June 15th at 7 via Zoom

The Parrots of Australia

Amy Hopkins is President of The Parrot Club, Connecticut’s oldest companion bird club, and a long-term member of Menunkatuck Audubon. Tonight’s program is the fruit of her month-long trip to Australia in September 2016 for a wild parrot birdwatching tour. During her presentation, Amy will share some of her photos and videos from this extraordinary parrot paradise.

Around 300 species of the parrot family have been recorded throughout the world. Of them 56 species are found in Australia, all but five endemic. Parrots, like the gallahs pictured at the right, are large colorful birds with powerful bills for cracking seeds and nuts. Many also feed on fruit, nectar and sometimes insects. They often depend on hollows in mature trees for nesting sites.

July 20th at 7 via Zoom

Birding and living in Central Texas

On Tuesday evening, June 15th, via Zoom, PV Audubon past president Martin Byhower will be sharing images from favorite birding locations in Central Texas, where he now lives. It’s an area with the Hill Country to the west, the Blackland Prairie to the east, and birds that migrate through from the north and south. “There’s a lot of biodiversity,” Martin says, “which means I’ve been a kid in a candy store!” Besides the birds, Martin will include a few other slides from the collection he’s named “This is Texas.” It’s a Big change from life in California!

After early years as a marine biologist, commercial diver and marine educator, Martin taught science at Chadwick School for 32 years, with a side job as a bird guide. He developed an interest in plants while doing habitat restoration at Chadwick Canyon and Harbor Park. Now, with Tony Baker as his inspiration, Martin has become a landscape designer and native plant retailer. One result of the recent big freeze in Texas is that his business is booming! And he’s still doing bird guiding on the side. “Who knew,” Martin asks, “retirement would be this busy?”
The inch of rain that fell in March gave scant relief from the dry winter, but it was better than the 0.02 inch in April, as once again drought has tightened its hold on California. The thermometer reached a high during the period of 88°F on April 1, but cooled the rest of the month.

The outstanding rarity in our area during March and April was a little bird that is common in other parts of California but rare on the Peninsula: the **Wrentit**, which was spotted by Dan Cooper at Portuguese Bend on March 26. Although it breeds only 30 miles away in the San Gabriel Mountains, it is a species seldom seen on the Peninsula. It has never been observed on the Palos Verdes Christmas Bird Count. The Wrentit is a bird that lives in dense chaparral and doesn’t like to come out in the open, so even in areas where it is common it is seldom seen. Its reluctance to leave ground cover undoubtedly explains its absence from the Peninsula; the vast open urban plain must seem like a frightening barrier. In the same way, the Columbia River is an uncrossable obstacle: the Wrentit is common on the south bank in Oregon but absent on the north bank in Washington only a couple miles away.

Another rare visitor was the **Black-throated Sparrow** found at Three Sisters Preserve by John Sterling and others on April 29. This handsome sparrow was formerly known as the **Desert Sparrow**; you can guess why. **Oak Titmouses** were observed on the L.A. River on March 16 (Dick Barth) and Harbor Park on April 18 (Marvin Nelson). **Phainopeplas** popped up at R.H.E. Landfill Loop, Peck Park, South Coast Botanic Garden, and Vicente Bluffs. The **California Thrasher** at Founders Park on the south coast was seen again on April 5. Greg Hertler photographed a **White-tailed Kite** in the Pt. Vicente area on April 27. Stephanie Bryan had a **White-winged Dove** in her yard on May 5. Dick Barth came across an astounding flock of 56 **Black Skimmers** on the River at Willow Street on May 7.

One by one, our wintering rarities have been departing for northern climes. The wintering **Green-tailed Towhee** in San Pedro was last seen on March 14 (Valerie Anderson), even while the one in Rolling Hills lingered into May (Jim & Cathy).
The **American Redstart** at Polliwog Park was last seen on March 4. The **White-throated Sparrow** at Wilderness Park was last seen on March 22; the one at Harbor Park a couple days later. The **Loggerhead Shrike** at Madrona Marsh hasn’t been seen since March 25. The **Black-and-white Warbler** that wintered at DeForest Park was last seen on April 16; the one at Madrona Marsh departed a couple days later. **Pine Siskins** continued at Wilderness Park through April 23 and at a Redondo Beach home through May 2. The same home hosted a **Lawrence’s Goldfinch** in early March (Adrian Vilca). Late **White-crowned Sparrows** lingered in Rolling Hills through May 9. (Jim & Cathy).

