



HUMMIN'

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Identifying Gulls—and Humans

By Martin Byhower

Gulls. Many birders avoid them, at least until and unless they have seen most of the other birds that occur within their normal birding “striking range” and need to add some ticks to their lists. Some birders have an “adults only” approach to identification and lump all sub-adults into the “juvenile gull species” category. Of course, for most folks, anything in the Laridae family is simply a “seagull.”

No wonder—gulls are challenging. I sometimes feel more confident distinguishing shearwaters seen far offshore, through a spotting scope, than I do with first- or second-year gulls standing in a flock on a beach or spillway right in front of me. First of all, there are some eight or ten species you can see, if you are looking, in a regular year in Southern California (SoCal), and there are several rarer ones that can wander into our area, especially in fall and winter. To make matters worse, they are a promiscuous clan: Many gull species will hybridize with one another, producing some truly puzzling, if not puzzled, offspring.

There is more. A good deal of individual variation occurs within a species. On top of this, depending on the species, gulls take two to four years to acquire their adult plumage. A first-year Western Gull is quite different from a two- or three-year-old, all of which are different from an adult. Once a gull is an adult, fortunately, it acquires a seasonally consistent plumage. But there are also seasonal differences! A striking alternate (summer or “breeding”) plumaged Bonaparte’s Gull is scarcely recognizable in its basic (“winter”) plumage. Gulls seem to change every week throughout the year, and an individuals of one species in a flock might be in a different seasonal stage than his or her cohorts of the same species and age.

For most birders, managing the identification of regularly occurring adult species is not too difficult, and eventually doing so with “typical” common juveniles is feasible. However, if you want to pick up a rarity, you usually have to be willing to look at the seemingly generic first-year juveniles. This is because the adult birds typically get the best foraging territories and tend to drive out the less experienced and less aggressive youngsters. Rarely does one see an adult Thayer’s, Glaucous-winged or Glaucous Gull in

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Sightings at Three Sisters

The White-Crowned Sparrow, at left, and Western Scrub Jay are just two examples of the wide variety of birds found at the Three Sisters habitat in Palos Verdes. See the calendar for project details.

Photos by Evi Meyer



PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

Our Chapter Needs *You* to Support a Birdathon Team



By John Nieto

Fundraisers are always finding their way into our consciousness, and we are used to having the neighborhood children drop by for a pledge to this or that school, Scout troop or church project. The funds are always collected for a worthy cause: school field trip, Scout campout, etc. Well, I have a worthy cause for you called the Palos Verdes/South Bay

Audubon Birdathon. This is a springtime Chapter fundraiser involving sponsored teams of birders. Each team counts the number of bird species found while birding with friends and relatives, as a team, on a spring day chosen in advance.

Prior to the day of the event, the team members solicit pledges from family and friends at work. Sponsors can pledge an amount for each species found or pledge a set amount for a particular team's total sightings. For example, if you pledge \$1 for every species found and the team finds 100 species, your check will be written for \$100 after the Birdathon. If you pledge a set amount, then the check is simply written to the team that you pledged to sponsor.

Each team selects the day of their Birdathon with great care. The best day in spring would be the day before the winter migrants leave and the day that the spring migrants pass through—which occurs sometime from late April to early May. Each team selects the day using past years' totals and data, along with the experience of years in the field. On the selected day, the team starts out very early in the morning and ends the search in the late afternoon or early evening, counting the numbers of bird species sighted and/or heard by team members in a specific targeted area.

This sounds easy enough, but in the many years that this Chapter has fielded Birdathon teams, different styles have emerged. The most dynamic has been the team led by Martin Byhower. He has evolved his Birdathon into a "green" event. For the last two Birdathons, he and his team have pedaled bicycles around the Palos Verdes Peninsula and South Bay while videotaping the Green Birdathon adventure. Martin presented the professionally edited video of this past year's effort at our October members meeting. The "Green Team" is not our only Birdathon team as the Chapter fields at least four teams led by some of our most active members and best birders.

The Birdathon team leaders include some of our board

members and committee chairs. One team is led by Jess Morton, our current treasurer and one of our Chapter's founding members. Jess also sits on the National Board of Directors of the Audubon Society. Lillian Light and Ollie Croker lead a Birdathon team for us. Lillian is our conservation committee chair, and Ollie is one of our Chapter's founding members.

Another team is led by Bob Shanman, Tracy Drake and Ron Melin. Bob of Wild Birds Unlimited in Torrance also provides our door prizes at each of the general membership meetings every month. Bob leads many bird walks for our Chapter at Madrona Marsh in Torrance, White Point in San Pedro and Polliwog Park in Manhattan Beach. Tracy is the manager naturalist at Madrona Marsh and committee chair for Audubon at Home. Ron Melin is also a naturalist at Madrona Marsh and our committee chair for the Snowy Plover Survey. Once again, the "Green Team" will be



Birds such as the Eared Grebe, above, and Red-Winged Blackbird were seen locally during the 2010 Birdathon.

Above photo by Jess Morton



led by Martin Byhower, our past president and bird walk leader at Ken Malloy Harbor Regional Park.

Every team leader and team member must solicit pledges from friends, relatives, acquaintances and neighborhood businesses. Please, friends, take a moment to ask yourself which team you would like to sponsor, then call the team leader and pledge an amount that satisfies you, provide your contact information and wait for their return from the Birdathon to actually give your pledge. If you would like to join a team or perhaps put a team together, please contact me for the details.

