

HUMMIN'

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Palos Verdes/South Bay Audubon Society

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Survey of Coastal Cactus Wren Leads to Peninsula

By Ann Dalkey
Science Director, PVPLC

Who hasn't delighted in the throaty, rhythmic call of coastal cactus wrens (*Campylorhynchus brunneicapillus*)? Fortunate birders on the Palos Verdes Peninsula have caught these birds doing what they do best, calling from a cactus pad perch, building a nest or taking short flights from one cactus stand to another.

Not so fortunate for the coastal cactus wrens is their current predicament. Major wildfires in Orange and San Diego Counties in the past decade have destroyed large tracts of the coastal cactus wren habitat. As a result, large populations of coastal cactus wrens have been devastated.

The wren's behavior exacerbates the problem. Coastal cactus wrens are homebodies; they rarely migrate further than a few kilometers, which means they are unlikely to move to a new home. Plus, they are finicky. Coastal cactus wrens like well-developed prickly pear cactus stands, with associated stands of cholla and appropriate perching plants, especially Mexican elderberry. It takes 20 years or more for a cactus stand to mature sufficiently to satisfy a coastal cactus wren's exacting standards.

The formation of an ad-hoc Coastal Cactus Wren Conservation Network led to the start of a five-county study of coastal cactus wren. The plan was to gather better data on the habitat use and numbers of this bird throughout Southern California using volunteers. The Network included Palos Verdes Peninsula in the survey.

This spring the Palos Verdes Peninsula Land Conservancy's Science Director, Ann Dalkey, was joined by volunteer Bill Cullen and high school students Ariel Hawley



Above, Ariel Hawley helps survey the site. At left, Cactus Wrens. Photos by Robb Hamilton.



and Erica Capellino to survey areas near the Peninsula preserves, while Survey Leader Robb Hamilton conducted surveys on the preserves.

The good news is that 25 coastal cactus wren territories were found within and outside the preserves. Our local coastal cactus wrens can be found next to busy roads, like Hawthorne Boulevard, by residences

and along trails, wherever the cactus habitat is deemed perfect by coastal cactus wren standards. Because the Peninsula has few Mexican elderberry plants, the wrens use tree tobacco as an alternative perch. These data were relayed to the Coastal Cactus Wren Conservation Network.

In light of the success achieved by the enthusiastic volunteers, the surveys are going to become an annual event for long-term monitoring of the coastal cactus wrens. The Nature Conservancy was an important supporter of the effort. For information about the coastal cactus wren and the survey, visit the organization's Web site, ConserveOnline, at <http://conserveonline.org/workspaces/cacwnetwork>.

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

Never Give Up Your Great Expectations



By John Nieto

expectation *n* (1540) **1** : the act or state of expecting; ANTICIPATION. <in ~ of what would happen> **2 a** : something expected **b** : basis for expecting; ASSURANCE.

Natural history tours usually start out with the guides that are leading the trip saying, “Do not have any expectations about seeing that (insert that special behavior, sight, animal here) you always wanted to see...just let it happen.” It has been one of those California Least Tern seasons for me. I was expecting so much from this season; great photo ops for one thing. I need to remember to bring the camera next year!

I spend two early mornings (7 to 11 a.m.) each week in late April through early August sitting on a platform 6 feet in the air 100 yards away from a fenced-in area of about 3 acres of a sandy island. This refuge within a refuge sits in the middle of 900 acres of the Seal Beach National Wildlife Refuge. I watch with binoculars, waiting; expecting avian predators to sweep in and grab eggs or chicks. I watch male Least Terns take fish to their mates and then both take turns feeding fish to their young. I am expecting coyotes sulking around waiting to jump over the 6-foot electrified fence to feast on helpless chicks. Most days it is quiet: no predators. I find that my expectations are not being met.

Yet it is those other unexpected sights and sounds that entertain and enthrall me. The lone Turkey Vulture soars high above the salt marsh, causing a stir of birds all rising to scare off the huge scavenger. The ubiquitous Great Blue Herons are calling, complaining of egrets sitting in their territory. The Great Egrets are stalking, necks extended, eyes wide open, big yellow beaks pointing—waiting for that careless fish to swim by and with the speed of a bullet taking it into its beak and with a shake of the head down the throat it goes. Snowy Egrets walk with a purpose in the shallows, shaking bright yellow feet: Are they using them as lures or just shaking the mud off of them?

I catch sight of a bird I do not know (one of many through the season), walking among the resting cliff and barn swallows, pecking at the ground. It is a medium-sized bird with a dark mask and a dark breastband on white, with buff-colored body and wings. I try not to panic; I look closely through my spotting scope at this bird that is only

15 feet away—*wow!* I cannot believe the detail and the colors on this Horned Lark. There is a call coming out of the cord grass over my shoulder, a raspy five to six notes repeating, it is the elusive Light-footed Clapper Rail rarely heard and only seen by a lucky few.

I look up as I hear the sound of a Black Skimmer calling and flying straight into the saltwater, pulling up just at the right moment to stay a few inches over the water, dipping that bright orange beak just enough. Looking up, I see an Osprey as it circles over a large pool and dives down talons extended to grasp a fish out of the water and twirl it in mid air so that it faces forward. The days go on like this more or less, and I brighten up, expecting to be entertained by the flying menagerie that makes its home in and around the salt marsh.

