alone. As Rick Wright observes, “Nowhere is healthy agnosticism more appropriate than in junco identification.” Juncos are full of surprises. To my mind, the lilting trill of the Oregon Junco invokes the vast forests of the Sierra Nevada. So I was taken aback a couple of years ago during summer school at El Camino College when I heard a familiar but unexpected song — the junco’s. Sure enough, I found a pair of Oregon Juncos on campus and — a few weeks later — a juvenile junco (the juveniles are heavily streaked, like typical *Passerellids*). It turns out that a few years ago a local population of Oregon Juncos in San Diego started breeding in town. This city junco has since spread north as far as Los Angeles and is becoming a familiar summer resident.

**Allen:** You have to admire their pluck in adapting to such an alien habitat — just like we Allen’s Hummingbirds did!

*Photo credit Bob Walker, Pajarito Environmental Education Center*



Yellow-eyed Junco

Photo: Jess Morton



MEET, LEARN, RESTORE, ENJOY

# Chapter Calendar

All events are subject to any pandemic restrictions in place.

Bird walks and other in person events are limited to people who have been vaccinated and have registered to attend.

On-line attendance forms and Zoom links for programs can be found on our website at [pvsb-audubon.org](http://pvsb-audubon.org)

Sunday, Jan. 2, at 8 AM: Bird walk at Ken Malloy Harbor Regional Park. Meet in the parking lot between Vermont and Anaheim above the ranger station.

Tuesday, Jan. 18, at 7, via Zoom. Our program is “**Birding in Costa Rica**,” presented by Randy Harwood. See page 1 for program details.

Saturday, Jan. 22, at 9. Birding For Kids at Madrona Marsh. Leader:Jazmin Rios.

Sunday, Feb. 6, at 8 AM: Bird walk at Ken Malloy Harbor Regional Park. Meet in the parking lot between Vermont and Anaheim above the ranger station.

Tuesday, Feb. 22, at 7, via Zoom. “**Birds control pests—and save farmers millions**,” will be presented by Greg Breining. See page 1 for program details.

Saturday, Feb. 26, at 9. Birding For Kids at Madrona Marsh. Leader:Jazmin Rios.

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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- Treasurer: Jess Morton, [jmorton@igc.org](mailto:jmorton@igc.org)
- Secretary: Vincent Lloyd, [vincent@sabik.org](mailto:vincent@sabik.org)
- Directors: Paul Blieden, Tracy Drake
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- Christmas Bird Count and Field Trips:  
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*Photos by the author unless stated otherwise.*

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On January 18th, **Randy Harwood** presents “**Birding in Costa Rica**,” with photos from a spectacular, bird-rich country, to open our 2022 series of on-line (and in-person, we hope) programs on third Tuesdays of the month, at 7, via Zoom.

“**Birds Control Pests-and Save Farmers Millions**” is **Greg Breining’s** presentation on February 15th. Across America and beyond, farmers and vineyard and orchard owners are enlisting wild birds-from raptors to songbirds-in a sustainable battle against pests.



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AVIANTICS

By Evi Meyer