This year, as in other years, the Chapter's Birdathon will be our major fundraiser. The event will give your Chapter the resources to bring to many new people their first exposure to the remarkable pastime of birding.

Some Words for John Olguin

By “Jeff” Morton

1/1/11! John Olguin woke to a New Year, I’m sure, with thoughts of polar bears in mind. Not the furry sort, mind you, but rather the human hundreds who would gather on his beloved Cabrillo Beach at noon for the annual San Pedro Polar Bears swim. However, this was one swim John would not take in person, for a heart attack whisked him away when he got out of bed. But his memory swam there that day, as it always will.

John Olguin had a generosity of spirit, outgoing warmth and love of the world that drew people in. He was a natural-born storyteller and showman who could sell anything. Had he chosen to use those talents for personal gain, he would have been immensely wealthy. Luckily for us, he chose to use his gifts to sell us ideas, not just of the sea and his seaside town, but also of our own worth and of our abilities to work together. In doing so, John laid the foundations for whole institutions: the Cabrillo Marine Aquarium (CMA), American Cetacean Society and a global whalewatching industry.

When you ran into John, you could be sure to hear the latest just as surely as you’d be asked to take on some little task for, or donate to, some local worthy cause for community took priority in John’s mind. San Pedro was his town and bore his imprint every bit as much as did CMA or whale watching. Whether it was reno-

vating the Point Fermin lighthouse, celebrating the Fourth of July with a fireworks display at Cabrillo Beach, feeding the hungry through his church or sponsoring hard-working foreign craftsmen to come here, John worked to make the best things happen for others, and he wanted you to pitch in, too. “Jeff,” he would say to me, “let me show you...”

Jeff? When we first met 30-plus years ago, John misheard my name—“Jeff” instead of “Jess”—and it has remained that ever afterwards (and so it must be in the byline above).

Seriously, though, it was the sea that was John’s life: the sea, his family and all children. From his teenage years onward, teaching others, especially children, about the amazing world of the ocean was John’s passion. CMA started as card tables on the beach piled high with the shells and sea life found along the shore. Seventy-five years later, millions of beach visitors have learned about our oceans through the teaching methods he pioneered, methods that put you in a sea creature’s place. Dance like a jellyfish! Just do it!

Some of the children John taught did much more than pretend to be grunion coming ashore or barnacles feeding. They absorbed John’s brand of passion for the ocean and its creatures, becoming professionals of the sea in their own right. Whale photographer Bob Talbot is one. The late curator of mammals at the L.A.

Unfortunately, during the last 15 years the population has continued to plummet while the state has sat idle. New surveys have shown a 27% drop in the number of breeding burrowing owls in California’s Imperial Valley and a 28% drop in the San Francisco Bay area. These declines ride on the heels of a more than 50% Burrowing Owl population decline in the San Francisco Bay area and parts of Central California between 1983 and 1993.

In an effort to increase the awareness for California’s burrowing owls and highlight the need for both a statewide conservation strategy and legal protection under the California Endangered Species Act, we have recently begun asking the people of



Olguin on a Baja whale-watching trip.

Photo: Cabrillo Marine Aquarium

County Natural History Museum, John Heyning, is another.

John and Muriel, his wife, knew the sea in ways few others do. They rowed upon it everywhere. Across the channel to and around Catalina. A day or two at a time, or for long treks up along the Pacific Coast and abroad, living high in the little rowboat that was their home away from home. Cooking. Sleeping. Feeling the fog sweep in around them as the world became silent. Or hearing the sound of rain that comes when a thousand shearwaters slap their feet against the sea’s surface as they lift into flight.

Now, John himself has lifted into flight, but his legacy remains with us and will grow into the future. *Ave atque vale*, John, friend and most human of beings.

Dear Mr. Stitt, the Board, Officers of the San Bernardino Valley Audubon Society and other Chapters,

I am writing this letter to ask for your support and participation in an important grassroots conservation initiative being conducted by the Burrowing Owl Conservation Network. The Western Burrowing Owl has been witnessing steep declines in California, and the need for a range-wide conservation strategy was officially recognized by the state in 1995. However, California and the Department of Fish and Game have failed to take any action since the release of that Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation, which has now surpassed 15 years.

California and North America to voice their concerns and sign our Action Alert. All signatures will be hand delivered, along with a detailed letter, to state officials in Sacramento regarding the need for conservation action and legal protections.

Because the National Audubon Society, California Audubon Society and all Chapters have been and continue to be a critical driving force for the protection of the world’s birds, we are asking for your assistance to help spread the word and garner signatures/supporters. In an effort to gather as many signatures as possible and to reach a wide audience, we have made a

See Burrowing Owls, Page 5

CONSERVATION CORNER

Local Earth Day Events Aim to Teach, Inspire



By Lillian Light

Founded as a grassroots “national teach-in” on environmental problems in April 1970, Earth Day has become the world’s largest civic event, observed by a billion people around the globe. This year’s theme is “A Billion Acts of Green” to improve environments everywhere. To date, the Earth Day Network has amassed over 42 million acts of green from organizations and individuals worldwide.

