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Palos Verdes/South Bay Audubon Society

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2011 Birdathon to Focus on South Bay

By Jess Morton

With the annual Birdathon coming up on Saturday, April 30, now is the time to pledge and show your support for Audubon's work. This year's funds will go toward Marcos Trinidad's work with Audubon YES! (Youth Environmental Service) and National Audubon's work restoring ecosystems along the Gulf Coast and bird science program. There is much to do, and participation by Audubon members through donations is crucial to move this work forward. Please pledge your support for one or more Birdathon teams.

cycling and walking to hunt their birds. No motor vehicles to spew CO² into the atmosphere with this group. They expect to see upwards of 120 species. To pledge your support for their team, e-mail Martin at avitropic@sbcglobal.net.



HERON VS. WATER SNAKE

A bunch of us were birding at KMHRP when we were intrigued to see this Great-blue Heron trying to swallow a good-sized snake. Unwisely, and uncharacteristically of most snake-eating critters, it appears to be doing so tail-first. The snake is an Eastern banded water snake, *Nerodia fasciata*. The snakes are invasive, resulting from discarded pets breeding rampantly in the lake. The Heron is doing us a favor, although there are still thousands of snakes left in the lake. When we looked closely at some initial photos, we thought the heron was struggling because it had a plastic rope around its neck and thus couldn't swallow the snake, but David Ellsworth's photo and analysis show the true story. Presumably, the heron eventually won.

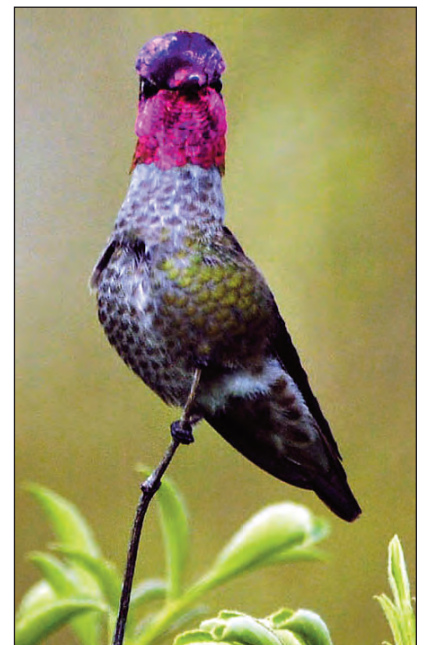
—Martin Byhower

Photo Bonus

Bob Shanman, Jess Morton and the "Wirdbotchers" team continue their tradition of offering contributors digital photos from the day's birding. These spectacular photos are great additions to your screen saver or to use as "wallpaper" for your computer screen. Donors of 50 cents per species will receive two pictures, and donors of \$1 per species or more will receive three additional pictures as well. The team expects to find 120 to 140 species. To pledge, e-mail me at jmorton@audubon.org.

Green Birdathon

Martin Byhower and the Bushwhackers continue their quest for "green" birding with a day spent bi-



Anna's Hummingbird

Photo by Jess Morton

Lillian Light and the Wild Bunch will also be out and about, hunting birds and raising funds for the Audubon Society. To pledge to Lillian's team, e-mail her at lklight@verizon.net.

Whichever team or teams you select, please pledge generously, making Audubon's work to preserve birds and habitat an active part of your life.

CONSERVATION CORNER

Nuclear Power Isn't Green, Safe or Cost-Effective



By Lillian Light

I have been disturbed upon hearing some highly respected environmentalists declare support for building nuclear power plants—a vastly expensive, inefficient and dangerous source of energy that requires massive taxpayer bailouts. Nuclear Regulatory Commission

Chairman Greg Jaczko says that the cost of building a nuclear power plant averages \$10 billion. Since investors are not willing to fund such a risky investment, the nuclear industry is looking for “loan guarantees” from the federal government.

Such guarantees would be direct taxpayer financing provided to rich utilities, like Electricite de France, Progress Energy and NRG Energy to buy nuclear reactors from General Electric (the world’s largest corporation) or Westinghouse/Toshiba.

In the past decade, the nuclear industry has spent over \$600 million lobbying the federal government as well as \$63 million in federal campaign contributions, according to the Investigative Reporting Workshop at American University. The industry is using our worries about global warming to further its cause, and some of us are falling for their line.

However, have they forgotten why citizens across the nation have successfully opposed expanding our reliance on nuclear energy since the 1970s? The Three Mile Island Disaster in 1979 and the Chernobyl meltdown in 1986 demonstrated that catastrophic accidents can happen and that many thousands of people can be killed. The Torch study of Chernobyl fatalities (2006) estimates it caused 30,000 to 60,000 deaths (www.nirs.org/factsheets/fctsht.htm). Because of this, nuclear reactors pose a massive security threat; an attack on one would cause mass destruction as well as prolonged power outages.

