POMONA VALLEY BIRD ALLIANCE
formerly Pomona Valley Audubon Society

# Chaparral Naturalist

A Publication of
Pomona Valley Bird Alliance

www.pomonavalleybirdalliance.org

WINTER 2025-26

## Equal Access to the Outdoors: How to Make Birding More Accessible for All

*By Tina Stoner, PVBA President*

One of the most appealing things about birding is how easy it is to get started. You don't need expensive gear, long trips or years of training—just binoculars, a field guide, curiosity, and time outdoors. Yet for many people, access to the outdoors is anything but easy. Uneven trails, a lack of wheelchair-friendly facilities, and programs designed for a narrow range of physical abilities or sensory experiences can unintentionally exclude people who would otherwise thrive in nature.

Fortunately, the birding community is recognizing that "everyone is welcome" must be more than a slogan. Organizations such as Birdability, Access Birding, the Blind Birders Birdathon, the growing network of All Persons Trails and our own chapter are redefining how we welcome everyone into the natural world.

Our chapter's new **Birding by Tram** program at the California Botanic Garden is one small but meaningful step toward expanding access. Designed for birders with limited mobility, the tram allows participants to experience the garden's varied habitats without the barrier of a long walk. Offered during our First Sunday of the Month Family Friendly bird outings, the tram stops wherever birds are seen or heard, provides access to parts of the 86-acre garden seldom reached on foot, and creates a shared nature experience that doesn't depend on mobility.

**Birdability**, founded by Virginia Rose, has been a national leader in this movement. Its mission is to share the joys of birding with people who have mobility challenges, chronic illnesses, or other disabilities by improving access, representation, and community. Birdability's online map helps users find and review accessible birding locations nationwide, offering detailed information on trail surfaces, slope, restrooms, benches, and more.

**Access Birding**, an initiative by the Audubon Center for Birds of Prey and other partners, also focuses on inclusive design. Their approach begins with listening to the lived experiences of people with disabilities and creating programs that meet them where they are—sometimes through shorter routes, adaptive optics, sensory-friendly events, or simply broadening the definition of participation.

The **Blind Birders Birdathon** highlights the fact that birding isn't purely visual. Participants who are blind or visually impaired rely on song and call recognition, environmental cues, and collaboration to connect with birds and with one another.

PHOTO BY TINA STONER

PVBA members and guests with the chapter's new Birding by Tram program at the California Botanic Garden.

Technology is also opening new doors. The **Merlin Bird ID** app now includes a powerful Sound ID feature that identifies birds by their songs and calls in real time. For birders who are deaf or hard of hearing, Merlin can confirm visual IDs and provides spectrograms that convert sound into a visual format. These tools expand the sensory experience of birding for everyone.

Physical accessibility remains a cornerstone of inclusive outdoor design. Across the country, **All Persons Trails** are being built in state parks and nature centers, featuring firm, level surfaces, Braille signage, and audio guides. These trails aren't only for people with disabilities—they improve the experience for families with strollers, older adults, and anyone who prefers a gentler pace.

Within our own chapter, field trip difficulty ratings help participants gauge terrain, wheelchair accessibility, hazards, and elevation gain and allow people to choose outings that work for them.

These steps are just the beginning. True accessibility means weaving inclusion into every event, not just a select few. It means assessing our favorite birding locations and contributing reviews to the Birdability Map. Most importantly, it means asking participants what they need and being willing to adapt.

Accessibility is an ongoing practice of empathy, curiosity, and creativity. When we make space for all bodies, all senses, and all ways of engaging with nature, we don't just broaden participation—we enrich our community and our own experiences as birders.

If you would like to help complete a Birdability Site Review Checklist, please email tinastoner@earthlink.net.

# Braving Triple-Digit Temps to See Mexican Birds in Southeast Arizona

*By Mike Brossart*

Who in the world would travel to southeast Arizona in the desert heat of midsummer?

Birders, of course, in search of the local specialties that are primarily Mexican species but ignore the border to hang out in Arizona's Sky Islands — mountains that rise steeply from the surrounding desert floor and provide several ecological zones along their canyon slopes.

And so, eight of us birded the area from Aug. 4-9: field trip leader Dan Gregory, fellow Pomona Valley Bird Alliance members Kathy McPherson, Kitty Blassey and Mike Brossart, along with Jose Tovar and the Perkins family — college student Emily and her parents, Robert and Christine. The trip had been scouted out a year earlier by Dan and field trip chair Scott Marnoy.