One morning I see a familiar silhouette. It is my favorite falcon, an American Kestrel: Is it a male, a female? I follow it across the horizon toward the Least Tern Colony and, to my horror, it dives into the now flying mass of Terns coming up to meet this encroaching predator. It dives twice, three, four times and then it flies off. Did it grab a chick? I rationalize that it probably did not; after all, I was shouting at the top of my lungs and waving my arms and running towards the Colony.

I settle down to catch my breath, and it happens again. This time as all the Terns raise, the Kestrel finds an opening and swoops down and finds a helpless fluff ball in the open and grabs it with talons like meat hooks. I am heartbroken. How can I ever expect to watch this majestic falcon hunt lizards and mice again and not think of the carnage I witnessed that day as it and a mate returned over and over again to satisfy the hunger of their own chicks?

At the end of the season, I can only think of what an adventure I had experienced! The Kestrels were trapped after a week of having their way with the Colony and in the end the Terns fledged chicks out of 179 nests—a happy ending? It is as happy an ending as we can have in the Wildlife Refuge.

As I look forward to next season I have expectations of visiting other sites, many of them listed in our calendar's Field Trips section. I challenge you to take one of our outings and try to quell your expectations of finding that special bird you need for your life or year list. Our chapter offers many bird walks throughout the month, on weekdays and weekends. Find a destination and a leader, and try to control your expectations from taking hold of your soul—just try!

Long-Advocated Harbor Park Improvements Now Under Way

By Jess Morton

It felt as though decades of work by myself, Martin Byhower, Julie Greer and other Audubon leaders stretching back to Mitch Heindel to Shirley Wells and Ken Malloy himself (for whom the park is named) were about to be rewarded. On July 1, L.A. city planners presented preliminary designs for major improvements to Harbor Regional Park at the eighth public Proposition O design workshop in Harbor City.

Centered on the need to meet state and federal water-quality mandates, Los Angeles will invest \$117 million over the next 4 years in park and Wilmington Drain projects that will also greatly enhance habitat values and park enjoyment. These have been a long time coming, and Audubon has been involved since the beginning!

The plans include the installation of in-stream trash and silt collection systems, dredging of Lake Machado, shoreline stabilization, lake water aeration and polishing systems, as well as a variety of trail and vegetation enhancement projects. By far the most costly project will be lake dredging, estimated to run about half of the total cost, with the trash control systems a distant runner-up.

The result will be a lake that no longer looks like the endpoint for half of the fast food wrappings in L.A., but rather is the heart of a productive riparian wetlands complex running from Lomita Boulevard to Pacific Coast Highway. For details, please visit: www.lapropo.org/sitefiles/Machado/machadointro.htm.

As longtime Audubon members will know, Harbor Park has been the site of our chapter's principal efforts over the past decade, and important to our activist and birding community for far

longer. Several chapter officers have served multi-year stints chairing the park advisory board, and many more have worked closely with park staff to maintain the park and to document its wildlife values.

The park would not have existed at all if it had not been for the foresight



Alfred Mata, L.A. Bureau of Engineering project manager, led the discussion of proposed goals.



John Nieto (right) and Jacob Gutierrez consider the effects of park projects on Native American sites.

and persistence of Ken Malloy, who was a chapter vice president in the 1980s. Shirley Wells, who would have been our Audubon's founding president had she lived, was the driving force that kept Wilmington Drain's valuable habitat from being paved over. Instead of that unappetizing name, we should see that it is renamed the "Shirley Wells Waterway" in her honor.

Those attending the Wednesday evening presentation included Audubon's John Nieto, Martin By-

hower, Julie Greer, myself and several other members. The evening was hosted by combined L.A. City departments, with the project consultants, CDM and Parsons, handling much of the show's technical side.

Especially gratifying to the present Audubon team members was the seamless way virtually all of our suggested improvements, some of which we have been advocating for a dozen years, have been incorporated into the final design. It's still too early to celebrate, but not too soon to think about what cakes and streamers we'll need to order when we do.

View *Hummin'* Online

The Palos Verdes/South Bay Audubon Society is working to transition from a printed, mailed newsletter to an electronic version, with color photographs, beginning with the October/November edition of *Hummin'*. The new *e-Hummin'* will be available on our Web site, www.pvsb-audubon.org, the first of alternate, even-numbered months: October, December, February, April, June and August.

Another option for subscribers would be to receive their newsletter via e-mail. If you wish to cancel your paper copy of *Hummin'* and access it online only, please write to the Chapter's secretary: nancy@pvsb-audubon.org.

So what are the benefits of switching over to *e-Hummin'*?

- Saving time volunteers spend folding, stamping and mailing hundreds of copies;
- Saving money on printing and postage costs;
- Ensuring immediate delivery to your e-mail box concurrently with Web publication; and
- Saving trees!

—Nancy Feagans

Birds of the Peninsula

May/June 2009 Sightings

By Kevin Larson

The luck of having extraordinary numbers of northbound landbird migrants deposited along our western coastal area was not with us this spring, but the second half of migration turned out better than the first. May got off to a good start and our best look at migration came during the middle of the month. Migration was largely over by the middle of June, but a few passerine stragglers were noted during the second half of the month.

Local rarities such as a Little Blue Heron and a Laughing Gull during the period rivaled those coming from the passerine category. Two Hooded Warblers were the standouts among the few eastern warblers reported. High numbers of Rose-breasted Grosbeaks and Indigo Buntings were reported this spring.

With the exception of a brief period of high pressure and warm temperatures a week into May, marine layer clouds were a nearly uninterrupted daily weather feature during May and June. Persistent low pressure and thick overcast skies made our weather unseasonably cool from late May through June. A remarkable string of below-normal daily high temperatures at Downtown Los Angeles and LAX extended from 22 May through the end of June.