Among the more interesting migrants were a pair of **White-faced Ibises** on the lower L.A. River on May 2 (DB). **Solitary Sandpipers** showed up at Harbor Park (Randy Harwood), Madrona Marsh (Jeanne Bellemin) and Dominguez Gap (Jeff Boyd) toward the end of April. David Ellsworth had a **Red Knot** at Cabrillo Beach on April 13. A **Dunlin** and a female **Wilson’s Phalarope** stopped at the River on April 30 (DB & JB).

Derek Hameister encountered a **Black-chinned Hummingbird** along the Lower Willow Springs Trail in Rolling Hills on April 17. Several **Purple Martins** stopped by Harbor Park in mid-April (Bobby T); others were seen in Peck Park (Bernardo Alps) and Redondo Beach (Calvin Bonn). Toward the end of April, **Bank Swallows** swooped by Harbor Park and Madrona Marsh (AV). On April 29, Jim Hecht came across a migrating **Yellow-breasted Chat** at Sand Dune Park. This individual might be the bird that stopped by Sand Dune Park about the same date in 2019 and was seen in September in 2019 and 2020. **Yellow-headed Blackbirds** stopped at Entradero Park (Charlie Keller) and Harbor Park (SVL), both on April 13; Dick Barth found 18 of them on the L.A. River on April 23! The same day he spotted two **Blue Grosbeaks**; others were seen at Madrona Marsh on April 13 and Harbor Park on April 24.

**Acorn Woodpeckers** were seen at RHE Landfill Loop, Madrona Marsh, Roosevelt Cemetery, and the L.A. River. **Nuttall’s Woodpeckers** made a racket at Ernie Howlett Park, the RHE Landfill Loop, and homes in Redondo Beach and San Pedro. A pair of **Steller’s Jays**, mountain jays not often seen here, were observed just outside of our area in Long Beach on April 24. **Cactus Wrens** appeared at Alta Vicente, Filiorum Preserve, and Three Sisters Preserve.

In the exotic department, a **European Goldfinch** popped up at a home in El Camino Village at the end of April (Teresa Palos), while a flock of five **Black Swans** flew over Madrona Marsh on May 8 (Jess Morton).

Finally, an adult Bald Eagle was seen flying around the Peninsula in March. Calvin Bonn observed it at Redondo Union High on March 26.

The author seeks reports from readers about unusual birds you see in our area (the area west of the Los Angeles River and south of I-105.) Send reports to stephenvincentlloyd@gmail.com.

**Image credits:**
1. **Wrentit:** Dave Keeling.
2. **Yellow-headed Blackbirds:** Vincent Lloyd
3. **Green-tailed Towhee:** Valerie Anderson
4. **White-winged Dove:** Stephanie Bryan
“So, where is it? I could sense the fury whirling inside that Anna’s tiny brain as it stretched its neck impossibly up, up, up while its outraged eyes took me in. He knew that somewhere inside the clicking camera I held an enemy was feeding on his flowers. The moment that hummingbird showed itself, it was going to be toast!”

Jess Morton

“Recycle, repurpose, reuse! I provide nesting materials for the birds that visit my garden, supplementing the usual material whenever I brush my dogs. It is always interesting to see which materials the birds choose. Some, such as American crows, squabble over the harsher coat of my Westie, Gracie. Others, such as Anna’s hummingbirds, and the oak titmouse you see here, go for the soft undercoat of my golden retriever Jack.”

Sara Courtneidge

Four Images and Their Stories
“One of my favorite photos is of this Blue-footed Booby. I took it on a visit to North Seymour, one of the smaller Galapagos Islands. It is covered with low, bushy vegetation and offers an abundance of open nesting grounds for boobies. This particular male was in a long, full-throttle courtship, with extensive strutting, stamping and posturing to impress the females around him. All of a sudden, he took a break from the excitement of courtship to preen himself. It was this pensive expression that grabbed my attention.”