In order to inspire activism on behalf of environmental protection, two exciting Earth Day events will take place in the Palos Verdes Peninsula and South Bay. It is particularly important to connect with the network of environmental organizations because we need to defend existing green legislation from a congressional onslaught. On page 17 of the latest *Audubon Magazine*, Bradford Plumer writes,

The Republican takeover of the House means that Congress will now have at least 45 new members who don’t believe in global warming. In Washington the environmental landscape is going to look drastically different during the next two years.

House Republicans have vowed to stop Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator Lisa Jackson from forging ahead with new regulations on greenhouse gases and other pollutants under the Clean Air Act. They plan to slash the agency’s budget and/or strip the EPA’s authority over carbon pollution. The Clean Air Act was enacted after the first Earth Day, together with the creation of the EPA. Only an aroused and informed group of environmentalists may be able to prevent the destruction of this important agency.

How can we refute congressional attempts to depict climate scientists as untrustworthy? Darrell Issa, the incoming head of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, has pledged to hold hearings on climate science. “I want to make sure the skeptics are heard,” he said a few months ago. Only by joining organizations that are participating in the local Earth Day events can we work together to counter skeptic distortions of the scientific findings of climatologists.

On Saturday, April 16, 2011, from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., you may enjoy the Earth Day Celebration and Concert at Polliwog Park on Manhattan Beach Blvd. in Manhattan Beach. The event will feature live music and events all day as well as children’s activities like the Eco-quiz, which awards prizes. They have great food, eco-friendly shopping, alternative fuel vehi-

cles and booths featuring many environmental organizations like our own Environmental Priorities Network (EPN). Come and sign up for our EPN Solar Homes Tour in May and our upcoming Public Forum on Desalinization. Find out about the Sierra Club campaign to shut down dirty coal plants and how cleaning up the air can promote economic growth. For details, call VOICE (310-226-2927), contact Kaye Sherbak at greener-voice@gmail.com or access www.greenervoice.org.

One week later, on April 23, 2011, the Cabrillo Marine Aquarium is holding its annual Earth Day Fair to celebrate our ocean planet and its natural communities. Again, many environmental organizations will be featuring their work to preserve and improve our environment. You will find displays, demonstrations, brochures, educational materials and membership information. The day’s events start with a beach cleanup from 8 to 10 a.m., followed by demonstrations, live entertainment, a raffle for eco-friendly products, displays and hands-on activities until 3 p.m., all at no cost. Submissions to a poster contest will be received up to March 16, and the winners will be announced on April 23. The Exploration Center will include a family activity area with puzzles and books. An eco scavenger hunt is also planned for children. For details, contact Alfonso Montiel at alfonso.montiel@lacity.org or 310-548-7562, ext. 203.

On Earth Day, you will be reminded that the biggest threat to the survival of animals, plants and people is global warming. What can we residents of sunny Southern California do to avert this looming catastrophe? We can use the sun to produce our electricity! Attending the EPN Solar Homes Tour, tentatively scheduled for May 21, will inform you about the advantages of solar power and the rebates available that would make such an installation much less costly.

Did you know that you can reduce your carbon footprint by drinking tap water rather than bottled water? The production of bottled water in 2006 alone released 2.5 million tons of carbon dioxide to exacerbate global warming. Of the 30 billion bottles that end up in a landfill each year, those that go unrecycled can take 1,000 years to decompose. As clean water becomes scarcer, corporations are buying up water supplies and are putting the water in bottles; their successful marketing campaigns resulted in Americans buying 31.2 billion liters of bottled water in 2006. Since public water supplies undergo more testing and more restrictions than bottled water, it is a good idea as well as smart environmental policy to make it a habit to drink water from the tap.

I would like to extend to my readers warm wishes for a healthy and happy New Year that will include reduced energy use and *increased* environmental activism!

What's Happening with Audubon YES!

By Marcos Trinidad

2011 has been the perfect start for new beginnings. Audubon YES! is continuing to connect youth volunteers to environmental organizations while expanding in new directions by enhancing our web site (<http://pvsb-audubon.org/AudubonYES.html>) and offering new opportunities for students. Besides the many events in Palos Verdes and the South Bay, I have encouraged our YES! members to take advantage of volunteer events offered by organizations all over Los Angeles County. By doing this, students can see how one community can affect another and how we are sometimes stuck with the burden of cleaning up after someone else (or their community). My goal has been to let students experience firsthand the importance of environmental awareness and land stewardship.

Saturday, January 8, 2011 was a gorgeous day in Los Angeles. The smell of fresh, steaming mulch filled the air, and the sound of children running up a hill resonated within. The cool weather made for perfect tree care weather. Volunteers of all ages arrived at TreePeople's groundbreaking tree care event. I say groundbreaking because it was not only their first street-tree care event of the year, but it was the first event that they had volunteers remove "permeable pavers" from tree wells in this thriving tree-loving community in northeast Los Angeles. In addition to volunteers removing 150-lb. slabs of permeable pavement, they weeded, mulched, watered and pulled metal poles in order to provide much-needed TLC to neglected oak trees. As YES! members worked away, a question came up about what role this work could play in keeping our coastal communities clean and healthy.

"I think it is really important to get all sides of what goes on in our environment. I lived in San Pedro and I wanted to



YES! students fill up buckets at a recent TreePeople event in L.A.

