



Hummin'

Palos Verdes/South Bay Audubon Society

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Christmas Counts and Global Warming

By Jess Morton

Dec. 23 marks the date for the 42nd annual Palos Verdes Peninsula Christmas Bird Count (CBC), one of the most entertaining and valuable events of our Audubon year. It's part of National Audubon's 107-year-old tradition of counts, originally aimed at replacing the Christmas afternoon side hunt, in which the day's presents of guns and ammo were put to the test, blasting anything out of doors that moved — usually excepting other hunters, of course.

Nowadays, the Christmas Count has so grown in scope so that more than 2,000 counts are held each year, with more than 50,000 people taking part in the world's biggest citizen science effort. Last year nearly 70 million birds of 1,894 species were counted in the Western Hemisphere. In the United States, totals were an impressive 65 million birds of 643 species. Not many species wintering in the United States were missed.

The value of these counts for scientific research on species diversity, population changes and global warming effects on ranges and numbers is inestimable. Greg Butcher, Audubon's director of bird conservation, and his colleagues have put together CBC and Breeding Bird

Survey (BBS) data for the last 40 years to come up with a Watch List of bird species. These range from endangered species, such as our own least tern, to common species that are in decline and at risk of requiring special protection measures. Greg's article "Common Birds in Decline" appeared in a recent issue of *Audubon*, and his complete list can be found on Audubon's website at <http://stateofthebirds.audubon.org/cbid/browseSpecies.php>.

As an example of the value of our own CBC data, I was easily able to create the graphs below from the Audubon CBC data website at <http://www.audubon.org/bird/cbc/hr/>. My sense has been that the incidence of warblers that would normally winter to the south of us has been increasing during the last few years. When I first started taking part in the CBC in the 1970's, Townsend's warblers could usually be found in small numbers, while black-throated gray was considered a rarity. As the first chart shows, both have dramatically increased in occurrence in recent years to the point where they are sort of ho-hum species. Well, not really—they are both pretty spectacular looking, but go out on the count, and you'll probably find one or more of each.

My guess about this increase in

warbler numbers is that it is part of a continent-wide northward shift in winter bird populations due to global warming. The analysis Greg has done on national CBC and BBS data shows this quite well, but even with the small data set we have from the Peninsula, we see traces of the larger trend. But there are declines in species numbers, too. And these declines may be due to a host of reasons, with habitat loss here and elsewhere the biggest single factor. We have a lot less open space today than we had 30 years ago. The second chart, also from our CBC data, shows how robins and two kinds of sparrow have declined during the last few decades. None are rare, but the trend is troubling.

The CBC, as you can see from the examples I've cited, is of great value for all of us. You can do your own analysis by visiting the Audubon website. It is quite simple to use. But whether you choose to analyze data, please help us generate some on this year's CBC. Do join us for the count. It's great fun, and you will learn a lot in the process. For how to take part, see the calendar section on Page 10 of *Hummin'*. If you are new to the CBC, call Bob Shanman at (310) 326-2473 (Wild Birds Unlimited) to take his CBC-prep class on Dec. 15.

President's Column

What do you know about science?

By Martin Byhower

Part I of II



Just for the heck of it, I thought I would try out some of the questions I ask my students at the beginning of the year on you. Keep in mind, I don't grade this, and I use it more to get their attention, shake things up a bit and get my students thinking ... Just answer true or false.

- ___1. Plastic is recyclable.
- ___2. Most of what makes up a tree comes from the soil.
- ___3. Animals are a necessary part of ecosystems.
- ___4. The asteroid that hit the earth 65 million years ago, wiping out the dinosaurs, was the worst mass extinction in the history of the planet.
- ___5. Trees are a major cause of rain.
- ___6. You are more closely related to a mushroom than you are to a tree.
- ___7. Venus flytraps eat insects.
- ___8. The tropical rainforest plant community is more endangered than the one you live in.
- ___9. All of you have some atoms in your body that were once part of an exploded star, a dinosaur, Moses, Jesus, Buddha, Mohammed, Ghandi and Hitler.

Answers in the next issue (no, just kidding, I know that either your impulse control or attention span won't permit *that!*)

1. False, at least for plastic beverage containers. To heat them enough to kill bacteria, the polymer structure is destroyed, so each new bottle means more petroleum (some plastic food containers can be *re-processed* into other plastic items, so don't throw them in the trash. *By the way, common plastic bottles leach toxic chemicals called phthalates, and most taste tests show people prefer tap water anyway.*

2. False. (Does the soil disappear in your potted plants?) Trees and plants come from air: either the carbon dioxide in the air or water from precipitation. The only part that comes from the ground is the ash left over after you burn a plant.

3. False. All you need are producers, like plants, and decomposers, like fungi and bacteria. Animals are freeloaders, but they make life much more interesting. Colorful flowers, fruit and lovely scents are all plant innovations designed in order to use animals so that the plants can achieve sexual reproduction and dispersal.

4. False. The Permo-Triassic extinction more than 300 million years ago was far worse, wiping out over 90 percent of species existing at the time, and we still don't know what caused it. Right now, we are in at least the sixth of the Earth's mass-extinction periods (a conservative estimate is three species a day and rising), and depending on how far global warming progresses, this might be the worst ever.

