

Sketches

SUMMER 2018 • VOLUME 69 • NUMBER 10

SAN DIEGO AUDUBON

Otay Valley Regional Park

From Bushtits to Ospreys: A Birding Paradise in the South Bay Community



American Kestrel by Mick Thompson/Eastside Audubon

Beyond Silverdome

PART II



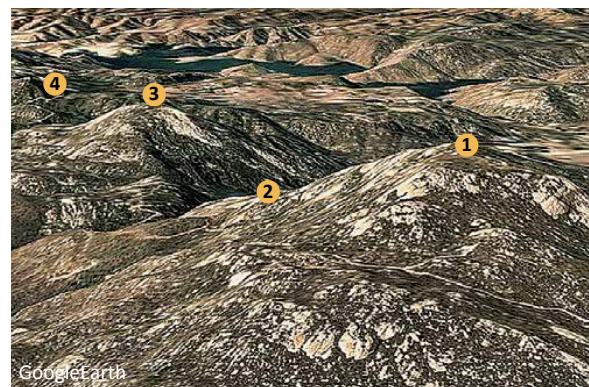
Above: The east face of Silverdome broods in the late afternoon shadows as the valley before it rises towards the western slope of Wiedenhoff (shown in foreground to left). The blue dots on satellite image (left) show the approximate locations where photos were taken. The numbers in yellow dots: 1) Wiedenhoff peak; 2) Wiedenhoff dome; 3) Silverdome; 4) Rudy's View and 5) Observation Deck. The corresponding points, in view from southeast, are shown in satellite image below.

When viewed from space via Google Earth, or simply from multiple vantage points along the circuitous 11+ mile El Capitan Open Space Trail, the dramatic topographic features of Silverwood with intersecting ridges, sculpted valleys, gorges, and two distinctive mountains reveal a landscape that defies the delineations of dryly technical plot plans. It is a living landscape, an expansion of the original Silverwood dream that creates opportunities for conservation, research and sheer inspiration.

