

The

# AVOCET

Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society

Fall 2023 · Vol 71 Num 4



Oriental Pied-Hornbills flying over Pulau Ubin, Singapore.

## FALL CLASS:

### WARBLERS 2023

Monday, September 4, 11, & 18  
via Zoom



Learn about the fall migration of our Warblers and how to identify them—

This 3-session online class will get you ready for the fall push of Warblers, from the most common and familiar to the rare and unexpected.

Register at [scvas.org](https://scvas.org)

## DON'T MISS ANOTHER UPDATE

If you haven't received our monthly emailed Avocet Updates, it may be because we don't have your current email address on file. Contact us at [scvas@scvas.org](mailto:scvas@scvas.org) to make sure you don't miss our online-only Avocet Extras!

## Assumptions while birding

*Matthew Dodder, Executive Director*

Unsurprisingly, our summer vacation involved a lot of birding. For the first time in four years my wife and I flew to another country. Somewhat out of practice with air travel—forgotten how to be someplace else, how to pack or deal with the hassle of the TSA. But we endured the cramped 16-hour flight with no problem and were rewarded with three reasonable meals and seven feature length movies between the two of us. Our reintroduction to the travel experience also led us to reflect on birding out-of-country and the assumptions we make when we travel.

Singapore is a flashy, 280-square mile modern nation state. It's not unlike a safer, cleaner, happier, well lighted version of Bladerunner with countless skyscrapers and world class experiences. There are also dozens of lush green spaces, parks in all the right places, and hundreds of eBird hotspots and an Uber-style transportation app that makes travel simple and fast for visitors. With little effort, we were able to go anywhere on the island quickly and cheaply, connect with wifi, operate our eBird Mobile app and never once felt lost or unsafe. Despite the urban environment, Singapore was wild with birds and the only thing that prevented us from finding them was our short stay. Birding culture was active and up to date and supported by scores of YouTube videos highlighting the city's birding attractions, and beautiful websites providing maps and detailed species accounts. We found it easy to bird Singapore.

The Indonesian island of Bali was a very different experience. Its stunning beaches, ancient jungle temples, and emerald paddy fields would seem to be

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excellent birding destinations. But we found the area more challenging to bird without the help of our familiar comforts—parks, preserves, hotspots and an active birding community. For a day or two we attempted to reach what we believed would be productive birding areas, but found getting there more difficult and distances prohibitive. Some areas we had hoped to visit were closed indefinitely such as the Mangrove Information Center and its famous boardwalk, but we made do with an informal fishing trail through the mangrove along the entrance road and had great success. We resorted to improvised birding quite often, and had a blast doing it. Birding sometimes demands a little courage and some trust. We were out of our element in Bali, but not out of our depth.

Our conclusion was this: we are so grateful for the birding resources we have at home but we must not assume they will be available everywhere. It's obvious really, when we travel we must also adjust. We can't expect everything to be the same,

we have to simply relax, trust and enjoy. And so, without much guidance we did just that, and had wonderful experiences in Bali with the Javan Kingfisher, Golden-headed Cisticola, and Chestnut-headed Bee-eater. Can't wait to see them again! ●



Just a few of our fantastic field trip leaders!

## FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

With three young writers in this issue, and stories that relate in one way or another to youth and exploration, this is indeed a celebration of the next generation. SCVAS has always thought about the future and how our organization will be relevant, especially now as we approach our 100th year.

With that in mind we consider our programs, our members, the greater community and our very name. We have concluded the survey that we distributed to members several weeks ago concerning our Chapter's name. We want to thank everyone who responded and appreciate your thoughtful comments. There were many responses as we hoped, both in favor and opposed to a possible name change. As the Board and I continue carefully reviewing all of your comments, we wanted to share that our members are in favor of removing 'Audubon' from the name of our organization, 67% to 33%.

We also heard clearly from our membership that conservation and advocacy are very important. Our next step will be to form a naming committee to create a process for proposing a new name.

## “As we approach our 100th year...”

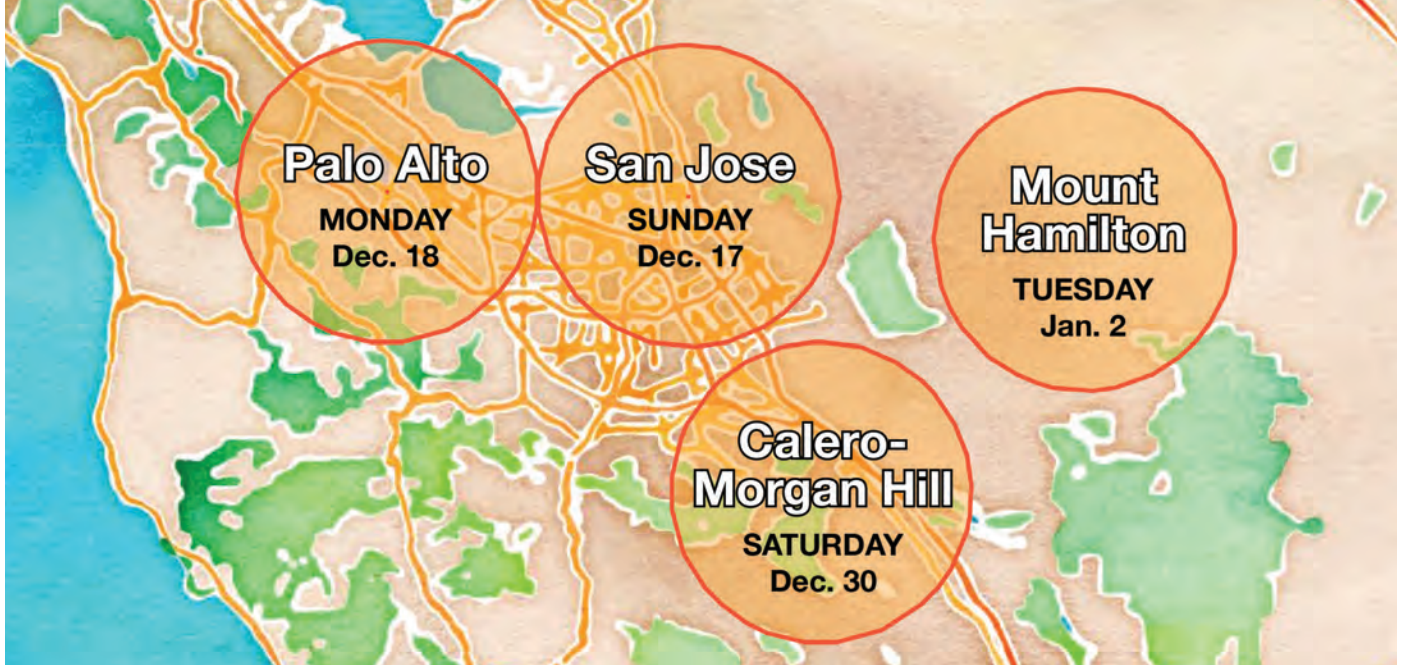
Finally, as a non-profit environmental organization, we, like many other organizations, look for ways to be good environmental stewards. One of the steps we are taking to do this is to transition the AVOCET Quarterly to an all-electronic publication (at least for the foreseeable future).

We are aware some members will find this difficult to adjust to, but it is necessary if we are to reduce our carbon footprint and paper use. Released from the constraints of a 16-page printed newsletter, the electronic release will allow us to explore new concepts for our publication like video content, interactive stories and more. While it will take time to fully embrace all the possibilities of this new format, I trust it will prove worthwhile. The Fall issue will be printed as usual, and the first all-electronic AVOCET will be released in January. We hope you will understand our need to make this change.

**Matthew Dodder**  
Executive Director

**Bill Walker**  
Board President





## Ann Hepenstal **CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT** SCVAS volunteer

You are invited to join this year's **Christmas Bird Count**, an annual bird survey: please see below, save the dates, and send a note to volunteer.

Santa Clara County has four "Count Circles," a defined area in which we conduct the bird survey on a specific day. Within the Count Circle, the area gets broken down into smaller chunks and assigned to teams of birders to conduct the survey and report back with their data. This is an opportunity to:

- ▶ help science: the Christmas Bird Count gives a better understanding of bird populations and trends
- ▶ go birding (house chores that day? No, I can't, because--science!)
- ▶ meet new birding partners and potentially, find an exciting bird

While we need birders who are skilled in bird identification, we also need birders of all skill levels. Since the birders go out in teams of 2 or more, even a beginning birder can take a role. Please see the webpage for more information including the count circle descriptions, dates and contact information on our site: <https://scvas.org/christmas-bird-count>.

