Palos Verdes/South Bay Audubon Society

Vol. XLV #2 March/April 2023

Oh, Feathers!

Oh, Feathers! It's an old mild expletive, except when uttered by us birders when faced with an intractable bird identification. Empids come to mind. Fall warblers, peeps darting here-there on a dingy mud flat; all those other mysterious birds that we want to identify, but can't. So, it is appropriate to take a few minutes and dedicate them to feathers, both in this issue of Hummin,' and at our April general program meeting—when Allison Shultz explains some of the fascinating ways in which birds use feathers for mating and other purposes.

Hummin's center spread. on pages 6 and 7, has been assigned to feathers, too. It has a little quiz for you and a poem having to do with feathers. The spread presents a set of plumage vignettes for nine California Southern birds. Thus, you only get to see a portion of each bird. Together, the set points up how amazingly diverse and beautiful our birds are. A listing of the birds and

their photographers is in the lower left corner of the spread. Cover it up if you want to make the quiz more challenging, or not if you want hints. Even then, you might be surprised at which name goes where.

Red-legged Honeycreeper

Photo: Jess Morton



March and April Meeting Programs

"A look back at the People, Wildlife and Sealife of Papua New Guinea" is the subject of Randy Harwood's talk on Tuesday, March 21st, at 7:00 P.M.,



in-person at Madrona Marsh Nature Center and via Zoom. Beginning in 1989 and continuing into the mid 2000s, Randy and his wife Deanna visited these distant islands. This presentation is meant to give you an appreciation of their amazing biodiversity, natural beauty and the cultures of their colorful peoples. Randy, a board member of the PVP Land Conservancy, is past president of the LA Underwater Photographic Society.



On Tuseday, April 18th, at 7:00 P.M., in-person at Madrona Marsh Nature Center and via Zoom, Dr. Allison Shultz, Assistant Curator of Ornithology at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles

County, presents "The How and Why of Colorful Feathers," a talk about the evolution of feather color in the largest family of birds – the tanagers. She will talk about why she is careful to use a bird's visual perspective to study this important signaling trait, and how natural and sexual selection have shaped plumage color in males and females. She will end her talk by describing some of her current work on the mechanisms underlying the diversity of colors in birds.

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From the President February 2023

By Ann Dalkey

Wow, January certainly brought us a lot of rain! It was so welcomed and, if you are thinking like me, hoping for more to arrive over the next three months. Already, we've seen wildflowers popping out here and there in the landscape--as well as weeds. And so, Spring California Style has begun to bring about abundant foraging for the birds.

Our Board now has a new webmaster and board member, Prevail de Rox, and also a new Secretary, Jonathan Nakai, nearly filling all vacancies on the roster. We still need a Vice President and would welcome a volunteer!

Recently, webmaster Prevail and Julian Chasin, our talented Treasurer, have teamed up to renovate the website. The home page now provides one or more photos about the current month's program along with a summary of the talk. A "More Info" button takes one to a page with other details about the program. The Events Calendar has been updated so that details on an event are shown when clicked. For example, on clicking "Chapter Meeting and Presentation," the date, time, location, speakers, and Zoom link are shown.

Our Chapter is fortunate to have many photographers who capture beautiful photos of local birds. Several members have donated photos for use on the website. Because I love not only pretty, colorful photos, I have asked our webmaster to also include more visual effects on the website. We are studying other websites to understand what works best to combine

Southern California Council Chapter Members

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Whittier Area Audubon Society

optimal visual effects with enough retained or added information to satisfy your curiosity. Our goal is to finish the website revamp in a couple of months.

Please note, you may contact PV/SB Audubon directly via email at info@pvsb-audubon.org. I or other board members will respond. Your email gets routed into my regular email, alerting me to your inquiry, whereupon I can respond.

All Things Audubon Part 2

In the previous edition of Hummin', I wrote an overview of Audubon, covering the beginnings of the organization, the size of the organization, and the many important issues it has addressed across the decades. More detailed information about the National Audubon Society can be found on its website at Audubon.org.

