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Ken Malloy's Park

By Jess Morton

The reopening of Ken Malloy Harbor Regional Park is scheduled for early in 2017. That's good news for local residents. It's great news for birders, for nowhere in the region is there a place with a record of bird diversity to match it, yet it has been largely inaccessible for a long time now. More than \$100 million has gone into the renovation, habitat restoration, water quality and public access improvements for the park and its associated, already-open Harbor City Greenway, for all of which PV/South Bay Audubon has played an important role.

But who was Ken Malloy, the namesake of this park? To many long-time Audubon members and birders, the name contains only a reference to a distant past, perhaps even as a memorial to a long-gone politician or city functionary. But to those of us who knew him, Ken was one of those quiet heroes, a man with a vision for the future whose perseverance, dedication and boundless energy made it come to pass.

Ken died 25 years ago, on Jan. 1, 1991. For a flavor of



Bob Shanman leads a birdwalk for National Audubon Society Board members in September 2003. *Photos by Jess Morton*

who Ken was, we have reprinted on page 2 the eulogy that appeared in *Hummin'* shortly after his death. On his deathbed, when he was no longer able to speak except through his eyes, I assured him that Audubon would continue the work he had begun at Harbor Park. And we have.

See Malloy, Page 2

Remembering Ken 25 Years Later

By Jess Morton

January 1991 — You may not be aware of it, but last week all of us lost a good friend, Ken Malloy. It may be that you knew him well. Met him now and again at community meetings. Saw one another in the park. Said hello to each other as you passed on the street. Knew his infectious grin, appreciated his quiet humor. In short, a friend.

Or, perhaps you knew him less well. Had only seen him once or twice — heard him speak about camping for young people. Maybe it was to converse of fishing and life along a river, or some other topic of mutual interest.

Still, he was your friend, and a better one than you could have realized from such short acquaintance. It's quite possible you never met the man — maybe never even heard of him before now. Yet he was your friend, and my friend, and a friend to all who live in and around San Pedro.

Ken Malloy was one of those individuals who have an unceasing interest in the betterment of the community and the enthusiasm, energy and commitment to do something about it. He was always working on some project to create new open spaces or preserve those that were about to be lost. He had a view of our future needs and the foresight to work at providing for them long before anyone else was aware of those needs. Ken grew up in the woods of Oregon and out along the



Then-Chapter President Richard Hubacek (left) congratulates Ken Malloy for receiving the 1985 PV Audubon Conservation Award for his work to preserve White Point open space.

white-water rivers of the Cascades. He was a hiker, a hunter and a fisherman. He loved the out-of-doors and its wildlife, and wanted to share that love with everyone.

The results are all around us now. The fishing pier at Cabrillo Beach; the remaining open space at White Point; Harbor Park. If you think the new military housing at the corner of 25th and Western is an eyesore, just imagine what White Point would look like if it hadn't been for Ken Malloy. More than 10 years ago, long before anyone else began to be concerned about it, Ken realized that someday soon the military

See opposite page

MALLOY, from Page 1

During the past quarter century, our Audubon chapter leaders have been the one consistent public voice for park betterment: chairing advisory boards, advocating for funding, showing up at public meetings, proposing improvements (all of which were eventually adopted), leading cleanups and education programs, and doing lots of habitat restoration.

Many hundreds of people have taken part through the years in this Audubon effort. To name just a few, Frank O'Brien, Martin Byhower and I each served for many years chairing various working groups, among other things. Mitch Heindel and the park are inseparable in my mind, his quest to document and save wildlife astonishing. Debbie Baker led a remarkable education program at the park, managing some restoration that professionals could not do. Debra Bowen played an important part, providing the first planning funds that eventually led to all that would be accomplished under Proposition O. But behind all this lay the groundwork set in place by Ken Malloy, the man to which this park is most appropriately dedicated.



A Harbor Park improvements workshop breakout, with Holly Gray's boathouse mural as backdrop.

would try to reclaim White Point from the City of Los Angeles. When the Air Force scrapped the Nike missile unit and dedicated White Point to the City, it reserved the right to re-take the property should national security require it. Perhaps, if Los Angeles had had the money to develop the park area, the Air Force never would have tried. As it was, the land remained as open space used for community gardens and occasional tours of the old fortifications.