If you're new to the Count (or, you want to change teams), **please contact the circle organizer directly** (names below). If you're returning to the same Count and the same Sector/Region, please contact your Sector Coordinator or Team Lead and volunteer. (They will be delighted to hear from you.)

### CBC Descriptions and Contact information:

- ▶ **December 17 (Sunday): San Jose Count Circle**  
<https://scvas.org/cbc-circle-san-jose>  
The San Jose count provides a wide range of habitats with a variety of different species. With urban parks,

waterways, open spaces, bayshore, mudflats and foothills, the San Jose count is home to a lot of birds. We have sectors from Sunnyvale to Alum Rock Park, and Evergreen to Alviso. If you are interested in participating, please contact the compiler Mike Azevedo at [geochelone@aol.com](mailto:geochelone@aol.com).

- ▶ **December 18 (Monday): Palo Alto Count Circle**  
<https://scvas.org/cbc-circle-palo-alto>  
The Palo Alto CBC covers an area ranging from the Bay to the Santa Cruz Mountains and poking into San Mateo County. Since the habitats in this circle range from baylands, to suburbia and city parks, to the foothills—we can find you an interesting assignment. Contact coordinator Ann Hepenstal at [paloaltocbc@gmail.com](mailto:paloaltocbc@gmail.com). (Al Eisner continues as compiler.)
- ▶ **December 30 (Saturday): Calero-Morgan Hill Count Circle**  
<https://scvas.org/cbc-circle-calero-morgan-hill>  
The Calero-Morgan Hill count in south Santa Clara County extends across the valley to foothills in both the Coast and Diablo ranges. It includes several creeks, lakes and wetlands as well as grasslands, chaparral, and oak woodlands. We count in city and county parks, open space preserves, water district reservoirs, and private properties—some not usually open to the public. Annual targets include both eagles, falcons, Burrowing Owl, and a surprising variety of gulls. If you'd like to participate, please contact compiler Rick Herder at [rick.herder@gmail.com](mailto:rick.herder@gmail.com).
- ▶ **January 2 (Tuesday): Mount Hamilton Count Circle**  
<https://scvas.org/cbc-circle-mount-hamilton>  
Henry Coe State Park... Lick Observatory... San Antonio Valley Road... Black Mountain... and sometimes—snow! All of these are found within the Mount Hamilton Count Circle. We usually count ducks, shorebirds, California Quail, sparrows, eagles and Lewis's Woodpeckers. If interested, please contact compiler: Bob Hirt, [bobhirt@aol.com](mailto:bobhirt@aol.com) ●

# WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Matthew Dodder  
Executive Director



## Miracle Moves & Fabulous Fumbles

If you read any of the recent stories concerning the American Ornithological Society's annual checklist supplement, you are aware very few changes to the list will affect Santa Clara County birders. As background, the AOS is the organization that determines which species are found in both North and Central America based on scientific research and expert review. Their supplement records final decisions regarding what changes will be made to the official checklist including the reordering, lumping or splitting of species. The single change that is germane to Santa Clara County is the long-overdue re-lumping of Western Flycatcher. Since 1989, birders have had to contend with Pacific-slope Flycatcher and Cordilleran Flycatcher—two identical looking birds that from a birder's point of view, were hard to identify and impossible to defend, except perhaps by a slightly different vocalization. Banding stations referred to the birds as "Western" Flycatcher long before this decision as differentiating them was difficult. So forget the "Pacific-slope", don't worry about "Cordilleran" and just use **Western Flycatcher** for the time being... it's what many birders were doing already. That is until the AOS changes it's mind again.

Now, on to the current season of birding... By now, many of our wintering Shorebirds have begun to arrive. They begin to show up in July after breeding in the Arctic. **Least** and **Western**

**Sandpipers** are seen commonly along the Bay now, as well as both **Dowitchers** (mercifully easy to identify at this age because of their distinctive plumage). In fact, all the juvenile Shorebirds are truly beautiful this time of year, most notably the young Western Sandpipers with their gleaming red "suspenders" along their backs. The adults' feathers are often worn and dull after breeding while the juveniles are fresh and colorful.

Among these common birds we might find less common ones like **Pectoral** or **Solitary Sandpiper** which show up on our checklist more frequently during the August-September timeframe. Watch for the mid-sized, very golden-colored **Pectoral Sandpiper** in the same areas you might expect to find **Ruff**—along the edges of the New Chicago Marsh, usually not too far from the vegetation. **Solitary Sandpiper** tends to show up in various sheltered ponds or creeks where it behaves very much like a **Lesser Yellowlegs**, but darker overall and with shorter, olive legs.

Fall is a curious time for our **Catharus Thrushes**. **Swainson's** and **Hermit** both move to the south, one species leaving us, the other arriving. From September to October we see an overlap of the species in Santa Clara County, so it's important to watch for the nervous tail and wing flicking of Hermit, or the



Former "Cordilleran" Flycatcher  
Tom Grey



Solitary Sandpiper  
Tom Grey



bespectacled facial pattern of Swainson's. By November, they will all be Hermit Thrushes.

The thing that really makes fall birding exciting for me is seeing the influx of Passerines, particularly Warblers, many of which are uncommon (but regular) visitors in fall as they pass through our area as they make their way further south. We can also count on scores of Yellow Warblers, many of which will be nearly colorless immature birds. The usual stops for these pass-through migrants will provide much-needed fuel for their journeys. Look for willow patches, stands of fennel, and any other areas that attract insects such as compost piles or gardens littered with fallen leaves. These habitats are also good for **Willow Flycatchers** which visit our area this time of year as well. Persimmon trees and flowering eucalyptus are all magnets for insects and the birds that seek them. Species like the thrush-like **Northern Waterthrush**, the shade-loving **MacGillivray's** and more outgoing **Nashville Warblers** are rare, but annual occurrences. Even rarer species show on occasion but it's hard to predict where they will be if at all—**Blackburnian, Blackpoll, Chestnut-sided, Tennessee...** and on and on.

The list of possible Warblers for our county is vast—an astonishing 37 species as of last year and a full half of them are rare. Ulistac Natural Area, Lake Cunningham, Lake Almaden, Vasona Lake Park, Los Gatos Creek Park, and Sunnyvale Baylands Park all provide good habitat for migrant Passerines and would also be good spots to check this fall. Personally, I also plan to watch for the return of the Painted Redstart at Agnews Historic Park. It delighted hundreds of birders last September 2022 and might again...

Very few Warblers spend their winters with us, but as migration ramps up the **Yellow-rumped Warblers** and **Townsend's Warblers** appear as well. In the absence of rarities, we can delight in their arrival. The challenge is to learn their simple call notes which are quite different from each other. A few minutes on Merlin or [allaboutbirds.org](http://allaboutbirds.org) will provide you with examples so when the CBC rolls around you will be able to recognize them by voice.

You might be wondering, how is it that these rare birds end up in our area in the first place... Whether it's a Shorebird or a Warbler, the possible explanations are numerous. One reason has to do with the length of a given species migration. The longer the migration, the easier it is to make a small miscalculation far to the north, which then widens the area in which a bird might accidentally end up. This is especially true for first-winter birds that are making the journey for the first time. There are also weather conditions that push or pull birds away from their normal (scheduled) flight, and given the accelerated rate at which we are seeing the effects of climate change, we can expect unexpected birds to continue showing up more often. Examine the range of our various Warblers and you'll see they are essentially "eastern". But many of their breeding ranges extend far to our north and reach as far as northwestern Canada increasing the chance a few might occasionally reflect their southbound journey westward—bringing them to us.

It would be worth remembering that our world is not only in constant motion, but also in a constant state of change. Seasons, weather, and habitats all respond to change in varied and impressive ways. So too does our understanding. ●



MacGillivray's Warbler  
Tom Grey



Blackburnian Warbler  
Tom Grey



# Conservation Corner

*Shani Kleinhaus*  
Environmental Advocate

## Google’s North Bayshore Master Plan approved in Mountain View

Twelve years ago, in December 2011, the City of Mountain View invited SCVAS to participate in a new planning effort for the North Bayshore area. North Bayshore was then, and remains still, special to our members. The area is adjacent to the Coast Casey wetlands and to Shoreline Park. It includes the egret and heron rookery of Shorebird way. Stevens and Permanente creeks riparian corridors run through it. So we did not wish to see yet another standard office park or mixed use district. Instead, we wanted to ensure that the habitats of North Bayshore and the sensitive species that inhabit them are protected and integrated into the planning process. We wanted to see nature infused into the plan, promoted and encouraged to thrive. We wanted North Bayshore to retain a bit of its wildness as it grows.



