POMONA VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY

Chaparral Naturalist

A Publication of
Pomona Valley Audubon Society
www.pomonavalleyaudubon.org

FALL 2025

Shorebirds Thriving at the Salton Sea

While deep-water habitats and fish-eating birds such as pelicans are in sharp decline at the Salton Sea, shorebirds are thriving, relying on the Sea's expanding wetlands and shallow water habitats, according to a recent report by Audubon California.

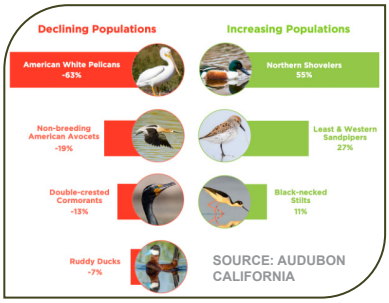
The Sea, a popular and beloved destination for PVAS members and birders across the region, remains an important refuge amid widespread bird declines across North America.

PHOTO BY BRIAN ELLIOTT

PVAS members at the Salton Sea

"I love to bird at the Salton Sea, especially in winter," said Brian Elliott, PVAS Conservation Chair. "There are many local and migratory species that I can best find in the areas in and around the Salton Sea. These include Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, Sage Thrasher, wintering Black-bellied Plovers, and large numbers of water birds on the Sea itself and on the wildlife refuge ponds."

The Audubon California report highlighted findings of bird surveys and habitat assessments from 2016 to 2023 at the Salton Sea and revealed how bird populations and their habitats are responding to rapid environmental change. For example, the increase in wetland habitat at the Sea resulted in an overall growth rate of 15 percent per year in waterbirds.



The Sea is California's largest and most imperiled lake. As it continues to recede, salinity has increased to more than double the ocean's salinity, pushing tilapia, the primary fish species that support fish-eating birds, towards collapse. Despite this, the Sea hosts over 300 bird species and millions of migratory birds annually, making it one of the most ecologically productive wetlands in the interior West.

The report, titled "Shifting Habitat Conditions at the Salton Sea Create New Opportunities for Conservation," gave targeted recommendations—including prioritizing shorebird conservation, stabilizing critical wetlands, advancing biofilm research, understanding water needs, and diversifying habitat types— to secure the Sea's future as an essential oasis for migratory birds in the West.

PHOTO BY BRIAN ELLIOTT

Snow geese at Sonny Bono Salton Sea National Wildlife Refuge

"By studying the impacts of changes at the Sea, we can see clear opportunities for strategic and efficient conservation, like protecting and enhancing the "accidental" or emerging wetlands dotting the shoreline," said Dan Orr, Audubon California's Director of Geospatial Science. "And while the Salton Sea has always been a dynamic place, we have a unique chance right now to create an essential oasis for birds and wildlife that can thrive into the future."

The report concludes, "As wetlands and saline lakes decline due to development, land use, and climate change, this habitat is increasingly essential for millions of migratory birds. Shorebirds are experiencing some of the steepest population declines in North America, so protecting their habitat at the Sea is more urgent than ever.

"Expanding wetlands and increasing shorebird trends at the Sea underscore the Sea's potential to serve as a critical refuge for these imperiled species. How this ecosystem is managed will determine whether these vital habitats within the Pacific Flyway are lost or transformed into a sustainable oasis for migratory birds in the West. With effective management, the Salton Sea could serve as a global model for sustaining other threatened saline lake systems."

The Salton Sea is changing rapidly. But it still offers a wealth of breathtaking birdwatching moments.

"One of my favorite experiences, on every trip to the Sea, is to view and photograph the huge flocks of Snow Geese, Sandhill Cranes, and White-faced Ibis fly in at dusk to their nightly water roosting ponds," Elliott said. "I then come back in the morning to watch the flocks take off for their daily foraging in the agricultural fields. These are truly awe-inspiring flights!"

Save the Date!