The highest temperature recorded at LAX during June, only 71 degrees, was the lowest maximum for that month since records began in 1944. Potent thunderstorms moving through the area on 3 June were spawned from a large cut-off low off central California. This rare weather scenario also brought light showers on 5 June.

An unusually late Greater White-fronted Goose was at Harbor Park on 9 May (Cal Yorke). A Brown Pelican at Harbor Park on 10 May was inland, where rare (Martin Byhower). An adult **Little Blue Heron** at Del Rey Lagoon 31 May-27 Jun was enjoyed by many (Regine Snitzer); a record of an immature in this area 17 May-21 Jul last year may involve the same in-



Indigo Bunting

Photo by David Ellsworth

dividual. Scarce in spring, two White-faced Ibises were along the Los Angeles River in Paramount on 2 May (Richard Barth).

A report of breeding **Peregrine Falcons** at Point Fermin was exciting news; two young were under a parent's wings on the cliff on 8 May (Lowell Barnum). A young juvenile **Virginia Rail** in the Playa Vista Riparian Corridor on 25 May confirmed our first modern breeding record of this species (Dan Cooper); individuals were present there last year from 25 Apr to 25 May but due to their furtive behavior, breeding evidence was not obtained.

Common Moorhens bred for the second year in a row at the Ballona Freshwater Marsh; a pair with five downy young was seen on 5 May

(Don Sterba). Spotted Sandpiper sightings at the Ballona Freshwater Marsh on 20 May and 2 Jun were late and may pertain to the same individual (DS). A Long-billed Curlew in the Ballona Wetland area 14-15 Jun was either an early southbound migrant or a summering non-breeder (Jonathan Coffin). An adult **Laughing Gull** was a nice reward for Ron Melin while conducting a Snowy Plover survey along Hermosa Beach on 19 May. An Acorn Woodpecker in Westchester on 23 May is one of few spring records for our area (KL). A Nuttall's Woodpecker was along the Westchester bluffs near Loyola Marymount University on 20 Jun (DC).

The only Dusky Flycatcher report this spring came from Madrona Marsh on 18 May (David Moody). A Pacific-slope Flycatcher in Manhattan Beach on 18 Jun was a late migrant (KL). Tree Swallows nested again this year at Harbor Park; a pair was feeding nestlings at a nest box on 10 May (MB). Nesting for the second year in a row at Harbor Park, a pair of Western Bluebirds fledged young by 10 May (MB).

On 2 May, another pair of Western Bluebirds was at Alondra Park, where breeding was confirmed for the first time last July (DM). Our area's first breeding pair of Western Bluebirds found in 2003 continues to nest at Ridgecrest Intermediate School in Rancho Palos Verdes; they hatched three young by the first week of June (Sam Bloom).

The California Thrasher found by Jonathan Coffin along the north side of Ballona Creek west of Culver Boulevard on 16 Mar 2008 was still present on 11 May (RB). A Phainopepla near the Ballona Freshwater Marsh on 24 Jun was an unusual

See Peninsula, Page 6

CONSERVATION CORNER

Join in the International Day of Climate Action



By Lillian Light

Have you been worrying about the horrendous consequences of runaway global warming?

Please put October 24 on your calendars! Representatives of 14 local groups met at the Manhattan Beach Community Church on Tuesday, July 14 to plan a

South Bay event on that date to participate in the 350.org's International Day of Climate Action on October 24. We are joining with more than 1,000 groups globally who have pledged to hold events calling for a fair global climate treaty that lowers carbon dioxide levels below 350 parts per million.

Our South Bay 350 Climate Action Group proposed forming a human tide line that will represent the impact of sea level rise from climate change, in the Manhattan and Hermosa Beach areas. There was enthusiastic agreement that this line be in place at 3:50 p.m. on October 24. You will not want to miss being part of this exciting event, but please arrive on time or earlier to take part in a rally before the tide line demonstration. Many more details need to be worked out, and we invite all who are interested to attend our next meeting on August 10.

You have a chance to take action that will help the world avoid climate catastrophe. The most recent science tells us that unless we can reduce the amount of the greenhouse gas, or carbon dioxide, to 350 parts per million, we will cause major damage to our planet. James Hansen of America's National Aeronautics and Space Administration has said, "If humanity wishes to preserve a planet similar to that on which civilization developed...evidence and ongoing climate change suggest that carbon dioxide will need to be reduced from its current 387 ppm to, at most, 350 ppm." The rate of 387 ppm is higher than at any time in the recorded history of our planet, and we are seeing its disastrous impacts on people and places all over the world. Climate scientists warn that we may be near the tipping point, which if passed, would have irreversible consequences.

The 2009 State of the Future, a report backed by the World Bank, UNESCO, the U.S. Army, and the Rockefeller Foundation, discussed the unprecedented scale of the effects of climate change and concluded,

An effort on the scale of the Apollo mission that sent men to the moon is needed if humanity is to have a fighting chance of surviving the ravages of climate

change. The stakes are high, as, without sustainable growth, "billions of people will be condemned to poverty and much of civilization will collapse."

We have an opportunity to urge world leaders to make a global climate treaty that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions in accordance with climatologists' recommendations. From December 7 to 18, delegates, NGOs, and businesses from every nation will meet in Copenhagen, Denmark to forge a new global climate change agreement to replace the Kyoto Protocol. You are invited to be part of a movement to pressure world leaders to change the global CO₂ target, which is now between 450 and 550 ppm, to 350 ppm, a figure that should save us from future climate crises. To do this, we need to stop burning coal, reduce our use of oil and gas, and start using solar, wind, and other such sources of renewable energy. This kind of energy revolution will also provide green jobs and, in turn, boost our nation's economy.