5. True. Half the rain in the Amazon is caused by transpiration by the trees there. The Gaia hypothesis, in which living things actually modify the Earth to their own benefit, seems apropos here.

6. True. Just check your DNA and you will see that there is fungus among us!

7. False. They live in poor acidic soils, so they need nutrients but not food. Thus, they trap and dissolve insects to get the nutrients, but unlike animals, they make their own food. Only things with mouths eat.

8. False. Last I checked, the one we live in here in coastal Southern California is far more endangered, maybe the most endangered on the planet! (Just try to find a significant tract of native vegetation around here.)

9. Water molecules are so small, abundant and quickly dispersed that any human who lived more than about 20 years or more ago has exhaled or passed water that has been fully dispersed into the global environment.

Look for more questions and answers in the February-March edition of *Hummin'*!

Conservation Corner

Just say no to nuclear power

By Lillian Light



There are many reasons why most environmental organizations, as well as most conservationists, reject nuclear power as a means of addressing climate change. The Sierra Club, NRDC, Friends of the Earth, Green-

peace, Public Citizen and US Public Research Group are among the many groups and individuals who have signed the following statement:

“We do not support construction of nuclear reactors as a means of addressing the climate crisis. Available renewable energy and energy-efficient technologies are faster, cheaper, safer and cleaner strategies for reducing greenhouse emissions than nuclear power.”

I maintain that the financial and safety risks associated with nuclear power are so grave that it should not be part of any proposal to reduce global warming. More and more deadly radioactive material pollutes our planet and will continue to do so for tens of thousands of years because it cannot be made safe. Waste disposal is a major and disturbing issue. Some 95 percent of the radioactivity ever generated in the United States is contained in the nation’s civilian high-level atomic waste. No strategy to treat these wastes has been devised, and no country in the world has solved this problem.

No permanent national repository is available for storing these dangerous wastes. Congress has been struggling for decades to build a dump at Yucca Mountain but has been unable to overcome fierce local opposition. Many scientists have found the site unsuitable for storing the wastes. No country in the world has yet built a permanent underground waste repository, nor has any solved this intractable problem. France, which has increased its supply of nuclear electricity, has been accused of dumping its wastes into the ocean.

Even our local San Onofre Nuclear Plant has been dumping radioactive materials into the Pacific. In its Aug. 18, 2006, edition, the *L.A. Times* published an article stating that radioactive, cancer-causing tritium, a byproduct of nuclear fission, had leaked into the groundwater beneath the San Onofre Power Plant. The following quotation tells what they did with the contaminated groundwater:

“San Onofre has extracted more than 10,000 gallons of the contaminated groundwater and piped it into the Pacific Ocean. Since groundwater will continue to seep into the contaminated area, plant officials will continue removing contaminated water and discharging it into the ocean until they can remove all traces of contamination.”

Way back in 1980, a UC Santa Cruz biologist discovered elevated levels of radiation in fish swimming among some of the 47,500 barrels of nuclear waste that the Navy had dumped in a 540-square-mile area around the Farallone Islands between 1946 and 1970. One fish registered 90 times the normal level of plutonium, and another had 5,000 times the allowable amount of radioactivity in its liver. A recent report on the Farallon Islands Radioactive Dump by the U.S. Geological Survey stated, “The potential hazard the containers pose to the environment is unknown”.

Is it possible that dropping nuclear waste at sea will have no devastating effects? When will underwater radiation start trickling up through the food chain? Daniel Hirsch, director of the Committee to Bridge the Gap, said, “There’s this incredible illusion that you can dump radioactive waste in the ocean and it won’t come back to you in the fish you eat. That’s troubling. Dilution is irrelevant.”

Meanwhile, nuclear waste is stored onsite at power plants, increasing the risk of leaks and the danger to plant workers. They make tempting targets for terrorist attacks. The National Academy of Sciences has raised serious concerns about the safety of

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Birds of the Peninsula

September and October 2007

By Kevin Larson

At the top of the local birding headlines was indisputably Los Angeles County's first Arctic Warbler, an Old World species not closely related to our wood-warblers; only a few records exist for our state. Astonishing also was a Cassin's Sparrow, a first for our area, at a residence in Lawndale. Our second area Buff-breasted Sandpiper came 36 years after the first. A Scissor-tailed Flycatcher and a Painted Bunting were among the other exciting finds. Record-high numbers of Stilt Sandpipers occurred at the Los Angeles River. Numbers of regularly occurring migrant land birds were generally below average and the total number of rarities found this fall was not exceptionally high. The rare-but-regular wood-warblers made a good showing this fall, but a Prairie Warbler mentioned in the previous column at the end of August and a Chestnut-sided Warbler in September were the only ones of the rarer variety recorded. However, a very good array of notable finds amassed through the hard work of local birders, along with the stratospheric rarity of a few occurrences, made this a great fall.