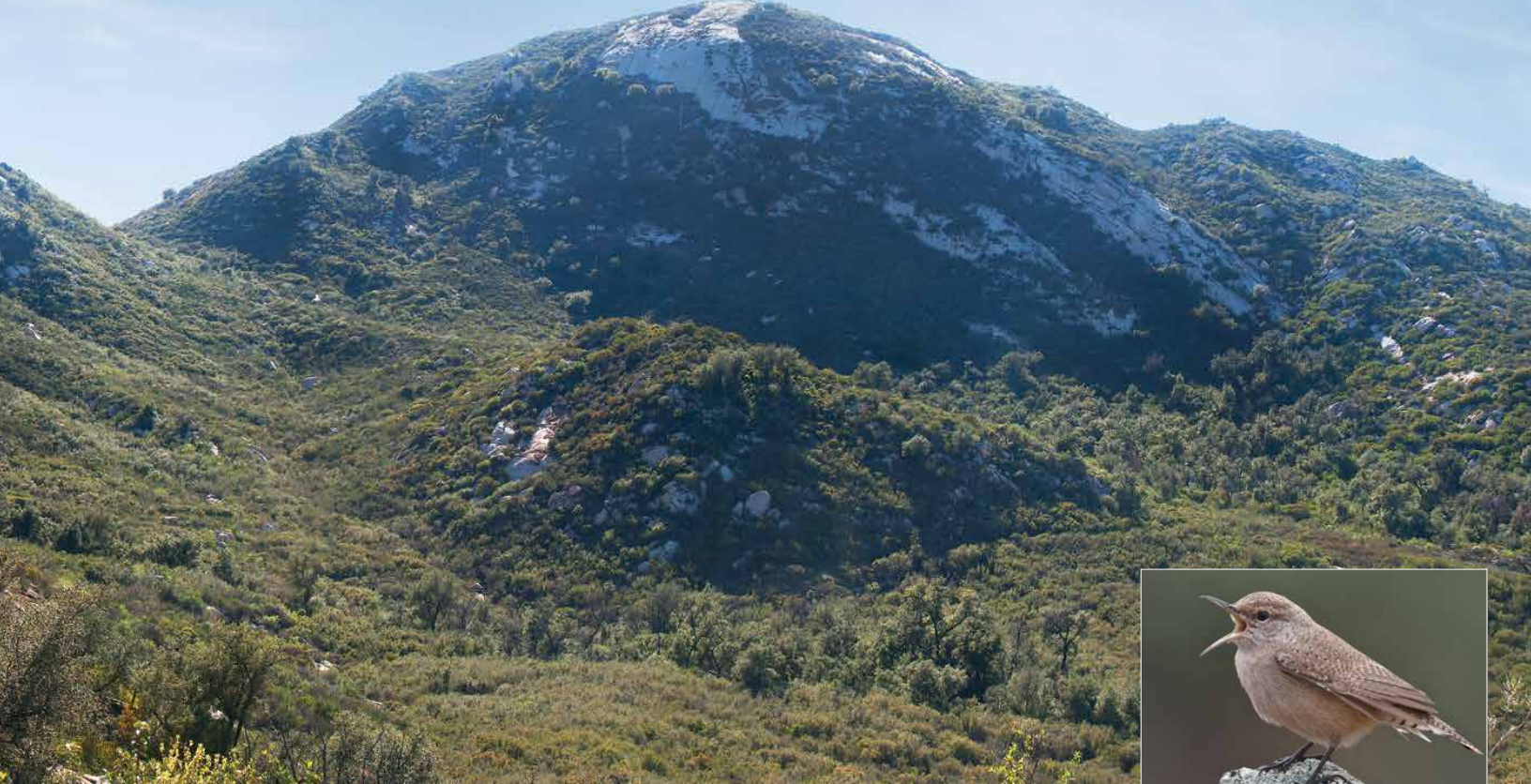
Though officially trailless, this eastern section of Silverwood is still vulnerable via the access points used to take the photos in this article to unwanted incursions by overly adventuresome hikers, illegal wildlife or plant collectors, and even occasional hunters. San Diego Audubon's task of protecting our sanctuary is not an easy one, but is one taken very seriously. The possibility of aerial drone surveys to disclose human intrusion, invasive plants and feral animals, as well as provide systematic visual surveillance that would show changes over time, is potentially an important new level of observation. The use of "camera traps" to monitor the presence of Mountain Lions, Mule Deer, Bobcats and other larger species might be considered. Occasional well-planned and low impact bio-surveys by trained naturalists would yield valuable data. Our indefatigable resident manager Phil Lambert keeps extensive records on species sightings, but a high proportion of that information is gathered within the trail system.

A cautious, "do no harm" approach is mandated, and the clear preference is to leave the trailless parts of Silverwood undisturbed as much as possible. As remote-sensing imagery continues to become more sophisticated and the resolution better detailed, it has the potential to yield valuable data without touching a single twig or overturning a single stone. *Please remember, "trailless" means "do not enter".*

Silverwood is a sanctuary developed over a half-century through the dedicated efforts and significant investments of many San Diego Audubon members. If your curiosity about this special landscape has been piqued, we invite you out to Silverwood before the summer heat – and encourage you, if you're up to it – to climb the trail to Rudy's View to ponder what lies beyond.



PART II



(Below and right) The familiar live oak grove that shades the Silverwood Observation Center is a tiny fraction of the large stands of oak that have long thrived in the downslope drainage that rims our two mountains. While there are signs of distress from fire, drought, and various wood-boring beetles, many trees currently show robust new growth and an ample harvest of acorns.