To obtain more information or to participate in the South Bay event, please contact the chairperson, Joe Galliani, of the Environmental Priorities Network at 310-373-7892 or mrjoe@mrjoe.com; or contact one of the vice chairs, Kathleen Jacecko (kjacecko@teachinggreen.org) or Amy Willinger (awillinger@earthlink.net). To learn more about international events, log on to www.350.org.

One more thing that you can do to reduce global warming pollution is to contact Senator Dianne Feinstein, and ask her to vote to strengthen the American Clean Energy and Security Act of 2009 (HR 2454). This is the bill recently passed by the House of Representatives that sets up "cap and trade." Urge her to oppose any amendments that would weaken the bill or delay its implementation. Tell her that the U.S. Global Change Research Program just released a report that details devastating effects on ecosystems, human health, water, agriculture, transportation, and infrastructure. It concludes that atmospheric CO₂ levels must be stabilized near current levels to avoid "severe, widespread and irreversible impacts." This report highlights the scientific urgency for deep and rapid reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. Now you know all that you can do to promote this most important goal and save the planet for future generations.

Senator Dianne Feinstein
331 Hart Senate OB
Washington, DC 20510
202 224 3841
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senator@feinstein.senate.gov

This Unknown Peninsula: White-Throated Swift

By Jess Morton

Swift! What an appropriate name for these sickle-winged marauders that spend virtually all of their waking hours on the wing. They hurtle high overhead after the aerial plankton, primarily insects, on which they thrive. A few birds are faster, and a few fly farther afield, but I doubt that any can sustain a swift's speed, nor travel as many total miles. The only possible rivals I can think of are all seabirds.

Of the four species that have been seen on the peninsula, the white-throated swift is by far the most frequently encountered. They can be found at any time of year, most commonly along the coastal bluffs and hillsides, where they nest in rocky clefts. While they number in the dozens, today, in the 1970's several hundred swifts lived in the quarry cliffs at the end of Forrestal Drive. The

collapse of one rock face there may have done in a good many birds. It certainly did in the best habitat, and



swifts are scarce there, today.

Sometimes inelegantly described as cigars with wings, white-throated swifts are rather stubby birds, somewhat larger than a sparrow, with very

long narrow wings. But there is nothing inelegant about these birds. They are striking in their sleek black and white plumage; butlers of the skies.

Our other swifts show little or no contrast in their plumage. Of them, the small Vaux's swift is common in migration, occasionally appearing in large flocks for a day or two, before moving on. With them, on rare occasion, is their eastern counterpart, a chimney swift. The two species are so similar, though, that only an expert can separate them in the field.

A fourth species, the black swift, is also migratory here, and though a western species, is rare along the coast. Inland, it has the amazing habit of nesting behind waterfalls. A safe enough habitat, when one stops to think about it.

Swifts are frequently heard before they are seen. There is a musical series of descending notes, which I once described in a poem as: "tinkling notes falling where the headlong swifts have

See Swift, Page 8

Peninsula, from Page 4

summer record (DS). A Northern Parula was a nice find at the Ballona Freshwater Marsh on 27 May (DS). Robb Hamilton found a singing Black-and-white Warbler in Rolling Hills on 25 May. An American Redstart was reported at the Ballona Freshwater Marsh on 20 Jun (Denise Perez).

Two **Hooded Warblers** were the best of the landbird vagrants this spring; singing males were along the Playa Vista Riparian Corridor on 10 Jun (DC) and at Bob Beckler's residence in San Pedro on 13 Jun. Russ Hoeltzel photographed an adult male Summer Tanager in Rancho Palos Verdes on 2 Jun.

A late White-crowned Sparrow (subspecies unspecified) was along the coast of Rancho Palos Verdes at the end of Hawthorne Boulevard on 14 May (Sally Moite). A Dark-eyed "Oregon" Junco at Highridge Park in Rolling Hills Estates on 25 May was very near where breeding was confirmed in 2006 (SM). An excellent showing of five Rose-breasted Grosbeaks included singles along the

Playa Vista Riparian Corridor on 25 May (DC), in Rolling Hills 30 May-11 Jun (Cathy Nichols), in San Pedro on 6 Jun (Stephanie Bryan), at Madrona Marsh on 16 Jun (RM, DM), and in Rolling Hills Estates on 26 Jun (Randy Harwood).

Five Indigo Buntings this spring was a remarkable total. Following an early individual at the Dominguez Gap Wetland on 23 Apr (Karen Gilbert), singles were in Rancho Palos Verdes on 10 May (Dalton Sanders), at Madrona Marsh on 18 May (Tracy Drake), in San Pedro 1-2 Jun (David Ellsworth), and in Harbor City on 2 Jun (Harold Ericsson). Eighty migrant Yellow-headed Blackbirds at the Ballona Freshwater Marsh on 5 May was a notable concentration (DS); a report of one came from at Madrona Marsh 15-18 May (Tracy Drake).

Thanks to everyone who reported sightings during the period. Please send your sightings to me at cbirdr@ca.rr.com for the Palos Verdes Peninsula, South Bay and vicinity, including areas east to the L.A. River, north to about the 105 Freeway, and along the coast up to Marina del Rey.