Summertime weather ended after a fierce incursion of heat and humidity from another monsoonal push relented during the first week of September. An unusually early Pacific storm dropped about one-half inch of rain on LAX 21-22 Sep. Shorebirding along the Los Angeles River took a downturn after flooding scoured away the channel's mudflats and vegetation growth. Another storm added a significant amount of rainfall to quench our parched landscape 12-13 Oct, but it was not enough. A strong Santa Ana wind event 19-24 Oct opened the door for a catastrophic firestorm affecting

seven counties across Southern California. Fire did not ravage our urbanized coast, but a pall of smoke from blazes in the San Bernardino Mountains hung over our area for days.

A Greater White-fronted Goose at Earvin Magic Johnson Recreation Area (EMJRA) in Willowbrook 14-30 Oct (Kevin Larson-KL) was evidently the same individual present last winter with feral geese; I suspect it remained through summer. A Ross's Goose on Torrance Beach on 28 Oct must have



Large-billed (Savannah) Sparrow

Photo by Jess Morton

been an exhausted migrant to be at this unusual location (Seth Davidson). A Cackling Goose, apparently of the Aleutian race, was at the Ballona Freshwater Marsh (BFM) 22 Oct-4 Nov (Daniel S. Cooper-DSC). Single Wood Ducks were at Averill Park in San Pedro 31 Aug-29 Sep (Steve Lenker), at Alondra Park 8 Sep+ (David Moody-DM) and at Harbor Park (HP) on 13 Oct (KL). A White-

winged Scoter was at the Marina del Rey Harbor entrance on 28 Oct (Martin Byhower-MB).

An immature Masked Booby came aboard a sportfishing boat en route from Catalina Island to Long Beach on 29 Sep. After remaining on the boat the following day at sea, it was taken to the International Bird Rescue and Research Center in San Pedro. The apparently healthy bird was later flown to Catalina Island and released. The only Cattle Egrets this fall were recorded at the Los Angeles River (LAR): one was in Paramount on 9 Sep (Richard Barth-RB) and two were in Long Beach on 20 Sep (RB, Jeffrey S. Boyd-JSB, Karen S. Gilbert-KSG). White-faced Ibis reports were fewer than usual this fall, but flyby flocks of 15 along Ballona Creek on 3 Sep (KL) and 25 along LAR in Long Beach on 9 Sep (JSB) were notable. Six migrant Northern Harriers were recorded in the area 14 Oct-2 Nov, while a returning individual in the Ballona Wetland area remained present since 3 Aug. Outstanding was an adult **Broad-winged Hawk** over Sand Dune Park (SDP) on 14 Sep (David Bell).

A Solitary Sandpiper was at LAR south of Del Amo Boulevard on 6 Sep (RB). A Black Turnstone along LAR south of Wardlow Road 6-9 Sep was an exceptional record for this inland section of river channel (RB). A juvenile Red Knot was at LAR in Long Beach 1-4 Sep (Kathy McFadden, Paul Clarke). Daily counts of one to five juvenile Baird's Sandpipers at LAR in Long Beach and Paramount continued into September; three south of Artesia Boulevard on 20 Sep were the last reported (RB, KL). At least 13, possibly up to 17, juvenile Pectoral Sandpipers were recorded at LAR in Long Beach and Paramount 30 Aug-15 Sep (John Kelly, Andrew Lee-AL,

RB, Bill Sauer, KL); more would likely have been found, but flooding from a 21-22 Sep rainstorm erased virtually all of the habitat within the river channel. An unprecedented invasion of juvenile **Stilt Sandpipers** along LAR began with two in Cudahy 31 Aug-4 Sep (RB), and then five were found south of Del Amo Boulevard on 1 Sep (Tom Miko, JSB, KL, RB). A total of 11 counted along LAR on 4 Sep included the two birds in Cudahy, three near Rosecrans Avenue and seven south of Artesia Boulevard. (RB, KSG). Afterward, daily counts of three to six were obtained 6-11 Sep. Unrecorded since 5-17 Sep 1971 at Green Hills Memorial Park in San Pedro, two **Buff-breasted Sandpipers** in Los Angeles County this fall were part of a statewide invasion. Not long after one was found in the Antelope Valley, Christopher Taylor photographed one along Ballona Creek in the vicinity of the UCLA Boat House 28-29 Sep.

Surprisingly scarce as a fall migrant in recent decades, a **Franklin's Gull** in first-winter plumage was at Hermosa Beach on 18 Oct (MB); the last fall record locally was of a juvenile along LAR near Rosecrans Avenue on 28 Jul 1998 (RB). An immature Bonaparte's Gull along Ballona Creek 15 Jul-11 Sep was an unusual record of a summering individual (KL, Don Sterba). A Black Skimmer at HP on 9 Sep was inland, where rare (MB). White-winged Dove sightings included three at LAR south of Willow Street on 3 Sep (JSB, KSG) and one at Madrona Marsh (MM) on 7 Sep (DM). A **Common Ground-Dove** at DeForest Park (DP) in Long Beach on 4 Oct was the first recorded locally in five years (KSG, JSB). Burrowing Owls were found at Entradero Park in Torrance 15-26 Oct (Brian Dougherty) and at White Point Nature Preserve on 25 Oct (Bob Beckler). A migrant **Short-eared Owl** roosting at SDP on 21 Oct was unexpected (KL). Migrant Lesser Nighthawks were in

Lawndale on 2 Oct (John Ivanov), at SDP on 21 Oct (KL) and at BFM on 2 Nov (RB). DM found migrant Common Poorwills at MM 12-13 Oct and at White Point Nature Preserve on 22 Oct. A Red-naped Sapsucker was in Rolling Hills on 20 Oct (MB). Rare in our area, Nuttall's Woodpeckers were at BFM on 23 Sep (KL) and in lower George F Canyon on 21 Oct (Steve Lenker).