No nation on earth has yet met the engineering challenge of safely storing nuclear waste that can emit dangerous levels of radioactivity for hundreds of thousands of years. Congress has been struggling for decades to build an underground waste repository at Yucca Mountain in Nevada but has been unable to overcome fierce local opposition. Scientists have also determined that high-level atomic waste cannot safely be stored there. The result is that nuclear waste is stored on-site at the power plants, increasing the risk of leaks and the danger to

plant workers. It makes no sense to build new reactors when we do not know what to do with the lethal waste from the ones we already have.

Japan has been depending on nuclear power to generate electricity. In July 2007, a 6.8-magnitude earthquake caused severe problems at the world’s biggest nuclear plant, leading to the release of radioactive elements into the air and ocean and an indefinite shutdown. Last month, an 8.9-magnitude earthquake occurred in Japan, and again nuclear radiation was released, prompting major evacuations. Why do they build nuclear reactors in seismically unstable places like Japan? Why do we have them in California at San Onofre and Morro Bay?

Even in areas where there is no earthquake danger, these plants release radiation. In March 2010, the Vermont legislature tried to kill the Vermont Yankee plant because deadly tritium leaked into the environment. Thirty-seven of the 104 nuclear plants in the U.S. have been confirmed to be leaking tritium. Other cancer-causing radionuclides released by nuclear facilities include Strontium-90, Cesium-137 and Plutonium 239, among others. The U.S. Academy of Sciences has done periodic reviews of the dangers of radiation to nuclear workers and the general public, with a recent report from 2005 stating that there is no safe level of radiation exposure. Every exposure to radiation increases the risk of cancer, birth defects and other disease.

Nuclear power requires a vast and polluting nuclear fuel chain simply to function, and compared to the viable renewable alternatives like wind, solar and geothermal, it does not produce clean energy. These renewable power sources are becoming less costly over time, even as nuclear power becomes more expensive. Renewable power plants can be built almost immediately without the long delays faced by nuclear reactors. If the government is going to subsidize greener energy, it would be both wiser and more cost-effective to take the millions that we are giving to the nuclear industry and instead devote it to conservation and the other renewable energies.

I would like to end with the final words of a *Los Angeles Times* editorial (11/28/09):

Nuclear power is a failed experiment of the past, not an answer for the future. Every dollar invested in it is a dollar misdirected, one that should have gone to more efficient, cheaper and cleaner power sources.



Steam pours out of the cooling tower of a nuclear power station.

*Photo by J. Ruchti
Reprinted with permission*

This Unknown Peninsula: Meet the Osprey

By Jess Morton

One would think large hawks immune to attack by lesser birds. But once you have seen that ultimate absurdity—a hummingbird zooming up to chase off a red-tail—you realize that size does not determine all threats and outcomes. While it is doubtful that a hummer poses any real danger to a hawk, there are lots of surprises in the bird world where confrontations are concerned. Recently, it was an osprey that got my attention.

Ospreys, often thought of as fish eagles, are the largest regularly occurring hawks in the South Bay. While much bigger, both bald and golden eagles are pretty rare here, while osprey can be found in ones or twos along the coast all year, though you will see them less often during the summer. They are strikingly marked birds, with huge dark wings, white under parts and a strong black band through the eye—quite unmistakable, once you have seen a couple.

Osprey do not nest in the South Bay, and until recently, nested uncommonly in southern California. Now, however, tall poles with nesting platforms on top can be seen in nearby wetlands, giving the birds new places to raise young. Perhaps, one day, we may be able to establish a similar nest site at Harbor Park, to afford us our own nesting pair.

As their informal name implies, osprey fish for a living, plunging into fresh or salt water to grasp an unwary fish in their powerful talons, then flying up to a perch where they can eat their catch. Fish are slippery critters, so an osprey's grip has evolved such that once bound to a fish, it will not release until the bird settles to a perch. While a great advantage in terms of preventing the escape of its prey, this adaptation also has its risks. More than one osprey skeleton has been found affixed to the back of large fish, the result of binding to prey too large and powerful to be pulled out of the water. Instead, these were birds pulled beneath

the surface and drowned because they could not let go in this dire emergency!

Much less perilous to the osprey, but undoubtedly highly annoying, is another downside of that no-release grip. Once they hold a fish, they cannot use their talons to ward off other birds. So even though bigger and more fearsome than a gull, it was an osprey's inability to drive away a harassing Western gull that attracted my eye the other day. Fortunately, I was able to photograph some of the encounter.

The osprey had taken a pretty good-sized fish, perhaps a foot and a half long, and was carrying it off to a perch when a passing Western gull thought it would try wresting a quick meal from the passing hawk. And the chase was on, the gull unimpressed by long curved talons.

It was the fish they held that the gull went after. Each time the gull approached, bill outstretched to nip off a bite—or better yet, snatch the whole thing—the osprey would slip aside or twist the fish just out of reach. And thus it went for several minutes, with a couple of other gulls joining in briefly on the fun. The weight of the fish, perhaps close to that of the osprey itself, was enough of a handicap to prevent a quick escape from the bullying gulls. At one point, the first gull appeared to reach up under the osprey and have the fish fully in its bill, but it could neither hold on nor maintain position, dropping away with nothing to show for its daring.