For years, Ken worked diligently to make San Pedro aware of this valuable property and its potential. Ken's dream was to unite the various publicly owned parcels at White Point and Royal Palms into a single park that would be both attractive and safe. The State of California was willing to take the area on as a State Park, but the details could never be worked out to everyone's satisfaction.

Still, Ken's activities bore fruit. When the Air Force finally invoked its claim to White Point, San Pedro realized what it was about to lose and tried to hang on. We lost the ridge top along the north and west boundaries of White Point, but saved the rest. If the Air Force had had its way, all of White Point would have been filled by units as ugly as those on the ridge.

For all that, though, Ken's first and greatest interest was Harbor Park. It was through his personal lobbying and more than 20 years of incessant hands-on labor that it is what it is today. Without his efforts and daily care, most of what is now the park would have been developed, paved over, built upon, filled, channeled and dredged. The open space is there because of Ken Malloy.

Most of Ken's time during the day was taken up with his

volunteer work at Harbor Park. The wildlife sanctuary in the south end of the park is the result of his personal efforts to get the City to recognize the importance of that area and then provide funding to preserve it. The camping facilities and much of the planting done there exist as a result of Ken's drive and persistence. Without Ken's continuing monitoring of the lake, it is likely that all of the shoreline would, by now, have been cemented or riprapped. There would be no tules along the edge of the lake to provide a home for countless wrens, yellowthroats, blackbirds, herons and other birds and animals. There would be no open pools and mud flats in the eastern part of the park for the sandpipers, stilts and bullfrogs.

Harbor Park was so much a part of Ken's life that the park cannot be thought of without him.

In recognition of this, Councilwoman Flores announced, as part of her tribute to Ken at his funeral services, that she had introduced a resolution to the City Council to have the park renamed the Kenneth D. Malloy Regional Park in his honor. I can only applaud her suggestion, and hope that it will be adopted quickly.

There were a thousand other ways in which Ken improved all of our lives, for he was an active member of just about every worthwhile organization in town. Suffice it to say, he was my friend — and yours, too, even if you never had the privilege of meeting the man. Ken Malloy was one of those rare human beings who manage to touch the lives of all of us. And he left us all just a little bit richer for it.

Thank you, Ken.

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PHOTOGRAPHY NIGHT!

**7 p.m., Tuesday, Dec. 15
Madrona Marsh Nature
Center in Torrance**

Come share your best nature photos with the Palos Verdes/South Bay Audubon Society for our Fourth Annual Photography Night. From digi-scoping to point-and-shoot photography to serious SLR shots, we all have our favorite photos that we would love to share.

Many birders enjoy hearing tales of adventure, so here is a chance to come in and share memories illustrated by your very own photos.

Everyone is invited to bring in up to



Perhaps you have a good story like Martin and Eileen Byhower about a New Zealand Kaka Parrot trying to get a better look at Eileen.

15 of their favorite nature photos to share. David Quadhamer will be our moderator. To participate, please bring up to 15 nature photos. Humor, I.D. quiz, artistic composition, and serious bird photography of all levels are welcome.

Be prepared to share something about each photo such as species, time of year, location, photo equipment and/or an amusing anecdote. Please email David (dquadhamer@yahoo.com) to let him know you will be presenting photos, or you can sign up at the door to show your photos. Be sure to arrive early if you wish to present.

The Nature Center has a Windows PC and a PowerPoint Player. Please bring your photos in JPEG format on a flash drive to show on a Windows laptop. If your photos are on a Mac, you will need to bring in your own laptop and an adapter so that you can connect to the PowerPoint Player. If you are using PowerPoint, your files must be in .ppt format, and not in .pptx.

TRASH BIRDS

By Evi Meyer

“**T**rash bird” is a derogatory term in bird lingo for any species of bird that is ubiquitous in a particular area. These birds usually hog feeders and outcompete other birds for habitat and resources. I never quite understood the use of the term, since one and the same bird can be common in one part of the world and rare or nonexistent in other places. How could the same bird be trash in one place and a rarity in another?