A Western Wood-Pewee at Cabrillo Beach on **27 Oct** is among the latest



Lawrence's Goldfinch

Photo by Jess Morton

ever recorded in California (Andrew Lee). Hammond's Flycatchers were at DP 13-14 Oct (KL), at SDP 14 Oct-4 Nov (Carol Selvey) and at BFM on 21 Oct (KL). Single Gray Flycatchers were at Polliwog Park on 18 Sep (KL) and at MM on 4 Oct (DM). Dusky Flycatcher sightings included one at SDP on 14 Sep (David Bell), one at MM 26-29 Sep (DM) and an unusually late individual at DP on 20 Oct (KL). An **Eastern Phoebe** photographed at MM on 31 Oct was the first recorded in fall locally in seven years (Tracy Drake). Two Tropical Kingbirds were at HP on 29 Sep (KL) and one was at BFM on 31 Oct (Don

Sterba). An adult **Scissor-tailed Flycatcher** at Banning Park (BP) on 27 Oct was an exceptional occurrence (KL). A Bell's Vireo at DP on 13 Sep was evidently a migrant (KSG, JSB); the individual that spent the previous four winters there was not detected as of the end of October. Single Plumbeous Vireos were at HP 5-20 Oct (KL), at DP 11 Oct-1 Nov (KSG) and at BP on 27 Oct (KL). Up to two Hutton's Vireos at DP 17 Aug-27 Oct (JSB), and one at HP on 27 Oct (KL) were at locations where this species is not resident.

Notable for our area was a Horned Lark along LAR in Long Beach on 28 Oct (AL). Single Purple Martins were sighted over DP on 7 Sep (KSG) and 20 Sep (JSB). Rare in fall here, an impressive flock of 50+ Violet-green Swallows over BFM on 10 Oct coincided with the passage of a weak frontal system (Don Sterba). A Bank Swallow was at BFM on 23 Sep (KL). At least two Mountain Chickadees were recorded at DP 22 Sep-25 Oct (KL, KSG). Two Red-breasted Nuthatches at Chadwick School on 2 Oct were likely part of our resident population on the Hill (MB); one at DP on 14 Oct (KL) and another at Wilderness Park in Redondo Beach on 26 Oct were part of this fall's developing movement into the lowlands of the region (KL). A Brown Creeper was at DP 11 Oct-3 Nov (KSG). For bird of the year honors, it will be hard to top an **Arctic Warbler** at DP 13-14 Sep (JSB, KSG, Brian Daniels, RB). Up to eight to 10 Western Bluebirds were at HP 7 Oct-1 Nov (KL). An extraordinary wave of Swainson's Thrushes, generally rare in fall, coincided with the passage of an early Pacific storm; a total of 25 were recorded at nine locations 21-23 Sep (KL, DM, John Ivanov, DSC).

A Tennessee Warbler was at DP 24-29 Sep (KSG). Single Virginia's Warblers were at DP 2-3 Sep (Mark

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and Janet Scheel) and 20-22 Sep (JSB, KSG); one in the willows behind BFM on 25 Sep was exactly where one was present the previous two winters (KL). Much rarer in fall than spring, a Northern Parula was at BP on 2 Oct (Tom Wurster). A Chestnut-sided Warbler at DP 25-30 Sep was a nice find (RB). **Eight** Palm Warblers was an unusually high total. After DM found one at MM on 5 Oct, a remarkable wave at the end of October included one just north of DP on 24 Oct (KSG), one at BFM on 27 Oct (Russell Stone, DSC), two along LAR south of Del Amo Blvd. 27-29 Oct (JSB), one at HP on 28 Oct (KL), one at White Point Nature Preserve on 28 Oct (Andrew Lee, David Ellsworth) and one at EMJRA on 30 Oct (RB). Blackpoll Warbler sightings included one at MM on 15 Sep (DM), one in the Wilmington Drain on 22 Sep (KL) and a long-staying individual at SDP 7-14 Oct (KL). The only Black-and-white Warbler was at BP on 28 Oct (Steve Sosensky). American Redstarts showed well: one was at DP on 17 Sep (KSG); one was at SDP on 18 Sep (KL); one was at the South Coast Botanic Garden on 23 Sep (KL); and another was at SDP on 28 Sep (John Ivanov, RB). A male American Redstart at EMJRA on 1 Oct was at a location where one spent the previous winter (RB).