I suppose, though, that what I was observing for the first time was old hat for both the gull and osprey. The hawk,



The osprey tightly grips the catch of the day, holding on even when a gull tries to steal it (below).

Photos by Jess Morton



dodging and weaving, eventually managed to get away from its pursuers. Whether the fish was a meal for itself or family, I cannot say, but I do know that I will not look at an osprey in quite the same way ever again.

What's Happening With Audubon YES!

By Marcos Trinidad
YES! Volunteer Coordinator

On Saturday March 12, the Friends of Madrona Marsh, City of Torrance, TreePeople and Audubon YES! joined together to celebrate Arbor Day by planting a combination of 84 native trees and shrubs along the Sepulveda Boulevard side of Madrona Marsh. The tree planting was not only to create a sound barrier from the busy street of Sepulveda but also to provide habitat for our feathered friends in the air. The day could not have been better. The ground was moist from a gift of rainwater just days before the event. As the clouds moved gracefully past the sun, the temperature was just right for digging in the soft soil. Volunteers of all ages from the South Bay gathered to give back on this gorgeous day designated for our trees.

As part of TreePeople's outstanding tree care program, they have committed to help Madrona Marsh and the City of Torrance take care of these trees for five years. The day started at 8:30 a.m. and ended about noon and would not have been possible without the help of



The Arbor Day service project at Madrona Marsh had a great turnout.

Madrona Marsh Advanced Restoration Crew (ARC) for stepping up to help supervise the volunteers. The ARC program was developed to inspire and encourage longtime volunteers at Madrona to take a leading role and to further their knowledge of life on the preserve. Three cheers for ARC—hip, hip, hooray!

Spring is here, which means our Audubon YES! Awards ceremony is around the corner. If you are eligible for an award, please send me your information because the deadline is April 10.

This year's award ceremony will be

held on April 23 in the auditorium of the Cabrillo Marine Aquarium. The ceremony will begin at 3 p.m. as part of the annual Earth Day Festival. The festival, which runs from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., will offer live music, eco-conscious exhibitors, eco-crafts, movie screenings and much more! Early risers are invited to come and join the beach clean-up from at 8 a.m. For details on the Earth Day Festival, call 310-548-7562.

Audubon YES! is open to all student Audubon members and their families. If interested, contact me at marcos@pvsub-audubon.org or 323-945-4346.

Nieto Honored for Local Efforts

The Palos Verdes Peninsula Lions Club honored John Nieto of Rancho Palos Verdes, who is President of the Palos Verdes/South Bay Audubon Society, with its 2011 Community Recognition Award. John was recognized for his longstanding commitment to the South Bay. His service includes acting as Vice President of the Friends of the Seal Beach National Wildlife Refuge. He is a senior naturalist and Certified Interpretive Walk Leader for Los Serenos de Point Vicente and is known as a "cool walk leader" who can identify birds and discuss wildlife with humor. The retired Aerospace Product Manager is chairman of the Los Serenos 2011 Whale of A Day. John also manages the Education Program for the Palos Verdes Peninsula Land Conservancy, including the popular Third Grade Program, and remains an active member of the American Cetacean Society's Gray Whale Census and Behavioral Study Program. John has given generously of his time and is a wonderful example and inspiration to all.

—Shirley Borks



PVP Lion Len Lyberger, left, presents the award to honoree John Nieto, who is the president of the PV/South Bay Audubon Chapter, along with fellow Lion John Letcher, at right.

Your Backyard Habitat



By Dr. Constance M. Vadheim
CSU Dominguez Hills

Island Bush Poppy *Dendromecon harfordii*

This time of year, when the weather is so changeable, it's nice to have a dependable source of color in the garden. If that color spot also provides habitat value, so much the better. One of my favorite shrubs right now is the Island Bush Poppy (and its slightly larger cousin the Chaparral Tree Poppy). Their bright yellow blooms are always a welcome treat in the early spring garden.

Dendromecon harfordii is native to Catalina Island where it grows on slopes and in ravines in the Chaparral plant community. The plant's name honors William George Willoughby Harford (1825–1911), a marine taxonomist



(similar to the California Poppy) that are about 2 inches across. The plant blooms off and on much of the year in our mild climate, but the main bloom season is late winter to spring. In fact, it often is one of the few things blooming in the late winter garden. The seed pods are typical for the poppies — once again like our well-known state flower.

Island bush Poppy thrives in full sun, but it can take some afternoon shade. The plant grows into a nice-size shrub in two to three years. The plant is evergreen with blue-green to yellow-green foliage and simple leaves. It looks good most of the year even when not in bloom. Older plants may get a little scraggly around the base, so planting a groundcover under the Bush Poppy makes sense. Be sure to plant something compatible as the Bush Poppy needs very little summer water once established (once a month or less). Bush Poppy makes a nice large shrub or can be used as a natural hedge. It looks lovely with other Island native plants like Catalina Snapdragon and Island Tree Mallow.