Your Backyard Habitat



By Dr. Connie Vadheim, CSUDH

Chaparral Mallow *Malacothamnus fasciculatus*

You probably already know that California natives are among the best habitat plants for our local birds, insects and other living things. Unfortunately, California native plants have a reputation for being “ugly and brown” in some circles. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth. California native species are prized



“exotic” ornamentals in gardens throughout the world. So you don’t have to sacrifice beauty when choosing plants for your habitat garden.

Among the prettiest local flowering shrubs are the native bush mallows. Grouped in the Mallow Family (*Malvaceae*), these lovely shrubs are related to both the garden Hibiscus and ‘Cheeseweed.’ They share in common simple, rounded leaves and characteristic showy flowers. The flowers have five large petals—often brightly colored in pinks and purples—fused into a funnel-shape at the base. The male and female sexual parts are located on a long stalk in front of the petals. This arrangement insures that hummingbirds, the most common pollinators, pick up and deposit pollen as they harvest nectar from the base of the petals.

The bush mallows make great habitat plants. In addition to hummingbirds, their nectar attracts bees and butterflies, including the West Coast Lady. Several local butterflies use

native bush mallows as larval food, including the White Checkered Skipper, Large White Skipper and West Coast Lady. Seed-eating birds relish the seeds, while the dense foliage offers cover and nesting sites for birds and small animals.

Bush mallows range in size from small trees (Southern Island Mallow—*Lavatera assurgentiflora*) and large shrubs (like Chaparral Mallow—*Malacothamnus fasciculatus*, 10 to 12 feet tall and wide) to smaller shrubs like *Malacothamnus clementinus* (San Clemente Island Bush Mallow) or the smaller Chaparral Mallow cultivar ‘Casitas’ (both of which are between 4 and 6 feet in size). Bush mallows can be used as accent shrubs or shaped and pruned into hedges. They also do well on slopes and hillsides.



Bush mallows grow in most local soils and are quite easy to grow, although they may be short lived. They like full sun to light shade (or afternoon shade in sunny gardens) and are very drought-tolerant once established. They look best with occasional summer water. Once established, they will bloom over a long period from late spring into fall. A blooming bush mallow is literally covered in pink-purple blooms—your neighbors won’t believe that this is a native plant!

Bush mallows spread by suckering. Cut back old woody stems to the ground to rejuvenate.

Those who are interested are invited to learn more about native plant gardening at the “Out of the Wilds and Into Your Garden” series on the first Saturday of each month from 10:00 a.m. to noon at the Madrona Marsh Nature Center.

PV/South Bay Birding Installment: Birds of the Region

By Martin Byhower

The Palos Verdes Peninsula and surroundings are famous for their scenic coastline and beautiful homes.

As birders discover it, it becomes known for its unique bird assemblage as well.

Local birders know that “The Hill” and the surrounding coastal lowlands are species-rich and vastly under-birded secrets in Los Angeles County. At one time or another virtually anything can—and eventually does—show up.

The Peninsula was once one of Southern California’s offshore Channel Islands, maintaining a closer biological affinity with them than with other nearby mountain ranges. The Peninsula is now separated from the Santa Monica and San Gabriel Mountains, not by water, but by the highly urbanized Los Angeles basin.

The island of Palos Verdes first emerged between 1 and 2 million years ago. It joined the mainland relatively recently, at the end of the last ice age, between 10,000 and 20,000 years ago, as the Los Angeles basin filled with debris from the erosion of the nearby Transverse Ranges.

Whether or not portions were previously connected to the mainland, organisms that colonized or were stranded on

the island were isolated from the mainland long enough for new species and subspecies to diverge. Some species that ordinarily might be expected in this habitat, such as Wrentit, Oak Titmouse and California Thrasher, seem unwilling to cross the Los Angeles basin in order to inhabit the area (can you blame them?).

Isolation has its benefits as well. Perhaps the nonmigratory *sedentarius* race of Allen’s Hummingbird evolved on the island of Palos Verdes; it continues its dispersal to surrounding areas even today. In any case, the Palos Verdes Peninsula may be the only area where the Allen’s is as common a resident as Anna’s Hummingbird, while migrant Rufous and Black-chinned Hummingbirds are relatively scarce. In winter, check the abundant flowering *Eucalyptus* and *Melaleucas* (bottle-brush) planted throughout the area. Year round, Allen’s can be found fairly easily in the local canyons and parks and in residential neighborhoods at any nectar-rich flowers or sugar-water feeders.

The Palos Verdes area also hosts the resident, rather dull (but endearing) Channel Island *sordida* subspecies of Orange-crowned Warbler. Based upon subtle variations in plumage and call or song, some meticulous observers believe that

we probably also have our “own” versions of Pacific-slope Flycatcher, Spotted Towhee and possibly others as well. But it is the excellent assortment of fall migrants and vagrants, as well as excellent offshore pelagic scoping, that really draws the binocular-toting crowds. Some interesting winter vagrants, spring migrants, shorebirds and the presence of “specialties,” like the California Gnatcatcher and various western endemics, make the area a worthy destination at any time of year.

The Palos Verdes Peninsula also hosts an eclectic group of stable breeding populations of exotics. Spotted Doves have declined drastically, but Peafowl, Mired Parakeets and Yellow-chevrons Parakeets are locally common. Which of the preceding you deem “countable” depends upon whose rules you decide to play by.

Before birding the area, check the map in the ABA guide and pick up a good local map such as the AAA “Southern Area” Los Angeles map. Note especially that the Peninsula uplands are broadly surrounded by a “square” perimeter road that changes name successively from Palos Verdes Drive West to PV Drive South, PV Drive East, or PV Drive North as you circle counterclockwise.

