



HUMMIN'

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This Unknown Peninsula Oystercatchers

By Jess Morton

“**T**he time has come, the walrus said, to speak on many things...” And so begins reportage of the only event I am aware of, if we are to believe Lewis Carroll, in which oysters might be said to be caught, sedentary beings that they are. Thus, the idea that a bird should be named “oystercatcher,” conjuring images of a roadrunner’s high speed chase, seems bizarre—that is, until we actually see one of these birds, ours being the black oystercatcher.

The black oystercatcher is a stocky bird of the rocky intertidal zone. Its black and deep brown plumage merges with the dark substrate of its habitat: black on black, except for its bill, legs and eyes! These more than make up for the dull coloration of the rest of the bird. Light pink feet splay over the rocks, its bulls-eye pupils are circled by orange and yellow, and an astonishing long, scarlet, chisel-shaped bill make this the clown of the shorebird world in appearance, though they are not foolish enough to spend much time close to us.

Oystercatchers can be hard to find. The majority of our oystercatchers lives along the isolated breakwaters of Los Angeles Harbor and Santa Monica Bay, out of view except by boat. The best places to find them near or on shore are White Point, in San Pedro, and along the outer channel at Marina del Rey. Cabrillo Beach and the rocky shoreline of the Peninsula are also places to look for them, where they will forage, though not nest. Even if oystercatchers are not there, other interesting shorebirds probably are.

Oystercatchers eat all manner of mollusks, their primary food, but will take other small marine animals as well. Their bills are well adapted for meat extraction. Should a bivalve show the slightest opening, the oystercatcher is quick to slide in its blade-like bill. Occasionally you will



Oystercatchers can be found in Palos Verdes and San Pedro, including the albinic oystercatcher, above, seen at White Point.

see one of these birds walking proudly along the rocks, “wearing” a mussel clamped desperately in a losing battle around the bill. Lunch is served!

There are two U.S. species of oystercatcher, American and

Black. The American, found along the East and Gulf Coasts and both coasts of Mexico, shows extensive white on the underparts. One was resident on the middle breakwater of the L.A.–Long Beach Harbor for several years and may still be there. Since hybrids do occur, positive identification of the bird has been problematic, of late. For the last two years, there has been a true oddity at White Point—a near albino oystercatcher! From a distance, the bird appears completely white, except for that amazing blood-red bill.

Oystercatcher! What an absurd name for a remarkable bird. So ignore the name: It’s time to go down the sea and the ships and the...er, oystercatchers.

CONSERVATION CORNER

Let's Bring the Clean Water Act Up to Date



By Lillian Light

Congress passed an expansive Clean Water Act (CWA) in 1972 to protect all “waters of the United States” from unregulated pollution and to rescue them from the states of crisis seen in the late 1960s. For almost 30 years, until the 2001 Supreme Court decision (SWANCC), the CWA helped to protect virtually all of America’s lakes, streams, and wetlands from pollution and destruction. It was important to protect the latter, because scientists estimate that one acre of wetlands can generate almost \$10,000 in ecosystem services. These include life-saving flood storage, protecting low-lying areas from hurricane and storm surges, filtering pollutants and providing irreplaceable habitat for waterfowl, shorebirds, and many fish species. They provide the foundation of the food chain upon which aquatic life depends and recharge flow in greater waterways.

In its 2001 SWANCC ruling (a 5 to 4 vote), the Supreme Court held that certain intrastate ponds were not protected by the Clean Water Act, and that protection should be restricted to waters somehow related to “navigable waters.” In 2006, the Supreme Court’s RAPANOS decision made CWA jurisdiction even more complicated, and required a case-by-case determination of when CWA protection could be allowed.

In 2003 the Bush administration removed protection from nonnavigable “isolated” water bodies. In 2007 the EPA and the Army Corps of Engineers eliminated from protection intermittent and ephemeral streams, and stripped categorical protection for tributaries of larger waters. All of these rulings shattered the fundamental framework of the CWA and put countless water resources at risk. Clean water depends upon the health of all water bodies from small streams to our biggest rivers, lakes and coastal waters. Science has proven that headwater streams and wetlands are vital parts of the aquatic system.

Today, many important waters—large and small—lack critical protections from pollution and destruction. Federal agencies have declared more than 15,000 water bodies unprotected in the past 8 years, and many have been destroyed, degraded or polluted. With each passing day more wetlands, lakes, and streams become vulnerable as they lose CWA protections. The drinking water of 117 million Americans is supplied by smaller streams that no longer fall under the jurisdiction of the EPA. Water supplies for 620,000 Coloradans

are at risk, and one third of Maine residents may be affected by polluted streams.

What about California? Over 50 miles long, the Los Angeles River flows from the San Fernando Valley, passes through 14 cities and ends in the Pacific Ocean in Long Beach. Originally it meandered through wetlands, marshes, willows and sycamores, providing water for the region. In the late 1930s the Army Corps of Engineers lined 80% of the river with concrete, making it into a flood channel that channeled rainwater down to the ocean.