_Evi Meyer_

“This photo of Brandt's Cormorant is special to me because my wife Deanna and I were on a SCUBA dive under the oil rig Eureka. We were at 70 feet, mesmerized by an underwater ballet of thousands of bait fish that were using the rig as a shelter. Suddenly, cormorants were swimming by! “ -- _Randy Harwood_
All That Jaz

By Jazmin Rios

This year’s Audubon YES! Awards Ceremony was held virtually. On May 14th, YES! Members came together and shared some of the great work they have done this past year. We honored eight YES! Members representing five high schools. They are Aileen Sohn (West High School), Christian Park (Palos Verdes Peninsula High School), Jeffrey Lee (South High School), Jeremy Park (South High School), Lauren Yoo (Notre Dame High School), Lisa Eun (Mira Costa High School), Luke Cho (South High School), Megan Yoo (South High School), and Ryan Yang (South High School). Despite the COVID-19 restrictions, all Audubon YES! Awardees volunteered at least 50 hours of their time on multiple projects in the Palos Verdes and South Bay area. Volunteer projects varied from interpretation at Cabrillo Marine Aquarium to restoration efforts at Linden H. Chandler Preserve. We are excited to have such motivated members of Audubon YES!

The ceremony was a small gesture to thank them for the fantastic job they did. Please help us congratulate Audubon YES! students and continue expanding the YES! Program through your donations to our Audubon chapter. Our mission is to educate young people about the needs of their local environment through conservation efforts and community service in conjunction with various organizations in the Palos Verdes and South Bay area. You can help us expand the Audubon YES! Program by sponsoring a student that may not have the resources to become a member by donating $35 to cover his or her Audubon membership.

All student Audubon Society members and their families are welcome to join Audubon YES! With COVID-19 restrictions lifting there will be more volunteer opportunities and events available for our members. Look out for new opportunities and events under the Project Manager’s Page on the chapter website at <pvsb-audubon.org>. If you know of any organizations in need of volunteers please contact me, Jazmin Rios, Project Manager, at mjazmin-rios@pvsbaudubon.org or call 562-896-3369.

One of the Audubon YES! teams at the Linden H. Chandler Preserve, where high school students are assisting the Palos Verdes Peninsula Land Conservancy with the habitat restoration that has proven successful for the Palos Verdes Blue Butterfly.
Good News for the Palos Verdes Blue

By Jess Morton

For forty years, moments of hope have come and gone for the Palos Verdes Blue Butterfly. The first was in 1982, when our Audubon chapter ran the first thorough survey of appropriate habitat (mostly in RPV) and found four new populations to add to the two already known. Hopes dimmed a year later when only a handful of butterflies were found at a single site, and died a year later when even that population had disappeared.

Hope returned a decade later with the discovery of a population of the butterfly in north San Pedro, miles from previously known sites on the other side of the hill. However, as time went on, this population, too, declined despite valiant efforts at habitat restoration. In desperation, a program to rear the butterfly in the laboratory was launched. It has proven wildly successful, and there is a thriving colony in captivity. But introductions of butterflies into good habitat had not been successful—until this spring.

A March-April survey by yours truly in one of the introduction areas turned up at least three individuals in lush habitat, that had not been released earlier this year. These had all grown up in the wild, probably from eggs laid by butterflies released in the area the year before. The ones I found were all females.

The photo (inset) shows one of them laying an egg on a stem-end of deerweed, the plant that will serve as host for the caterpillar. The hope is that it will survive and, next spring, emerge as an adult butterfly to mate and complete the reproductive cycle. All three females that I saw were actively laying eggs where there was a good chance the eggs will hatch and the larvae survive.

2021 BIRD-A-TTHON was a study in black (swans and skimmers) that is, and your donation puts Audubon in the black, too.

TOTAL: 109 SPECIES
ASK ALLEN
by Vincent Lloyd

Little Brown Birds

Vincent: Allen, all these little brown birds at my feeder — help me tell them apart!