Laurie Szogas photographed a Summer Tanager in her RPV backyard on 30 Sep. A Green-tailed Towhee in Lomita 21-26 Oct was a great yard bird for MB. Extremely rare anywhere in California, a **Cassin's Sparrow** in John Ivanov's front yard in Lawndale on 12 Oct was a bizarre occurrence. Clay-colored Sparrow sightings included up to two at MM 20-22 Sep (DM), one at SDP on 22 Sep (Lori Conrad), another at MM on 13 Oct and one at BFM on 24 Oct (Don Sterba). A few Brewer's Sparrows were recorded along LAR in the vicinity of DP 8-28 Sep (KL, JSB, RB),

and at MM 16 Sep-4 Oct (DM). Vesper Sparrows were at BFM 23-26 Sep (DSC) and at Friendship Park on 27 Oct (AL). Outstanding was a Large-billed (Savannah) Sparrow photographed at Cabrillo Beach on 21 Oct (Jess Morton). An early White-throated Sparrow was at MM on 5 Oct (DM); others following at White Point Nature Preserve on 17 Oct (DM) and at BFM 21-24 Oct (KL) made a very good total for the month of October. Four Dark-eyed "Oregon" Juncos at Averill Park in San Pedro on 31 Aug were evidently summering locally (Steve Lenker).

A "green" **Painted Bunting** at



Wood Duck

Photo by Jess Morton

MM on 4 Oct was an outstanding vagrant (DM). A Bobolink at MM 15-18 Sep was the only one found (Tracy Drake). A Yellow-headed Blackbird was at LAR near Willow Street 3-6 Sep (RB). Single Orchard Orioles were at DP 15-30 Sep and at BP on 6 Oct (KL); both were female-plumaged. A Baltimore Oriole was at DP 15-22 Sep (Tom Wurster). A young male Baltimore X Bullock's Oriole hybrid was at DP on 30 Sep (KL). One Pine Siskin flying over SDP on 21 Oct along with three over HP on 28 Oct were part of a widely reported movement into the region this

fall (KL). Lawrence's Goldfinches made a remarkable showing this fall: one was in RPV on 30 Sep (Laurie Szogas), one was along LAR in Long Beach on 18 Oct (JSB), up to three were at MM 20-24 Oct (Jess Morton) and four were at White Point Nature Preserve on 22 Oct (DM).

Following are the earliest dates on which these fall migrants were noted in 2007: Bufflehead—23 Oct BFM (KL); Red-breasted Sapsucker—29 Sep BP (Carol Selvey); Hermit Thrush—13 Sep DP (JSB); Cedar Waxwing (2)—**15 Sep** DP (JSB); Audubon's Warbler (2)—**9 Sep** HP (MB); Fox Sparrow (subspecies group unspecified)—22 Sep MM (Ron Melin); Fox Sparrow (Slate-colored group)—23 Sep BFM (Russell Stone); White-crowned Sparrow—18 Sep MM (DM).

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

Acronyms in Birds of the Peninsula

AL: Andrew Lee
 BFM: Ballona Freshwater Marsh
 BP: Banning Park
 DM: David Moody
 DP: DeForest Park
 DSC: Daniel S. Cooper
 EMJRA: Earvin Magic Johnson Rec. Area
 HP: Harbor Park
 JSB: Jeffrey S. Boyd
 KL: Kevin Larson
 KSG: Karen S. Gilbert
 LAR: Los Angeles River
 MB: Martin Byhower
 MM: Madrona Marsh
 RB: Richard Barth
 RPV: Rancho Palos Verdes
 SDP: Sand Dune Park

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irradiated nuclear fuel storage facilities from such attacks in its report entitled "Safety and Security of Spent Nuclear Fuel Storage."

In July of 2005, the National Academy of Science issued another report flatly stating that there is no safe level of exposure to radiation. Even very low doses can cause cancer. Exposure to background radiation causes some cancers. Additional exposures cause additional risks. Scientists determined that about one in 100 members of the public would get cancer if exposed to 100 millirads per year for a 70-year lifetime.

This is essentially the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission's allowable radiation dose for members of the public. These findings confirm that all levels of radiation are harmful. Since nuclear power routinely releases long-lasting radiation into the air, water and soil, it is necessary to avoid a revival of nuclear power to prevent unnecessary exposures in our generation and coming generations as well.

The enormous cost of building nuclear plants, the reluctance of investors to fund them, community opposition and the endless controversy over what to do with the wastes ensure that building up the nuclear infrastructure will be a slow process — far too slow to make a difference on global warming. In stark contrast to solutions like increased energy efficiency and solar or wind power, nuclear power involves too much time, money and risk to us and to our planet. Remember the 1979 accident at Three Mile Island in Pennsylvania that came close to causing a meltdown that would have rendered a huge area of the state uninhabitable. In 1986 this scenario came to pass at the Soviet Chernobyl nuclear reactor. Accidents continue to occur. Last July a magnitude 6.8 earthquake ruptured the world's biggest nuclear plant in Japan, leading to releases of radioactive elements into the air and ocean and an indefinite shutdown.