With over 500 independent Audubon chapters, the question becomes how does Audubon thrive with so many diverse entities? Good communication is one part of the answer. National Audubon also works with the individual chapters, such as our Palos Verdes/South Bay Audubon, on projects of mutual interest, while encouraging each chapter to pursue its own local projects. However, coordinating the efforts of 500 entities or more is still a challenge. Therefore, chapters are organized into Councils comprised of the chapters found within a certain regional area.

Our chapter belongs to the Southern California Council, which includes the 14 Chapters listed in the box at left. The Council meets throughout the year with representatives from Audubon California, the state's arm of National Audubon. The meetings are conducted via Zoom, which is nice if one wants to wear slippers on a cool day! I most appreciate the ability to learn what other chapters are doing and to meet with everyone involved in the Southern California Council.

I have found the opportunity to learn from others very rewarding. Their experiences can help us accelerate bringing current and new programs up to speed. For example, I now will be passing new ideas that can help focus and expand high quality programs to Project Manager Jazmin Rios. Of course, you will find out more as we employ the new ideas within our chapter.

Already our Chapter desires to initiate a snowy plover habitat expansion, increase the reach of our educational programs for school children, and continue to support habitat enhancement projects.

More info to come in All Things Audubon, Part 3!

All That Jaz!

Madrona Marsh A Bird Watcher's Paradise

By Jazmin Rios

Greetings bird enthusiasts! The recent monthly Saturday morning walks at Madrona Marsh Preserve and Nature Center were a real treat, the bird group (see photo, at right) was lucky to see a Cassin's Kingbird right next to an Ash-Throated Flycatcher, providing a unique opportunity to compare and contrast these two birds side-by-side.

The Cassin's Kingbird is a medium-sized bird with a slightly forked tail and a yellow belly. They have a dark gray head and back, and a white throat and breast. In contrast, the Ash-Throated Flycatcher is slightly smaller and has a grayish-brown back and wings. They have a pale yellow belly and a distinctive ash-colored throat. Being able to see these birds side-by-side was a fantastic opportunity for our group to appreciate the unique features and differences between them. It was a great learning experience for all of us and deepened our appreciation for the incredible bird species that call our region home.

In addition to the Cassin's Kingbird and Ash-Throated Flycatcher, we also saw some other incredible birds during our walk. We spotted both Killdeer and Spotted Sandpiper at vernal pool 6 and a pair of Hooded Mergansers swimming in the sump, which was an absolute treat for our group. Madrona Marsh is such an important place for birds, as it provides a crucial stopover for migratory birds. In fact,



Paul Blieden reports, "I was hiking at Alta Vicente Reserve when I heard a loud bird song. I did a three sixty looking for the bird. No luck! As I walked ahead, the song followed me. I looked to my right and there was this song sparrow, bellowing out its

song. Another wonderful day of hiking and bird photography!

the recent rain at the marsh has brought a lot of Spring migrating waterfowl and song birds, making it one of the best times to visit the Marsh.

I also had the opportunity to give a talk for the Neptunian Woman's Club in Manhattan Beach recently. During the talk, I spoke about the outreach work that we do with the bird group, and I shared some information about a Snowy Plover Habitat enclosure that we hope to create in the near future. It was wonderful to share our passion for bird conservation with a wider



audience, and I hope that our work will inspire others to get involved and make a positive impact on our local bird populations.

Lastly, I wanted to share that I recently started working at Madrona Marsh Preserve and Nature Center as their Volunteer and Program Specialist. In this role, I hope to connect my work with the Palos Verdes/South Bay (PV/SB) Audubon Chapter as project manager, to further support bird conservation and outreach efforts in the area. Madrona Marsh is a bird watcher's paradise, providing a unique opportunity to observe a wide range of bird species, including migratory birds. It is an essential place for bird conservation in our region, and I am excited to continue PV/SB Audubon Chapter work.

Join us on our next bird walk at Madrona Marsh the 4th Saturday of the month from 9-11am, and let's continue to appreciate and protect the incredible bird species that call our region home. Until next time, keep your eyes on the skies and happy birding!

57th PV Christmas Bird CountBy Jon Nakai

December 26, 2022 marked the 57th Annual Palos Verdes Peninsula Christmas Bird Count, and it was one of our best years yet!! We had 81 participants in 25 groups that counted a total of 23,247 birds and 175 different species, excluding domestic birds and taxa. This ties our count's 6th highest number of species from over the years!! (tied with 1993, 2001, 2006, 2011).