Initial work at the Charleston Retention Basin  
Photo by Shani Kleinhaus

In 2012, we partnered with other ecologically-oriented groups, including the Sierra Club Loma Prieta Chapter, Green Foothills, Citizens Committee to Complete the Refuge, and the Santa Clara Valley Chapter of the California Native Plant Society, to advocate together. Our advocates worked with Mountain View staff and City Council members who recognized that biodiversity is as important as sustainability for a resilient future. The honorable Ronit Bryant, Laura Macias, Margaret Abe-Koga and Jack Siegel were true visionaries, and with Mountain View staff, led by Martin Alkire, they carved an



Monarch Butterfly  
Photo by Shani Kleinhaus

unfamiliar path. Many other council members followed in their footsteps and reinforced the principles of the plan and delineated a North Bayshore Specific Plan where people and nature could thrive

We were also fortunate to work with the real estate teams of the companies that inhabit North Bayshore: Google, Intuit, and Microsoft. Intuit, under the leadership of Mike Gulasch (RIP), was the first company in North Bayshore to implement Bird Safe design and green roofs on their campus. At Google, we spend time with the real estate team reading and discussing books (Down by the Bay by Matthew Booker, Win-Win Ecology by Mike Rosenzweig, the Rambunctious Garden by Emma Maris and more). As a result, a better understanding of our respective goals and concerns evolved into a trusted partnership. Google’s real estate team, led by John Igoe, embraced a commitment to nature and ecology that has grown and permeated into every Google development project in our region and beyond.

The North Bayshore Precise Plan, updated and adopted in 2017, embraced bird safe design for new buildings and structures, created a list of native trees and plants of high habitat value for use in landscaping, and established habitat overlay zones (buffers) where development is restricted to protect creeks, wetlands, and the egret rookery.

Fast forward to 2023. Growth in North Bayshore is evident. Intuit, Microsoft and Google built new buildings and improved existing ones. Just as evident are the many oaks and sycamores in the urban forest, California native and habitat enhancing plants in drought-tolerant gardens, restored natural areas along Stevens creek and



the Charleston Retention Basin, and a healthy egret and heron rookery. Monarch and swallowtail butterflies flutter everywhere in North Bayshore. But residential development had yet to expand into North Bayshore.

In 2021, Google initiated their North Bayshore Master Plan with the goal of expanding their campus and creating a mixed use community to accomplish the goals of the North Bayshore Precise Plan. After an extensive and inclusive public process, on June 13, 2023, the City approved Google's Master Plan (a subset of the North bayshore precise Plan) to develop a mixed-use neighborhood in North Bayshore. The plan encompasses additional office buildings and commercial areas as well as 7000 units of housing to create a vibrant community of residents and workers. Google's plan pulls development back from the wetlands, riparian areas and the Bay, and increases density along the busy corridor of Shoreline Boulevard. This plan also adds over 20 acres of parks and open space to North bayshore, including a 9-acre ecological park (the "EcoGem") that would expand and restore habitat between the egret rookery and the Charleston retention Basin. The section of Shorebird Way that is home to the egret rookery will become "Shorebird Wilds," replacing what today is a city street with a 4.5-acre natural park. Google has already expanded and restored habitat along the Charleston retention Basin, and the added open space and parkland provided in the Ecogem and Shorebird Wilds will, altogether, protect the egrets rookery and create a large natural area for birds and pollinators.

Google has a commitment to landscaping with native plants, including milkweed and flower gardens to support monarch butterflies and other pollinators. They will create small and large patches as well as corridors of habitat for pollinating insects and migratory and local birds throughout the new development. Protecting and restoring open space and wildlife habitat as an integral part of urban growth is critically important for climate resilience and the future of both people and birds in our urban landscapes.

Witnessing Google's success at implementing Urban Ecology in North Bayshore, a new organization - GreenSpacesMV - formed in Mountain View. Members of this new group helped advocate for parks and open space, dark sky, native trees and plantings and biodiversity. Last year, we thanked the City Council for making yet another groundbreaking decision in prioritizing Biodiversity in the City's Strategic Plan. The City has started exploring how this priority may be expressed in re-wilding Mountain View's parks, the urban forest, and city infrastructure. The influence of the North Bayshore ecological experiment is spreading!

After a dozen years of engagement and partnership, SCVAS was pleased to join our partner environmental organizations in support of Google's North Bayshore Master Plan. We are fortunate and honored to have worked with inspiring leaders on Mountain View City Council and at Google and are thankful to everyone who worked hard for so long to bring this plan to fruition. As the plan starts to be implemented, we will continue to engage in the process. We hope that it delivers the many expected benefits to people and to the environment and that North Bayshore will continue to serve as a model for bringing nature in, and integrating it into our urban-suburban landscapes. ●

## Sunnyvale adopts the Moffett Park Specific Plan (MPSP)

SCVAS has also engaged as a stakeholder in the planning effort for Sunnyvale's Moffett Park, which was adopted by the City Council in July 2023. In the footsteps of the 2017 North Bayshore Precise plan, the MPSP envisions an "ecological innovation district" with policies that require bird safe design and dark sky measures, provide buffers from creeks and bay wetlands and increase tree canopy and habitat. This plan accommodates an addition of 10-million square feet of office (60,000 employees) and 20,000 housing units (to house 42,000 new residents) in this small area by the bay.

Due to the Moffett Park Specific Plan (MPSP) area's proximity to San Francisco Bay, the scope of development in the Plan area raises significant concerns about impacts on wildlife, shoreline ecosystems and open space resources, as well as community resilience to risks associated with sea level and (potentially contaminated) groundwater rise. We are also concerned with the need to expand infrastructure that may be needed to provide stormwater infrastructure, sewage treatment and transportation and other services to support the increased population of Moffett Park.

The Moffett Park Specific Plan will transform the South Bay Region, and will test the ability of cities along the bay to significantly increase density and at the same time, to retain livability, sustainability and ecological design. ●



Boardwalk at Charleston Retention Basin  
Photo by Shani Kleinhaus



# Field Notes

Please report rarities to  
pdunten@gmail.com

*Pete Dunten*

Santa Clara County eBird Reviewer

## Migration and Summer Visitors

An unseasonal **Snow Goose** turned up at Coast Casey Forebay on 23 Jun (MCa) and has remained in the area into July. A **Common Nighthawk** heard 'peenting' over Mountain View on 17 Jun was only the 4th county record (MDo). All have been in June. Four **Red Knots** on the remnant of the A10/A11 levee in Alviso on 21 May were also a nice find (MDo). The Knots don't occur every spring. A **Pectoral Sandpiper** was at the edge of a seasonal pond along San Antonio Valley Rd on 27 Apr (CT, WB, RNe). This was our 2nd spring record – spring migration from South America is predominantly via the Central flyway. A Solitary Sandpiper was at Lake Cunningham on 6 May (RJ, MMR, NM), the second of the spring. Solitary Sandpipers are more common in the spring than the fall, by about 3-to-1. As happened last summer, a **Black Tern** has chosen to remain in the area after arriving in mid-May. The first report was on 13 May from Shoreline Lake (COv). The tern started showing signs of body molt into its non-breeding plumage in photos taken on 8 Jul (KF, GL). Sightings have also come from Emily Renzel Wetlands to the west and the southeast corner of pond A3W to the east, making it difficult to know if all reports during the period are of the same individual. The A3W sightings, on 14 May (AHu,LBI) and 9 Jul (EvM), may have been of a second tern. **Least Terns** typically stage in the south bay before migrating south but are rarely seen during spring migration. One seen over Alviso pond A10 on 21 May (MDo) and again on 24 May (COv) was a notable find. A **Northern Parula**, a late spring stray from the east, was a one-day wonder on 23 Jun at the Gold St seasonal ponds in Alviso (RJ, MJM). And rounding out the birds typically found further east, an **Indigo Bunting** was heard singing at Shannon Valley OSP on 21 May (JPa) and subsequently sighted on multiple dates through 28 May (m. ob.).