Photo by Marcos Trinidad

know what is going on upstream from my community. If it takes me getting out of my neighborhood to come to L.A. to help out, that's what I have to do...creating healthy habits inland and keeping this area clean will be passed down to the ocean," said Christina Eslava, a Pasadena City College student and YES! member.

With a reaction from like that from students, how can anyone not love this job? This is Marcos Trinidad, your volunteer coordinator, signing out until the next issue!



Audubon YES! is open to all student Audubon members and their families. If you know of organizations or areas in need of volunteers and want to get involved, contact Marcos at marcos@pvsbaudubon.org or 323-945-4346.

Chapter Member's Marathon for Area Wildlife

On March 12, longtime Chapter member Bob Shanman will be running for the birds, figuratively speaking, on Catalina Island. Bob ran his first marathon in March 2009, raising over \$11,000 for the South Bay Wildlife Rehab and the Friends of Ballona Wetlands. He is training for this year's marathon and again doing it as a fundraiser. You can help raise money for the Palos Verdes/South Bay Chapter of Audubon by pledging to support Bob. Pledge support cards are available at his store, Wild Birds Unlimited.

The minimum pledge is \$26, and you can support up to four groups (i.e., the PV/SB Audubon Chapter,

South Bay Wildlife Rehab, Friends of Madrona Marsh and Friends of Ballona Wetlands). The pledge for each group should be \$26 rather than divided among them. Checks can be made out to the group(s) you support and submitted after the event.

The Catalina Marathon is considered one of the most difficult in the country, running from Two Harbors to Avalon. The course has an elevation gain of over 4,300 feet. Last year, Bob said the highlight of the marathon—besides finishing—was seeing a bison running along a ridge as he raced downhill to Little Harbor.

Let's get behind Bob and see how much money he can raise for the Chapter.

Burrowing Owls, from Page 3

brief, easily digestible version for public consumption available as a print/sign/mail form, or it can be signed electronically at the web site provided below.

We are hoping that you will be able to provide assistance in sharing this appeal with your community and members via email or at meetings, through your web site, etc. Any signatures you can help to gather directly or indirectly would be greatly appreciated. Additional information can be found at www.burrowingowlconservation.org, or you can contact me directly with any questions.

Scott Artis
Founding Director
Burrowing Owl Conservation Network
 P.O. Box 128
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 Mobile: 925-550-9208

The PV/South Bay Chapter Bird Quiz

By Martin Byhower

Welcome to this new *Hummin'* feature. Let us know if you like it! This is how it works: We run a photo of a bird, and you try to figure out what it is! It's OK to use a field guide, but see how far you can get without one. We will include a photo, taken in the South Bay by one of our excellent local photographers, plus a few clues. Answers (with explanations) will appear in the next issue, along with a repeat photo of the same bird, plus a new quiz bird photo.

For starters, we will give you two photos; one (Bird A) with the answer on another page in this issue, and another (Bird B) that you will have to puzzle over until the next issue of *Hummin'*.

Quiz Bird A

This bird is a youngster and was photographed by Steve



Wolfe in November 2010 near the shoreline of Machado Lake at Ken Malloy Harbor Regional Park (KMHRP). See the answer on page 11.

Gulls, from Page 1

SoCal; all of these tend to range farther north, but they might send their progeny southward into our area. So if you want a challenge, and you want to be the one to find that special rarity, you pretty much have to study up on and then sort through the “juvies.”

It helps to know where the gulls hang out. One approach is to simply check out areas like beaches and river mouths or, for you hardcore types, landfills and sewage outfalls. In these places, it is a numbers game, and searching through the hundreds or thousands of gulls that cycle through these areas can turn up the occasional needle in the haystack.

Then there are the places that, inexplicably (to me, at least), tend to have a higher frequency of occurrence or unusual gulls. The spillway area just south of the Anaheim Street crossing of the L.A. River, which parallels the Long Beach (710) Freeway, is one such place. For some reason, there is always a motley assortment of gulls, including half-breeds, mutants and gulls of questionable parentage as well as a good assortment of identifiable species, particularly those often referred to as the “white-headed” group (the larger species that have whitish heads, at least as adults, during summer).

On a late afternoon a few months ago, using the excuse that I was scouting for the upcoming Christmas count, I ventured to the spot. I parked near the river, in an isolated and seedy industrial area that most sane people would avoid. I climbed up the asphalt, under the freeway crossing and past the homeless dens and graffiti, to the east side of the riverbank. Unfortunately, instead of the usual sprinkling of gulls, cormorants, coots and pelicans, the spillway was occupied by some ungainly juveniles of the human type—probably delinquents of some sort—attempting to catch fish. I had never seen anyone actually out there before, and I somehow resented them for stealing my

valuable gull time. In short order, however, they abandoned their efforts, and as they walked by, I told them that I had never seen anyone out there before. They replied, in a disarmingly friendly manner, that it was no wonder, and they probably wouldn't try angling there again. OK, so I misjudged these kids, and then realized how often I felt misjudged in my long-haired, awkward “teen rebel” years.

So in the waning hours of daylight, I set up my scope. No sooner had I started looking than a rather grizzly guy on a bike appeared and asked me why I was taking pictures. I told him I was not taking pictures but looking at gulls. This guy rode an old bike and looked pretty scruffy; I assumed he was homeless. Light was fading, and when he asked if he could see through my scope, I tried to be polite when denying his request with the justification that I needed every moment left to try to inventory the species for a scientific survey. He seemed to understand. But he hung around, making me a bit nervous.