So I refrained from using the term, that is, until a recent trip to Bolsa Chica, when “trash bird” seemed a perfectly legitimate description for what I saw. Let me explain.

On a morning birding trip to Bolsa Chica in late September, I was hopeful to see shorebirds and ducks, which had returned for the winter. I left home at sunrise with the intention of arriving before the tide was high. I found a few shorebirds, some ducks, grebes and pelicans inside of the channels, but not nearly in the numbers I had hoped for. Granted, the tide was higher than I had anticipated, and there wasn't a lot of exposed mud for the probers, but at least one of the Ridgway's Rails or the American Bittern could have made an appearance. Not so.

It was mid-morning now, and I was joined by my good birding friend Jess Morton. Four eyes are always better than two, especially if the birds are scarce. Together we meandered through the channels and looked for birds, any birds at this point, but did not see much. When we turned the bend at Rabbit Island, we noticed how the flood control channel had carried in a tremendous amount of trash.

There was a lot of the usual small



Photo by Jess Morton

stuff like bottles, cans, balloons and cigarettes, but also some pretty big trash such as furniture and even a mattress. We were disgusted and ready to pass by that area as fast as possible.

But then we saw something very unexpected that stopped us in our tracks. In the middle of those mounds of trash, a Sora was foraging in the open, seemingly completely unfazed by the pollution of the channel. Soras are more often heard than seen, as they usually work the edge of reeds in freshwater ponds and disappear in them at the slightest disturbance. This Sora was different. It busily picked up food between styrofoam pieces, bottle caps and cigarette butts without any place to hide. We had found our trash bird!

Not long ago I would have hesitated to aim my camera on a bird inundated by trash and moved on towards birds in more natural habitats. But this time I was fascinated by the tenacity of this Sora under what seemed to be very adverse conditions from a human perspective.

But were they really adverse for the Sora, or had that bird found a treasure trove of food in this refuse? Could it be that the visually appalling piles of trash

**Haunting habitat?
Big trash. Little bird finding fare.
Pick out your meaning. — Jess Morton**

actually provided a breeding ground for high concentrations of algae and invertebrates, which served as food for this bird?

However this Sora encounter can be interpreted, it made us stay with the bird for a good long time and document photographically how a beautiful bird can gracefully forage through not so graceful piles of trash.

I have long been an advocate for including humans as an important component of any realistic analysis of an ecosystem. There are over seven billion of us on this planet and — being the only species that creates trash — we do alter the natural environment around us simply by our mere existence. Through smart choices we can diminish, but not completely eliminate, the impact we have.

While we should of course always strive to reduce pollution to the maximum, when we do encounter it, we can sometimes be pleasantly surprised by finding beauty and life in it, like we did on that late September morning. One creature's trash can be another creature's treasure! We just need to keep our eyes open to see it.

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

A Golden Anniversary for Local Bird Count



By David Quadhamer

The 116th Christmas Bird Count (CBC) is almost here. The Palos Verdes Peninsula count will take place on Sunday, Dec. 27. This will be our 50th CBC! Each CBC takes place in a 15-mile diameter count circle. Our circle is centered at the Palos Verdes Reservoir and is divided into 10 areas.

Participation is open to everyone. You don't need to be an expert birder in order to help. We need help counting and tallying the birds we find.

Volunteers will be assigned to one of these areas and each area will have at least one knowledgeable birder on hand to help identify the birds. Please contact Ann Brooks at motmots@aol.com if you want to help with the bird count this year.

At the end of the day, after everyone has finished counting birds, we meet at the Madrona Marsh Nature Center to enjoy a potluck dinner and to tally the results. It is always interesting to find out what the other groups have found and how the count went. We can usually expect to tally around 160 to 170 species. Last year we had 175 species, putting our count in the top thirty counts in the United States species wise.

The first Christmas Bird Counts took place on December 25, 1900. At the time, people would participate in what was known as the Christmas "Side Hunt," in which participants would go out in groups and try and shoot as many birds and animals as they could. The group with the largest pile of birds and animals won.

Frank Chapman, an ornithologist, proposed a "Christmas Bird Census" that would count birds as an alternative to the Christmas "Side Hunt." Twenty-seven birders participated in 25 bird counts on that day. The counts were held in Canada and the United States, with most of them located in the north-eastern United States. The Christmas Bird Count is the longest-running citizen science bird project in the United States.