Was it hot? Well, here's what Kitty said while checking her weather app the morning of Day 4: "Oh, good, today is going to be 5 degrees cooler than yesterday! It's only supposed to get up to 103."

PHOTO BY JOSE TOVAR

Rose-throated Becard at nest

We adopted the mantra that Kathy borrowed from a friend: "Heat doesn't bother me. I just always tell myself it's 82 degrees."

Dan's outings were planned to keep us out of the worst afternoon heat, and the mountain canyons were cooler than Sierra Vista and Green Valley, where our two hotels were located. We spent afternoons in the hotel air-conditioning.

What rewards did we reap from braving the heat, besides camaraderie and a good time?

Among the species highlights were birds that can best be seen (or in some cases, only seen) in southeast Arizona in the summer: Rose-breasted Becard, Elegant Trogon, Northern Beardless-tyrannulet, Flame-colored Tanager, Varied Bunting, Dusky-capped Flycatcher, Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher, Common Black Hawk, Mississippi Kite, Greater Pewee, and several beautiful hummingbirds: Berylline, Violet-crowned, Lucifer, Rivoli's, Broad-billed and Blue-throated Mountain Gem.

Species that can be seen there year-round or have a wider range included Hepatic Tanager, Gray Hawk, Harris's Hawk, Zone-tailed Hawk, Arizona Woodpecker, Gila Woodpecker, Broad-tailed Hummingbird, Curve-billed Thrasher, Bridled Titmouse, Painted Redstart, Mexican Jay, Virginia's Warbler, Yellow-eyed Junco and Canyon Towhee.

Dan's eBird trip report totaled 90 species across 14 hotspots, and each of us recorded a goodly number of lifers.

**Our itinerary:**

PHOTO BY JOSE TOVAR

Birding trip participants

Day 1: Early departure from the Pomona Valley—3 a.m.(!) for the most ambitious among us — with noonish arrival at Ramsey Canyon, where there were higher-elevation hummingbirds. Afterward, we settled into our Sierra Vista hotel where we would stay for two nights.

**Day 2:** A hike up Miller Canyon, followed by sack lunch at the Beatty's Guest Ranch hummingbird feeders. After we cooled off at the hotel during the afternoon heat, Ash Canyon provided another terrific hummer display.

**Day 3:** We moved our base from Sierra Vista to Green Valley (due south of Tucson), seeing great birds along the way. Dan took us down a dirt road near the town of Patagonia where Rose-throated Becards had been reported, and we saw a pair of them tending a nest, along with two juvenile Gray Hawks, a Varied Bunting, and a Northern Beardless Tyrannulet. In town we saw a Mississippi Kite, thanks to a volunteer at Paton Center for Hummingbirds who told us where to find it.

**Day 4:** Several stops in Madera Canyon produced a variety of excellent birds (and a Coatimundi, a raccoon relative). From the highest-elevation parking lot in the canyon, we hiked into Mount Wrightson Wilderness, spotting a Greater Pewee along the way. We could hear our target species, an Elegant Trogon, repeatedly barking out its call as we hiked, and a couple of members of our party got a glimpse of it as it flew off, to be heard but not seen again.

PHOTO BY JOSE TOVAR

Hepatic Tanager

**Day 5:** Great relief from the desert heat came on 9,159-foot Mt. Lemmon, north of Tucson. But try as we might, we couldn't find the Bird of the Day that Merlin had given to Kathy — a Wilson's Phalarope, which became the running joke of the day. We much enjoyed the lovely, cool, mountain woods (where we spotted a long-eared Abert's Squirrel). After dinner back at the hotel, some members of the party went owling in Madera Canyon, finding no owls but Javelinas, lots of scorpions and some interesting insects.

**Day 6:** Dan had one more treat for a few of us as we left for home. He had found eBird reports of Harris's Hawks on a nest just minutes from the hotel, so we stopped and were rewarded with views of both parents flying off to hunt together and return to the nest. As Dan told us, Harris's are the only hawks known to hunt cooperatively.

Satisfied that we'd seen dozens of exceptional birds and enjoyed a great week, we drove home, with our cars' air conditioning cranking all the way.