PVAS Conservation Chair Brian Elliott will lead an overnight birding field trip to the Salton Sea on Jan 24-25, 2026. Watch for details on the chapter website and the next issue of this newsletter.

Audubon California contributed to this report.

New Technologies Advance Understanding of Bird Migration

By Patrick Gavit

When I lived in Michigan, I eagerly awaited the arrival of the first American Robin to return from wintering grounds to our backyard. Nowadays I look forward with anticipation to the first White Crowned Sparrow to settle in my yard for the fall and winter. It gives us reassurance and even comfort when we see the cycles of nature repeat for another year, as they have for millions of years. The spectacle of bird migration is truly awe inspiring. In the last 10 to 20 years, what scientists have learned about this aerial phenomenon has increased dramatically, in particular the routes and distances that birds navigate in their yearly journey.

Historically, one of the main tools for studying bird migration was the banding of birds and the subsequent recapture at a later date and different location. This type of data has proven to be valuable; however, it is limited in terms of defining a precise route the bird took to get from its banding to recapture location. Additionally, bird banding requires the recapture of banded birds in most cases, which typically has a low rate -- less than 1 percent for most species. For example, in a study of Gray Cheeked Thrushes in Alaska, only three birds out of 4,300 banded were recaptured.

New technologies for studying bird migration have revolutionized the ornithology world and led to a wealth of new knowledge. These new technologies have been enabled by the miniaturization of electronics that allow for very lightweight devices to be fitted on birds.

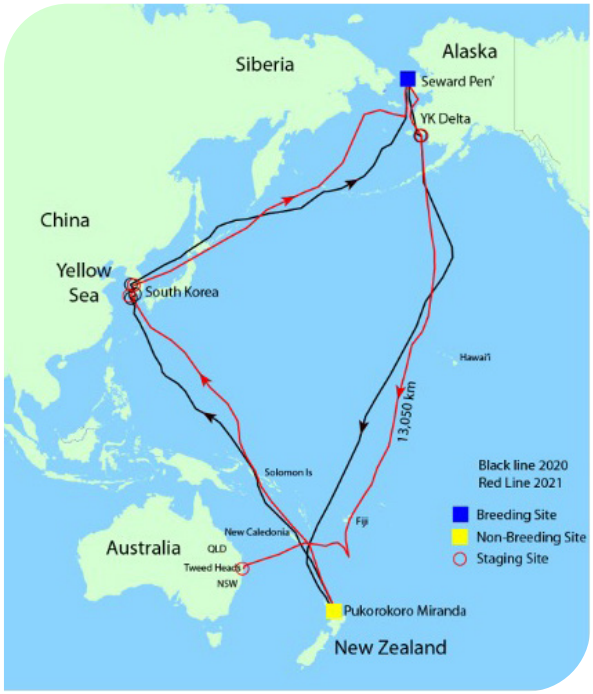


ILLUSTRATION BY ADRIAN RIEGEN

Bar-tailed Godwit migration route

One of the first new technologies was satellite telemetry. In this approach a satellite transmitter is attached to or implanted in a bird, and this transmitter sends a signal to a satellite, which determines its location. Using this technology, ornithologists learned that during fall migration Bar-tailed Godwits fly over the middle of the Pacific Ocean. They fly nonstop for 7 to 9 days from Alaska to New Zealand and Australia. At 7,200 miles, this is the longest nonstop migration of any landbird. These devices are not appropriate for small birds due to their weight. Thus, to study the migration of smaller birds, other devices are used including light-level geolocators, GPS tags, and nanotags.