Conservationists have been making plans to revitalize the river to utilize rainwater to recharge groundwater, to protect wildlife, and to make it more accessible to people. In June 2008, a Corps ruling determined that only four miles qualified as “navigable water,” leaving more than 90% of the river without CWA protection from polluting sources. In August 2008, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) designated the Los Angeles River a “special case,” thus stripping the Corps of its authority to determine the river’s status. By April 2009, the EPA has not yet taken action on protecting our L.A. River.

What is needed now is legislation that will restore historic CWA protections. Since the Supreme Court decisions have curtailed the EPA’s ability to regulate and protect 60% of U.S. waters and millions of acres of wetlands and lakes, only Congress can restore this power to the EPA. Recently EPA administrator Lisa Jackson spoke to the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee recommending that they reestablish historic CWA protections.

Last June the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee passed the Baucus–Klobuchar–Boxer amendment to the Clean Water Restoration Act (S 787) to restore protection to all waters and to remove the confusing term *navigable*. It also supports Congress’s constitutional authority to protect our waterways so that we will have clean water for drinking, swimming, fishing and growing our own food.

Unless we prevent pollution at its source, in the nonnavigable headwaters and wetlands of each watershed, we cannot possibly “restore and maintain the chemical, physical and biological integrity of the nation’s waters.” This was the critically important goal of the CWA.

Now is the time to urge your congressperson and your senator to take immediate action to pass legislation that will restore historic CWA protections to waters that have been left vulnerable since 2001. Tell Senator Feinstein and Represent-

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PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

Fire Damage at Preserves Poses Challenges



By John Nieto

Fire: It is sometimes a friend and other times, not so friendly. We have experienced two fires close to home recently; a fire in the Palos Verdes Preserve and another at Ken Malloy Harbor Regional Park (KMHRP). The fire in Palos Verdes took out more than 200 acres of habitat

and a favorite hiking area called the "Lemonade Berry." The trails will be closed for some time to allow assessment of the damage and to restore the habitat to a marginal state in order to survive the impending rains this season.

The 20-plus-acre fire damage at KMHRP has exposed decades of abuse in the way of derelict trash, from large metal pieces of car wheels, to appliances, to metal barrels. Both fires were frightening to witness but, in the end, they both may have brought new opportunities for good things to take place. The positive spin on these events is that the scientific community, restoration specialists and local volunteers who want to keep busy for a few years just may have gotten their wish.

While I was watching the fire in the Palos Verdes Preserve from my front yard, I could not describe the awesome feeling that the flames had over me; the feeling of fear and wonder at the same time. We had packed our belongings, treasures and photos and pointed our cars out of the driveway, as had most of our neighbors. We waited in the dark, without power or telephones, for the flames to die down as helicopter after helicopter flew overhead with water to douse the huge flames. It did quiet down about 1:00 a.m. and we felt safe enough to go to bed. The devastation we saw the next day looks like a moonscape even today. Gray and blackened patches of earth lay where great stands of lemonade berry habitat stood only the day before.

The fire at KMHRP, on the other hand, was an experience I witnessed through the eyes and senses of my relatives. My niece's family and my mother-in-law saw and smelled the thick black smoke from their homes in Wilmington. The acrid smell wafted through their neighborhoods so thickly that they closed their windows and kept the children inside until the fire was extinguished. My son and his fiancé were out for lunch and saw the flames from Pacific Coast Highway across the park from where it had started and noticed that the helicopters were dropping water (or some kind of liquid) onto the flames. They did not know if

the liquid was fire retardant or just what it was.

Later we surmised that it was the very dark water from the Machado Lake itself—so polluted and rank that it did not even look like water from a half mile away as it fell from the low-flying helicopters. This time my fear was focused mainly on their safety.

Now after all the excitement has quieted down, there is time to stand back and assess the amount of damage done at both of these cherished outdoor environments. The outlook for both is that time will heal the scars. The time between now and then will be filled with many long hours of sweat and toil. Our own Martin Byhower is leading the way at KMHRP with work parties to clear trash now visible in the ashes. In the Palos Verdes Preserve, the Palos Verdes Peninsula Land Conservancy (PVPLC) will be leading the effort to clear and re-vegetate the area.

The citizens of our area, who all share these two magnificent open spaces, can support the effort to restore them back to their luster again by boosting the efforts of the PVPLC and the Palos Verdes/South Bay Audubon Chapter. Contribute your time, volunteering to work the spoiled habitat, clearing and planting for the next several months.

If you cannot contribute to the cause physically, then perhaps you will consider aiding either organization, or both, with your generous donations. We will try to bring both of these South Bay area jewels back from the brink, back to their former luster as polished diamonds in the rough.

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tative Jane Harman that 60% of the nation's waters, safe drinking water for millions of Americans and migratory bird habitats are all at risk if Congress does not act to pass the Clean Water Restoration Act (S787). Without such action, a generation's worth of progress in cleaning up U.S. waters may be lost.