# The Superpowers of Owls

*By Patrick Gavit*

GREAT HORNED OWLS, PHOTOS BY PATRICK GAVIT

In the superhero world there are famous characters based on spiders (Spider-Man), bats (Batman), and Cats (Cat Woman), but none yet based on owls. There should be. The superpowers of owls are legendary and make them very well adapted for hunting mammals at night and birds at dusk. Imagine a vole slowly moving deep under the snow, seemingly undetected. However, a Great Gray Owl even up to 100 meters away can hear the vole's movements. What is just as remarkable is the owl's ability to home in on the vole's exact location in the complete dark of night and capture the prey. How are owls able to do this? Most owls have a ring of stiff interlocking feathers on their face that capture sound waves and channel them toward the ears, similar to the benefit we get when we cup our hands around our ears to funnel sound waves. Additionally, the owl's hearing system doesn't age like ours. No hearing loss occurs at any sound frequency. What enables the Great Gray Owl to zero in on the vole's exact location is an asymmetrical positioning of the ear holes, one being lower on the head than the other.

Another superpower of owls is their stellar vision. Since both of their eyes are on the front of their head, they have excellent depth perception, making them suited to determine an animal's direction of travel and distance. Many of us know the haunting stare of an owl with its large eyes, which enables more light to enter. An owl's eyes are so large that they make up 3-5 percent of their total weight. This is amazing considering human eyes are only 0.0003 percent of our weight. Also, the eyes contain many rods, which make them well adapted for night vision. Some species have eyes that are 100 times more sensitive in low light than humans.

While owls rely on keen senses of hearing and sight, they must also be stealthy to not prematurely alert target prey while swooping in for a capture. How do they accomplish this considering a bird flying or soaring through the air will inevitably make noise, such as from air resistance, air rushing through feathers, or wings flapping? It turns out an owl's feathers are uniquely adapted for stealth flight. These adaptations work together to break up and absorb the sound of airflow, preventing the loud rushing noise typical of other bird's wings. The sound made by the flight of many owl species is below the threshold of human hearing and that of many prey animals.

The three superpowers of owls, excellent hearing and vision, and the ability for silent flight make owls formidable nocturnal hunters of mammals and birds, which is a unique niche in the bird world. Hollywood would be wise to develop a superhero character based on an owl.

# Meetings

PVBA 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.

**Monday, December 8, 2025 at 7 p.m. - Note different day this month!**

***Candace Leuthold — The Heart of the Habitat: Oaks and the Web of Life***

Native oak trees are among the most ecologically important species in California's landscapes. Come learn how oaks serve as keystone species; anchoring entire ecosystems and supporting hundreds of interdependent plants and animals that form the living web of our local habitats.

Candace Leuthold is a biologist and educator with 20+ years of experience teaching at Mt. San Antonio College and in local high schools.

**Thursday, January 8, 2026 at 7 p.m.**

***Dr. Greg Pauly – Beyond Raptors and Carnivores: Anticoagulant Rodenticide Exposure in Southern California Snakes***

Anticoagulant rodenticides (AR) are commonly used to control pest populations, but their effects reach far beyond rodents. These poisons often harm the predators and scavengers that consume contaminated prey. Dr. Pauly's team has found that in California, roughly one-third of salvaged snakes tested positive for at least one AR compound. Despite statewide bans of AR's the problem remains, leaving wildlife, including snakes, at risk.

Dr. Greg Pauly is Director of the Urban Nature Research Center and Curator of Herpetology at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, where he studies how urbanization affects reptiles and amphibians and champions community science.

**Thursday, February 5, 2026 at 7 pm**

***Tania Romero – Morning Rush Hour on the Feathered Freeway: bird migration monitoring, training and outreach at Bear Divide***

Every spring, thousands of migratory birds funnel through Bear Divide in the San Gabriel Mountains — one of the most spectacular migration hotspots in western North America! Founded in 2021 by avian biologists Tania Romero, Lauren Hill, and Walter Sakai, the Bear Divide Banding Station monitors migration through mist-netting and bird banding, building vital data on population trends and body condition. Now in its fourth year, the station serves as a hub for research, training, and community outreach, inspiring conservation and expanding access to avian science.

Tania Romero received her BS from UCSD, her MS from CSULA and is currently a PhD candidate studying larger scale migration ecological research in the Tingley Lab at UCLA.