Now, Christmas Bird Counts have gone global. Bird counts take place during a three week period from December 14 through January 5. The Palos Verdes count usually takes place on the second Sunday in this three-week period. Participation in the bird counts has grown from a small group of 27 birders in 1900 to tens of thousands of volunteers today.

Why are Christmas Bird Counts important? The data collected by bird count participants allows researchers, conservation biologists, wildlife agencies and others to study and assess the long-term health and status of bird populations. This

information is combined with other surveys, and together the data shows how bird populations have changed. Then it's used to develop strategies for protecting birds and their habitats.

Christmas Bird Count data has been used in a number of scientific reports. Audubon's 2014 Climate Change Report predicts how the ranges of 588 species of North American birds could be affected by climate change. The 2009 State of the Birds, a collaborative report by the North American Bird Conservation Initiative, showed declines of bird populations during the previous 40 years.

Audubon's 2007 Common Birds in Decline report showed that the populations of some of the most familiar birds in the United States have decreased significantly. Some of the birds in the top 20 in this report included the Northern Bobwhite, Northern Pintail, Loggerhead Shrike, Lark Sparrow and Rufous Hummingbird.

We can see some trends in our data. Thirty years ago we would consistently find California Quail on our count. Now they are rare. It is a similar story for the Loggerhead Shrike. There were 59 counted in 1980 but just one counted last year. Some introduced birds have moved into our area. One of these is the Eurasian Collared-Dove. They weren't to be found on our count 30 years ago, and we counted 31 last year. It is a similar story for the Scaly-breasted Munia (a.k.a. Nutmeg Mannikin). We counted 61 last year.

The United States is home to more than 800 species of birds, 67 of which are federally listed as endangered or threatened. Approximately 184 more are species of conservation concern because of declining populations, limited distribution or high threats. Information about bird populations gathered during the Christmas Bird Counts informs conservation efforts to help the endangered species and manage the others so they don't become threatened or endangered.

This makes your participation so important. The more people we have out counting birds, the better our results will be. Please join us!

Another important reminder is that the chapter's annual elections will be held at our December meeting. I will be running for President and Jess Morton will be running for Treasurer. Currently the positions of Vice President and Secretary are both open, and we need to fill those positions.

The Vice President will help me run the chapter and fill in for me at meetings when I can't attend. The Secretary takes minutes at our board meetings and distributes them to the board. The board members up for election are Bob Carr, Ollie Coker, Tracy Drake, Stacy Herman, Lillian Light and Brandon Winner. We are also looking for additional board members. We have five board meetings per year plus an annual planning session. Please let me know if you're interested.

Your Backyard Habitat



By Dr. Constance M. Vadheim
CSU Dominguez Hills

Big gumplant *Grindelia camporum*

What an unusual year this has been! Spring plants are beginning to bud out,

months early, while some fall-blooming sunflowers are still flowering. Very unusual! One sunflower that blooms both spring and fall is the Big gumplant.

Grindelia camporum is native to the California and Baja California coastal regions and coastal foothills. It favors seasonally moist places like wetland margins, roadsides and riparian areas. You can still see it in the Santa Monica Mountains, and it once grew in the local coastal marshes and the coastal sage scrub and chaparral plant communities.

Like all sunflowers, Big gumplant is an important habitat plant. It produces high-quality nectar and pollen for a wide range of insect pollinators, including native bees (like the Longhorn Bees at right), pollinator flies and wasps, butterflies, moths and others. The seeds are enjoyed in fall and winter by seed-eating birds.

The flowers of Big gumplant grow in the

heads typical of the sunflower family. The heads are medium size (1 to 1.5 inches across) with bright yellow ray flowers (petals) and golden yellow disk flowers (smaller central flowers that produce the seeds). Young heads are covered with a white “gum.” During the spring, a plant may be literally covered with flowers. It’s a lovely sight, particularly when paired with the purple flowers of our local sages (*Salvias*).