ROCK WREN BY KAREN STRAUS



MOUNTAIN MAHOGANY BY GERRY TIETJE



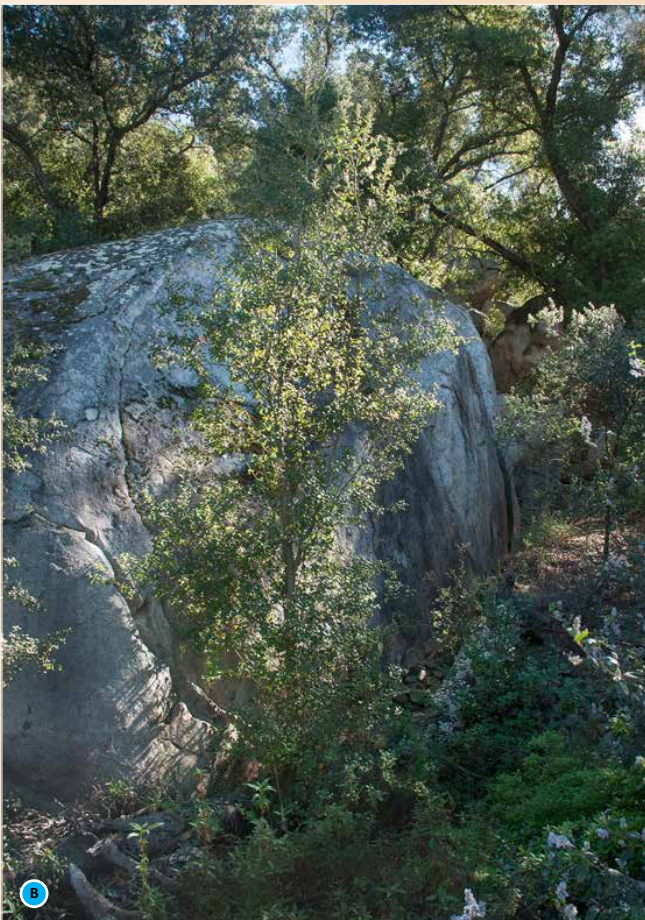
COSTA'S HUMMINGBIRD BY ED HENRY



GRANITE SPINY LIZARD BY KAREN STRAUS



B



B



B KAREN STRAUS

The Cedar Fire destroyed many structures along the northern flank of Wiedenhoff, including two that are very near a parcel SDAS recently acquired. The one shown to left is the Sloan property where the long-time Silverwood manager Frank Gander lived for several years.



Scrub Oak with acorns

The Nature of Silverwood by Phil Pryde, PhD

Phil Pryde is author of the recently revised 5th edition of San Diego: An Introduction to the Region

The nature of any area (its natural history) can be likened to a great symphony orchestra, as both are complex entities made up of many different components, each of which plays its own part, but which in combination produce a magnificent and inspiring composition. The foundation of Silverwood's natural orchestra is its bedrock component. The ubiquitous boulders that visitors see on the surrounding mountainsides are a form of very hard granitic rock, which in this area are termed Chiquito Peak Monzogranite. The taller mountains in the easternmost portion of Silverwood are a slightly different type of granitic rock called tonalite. They are all part of the Peninsular Ranges Batholith, formed by ancient extrusions of molten material from deep within

the earth. The maximum elevation on Silverwood (3,177 feet) is the summit of the sanctuary's highest mountain, which we called Wiedenhoff Peak after the family (Max Wiedenhoff and his wife) who sold the property to San Diego Audubon in 1990.

Fault lines have also played a major role, particularly movements along the Elsinore Fault which account for the steep eastern slopes of the Laguna Mountains. With time, these tectonic forces gradually elevated the land to the west of the Elsinore Fault, just as you would create a gradual slope by slowly opening a book's cover. (There is another theory concerning the steep drop-off east of the Elsinore Fault involving different rates of erosion, but space precludes discussing that here.) The strains of this uplift caused the granitic rock to become highly fractured, which was both bad (made gold mining very difficult) and good (the fractures retain large amounts of groundwater in wet years). With time, various types of weathering transformed the cracked rocks into decomposed granite and then into smaller sandy particles. These particles combined with decomposing organic matter produce the soils of Silverwood.