The Bush and Tree Poppies prefer a well-drained soil. If your soil is clay-like, consider planting the Bush Poppy on a slope. They need very little management once established. Trim back branches by about half their length each fall for a fuller shrub. Other than that, sit back and enjoy a long-running show.

who was also interested in local plants. The Island Tree Poppy and the Chaparral Tree Poppy (*Dendromecon rigida*) are true poppies, in the family *Papaveraceae*, although much larger than our usual notion of poppies. It matures into a woody shrub 6 to 10 feet tall and wide, so be sure to plant it with enough space to accommodate its size. The flowers are a nectar source for bees, butterflies and other insects, and the shrub itself is dense enough to provide cover and nesting sites for birds and other small creatures. Birds also enjoy the seeds.

Island Bush Poppy has brilliant yellow poppy-type flowers



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

Birds of the Peninsula

January & February 2011

By Tracy Drake & Bob Shanman

We started the last column talking about the 12 inches of rain that fell in November and December. Perhaps we jinxed it because the following six weeks were quite dry but seasonably cool. But the birds seemed to have hung around for all to see, according to the reports we received.

Greater White-fronted Geese continued to be reported at Ballona (1/13, 1/14; Rick Pine, Jonathan Coffin). They were seen grazing in the seasonal wetland west of Lincoln and north of Jefferson. Dick Barth (DB) reported another at the Inglewood Cemetery on 2/8 that had taken up residence in mid-December. A Ross's Goose was reported at the Ballona Freshwater Marsh (BFM; Roy van de Hoek, 2/18–2/21). David Ellsworth (DE) reported two Brant at Cabrillo Beach (2/4). Brant can also be found on the jetties at Ballona during the winter and early spring. A Cackling Goose continued at Ballona along the creek, according to Richard Greer (1/9), who was visiting from Birmingham, England.

Tracy Drake observed two to six Ring-necked Duck at the Madrona Marsh starting on 1/2 and continuing through the month of February. Prior to 1984, White-winged Scoters were regular winter visitors to the South Bay Coast and were relatively easy to find in Surf Scoter flocks. Reportedly, the species had a near-complete breeding failure and population crash in 1983 in the breeding range in Canada. Since then, this species has been irregular along our coast. A number of observers have reported the birds in the Cabrillo Beach area. Sightings were reported on 1/6 (DN), 1/14 (Tom Miko), and 2/2 (DE). David's description is below:

"As of yesterday, Wednesday (Feb. 2, 2011), the White-winged Scoter continues at the Cabrillo Fishing Pier. That makes six weeks so far. Starting in late



White-winged Scoter

Photo by Jess Morton

December 2010, she underwent a molt, losing the white feathers on the sides of her head. By mid-January 2011, the white on her face had virtually disappeared. Her white secondaries are definitely still there, but sometimes she'll hide them for long periods of time" (see above photo).

On 2/28, DB reported both a female Black Scoter and an immature male Long-tailed Duck in a "scattered" flock of less than 100 Surf Scoters off Dockweiler Beach. Loon numbers seem to be down this year, so a report of a Red-throated Loon is noteworthy. Martin Byhower, Jose Sandoval (JS) and DE observed the bird on 1/23.

On 2/20, Nick and Mary Freeman (NF and MF) observed a Least Bittern at the BFM. The bird was found in the reeds (locale not specified). There is excellent habitat throughout the marsh margins for bitterns and rails.

Very unusual for this time of year was a sighting of a Turkey Vulture just north of the BFM on 1/1/11 (Vic War-

ren, Laurel Scott). Equally unusual was the report from 2/7 of a Bald Eagle, complete with wing tags, over George F Canyon. Thanks to Juan Croucier (JC) for reporting this sighting. His description was excellent, especially his comment that the bird was twice as big as the Red-tailed Hawk chasing it! On 1/14, JC reported a Northern Harrier within the Ballona Ecological Preserve, hunting in the late afternoon.

On 2/14, JC reported a single Black-bellied Plover in complete breeding plumage. While the species is abundant at Ballona this time of year, it is unusual to have one in summer plumage.

On 1/16 John Thomlinson reported a Snowy Plover at Cabrillo Beach in the afternoon, on the narrow strand running east-west toward the pier. It was hunkering down in a tire-track depression towards the end of the day.

A Semipalmated Plover was on the outer side of Cabrillo Beach on 1/18. It was in the Cabrillo Salt Marsh (Salinas de San Pedro) on the day of the Christmas Bird Count (Dec. 26, 2010), and

was still in the Salt Marsh on 1/8 in the late afternoon (DE).

On 1/1, VW and LS reported three Black-necked Stilts at the west end of the BFM, another species that seems to be taking up residence there.

DE has tracked the numbers of Mew Gulls at Cabrillo Beach during the period, reporting 111 individuals on 1/7, with a peak of about 140 on 1/31. Only a few Mew Gulls have been reported from Ballona, where several were seen on 2/20 (Bob Shanman, NF and MF). DE also tracked the Black Skimmers at Cabrillo, with a high count of 136 (12/24/10) to zero on 1/23. Seven were present on 2/2.