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

## NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY (NAS) AND POMONA VALLEY BIRD ALLIANCE (PVBA) MEMBERSHIP

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

Check one:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| JOIN | ❑ Join both NAS and PVBA ONLINE. . . . . | On the PVBA website, click on "Membership" and then on link to NAS. Make a $20 donation to NAS. Check Chapter Code: C08 |
| | ❑ Join both NAS and PVBA BY CHECK. . . . . | Make out a $20 check to NAS. Mail to NAS with address slip below. |
| | ❑ Join PVBA only, not NAS. . . . . | Make $20 check to PVBA and send to PVBA with address slip below. |
| RENEW | ❑ Renew your joint membership in NAS and PVBA 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 PVBA BY CHECK. | Make $20 check to NAS and send to NAS with address slip below. |
| | ❑ Renew your PVBA only membership. . . . . | Make $20 check to PVBA and send to PVBA with address slip below. |

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

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

Name _____ Chapter Code C08

Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

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# 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.

### Thursday, December 18, 2025

**Birding the Claremont Hills Wilderness Park**

N. Mills Avenue and Mt. Baldy Road, Claremont

*Difficulty: Strenuous-2-3 miles on gravel roads with elevation gain.*
Join us on this collaboration with the Friends of the Claremont Hills Wilderness Park to bird a diversity hotspot. Meet at the entrance gate to the park at 7:00 AM. Bring water, sunscreen, sturdy shoes and binoculars. Limited to 15 participants. Please sign up at https://tinyurl.com/CHWP-Bird-Walk **Questions?** Contact Scott Marnoy at gopherus2@gmail.com

### Saturday, January 17, 2026

**Coastal Big Day with Dan Stoebel**

Stay tuned for details to be announced.

### Wednesday, January 21, 2026

**Field Trip to Santa Fe Dam Recreation Area**

15501 E. Arrow Highway, Irwindale

*Difficulty: Moderate (walking up to 3 mi)*
Carpool from Memorial Park in Claremont at 8:15 a.m. or meet at the first parking lot in the park at 9:00 AM. Bring snacks, water, and lunch if you'd like to stay in the park to eat after birding.

**Contact Trip Leader:** Patrick Gavit ebiner.gavit@gmail.com or 626.214.6905.

### Wednesday, January 28, 2026

**Birding the Newport Back Bay by Pontoon Boat**

931 W Coast Hwy, Newport Beach, CA 92663

*Difficulty: Easy*
Meet at the Newport Sea Base by 10:00 AM. Anticipate 2-2 ½ hour trip. Attendance limited to 18 participants with sign up no later than January 15. Ticket price to be announced (nonrefundable) via check made out to Pomona Valley Bird Alliance or Paypal. Contact trip leader Scott Marnoy at gopherus2@gmail.com BEFORE sending payment to reserve a spot.

### Saturday and Sunday, February 7-8, 2026

**Birding Weekend Trip to the Salton Sea**

Salton Sea State Park Headquarters 100225 State Park Rd, Mecca, and multiple locations.

*Difficulty: Easy to Moderate. Driving on good gravel roads with minimal walking, some of the walking on uneven gravel roads.*
The trip begins at the State Park headquarters at 8:00 AM (Entry fee $7.00 adults/$5.00 seniors). Lodging is available in the Brawley area and recommendations will be forthcoming. An optional second day of birding begins at dawn on Sunday with the trip winding up by 1:30 PM. Contact trip leader Brian Elliott brianelli@aol.com or 909-241-8036 to RSVP and for last-minute details.

### Friday, February 20, 2026

**Field Trip to San Jacinto Wildlife Area**

17050 Davis Road, Lakeview

*Difficulty: Easy to Moderate (walking up to 3 mi.)*
A Lands Pass for admission is required unless you have a fishing or hunting license. Day passes can be obtained on line at https://wildlife.ca.gov/licensing or by calling (800) 565-1458, or in-person wherever fishing and hunting licenses are sold. Meet at 6:00 AM at Memorial Park in Claremont. Bring snacks, water, and lunch.

**Contact Trip Leader:** Dan Gregory (909) 456-4994 or DanRCRenee@verizon.net

### Saturday, February 21, 2026

**Field Trip to Lake Perris**

Lake Perris 17801 Lake Perris Dr., Perris

*Difficulty: Easy to Moderate (walking up to 3 mi.)*
Meet at 7:00 a.m. at Memorial Park in Claremont. Bring snacks, water, and lunch. There is a $10 vehicle entry fee ($9 if age 62+) at Lake Perris State Recreation Area.