The vegetation of any region is primarily a product of the particular climatic zone in which the region lies. People think that the moderate temperatures and highly seasonal rainfall regime in San Diego gives it a Mediterranean climate. This is not *quite* true. The average rainfall in the San Diego urban area is so low that the coastal region is actually a semi-arid climatic zone called technically a Steppe climate. Only when you go as far inland as Fallbrook, Ramona, or Alpine is there enough rainfall for the area to be a Mediterranean climate. Silverwood lies approximately on the boundary between the two climatic zones.

The dominant vegetation of Silverwood is chaparral, a marvelously diverse ecosystem uniquely adapted to handle the summer dry season. Along the streams and in the major valleys are ribbons of larger oak and sycamore trees which create a very productive riparian woodland habitat. Some smaller, localized habitats also exist, such as the cienega meadow just up the Chaparral Trail from the observation area. Over time the impressive variety of birds, mammals and other wildlife at Silverwood have adapted to, and prospered in, the climatic regime and vegetation zones.



Telescopic view of Wiedenhoff summit from ECOST, by Tim Stump.

Special thanks to Phil Lambert and Phil Pryde for their assistance and expertise with the "Beyond Silverdome" project. Other important contributions: Leland Foerster for his work on the Google Earth images, and Tim Stump for his willingness to make four trips up ECOST with me. Uncredited text and photos (both May and Summer issues) are by David Stump.

LOCAL CONSERVATION ACTION ALERT: Safeguard Our San Diego Countryside Initiative

San Diego Audubon is endorsing a ballot measure to protect the County's General Plan, which in turn protects prime wildlife habitat, productive farmland, and scenic backcountry landscapes.

The County General Plan, adopted in 2011 after a decade of hard work, provides for sufficient housing in the unincorporated area to meet population growth. Yet developers seeking higher profits have attacked the plan by proposing massive, out-of-place amendments that violate the Plan's "smart growth" framework and leapfrog into rural, automobile dependent, fire-prone areas. The **Safeguard Our San Diego Countryside Initiative**, developed by San Diegans For Managed Growth, would give voters control of these types of changes via a ballot referendum. It protects the rights of small landowners and does not conflict with affordable housing requirements.

Signatures, volunteers and donations are urgently needed – **we need 100,000 signatures to get this on the ballot**. Here are three ways you can help:

1. Sign the petition at the SDAS office at 4010 Morena Blvd.
2. Become a signature gatherer. To help gather signatures contact: Diane Coombs at drbcoombs@msn.com.
3. Immediate financial help is necessary for this kind of effort to fund paid signature gatherers. For donations or wire transfer instructions, contact Dan Silver at dsilverla@me.com. Visit the website for more information at: saveourcountryside.org.

Otay Valley Regional Park

An invitation to visit from Senior Park Ranger Mika Shimada

The Otay Valley Regional Park (OVRP) is only four miles north of the U.S.-Mexico border and eight miles south of downtown San Diego, yet once you enter the riparian and coastal sage scrub habitats you can break away from the hustle and bustle of the nearby South Bay cityscape and find a haven for birds and people along our trails. The park offers easy hiking, biking and equestrian trails for exploring the four ponds spaced along the Otay River, where you may encounter regionally specific birds like the California Gnatcatcher, as well as the nationally recognized Golden Eagle.

The OVRP is jointly managed by the County of San Diego and Cities of Chula Vista and San Diego. I am the Senior Ranger for this area, which is currently open to the public with over 8 miles of trails (and growing!) and over 7 staging areas and overlooks. The land immediately around the reservoirs is managed by the City of San Diego's Public Utilities Department for watershed protection. South of the reservoirs, from Otay Lakes County Park extending west to Heritage Road, is managed by the County. Trails are currently being planned in this area. The area spanning from Heritage Road west to the San Diego Bay National Wildlife Refuge is managed by the City of San Diego with proportional funding from the City of Chula Vista.