Then, for some reason, we started talking about rats. He said that he was on his way to see his daughter, for whom he had recently bought a pet rat. He went on talking about rats, and in little time I realized he knew way more about rats than I did about birds. Now, I happen to really like rats, and it was clear that this guy was at least as “normal” as me. Here I was, in my sweat pants, old jacket, tennis shoes and beat-up old baseball cap, judging a family man who was taking a leisurely after-work bike ride along the river on his way home to his loved ones and pets.

We said our goodbyes, and in the waning light I spotted an adult Glaucous-winged Gull, a juvenile Herring Gull, a few Bonaparte's Gulls on a quick flyby and several weird gulls that I simply could not identify. Well, no wonder, my ID skills when it comes to humans apparently fall short, so why should I do any better with gulls?

Your Backyard Habitat



By Dr. Constance M. Vadheim
CSU Dominguez Hills

Manzanitas *Arctostaphylos* species

For many Californians, Manzanitas are the quintessential native plants of early spring. Along with the native currants and gooseberries, they are among the earliest blooming shrubs in our area. They begin to flower during the rainy season and remind us that spring is just around the corner. Their flowers are a welcome sight to the hummingbirds that visit them regularly.



There are just over 100 species of Manzanita, many of them native to California. Species occur from sea level to mountain elevations—and as far north as British Columbia, Canada, to central Mexico in the south. In nature, Manzanitas usually grow in climates that are a bit colder than ours. Locally, we can see the Catalina Island Manzanita (*Arctostaphylos catalinae*) in the highlands of Catalina Island and the Bigberry Manzanita (*Arctostaphylos glauca*) and Eastwood Manzanita (*Arctostaphylos glandulosa* ssp. *glandulosa*) growing in the Santa Monica and San Gabriel mountains.

Manzanitas often do well in South Bay gardens. The trick is to understand their requirements and to choose species or cultivars (varieties developed specifically for gardens) that succeed in our area. Local species do well, but they are fairly large. Manzanitas from the Central and Northern California coast (and their cultivars) are particularly well suited to the

needs and conditions of many South Bay gardens.

Manzanitas range from low-growing forms that make attractive groundcovers to tree-like species that are 20 foot tall or higher. All have the red peeling bark and delightful, pink, urn-shaped flowers for which they are known (see photo at left) as well the “little apple” fruits for which they are named. The fruits, which ripen in summer, are edible and make a refreshing cider-like drink. Birds also love them!

Manzanitas are all evergreen, but their size, shape, color and requirements are remarkably variable. So plan to research the Manzanitas before choosing one for your garden. Visit native plant nurseries like the Theodore Payne Foundation or Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden (a new nursery in Westwood) to see Manzanitas in bloom right now. Be sure to ask the staff about the types suitable for your garden conditions. There are several good online sources of information: The Las Pilitas Manzanita page provides a good introduction (www.laspilitas.com/groups/manzanita_arctostaphylos/Manzanita.html) as does the Theodore Payne Foundation Native Plant Wiki (www.theodorepayne.org/mediawiki/index.php?title=Main_Page).



Happy hunting! The time you spend choosing the correct Manzanita will be well rewarded. Manzanitas can be a beautiful, long-lived (and edible) addition to your garden.



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

November and December 2010

By Tracy Drake & Bob Shanman

Well, it has been a busy two months since our last article. One of the most interesting things about birding is how quickly things can change. The storms finally showed up! Los Angeles has received 12 inches of rain (against an average of just over 14 inches), and the birds have been popping up everywhere. The Christmas Counts have come and gone, so here's what else was seen.

A Greater White-fronted Goose was found 11/14 on Ballona Creek near Centinela (WL) and seen again on 12/4. Another continued to be seen at Ken Malloy Harbor Regional Park (KMHRP) from 11/29 through 12/13 (MB). A Ross's Goose was reported on 12/24 at Lower Ballona Creek (DC). Jon Fisher had two Brant on 12/5 and one in del Rey Lagoon on 12/11 (Alexander Viduetsky). One has two bands—one per leg, with the right leg band reading "R3" and the left leg band has the number 1987. Could it be that this goose is at least 23 years old? The Cackling Goose at Polliwog Park was seen 11/7 at Polliwog Park (Bob Shanman). MB found another on 11/29 at KMHRP, along with a Canada Goose. Another was reported from the Ballona area, both at del Rey Lagoon and the Ballona Fresh Water Marsh (BFWM) on 12/23.