See Birding, Page 9

Swift, from Page 6

cracked through crystal air.” It is a sound to remember. A call to look upward and search for these consummate aerialists.

It is another poem, though, that describes one of the white-throated swifts most remarkable characteristics. In “Physics of Flight,” I wrote of them, “Unaware that two objects cannot coexist/the white-throated swift hurtles at tall rock/where a fissure must open to accept it.”

For our swifts only roost and nest in narrow, vertical crevices in rock faces. They do not perch on the ground or in trees as other birds do. In fact they belong to



the family *Apodidae*, literally without feet, which is not really true. But feet don’t have anything to do with their approach to a roost or nest. Into their crevices they go, seemingly at full speed. Hair raising, the first time you see it.

The nests are made of short twigs and grasses pasted to the vertical rock face with a salivary glue and lined with feathers. Typically, four or five eggs are laid, and the full nestling cycle takes about 6 weeks. The young are strong fliers once out of the nest, soon foraging completely on their own. High overhead, they

take their place in the crystal chorus of the white-throated swifts.

Birding, from page 8

An excellent starting point for observing a representative sample of Southern California species as well as some regionally scarce specialties is **Ken Malloy/Harbor Regional Park (KMHRP)**.

Through the years over 300 species have been documented here—a very large number for such a small area! This park, Banning Park and Deforest Park may be the three best spots to visit during migration, but KMHRP is an excellent place to bird year-round. One can easily spend an entire day birding here. Much of the habitat has been degraded, but the birding is still good to excellent. Watching for new, rare and long-absent species to drop in is a big part of the fun!

Start at the intersection of Pacific Coast Highway (Highway 1) and the Harbor Freeway (Interstate 110). Go northwest on Pacific Coast Highway, turning left at the light onto Vermont Avenue (0.5). Park where the lot curves to the right, paralleling PCH.

A walk eastward along the remaining riparian forest (the “north-end willows,” as locals call them) can turn up excellent vagrants during late fall migration into the winter and sometimes in late spring, as well. Earlier in the morning is best here. Try to locate the warbler/Bushtit flock(s) and then seek out the unusual members. Residents in the willows here include Allen’s Hummingbird, Downy Woodpecker, Black Phoebe, American Robin, American Goldfinch, the Channel Island (*sordida*) race of Orange-crowned Warbler, California Towhee and other species.

A few pairs of Yellow Warblers and Black-Chinned Hummers represent the only remaining breeding populations of these species on the Peninsula (summer). Red-shouldered and Cooper’s Hawks, Bullock’s Oriole and a few Swainson’s Thrushes still nest in the area in season.

Venture deep enough and you might find a remaining colleague of Reggie, the Park’s legendary alligator (but more likely, you’d see invasive snapping and red-eared slider turtles and the invasive and unfriendly Banded Florida water snakes). End your eastward stroll when you reach where the “Wilmington Drain” crosses under PCH. Follow the edge of the water south (watch your step) into an

elevated clearing. Wilson’s Warbler, Blue Grosbeak, Bell’s Vireo, Yellow-breasted Chat and other species have attempted to nest here: With cowbird control and a bit of encouragement, they may succeed.

To continue, walk or drive parallel to **Machado Lake**, southward along Vermont Avenue. (You can choose to walk the length of the lake or leapfrog to the succeeding parking lots along the west shore.) There are always a few grebes, ducks, gulls and shorebirds visible from this area southward to the dam/spillway, and the numbers increase significantly in winter. This can be a good area to pick up Thayer’s Gull in the gull flock, especially after mid-November. Be sure to scan the groups of feral geese and ducks for surprisingly easy-to-miss legitimate individuals like Brant, Ross’s Goose, Wood Duck and the like. In late May, check this area at dusk for Black Swift and other unusual migrants. Always check over the lake for White-throated Swift (year round) and Vaux’s swift (migration), and western swallow species in migration.

Search the tules on your side of the lake as well as the opposite shore for Sora, Common Moorhen, Marsh Wren (only local spot for this species), Song Sparrow, Red-winged and Tricolored Blackbirds and other marsh birds. Tricoloreds often segregate by sex or age and are declining locally, but a few remain in winter. Unfortunately, Great-tailed Grackles have moved in for good (or bad), threatening many of the regionally declining nesting wetland species.

In late spring and summer, the south end of Machado Lake has been one of the best locations in Los Angeles County to look for Least Bitterns. Look for them in the tules along the east shore or flying across the lake (watch for American Bitterns in winter). Better yet, park in the lot closest to Anaheim Street and Vermont Avenue and walk east along the concrete bike path to stop mid-lake along the spillway. Standing along the spillway in the morning or at dusk in June and July affords the best opportunity to spot Least Bittern, as well as Least Terns teaching their young to fish for the mosquito fish stocked in the lake.

Continue across the dam and stop at the end. The willow forest on the left can

be excellent for warblers and other migrants. Depending upon the season, scan the field to your right for White-Tailed Kite, Loggerhead Shrike (declining locally), Cassin’s, Western and (in fall) Tropical Kingbirds and sparrows. Ahead of you, near the chain link fence by the golf driving range, is an area locals call the “sparrow corner.”

Watch here and in the restoration area to your left and below you for vagrant sparrows (winter and migration) and migrant Lazuli Buntings among the common White-crowns, Lincoln’s and Savannahs. Don’t be fooled by the exotic Nutmeg Manikins or Orange Bishops (the female of which may be mistaken for a Grasshopper Sparrow). Continue on, checking ponds there for Cinnamon and Green-winged Teal.