For those of you who may not know much about Christmas bird counts, before the turn of the 20th century, many scientists and bird enthusiasts became increasingly worried about the decline in bird species due to the holiday tradition of hunting birds known as the Christmas "side hunt". To stop this, a man named Frank Chapman proposed a new holiday tradition called the "Christmas bird census" where instead of killing birds, people would count them. On Christmas Day, 1900. Chapman and 26 others conducted that first Christmas Bird Count. 123 years later, this tradition has become one of the largest and most important citizen science projects to help protect and preserve bird species and their habitats. Today, over 75,000 observers across 30 different countries participate in the Christmas bird count. Actual count dates now span from the second week of December to the first week of January.

Some highlights for our count were the following:
• Greater White-fronted Goose - 34 (High Count)



Mountain Bluebird

• Common Goldeneye - 2 (LA River, Dick Barth; Unusual Species)

- Palm Warbler -1 (LA River, Dick Barth; Unusual Species)
- **Hooded Merganser** 9 (Madrona Marsh, LA Young Birders; High Count)
- •Hammond's Flycatcher 1 (Franklin Park, Christine Jacobs and family; Unusual Species)
- •Hermit Warbler -1 (Franklin Park, Christine Jacobs and family; Unusual Species)
- Dusky-capped Flycatcher 1 (Peck Park, Tom Miko; FIRST TIME REPORT ON COUNT DAY)
- •Tufted Puffin 1 (Offshore, Jess Morton; FIRST TIME REPORT ON COUNT DAY)
- •Brown Creeper 1 (Rolling Hills area, Jim Aichele & Cathy Nichols, Bob Shanman, and Calvin Bonn; Unusual Species)
- •White-throated Sparrow 2 (Rolling Hills area, Jim Aichele & Cathy Nichols, Bob Shanman, and Calvin Bonn; Unusual Species)
- •Lawrence's Goldfinch 1 (Peck Park, Tom Miko; Unusual Species)
- •Townsend's Solitaire 8 (High Count and Unusual Species)
 - •Western Bluebird 37 (High Count)
- •Northern Parula 1 (Ken Malloy Harbor Regional Park, Alejandra & Manuel Duran and Nancy Salem; Unusual Species)
- •Nashville Warber 1 (Golden Shore Marine Reserve, Joseph Di Liberto; Unusual Species)
- •Summer Tanager 4 (High Count and Unusual Species)

·Western Tanager - 3 (Unusual Species)

For everyone who participated this year, I hope that you had an enjoyable time, and for those who didn's take part, I hope you will consider participating next time. I'll see you all later this year for our 58th annual Christmas Bird Count!



Townsend's Solitaire

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Some Things Take a Little Longer to Understand By Evilleyer

On a recent trip to Ken Malloy Harbor Regional Park I photographed some Snow Geese who had made the lake and its shore their temporary home. These geese were just dabbling around, at times showing a bit of aggression towards

one another. Normal goose stuff. Upon closer inspection of my photos, though, I discovered surprises in their bill and mouth structure.

Goose bills are made of light bony projections that extend from the skull and are covered with a sheath of keratin. Along the inside edges they contain serrated comb-like lamellae

which are also keratinous. The big advantage of this substance is that it is replaceable when

broken or used up, just like our hair or fingernails.

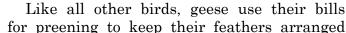
These lamellae aid primarily in the feeding process. When used mostly to grip and rip plant material or other food, as they are by some species, the lamellae look like miniature teeth, quite hard and sharp. With other species, they

mostly serve as sieves for straining food from water and muck. Those may be quite soft and flexible, as with the baleen of Mysticeti whales. On Snow Geese, a small visible open space between the closed upper and lower mandibles, called a "Grin Patch," allows water to exit from the bill easily. This patch makes Snow Geese look like they smile.