## Nesting Season

**Eared Grebes** took advantage of the flooding of Crittenden Marsh to build nests and raise young. The young take refuge on the backs of their parents, much to the delight of photographers. Conditions for nesting don't occur often – the last opportunities were in 2017 and before that in 1993. On



Indigo Bunting  
*Pingang Wang*



Eared Grebes  
*Julio Mulero*



Yellow-breasted Chat  
*John Scharpen*



22 Jun the colony included 24 nests (WGB). A pair of **Western Gulls** were noted making use of a blind for their nest on pond A3W on 3 Jun (MJM). Western Gulls are rare in the county in summer. The pair of **Bald Eagles** at Felt Lake faced some adversity after their old nest came down in a wind storm this spring. By Jun 3 they had built a much smaller new nest in the still-standing part of their favored tree and had two young in the nest. The adults were adding sticks to the nest while it was in use (PDU). A more remarkable pair of Bald Eagles near J Grant CP carried two young Red-tailed Hawks to their nest and adopted them, feeding both the hawks and their single eaglet (fide TD in the SF Chronicle and KGo in Bay Nature). Photos show one of the Red-tails being brought to the nest on 20 May. In the first week of June one of the adult eagles killed the smaller of the two adopted hawks. The second hawk fledged in the first week of July but perished after the eagles stopped feeding it. The Bay Nature story references a study conducted between 1987 – 1991 in Washington state that found 3 instances where Bald Eagle pairs raised Red-tailed Hawks in addition to their own young (J. Raptor Res. 27(2):126-127). The frequency of adoptions (3 of 662 broods) was astonishingly high.

**Purple Martins** formerly nested at Copernicus Peak on Mt Hamilton, 'formerly' being in the late 1800's. This spring four were seen inspecting telephone poles on the peak on 13 May (MMR, RJ). Subsequent sightings have been of seven martins on 11 Jun, five at the cell towers on the peak on 12 Jun and one on 2 Jul (all EGA). There's no reason the martins shouldn't be successful nesting, even after an absence spanning over 120 years. **Yellow-breasted Chats** were noted at five locations this spring. The first was at J Grant CP on 26 Apr (JEI), with additional reports through 12 May (m. ob.). The second was at Ulistac NA between 9 – 11 May (EFI). The third was a backyard bird present for a day on 9 May in a neighborhood between SJ State and Coyote Creek in San Jose (MJ). The fourth was also reported on only one day, along Uvas Creek in Gilroy on 13 May (LON). Finally, a pair have nested at Alum Rock Park, with the first sighting on 31 May (TKP). One of the pair was photographed carrying insects on 4 Jun (TC), 10 Jun (LY) and 13 Jun (TO). Consistent with their secretive habits, most reports have been of a single bird, with two noted on 12 Jun (KE, THo, KI) and 20 Jun (AHu).

**Observers** Laurel Balyeat (LBI), Wendy Beers (WB), Bill Bousman (WGB), Marty Casey (MCA), Tom Cho (TC), Matthew Dodder (MDO), Tara Duggan (TD), Pete Dunten (PDU), Kathy Eder (KE), Janet Ellis (JEI), Erica Fleniken (EFI), Kent Forward (KF), Elinor Gates (EGA), Kate Golden (KGO), Tim Hoo (THo), Alden Hughes (AHu), Kumiko Iwashita (KI), Richard Jeffers (RJ), Melissa Johnson (MJ), Garrett Lau (GL), Nateri Madavan (NM), Mike Mammoser (MJM), Eve Meier (EVM), Rich Nicholson (RNC), Tom Olson (TO), Leo O'Neill (LON), Chris Overington (COV), Janna Pauser (JPA), Tracy K Pham (TKP), Mike Rogers (MMR), Christina Tarr (CT), Loni Ye (LY) ●



Photo by Matthew Dodder

Matthew Dodder  
Quiz Master

## TRACK & FEATHER

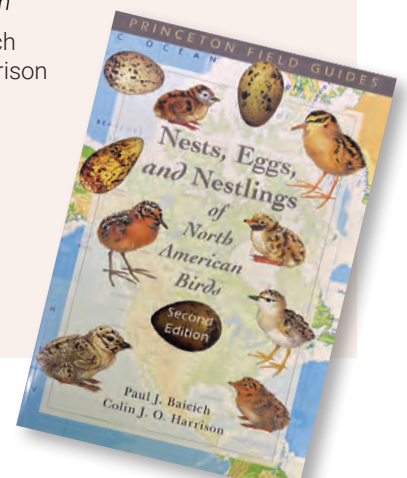
When a Black-chinned Hummingbird built her nest along the creek trail at McClellan Ranch I noticed how different it was from the occasional Anna's Hummingbird nest I'd seen in the past. The structure was more flaxen than the Anna's nest, which is often grayish and includes bits of pale green lichen. The Black-chin instead chose small golden fibers from cottonwoods or the undersides of sycamore leaves glued together with spider web. The perfect cup was positioned on a downward oriented branch as expected and looked exactly like teased felt. Being soft and flexible, the nest was able to stretch easily and accommodate two growing chicks. In one photo, dark fecal pellets are visible on the neighboring leaves, presumably ejected by the female as she sat in the nest. Sadly, the nest eventually failed and the chicks were likely taken by a predator before they could fledge, but I have hope the species will nest again at our preserve. Seeing as it so late in the season and a double brood seems unlikely—so we will have to wait until spring.

### Recommended reading:

#### **Princeton Field Guides**

*Nests, Eggs, and Nestlings of North American Birds, 2nd Edition*

by Paul J. Baicich  
& Colin J.O. Harrison



# Friends of SCVAS



## Gifts received February – April 2023

### GOLDEN EAGLE

\$1,000 - 4,999

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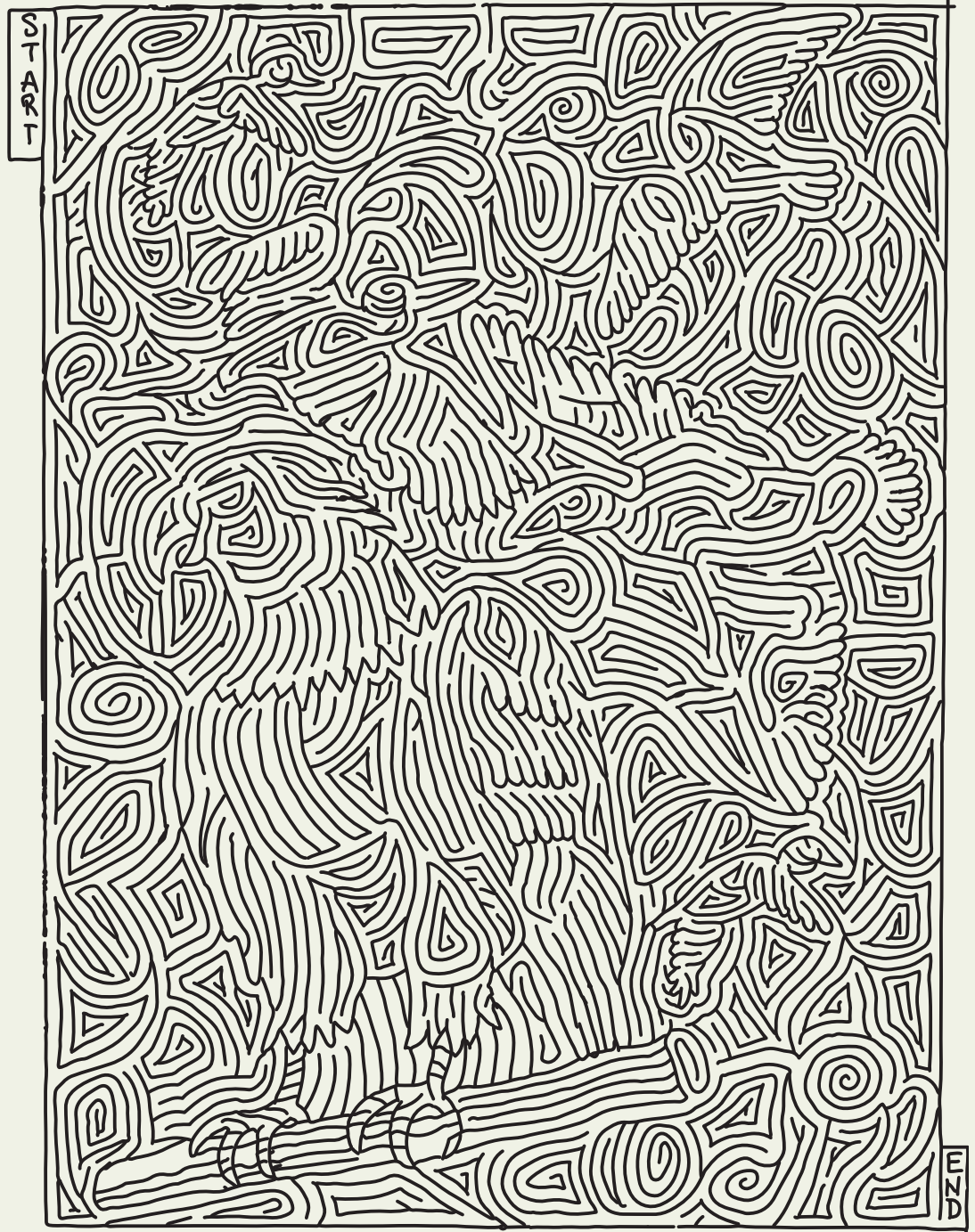
Photos L to R:

Golden Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, Burrowing Owl,  
American Avocet, and California Quail by Tom Grey



# Amazing Birds

This intricate design was created by Christopher Klein, a frequent participant on our North Coyote Valley bird surveys. He has drawn detailed mazes like this for decades and often creates them for special events like birthdays, anniversaries and fundraisers. He submitted the work as part of the Birdcasso team during the 2023 Birdathon earlier this year. Not surprisingly, he has embedded several birds within the design. See if you can find them all. Enjoy!



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Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society  
is very pleased to announce our  
partnership with the  
Young Birders Club!

This group, created by Allison Cheng and Valerie Wong, is intended to fulfill a much needed role in our community: a place where birders still in school can meet their peers, develop their birding skills, and explore leadership and volunteer opportunities. Keep an eye out for the Young Birders Club on our calendar, and please help us spread the word about this awesome club with the budding naturalists in your life! The Young Birders Club is open to birders age 10 to 21, but parents and younger siblings are welcome to join in! For details, visit [scvas.org/ybc](http://scvas.org/ybc) ●



# Why We Need a By Co-leads Valerie Wong and Allison Cheng YOUNG BIRDERS CLUB

As young birders, we've always cared deeply about the environment and the birding community. We both discovered a passion for birding and wildlife photography in high school, spending as much time as possible in nature with the birds around us. Naturally, we quickly became involved in the local birding community as well, volunteering in organizations like SCVAS and SFBBO. But although we became involved in BioBlitzes, SCVAS field trips, and environmental volunteering, we wanted more opportunities for young birders in particular to contribute to the birding community and connect with like-minded youth. Because of this, we realized that there needed to be a dedicated space in the Bay Area for young birders to share their love for birds. And so, the Young Birders Club was born.

We created the Young Birders Club to both raise awareness about the natural world and to promote leadership, civics, and creativity—assets that we ourselves wanted outlets to express as early teenagers. We wanted to create not only a hobby, but a community by young birders, for young birders, that had been missing from our lives—one where we could encourage the interests of children and create a group enhanced by the talents of each individual.

In the future, we hope to live out the SCVAS values of "birding, education, and conservation" in multiple ways. First, we aim to create experiences that truly display the unique beauty of nature and the joy of birding. By providing an inclusive, like-minded community of young

birders, we hope to deepen their knowledge, interest, and passion for birds and the environment. Second, we will ensure that young birders will not only have the opportunity to learn about the avian world, but also be allowed to educate others about their areas of passion. Whether young birders are passionate about bird identification, wildlife biology, or field sketching, we will encourage them to grow their passions and share them with others. Nobody knows everything, but everyone has something unique they can share with others. Lastly, we hope to promote conservation and care for the environment by providing young birders opportunities in community science, habitat restoration, and outreach activities. What better way is there to protect our environment than to inspire the next generation to create change? By embodying these pillars, we hope to inspire the future of birding by fostering a love for both birding and conservation.

As the younger generation, we have the unique power to bring new perspectives, ideas and innovation to the birding world. In the past, we've seen young birders exhibit amazing creativity by combining their passions for music, video production, and even origami with birds to give back to the birding community. In the future, we aim to foster this creativity and initiative by creating opportunities that allow the talents of young birders to flourish. Above all, we hope to provide a safe community where the future stewards of our planet can reach their fullest potential. ●



# The Birds & Birders of Santa Fe, New Mexico

By Yathir, Age 9

**We met Yathir and his father at an SCVAS Baylands drop-in event. He told me how much he had been enjoying our field trips and was clearly excited about birding. His new passion had been sparked by the film "Big Year" as well as a recent trip to New Mexico. He asked me if he could submit a story for the Avocet about his trip to the Santa Fe Randall Davey Audubon. Of course, we welcomed his submission. The following highlights of the experience are in his own words.**

The gravel moaned and groaned as the tires of our rental GMC charged up the hilly road. Baby fir trees jetted up from the moist, red ground. The parking lot was unpaved and the GMC practically demolished any loose rocks. Your nostrils immediately grasped the fresh mountain air. Black-throated Hummingbirds buzzed around feeders. Pine Siskins were chirping all around. This was a bird hotspot!

We met a person who worked at the society, and told us that the Bear Canyon Trail was good for Warblers. The red dirt and baby Aspen trees lining the trail made the trail a beautiful sight to see. We met a elementary school teacher who was a birder, and she informed us about a great spotting, a Black-headed Grosbeak sitting on a bush. Orange and black, the Black-headed Grosbeak is a wonderful bird. Sadly, the bird flew off before I could look through binoculars or snap a shot. Curious about an unusual bird noise, we pulled out Merlin Bird ID to recognize it. "Wow!" I exclaimed. It was a Summer Tanager! The teacher and we were amazed.

We continued to follow the red, winding trail, keeping an eye out for a still-singing Western Tanager, when the teacher stopped us at a large tree. "This is a Ponderosa Pine," she explained. She told us how the swirling brown bark of this tree smells like cookies. We took turns taking in whiffs of the tree. As she had explained,

the faint scent of cookies lingered around the large tree. We could see a tiny silhouette of a bird moving around in the tree. We suspected this was the Tanager.

Soon we came across a slimy, muddy creek. A wooden sign posted on a fir tree warned us that the trail was small, unkept, and mountainous. We decided we could head a little further, with tall, lush green grass growing on either side of the 'trail' (if that's what we could even call it at that point). Soon our choice paid off. A Grace's Warbler was dancing in the trees. Its call started and peaked over and over again. Although its yellow and gray were hard to distinguish, it still was a beautiful bird.

My attention quickly turned to a Mountain Chickadee that was hopping in and around a beaver's nest. We quickly got a video of the bird and studied its behavior. I suspected it had a nest nearby. Satisfied with our sightings so far, we turned back to the muddy trail to lead the way. We walked along the trail when a colorful figure in a tree stopped me (and my dazed eye). A Western Tanager.

I started to panic that the bird might fly away. I wanted to enjoy the dazzling hues of this bird...At this point we watched the bird for a bit, and then left. The trail continued to wind with switchbacks, down the hill.

The cold metal of the gift shop door handle kissed my hand. We engaged in a conversation with the store manager. He told us that he has been birding for more than 40 years and that he and his friend would pick a US birding hotspot every year to go to. Toledo for the Warblers as well as Tucson, Miami, and Alaska. Both him and his stories were amazing, but it was time to go now. We got back in the same GMC, and drove down the same cliffside. **But one thing wasn't the same. My love for birds.** ●



Western Tanager  
Photo by Yathir.





# Red Dress

Craig Edgerton,  
SCVAS volunteer and story teller

“Do you realize that  
you can find  
birds anywhere  
in the world, so  
you can be a birder  
wherever you go?  
You can be a birder  
the rest of your life.”

On June 10, 2021, I had one of the most rewarding experiences I have had as an OSA docent. Rick and I were teaching a beginner’s birding class at the newly acquired North Coyote Valley Conservation Area.

As I began my part of the introduction, explaining what to expect for the day, I noticed a young girl, maybe 9 or 10, wearing a red dress and hugging close to her mom. Over the years I have developed a habit of picking out youngsters in my group and attempting to directly interact with them and get them involved in whatever the subject was. It is often a challenge as they are not sure who this man is talking directly to them, and they are unprepared for someone to treat them as an adult. This little girl was no different.