Big gumplant is easy to grow. The plants are robust subshrubs, 3 to 4 feet tall and wide. Big gumplant can be grown



in any local soil, likes sun and is very drought tolerant. It usually dies back in summer, then greens up and flowers again if given a little water in late August. Plants look best if pruned back after flowering — either in summer or late fall. That’s about all that’s required.

Include *Grindelia camporum* in your garden for its pretty flowers, habitat value, and even for its many practical uses. To learn more, visit: <http://mother-natures-backyard.blogspot.com/2015/11/plant-of-month-november-big-bracted.html>



For more information on growing and purchasing this plant, visit the Madrona Marsh Nature Center. You can also learn about local native plants at the “Out of the Wilds and Into Your Garden” series on the first Saturday of each month at the center.

CONSERVATION CORNER

Let's Join the Fight to Save America's Food System



By Lillian Light

The stability of the U.S. food system is facing a serious threat! Honeybees, vital pollinators of more than one-third of our nation's crops, are dying in record numbers. The rapid loss of honeybees threatens to unravel agricultural production all across the country. The culprit behind the bee die-off is a class of

pesticides known as neonicotinoids — or “neonics” for short.

Neonics have lethal effects on birds and butterflies as well as on bees. Two years ago the American Bird Conservancy released a groundbreaking report “The Impact of the Nation's Most Widely Used Insecticides on Birds.” Since that time, hundreds more studies have been published addressing the adverse effects of neonics on birds, bees, Monarch butterflies, and entire ecosystems. Often they are used as a seed treatment. The seed coatings are deadly to bees and also to songbirds. When these seeds are planted, most of the chemicals wash into the soil and end up in our waterways, killing off the aquatic invertebrates relied upon by birds, bats and other wildlife. Despite the hundreds of millions of acres on which neonics are applied, scientists are finding that these chemicals are not actually boosting agricultural yields.

Bees and other pollinators play a vital role in our food system by enabling the production of nuts, fruits and vegetables for our tables. In total, pollinators make possible 35% of global food production and contribute more than \$24 billion to our economy. The number of managed honey bee colonies in the U.S. has declined from 6 million in the 1940s to just 2.5 million today, jeopardizing the domestic agriculture industry. The U.S. Department of Agriculture has issued the following dire warning: “Currently, the survivorship of honey bee colonies is too low for us to be confident in our ability to meet the polli-

nation demands of U.S. Agricultural Crops.

There is some good news. Portland, Oregon; Eugene, Oregon; and Seattle, Washington have all enacted local bans on neonics. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is phasing out the use of neonicotinoids across the Wildlife Refuge System. The European Union has also suspended the use of this toxic pesticide. The United States should take similar steps to protect its natural resources, its food security and its pollinators.

It is time for the EPA to get serious about these dangerous chemicals. Please contact Congressman Ted Lieu, and urge him to cosponsor HR1284, the Saving America's Pollinators Act of 2015.

This bill, authored by Representatives Conyer and Blumenauer, would require the EPA to suspend registration of the four most toxic neonicotinoid insecticides. The bill would expedite EPA's scientific review and the monitoring of impacts on our birds, bees, and aquatic life.

Congressman Ted Lieu
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AVIANTICS

By Evi Meyer



MEET, LEARN, RESTORE, ENJOY

Chapter Calendar

Events

Wednesday, Dec. 2, 7 p.m.: **PV/South Bay Audubon board meeting** at Madrona Marsh. All Audubon members and friends are welcome.

Tuesday, Dec. 15, 7 p.m.: **Audubon Third Tuesday Get-Togethers. Photo Night.** Bring your best nature photos to share. Come to Madrona Marsh to socialize with friends and to enjoy the bird quiz, raffle and prizes from Wild Birds Unlimited.

Tuesday, Jan. 19, 7 p.m.: **Audubon Third Tuesday Get-Togethers.** Our speaker for the night will be Connie Vadheim, presenting "Native Plants and Birds." Come to Madrona Marsh to socialize with friends and to enjoy the bird quiz, raffle and prizes from Wild Birds Unlimited.

Sunday, Dec. 27: Los Angeles Christmas Bird Count. For details, e-mail motmots@aol.com or call 323-295-6688.

Field Trips

Important change: Construction at Ken Malloy Harbor Regional Park remains underway, so all second Sunday bird walks to this area are cancelled indefinitely.