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Harbor Regional Park Cleanup Comes in 70-Bag Strong

By Alexa Aranjo
10th Grade, Chadwick School

Thousands of volunteers around the world gather one day every year to do one thing: pick up trash. Traditionally scheduled for the third Saturday of September, the International Coastal Cleanup Day may be the largest volunteer day on the planet. The one-day cleanup is global, with more than 100 nations participating.

Coastal Cleanup Day began in 1985 and has grown into a huge annual event, with September 19 marking the 25th year. Every state with a coastline participates, including the Great Lakes states, while inland states clean the shores of rivers, streams and lakes.

Volunteers all around the world go to beaches to collect amassed debris and other waste. By removing garbage from the beach, the cleanup effort also protects aquatic life and makes these areas much nicer to visit. Volunteer also record data on the nature of the accumulated coastal trash to better assess and solve trash problems. Locally, Chadwick seventh-graders use the data to make graphs and to analyze the problem, as well as come up with solutions, for their science classes.

The Los Angeles County coordinators for the California Coastal Cleanup Day are Heal the Bay and the L.A. County Department of Beaches and Harbors. More than 10,000 volunteers clean up sites in L.A. County, including Ken Malloy Harbor Regional Park (KMHRP). Palos Verdes/South Bay Audubon, Chadwick School and the KMHRP Advisory Board worked together in coordinating the local cleanup, while area merchants helped provide supplies and refreshments for participants. For nearly two decades PV/SB Audubon board member Martin Byhower has served as team captain at KMHRP, where volunteers have re-

moved tons of trash and recyclables.

This year, students, parents, and other volunteers from the above organizations and other groups spent about four hours grooming the regional park. Specifically, they fanned out around the wetland areas surrounding Machado Lake. In this short time frame, they collected 70-plus full bags of trash, in addition to nearly 5,000 cigarette butts and about 800 spray paint cans.

Some of the notable (but, unfortunately, typical) items included eight 100-lb. bags of asphalt, 26 tires and 10 appliances. I have participated in the Coastal Clean-Up Day for four years, and each year it is different. We always find some truly unusual items, including a safe one year!

We spread out all over the park, particularly into valuable habitat areas not normally cleaned by park maintenance staff. While we are picking up

trash, we also look for hidden cards. As an added incentive, postcards are hidden in advance amid the trash in various locations. Those who find the cards win prizes donated by sponsors. While winning prizes is fun, I know we would still be out there, anyway, trying to make the park a better, cleaner place for people and wildlife.

This year we are going to do an additional cleanup at KMHRP in November, apart from the monthly habitat restoration parties, open to all, on the second Saturday of every month. This time, we plan to focus our efforts on a 20-acre area, adjacent to the restoration site, where a recent fire burned prime wetland habitat. As a result, tires, appliances and some remnant surviving invasive plants became exposed.

To assist with this effort, contact Geffen Oren at gefbofef@yahoo.com or Martin Byhower at martin.byhower@chadwickschool.org.

Audubon YES! Links Up With Local Groups

By Marcos Trinidad

Since the beginning of the school year, my work as Audubon YES! volunteer coordinator has been to establish new connections with local environmental organizations and to reconnect with old ones.

The folks at the Bixby Marshland are happy to be involved with Audubon YES!, while the Tree Musketeers, with whom we have worked for many years, will be training our students to take on leadership roles with urban forestry in El Segundo.

A second group with whom YES! has teamed shares the same mission of empowering young people to be leaders of environmental and social change. Audubon YES! has connected with the South Bay Hwarang LEO Club, which will provide up to 60 new

YES! members. These members are already making a huge contribution at Madrona Marsh. The South Bay chapter of the LEO Club, a division of the Lions club, is dedicated to helping Korean youth find service opportunities in their communities.

Audubon YES! has also joined with TreePeople to do habitat restoration in the Santa Monica Mountains, extending the volunteer trail work we have been conducting. TreePeople's mission is to inspire and support people to take responsibility for the urban environment, making it safe, healthy, fun and sustainable. It is holding a Community Greening Workshop in Torrance this January, open to all. If you are interested, please e-mail: Marcos@pvsb-audubon.org. Audubon YES! now has 160 new members and continues to grow on a daily basis.

Your Backyard Habitat



By Dr. Constance M. Vadheim
CSU Dominguez Hills

Blue Elderberry *Sambucus nigra ssp. cerulea*

On a warm fall day, I sit and marvel at the activity in my backyard elderberry tree. Bees visit a few remaining flowers, while other insects sun themselves or forage for food. Bushtits, Yellow-rump Warblers and White-crowned Sparrows busily feed among the branches. An Allen's Hummingbird chips his warning from a perch.



And just weeks ago I made a last batch of Elderberry jelly. Just amazing—we're talking serious habitat value from a single tree!

Plants that provide multiple benefits—shade, fragrance, food and shelter—are a real boon to those of us with limited garden space. Perhaps you have an old tree to replace or you'd like to plant a shade tree. Chose a native tree like the Blue Elderberry and you provide much more than shade or a convenient perch. You create a home, or habitat, for your family and all the wild cohabitants of your yard.