There has been the usual but nevertheless good crop of ducks. MB found a Blue-winged Teal on 11/24 at Bixby Marsh. Two more were found and seen from 11/26–11/29 at KMHRP by Ed Griffin. Cinnamon Teal and Green-winged Teal were also seen in the same period. Of note were a male Canvasback from 11/26–11/29 at KMHRP (EG) and a Redhead on 11/25 at del Rey Lagoon (WL), and on 12/24 at BFWM (Don Sterba). Darren Dowell and John Garrett reported three Greater Scaup on 11/20 along Ballona Creek. Unusual for KMHRP was a Lesser Scaup on 11/29 (MB). In the early 1980s, White-winged Scoters were seen regularly off our coast, including several each winter. Following a possible collapse of the

breeding population in Canada in 1983, the bird virtually disappeared from our area in the winter. Dick Barth reported seeing female or immature White-winged Scoters regularly in November and early December in the scoter flock off Dockweiler Beach (11/16, 11/19–20, 11/26 and 12/11). On 12/16, another was found off Cabrillo Beach by Steve Wolf and David Ellsworth. Jess Morton also had one at Cabrillo in the same time period. In the Dockweiler flock, DB and Tom Benson observed from one to five Black Scoters throughout November. Just to wrap up the ducks, DB also had a Long-tailed Duck in the same area throughout November, and DS found a female Hooded Merganser on 11/24 at BFWM.

An early Red-throated Loon was found on 11/9 off Dockweiler. On 11/23, DE found two more at the end of the Fishing Pier near Cabrillo. Kimball Garrett found 35 Pacific Loons on 11/7 off the South Bay coast. SW spotted a Horned Grebe on 11/27 at Cabrillo Beach; two more were found on 12/22 (DE). A Red-necked Grebe was seen on 11/20 of Dockweiler (DD, JG). Meanwhile, KG was hard at work on the school trip he was on, spotting two Northern Fulmars (11/7) and 20 Pink-footed Shearwaters, a Manx Shearwater and over 4,000 Black-vented Shearwaters.

The BFWM is truly a "field of dreams." In 1983, BS had an American Bittern near Playa del Rey; according to Dan Cooper, it was likely the last one seen in the Ballona Valley until BFWM was built. They are now seen with some regularity in the area, most recently on 12/1 (DS). DS also saw three Least Bitterns there on 11/24.

Turkey Vultures in our area are uncommon, so finding one is noteworthy. MB had one on 11/24 at KMHRP. Single Osprey were observed on 11/14 along Bal-



White-Winged Scoter

Photo by David Ellsworth

lona Creek (WL) and on 11/26 (EG) and 11/29 (MB) at KMHRP. MB had a Northern Harrier on 11/29 at KMHRP and RM had one at Portuguese Bend on 12/16. DS had up to three individuals (one male and two juvenile or female) on 12/3 at BFWM, followed by another sighting on 12/11 by AV. A Ferruginous Hawk was seen on 11/7 near Vista del Mar Park along Vista del Mar (west of the end of LAX's northern runways; Lori and Mark Conrad). Another was seen in the same general area on 11/23 (Tom Ryan). Could this be the same individual that has appeared over the past two to three years? To finish off the raptors, MB had a Merlin on 11/29 at KMHRP, and one has been hanging around at Alondra Park for the last few weeks of December (Dinuk Magamanna). Jan Gaffney reported a Virginia Rail on 11/15 at Terranea in Rancho Palos Verdes.

Shorebird reports in the South Bay were generally lacking for this reporting period. Two birds noted were a Pacific Golden-plover along Ballona Creek (11/18–11/20; EG and others). If you are birding along the south side of the creek and have the time, walk east past the UCLA boathouse and the pipe along the south bank. The shorebirds seem to be congregating in this area this year more than in the past. Mixed flocks of 500 to 1,000 birds have been found roosting here, and it is always worth the time to scope through them. You never know what you'll find! The other "shorebird" reported were Wilson's Snipes on 11/26 and 12/1 (up to 13) at KMHRP (EG) and eight or nine individuals at BFWM (DS).

Bonaparte's Gulls were reported throughout November but not December. KG had about 450 on his boat trip. There were about 20 along Ballona Creek on 11/14 (WL) and reports from Dockweiler (DD, JG) on 11/20 and KMHRP (MB) on 11/29. Other gulls of note were six Herring Gulls on 11/7 (KG), a Thayer's Gull on 11/20 (DD, JG) and one at KMHRP from 11/29–12/13 (MB). (Send December sightings to bobsbirdreports@gmail.com or tdrake@torranceca.gov.)

A Common Tern was found on 12/11 near Playa del Rey (AV). KG reported about 125 Elegant Terns on 11/7 off the



Summer Tanager

Photo by Steve Wolfe

coast—unusual numbers for late fall. Just to wrap up his report, Kimball also had the following on his 11/7 trip: Pomarine Jaeger (14), Parasitic Jaeger (5), Common Murre (3) and a Rhinoceros Auklet. On 12/22, DE had a flock of 135 Black Skimmers at Cabrillo.

One big surprise for the period was an Ancient Murrelet, present from 12/5–12/7 in the Ballona Channel and Playa del Rey Breakwater. The bird was first found by JF. A Burrowing Owl, not seen since 10/25, was reported back on the Ballona Wetlands on 11/7 (JC).

Woodpeckers are not abundant by any means in the South Bay, so reports of them are interesting. Sally Moite reported a possible Hairy Woodpecker on 12/24 in the Palos Verdes Land Conservancy burn area off Burma Road. If you are hiking or birding in this area, pay close attention and you may find some interesting birds!

Sapsucker reports were mainly from behind the gates in Rolling Hills and from KMHRP. The reports included a Yellow-

bellied Sapsucker, Red-breasted Sapsucker and a Red-naped Sapsucker on 10/31 in Rolling Hills (SW, DE); a Red-naped Sapsucker on 12/13 at KMHRP (MB) and on 12/26 from the end of Via Campesina (Jim Pike). A Red-breasted Sapsucker was also found at KMHRP on 11/26 (EG) and on 12/13 (MB).