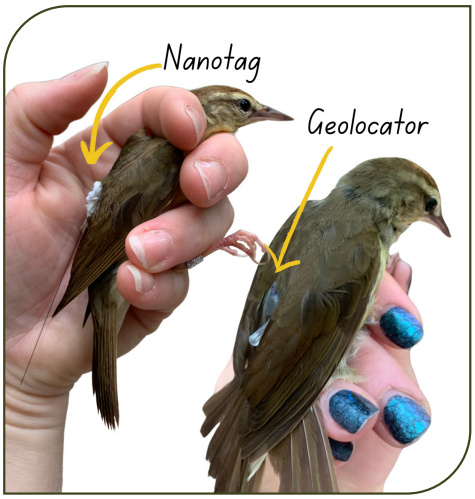
Light-level geolocators are devices that record the level of light on an almost continuous basis. When the light level is combined with the date and time of day, the latitude and longitude can be determined. This method also requires the bird to be recaptured but once the data is downloaded, the route of the geolocator tagged bird can be pieced together. Amazingly, these devices weigh only a fraction of a gram and can thus be used on very small birds such as warblers. Using these devices, researchers determined that Blackpoll Warblers migrate over the open Atlantic Ocean during their fall migration from the northeast coast of the United States to South America. Even more spectacular, Blackpoll Warblers that breed in Alaska, first migrate to the eastern coast of the United States and then over the open ocean to their wintering grounds in South America- a round-trip distance of 12,400 miles. The location accuracy of this method ranges from 7 to 300 miles depending on whether accurate sunrise and sunset times can be calculated, which can be difficult if the bird is flying in shade.

PHOTO BY ANDREAS TREPTE/WIKIMEDIA

Bar-tailed Godwit

A method that gives a more precise location is a GPS tag. These small tags receive signals from the GPS satellite system that allows a very precise location to be determined. To keep these devices as light weight as possible, they do not have the ability to transmit the data to a receiving station and thus the bird must be recaptured so the data can be downloaded.

An even smaller and lighter weight device is a nanotag, which is so light that it can be attached to a hummingbird or even a large insect. These nanotags send out signals that are unique to each individual outfitted with one. They rely on receiver stations that are installed in different locations around the world. A bird or insect with a nanotag must pass within 15-20 miles of a receiver station for its unique signal to be picked up. Collectively, these receiver stations are referred to as the Motus Wildlife Tracking System. Globally, there are over 1,300 Motus stations and over 32,000 animals with nanotags including birds, bats, and insects. Data from these systems is used to determine bird movements and general migration routes of individual birds. As more stations are installed, more precise routes can be determined because there will be more pings for each tagged bird picked up by the network. I look forward to seeing what other migration mysteries can be unraveled by these new technologies.



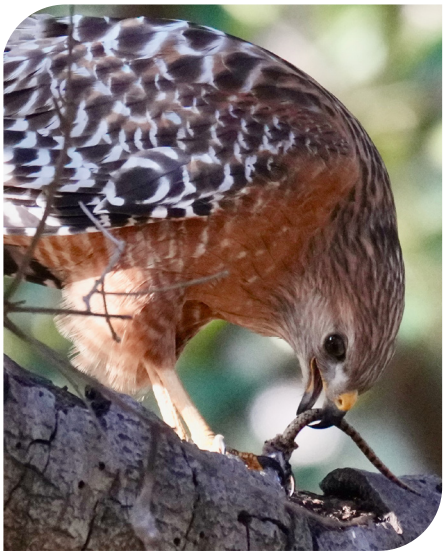
PHOTOS OF SWAINSON'S WARBLER COURTESY OF JENNIFER MCCARTHEY TYRRELL, AUDUBON SOUTH CAROLINA

2025 Photo Challenge

At the June meeting, several chapter members showed and narrated stunning photos of birds from their backyards and around the world during the annual Photo Showcase. In addition, the photos below were submitted in this year's Photo Challenge, with the subject of "Birds Feeding."

◂ Brian Elliott's photo of a Reddish Egret won this year's Photo Challenge. This egret easily caught a fish as the tide rushed into Famosa Slough in San Diego.

▸ Scott Marnoy photographed a Turkey Vulture at Bonelli Park feasting on a carp.



▴ Brian Elliott captured a Red-Shouldered Hawk eating a lizard.