Blue Elderberry is known by several names: *Sambucus nigra ssp. cerulea* (official scientific name), *Sambucus cerulea* and *Sambucus mexicana*. The species is native to the western United States and Mexico, where it grows naturally along stream banks and in openings. In cold climates, Blue Elderberry dies back to the ground in winter, re-growing into a large upright shrub each year. In our area, it ulti-

mately grows into a small tree (about 20 feet tall and wide) unless cut back routinely. While Elderberry becomes briefly deciduous in fall and winter, its leaves form a lacy canopy most of the year, providing the dappled shade that many plants love. The medium-green leaves contrast nicely with the red bark of younger branches. Blue Elderberry provides year-round beauty in addition to its other attributes.

Elderberry blooms throughout the year, but the main bloom season is spring and summer. The tiny flowers, which grow in clusters (see below photo) have a sweet, honey-like aroma attractive to native pollinators. The abundant blue berries, which resemble small blueberries, ripen from summer through fall. The berries make wonderful juice, jelly and syrup and can also be used in baked goods. The branches are used to make native flutes and clapper sticks. The plant also provides natural dyes and medicines.



Many species of seed and fruit-eating birds eat Elderberries, and then insect-eating birds are attracted by the numerous insects.

Blue Elderberry is quite easy to grow and does well in most local soils. While quite drought tolerant once established, it can take regular water. Elderberries like sun and benefit from a bark mulch. Prune in winter to shape; or prune hard to keep as a shrub. Bon Appetit!

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 Nature Center.

Birds of the Peninsula

September and October 2009

By Kevin Larson

Fall migration progressed in a steady, protracted fashion. Daily migrant numbers were generally moderate, and I received no indication of any fallout days. Though a good number of rare-but-regular species were found, there were few of the rarer variety. A Yellow-throated Warbler found in late October was outstanding. A few locations received excellent coverage, but there were few reports from many of the tried-and-true vagrant traps.

The stagnant, humid weather of summer gave way to a progression of troughs and ridges after the first week of September. Cool onshore flow alternated with warm, dry offshore weather through the end of October. The jet stream dipped enough to bring an early storm that dropped over 1 inch of rain at LAX and over 2 inches at Downtown Los Angeles 13-14 Oct.

Greater White-fronted Geese made a good showing this fall: one was at Harbor Park 3-11 Oct (Ed Griffin), up to seven were at the Los Angeles River near Willow Street 5-6 Oct (Richard Barth), six were at Earvin Magic Johnson Recreation Area in Willowbrook on 22 Oct (RB), and two were seen in flight over the Ballona area on 26 Oct (Lucio Gomes). An "Aleutian" Cackling Goose at Harbor Park on 11 Oct is believed to have been continuously present since last winter (Martin Byhower).

Ed Griffin found a Wood Duck along the Los Angeles River south of Willow Street on 10 Oct. Two Buffleheads at the Ballona Creek mouth near the UCLA dock on 26 Sep were exceptionally early (Roy van de Hoek); fall migrants generally arrive a

month later. A brood of recently hatched Ruddy Ducks at the Ballona Freshwater Marsh on 3 Oct were the product of a late nesting (Dan Cooper).

Two Cattle Egrets were along the Los Angeles River in Paramount on 10 Oct (RB). White-faced Ibises were



White-fronted Goose

Photo by Jess Morton

regularly recorded along the Los Angeles River through early October (RB). Other White-faced Ibis sightings included one at the newly opened Bixby Marsh in Carson on 5 Sep (EG), singles at the Ballona Freshwater Marsh 16-22 Sep (Vic Warren) and 7 Oct (Don Sterba), and one along a flood control channel in Torrance on 28 Sep (John Small). Unexpected near the coast, a kettle of 63 migrating Swainson's Hawks was over Westchester on 17 Oct (KL). An early Ferruginous Hawk was over Lincoln Boulevard in the Playa Vista area on 1 Oct (DC).

Two Solitary Sandpipers were along the Los Angeles River in Paramount 20-29 Sep (RB). A late Lesser Yellowlegs along the Los Angeles River in Long Beach on 25 Oct was

where an individual has been found wintering in recent years (Andrew Lee). Two juvenile Baird's Sandpipers along the Los Angeles River in Long Beach on 24 Sep were the last to be reported this fall (Jeff Boyd). Juvenile Pectoral Sandpipers invaded the Los Angeles River in Long Beach and Paramount during late September and early October; Richard Barth obtained a high single-day count of 19 on 5 Oct. A late Pectoral Sandpiper report at the river was of an individual north of the 405 freeway crossing on 25 Oct (AL).

A South Polar Skua was seen from a whale-watching boat in the near-shore waters off San Pedro on 8 Sep (Graham Langley). A Black Tern was seen flying north along the Los Angeles River adjacent to DeForest Park on 8 Sep (JB, Karen Gilbert).