In his booklet on the birds of KMHRP, Mitch Heindell lists the Eastern Phoebe as accidental from October through February, with one to two records in a 10- to 30-year period. So the Eastern Phoebe found by SW at KMHRP on 11/27 (and seen off and on by others through 12/13) is quite noteworthy. MB had the Tropical Kingbird on 10/28 in the Dominguez Gap and also on 11/14 and 11/29 at KMHRP. TS observed one at Madrona Marsh on 12/26.

A Loggerhead Shrike was seen on 11/7 near Vista del Mar Park by Lori and Mark Conrad. A single Plumbeous Vireo was reported 11/14 at Polliwog Park (BS). Tree Swallows sightings are uncommon this late in the year, but they were spotted in several places: on 11/24 and 11/28–12/5 at BFWM (DS), two on 11/7 off the coast over Redondo Canyon (KG) and three at KMHRP on 12/13 (MB). A Northern Rough-winged Swallow was at KMHRP on 12/13 (MB).

Red-breasted Nuthatches have been seen in many South Bay areas in such habitats as the South Coast Botanical Garden (SCBG), KMHRP, Wilderness Park, Highridge Park and areas behind the gates on PV; also, on 12/5 one was spotted at SCBG by Stephanie Bryan. A historical California Gnatcatcher was reported on 11/3 at BFWM (DS). Golden-crowned Kinglets not often seen in our area were spotted in Rolling Hills on 11/5, 11/25 and 12/11. Two were spotted in November and one on 12/11 (DE, SW).

Several Western Bluebirds were in the area over the past few months, including on 10/31 in the Highridge Park area (MB), and on 12/13 five were at KMHRP (MB). A possible Varied Thrush was at Bill and Fran Arrowsmith's yard in Torrance on

12/27. EG spotted the first of the fall American Pipit on 11/26—and on 12/13 MB found 50 at KMHRP! SB spotted a Phainopepla on 12/27 at the 900 block of 14th Street in San Pedro.

Some unusual warblers were spotted during the last two months of 2010, including a Hermit Warbler seen on 10/31 behind the gates on PV by SW and DE, and another was seen near Highridge Park on the same day by MB. Jim Pike spotted a first-ever wintering Pine Warbler on 12/26 by the PV Country Club. A Palm Warbler was reported at BFWM 11/3–12/21 by various people including DS, DB, and Dean Schaff. One was also seen on 12/22 off Dockweiler.

A Black-and-white Warbler first seen by Ron Melin on 10/07 continued through mid-December at Madrona Marsh, and the one spotted and reported by several birders on 11/20 continues at Sand Dune Park. From 11/8–12/26, a Wilson's Warbler was reported by MB at KMHRP and a very rare Hooded Warbler was seen by Kathy Day and Doug Virtuein in a backyard at 12th and Dodson in San Pedro.

There were several Summer Tanagers reported, including one 11/25–11/26 at DeForest Park by Karen Gilbert, Jeff Boyd and Tom Miko; one on 12/10 at Sand Dune Park by DS and Jeannie Tamaki; and one at Ernie Howlett Park by Sally Miote. Several birders reported Western Tanagers in November and December throughout the South Bay. Three Rufous-crowned Sparrows were seen on 12/12 on the "Old Ocean Trails" (SW).

Cecilia Bacon at Santa Cruz Street, San Pedro, saw a Lincoln's Sparrow on 12/27, and a Swamp Sparrow was spotted near the geranium fields at CSUDH on 11/19 by Tracy Drake. There was an adult White-throated Sparrow at Polliwog Park on 11/7 (BS), and another one at SCBG on 12/5 (SB). Golden-crowned Sparrows were spotted in a few areas, including one at BFWM on 12/15 (DS) and about 24 in Portuguese Bend (RM); also, Kevin Larson had one in his yard on 12/16 and another from 12/27–12/29. A Dark-eyed Junco "pink-sided" was spotted on 10/31 at Rancho Vista School. Five Rose-breasted Grosbeaks were observed by JG from late October through Thanksgiving at Via Los Vegas and PV Drive North.

MEET, LEARN, ENJOY, RESTORE

Calendar

Events

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

Saturday, February 5, 8 a.m.–12 p.m.: **Natural history walk at Bixby Marshland.** Explore the new 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 successful restoration. Located in Carson, Bixby Marshland is on the west side of Figueroa Street just south of Sepulveda Blvd. The marsh is managed by the L.A. County Sanitation District: www.lacsd.org/education/.

Thursday, February 10, 8–10:15 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. Volunteers are needed. They will be trained in identification and the methods used in the survey. To participate, contact Ann Dalkey at adalkey@pvplc.org or 310-541-7613, ext. 208.

Saturday, February 12, 9–11 a.m.: **Second Saturday Habitat Restoration Project at KMHRP.** Come take part in Audubon's important partnership with the Chadwick Ecommunity and the City of Los Angeles to restore habitat in Ken Malloy Harbor Regional Park. Led by a Chadwick teacher and students, 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. Harbor Park is located at 25820 Vermont Ave., west of the Harbor Freeway. Call Martin at 310-541-6763, ext. 4143.