The Burrowing Owl has returned to the BFM to the same location as usual. JC reported its arrival on 1/5, and many observers have seen it since. VW and LS reported White-throated Swifts on 1/1 at the BFM that were working the sky over the marsh and the field on the north side of Jefferson. This may be an early record or overwintering birds.

On 1/6, DE and John Astorga observed a Red-naped Sapsucker inside the entrance to the South Coast Botanic Gardens. On a chase to find the White-throated Sparrow, TM found a Red-breasted Sapsucker at Eastview Park in San Pedro, where a number of interesting birds have been reported recently. Very unusual for any part of the region was a Nuttall's Woodpecker on 1/14 working the laurel sumac on both sides of Ballona Creek (JC).

Moving on to flycatchers, TM spotted the Eastern Phoebe on 1/14 at KMHRP, and one continued to be seen in the park's dam area (LAAS report). A pair of Say's Phoebes is nesting again at Madrona Marsh, where they have been breeding since 2006. Throughout February there were one to eight Lark Sparrows reported there as well (TD).

On 1/21, TM found a Cassin's Kingbird in the Forrestal Quarry above Ladera Linda Park, and he also saw an Eastern Kingbird on 1/14.

JS and DE found a vocalizing Hut-

ton's Vireo on 1/6 near Hidden Meadow. The first of the season swallows were reported from the BFM on 2/20 (NF, MF). The three species seen included Tree, Rough-winged and Violet Green.

Highly unusual for the South Bay was a Mountain Chickadee on 1/21 at Eastview Park. On the same date, there was also a Red-breasted Nuthatch (both TM). Another report from Eastview Park noted the continuing presence of at least three Western Bluebirds on 1/12. The Hooded Warbler reported in the last issue continues to be seen in a yard at 12th and Dodson in San Pedro.



White-throated Sparrow

Photo by Steve Wolf

On 1/13, Cactus Wrens were active during the bimonthly survey at the Three Sisters Nature Preserve near Portuguese Bend in Rancho Palos Verdes (Bill Cullen). During this survey, Bonnie Cohn pointed to what appeared to be a Scott's Oriole. Jess Morton took a photo and thought it might be a young Male Scott's Oriole or even an escaped exotic. There was a first year Harris' Sparrow in the Three Sisters Preserve on 2/27.

Jumping back to the BFM, NF and MF saw a first-year Yellow Warbler along the Lincoln Boulevard side in the willows on 2/20. On 1/7, Danny Sloan reported a single Palm Warbler on a jetty along Ballona Creek. They reported the bird as "unmistakable, especially the tail wagging." On 2/4, during the monthly bird survey at BFM, a Palm Warbler was reported along the Lincoln side that is likely the same bird reported

there since early December (DB).

On 1/21, TM found two Rock Wrens and a Rufous-crowned Sparrow in RPV's Forrestal Quarry. Peggy Gusman reported a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher and three California Gnatcatchers along the road below the hill. On 1/22 TM reported a Golden-crowned Sparrow at the Forrestal Quarry as well.

On the morning of 2/5, BC encountered a group of six Lark Sparrows at Hesse Park in RPV. On 1/13 SW photographed a "continuing" White-throated Sparrow that might be the one DE, JS, JA and SW first saw at Eastview Park on 1/9/10. A White-throated Sparrow was also spotted at the South Coast Botanic Garden on 1/9/11.

The next few months should be excellent for birding as migration will be in full swing. In reviewing the Hummin' issues from 2003 to 2010, we have pulled together some of the more unusual sightings for March and April. Our original list had 66 birds on it, so we decided to pare it down by limiting this list to species seen at least three times in the past eight years. These are birds that are worth looking for in our area but that won't necessarily be found. Expected birds are not included and neither are the super rarities.

This list is not in taxonomic order but in the chronological order starting from 2003: Manx Shearwater, Laughing Gull, Magnolia Warbler, Palm Warbler, Short-eared Owl, Lesser Night Hawk, Gray Flycatcher, Yellow-throated Warbler, Green-tailed Towhee, Yellow-headed Blackbird, Reddish Egret, Vermilion Flycatcher, Sage Thrasher, Virginia Warbler, Northern Parula, Black-throated Sparrow, Little Blue Heron, Thick-billed Kingbird, Loggerhead Shrike, Wrentit, Calliope Hummingbird, Rose-breasted Grosbeak and Acorn Woodpecker.

The past few months have had plenty of surprises, so we would like to thank everyone who contributed to this report. Go out there again, enjoy the beauty of spring, have fun and happy birding!

Calendar

Meet, Learn, Enjoy, Restore

Events

Saturday, April 2, 8 a.m. – 12 p.m.: Natural history walk at Bixby Marsh. Explore the 17-acre Bixby Marshland after a half-hour introductory walk with Audubon leaders Jess Morton and John Nieto. Walks begin on the hour at the parking lot welcome table. Learn about how the marsh came into being, see the results of this restoration and view the many birds that have made the wetland home. Located in Carson, Bixby Marshland is on the west side of Figueroa just south of Sepulveda Blvd., and is managed by the County Sanitation District: www.lacsd.org/education/.

