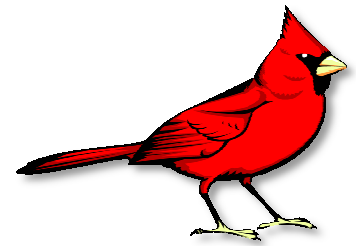


THE OBSERVER



Calendar

December 13. Beginner bird walk at Sycamore Canyon. Meet at the Sycamore Canyon trailhead at **8:00 AM**. The trail is located adjacent to Rose Hills Cemetery gate 17, but note that the trail is **not** in the cemetery! The entrance to Sycamore Canyon is a driveway just southwest of the entrance to the cemetery. Jay Oberholtzer leads. Rain or recent rain cancels.

December 18. Monthly meeting and program 7:30 PM at the Whittier Community Center. Robb Hamilton presents: "Cactus Wrens of Southern California." Details on page 3.

December 20. Field trip to Whittier Narrows. Meet at the Whittier Narrows Nature Center parking lot at 8:00 AM. Jennifer Schmahl leads; details on page 3.



AUDUBON IN CALIFORNIA

FROM THE AUDUBON CALIFORNIA WEB SITE

In the late 19th Century, it became fashionable for women to wear real bird feathers in their hats. The trend spurred a trade in wild bird feathers that had a devastating effect on native bird populations. The American Ornithologists Union estimated that as many as five million birds per year were being killed for the millinery trade. The birds most sought were the Great Egret and the Snowy Egret, for their white feathers. Early conservationists began to sound the alarm.

One of these conservationists was named George Bird Grinnell, who as a young man had a fascination with the work of John James Audubon. Now the editor of Forest and Stream Magazine, he took to his publication in 1886 to call for the formation of an Audubon Society "for the protection of wild birds and their eggs." The initial response to his call was positive, and the following year he incorporated the new society with 39,000 members.

Grinnell's original Audubon Society was short-lived however, and the trade in bird feathers continued to grow. But he had been on to something. Starting in Massachusetts in 1896, other Audubon groups began to spring up around the country. The first chapter in California was founded in 1898.

Even before the National Audubon Society formed in 1905, the movement enlisted noted photographer/naturalist William Finley to promote bird conservation out West. Finley worked with Theodore Roosevelt to create the first wildlife refuge in the Lower Klamath on the California/Oregon border.

Less than two decades after the creation of the Klamath refuges, Finley and Audubon were fighting proposals to drain the wetlands for agriculture. And the battle to keep water for the migratory birds in the Klamath continues today.

California quickly became a major stronghold for the National Audubon Society, prompting it to build its second nature center there in 1939, the Audubon Center of Southern California. The center was part of a major membership effort in the state that created several new chapters. The center is now run by the County of Los Angeles, and is called Whittier Narrows Nature Center -- it was the precursor to what is now the Audubon Center at Debs Park.

From the beginning, Audubon chapters in California have been a remarkably effective, independent voice for conservation. For example, in the late 1970s, many supported the expansion of Redwood National Park, while the National organization backed a compromise plan. The chapter perspective carried the day.

California chapters were among the first to highlight the dangers of wind turbines to birds, and Bay Area chapters sued over the deaths of protected birds at Altamont Pass. These chapters have truly led the way on creating a responsible renewable energy future, and helped inform National Audubon Society policies that don't force us to choose between renewable energy and wildlife protection.

Audubon California was established in 1996 as a field program of the National Audubon Society, overseeing the organization's properties and leading conservation efforts. With a wide array of ambitious programs, Audubon California is a force for conservation along the entire Pacific Flyway.

TRICOLORED BLACKBIRDS

FROM THE AUDUBON CALIFORNIA WEB SITE

The Tricolored Blackbird (*Agelaius tricolor*) is North America's most colonial landbird. Found almost exclusively in California, its breeding colonies often teem with more than 50,000 birds, sometimes all settled into a single 10-acre field or wetland to raise their young. While similar to the more widespread Red-winged Blackbird, the Tricolored Blackbird is distinguished by its red shoulder patch with a bright white bar.

In the 19th Century, Tricolored Blackbird flocks were described as so numerous "as to darken the sky." Since then, the population has declined from several million to slightly less than 300,000 today. Over just the last 70 years, the Tricolored Blackbird population has decreased by more than 80%.

The reasons for this decline are many, but the loss of marsh and nearby foraging habitats along the coast and in the Central Valley is the main issue. In more recent years, the species has become dependent on agricultural lands, with most of the largest colonies nesting in grain fields. A real dilemma develops because Tricolored young typically have not yet left the nest before the time farmers harvest their crop, and harvesting destroys Tricolored Blackbird nests and young. In some cases as many as 20,000 nests have been lost in a single field.