Allen: If you’re not lucky enough to be a hummingbird, it’s a good plan to be a small brown bird with a thick bill good for cracking seeds. Seeds are everywhere, so food is not a problem; a brown bird foraging on the ground doesn’t stand out, so predators are likely to prey on showier birds. It’s not surprising that several unrelated groups of songbirds have adopted this form — an example of what biologists call convergent evolution.

In California, there are three major groups of small brown seedeaters: the finches (like the House Finch), the New World sparrows (like the White-Crowned Sparrow), and the Old World sparrows (like the House Sparrow).

Vincent: There are finches in the Old World as well as the New World, so when European ornithologists first encountered North American birds, they had a word for New World finches. But the New World sparrows were new to science, so they had no word for them; for a long while they were sometimes called finches, sometimes sparrows. Looking back now, we can see that it would have been better to find another word altogether, to avoid confusing the New World sparrows with the Old World sparrows. DNA evidence shows that the New World sparrows (the Passerellidae) are more closely related to the Old World buntings (the Emberizidae) than they are to the Old World sparrows (the Passeridae), but we are now stuck using the word sparrow. Even the family names are confusing: the Passeridae are named for the genus Passer, which contains the House Sparrow (“passer” is the Latin word for sparrow), whereas the Passerellidae are named after the genus Passerella (literally, “little sparrow”), the genus of the Fox Sparrow.

The male House Sparrow is easy to identify: it has a black bill, a grey crown, whitish cheek, chestnut-brown nape, and black throat — a handsome bird. The male House Finch with its reddish head and breast is likewise distinctive. But the female House Finch and the female House Sparrow look like native sparrows.

Allen: They do rather. And the native sparrows differ in that the sexes usually look similar. Here are some tips on identifying small brown birds to family.

1. Observe their behavior.

House Sparrows, finches, and native sparrows (like the White-crowned) can be distinguished by their behavior alone.

House Sparrows are noisy and gregarious and are always found near human habitation. When disturbed, they “lift off in a befuddled panic, each member of the flock intent on reaching the center of a low bush or tree, where they gather in irregular clumps of three or four birds, sometimes so close as to be nearly touching one another,” as Rick Wright observes in Sparrows of North America. Native sparrows are shy, keep close to the ground, and when alarmed make a bee line to the nearest bush, where they spread out. They are seldom seen flying overhead. Finches are more often seen high in trees than on the ground and frequently
fly overhead. As David Allen Sibley notes, they often perch with erect posture and their tail angled down, while native sparrows hold their tails horizontal or angled up a little.

2. Listen to their sound.

House Sparrows chirp constantly, even monotonously, but don’t have what you’d consider a song. Finches are likewise chatty but the male has a musical song, one that goes up and down. The song of the House Finch often ends in a harsh chrrrr. Native sparrows are usually quiet, occasionally making a quiet chip. They generally stay hidden while singing, but their song is more melodic than that of finches; the Song Sparrow, for example, is well-named.

3. Look at the back.

Rick Wright points out that there is a lot more to native sparrows than their face. Their back is generally covered in bold stripes of black, brown, and chestnut. Finches are less strikingly patterned; their grey backs are marked with indistinct darker streaks. The House Sparrow is somewhere in between: its back has broad orange-brown stripes separated by fine black lines that Rick compares with freeway lanes!

Pay attention to the profile as well. In poor lighting, House Sparrows, finches, and native sparrows can be separated by their silhouettes. House Sparrows have rather short, wide tails, chunky bodies, and thick bills. Native sparrows have longer tails and smaller bills. Finches have thick bills and long tails that are notched.

Once you’ve ID’d the bird to family, then you can consider what species it is. If it’s an Old World sparrow, it’s a House Sparrow (unless you run across the European Tree Sparrow that’s been hanging out in Wilmington Marina the last few years). If it’s a finch, it is almost certainly a House Finch, an abundant bird common in the wild as well as in the cities. The similar Purple Finch breeds in the mountains and only occasionally is encountered in the city in the winter.

