



# Chaparral Naturalist

A Publication of  
Pomona Valley Audubon Society

[www.pomonavalleyaudubon.org](http://www.pomonavalleyaudubon.org)

SPRING 2021 | MARCH - MAY

## Where are Burrowing Owls in Winter?

Story and Photo by Suzanne Thompson

With a little luck in the spring and summer you can see Burrowing Owls in the usual spots any time during the day. But when you want to sneak a peek in fall and winter, it looks like they're gone. But where?



BUOW at dawn in Ontario

The surprising answer is: Nowhere. Unlike their northern and midwestern cousins, Southern California Burrowing Owls do not migrate, but stay in the area, often in the same burrows and with the same mate from the summer.

During most of the year, Burrowing Owls are crepuscular, doing most of their hunting in the twilight before dawn and after dusk. But in the late spring and summer, they are likely to have a burrow full of hungry owlets. The pressure to feed three to nine owlets keeps both adults out hunting in daylight when we get good views of them. In the winter they are empty-nesters and doing most of their hunting in twilight, so we see them much less often.

It is possible, but challenging, to see the owls this time of year during twilight. Seth and I have made a number of trips to Ontario and Chino at twilight this winter with more luck at dusk than dawn. There is a narrow window of time between it being too light for the owls to be out and too dark to see them but a few times we hit it just right. On one trip to the Chaffey fields in Chino we saw four pairs of owls emerge from their burrows at dusk.

When March comes around again, our Pomona Valley owls do not have to make the journey from far off wintering grounds. Most of them already have a nest and a partner and can start raising the next brood of owlets who will pop out of their burrows in daylight for all to see.

## 49th Annual PVAS Christmas Bird Count

By Seth Thompson

At the turn of the 20th Century it was customary in many parts of the country to have a big day of bird shooting, and piles of corpses were considered part of the Yuletide holiday decorations. With the motto of "count 'em, don't shoot 'em", National Audubon initiated an annual bird count to replace the carnage.

Counters go out in small groups to defined territories, record each species and try to count each individual bird they see. Since this is an annual event across North America, the individual chapter reports provide a record of changes in the distribution and abundance of species over time.

Pomona Valley Audubon has been participating in the Christmas Bird Count for 49 years, and on Saturday, December 19, eighty-eight birders fanned out across the PVAS area with masks and social distancing. They observed 135 species and counted 12,057 individual birds. That was thirteen more species than last year, but 500 fewer individuals, and consistent with the averages for past ten years. Typical birding: sometimes you see a lot and sometimes not.

A special shout out goes to Sheila White. After the fun and excitement of the day died down, she took on the tedious task of compiling all the individual results and preparing the final report for submission to National Audubon.

## New Burrowing Owl Stickers!



Our Burrowing Owl Committee member, Kim Dillbeck, designed two charming vinyl stickers for the Eyes and Ears on Burrowing Owls Project which we are gifting to Friends of the Burrowing Owls. We also created a business-sized card that can be handed out to people who are interested in the project or to educate photographers who are disturbing the owls on their nesting grounds. The stickers and the cards are available free to Friends. If you would like either or both the



stickers and a few cards, let me know the best way to get them to you. They can be left for you on a committee members' front porch for pick up (one located in Pomona and one in Claremont) or sent via postal mail. If you want them mailed, please send your mailing address to Suzanne Thompson [sthompson@pomona.edu](mailto:sthompson@pomona.edu). If you can pick them up, let me know which location you prefer and an envelope with the items and your name will be left on the porch of your choice. Keep Burrowing Owls in the Pomona Valley!

# Spring Meeting Speakers

You will receive the meeting links via email, IF we have your address! If you've never received an email from PVAS, send your address to [pomonavalleyaudubon@gmail.com](mailto:pomonavalleyaudubon@gmail.com).



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## Thursday March 4, 2021 at 7 pm

**Dr. Christopher Clark, PhD – Singing Feathers, Humming of Hummingbirds and the Quiet Flight of Owls and Other Birds**



Dr. Clark will present ongoing research from his lab at UCR, starting with results about how Costa's Hummingbirds perform their courtship dives

and learn to sing. He will then talk about a new research project on quiet flight, including new information that owls are not the only birds to fly quietly. Christopher Clark is a professor of biology at UCR where he and his

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students use wind tunnels, high speed video and other technology to study courtship displays and how feathers produce sound with a focus on hummingbirds. This fun mix of bioacoustics and biomechanics is used to study the relationship between sound and behavior. Dr. Clark attended Washington State University, UT Austin and received his doctorate from UC Berkeley.

REMINDER: Meeting links are NOT posted anywhere so we need your email address to send you a link. Send to [pomonavalleyaudubon@gmail.com](mailto:pomonavalleyaudubon@gmail.com).

Thank you!

## Thursday, April 1, 2021 at 7 pm

**Dr. Nina Karnovsky's Senior Avian Ecology Students**



Watch Western Gulls steal fish from Rhinoceros Auklets off the coast of CA on Ano Nuevo Island. Take a peek at the social life of Dovekies at a colony on the island of Spitsbergen,

Norway. Find out how climate change will alter the distributions, migration routes and interspecies interactions of wood warblers. Three undergraduate seniors from Pomona College working with Professor Nina Karnovsky will give short presentations on their bird research. Kyra Madunich: The frequency and impact of kleptoparasitism on Rhinoceros Auklets breeding on Año Nuevo Island, Tessa Fujisaki: The behavior of Dovekies at the colony on Spitsbergen and Cody Pham: The impacts of climate-mediated range shifts on wood-warbler (Parulidae) species.

## Thursday, May 6, 2021 at 7 pm

**Dr. Andrea Bonsoli Alquati, PhD – The Lives of Birds in a Polluted World**



We live in a world polluted by a variety of toxic substances that threaten the natural world and our health. Some pollutants are the legacy of our past, but new ones continue to emerge. Birds are sensitive sentinels of the effects of pollutants. Dr. Alquati will present recent research, including his, to explain what birds tell us about the effects of pollutants on the natural world and how bird diversity influences their sensitivity and

response to environmental pollution. Andrea Alquati is a professor of environmental toxicology at Cal Poly Pomona whose research examines physiological and genetic responses to environmental contamination, such as the nuclear accidents of Chernobyl and Fukushima, and the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. His research has expanded to investigating how birds respond to emerging contaminants such as microplastic levels in the ocean along the So Cal coast.

## An Invitation to Join Friends of Pomona Valley Burrowing Owls



Join the Friends of the PVAS Burrowing Owls and receive two charming vinyl decals designed by Burrowing Owl committee member Kim Dillbeck. We also created a business-sized card that can be given to people who are interested in the project or to educate photographers who are disturbing the owls. The stickers and the cards are available free to Friends.

Contact Suzanne Thompson ([sthompson@pomona.edu](mailto:sthompson@pomona.edu)) to join the Friends group and help keep Burrowing Owls in the Pomona Valley!