Tuesday, February 15, 7 p.m.: **Audubon Third Tuesday Get-Togethers.** Come to Madrona Marsh to hear the monthly speaker, socialize with friends and enjoy the bird quiz, raffle and prizes from Wild Birds Unlimited.

Saturday, February 19, 7:50–10:00 a.m.: **Bird survey on a habitat restoration site.** See February 10 for details.



Participants in the Three Sisters Bird Survey celebrate the midpoint of the 5-year study: from left, Ann Dalkey, David Quadhamer, Bonnie Cohn, Linda Wedemeyer, Evi Meyer and Jess Morton.

Photo by Ann Dalkey

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

Thursday, March 10, 7:35–9:45 a.m.: **Bird survey on a habitat restoration site.** See February 10 for details.

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

February						
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					

March						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
		1	2	3	4	5
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		

Tuesday, March 15, 7 p.m.: **Audubon Third Tuesday Get-Togethers.** Come to Madrona Marsh to hear the monthly speaker, socialize with friends and enjoy the bird quiz, raffle and prizes from Wild Birds Unlimited.

Saturday, March 19, 8:20–10:30 a.m.: **Bird survey on a habitat restoration site.** See February 10 for details.

Field Trips

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

Friday, February 11, 4-6 p.m.: **PVPLC Natural History Walk to Bluff Cove.** This wide open cove offers rocky shoreline hiking down to a rocky beach and magnificent tide pools; it is also a popular spot for surfers. Moderate. For details, visit www.pvplc.org.

Sunday, February 13, 8 a.m.: **Second Sunday Walk at KMHRP.** Join Audubon leaders and explore this important natural area of the South Bay. See February 12 event.

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

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

Saturday, February 19, 2:30 p.m.: **Los Serenos de Point Vicente Natural History Walk to Abalone Cove Shoreline Park.** Tour the tide pools, which are teeming with fascinating marine life. Moderate. For details, visit www.losserenos.com/pvic.htm.

Sunday, February 20, 8 a.m.: **Bird walk at Ballona Wetlands** with Bob Shanman. For details, go to www.torrance.wbu.com.

Tuesday, March 1, 8:30 a.m.: **"Tour de Torrance."** See February 1 details.

Saturday, March 5, 10 a.m.–4 p.m.: **Whale of a Day at PVIC.** Fun, food, entertainment, education. On the grounds of the Point Vicente Interpretive Center. Bring the family and friends. For details, visit www.losserenos.com/pvic.htm.

Sunday, March 6, 8 a.m.: **Bird Walk at South Coast Botanic Garden.** See February 6 for details.

Wednesday, March 9, 8 a.m.: **Bird Walk at Madrona Marsh.** See February 9 for details.

Saturday, March 12, 9–11 a.m.: **PVPLC Natural History Walk to Defense Fuel Supply Point.** Discover

Bird Quiz, from Page 6

Quiz Bird B

The bird at right, also photographed by Steve Wolfe at KMHRP in late November 2010, is a very uncommon vagrant to our area, but you can still find it in the Western field guides. Hint: This bird is a first fall juvenile. Note the solid-colored bill and the lack of any eye ring. This bird, like others in its genus, typically sits in the open, sallies for insects and dips its tail frequently. The answer will be given in our next issue!

Answer to Quiz Bird A

Well, the first thing to consider about any bird is the overall shape, proportions, bill and habitat. The pigeons in the background don't help much, but you were told that the habitat is lakeside.

That, plus the bird's distinctive body plan—a robust bird with a generalist bill—would indicate to most that the bird is some sort of gull. The brownish coloration indicates a juvenile bird in the Genus *Larus*, but now it gets trickier. With gulls, it is usually a suite of features that must be considered before making a positive ID. The tail is too dark for a Glaucous or Glaucous-winged Gull. A California Gull in November would have a two-toned bill and darker tertial feathers, plus the legs are way too pink for most California Gulls. Western Gulls would have much darker primaries and tertials, a more bulbous bill and a proportionately larger head. Herring Gull is a possibility, but the head proportions are wrong; Herrings have a larger, flatter head, usually with noticeable white markings on the face, and a "meaner" countenance.

Notice how this bird has an almost dovelike expression, with a relatively small eye and rounded head. The pink legs, contrastingly darker (but not blackish) tertials, tail and primaries and, perhaps most distinctively, the symmetrical, whitish, scalloped pattern on the body, all suggest that this is a first winter Thayer's Gull. This species is uncommon but regular, usually showing up in November at Machado Lake.



the trails behind PVPLC's native plant nursery, where the PV blue butterfly was rediscovered! For entry security, reservations are required. Moderate. For details, visit www.pvplc.org.

Sunday, March 13, 8 a.m.: **Second Sunday Walk at KMHRP.** See February 13 for details.

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

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

Sunday, March 20, 8 a.m.: **Bird walk at Ballona Wetlands** with Bob Shanman. Go to www.torrance.wbu.com.

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



For more information on local events, please go to the Chapter web site at: www.pvsb-audubon.org. For a complete list of events at Madrona Marsh, go to: www.southbaycalendar.org and click on "Friends of Madrona Marsh." For a list of activities for Audubon's Youth Environmental Service program, go to: www.AudubonYES.org.

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