The nuclear industry has long had trouble finding private investments to construct expensive new plants, so they have asked the government for \$50 billion in loan guarantees during the next two years. You may be shocked to learn that a provision in the Senate Energy Bill (HR 6) would allow the Department of Energy (DOE) to provide taxpayer-funded

loan guarantees for the construction of new nuclear power plants. This controversial provision would allow the DOE to provide an unlimited amount of taxpayer-funded loan guarantees to nuclear and coal technologies at the expense of legitimate, innovative, clean energy technologies. The Congressional Budget Office, when investigating costs for such costly and risky construction projects, considered the risk of default to be above 50 percent, thereby putting taxpayers at risk for billions of dollars. Please write to all three of your legislators. Their contact information is below.

Tell them to reject the provision that would allow the DOE to give a blank check signed by taxpayers to high-risk nuclear energy construction, at the same time when it removes congressional oversight from the loan guarantee program. Remind them that wasting our precious resources on nuclear power means that we will not be able to implement the renewable and energy-efficient technologies that are needed to avert a climate catastrophe.

Write to their local offices at:

Congresswoman Jane Harman
2321 Rosecrans Blvd.
El Segundo, CA 90245
(310) 549 8282
(202) 225 8220
jane.Harman@mail.house.gov

Senator Dianne Feinstein
11111 Santa Monica Blvd.
No. 915
Los Angeles, CA 90025
(310) 914 7300
(202) 224 3841
senator@feinstein.senate.gov

Senator Barbara Boxer
312 N. Spring St. No. 1748
Los Angeles, CA 90012
(213) 894 5000
(202) 224 3553
senator@boxer.senate.gov

Your Backyard Habitat



By Dr. Connie Vadheim,
CSUDH

Island Bush (Catalina) Snapdragon

Gambelia/Galvezia speciosa



Winter, and our rainy season, are (hopefully) soon upon us. Many native plants begin their growth season, but the garden lacks the floral displays typical of spring. Fortunately, several native shrubs flower in early winter. And a few, like Island Bush Snapdragon (*Gambelia speciosa*), even provide a welcome touch of red in the winter garden.

Island Bush Snapdragon is one of a number of plants found only on the Channel Islands of Southern California and Baja. These “island endemics” may now be rare in nature — as is Island Snapdragon — but are well suited to South Bay gardens. Island endemics are often beautiful and unusual plants. Adding a few to your habitat garden may inspire you to learn more about these unique California plants.

Because it blooms nearly continuously, *Gambelia speciosa* is an important bird and insect habitat plant. The bright red, “snapdragon” flowers provide hummingbird nectar nearly all year. Seed-eating birds and insects also relish the tiny seeds, which develop inside interesting three-part capsules.

Gambelia speciosa is a small, semi-woody shrub.

In the wilds it grows as a 2- to 4-foot tall shrub in rocky canyons and sea bluffs. While it can sprawl to 10 or more feet wide, Island Snapdragon is usually pruned to a more manageable size (3 to 6 feet wide) in gardens. It takes well to shaping when young, so you can leave it “natural”-looking or prune it to a more manicured shrub. Like garden fuchsias, Island Snapdragon responds to tip-pinching (pruning off the very tips of new growth) by producing a bushier plant.

Island Snapdragon does well in most local soils, including clays. It looks best with some afternoon shade. Island snapdragon is very drought tolerant. Once established, it can get by on rainwater alone in most years, although occasional summer water keeps it greener. It needs no added fertilizer, unless you grow it in a pot (even then, go easy!). This is a very low-maintenance shrub. The best time for pruning is late winter/early spring.



Gambelia makes a nice shrub or specimen plant. It does fine in large pots and planters. It can be used as a tall ground cover, even under oaks. You can train it along a wall or fence with some support. It also does fine on slopes. Several smaller cultivars are available, including “Firecracker” and “Boca Rosa.”

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

Options in Carbon Offsetting

By Evi Meyer

Nobody can claim to live a completely carbon-neutral life. Sometimes we have to go places and just can't do it all on a bike. But it is crucial for a healthy environment that we all strive to be conscientious consumers and try to live a low-emission lifestyle. Reducing our carbon emissions by *polluting less* is the most effective way to combat global warming. This might require some behavior changes, which can be inconvenient and difficult. Only after we have tried to reduce our personal greenhouse gas emissions by choosing to pollute less should we consider purchasing carbon offsets. They are an effective way to counteract the remaining (unavoidable) footprint left behind.

This article is meant to serve as a tool for people to navigate through the maze of carbon-offset providers. As described in the last issue of *Hummin'*, the Palos Verdes/South Bay Audubon Society purchased carbon offsets to balance the global warming effects of its members' nature-related activities. Hopefully last month's article stimulated some people to contemplate their own carbon footprint and how to take personal responsibility for it.

The carbon-offset provider market has grown very rapidly and standards for the industry are still evolving. A wide array of projects cover everything from renewable energy and energy efficiency to fuel replacement, material substitutions, transportation efficiency, methane gas conversion and reforestation. It can be confusing to find

a reputable offset provider. Here are some tips on what to look for in an offset program and where to find good offset providers.

What to look for:

1) Look for offsets that support specific projects and not vague statements. Look for transparency of projects offered.

2) Look for offsets that cause *new* carbon reductions that would not have happened otherwise (e.g. don't invest in a forest that already exists).

3) Look for offsets that will create greenhouse gas reductions in a clear time frame. Find out the start and end of the project.