As park staff, we have the challenging task of connecting the full planning area of approximately 9,000 acres. The eastern end of the Otay River Watershed originates on the western slope of the Laguna Mountains and flows all the way into South San Diego Bay. OVRP boasts thirteen vegetation communities, as well as ponds, lakes,

several canyon tributaries and one of the largest vernal pool complexes remaining, along with their unique flora and fauna.

Our most westerly pond, Hollister Pond, is a popular spot for birds of the San Diego Bay National Wildlife Refuge. You may find many migrant waterfowl resting and recharging from their travels. In the spring, you may see families of grebes and watch the busy parents catching crayfish from the bottom of the pond to feed their hungry chicks.

Fenton Pond is a favored hunting spot for Osprey. A local birding mentor, Richard Griebel, has volunteered countless hours building and mounting nesting platforms for the Osprey and nest boxes for owls and other birds. You will also find many nest boxes in the park made by children and their families during the 2017 Discover Otay Valley Regional Park Day.



Eared Grebe in breeding plumage, by Kristzina Scheeff, KS Photography

Heart Pond is another special spot. Listen, and you might hear the call of a Ridgway's Rail, or maybe the sight of a Common Yellowthroat, showing off how wide he can reach his legs between cattails. Northern Flickers rap the bark of Cottonwoods, looking for grubs.

Continuing east, you'll come to the last pond, Le May Pond. As always, the Black Phoebe, dressed in a snazzy tuxedo, will be practicing its waltz as it snatches insects above the pond. Coots and Ruddy Ducks spread ripples across the surface as a California Scrub-jay, or perhaps a California Thrasher, greets you in call.

Between ponds, you will have the pleasure of non-stop bird sightings: various hummingbirds, warblers, orioles, and kingbirds, Bushtits and California Gnatcatchers. Looking for raptors? We have Merlins, White-tailed Kites and American Kestrels, as well as Cooper's, Red-shouldered and Red-tailed Hawks. And don't forget – Golden Eagles have been spotted in our planning area!

One of the most challenging yet rewarding tasks I've faced over my 18-year career is to help nurture the spirit of outdoor stewardship among under-served communities. As we gave shape to our vision, the key seemed to be the development of quality programming. The *Nature Club* is a ranger-led kids program. *Adventure Passport* is a new and free family program of outdoor activities throughout the year. We recently hosted our newly-enhanced annual *Discover OVRP Day* and we have offered fishing, biking, Kumeyaay nature walks, planting, sketching, kayaking, birding activities and more.

I believe that the heart of the Park Ranger's duty is to help the community learn environmental stewardship: caring, protecting and preserving the park and its diverse wildlife and flora. It all starts with coming out to visit. I hope to see you soon, out on the trails at Otay Valley Regional Park.

Sincerely, Ranger Mika

P.S. We could always use help. We are looking for volunteers for a project creating self-guided birding information panels for our range of habitats, birding tips, birding hot spots, and sensitive species information in the park. Contact me at MikaShimada@sandiego.gov.

Fenton Pond, a favorite haunt of our Ospreys, is one of the four distinctive ponds along the Otay River.



Conservation In Action

Support Prop 68: the Clean Water and Safe Parks Act

By Megan Flaherty, Restoration Program Manager

A perfectly Mediterranean climate, beautiful and accessible coastlines, a dazzling diversity of plant and animal life that can be explored in numerous protected places – these are just a few of the many perks of being a resident of Southern California. But there are also a few less than ideal realities of our region, such as the continuing drought, and the intense and frequent wildfires that have become the norm.