Participants of Martin Byhower's bird walk at Harbor Park on 13 Sep enjoyed a Common Tern. Two Band-tailed Pigeons flew over a residence in Westchester on 4 Oct (KL) and another was at Recreation Park in El Segundo on 13 Oct (RB). White-winged Dove sightings included one at a Westchester residence 14-17 Sep (KL) and another at Madrona Marsh on 18 Oct (Tracy Drake). Fran Arrowsmith reported a Common Ground-Dove at her Torrance residence on 11 Sep.

A Rose-ringed Parakeet photographed at Madrona Marsh on 25 Sep was south of this species' expected haunts in the vicinity of Playa del Rey (TD). A Burrowing Owl in the Ballona Wetland area 28 Sep-20 Oct was at the exact location where one spent the winters of 2005/06 and

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2006/07; it was looked for and missed the past two winters (Jonathan Coffin). A female Black-chinned Hummingbird at Russell Stone's feeder in Westchester on 7 Oct was quite late.

An Acorn Woodpecker in residential Westchester on 19 Sep was a rare visitor (Russell and Dorothy Stone). A Red-naped Sapsucker was at Harbor Park 10-12 Oct (Chris Boyd). A Nuttall's Woodpecker at Harbor Park 24-25 Oct occurred at a location where there are few records; also at Harbor Park during this date span was an apparently pure male Yellow-shafted Flicker (MB).

What amounted to a local wind-fall of **Eastern Phoebes** included an exceptionally early individual at the Ballona Freshwater Marsh on 22 Sep (DS) and another at Madrona Marsh 12-14 Oct (TD). A female Vermilion Flycatcher was a nice find at the Ballona Freshwater Marsh on 18 Oct (DC). Tropical Kingbird sightings included one at the Los Angeles River north of PCH on 6 Oct (KG, JB) and one at Banning Park on 11 Oct (Tom Wurster, Liga Auzins). A **White-eyed Vireo** at DeForest Park in Long Beach 22-27 Sep likely summered; it would be reasonable to assume it was the same individual present 2-4 Jul (JB).

A Purple Martin over Madrona Marsh on 4 Sep was the only one found locally this year (David Moody). Rare in fall, a good showing of Violet-green Swallows occurred in advance of a rain-producing low pressure system 13-14 Oct; sightings included approximately 50 flying south over Westchester on 11 Oct (KL), at least 20 at the Ballona Freshwater Marsh on 12 Oct (DC), and several at Harbor Park on 12 Oct (MB).

Another push of Violet-green Swallows occurred on 25 Oct, when

one was over Banning Park and several were along the Los Angeles River (AL). A Bank Swallow in Westchester on 26 Sep was the only report (KL). Up to two Red-breasted Nuthatches in Rolling Hills 14 Sep+ may have been part of a small, lingering resident population in the area (Cathy Nichols). A Brown Creeper was at the Redondo Beach Library on 17 Oct (Bruce Brown). Andrew Lee reported a Golden-crowned Kinglet at Banning Park on 25 Oct. The only Phainopepla report came from Madrona Marsh on 3 Oct (DC).

A Virginia's Warbler was at DeForest Park 8-9 Sep (JB, KG). A Lucy's Warbler at the Dominguez Gap Wetland on 22 Oct was near where one



Acorn Woodpecker

Photo by Jess Morton

was found on 18 Aug (JB, KG). A **Yellow-throated Warbler** at DeForest Park in Long Beach on 29 Oct is the fourth record for this article's coverage area and second for fall (JB, KG). Our last local record of this species, also at DeForest Park, was on 25 Apr 2004; the other fall record was at the South Coast Botanic Garden on 21 Oct 1972.

Martin Byhower found a Palm Warbler at Harbor Park on 25 Oct. Single Blackpoll Warblers were at Banning Park on 27 Sep (AL) and at

DeForest Park on 22 Oct (JB, KG). Single Black-and-white Warblers were at Sand Dune Park on 4 Oct (Lori Conrad) and at Charles Wilson Park 6-30 Oct (Tommye Hite). Mark Conrad spotted an American Redstart at Sand Dune Park on 12 Sep. One of the better warblers this fall, an Ovenbird, was unfortunately found dead along a trail in Rolling Hills on 19 Sep (Emile Fiesler).

Dan Cooper found a Northern Waterthrush in the Playa Vista Riparian Corridor on 9 Sep. The Summer Tanager found on the early date of 6 Aug at Madrona Marsh was last seen on 5 Sep (TD). Single Clay-colored and Brewer's sparrows were at Madrona Marsh on 22 Sep and 5 Sep respectively (David Moody). The only Vesper Sparrow was at the Ballona Freshwater Marsh 30 Sep-4 Oct (DC).

A **Lark Bunting** was an astounding yard bird for Russell and Dorothy Stone in Westchester on 10 Oct. Two of the three Indigo Buntings at Madrona Marsh this fall were still present on 16 Oct (TD). The only Bobolink was at Madrona Marsh on 4 Oct (fide TD).

