



# THE OBSERVER

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Welcome to a new year with Whittier Area Audubon Society. After 16 superlative years as editor, Jeff Allison is stepping down from The Observer and passing editorial duties to me. I am the immediate past president and long-time lurker behind my more active spouse, Larry. If you are willing to bear with my experiments with formatting and navigating publishing tools, we'll get started on the next adventure in newslettering.

*Jennifer Schmahl*

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## Do Frigate Birds Dream?

*From National Audubon:*

A common myth once held that albatrosses could fly for years at a time, eating and drinking and mating on the wing, landing only to lay their eggs. Modern science does not support this old wives' tale, but the verifiable truth about avian flight behavior is almost as impressive. The Gray-headed Albatross [can circle the globe in only 46 days](#), making numerous pit stops along the way. And rather than the albatross, it's the Alpine Swift that holds the record for the longest recorded uninterrupted flight by a bird: [One logged more than 200 days in the air](#) as it hunted flying insects on its wintering range in the skies over West Africa.

These legendary flights raise a flurry of questions about how the birds pull off such feats, and chief among them is the question of sleep. For many years, scientists conjectured that long-ranging birds could sleep while aloft, despite having no real evidence to support this claim. Until now, that is. A new study about the Great Frigatebird, [published earlier this month in \*Nature Communications\*](#), supports the conventional wisdom—but in a surprising way.

The Great Frigatebird might not have the incredible range of the Alpine Swift, but its aerial feats are astonishing in their own right. On their wandering flights, frigatebirds can stay aloft for up to two

months without touching down on land or water. More importantly, while out at sea, they couldn't even take a break even if they wanted to; unlike most other seabirds, frigatebirds can't swim, becoming waterlogged and eventually drowning if they do encounter water. It's this inability to stop and get some rest while floating that has caused scientists to suspect the bird might sleep while flying, and it's why Niels Rattenborg of Germany's Max Planck Institute for Ornithology (and other colleagues) chose to study their sleep patterns.

Rattenborg was also drawn to frigatebirds for logistical reasons. One nesting population of the species in the Galapagos Islands is "quite tame" after years of constant observation, he says. Rattenborg and his team found it relatively easy to capture 15 of the birds to implant electroencephalographs (EEGs) into their skulls. Because EEGs measure electrical activity in the brain, the researchers were able to tell when the birds were awake or asleep. An implanted accelerometer clued them into how fast and in what direction the animals flew.

When they downloaded the data from the tiny devices a week later, the researchers found that while frigatebirds do sleep while flying, they sleep very little—about 45 minutes each day in short ten-second bursts, usually after dark. By contrast, on land, the birds sleep one minute at a time throughout the day and night for a total of roughly 12 hours each day.

## KIDS SPACE

**Coming This Fall:** "Wild About Birds" is a new classroom resource kit with print and online content for grades 3-5 to be released in late August.

"Wild About Birds" has both printed student resources and online content for three new learning modules:

"Owl Prowl" In this printed student magazine, young people are introduced to the mysterious and endearing world of owls. When it comes to adaptation, these big-eyed raptors are equipped with the tools of the hunter: keen eyesight, powerful feet with sharp talons, a ripping hooked beak, and special feathers that allow them to fly silently on their (mostly) nocturnal forays for food.

"The Watery World of Wading Birds" In this printed student magazine, students learn what waterbirds are and about the physical and behavioral characteristics that help them survive

in water habitats. They will learn about the role that waterbirds play in a healthy ecosystem and why their survival hinges on the continuation of their ecosystem's health.

"Wild About Birds" In this printed student magazine, students explore the astounding diversity of birds, from body type and color to habitat and the behaviors that help a particular species survive in a particular place. Students are introduced to John James Audubon, the 19th-century naturalist whose paintings of birds are now considered to be national treasures, both as works of art and as works of scientific accuracy.

## General Meeting for September

Our chapter meets every third Thursday of each month, except July and August. We meet 7:30 p.m. at the Whittier Community Center, 7630 S. Washington Ave., Whittier, CA. (not Washington Blvd.) This month our speaker will be discussing shorebirds.

**Admission is free and light refreshments will be served**

### Field Trip Schedule:

**Sept 10 7:00am Sycamore Canyon Beginning Bird Walks**, meet at the Sycamore Canyon Trailhead. Every second Saturday of the month (except July and August, rain or recent cancels) 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.

Steve and Chris Huber lead.

September 17 BOLSA CHICA, in Huntington Beach. We will convene in the parking lot of the Whittier Community Center and carpool/caravan, leaving at **7:00 AM sharp**. If you would rather meet at Bolsa Chica, plan to rendezvous in the PCH parking lot at 8:00.

Bolsa Chica is one of the great local birding spots. Ducks, shorebirds, and waders can be found in abundance. Gulls, terns, and pelicans are regular, as are raptors that nest on the bluffs. Bring water, a lunch, a hat, and sunscreen. We will bird Bolsa Chica and possibly nearby spots like Central Park or Harriett Wieder Park.

Steve and Chris Huber lead.

Field trip to San Bernardino Mountains, June 17, 2016

Our first stop was Jenks Lake off of Highway 38. We birded the picnic areas and scared up White headed Woodpecker, Acorn Woodpecker, Red shafted Flicker, Red breasted Sapsucker, Red breasted Nuthatch, White breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Western Wood Peewee, Mountain Chickadee, Purple Finch and assorted regulars.

Then we travelled over to the upper reaches of the Santa Ana River and birded at spots along the highway. Notable sightings included MacGillivray's warbler, Wilson's Warbler, Lawrence's Goldfinch and a family of Clark's Nutcracker. The weather was beautiful and a good time was had by all.



**Next month Larry and Jennifer Schmahl will have a show and tell of their February trip to Belize**

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## Find us online!

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!

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 and 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.

We are a chapter of National Audubon