I asked her directly if she had ever been birding and she just sheepishly looked down and hid behind her mom, saying nothing. I recognized the bashfulness and turned my attention away from her as I continued my talk.

A few minutes later, at the first stop to point out a Mourning Dove, I again tried to engage her and, again, she bowed her head, saying nothing, but not going behind her mom this time.

Progress! It was a small step forward, but I immediately recognized a little thaw and suspected that I might be starting to build a modicum of trust.

The main aspect of this class was to teach the attendees how to use the Merlin app to help them identify species. About 20 minutes into the walk, we spotted 2 birds in the top of a dead Valley Oak tree. I had all the folks go through the steps on Merlin to see if they could ID the bird using the app. I kept an eye on the little girl to see if she was participating with her parents, and she was.

I asked her directly if she was able to find them on the app. She looked up at her mom, intuitively asking for permission to answer this stranger, and her mom nodded in the affirmative. The little girl’s answer was an almost imperceptible “yes”. I was making progress. I got a verbal response and a slight spark of interest.

At the next stop, I noticed she was actively engaged in using the app with her parent’s guidance. The painfully shy little one was now actively participating so I continued to engage her and ask questions.



"Were you able to find the bird using the app?" I asked.

"Yes, it is a House Finch" she replied.

"Terrific! Were you able to go through all the steps on the app to get the answer?" I inquired further.

"I needed some help from my mom, but we did do all the steps" she proudly exclaimed.

"Good, let's see if you can do the next one by yourself" I encouraged.

About that time a Turkey Vulture flew over, knowing that was a pretty easy bird to ID. I looked at her and nodded in silence to see if she could find it on the app by herself. She glanced up at her mom, silently asking permission to do it by herself and her mom smiled and said "yes".

When she identified the bird, she called out "Turkey Vulture!" and the rest of the group acknowledged her success with a round of applause.

She continued to use the app for the rest of the trip and was engaging and enjoying the birding adventure. As we neared the end of the class, I had parked my bicycle about 200 yards from where the attendees had parked their cars. As I wished them all well and hoped they would become dedicated birders, I rode my bike off towards home and they continued their walk to their cars.

Just as I passed the parked cars, I had to stop and make a minor repair to my bicycle seat. As I finished, I heard a small voice call "Mister, mister". I looked around and the little girl in the red dress had run ahead of the others by herself, wanting to thank me for a wonderful day learning about birds. My docent training kicked in and I immediately asked what she learned that day.

She thought for a split second before replying: "Birds are AWESOME!" as she twirled around in a little pirouette dance with her arms held high.

I said, "Do you realize that you can find birds anywhere in the world, so you can be a birder wherever you go? You can be a birder the rest of your life."

"But there aren't birds in space, are there? I'm going to be an astronaut so can I see birds in space?" She retorted.

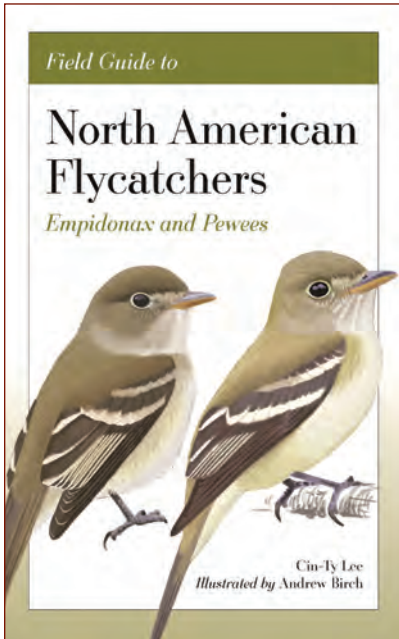
"You are correct, there are no birds in space, so you got me there. I hope you get to become an astronaut and get to space someday. I'm glad you came today and keep learning more about birds," I encouraged.

"Thanks again, mister. Birds are really fun!"

And with that, I rode home in a state of elation, barely feeling the bicycle wheels touching the ground! ●







# THE BIRDER'S BOOKSHELF

*Matthew Dodder*  
Avid book collector

## Field Guide to North American Flycatchers Empidonax and Pewees

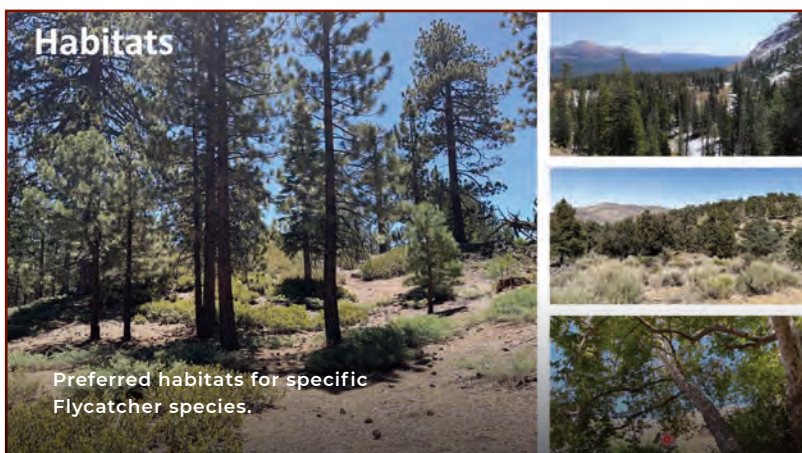
By **Cin-Ty Lee**, Illustrated by **Andrew Birch**  
\$19.95; 168 pages

In November 2022 Princeton announced it would publish a new field guide dedicated to just two genera of North American Flycatchers. I immediately placed my order. I had long complained there was no Helm Guide styled book available for this difficult group of birds—and there still isn't. This new guide

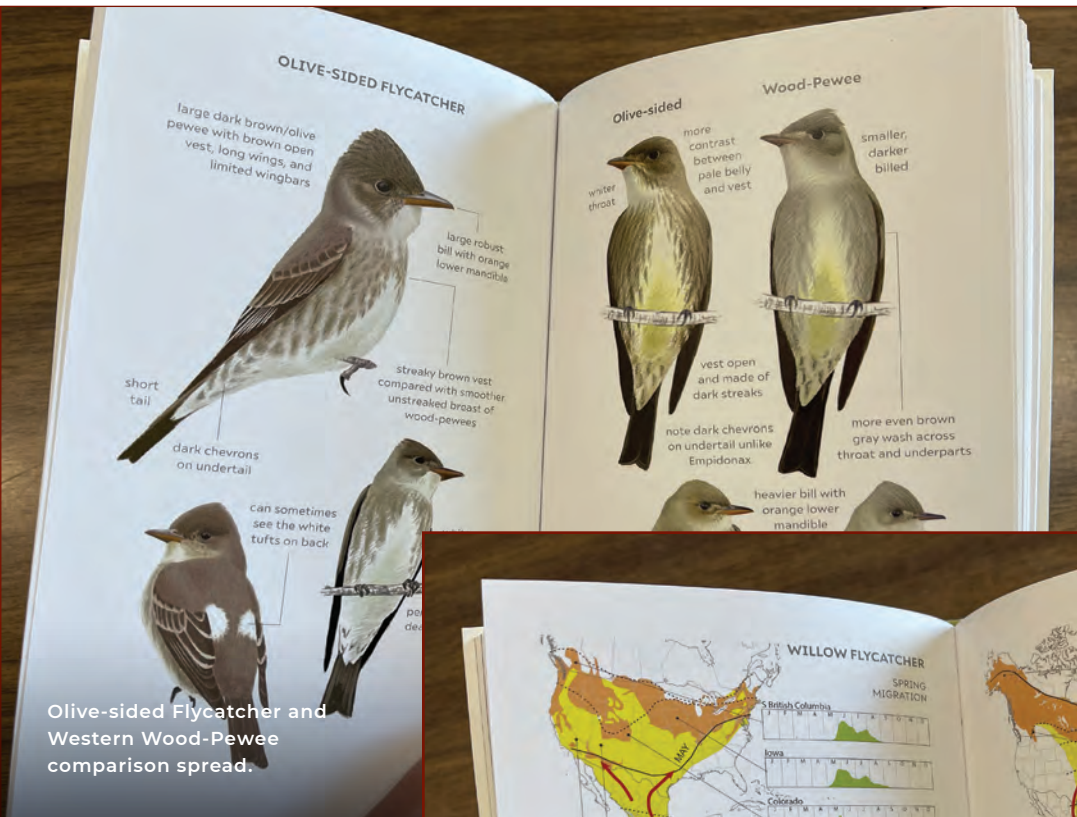
does not address all members of the family found in the world, but wisely focuses only on the members found in the ABA checklist area. A full presentation of all representatives would be a gargantuan undertaking of limited usefulness and likely a target of endless scrutiny from local experts. Still, Lee and Birch have taken on a daunting task and produced a significant work that will enrich our ability to identify the 18 species it covers.