▾ Patrick Gavitt photographed a Great Tailed Grackle in Bonelli Park.

▴ Ken Burgdorff said this Great Blue Heron at Legg Lake in Whittier Narrows caught a gopher, dunked it in the water, but it was still kicking!

▸ Kimberly Hardison captured a Brown Pelican grabbing a snack in Mazatlán, Mexico.

Meetings

PVAS meetings take place at 7 p.m. in the Padua Room of the Alexander Hughes Center at 1700 Danbury Dr. in Claremont, generally on the first Thursday of each month from September through June.

Thursday, September 4, at 7 p.m.

Nina Karnovsky and Students – Sagehen studies of oystercatchers, pelicans, puffins, and terns

Come learn about the summer research adventures of Pomona College students (aka Sagehens) in Professor Karnovsky's lab. Anji will share her studies of American Oystercatchers and Black Skimmers in North Carolina. Max will describe how he and the Common Terns weathered a storm in the Gulf of Maine. Thomas will present his kayak surveys of tagged pelicans here in Southern California. Mark will take you to Seal Island, Maine, where he studied Atlantic Puffins, Black Guillemots, Razorbills, and Leach's Storm-Petrels.

Nina Karnovsky is the Willard George Halstead Zoology Professor at Pomona College.

Thursday, October 2, at 7 p.m.

Brian Elliott – Birding Down Under: The Sub-Antarctic Islands of New Zealand and Australia

Last December, PVAS member Brian Elliott joined a 15-day small-ship birding and natural history cruise to the remote Subantarctic Islands south of New Zealand. These UNESCO World Heritage islands host the world's most diverse seabird populations, including 10 species of albatross and seven species of penguins. Land excursions bring visitors close to penguins, giant elephant seals, and unique megaherbs, while Zodiac cruises offer spectacular pelagic birding. Join Brian as he shares stunning photos and stories from these wild, little-visited islands.

Brian worked as a geologist before a long career teaching high school physics and environmental science. Retirement has allowed him to travel the globe on many birding trips.

Thursday, November 7, at 7 p.m.

Alicia Wszelaki & Matthew Nothelfer -- Special Screening of HAWKWATCH

Join the directors, producers, and editors of Path 88 Productions for a special screening of HAWKWATCH, a documentary highlighting the spring migration of Swainson's Hawks through the Borrego Valley. Alicia and Matt will introduce the film and lead a Q&A session afterward. The Borrego Valley hosts one of the largest spring gatherings of migrating Swainson's Hawks in North America.

HAWKWATCH is the latest documentary by the award-winning team of Wszelaki and Nothelfer. Their Path 88 Productions studio has been writing, producing, directing, and editing domestic and international projects for the last three decades.

See www.pomonavalleyaudubon.org for full details of presentations and presenter bios.

NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY (NAS) AND POMONA VALLEY AUDUBON (PVAS) MEMBERSHIP

We invite you to become a member of both NAS and PVAS. You also have the option of joining just PVAS. For either option, a yearly individual or family membership is $20.

Check one:

JOIN	❑ Join both NAS and PVAS ONLINE.	On the PVAS website, click on "Membership" and then on link to NAS. Make a $20 donation to NAS. Check Chapter Code: C08
	❑ Join both NAS and PVAS BY CHECK.	Make out a $20 check to NAS. Mail to NAS with address slip below.
	❑ Join PVAS only, not NAS.	Make $20 check to PVAS and send to PVAS with address slip below.
RENEW	❑ Renew your joint membership in NAS and PVAS ONLINE. . .	Use the renewal notice you receive from NAS or make a $20 donation to NAS on the NAS website. *Use the same name as your membership.
	❑ Renew your joint membership in NAS and PVAS BY CHECK.	Make $20 check to NAS and send to NAS with address slip below.
	❑ Renew your PVAS only membership.	Make $20 check to PVAS and send to PVAS with address slip below.