Wednesday, April 6, 7 p.m.: Eric and Ann Brooks' birding class at South Coast Botanic Garden. Walks in the garden before class start at 6 p.m. as long as daylight permits. The fee for eight classes is \$36 for Foundation members and \$40 for nonmembers.

Wednesday, April 6, 7 p.m.: PV/South Bay Audubon board meeting at Madrona Marsh. All Audubon members and friends are welcome.

Saturday, April 9, 9 – 11 a.m.: Second Saturday Habitat Restoration Project at Ken Malloy Harbor Regional Park (KMHRP). Come take part in Audubon's important partnership with the Chadwick Ecommunity and City of Los Angeles to restore habitat. Led by Chadwick students and their teacher, Martin Byhower, this is a hands-on opportunity to learn about invasives removal and native species planting. Students earn community service credits. Wear closed-toe shoes, long pants and a hat. Bring water, a snack, sunscreen, bug repellent and work gloves. KMHRP is located at 25820 Vermont Ave., just west of the Harbor Freeway. For details, call Martin at 310-541-6763, ext. 4143.

Thursday, April 14, 7:50 – 10 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. Volunteers are needed. They will be trained in identification and the methods used in the survey. To participate, contact Ann Dalkey at 310-541-7613, ext. 208 or adalkey@pvplc.org.

Saturday, April 16, 7:50 – 10 a.m.: Bird survey on a habitat restoration site. See April 14 for details.

Saturday, April 16, 11 a.m. – 4 p.m.: Earth Day Celebration and Concert at Polliwog Park. The Manhattan Beach event will feature live music and activities, including an Eco-quiz for children (with prizes!), eco-friendly shopping, alternative fuel vehicles and booths for environmental organizations like the Environmental Priorities Network (EPN) and Sierra Club. Learn about the EPN Solar Homes Tour in May and the upcoming public forum on desalinization. For details, call VOICE at 310-226-2927, contact Kaye Sherbak at greenervoice@gmail.com or visit www.greenervoice.org.

Tuesday, April 19, 7 p.m.: Audubon Third Tuesday Get-Togethers. Our speaker for the evening has yet to be announced. Come to Madrona Marsh to socialize with friends and to enjoy the bird quiz, raffle and prizes from Wild Birds Unlimited.

Wednesday, April 20, 7 p.m.: The Brookses' birding class at South Coast Botanic Garden. See April 6 for details.

Saturday, April 23, 8 a.m. – 4 p.m.: Earth Day Fair at Cabrillo Marine Aquarium. This fair will host several

April						
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10	11	12	13	14	15	16
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24	25	26	27	28	29	30

May						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

environmental groups and offer many opportunities such as a beach cleanup from 8 to 10 a.m. and an eco-scavenger hunt, live entertainment, a raffle and other hands-on activities. Contact Alfonso Montiel at alfonso.montiel@lacity.org or 310-548-7562, ext. 203.

Saturday, April 30: This year, the Chapter is going to find out how many birds can be seen *just in the South Bay* on a spring day (mostly in the PV Christmas Count circle)! Volunteers plan to cover 30 or 40 miles by bike and even more by foot. Please pledge your support via e-mail to Martin Byhower (avitropic@sbcglobal.net). All funds will help the PV/SB Audubon support its youth environmental service program and other valuable programs. See the cover story for more details.

Wednesday, April 27, 7 p.m.: The Brookses' birding class at South Coast Botanic Garden. See April 6 for details.

Wednesday, May 4, 7 p.m.: The Brookses' birding class at South Coast Botanic Garden. See April 6 for details.

Saturday, May 7, 8 a.m. – 12 p.m.: Bixby Marshland open to the public. See April 2 for details.

Wednesday, May 11, 7 p.m.: The Brookses' birding class at South Coast Botanic Garden. See April 6 for details.

Thursday, May 12, 7:45 – 9:45 a.m.: Bird survey on a habitat restoration site. See April 14 for details.

Saturday, May 14, 9 – 11 a.m.: Second Saturday Habitat Restoration Project at KMHRP. See April 9 for details.

Tuesday, May 17, 7 p.m.: Audubon Third Tuesday Get-Togethers. The guest speaker is TBD. Come to Madrona Marsh to socialize with friends and to enjoy the bird quiz, raffle and prizes from Wild Birds Unlimited.

Wednesday, May 18, 7 p.m.: The Brookses' birding class at South Coast Botanic Garden. See April 6 for details.

Saturday, May 21, 7 – 9 a.m.: Bird survey on a habitat restoration site. See April 14 for details.

Saturday, May 21, 9:30 a.m. – 5:30 p.m.: EPN Solar Homes Tour. The EPN is hosting its sixth annual tour of South Bay homes with solar panels and other "green" features like solar hot-water heating and drought-tolerant plantings. This is a great opportunity to find out more about conservation, renewable energy and energy efficiency. Some homes may request a \$5 donation. To request a flyer with the tour schedule, contact Lillian Light at lk-light@verizon.net or 310-545-1384.