I marginally knew about these serrations along goose bills. The surprise I found on my

photos was of the additional rows of lamellae along the tongue. These assist the bill lamellae in shearing off food and also serve to direct that towards the throat. Now my interest was sufficiently piqued, so I did some research on

the subject. Goose tongues have a sharp, hardened structure at the tip of the tongue called a "Lingual Nail." This modified tongue tip can be used like a spoon to pick up seeds, grain and other small food items when foraging on land. If roots or bulbs need to be dug up, the sturdy bill can be used like a digging shovel. Pretty amazing stuff!



and interlocked properly to provide a waterproof shield over their bodies. I can imagine those comb-like lamellae to be a quite useful tool for that purpose. What I did not expect was to see those lamellae used in intraspecific aggression. Some of the geese I observed were chasing each other on the water and biting down hard on competitors'

feathers. Whether there was any pain involved in this is doubtful, but it was certainly a very effective behavior for "clearing the way".

In the future I will certainly pay more attention to the anatomy and inner workings of the mouths of geese and ducks as I encounter them. What I had thought was just a bill adapted to life in the water, is actually a very sophisticated and highly effective food gathering tool. It just took me a while to realize that.

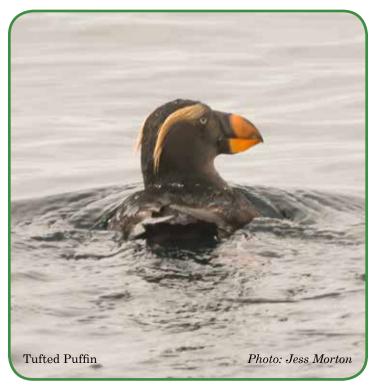




BIRDS OF THE PENINSULA December 2022 — January 2023 by Vincent Hoyd

Winter brought welcome relief from the drought when a series of a dozen storms brought over five inches of rain to the South Bay in late December and into January. Seasonal wetlands at Madrona Marsh and Harbor Park were flooded and are now teeming with ducks and geese. The high temperature during the period was 82°F on Christmas Day; the low was 39° on Jan. 21–23.

The warm weather continued on the day after Christmas, when the 57th Palos Verdes Peninsula Christmas Bird Count was held. A record high 81 observers found 175 species and 23,212 individual birds. It was a great start for Jonathan Nakai in his first year as organizer of the Count. He was ably assisted by Christine Jacobs as data compiler. Two species were new to the Count: a Tufted Puffin, a



bird often seen in Northern California but seldom in Southern California, and a Dusky-capped **Flycatcher**, a bird of the Southwest.

Townsend's Solitaire, a grey thrush that breeds high in the mountains, is seldom seen in the South Bay, but this year they invaded in numbers. Solitaires were seen at PV Peninsula High School, at

Madrona Marsh, on the Landfill Loop, at Hix Ring in Rolling Hills, as well as four or five along Crest Road. This bird had not been seen on the CBC since 2009. Another rare sight was, ironically, a **Common** Goldeneye, that was spotted on Count Day hanging out in the Los Angeles River.

I love flycatchers! Who doesn't? They are fun to watch as they fly out from a perch to catch bugs in the air. They can be challenging to identify, though, and no group is more confusing than the flycatchers of the genus Myiarchus, represented locally by the Ash-throated Flycatcher. The aforementioned Duskycapped Flycatcher, which continued at Peck Park at least to Jan. 14, belongs to this group. So does the Brown-crested Flycatcher, which Nancy Salem spotted on New Year's Day at South Coast Botanic Garden. It may be the same bird that spent last winter at the that location. A regular summer visitor, the Western Kingbird is rare in the winter, but the one spotted at Madrona Marsh in October continued into February. Two different **Tropical Kingbirds** continued along the L.A. River. A Hammond's Flycatcher was found at Franklin Park, in North Redondo, on the CBC.

The days are long gone since the **Loggerhead** Shrike was a common sight on the Peninsula, yet one was reported at Portuguese Bend on Jan. 24. Kim Moore found a Cassin's Vireo at Alondra Park on Jan. 7, while Bob and Julie Schallman found a Plumbeous Vireo at Bandini Canyon Trail Park in San Pedro on Count Day. Another Plumbeous hung out at Harbor Park in January. Brown Creepers were spotted on Count Day on Crest Road (Cathy & Jim) and nearby Rancho Del Mar School Loop (Calvin Bonn); another was at Ryan Park in RPV two days later (Cameron Tescher, Lucas Stephenson). San Pedro's resident Magpie was seen around Christmas at the Pacific Diner. David Moody came across a **Phainopepla** at the Landfill Loop on Dec. 10 that fortunately was still there on Count Day.