NAS mailing address: **NAS, PO Box 97194, Washington DC 20090**

PVAS mailing address: **PVAS, 2058 N. Mills, PMB 426, Claremont, CA 91711**

Name _____ Chapter Code C08

Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Email _____ Phone _____

Field Trips

For most trips, you have the option to meet at Memorial Park in Claremont and carpool or caravan to the site or you can meet us at the site.

Saturday, September 20

Field Trip to Bolsa Chica Ecological Preserve and adjacent Harriett Weider Park

18000 CA-1, Huntington Beach, and 19251 Seapoint Street, Huntington Beach - Difficulty: Easy (up to 3 miles)
Meet at 7:00 a.m. at Memorial Park in Claremont or meet at Bolsa Chica about 8 a.m. Bring snacks, water and lunch for a full day trip. (Estimated roundtrip driving 100 miles)

Please RSVP with Trip Leader: Dan Gregory (909) 456-4994 or DanRCRenee@verizon.net

Friday, October 10

Field Trip and Survey of North Etiwanda Preserve

4890 Etiwanda Ave, Rancho Cucamonga -- Difficulty: Strenuous (rocky, uneven terrain, 3.5 miles, 800+ ft elevation gain) with a moderate option to survey the southern edge of the park.
Twice a year we gather bird population data for the County of San Bernardino by doing what we love - birding! Join us for all or part of the day. Specialties include Bell's Sparrow, Loggerhead Shrike, and other open country species. We will be taking our usual counterclockwise route on the main trail making us easy to find, so feel free to join us at any time. Meet at Beryl Park at the West Parking Lot, 6501 Carnelian St, Rancho Cucamonga for a 7 a.m. departure to the preserve. This is a hike and not a walk, please bring sturdy footwear, a portable lunch, water, snacks, and layered clothing for about 6 hours in the field. (Estimated driving 30 miles.) Please RSVP with Trip Leader: Dan Gregory (909) 456-4994 or DanRCRenee@verizon.net

Friday through Sunday, November 7-9

Bishop/Eastern Sierras Weekend Trip

(Difficulty: Easy to Strenuous (up to 4 mi./day).
By day, we'll be birding by car (especially at Owens Lake) and driving to local hotspots with some walking/hiking (optional). By night, we'll be looking for owls. Target species include Tundra Swan, Prairie Falcon, Gray-crowned Rosy Finch and other area specialties. Final itinerary based on weather and birds in the area that weekend. Lodging is on your own (in Big Pine or Bishop). Limited to 8 participants. RSVP with trip leader before October 9th. (Estimated roundtrip driving 520 miles to Bishop, plus touring.) Please RSVP with Trip Leader: Eric Smith (661) 372-8946 or bird4life28@gmail.com

Saturday, November 15, 2025

Field Trip to San Joaquin Marsh

Parking Lot, 5 Riparian View, Irvine -- Difficulty: Easy (up to 2.5 miles)
An Orange County gem consisting of a series of reclaimed freshwater ponds. Species may include herons, rails, ducks, raptors and even Roadrunners. Meet at 7:00 a.m. at Memorial Park in Claremont. If you plan to meet at the preserve, approach from the south on Campus Drive and enter on Riparian Drive. Bring snacks, water and lunch for a half-day trip. Please RSVP with Trip Leader: Dan Gregory (909) 456-4994 or DanRCRenee@verizon.net

Field Trip Basics

Pomona Valley Audubon Field Trips are offered at no cost (unless otherwise specified) and are open to all. ALWAYS contact the trip leader if you plan to attend and to verify time, location and trip status. In case of rain, call the trip leader the night before. Driving mileage estimates are round-trip from Memorial Park in Claremont. For your comfort and enjoyment, participants should plan to bring the following suggested items:

- **Binoculars/spotting scope/camera** (as desired)
- **Water**
- **Snacks/Lunch**
- **Walking/Hiking shoes**
- **Sunscreen/Repellant**
- **Appropriate clothing** (Dress in layers and be ready for unexpected weather changes.)
- **Hat**
- **Full tank of gas**

Bird Walks

First Sunday of the Month Family-Friendly Bird Walks at the California Botanic Garden

1500 N. College Ave. Claremont

Meet at the entrance at 8:00 a.m. for free admission. This family-friendly bird walk is approximately two hours long and is perfect for beginners and experienced birders alike. A limited number of loaner binoculars are available, and you will receive instructions on their use! PVAS volunteer Ken Burgdorff (gwrencaps@gmail.com) and others will lead the walks.

Please RSVP using the following date-specific links:

September 7 - https://tinyurl.com/yaxyv9ux

October 5 - https://tinyurl.com/wu6dkbsv

November 2 - https://tinyurl.com/eebwxh3h

Fourth Sunday of the Month Bonelli Bird Walks

Frank G. Bonelli Regional Park in San Dimas -

Difficulty: Moderate
Frank G. Bonelli Regional Park in San Dimas - Difficulty: Moderate
Enjoy one of the richest birding sites in Southern California! We meet in the parking lot of Brackett Field Airport/Norm's Hangar Coffee Shop, at 1615 McKinley Ave., La Verne. Meet at 7:45 a.m. to caravan into the park for free entrance and an 8:00 a.m. walk lasting two to three hours. Don't forget your binoculars and comfortable shoes.

RSVP with leaders for desired date:

September 28: Kris Janicki Starlite07kmj@yahoo.com

October 26: Dan Stoebel dstoebel@mac.com

November 23: Patrick Gavit ebiner.gavit@gmail.com or (626) 214-6905

Connect With Us!

Stay up-today on chapter news and events by signing up for our monthly email newsletter. Use this QR code:

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pomonavalleyaudubon@gmail.com

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Pomona Valley Audubon Society
2058 N. Mills Ave., PMB426
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Michael Farivar Receives 2025 Flock Leader Award

By Tina Stoner, PVAS President

On June 5, at our annual June meeting and party we proudly presented the Dr. Henry E. Child's Flock Leader Award to Michael Farivar for his commendable and outstanding service to our chapter.

Michael is a dedicated volunteer, stepping up for virtually every kind of event where help is needed, with a special passion for community outreach. His communication skills make visitors to our booth/table feel welcome. He's the person who arrives early, stays late, and is always ready to lend a hand—whether it's setting up, breaking down, or capturing the moments in between with his camera. Michael's talent behind the lens is much appreciated because he generously shares his excellent photos from outreach events and field trips. It's likely you've seen them on the pages of our newsletter, as well as our social media platforms.

But his contributions don't stop there. Michael is also a supportive presence on bird outings, assisting others as needed. He's proven to be quite the handyman too. Earlier this year, he played a key role in restoring the water feature at the Dan Guthrie Bird Oasis on the Thompson Creek Trail. He visited the oasis, diagnosed the problem, sourced the parts, and gathered the tools needed. He returned to replace the pump, clean the water reservoir and reconnect the solar panel ensuring that water, once again, flows for birds and other wildlife at the oasis.

His reliability, spirit of service, and the positive way he represents PVAS in the community did not go unnoticed by the board making it an easy and unanimous decision to honor him with this award. Congratulations, Michael—and thank you!

PVAS Board of Directors

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BURROWING OWL PROJECT - Suzanne Thompson - sct047047@pomona.edu

Fall Volunteer Opportunities

To help in the PVAS booth at any of these events, contact Tina Stoner at tinastoner@earthlink.net

Saturday, October 11: Halloween Nature Crawl -- San Dimas Canyon Nature Center

Friday and Saturday, October 17 and 18: Things That Go Bump in the Night -- California Botanic Garden

Saturday, October 25: 43rd Annual Village Venture

Saturday, November 22: Fall in the Farm, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Fairplex