Wednesday, May 25, 7 p.m.: The Brookses' birding class at South Coast Botanic Garden. See April 6 for details.

Field Trips

Sunday, April 3, 8 a.m.: Bird walk at South Coast Botanic Garden. Audubon leader Stephanie Bryan will lead this walk through the garden, lo-

cated at 26300 Crenshaw Blvd., Palos Verdes. There is a minimal charge for nonmembers of the SCBG Foundation, or you can join at the box office.

Sunday, April 3, 8 a.m.: Eric and Ann Brooks' fieldtrip to Huntington Beach Central Park and Bolsa Chica. For details, call 310-913-2799 or 310-913-2798.



This Osoyoos Yellow Warbler adds a welcome splash of color to local fauna after an unusually rainy spring.

Tuesday, April 5, 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, April 9, 9 – 11 a.m.: PVPLC Natural History Walk to Forrestral. This 155-acre preserve offers some of the best wildflowers in the spring. See geological formations including faults, folds, sedimentary bedding and igneous intrusions from dramatic cliffs. Moderate to strenuous. For details, visit www.pvplc.org.

Saturday/Sunday, April 9 – 10, 8:30 a.m.: The Brookses' fieldtrip to Carrizo Plain. For details, call 310-913-2799 or 310-913-2798.

Sunday, April 10, 8 a.m.: Second Sunday Walk at KMHRP. Join Audubon leaders and explore this important natural area of the South Bay. See KMHRP listing on p. 8 for directions.

Wednesday, April 13, 8 a.m.: Bird Walk at Madrona Marsh with Audubon leader Bob Shanman. Meet at the Madrona Marsh Nature Center.

Sunday, April 17, 8 a.m.: Bird walk at the Ballona Wetlands with Bob Shanman. Visit <http://torrance.wbu.com>.

Sunday, April 17, 8 a.m.: The Brookses' fieldtrip to San Joaquin Marsh. For details, call 310-913-2799 or 310-913-2798.

Sunday, April 17, 3 p.m.: Los Serenos de Point Vicente Natural History Walk to Ocean Trails at Trump National Golf Course. Walk the switchback trail to the beach, learning about local geology and spring blooming habitat. Stay to watch the sunset from beautiful Founders Park. Visit www.losserenos.com/pvic.htm.

Tuesday, April 19, 8:30 a.m.: "Tour de Torrance." See April 5 for details.

Wednesday, April 20, 8 a.m.: Bird walk at South Coast Botanic Garden. See April 3 for details.

Tuesday, April 26, 8:30 a.m.: "Tour de Torrance." See April 5 for details.

Friday, April 29 – Sunday, May 1, 7 a.m.: The Brookses' annual fieldtrip to the Salton Sea, Big Morongo Canyon and Joshua Tree. For details on this weekend event, call 310-913-2799 or 310-913-2798.

Sunday, May 1, 8 a.m.: Bird walk at South Coast Botanic Garden. See April 3 for details.

Tuesday, May 3, 8:30 a.m.: "Tour de Torrance." See April 5 for details.

Do You Know about the Dangers of Easter Grass to Birds?

By Nancy Feagans

At this time of year, bluebirds are nesting and kids have Easter Egg hunts. How are these related? Dropped or discarded Easter grass makes for easy pickings for Bluebirds and other cavity nesters, such as Tree Swallows, that build their nests out of grass. They pick up the plastic Easter grass and weave it into a beautiful nest — a nest that is dangerous for adults and chicks. Birds get tangled in the strong plastic grass and then become trapped, unable to leave the nest to feed or fly away.

The Bluebird Nest Box Project is now in its third year at Harbor Park, and its members have first-hand experience with this danger, especially in the spring. The project's nest box monitors have been removing strands that were woven



The nest above shows how Easter grass can easily become tangled into natural materials.

into the nests and have picked up and disposed of clusters found on the ground.

This year, in an attempt to educate the public about this danger, project volunteers are working with the staff at Harbor Park to get the word out. They have created an informative flyer that will be posted by park workers on poles and picnic tables, and the nest box monitors and volunteers will be giving them to park visitors during their weekly nest box checks.

If you would like to help by spreading the word to family and friends or by joining us at Harbor Park to hand out flyers, we would appreciate it. The flyer is available at: www.pvsb-audubon.org/bluebirdproject.html. If we are able to save even a few nesting birds through this effort, it will be well worth it!

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Sunday, May 8, 8 a.m.: Second Sunday Walk at KMHRP. See April 10 for details.

Sunday, May 8, 8 a.m.: The Brookses' fieldtrip to Starr Ranch. For details, call 310-913-2799 or 913-2798.

Tuesday, May 10, 8:30 a.m.: "Tour de Torrance." See April 5 for details.

Wednesday, May 11, 8 a.m.: Bird Walk at Madrona Marsh. See April 13 for details.