**Contact Trip Leader:** Dan Gregory (909) 456-4994 or DanRCRenee@verizon.net

# 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 approximately two-hour walk is perfect for beginners and experienced birders alike. A limited number of loaner binoculars are available. PVAS volunteer Ken Burgdorff (gwrencaps@gmail.com) and others will lead the walks.

Please RSVP using the following date-specific links:

***December 7, 2025*** - https://tinyurl.com/December-Walk

***January 4, 2026*** - https://tinyurl.com/January-Walk

***February 1, 2026*** - https://tinyurl.com/February-Walk

If you have limited mobility and would like to bird from the tram, please contact the garden at registrar@calbg.org to reserve a spot.

### Fourth Sunday of the Month Bonelli Bird Walks

**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:

***December 28, 2025:*** Brian Elliott brianelli@aol.com or (909) 241-8036

***January 25, 2026:*** Patrick Gavit ebiner.gavit@gmail.com or (626) 214-6905

***February 22, 2026:*** Keith Condon catbird117@yahoo.com

Pomona Valley Bird Alliance
2058 N. Mills Ave., PMB426
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# New Season, New Name: Pomona Valley Bird Alliance

It's official! The Pomona Valley Audubon Society is now the Pomona Valley Bird Alliance (PVBA). All our communication channels, including social media, the website and newsletter, now feature our new name and logo.

"The new name is more contemporary, welcoming and inclusive and better aligns with our mission and values," said Tina Stoner, PVBA president.

"And while we have a new name, we still have the same mission: to promote the protection, appreciation and enjoyment of birds and other wildlife through recreation, education and conservation," she said.

The word "Alliance" reflects the strong network of members, donors, volunteers, and community partners who work together to advance our mission, Stoner added.

PVBA remains a local chapter of the National Audubon Society, with all the benefits of affiliation. Our chapter will also retain its signature logo featuring our mascot, the Acorn Woodpecker.

The name change wasn't undertaken lightly. The process began in July 2023, when the board formed a committee to survey members and explore options. After months of discussion and input, the board unanimously adopted the new name in November 2024.

Key board members worked overtime this year to make all the necessary legal and financial changes behind the scenes to officially adopt the new name. Members don't need to do anything, and their membership is unchanged.

The board considered a name change after learning more about John James Audubon's ties to slavery and opposition to abolition. Although Audubon authored and illustrated the seminal "Birds of America," some members felt a continued association with him might discourage newcomers. The new name emphasizes inclusivity and a welcoming spirit.

PVBA joins many local chapters that have dropped "Audubon" from their name. Several California chapters also use the name "Bird Alliance," including San Diego Bird Alliance, Golden Gate Bird Alliance, Santa Clara Valley Bird Alliance and others.

Our new website is pomonavalleybirdalliance.org. The old address will automatically redirect, so you'll always find us.

## PVBA Board of Directors

**PRESIDENT** - Tina Stoner - tinastoner@earthlink.net
**VICE-PRESIDENT** - Seth Thompson - polpsych@gmail.com
**SECRETARY** - Patty Nueva Espana - nuspain@icloud.com
**TREASURER** - Patty Anis - pattyanis@gmail.com
**MEMBERSHIP** - Laura Dugan - ladwight76@hotmail.com
**PROGRAMS** - available (Tina Stoner)
**EDUCATION** - Laura Jaoui - ljjaoui01@gmail.com
**COMMUNICATIONS** - Sam Atwood - twoatwoods@gmail.com
**COMMUNICATIONS** - Available (co - chair)
**CONSERVATION** - Brian Elliott - brianelli@aol.com
**FIELD TRIPS** - Scott Marnoy - gopherus2@gmail.com
**MEETING LOGISTICS** - Laurie Borer - peachborer@gmail.com

**Committees & Contacts**

**WEBMASTER** - Seth Thompson - polpsych@gmail.com
**NEWSLETTER EDITOR** - Sam Atwood – twoatwoods@gmail.com
**OWL PELLETS FOR EDUCATORS** - Kathy McPherson - kathleenamc@yahoo.com
**BURROWING OWL PROJECT** - Suzanne Thompson - sct047047@pomona.edu

## February Volunteer Opportunities

We're looking for enthusiastic volunteers to help staff our PVBA booth at upcoming community outreach events Feb. 15 & 21! Share your passion for birds, connect with nature lovers, and help inspire others to appreciate our feathered friends by contacting Tina Stoner at tinastoner@earthlink.net to sign up.