Tom Miko found an unusual Lawrence's Goldfinch at Peck Park on Count Day. Johnny Ivanov came up with a Tricolored Blackbird at Harbor Park on Jan 21, the only one reported so far this winter. In the sparrow department, a Greentailed Towhee was reported at Dominguez Gap on Dec. 26 (Jack Wickel) that continued to the end of January. A Pink-sided Dark-eyed Junco was a nice find at Highridge Park on Dec. 28 (LS). Whitethroated Sparrows were seen on Crest Road, at SCBG, at White Point, and at a home in RPV. The

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Black-and-White Warbler at Madrona was last reported on Dec. 8; the one at Wilderness Park continued into February. A couple Palm Warblers were seen along the River in January. Joey DiLiberto, a student visiting during winter break from college back east, found a Nashville Warbler at Golden Shores on Count Day. Another continued at Harbor Park thru Jan. 8. The Northern Parula



at HP hasn't been seen since Jan. 2, but was spotted on Count Day. Summer Tanagers ran amok in December, with reports from Polliwog Park, Malaga Dunes, Alma Park, El Nido Park, Torrance Park, and Redondo High.

It's been a good winter for ducks and geese. A flock of ten Snow Geese and a group of a dozen Whitefronted Geese have delighted many at Harbor Park. A couple of **Brant** hung out at Cabrillo Beach



in December. Averill Park's continuing Wood Duck was seen on the CBC (JN), while another was seen off and on at Harbor Park in December. Northern Pintail, a duck once abundant but now uncommon in our area, have been wintering at Harbor Park and along the River. In the bay duck category, an unusual 14 Redheads have been adding color to the River, while Greater Scaup have been seen at Cabrillo Beach and Golden Shores. As for sea ducks, Dick Barth has spotted Black Scoters, Whitewinged Scoters, and Long-tailed Ducks among the Surf Scoters off Dockweiler Beach.

A surprising ten Wandering Tattlers were spotted on the L.A. Harbor Breakwater on Jan. 15; single tattlers were counted on the CBC at King Harbor (DM, AJ) and Lunada Bay (RS). Jon Fisher had a Lesser Black-backed Gull at the Willow Street crossing on Jan. 21; this may possibly have been the same bird that many saw there over the summer. Joyce Brady saw a pair of Thayer's **Iceland Gulls** at the same spot on Jan. 19. Kiersten Lo caught sight of a Black Skimmer flying down Hermosa Beach on Jan. 18; other sightings were at Cabrillo Beach, in the L.A. Harbor, and along the River. The only booby reported during the period was a **Brown Booby** found at Redondo Canyon on Jan. 21.

Bret Karley saw a **Ferruginous Hawk** soaring down the L.A. River on Dec. 16; too bad it didn't hang around for the CBC. Riley Daniels spotted an interesting Red-naped/Red-breasted Hybrid Sapsucker on Dec. 19 along the Torrance/PVE border. Yellow-shafted Northern Flickers appeared at Henrietta Basin, Wilderness Park, SCBG, and Madrona Marsh. Acorn Woodpeckers continued along the River. Cactus Wrens were seen on Count Day at Three Sisters Preserve (Gregory Hachigian, Olivia Jenkins) and Alta Vicente (Charlie Keller, Sandra Blair). The Schallmans had six California Gnatcatchers at the Defense Fuel Depot on Count Day. Rufous-crowned Sparrows were seen in their usual locales at Pt Vicente on Dec. 20 (JN) and Terranea on Jan. 22 (Ted Robertson); unusual was the Rufous-crown that came to Cathy and Jim's feeder on Crest Road on Dec. 12.

Vincent seeks reports from readers about unusual birds found in the South Bay area (the area west of the Los Angeles River and south of I-105.) Send reports to: stephenvincentlloyd@gmail.com. 10 March/April 2023

MEET, LEARN, RESTORE, ENJOY

Chapter Calendar

All events are subject to any pandemic restrictions in place at the time.