Yellow-headed Blackbird sightings included two at the Ballona Freshwater Marsh on 16 Sep (DS) and two at the Los Angeles River in Paramount on 20 Sep (RB). A female or immature Orchard Oriole was at DeForest Park on 29 Sep (RB, JB). Lawrence's Goldfinch reports included one at Madrona Marsh 2-3 Oct (TD) and two flying south over Westchester on 10 Oct (KL).

Thanks to all who reported sightings during the period. Please send your sightings to me at cbirdr@ca.rr.com for the Palos Verdes/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.

Updates on Machado Lake, Harbor Regional Park, and the Wilmington Channel Cite Problems and Challenges

By Martin Byhower

The Ken Malloy Harbor Regional Park (KMHRP) is a study in contrasts. Last month, just as I finished the first draft of this article, I was walking around the lake after finishing up with the volunteers working at our habitat restoration site. I happened to look up, and there, staring me in the face from a post along the new bioswale near PCH and Vermont, was a kestrel—a small, native falcon. Beautiful little raptors, kestrels are wild predators.

But something just wasn't right. She swooped down to the ground, grabbed at something, and then flew back to the perch. I couldn't resist putting out my arm, and she immediately flew in and landed on it (in the photo at right, she is perching on the head of a seventh-grade student who attended the walk today!).

At first, this seems exciting and maybe a bit magical. But apparently, the bird has imprinted on humans, which is generally a dead end for wild species. Someone must have somehow obtained and then dumped the bird, probably malnourished and underdeveloped, in the park several weeks ago. Some of the persistent park residents/job seekers who still try to get pickup work in the Vermont lot (despite the day labor site being moved to the other side of the park) had "adopted" the bird. They had been buying baby mice and feeding them to the bird (supplemented with carne asada and some live crayfish). I was struck by the gentle goodwill and generosity shown by these less fortunate folks who probably struggle for the dollars it takes to feed their falcon.

Ultimately, KMHRP cannot provide a long-term home for them any more than they can provide one for the bird, which is probably now unable to fend for itself in the wild. There are many, many varied but compatible uses and activities at Harbor Park. I hope you will be visiting there more often in the near future.

What's happening at Ken Malloy? I hear this question a lot. It's never an easy one to answer. Let me throw it back to you: What do *you want* to be happening there? That may be a bit easier.

If you want a green, friendly place to picnic, or a place for the kids enjoy a new and safe outdoor play facility, see some interesting birds, or play a round of inexpensive golf on the adjacent course, then you are already probably able to have your needs met (especially if you don't look too closely along the margins). However, if you want a thriving, healthy ecosystem, a clean, trash- and pollution-free envi-



This native falcon seems to have imprinted on humans.

Photo by Martin Byhower

ronment in the lake and the Wilmington channel, top-rate catch-and-release fishing, pleasant walking trails, a well-maintained and safe camping facility and abundant native wildlife, you will have to wait just a bit longer.

Let's try this another way: good news vs. the less-than-optimal news. On the positive side, progress is being made as we approach a date for breaking ground for the \$117 million Proposition O "Machado Lake Ecosystem Rehabilitation Project and Wilmington Drain Multi-Use Project." After (no less than!) eight public stakeholder pre-planning meetings and one environmental permitting review meeting, everyone seems happy with the direction of the projects. The residents along the Wilmington Drain will see a low-impact, passive and restricted-use parkland area rather than a trashy, weedy, neglected channel adjacent to their homes. Mosquitoes and homeless people will be replaced by native vegetation and a quiet, stream-side trail system that isolates visitors away from residences.

Machado Lake will be deeper, cooler, cleaner, aerated

and less choked by invasive vegetation. The water that enters it will be cleaner and pre-treated to remove trash and pollutants. Bike paths, walkways, parking and amenities will be what one would expect in the fourth-largest regional park in Los Angeles. Islands in the middle of the lake will support endangered shore and wetland bird species. Native waterfowl will replace pigeons, aggressive feral geese and vermin. Inaccessible areas that are currently full of trash and stagnant water, which are choked with weedy vegetation that serves as a cover for illegal activities, will become open, healthy, green spaces accessible to all. Fishing promontories as well as natural water filtering and purifying areas will add recreation and interest.

In the less-than-optimal news column, we have to wait a bit longer for the improvements, The Machado Lake work is proposed to begin in 2011 and take about 2.5 years to complete. Wilmington Drain construction is proposed to begin in spring 2010 and take about a year and a half to complete. Meanwhile, we need to find solutions to existing problems, and we are breaking even at best.

On a positive note, about 150 students and community volunteers came together September 19 for the 25th annual Coastal Cleanup Day, and with the help of the L.A. City Recreation and Parks and Maintenance Departments, removed about a ton of trash from the park. On October 16, a group of students from Chadwick and Rolling Hill Prep Schools joined forces, as they do every second Saturday of the month, and weeded, watered and prepared for continued planting on the beautiful, native and drought-tolerant Conlon Bluff coastal sage scrub restoration site along the bike path to the lake's south edge.