For the last several years, Southern California, and much of the state, has been caught in a cycle of drought and extreme rainfall events. The overall climatic instability is taking a toll on our parks, trails and conserved areas, with native plants and animals affected in turn by low rainfall, intense wildfires, and devastating floods and landslides. This has also affected our communities, where the threat of water scarcity looms large, and where many neighborhoods still have inadequate access to safe hiking trails and parklands. To top it off, much of our state's funding for the conservation projects that aim to mitigate these natural disasters and protect our precious natural heritage is set to run dry in the coming years. Reinvesting in this critical infrastructure should be a priority, and action is currently being taken in Sacramento to make that happen. The pressing concerns surrounding water availability, habitat conservation and access to natural spaces were the impetus for **Proposition 68 – the Clean Water and Safe Parks Act**.

San Diego Audubon is joining Audubon California and a broad coalition of conservation organizations and water agencies in endorsing Prop 68 on the June 5th California ballot. This \$4 billion bond measure is the first bond to focus on public parks and drinking water in over a decade, and it prioritizes under-served, park-poor areas, as well as our bays, coasts and the oceans. The benefits would

be statewide, but they would also be local – here in San Diego, an estimated \$12 million would go to the San Diego River Conservancy to support their efforts to safeguard open space and water resources.

Prop 68 would also kick off the long overdue restoration of the Salton Sea, where receding and increasingly saline waters are creating a public health hazard and endangering the fresh water resources that are vital to the birds that rest here along their migration routes. With the \$200 million that is earmarked for the Salton Sea, breaking ground on wetland restoration projects could finally become a reality.

Safeguarding our state's water infrastructure, improving access to safe parks, and mitigating against future natural disasters is a must – for our citizens and our wildlife. Please join with San Diego Audubon in our efforts to protect water and open space resources by voting **Yes on Prop 68 this June**. To learn more and get involved, visit <https://yes68ca.com/learn-more/>.



Education SDAS

Making a Difference, One Student at a Time

by Rebekah Angona, Director of Education

Working in the environmental education field is a rollercoaster of joys and challenges. You can only imagine the looks we get from teachers, parents and friends when we tell them we are going to take thirty elementary students outside the walls of their classroom and into the unknown. To many environmental educators, the unknown has us dreaming about boundless adventures.

Those adventures do bring challenges, though. There are plenty of days we convince ourselves the students would rather be in an air-conditioned classroom playing on their phones. Or, we find ourselves flat out exhausted before we even begin teaching from all of the bureaucratic hoops we had to jump through just to get the students off campus for a hike. And then there are those days when we swear the students haven't listened to a word we have said. That is, until we hear one of them whisper to their friend, "I never knew I was going to love nature so much."

We live for moments like those, and this year was no exception to the plethora of wonderful "quotable quotes" from our students. Throughout the approximately 3,100 student visits to nature through our Anstine Adventures, OutdoorExplore!, Sharing our Shores, and Silverwood Science Discovery programs, we were fortunate enough to be rewarded with the following student quotes:

- "I could finally get myself dirty on purpose."
- "When I was climbing the tree I felt like I was flying."
- "It makes me feel like I could just sit here and stay here all day."
- "It feels peaceful and quiet and relaxing and you can feel the air flowing in your body and you can hear that you're doing."

I would like to personally thank each one of our funders for making this year such a wonderful success. We look forward to a rejuvenating summer and for what adventures into the unknown next year will bring. *Our generous program funders include:*

Audubon California	SDG&E Environmental Champions Award
El Capitan Rodeo Association	Schoenith Foundation
Heller Foundation	Tippett Foundation
Kiwanis	US Fish and Wildlife's Urban Refuge Project
Nordson Foundation	California Coastal Commission Whale Tail Program
Port of San Diego	...And support from our SDAS members

If you have a background or an interest in education, our Education Committee is always looking for volunteers who can help expand our capabilities to reach more children through our broad range of programs. Rebekah can be reached at angona@sandiegoaudubon.org.



Pygmy Nuthatches
by Peter Thomas

field trips

JUNE 2018 SAN DIEGO AUDUBON FIELD TRIPS

These walks are devoted to enjoying the varied habitats and avian inhabitants of San Diego County. Registration is open to all. Our trips are very popular, and most fill up quickly. To attend a SDAS field trip, follow these three steps:

1) Follow our listings at sandiegoaudubon.org (Birding, Local Field Trips). Trips listed in Sketches are first posted for registration online, generally towards the end of the month prior to issue date.