Tuesday, Dec. 1, 8:30 a.m.: **"Tour de Torrance."** Join Audubon leader Ron Melin and friends on a ramble around a great local birding area. Meet at the Madrona Marsh Nature Center.

Wednesday, Dec. 2: Birding with Bob. Bob Shanman leads bird walks to different destinations every first Wednesday of the month. For details, visit www.torrance.wbu.com and click on "Birding with Bob."

Wednesday, Dec. 9, 8 a.m.: **Bird Walk at Madrona Marsh** with Audubon leader Bob Shanman. Meet at the Madrona Marsh Nature Center.

Saturday, Dec. 12, 2 p.m.: **PVPLC Natural History Walk to Ocean Trails – West Bluff Cove Reserve.** Walk along restored habitat on the bluffs surrounding the Trump National Golf Club and possibly catch a glimpse of rare California Gnatcatchers while walking to the beach. Moderate. For details, visit www.pvplc.org.

Saturday, Dec. 12, 2:30 p.m.: **Los Serenos de Point Vicente Natural History Walk to Abalone Cove Shoreline Park.** Tour tide pools teeming with marine life. Moderate. Visit www.losserenos.com/pvic.htm.

Sunday, Dec. 13, 8 a.m.: **Bird walk at South Coast Botanic Garden.** Audubon leaders Steve Dexter, Manuel Duran and Ed Griffin will lead this walk through the garden, located at 26300 Crenshaw Blvd., Palos Verdes. There is a minimal charge for nonmembers of the SCBG Foundation, or you can join there.

Sunday, Dec. 13, 8:30 a.m.: **Fieldtrip to Upper Newport Bay** with Eric and Ann Brooks. For details, call 323-295-6688 or e-mail motmots@aol.com.

Tuesday, Dec. 15, 8:30 a.m.: **"Tour de Torrance."** See Dec. 1 for details.

Saturday, Dec. 19, 8 a.m.: **Fieldtrip to Kenneth Hahn Park** with Eric Brooks. For details, call 323-295-6688 or e-mail motmots@aol.com.

Saturday, Dec. 26, 8:30-10:30 a.m.: **Bird Walk at Madrona Marsh** with



Peregrine Falcon

Photo by Evi Meyer

Audubon leaders Tracy Drake and Dinuk Magamma. Meet at the Madrona Marsh Nature Center.

Tuesday, Dec. 29, 8:30 a.m.: **"Tour de Torrance."** See Dec. 1 for details.

Tuesday, Jan. 5, 8:30 a.m.: **"Tour de Torrance."** See Dec. 1 for details.

Wednesday, Jan. 6: Birding with Bob. Bob Shanman leads bird walks to different destinations every first Wednesday of the month. For details, visit www.torrance.wbu.com and click on "Birding with Bob."

Saturday, Jan. 9, 9 – 11:30 a.m.: **PVPLC Natural History Walk to Three Sisters Reserve.** Named after the three ridges that traverse the parcel, walk through the 21-acre habitat that is home to rare birds like the Cactus Wren. Strenuous. For details, visit www.pvplc.org.

Sunday, Jan. 10, 8 a.m.: Bird walk at South Coast Botanic Garden. See Dec. 13 for details.

Sunday, Jan 10, 8 a.m.: Fieldtrip to Veterans Park in Sylmar with Eric and Ann Brooks. For details, e-mail motmots@aol.com or call 323-295-6688.

Sunday, Jan. 10, 2:30 p.m.: Los Serenos de Point Vicente Natural History Walk Abalone Cove Shoreline Park. Tour the tide pools teeming with fascinating marine life. Moderate to strenuous. For details, visit www.losserenos.com/pvic.htm

Wednesday, Jan. 13, 8 a.m.: Bird Walk at Madrona Marsh. See Dec. 9 for details.

Friday to Monday, Jan. 15–18, 8 a.m.: Weekend Fieldtrip to Carrizo Plain and Southern Joaquin Valley with Eric and Ann Brooks. For details, e-mail motmots@aol.com or call 323-295-6688.

Sunday, Jan. 17, 8 a.m.: Bird walk at Ballona Wetlands with Bob Shanman. Visit www.torrance.wbu.com and click on “Birding with Bob.”