The guide takes a holistic approach to identification, arguing that "identification depends on not one field mark but a combination of field marks." Additionally, birders should "focus

on shape, proportions, and contrasts rather than absolute size, length, and color, which are difficult to judge in the field..." The same could be said about equally challenging groups like Gulls or Shearwaters. Indeed, attention to structure is always important and often underappreciated by field guides, the emphasis being usually on colors, patterns and familiar features such as bill shape. Which brings me to the author-illustrator partnership Lee and Birch have had for years which is crucial to the success of a project like this. This level of detail can only be achieved through the partnering of precise language and observant illustration.

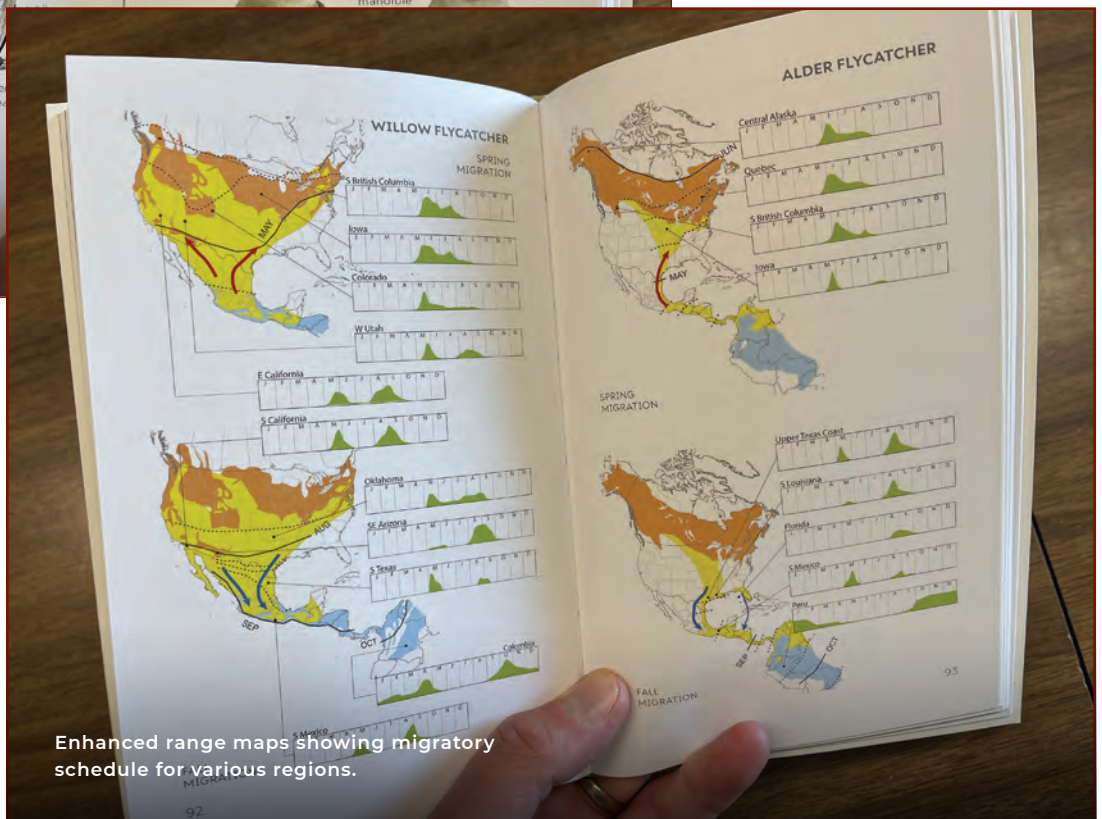






Olive-sided Flycatcher and Western Wood-Pewee comparison spread.

Currently our Nature Shop can not stock these books, but they can be found at your favorite bookseller.



Enhanced range maps showing migratory schedule for various regions.

This successful union of strengths began at UC Berkeley where Lee and Birch met—about the same time I attended school there. Both of them were birders and saw each other's skills brought to the practice of identification. Shortly afterward they began working together on articles for a small audience and later for North American Birds, ABA Birding Magazine, and [surfbirds.com](http://surfbirds.com) covering difficult identifications like Loons, Dowitchers, Pipits, Pewees, Orioles, etc. The combination of their individual expertise brought fuzzy ID topics into sharp focus.

Lee writes succinctly but descriptively, drawing attention to field marks, behavior, habitat and most importantly comparative features that highlight the significance of small differences in combination. Birch interprets these features through rich digital paintings that represent these subtle birds in accurate detail. Interestingly, when they were guests on our recent Speaker Series, Birch said the choice of digital painting was important to the project as frequently they saw the need to revise or adjust

the images for accuracy—something that would have been impossible with traditional watercolor or gouache.

I look forward to absorbing this work, which is still new to me. My first question to the co-authors during the presentation was whether they would follow up with another volume to cover *Myiarchus* (Ash-throated, etc.) and *Tyrannus* (Kingbirds). They smiled and said, yes. This was going to be a three part series and they were already hard at work on the second!

To watch the recent Speaker Series with Cin-Ty Lee and Andrew Birch visit: [youtube.com/watch?v=3t6CA2Akbwc](https://youtube.com/watch?v=3t6CA2Akbwc). ●

# International Travel in the Age of eBird

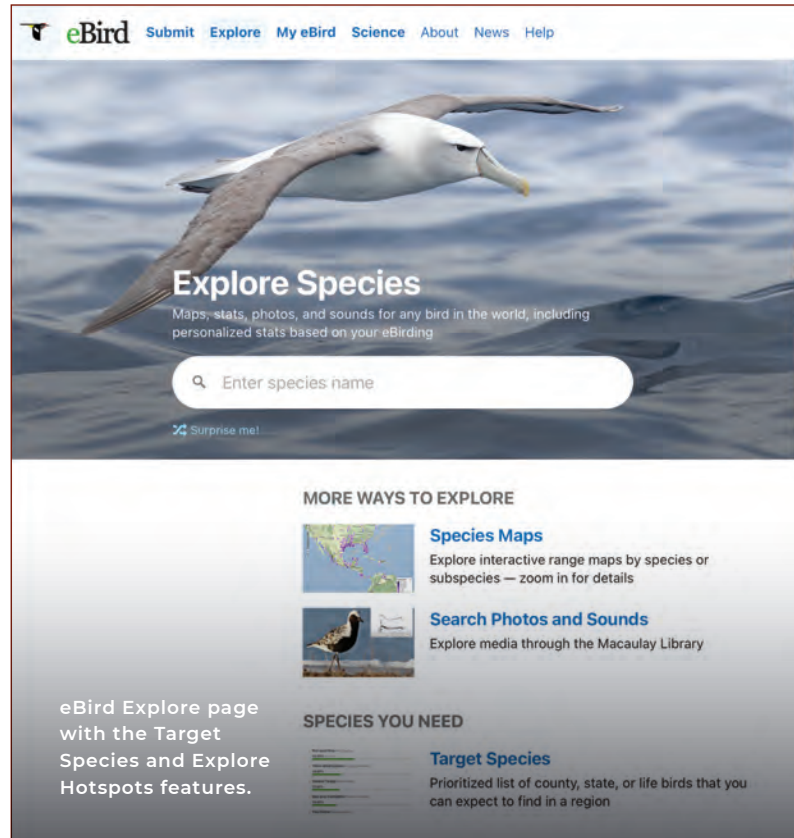
## eBird Explore is an essential pre-trip research tool

In preparation for our 20th anniversary-vacation-celebration in southeast Asia, Cricket and I did a lot of research on the birds we might see. We had not planned on joining a tour or utilizing BirdingPal and so much had changed in the 25 years since I had visited the area, we were at a disadvantage when it came to finding and identifying birds. But we always love a challenge!

What all this meant, though, was we would make mistakes frequently. We'd choose the wrong place to search for birds, we'd fail to anticipate the amount of walking, or the popularity of specific trails. And, we'd probably misidentify birds every day. Oh, well.