The city is interested in acknowledging our site as a model for drought-tolerant landscaping efforts now under way throughout the Southland. Recently, the parents of the Chadwick student who helps coordinate the monthly restoration work hosted a classical music fundraiser that helped raise over \$6,000 for the project.

Unfortunately, while students and volunteers work to restore and improve the park, others still abuse it. Today, during last month's (second Sunday) nature and bird walk that I lead at the park, we saw where illegal occupants had recently carved trails into, and thoroughly trashed, areas in the willow forest southeast of the lake. Along the bike path, walk participants dodged illegal go-carts and off-road vehicles, which tear through the campground areas and rip up the lawns in the picnic areas. We saw a pair of freshly dumped pet house rabbits running through the habitat enhancement area, confused, frightened and unaware of the fate they would likely meet—starvation, disease or predation.

Despite the installation of some long-needed fencing along Figueroa Place, which had been the entry point for many park abusers, much of the park is a neglected free-for-all. Illegal dumping, tagging, occupancy, parking lot parties and more trouble occur on a near-daily basis. Patrolling of the park has been much reduced with the cutbacks to the city's Ranger Department. Most of the park visitors are families or couples out for a pleasant day of play, barbecuing and relaxation, but cutbacks to the L.A. Ranger Program have left the park poorly patrolled.

So, folks who live nearby or who wish to travel to this park can wait and hope for the Prop. O improvements to solve many of the problems, or they can take action now. Please come down and visit the park. Most likely, you will have a pleasant experience, but if anything seems amiss, please do one of the following:

- Call the dispatch office at L.A. City General Services (213-978-4670) and ask them to send out a ranger;
- call the LAPD Harbor Division if you see clearly illegal activity (it may take patience to get through, but every complaint increases the chances of adequate patrolling), so try calling 1-800-ASK-LAPD;
- contact 15th Council District Office of Councilwoman Janice Hahn and ask her to make KMHRP a priority; or
- check out the PV/SB Audubon Web site to learn how to get involved in park projects or join field trips to the park (www.pvsb-audubon.org/).

Just as I finished writing this article last month, a fire broke out at the park that afternoon. It ate up about 20 acres of prime tule/willow/mulefat habitat on the south side of the park before firefighters could extinguish it. The fire was initially attributed to the homeless occupants. However, I recently talked to an individual who was at the park that day. He told me that a church group had been using the campground, but a few kids had snuck away from the larger group and were playing with matches in the area near where the fire started, so who knows.

In response, last weekend some of my students and I used the opportunity created by the fire to remove car tires, wheels, 55 gallon drums, and appliances, all the result of decades of illegal dumping, from the area. We dug out eight patches of partially burned, highly invasive Arundo, or giant reed, that would have spread throughout the recovering wetland.

Right now, the area is occupied by abundant Cassin's Kingbirds, Western Meadowlarks, Northern Flickers, Wilson's Snipe, and others. Some park rarities, like Nuttall's Woodpecker, Palm Warbler, Yellow-shafted Flicker and others are taking advantage of the transitional and successional habitats created by the burn. Life does go on...

MEET, LEARN, ENJOY, RESTORE

Calendar

Events

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

Saturday, December 5, 8 a.m.–12 p.m.: **Natural History walk at Bixby Marsh.** Audubon leaders Jess Morton and John Nieto will lead this walk. The Bixby Marshland, a 17-acre property restored by the Sanitation Districts of Los Angeles County, is located on Figueroa Street just south of Sepulveda. It will be open to the public during this walk. For details and special appointments, visit www.lacsd.org or e-mail rsoni@lacsd.org.

Thursday, December 10, 8:15–10:15 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 Ann Dalkey's article in the Aug./Sept. 2009 *Hummin'*). Volunteers are needed. They will be trained in identification and the methods used in the survey. To participate in this project, contact Ann Dalkey at adalkey@pvplc.org or 310-541-7613, ext. 208.

Saturday, December 12, 9–11 a.m.: **Second Saturday Habitat Restoration Project at Ken Malloy Harbor Regional Park (KMHRP).** Led by Gefen Oren, Martin Byhower and others, the cleanup and restoration of this important wildlife area offers a hands-on opportunity to learn about invasive species removal, native planting, effective debris removal and much more while earning community service credit. Wear closed-toe shoes and long pants. Bring water, a snack, sun-

screen, bug repellent and work gloves. Harbor Regional Park is located at 25820 Vermont Ave., just west of the Harbor Freeway. For details, call Martin at 310-541-6763, ext. 4143.

Tuesday, December 15, 7 p.m.: **PV/South Bay Audubon Holiday Party** at Madrona Marsh. All Audubon members and friends are welcome to attend. The party will replace the third Tuesday Get-Together for December. Our speaker for the evening will be Julie Greer, who will present a talk on the Antarctic and penguins.

Saturday, December 19, 8 a.m.: **Christmas Bird Count Class.** Be a citizen scientist, help survey our local birds. The class will be taught by Bob Shanman at the Madrona Marsh Nature Center.