There is more variety in the New World sparrows. The only common year-round resident is the Song Sparrow, which is always found near streams or ponds. In the winter, there are a variety of sparrows, but the most common by far is the White-crowned Sparrow. The Golden-crowned, Lincoln’s, Chipping, and Savannah Sparrows can all be found at Madrona Marsh and other places in the winter.

ID challenge: can you ID the Mystery Bird as an Old World sparrow, a New World sparrow, or a finch? (Answer on page11.)

Captions
1. Female House Sparrow. (Wikipedia Commons).
2. Female House Finch. (Cornell Labs).
3. Adult White-crowned Sparrow. (Wikipedia Commons).
Chapter Calendar

In person meetings and bird walks have been suspended temporarily due to covid-19.

Visit our website at pvsb-audubon.org for live-stream instructions with links to our monthly programs. See page 1 for articles about our June 15th and July 20th speakers and their programs.

SUMMER BUTTERFLY AND DRAGONFLY COUNTS

The 41st annual Palos Verdes Butterfly Count is scheduled for Saturday, July 10th. As in the Christmas Bird Count, the aim is to count all the butterflies that are seen on the count day within the count circle. The count circle extends east to the Los Angeles River, north to Alondra Park, west to Santa Monica Bay, and south into the Catalina Channel.

Our count is one of about 450 “Fourth of July” Butterfly Counts in North America. The results are collected and published by the North American Butterfly Association. Their annual reports are an important record of the distribution and numbers of North American butterfly species. Comparisons of the results across years are used to monitor changes in butterfly populations and study the effects of habitat degradation and climate change.

If you would like to participate in this year’s count, contact Vincent Lloyd at stephenvincentlloyd@gmail.com. Volunteers are needed to survey parks and canyons in the count area (in small socially distant groups). We also welcome butterfly lovers who are willing just to count the butterflies in their yard on the count day. A $3 contribution to N.A.B.A. is requested from participants.

Dragonfly lovers may want to participate in the Dragonfly count on Saturday, June 19th. Contact Vincent for details.

At the left and above are life-sized photos of a Giant Swallowtail, found on the 2009 count, and a Green Darner, taken at Harbor Park. These are our largest members of the PV-South Bay butterfly and dragonfly fauna.

Photos by Jess Morton.
A Bat in a Bird House
By Ann Dalkey

This was a mystery: Why wasn’t the pair of house finches moving into the bird house? My husband built the bird house 25 years ago and painted it to match our home. Over the years the bird house was moved to a variety of locations, usually to avoid a predator. The original location, on the north side of our garage, was threatened by an athletic cat who could climb the wall to the nest in search of a snack. At another location, crows found the tasty eggs and baby birds leading to the nest being deserted. Other locations were not appealing to the finches, so we finally moved it back to the original location. We felt this was now a safe location since the “new” cat is 15 years old and prefers to live indoors.

This year, we were hoping to have a brood or two in our bird house. Seeing the house finch pair gave us hope. The two certainly were looking at the bird house, but then left without moving in, thereby disappointing us.

Idea! Perhaps the bird house was full of cobwebs that made it unappealing. I grabbed a cloth and hauled out a stepstool with the intent of cleaning out the cobwebs. Hmmm, something was inside the bird house, possibly an old wasp nest. I reached inside to at least clean out the cobwebs before attempting to deal with the wasp nest.

There was some trepidation about reaching into a place that possibly had a wasp nest, whether new or old. As I carefully reached in, my fingers brushed up against something that was soft, furry, and warm. Surprise, it must be a bat!!

A bit of internet searching allowed me to identify our friend. It is a California myotis bat (*Myotis californicus*), identifiable by its small size and coloring. That this was a solitary bat indicates that it is probably a male, so perhaps my husband should build us a “Bat City” adjacent to the bird house just for females and their babies!

Answer to Mystery Bird Challenge: New World Sparrow (Song Sparrow)
Dive on in for a bill a bird!

On May 8th, birders fanned out around the South Bay to count birds for our annual Bird-a-thon fundraiser. The results are in. The species total was 109.

Please support our chapter’s programs with a donation on our website at: https://pvsb-audubon.org/donate-join/

Palos Verdes/South Bay Audubon Society
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AVIANTICS

By Evi Meyer

Is this kid ever not hungry?