COLLABORATIVE CONSERVATION

Audubon California is working closely with landowners and its partners in the Tricolored Blackbird Working Group to protect this species across California. The Tricolored Blackbird Working Group is a collaborative alliance of farmers, agricultural associations, governmental agencies, and environmental organizations that have all recognized the importance of a multi-faceted and cooperative approach to promote the long-term persistence of the Tricolored Blackbird. The Working Group strives to reverse the population decline of this species, and increase the population to more than 750,000 over the next 20 years.

The efforts of the Working Group are guided by the Tricolored Blackbird Conservation Plan that lays out a strategy to boost populations through long-term conservation planning and short-term action-oriented intervention. Specifically, the Plan commits stakeholders to implement:

- 1) habitat conservation projects to benefit the species;
- 2) a research program to more thoroughly understand the species' life history;
- 3) a monitoring program to effectively document population trends and distribution;
- 4) an outreach and education program to enhance public and private landowner awareness, and to build public support for conservation.

In our area you can often find Tricolored Blackbirds at Legg Lake, usually along the north lake near Rosemead Blvd.

DECEMBER MEETING AND PROGRAM

ROBB HAMILTON PRESENTS: "CACTUS WRENS OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA"

Perhaps the most imperiled resident bird on the coastal slope of southern California has no legal status in Los Angeles County, but biologists and volunteers are joining together to study and protect our remaining populations of the Cactus Wren anyway! We will examine places where these fascinating birds are found in the Whittier Hills and beyond, with an emphasis on Los Angeles County, examine forces that seem to be aligned against the wrens, and finish by reviewing conservation strategies that are giving these beloved birds a fighting chance.

Robb Hamilton is a biological consultant based in Long Beach. He has surveyed for Cactus Wrens and mapped their cactus scrub habitat across much of their coastal range. He recently updated the Cactus Wren species account for the Birds of North America Online.

The meeting will take place on Thursday, December 18th, at 7:30 PM at the Whittier Community Center. The Community Center is located at 7630 Washington Ave. (not be confused with Washington Blvd.), on the corner of Mar Vista St. and Washington Ave., in the City of Whittier, adjacent to the Whittier Public Library.

The program is free. Light refreshments will be served.



GOING NON-POSTAL

JEFF ALLISON

Our chapter is considering the idea of making the electronic version of *The Observer* the default means of distribution. We currently print up 650 paper copies per month and mail them out. This is expensive to our chapter, and is not terribly eco-friendly. Currently you can find *The Observer* on line in our Yahoo group, which is called whittieraudubon. Just go to groups.yahoo.com and search for whittieraudubon.

We'll continue to support folks who want the paper version of *The Observer*, but the expectation is that those will be fairly few in number. If you have a strong opinion on this direction, please let us know. You can sound off at the next chapter meeting or drop an email to either myself or one of our board members. Contact information is on the back page.

DECEMBER FIELD TRIP TO WHITTIER NARROWS

THE DECEMBER BIRD WALK will be on Saturday, December 20th. Join us to see what winter residents and visitors can be found right here in Whittier. We will meet at 8:00 a.m. in the Whittier Narrows Nature Center parking lot. The nature center is located at 1000 N. Durfee Ave, in South El Monte. Phone is 626-575-5523.

Refreshments to follow in the picnic shelter near the parking lot at the conclusion of the walk.

Jennifer Schmahl leads

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Whittier Area Audubon's web site is located at <http://www.whittieraudubon.org>. Our Yahoo group is called whittieraudubon. And we're on Facebook...search for Whittier Area Audubon!



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JOIN WHITTIER AREA AUDUBON SOCIETY!

EVERY MEMBERSHIP SUPPORTS AUDUBON'S VITAL EFFORTS to protect birds, wildlife, and natural habitats. For \$30 per year you can support Whittier Area Audubon, receive 10 issues of our chapter newsletter, *The Observer*, and support our local projects and events.

To join our **local** chapter, make your check payable to Whittier Area Audubon and send it to Whittier Area Audubon, P.O. Box 548, Whittier, CA 90608-0548.

To join National Audubon, make your check payable to Audubon and send to National Audubon Society, PO Box 42250, Palm Coast, FL 32142-2250. Please include a letter with your name, mailing address, and any other personal contact information you wish to share (e.g., email address, phone number) along with Whittier Area Audubon Society's code, C4ZC170Z. As a member of National Audubon, you will receive Audubon's bimonthly magazine and our Chapter's newsletter, *The Observer*.

You can find your membership expiration date on the mailing label on your *Observer*.

BRING YOUR CANS!

Reminder: Bring your aluminum cans to our monthly meetings. We can raise funds by recycling your cans.