Saturday, December 19, 8:30–10:30 a.m.: **Bird survey on a habitat restoration site.** See December 10 for details.

Sunday, December 27: Annual **Christmas Bird Count.** For details, contact Dave Moody at dsmoods@adelphia.net.

Saturday, January 2, 8 a.m.–12 p.m.: **Bixby Marshland open to the public.** See December 5 for details.

Saturday, January 9, 9–11 a.m.: **Second Saturday Habitat Restoration Project at KMHRP.** See December 12 for details.

Thursday, January 14, 8:30 a.m.: **Bird survey on a habitat restoration site.** See December 10 for details.

Saturday, January 16, 8:30 a.m.: **Bird survey on a habitat restoration site.** See December 10 for details.

December						
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January						
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31						

Tuesday, January 19, 7 p.m.: **Audubon Third Tuesday Get-Togethers.** The speaker will be our very own expert birder Jess Morton reporting on San Quintine. Come to Madrona Marsh and socialize with friends, enjoy the bird quiz, raffle and prizes from Wild Birds Unlimited.

Field Trips

Tuesday, December 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 the Madrona Marsh Nature Center.

Sunday, December 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 of the SCBG Foundation, or you can join there.

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

Saturday, December 12, 1-3 p.m.: **PVPLC Natural History Walk from Portuguese Point to Abalone Cove Beach.** This walk recalls this area's in-



This common tern was spotted at the Harbor Regional Park in September.

Photo by Jess Morton

interesting history. From Neal Armstrong, Wayfarers Chapel, and to the Vanderlips, including their first school on the beach. Visit: <http://www.pvplc.org/>.

Sunday, December 13, 8 a.m.: Second Sunday Walk at KMHRP. Join Audubon leaders and explore this important natural area of the South Bay. See meeting locations for directions.

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

Wednesday, December 16, 8 a.m.: Bird Walk at South Coast Botanic Garden. See December 6 for details.

Saturday, December 19, 8 a.m.: LAAS bird walk with Eric and Ann Brooks at Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area. Meet in the first parking lot on the left side of the kiosk. Entry is \$4 per car. Go to: http://www.parks.ca.gov/default.asp?page_id=612.

Sunday, December 27, 11 a.m.: Los Serenos de Point Vicente Natural History Tour to Abalone Cove Shoreline Park. Tour the tidepools, which are teeming with fascinating marine life. Moderate. For details, call PVIC at 310-377-5370 or visit <http://www.losserenos.com/pvic.htm>.

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

Sunday, January 3, 8 a.m.: Bird Walk at South Coast Botanic Garden. See December 6 for details.

Tuesday, January 5, 8:30 a.m.: "Tour de Torrance." See December 1 for details.

Saturday, January 9, 9-11 a.m.: PVPLC Natural History Walk to Eagles' Nest. We will walk down "Old Crenshaw," now Burma Road, pointing out interesting geology and a variety of native and nonnative plants, all the while enjoying the spectacular views.

Moderate. Visit: <http://www.pvplc.org/>.

Sunday, January 10, 8 p.m.: Second Sunday Walk at KMHRP. See December 13 for details.

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

Tuesday, January 19, 8:30 a.m.: "Tour de Torrance." See December 1 for details.

Wednesday, January 20, 8 a.m.: Bird Walk at South Coast Botanic Garden. See December 6 for details.

Sunday January 24, 3 p.m.: Los Serenos de Point Vicente Natural History Tour to the Eastern Bluff Preserve. Meet at the intersection of La Rotonda and Twin Harbors View Drive. Hike through coastal sage scrub habitat and check for gray whale sightings. Moderate. For details, call PVIC at 310-377-5370 or visit <http://www.losserenos.com/pvic.htm>.



For more information on local events, visit the Chapter Web site at: <http://www.pvsb-audubon.org>. For a list of events at Madrona Marsh, go to: <http://www.southbaycalendar.org> and click on Friends of Madrona Marsh. For a list of activities for Audubon YES!, go to: <http://www.AudubonYES.org>.

Tradeoffs of Using Bird Recordings in the Field

By Martin Byhower

Years ago, at my desert place, I recorded some Black-throated Sparrows singing in my "yard" near their nest in a cholla. I played the recording back a bunch of times, thrilled by the way they came in and mobbed the machine. But eventually they abandoned the nest, and I have felt guilty ever since.

Honestly, I don't know the true extent of harm done by recordings. I know of stories of people using tapes, only to lure a bird to its death as a nearby Cooper Hawk watched it come into the open. In general, however, it is probably only in breeding territories where the major potential for harm exists. I think the main concern is that if amateur birders see lots of people using the devices as lures, then they will think it is standard procedure and use it inappropriately and/or excessively.

Also, the more that tapes are used, the less that birds, over time, respond to them. That has also "ruined" some areas for birding (at least by using this particular method).

One final note: It is against the law to use tapes to lure in species that have any state or federal protected status!

Vocally imitating the birds or making sounds to attract them (pishing) is considered more "sporting" and is legal in all situations. Yet it also seems to be a dying art.



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