2) Online registration is required for all field trips. Attendance for trips is now capped at specific numbers (see trip descriptions), and all trips are filled in order of registration. **NOTE: Some trips will require a small fee – pay when registering online. All trips subject to cancellation.**

3) Note details of the trip, especially time and location. Some trips require parking fees. Plan to arrive a few minutes early. Bring binoculars, scopes, water, sunscreen and hat. Google Maps info is provided for each trip. If you have questions, call Peter Thomas at 858-571-5076, or email your queries to prthomas1@yahoo.com. **All trip information is available at sandiegoaudubon.org**

Lake Hodges – South Shore Trail

Sunday, June 3, 2018, 7:30 AM – 10:30 AM

Google Maps: Piedras Pintadas Trailhead

Leaders: Lisa Ruby, 858 705 1873, Charles Jackson, and Ter Hurst

The trails around Lake Hodges always provide a good array of birds – both year-round, and during nesting season. This trip will focus on the south shore along a trail that allows great downward views of the lake and its creatures. We hope to find Western and Clark's Grebes (prepare to distinguish these species by their calls), raptors, gnatcatchers, swallows, and swifts. Because the trail is narrow, the **registration is capped at 16**.

CHANGES COMING FOR SKETCHES The San Diego Audubon Board of Directors has approved a new schedule for the publication of *Sketches*. Beginning in our next issue (September) we will go to a bi-monthly calendar, publishing six times a year. The field trips will be listed as available in a shortened form, with full information and registration (as currently provided) on our website. We will do what we can to make this a smooth transition.

Creature Feature: The Northern Mockingbird

By Anna Prowant, Anstine-Audubon Education Docent

It's late at night as you lay down to rest after an exhausting day of work. Drifting off to sleep, you are suddenly awoken by a car alarm. Almost as quickly as it had pierced the night's silence, the alarm ends, and a Killdeer calls in the distance. That makes sense, you think to yourself, as Killdeer commonly call out in the darkness during the spring. Your allergies have been bothering you today, marking the start of the busy season for the birds and bees and flowers and trees (along with all of their pollen).

After a few sets, the Killdeer finishes its call and the sound is replaced by a nearby Oak Titmouse. Your eyes open quickly, as you ponder why the titmouse isn't safely tucked away in a cavity for the evening. Then the melodious twitter of a Song Sparrow begins; again unusual at this time of day. Your curiosity gets the best of you, and you walk out your front door to see a mockingbird perched on the branch of your neighbor's tree, filling the air with borrowed songs.

Have you ever experienced a scenario similar to the one described above? If you have, you were witness to a bachelor Northern Mockingbird in search of love. His after-hours performance is an untiring attempt to find a mate during the spring and summer months. Like songbirds all over the world, the Northern Mockingbird sings to attract mates, as well as advertise territorial boundaries. One distinct difference is that the persistent, unpaired male mockingbird will sing throughout the night in search of a lady. So the next time you hear an unending loop of various calls echoing in through your bedroom window, try to abate your frustration, and wish the hard-working bachelor luck in his pursuit of a family.



Agua Dulce Creek - "Quick, Three Beers"

Saturday, June 9, 2018 8:00 AM – 11:00 AM

Google Maps: Wooded Hill Nature Trail

Leaders: Chris Smith, 858 740 8858, and others

This will be our annual walk along Agua Dulce Creek in the Lagunas. We will visit forest, meadow, and riparian habitats just off the Sunrise Highway at approximately 6,000 feet elevation. A major target to be sought will be Olive-sided Flycatchers, sitting atop the tallest available snag, singing "Quick, Three Beers". Other possible birds include Mountain Quail (most often heard "Quirk" or "T'wook"), Band-tailed Pigeons, Western Bluebirds, Brown Creepers, Mountain Chickadees, and Pygmy Nuthatches. Please dress for possible changes in the weather, and bring water. **Participation is capped at 25.**