At the end of the bike path, check the Eucalyptus trees for sapsuckers; these and a few red willows in the park commonly host Red-breasted, and Yellow-bellied and Red-naped Sapsuckers have also been seen here recently. Hooded and Bullock’s Orioles are also common spring and summer here. If you want to proceed, you can follow the trail next to the lake around to the left until it ends. *Do not walk onto the golf course.*

An easier option at this point is to return the way you came and head south from the west side of the spillway (if water is pooled, check here for ducks and shorebirds), then east around the bend, entering an area of dirt trails by the seasonally inundated lower wetlands. Trails then loop through Camp Machado, an occasionally productive area composed mostly of nonnative trees and shrubs. Eventually you will come to the seasonally inundated (and soon to become permanent) “lower wetlands” which can be very productive for birds mentioned earlier, particularly during times when the Park/lake margin is crowded with people. **Author’s Note:** *The above article is a more complete and detailed version of the chapter introduction I wrote for the 2006 ABA Guide to Birding in Southern California. Keep in mind that the upcoming Proposition O water quality and habitat enhancement improvements will change things but will vastly improve the birding at and around Machado Lake!*

MEET, LEARN, ENJOY, RESTORE...

Calendar of Events

Wednesday, August 5, 7 p.m.:
PV/South Bay Audubon board meeting at Madrona Marsh. All Audubon members and friends are welcome to attend.

Saturday, August 8, 9–11 a.m.: **Second Saturday Habitat Restoration Project at Ken Malloy Harbor Regional Park (KMHRP).** Led by Geffen Oren, Martin Byhower and others, the cleanup and restoration of this wildlife area offers a hands-on opportunity to learn about invasive species removal, native planting, effective debris removal and more while earning community service credit. All ages are welcome, but an adult must accompany those under age 16. Wear closed-toe shoes and long pants. Bring water, a snack, sun/bug repellent and work gloves. The park is located at 25820 Vermont Ave., west of Harbor Freeway. For details, please call Martin at 310-541-6763, ext. 4143.

Thursday, August 13, 7:45–9:45 a.m. **Bird survey on a habitat restoration site.** In collaboration with the Palos Verdes Peninsula Land Conservancy (PVPLC), our chapter will be monitoring the bird population on the Three Sisters habitat restoration site as a long-term project (see Dalkey's article in the Aug./Sept. 2008 issue of *Hummin'*). Volunteers are needed. They will be trained in identification and survey methods. If you would like to participate in this important project, contact Ann Dalkey at adalkey@pvplc.org or 310-541-7613, ext. 208.

Saturday, August 15, 7:45–9:45 a.m.: **Bird survey on a habitat restoration site.** In collaboration with the PVPLC, our chapter will be monitoring the bird population on the Three Sisters habitat restoration site as a long term project. Volunteers are needed. They will be trained in identification and survey methods. To partici-

pate, call Ann Dalkey at 310-541-7613, ext. 208.

Sunday, August 16, 9 a.m.–3 p.m.: **Annual Strategic Planning Meeting at Madrona Marsh.** We will brainstorm plans for next year and have lunch.

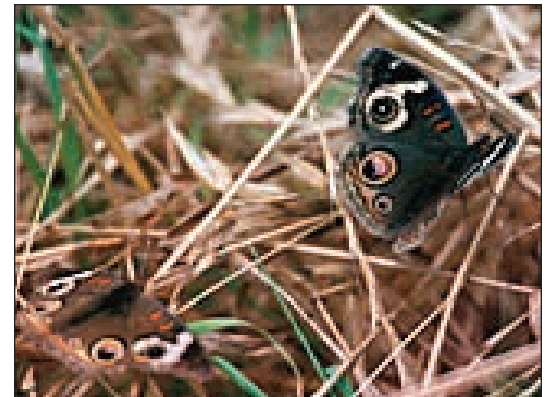
Thursday, September 10, 8–10 a.m.: **Bird survey on a habitat restoration site.** In collaboration with the PVPLC, our chapter will be monitoring the bird population on the Three Sisters habitat restoration site as a long term project. Volunteers are needed. They will be trained in identification and survey methods. If you want to participate, call 310-541-7613, ext. 208.

Saturday, September 12, 9–11 a.m.: **Second Saturday Habitat Restoration Project at KMHRP.** Led by Geffen Oren, Martin Byhower and others, the cleanup and restoration of this wildlife area offers a hands-on opportunity to learn about invasive species removal, native planting, effective debris removal and more while earning community service credit. All ages can help, but an adult must accompany volunteers under age 16. Wear closed-toe shoes and long pants. Bring water, a snack, sun/bug repellent and work gloves. Call Martin at 310-541-6763, ext. 4143.

Tuesday, September 15, 7 p.m.: **Audubon Third Tuesday Get-Togethers.** Our speaker will be Roy Poucher. He will be talking about Birding Southeast Asia (Thailand and Cambodia). Come to Madrona Marsh and socialize with friends, and enjoy the bird quiz, raffle and prizes from Wild Birds Unlimited.

Saturday, September 19, 8:15–10:15 a.m.: **Bird survey on a habitat restoration site.** In collaboration with

the PVPLC, our chapter will be monitoring the bird population on the Three Sisters habitat restoration site as a long-term project. Volunteers are needed. They will be trained in identification and survey methods. To participate, call 310-541-7613, ext. 208.



Various butterfly species can be found at KMHRP during the summer.