4) Look for offset providers with third-party validation (e.g. Environmental Resources Trust-ERT, Green-e label).

5) Look for offset providers who use their platform as an opportunity to educate the public about global warming. Education is key to the fight on global warming.

Where to find it:

The easiest way to tap into the market of offset providers is to search the web. The market is huge and it is helpful to read reliable surveys or consumer guides relevant to this subject.

Clean Air-Cool Planet (CA-CP), a science-based, nonprofit environmental organization, published a long and detailed "Consumers' Guide to Retail Carbon Offset Providers" at www.cleanair-coolplanet.org. They provide interesting global warming mitigation factoid tables and carbon calcula-

tors. Thirty offset providers went through their stringent evaluation process. Three of their top picks were based in the United States. They are Climate Trust at www.climatetrust.org, Native Energy at www.nativeenergy.com and Sustainable Travel Int'l at www.sustainabletravelinternational.org. These companies' websites are full of useful information and worth browsing. Another U.S.-based offset provider in CA-CP's top dozen choices is Carbonfund.org at www.carbonfund.org. Palos Verdes/South Bay Audubon Society chose to purchase their carbon offsets because they offer a reforestation program at Sequoia National Forest, which also provides new bird habitat.

Additionally, EcoBusinessLinks published an interesting carbon-offset survey at www.ecobusinesslinks.com. Go to "Services" and click on "Carbon Offsetting-Price Survey." This company rates offset providers strictly by price but also provides information on tax status, project types, project choice, offset types and product certification/verification. Their survey table is very clear and user-friendly.

So once you establish a list of reputable offset companies in your price range, it really all boils down to personal preference. Contribute to a project that appeals to you in a place you want to make a difference. Remember that the whole world shares its atmosphere and there are no borders in the air. Even if purchasing carbon offsets is not a financial investment per se, it is certainly an investment in the future of a healthy environment.

Calendar

Meet Learn Enjoy Restore

Events

(See Calendar locations and information box for directions)

Saturday, Dec. 8 from 9 to 11 a.m.:

Second Saturday Habitat Restoration Project at KMHRP. Led by Geffen Oren, Martin Byhower and others. Cleanup and restoration of this important wildlife area offers a hands-on opportunity to learn about invasive species removal, native planting, effective debris removal and much more while earning community service credit. All ages, but folks under 16 must be accompanied by an adult.

Wear closed-toed shoes and long pants. Bring water, snack, sun/bug repellent and, if possible, work gloves. Questions? Contact Martin Byhower at (310) 541-6763, ext. 4143.

Wednesday, Dec. 12 at 7 p.m.:

PV/South Bay Audubon Holiday Party and Board Meeting at Madrona Marsh. All Audubon members and friends are welcome to attend. The party will replace the Third Tuesday Get-together for December.

Sunday, Dec. 23: Christmas Bird Count.

Saturday, Jan. 12 from 9 to 11 a.m.:

Second Saturday Habitat Restoration Project at KMHRP. Led by Geffen Oren, Martin Byhower

and others. Cleanup and restoration of this important wildlife area offers a hands-on opportunity to learn about invasive species removal, native planting, effective debris removal and much more while earning community service credit. All ages, but folks under 16 must be accompanied by an adult.

Wear closed-toed shoes and long pants. Bring water, snack, sun/bug repellent and, if possible, work gloves. Questions? Contact Martin Byhower at (310) 541-6763, ext. 4143.

Tuesday, Jan. 15 at 7 p.m.:

Audubon Third Tuesday Get-togethers. Our speaker will be Linda Gonzales. She will talk about Native American uses of native plants. Come to Madrona Marsh and socialize with friends, enjoy the bird quiz, raffle and prizes from Wild Birds Unlimited.

Wednesday, Feb. 6 at 7 p.m.:

PV/South Bay Audubon Board Meeting at Madrona Marsh. All Audubon members and friends are welcome to attend.

For a complete list of events at Madrona Marsh, go to www.southbaycalendar.org and click on Friends of Madrona Marsh.

For a complete list of Audubon YES (Youth Environmental Service) program activities, go to www.AudubonYES.org.

Fieldtrips

(See Calendar locations and information box for directions.)

Tuesday, Dec. 4 at 8 a.m.:

“Tour de Torrance.” Join Dave Moody & friends on a ramble around Torrance’s best birding areas.

Saturday, Dec. 8 at 8 a.m.:

Palos Verdes Peninsula Land Conservancy Natural History walk. McBride Trail: meet at the west end of Ocean Terrace Drive in Rancho Palos Verdes.

Sunday, Dec. 9 at 8 a.m.:

Second Sunday Walk at Ken Malloy Harbor Regional Park. Join Audubon leaders & explore this important natural area in the South Bay. See meeting location.

Sunday, Dec. 9 at 1:30 p.m.:

Los Serenos de Point Vicente Natural History Tour. Abalone Cove Shoreline Park Tidepool walk.

Wednesday, Dec. 12 at 8 a.m.:

Bird Walk at Madrona Marsh. Leader: Bob Shanman.