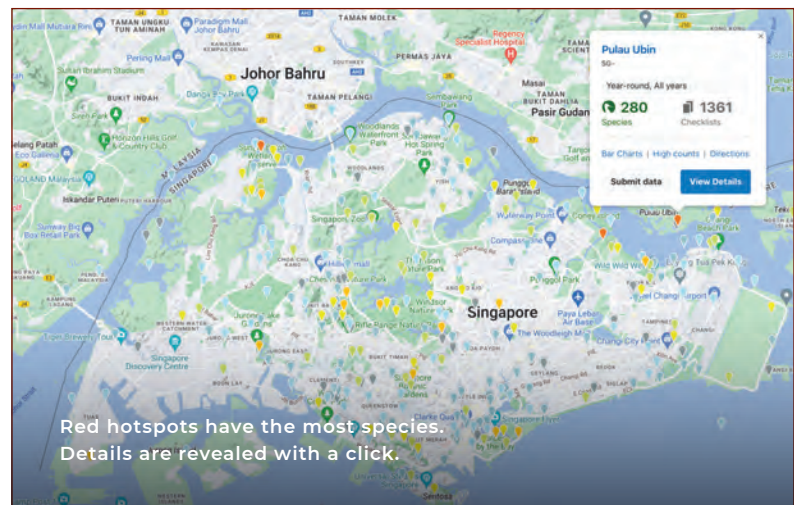
## What to Expect

The first thing we did was locate updated field guides for the trip. While we do most of our research on eBird, there's a special magic about field guides that is hard to resist. Next, we used the Explore page's "Target Species" feature on the eBird website to create lists for both Singapore and Bali. To do that, we specified a July timeframe for each island to eliminate the species unlikely to be encountered and leave only the birds we would need for our Singapore or Bali "Year lists." Configuring the search this way produced all the species found during the month of July in descending order (most common to least). It worked very well. In fact, the first birds we spotted at the Changi Airport in Singapore matched that list exactly... As a separate exercise, I created a list that limited the results to only the lifers I needed for my list; eliminating the species I had seen on my previous trip in 1998. Using these lists, we quickly got a sense of what was likely to be found, which ones would be lifers, and could study photographs, sound recordings and videos—all on eBird's website.

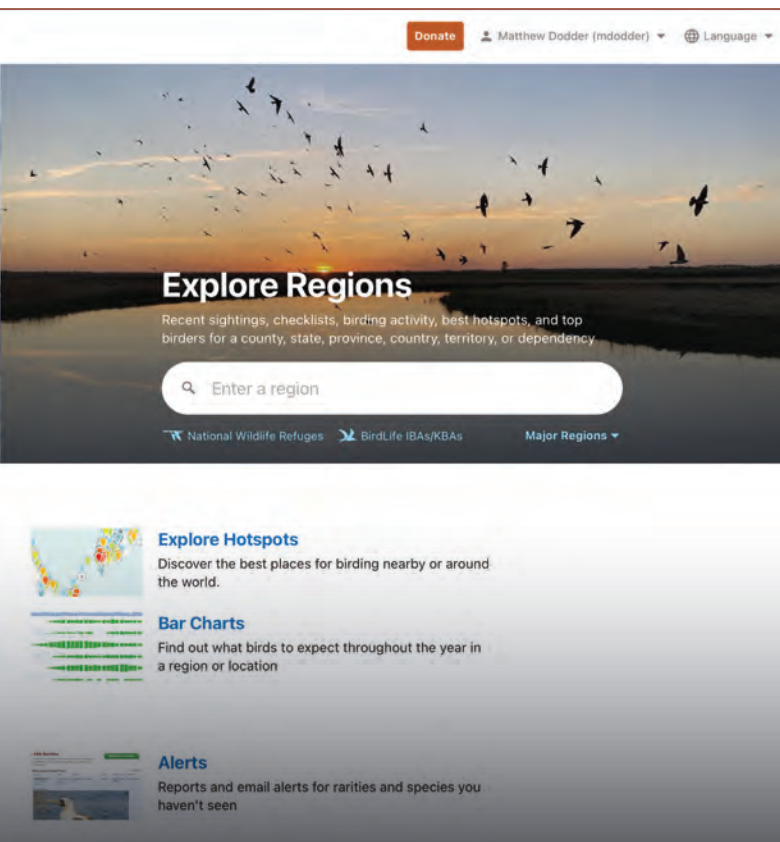


## Where to Look

Next we researched the all-important question of where to look for these birds. "Species Maps" certainly helped us and gave us an idea how widespread each species was. We could see which reports of Oriental Pied-Hornbill were very recent, and which were historic... We could read helpful details like "found easily near the boat dock" or "seen from viewing deck 2". But the real strength of the platform came from the "Explore Hotspots" feature. Zooming into the map of the islands revealed hundreds of markers, some pale blue or green, others vibrant yellow, orange or red. The orange and red "hot spots" indicated high species counts for that area. That was where we chose to focus our efforts. Clicking on any of the hotspots brought up a panel that allowed us to view bar charts, details about the location, and even recent checklists or photos from other birders. This level of detail enabled us to prepare for our trip like never before, and plan our birding itinerary.







ID would be able to make the connection... Alas, it could not. I do enjoy the feature when it works, but only to alert me about the possible presence of a species which I can then search for in the canopy and underbrush. It certainly would have been helpful to have that extra help in the rainforest where the birds were vocal but mostly invisible. There's much more to be said about the responsible use of this technology—perhaps in a future story.

## How it ended

Ultimately, the success of our self-organized trip rests on whether we had fun or not. Simply put, yes. It was a huge success on that front. We were able to navigate the islands, find hotspots, review bar charts, and even target specific species. Without the structure of a tour, we moved at our own pace and came away with more than 100 species. A modest list, but among the spoils were memorable looks at Blue-winged Pitta, Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker, Lineated Barbet, Greater Racket-tailed Drongo, Stork-billed Kingfisher and our dream bird, the Oriental Pied-Hornbill—a bird I will certainly never forget! ●



## What should have worked... but didn't

I have great hope for the future of Merlin Sound ID, but unfortunately, it let us down this time. Despite having downloaded the Bird Packs for both Singapore and Bali, which theoretically should have informed the Merlin app of the local birds, it failed to work even once. It became almost comical when we were able to identify birds by sound that the app could not recognize—Olive-backed Sunbird, White-crested Laughingthrush, and Yellow-vented Bulbul to name just three. To be fair, the artificial intelligence (AI) needed to identify sounds or images is only as healthy as the source data it is fed. In the absence of correctly identified observations, the AI lacks the source materials it needs to learn. To that point, we saw many fewer checklists in these two areas which means very few sound files for Merlin's AI to work with. One would think though, that with the combination of checklists and sound files, Sound



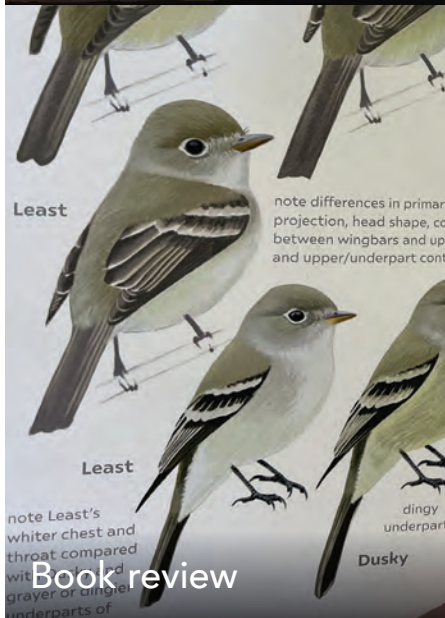
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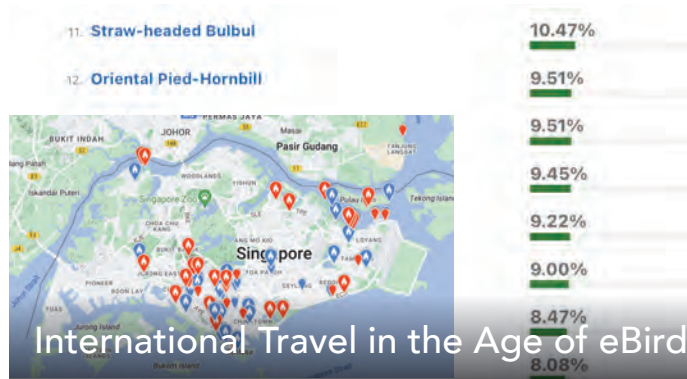


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