Field Trips

Sunday, August 2, 8 a.m.: **Bird Walk at South Coast Botanic Garden.** Audubon leader Stephanie Bryan 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.

Tuesday, August 4, 8:30 a.m.: **"Tour de Torrance."** Join Audubon leader Dave Moody on a ramble around a great local birding area. Meet at Madrona Marsh Nature Center.

Saturday, August 8, 9 a.m.: **PVPLC Natural History Walk at Miraleste Canyon.** A first time visit to beautiful canyons on the east side of the Peninsula, overlooking the harbor. Strenuous due to some steep and rocky trails. Park at Miraleste Elementary School 6245 Via Canada. Visit pvplc.org.

Sunday, August 9, 8 a.m.: Second Sunday Walk at KMHRP. Join Audubon leaders and explore this important natural area of the South Bay. Please find the park location in the Aug. 8 KMHRP listing.

Wednesday, August 12, 8 a.m.: Bird Walk at Madrona Marsh with Audubon leader Bob Shanman.

Tuesday, August 18, 8:30 a.m.: "Tour de Torrance." Join Audubon leader Dave Moody and friends on a ramble around a great local birding area. Meet at Madrona Marsh Nature Center.

Wednesday, August 19, 8 a.m.: Bird Walk at South Coast Botanic Garden. Audubon leader Stephanie Bryan will lead this walk through the garden, located at 26300 Crenshaw Blvd., Palos Verdes. There is a minimal charge for nonmembers.

Saturday, August 29, 10 a.m.: Los Serenos de Point Vicente Natural History Tour at Oceanfront Estates/PVIC. Join us for a tour of the museum and native plant garden, plus an easy walk along the spectacular blufftop at Oceanfront Estates. For details and directions, call PVIC at 310-377-5370 or visit its Web site www.losserenos.com/pvic.htm.

Tuesday, September 1, 8:30 a.m.: "Tour de Torrance." Join Audubon leader Dave Moody and friends on a ramble around a great local birding area. Meet at Madrona Marsh Nature Center.

Sunday, September 6, 8 a.m.: Bird Walk at South Coast Botanic Garden. Audubon leader Stephanie Bryan will lead this walk through the garden, located at 26300 Crenshaw Blvd., Palos Verdes. There is a minimal charge for nonmembers.

Wednesday, September 9, 8 a.m.: Bird Walk at Madrona Marsh with Audubon leader Bob Shanman.

Saturday, September 12, 9 a.m.: PVPLC Natural History Walk at Katjima/Crooked Beach Patch and McBride trails. Easy walk on RPV's oldest public trail, offering a panoramic view over largest public open space in RPV. For details, go to pvplc.org.

Sunday, September 13, 8 p.m.: Second Sunday Walk at KMHRP. Join Audubon leaders and explore this important natural area of the South Bay. Please find the park location in the Aug. 8 KMHRP listing.

Tuesday, September 15, 8:30 a.m.: "Tour de Torrance." Join Audubon leader Dave Moody and friends on a ramble around a great local birding area. Meet at Madrona Marsh Nature Center.

Wednesday, September 16, 8 a.m.: Bird Walk at South Coast Botanic Garden. Audubon leader Stephanie Bryan will lead this walk through the garden, located at 26300 Crenshaw Blvd., Palos Verdes. There is a mini-

mal charge for nonmembers.

Saturday, September 19, 9 a.m.–Noon: Los Serenos de Point Vicente Natural History Tour at Abalone Cove Shoreline Park. International Coastal Cleanup day. Bring the family to help clean the beach. Gloves and trash bags provided. For details, visit www.losserenos.com.

Tuesday, September 29, 8:30 a.m.: "Tour de Torrance." Join Audubon leader Dave Moody and friends on a ramble around a great local birding area. Meet at Madrona Marsh Nature Center.

Saturday, September 19, 9–11:30 a.m.: 25th Annual Coastal Cleanup Day. See detailed information at right.

For a complete list of events at Madrona Marsh go to www.southbay-calendar.org and click on Friends of Madrona Marsh. For a list of Audubon YES (Youth Environmental Service) program activities go to www.AudubonYES.org.

All Are Invited to Park Cleanup on September 19

The annual Ken Malloy Harbor Regional Park Cleanup is a chance to raise awareness and do something about the problem of trash in our oceans, parks, wetlands and beaches. KMHRP contains one of the last remaining freshwater wetlands in Southern California and is extremely valuable to wildlife. Please attend and help us clean it up—or consider cleaning up a site closer to you, if you can't make it!

Bring along gloves if possible, a hat, long pants, closed toe shoes, sunscreen, mosquito repellent, and an extra friend or family member. We will provide some water and snacks. We will provide trash and recycle bags, water, snacks, gloves, cleanup tools, data cards, and grateful encouragement.

Each participant, including parents and siblings, must have their own liability form for the event. *You can't participate unless your parents have signed the release form.* It is best to turn in your release form before the event. Visit Healthebay.org to get a liability release form that you can fill out in advance and bring on the day of the cleanup. This will make it a lot easier to sign in. Meet in the parking lot near the "5 points" intersection, at the southwest corner of KMHRP near the intersections of Anaheim and Vermont Ave., on the lawn near the Anaheim Street entrance. Enter the lot off Vermont from the north or Anaheim from the South. Entrance is one mile west of the 110 Freeway on Anaheim Street.

For more information, call Martin Byhower at 310-541-6763, ext. 4143. On the cleanup day only, call his cell number, 310-487-3353.

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Michelle Fisher

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