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

On-line attendance forms and Zoom links for programs can be found on our website at pvsb-audubon.org

Sunday, Mar. 5, at 8 AM: Bird walk at Ken Malloy Harbor Regional Park. Meet in the parking lot between Vermont and Anaheim above the ranger station.

Wed.-Thurs, Mar. 8-9. Field trip to Morro Bay. Email motmots@aol.com to take part.

Tuesday, Mar. 21, at 7, in person and via Zoom. Our program is "A look back at the People, Wildlife and Sealife of Papua New Guinea" presented by Randy Harwood.

Saturday, Mar. 25, at 9. Birding For Kids at Madrona Marsh. Leader: Jazmín Ríos.

Sunday, Mar. 26. Field trip to Yorba Regional Park in (north) Anaheim. Email motmots@ aol.com to take part.

Sunday, Apr. 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.

Wed.-Thurs, Apr. 5-6. Birds'n'Blooms tour, Carizzo Plain. Note starting WEDNESDAY, hopefully beating the crowds! Carrizo Plain for birds and spring wildflowers should be wonderful this year! Email motmots@aol. com to take part.

Saturday, Apr. 8. **Spring Butterfly Count**. All are welcome to participate, regardless of expertise. To take part, contact Kim Moore at kims.sight@verizon.net.

Tuesday, Apr. 18, at 7, in person and via Zoom. Our program is "The How and Why of Colorful Feathers" presented by Dr. Allison Shultz.

Wednesday, Apr. 19. Field trip to Bear Divide, a super special migrant location! Email motmots@aol.com to take part.

Saturday, Apr. 22, at 9. Birding For Kids at Madrona Marsh. Leader: Jazmín Ríos.

Sunday, Apr. 23. Field trip to Prado Regional Park in Chino. Email motmots@aol.com to take part.

Sunday, Apr. 30. Field trip to Huntington Beach Central Park and Bolsa Chica. Email motmots@aol.com to take part.



Western Meadowlark Photo: Evi Meyer

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Birdathon fisfin the Wings!

T's time for our chapter's annual BIRDATHON, when our birding team, led by Jon Nakai, heads out around the South Bay and PV Peninsula to see how many kinds of birds can be recorded in a 24-hour period, and, most importantly, raise money for your Audubon chapter's activities.

This year, we especially want to replenish the Gambee grant fund so that next year we can award up to \$5,000 for worthy bird-related projects, like the one described by Ann on page 3, and to our other education and conservation projects mentioned elsewhere in this issue of Hummin'. Please give generously, either as a fixed dollar amount or on a per species basis. We expect the day's count to run anywhere from 110 to 135 species. A high total depends on it being a "birdy" day, and with many birders out to take its measure.

You can expect a lot of superb bird photos to be produced by our photographers on count day, so we are offering donors an email with a selection of prize, print-worthy pictures. For donors of \$10 per species or more, we will send a fine print, suitable for mounting, of their choice from the pictures of day. To pledge, e-mail your support to info@pvsb-audubon.org.

SPRING BUTTERFLY COUNT

The Palos Verdes Spring Butterfly Count is scheduled for Saturday, April 8. Under the auspices of the North American Butterfly Association, this count seeks to survey our early-flying butterflies. We need both beginners and old pros to help count the butterflies. If you have butterflies in your garden, a report about them would be valued. If you are interested, please contact Kim Moore at kims.sight@verizon.net.

The summer Butterfly Count will be held on Saturday, July 8.

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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Executive Officers and Staff

President: Ann Dalkey

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Secretary: Jonathan Nakai (acting)
Directors: Prevail de Rox, Tracy Drake,

Jess Morton, David Quadhamer

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March 21st, Randy Harwood presents "A look back at the People, Wildlife and Sealife of Papua New Guinea," about the biodiversity, beauty, birds and colorful cultures of the inhabitants of this remote island.

April 18th, Dr. Allison Shultz presents "The How and Why of Colorful Feathers," a look from a bird's perspective at how natural and sexual selection have shaped plumage color in males and females.





Palos Verdes/South Bay Audubon Society P.O. Box 2582 Palos Verdes Peninsula, CA 90274

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