Tuesday, Jan. 19, 8:30 a.m.: “Tour de Torrance.” See Dec. 1 for details.

Saturday, Jan. 23, 8:30-10:30 a.m.: Bird Walk at Madrona Marsh with Audubon leaders Tracy Drake and Dinuk Magamma. Meet at the Madrona Marsh Nature Center.



NOTE: PV/South Bay Audubon field trips are generally free, but donations are much appreciated to support programs of the chapter. Please visit the Chapter website at www.pvsb-audubon.org, or www.southbaycalendar.org. Area youth and their families are encouraged to visit www.pvsb-audubon.org/AudubonYES.html.

Book Review: *Feathers, The Evolution of a Natural Miracle*

By Evi Meyer

Feathers are an evolutionary miracle whose story has not been properly told until now. They are a uniquely avian feature, but have fascinated humans since time immemorial. I thoroughly enjoyed reading this informative book not only because of its detailed description of the biology of feathers, but also because it dives deeply into the human culture and psyche.

In *Feathers*, author Thor Hanson, a conservation biologist, illustrates the significance of feathers and elaborates on their evolution, development, structure and functions for birds. He writes with clarity and humor, using many years of personal experience in field research and many hours of talking to feather experts as guidelines.

Feathers is not just a technical book about feathers, as Hanson also sheds a light on the human fascination with them. He devotes a large and well-researched section to the cultural and mythological significance they have played throughout human history. By weaving the field of biomimicry into several chapters, he successfully connects the ancient structure of feathers to the modern cutting-edge world, in which scientists and engineers seek innovation and sustainable solutions to human problems by using nature’s time-tested patterns and strategies.

To explain the evolution of feathers, Hanson highlights the anatomy of various theropods (hip-jointed lizard-like dinosaurs) from the Mesozoic era. We are shown the progression from “dino-fuzz” without any aerodynamic function, to flight feathers used for gliding, which had great implications for the flight of modern birds.

A large and very descriptive part of this book is devoted to the functions of feathers such as flight, thermoregulation and waterproofing, all essential to a bird’s survival. A very compelling chapter called “Give Us Those Nice

Bright Colors” illustrates magnificently the courtship behavior and sexual selection made possible by elaborate feathers that many male birds develop for that purpose. We are shown interesting comparisons of the effectiveness and subtleties of those avian sexual selection mechanisms to the ones employed by mammals.

While Hanson expertly describes the biology of feathers, he also has a deep understanding of human nature — the good and the bad — and its interactions with the natural world. As a conservation biologist, he reminds us that at the beginning of the 20th century many bird species were exploited to make fashionable feather-flaunting hats, which led to their near extinction.

Hanson is quick to point out that the devastating consequences of this exploitation awakened the nascent bird conservation movement of which the Audubon Society is a direct product.

It is very noteworthy that this book goes beyond describing the exploitation of birds for human use and highlights the potential ingenuity of the human intellect stimulated by the study of bird feathers. By linking the development of the first flying machines of the Lilienthal and Wright Brothers with the construction of modern-day airplanes, we are shown in detail how examining nature’s models can lead to important designs for solving human challenges.

I highly recommend this detailed and well-researched book to all “feather nerds,” but also to anybody who is interested in human history and culture. While it is educational for its biological and scientific content, it is thought provoking when it challenges some destructive aspects of human nature, and inspiring when it showcases where the human intellect can go by learning from problems nature has already solved.

I don’t think that anyone who reads this book will look at feathers in quite the same way ever again.

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The Palos Verdes/South Bay Audubon Society and National Audubon Society, of which PV/SB Audubon is the local chapter, are dedicated to the understanding and preservation of our natural heritage.

EXECUTIVE OFFICERS

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Vice President: Open
Treasurer: Jess Morton (Acting), 310-832-5601
Secretary: Open
Past President: Nancy Feagans

DIRECTORS Robert Carr Ollie Coker Tracy Drake
Stacy Herman Lillian Light Donna Morton
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Birds of the Peninsula: Open
Bird Walks: KMHRP: Open
Madrona/Polliwog/Ballona: Bob Shanman, wildbirdbob@gmail.com
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