Saturday, May 14, 9 – 11 a.m.: PVPLC Natural History Walk to White Point. Walk the trails at this Nature Preserve across from Royal Palms Beach in San Pedro, from Nature Center to the historic Navy gun emplacements to enjoy spectacular views. For details, visit www.pvplc.org.

Sunday, May 15, 8 a.m.: Bird walk at Ballona Wetlands with Bob Shanman. Visit <http://torrance.wbu.com>.

Sunday, May 15, 8 a.m.: The Brookses' fieldtrip to Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden in Claremont. For details, call 310-913-2799 or 310-913-2798.

Tuesday, May 17, 8:30 a.m.: "Tour de Torrance." See April 5 for details.

Wednesday, May 18, 8 a.m.: Bird walk at South Coast Botanic Garden. See April 3 for details.

Saturday, May 21, 8 a.m.: The Brookses' fieldtrip to Kenneth Hahn Park. For details, call 310-913-2799 or 310-913-2798.

Sunday, May 22, 8 a.m.: The Brookses' fieldtrip to Friendship Park and other South Bay sites. For details, call 310-913-2799 or 310-913-2798.

Tuesday, May 24, 8:30 a.m.: "Tour de Torrance." See April 6 for details.

Saturday, May 28, 1 p.m.: Los Serenos de Point Vicente Natural

History Walk to Forrester Nature Preserve. Walk through Coastal Sage Brush habitat. Learn about the local geology. Moderate. For details, visit www.losserenos.com/pvic.htm.

Saturday, May 29, 8:30 a.m.: The Brookses' fieldtrip to Galileo Hill and Silver Saddle Resort. For details, call 310-913-2799 or 310-913-2798.

Tuesday, May 31, 8:30 a.m.: "Tour de Torrance." See April 5 for details.



For more information on local events, please visit the Chapter website at www.pvsb-audubon.org. For a complete list of events at Madrona Marsh, visit www.southbaycalendar.org and click on "Friends of Madrona Marsh." For a complete list of activities for Audubon's Youth Environmental Service (YES!) program, visit www.AudubonYES.org.

The PV/South Bay Audubon Bird Quiz

By Martin Byhower

Since a few people told me they liked the monthly local bird quiz column and another asked if last month's guess was correct, I shall assume that I have a resounding mandate to continue to puzzle and challenge you and to perhaps offer a chance to help *Hummin'* readers build their birding skills. Please let me know if you find the quiz birds either too easy or too difficult to identify because I could include one easier and one more challenging photo each month.



Let's start with last month's bird (shown at left). As you may recall, I did give you some important clues, as this is a very uncommon bird in our area. Remarkably, as of my monthly bird walk at Ken Malloy Harbor Regional Park (KMHRP) this morning, March 13, the bird is still present, but it will be gone soon, as the little guy is overcome by the urge to migrate.

Just as in real estate, one of the most important factors in bird identification is loca-

tion, location, location; yet with birds, habitat type is even more important than the geographic coordinates. (The time of year is also critical, as you will find out in this month's quiz bird). KMHRP, with its varied habitat types, attracts a number of off-course migrants, or vagrants, each year, particularly in the fall, when juvenile birds are migrating for their first season and stray, sometimes across continents (and even oceans).

So, armed with the knowledge that the bird is a juvenile and a nonlocal, we next look at the kinds of places where it likes to hang out and what it likes to do there. The bird will invariably appear in open areas, with fields and scattered shrubs, often near water. Like other members of its family, it sits on low- to medium-height perches, sallies out to grab insects and returns to its perch. Additionally, it frequently bobs its tail downward. These habits, as well as the pointed insectivore bill, the "blocky" head, the small size and the presence



For next month's quiz, the bird above was seen in mid-October, also at KMHRP, and the clues below should give our readers a good start in guessing its species.

Photo by Steve Wolfe

of small sensory feathers at the base of the bill (rectal bristles) points us in the direction of the family *Tyrannidae*, more commonly known as the Tyrant (or "New World") Flycatchers, and a particular family within that group.

Having said all of this, the flycatcher group contains a large number of very similar species that can be unbelievably difficult to identify. Sometimes, if the bird isn't in its breeding habitat, identification is only possible by voice. Our bird gives itself away when it vocalizes, but it does so only infrequently. Supplied only with a photo, we need to observe the details very carefully.

Lack of an eye ring rules out a number of species, as does the small size and relatively short tail and wings. We are left with the Wood-pewees, the few non-eye-ringed Empidonax ("Empie") Flycatcher species and the Phoebes. If we saw a Western Wood-pewee in life, we could rule our bird because that species lacks the tail-pumping behavior. Our bird lacks wing bars, which would also rule out the Wood-pewee (and all the Empies, too), but alas, we cannot see the wings in the photo.

The most helpful feature here is the all-black bill. Wood-pewees and Empies have at least a bit of orange, at least on the lower mandible. Knowing the bird must be a Phoebe makes it easy; the only Phoebe with a white chin is an **Eastern Phoebe**. This bird also has the unique yellowish patterning of the juvenile of that species. Thanks to Steve Wolfe not only for discovering this great bird at KMHRP but also for providing the photo!

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