Penasquitos Canyon, Western approach

Sunday, June 17, 2018, 7:30 AM – 10:30 AM

Google Maps: Penasquitos Canyon West Entrance

Leaders: Peter Thomas, 858 571 5076, and others

The Western approach to Penasquitos Canyon is a less frequently birded area of San Diego County. The trails are mostly flat, passing along the riparian corridor and allowing broad views of open grassland. Expect the year-round residents – hawks, towhees, California Thrashers, and California Quail as well as and summer visitors – Ash-throated Flycatchers, Orioles, BH Grosbeaks, possibly Lawrence's Goldfinches, and sometimes other surprises. Easy walking. Porta-Potties at the trailhead. **Participation is capped at 25.**

Tecolote Canyon Natural Park

Saturday, June 23, 2018, 8:00 AM to 11:00 AM

Google Maps: Tecolote Canyon Natural Park and Nature Center

Leaders: Anitra Kaye, 619-517-1168, John Walters, and Jack Friery

Tecolote Canyon is one of several protected urban canyons in the San Diego area that support native plant communities and associated bird life. Birds that are here for the entire year include hawks, Anna's Hummingbird, California Thrasher, House Wren, Wrentit, and both California and Spotted Towhees. At this time most resident birds should be out and singing. Springtime migratory birds may also be found. Easy walking. Restrooms may be found at the trailhead by the Visitor Center. **Participation for this trip is capped at 25.**

For all trip details and registration, go to sandiegoaudubon.org

San Diego Audubon Society Field Trips may be scheduled on occasion during the summer months. Please check the website for any additional offerings. Thanks for your participation – and remember to cherish nature!



San Diego Audubon Society
4010 Morena Blvd. Ste. 100
San Diego, CA 92117

Nonprofit Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
SAN DIEGO, CA
Permit #37



Become a Friend of San Diego Audubon today and enjoy these many benefits:

It only takes a couple of minutes to sign up at www.sandiegoaudubon.org.
— you can call or visit our office for a brochure

- Subscription to *Sketches*, our member magazine (10 issues a year)
- Access to free local birding trips
- Exclusive guided walks at our two nature sanctuaries
- Discounts on nature guidebooks and other merchandise
- Access to a wide variety of volunteer opportunities
- Discounts on special workshops about birds, native plants and more
- Invitations to special events like our holiday party and volunteer celebration
- Email newsletter updates, including advance notice of events

While San Diego Audubon is a chapter of National Audubon Society, we are an independent not-for-profit organization. We encourage you—especially if you are already a National Audubon member—to become a Friend of San Diego Audubon to directly support our local conservation and education programs.


friends of
SAN DIEGO
AUDUBON

Sketches SAN DIEGO AUDUBON

SKETCHES is published monthly, except July and August. For details on submissions and deadlines, please contact Kelsey Wadman at wadman@sandiegoaudubon.org

SDAS OFFICE 4010 Morena Blvd. Ste. 100, San Diego, CA 92117. Our reception desk is staffed by volunteers, and time slots may go unfilled. Please call ahead before planning your visit to ensure someone will be there to assist you. Messages can be left at any time on the office answering machine at 858-273-7800 or email sdaudubon@sandiegoaudubon.org.

San Diego Audubon Office: 858-273-7800

California Audubon Society: www.ca.audubon.org

National Audubon Society: www.audubon.org

National Audubon Activist Hotline: 800-659-2622

National Audubon Customer Service: 800-274-4201

San Diego Audubon Society is a chapter of the National Audubon Society



For online resources, including our Events Calendar, please see our website:
www.sandiegoaudubon.org

Like us on Facebook:
facebook.com/sdaudubon

Follow us on Twitter:
twitter.com/sdaudubon



...Fostering the protection and appreciation of birds, other wildlife and their habitats...