Sunday, Dec. 16 at 8 a.m.:

Bird Walk at South Coast Botanic Garden, 26300 Crenshaw Blvd., Palos Verdes. Leader: Stephanie Bryan. Charge for nonmembers of the SCBG Foundation; you can join at the entrance.

Tuesday, Dec. 18 at 8 a.m.: "Tour de Torrance." Join Dave Moody & friends on a ramble around Torrance's best birding areas.

Wednesday, Dec. 19 at 8 a.m.: Bird Walk at South Coast Botanic Garden, 26300 Crenshaw Blvd., Palos Verdes. Leader: Stephanie Bryan.

Sunday, Dec. 23: Christmas Bird Count.

Tuesday, Jan. 1 at 8 a.m.: "Tour de Torrance." Join Dave Moody & friends on a ramble around Torrance's best birding areas.

Sunday, Jan. 6 at 8 a.m.: Bird Walk at South Coast Botanic Garden, 26300 Crenshaw Blvd., Palos Verdes. Leader: Stephanie Bryan. Charge for nonmembers of the SCBG Foundation; you can join at the entrance.

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

Saturday, Jan. 12 at 8 a.m.: Palos Verdes Peninsula Land Conservancy Natural History walk at White Point Preserve. Park on the preserve off of Paseo del Mar, between Western & Weymouth, San Pedro.

Sunday, Jan. 13 at 8 p.m.: Second Sunday Walk at Ken Malloy Harbor Regional Park. Join Audubon leaders & explore this important natural area in the South Bay. See meeting location.

Tuesday, Jan. 15 at 8:30 a.m.: "Tour de Torrance." Join Dave Moody & friends on a ramble

around Torrance's best birding areas.

Wednesday, Jan. 16 at 8 a.m.: Bird Walk at South Coast Botanic Garden. Leader: Stephanie Bryan.

Saturday, Jan. 27 at 3 p.m.: Los Serenos de Point Vicente Natural History Tour at the Trump National Golf Course, East Bluff Preserve. Park on La Rotunda at Twin Harbors View Drive.

Tuesday, Jan. 29 at 8:30 a.m.: "Tour de Torrance." Join Dave Moody & friends on a ramble around Torrance's best birding areas.

Sunday, Feb. 3 at 8 a.m.: Bird Walk at South Coast Botanic Garden. Leader: Stephanie Bryan.

Tuesday, Feb. 5 at 8:30 a.m.: "Tour de Torrance." Join Dave Moody & friends on a ramble around Torrance's best birding areas.

Sunday, Feb. 10 at 8 a.m.: Second Sunday Walk at Ken Malloy Harbor Regional Park. See meeting location below.

Wednesday, Feb. 13 at 8 a.m.: Bird Walk at Madrona Marsh. Leader: Bob Shanman.

Sunday, Feb. 17 at 12:30 p.m.: Los Serenos de Point Vicente Natural History Tour, Abalone Cove Shoreline Park Tidepool walk.

Tuesday, Feb. 19 at 8 a.m.: "Tour de Torrance." Join Dave Moody & friends on a ramble around Torrance's best birding areas.

Wednesday, Feb. 20 at 8 a.m.: Bird Walk at South Coast Botanic Garden. Leader: Stephanie Bryan.

Meeting Locations and Information Sources

KMHRP: Ken Malloy Harbor Regional Park, Harbor City; parking lot near the intersection of Anaheim Street and Vermont, west of the 110 Freeway. Park opposite of old boat house.

Madrona Marsh Preserve: 3201 Plaza Del Amo, Torrance. Between Maple and Madrona Avenues. Park at Nature Center.

South Coast Botanic Garden: 26300 Crenshaw Blvd., Palos Verdes.

Eric and Ann Brooks organize birding fieldtrips that are co-sponsored by PV/South Bay Audubon. Suggested donations: \$5 for day trips (\$4 if carpooling). Weekend trips Saturday are \$10 (\$8); Sunday \$5 (\$4). Contact them directly for details at motmots@aol.com or at (323) 295-6688.

Martin Byhower provides field guided trips. For updates and details on all trips, go to www.birdingsocal.com and click on "Updated calendar of events."

Palos Verdes Peninsula Land Conservancy sponsors walks and other activities on the Peninsula. For more information, consult the website at <http://www.pvplc.org>, contact the conservancy by e-mail at info@pvplc.org or call (310) 541-7613.

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Editor Chris Boyd

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For back issues and chapter info, go to www.LMconsult.com/pv Audubon

Help Needed!

Audubon YES! Contacts with South Bay schools and teen youth groups are wanted. If you are a teacher looking for extra-credit opportunities for your students, or if you are an adult advisor to a teen group looking for volunteer activities, become an active part of Audubon YES!, our Youth Environmental Service program. Audubon wants to work with you and your kids! For more information, call Jess Morton at (310) 832-5601 or visit us online at www.audubonYES.org. Pick up postage-paid envelopes at Wild Birds Unlimited at Pacific Coast Highway and Crenshaw to recycle your **HP or Lexmark Inkjet cartridges**. For each cartridge sent in these envelopes, \$2.50 is donated to our chapter or to South Bay Wildlife Rehab. This is a great way to reduce waste and to support your favorite organizations.