



Chaparral Naturalist

A Publication of
Pomona Valley Audubon Society

www.pomonavalleyaudubon.org

WINTER 2021-22 | DECEMBER - FEBRUARY

20 Years at Bonelli

By Tina Stoner

This issue of the Chaparral Naturalist is dedicated to Pat and Rod Higbie who have retired from leading the nature walks at Bonelli Regional Park after 20 years of service.

The fourth Sunday of the month nature walks have been a staple event for beginner and seasoned birders alike for

“Seeing the excitement when a someone got a life-bird.” Whether a rarity or a fairly common species, their enthusiasm was always rewarding.

many years, but it wasn't always so. In 2001, Pat and Rod were living in Bonelli's RV Park and the nature walks were led by paid park staff. Staffing reductions and reassignments left Bonelli without a walk leader and the Park Superintendent asked Pat and Rod if they would take over. In March of 2001 they began taking a few people on walks and talked about the trees, the rocks (puddingstone) and the birds at Bonelli. Sometimes, no one came. The only publicity was a sign on the entry kiosk.

About 2005, PVAS got involved and started advertising the walk in this newsletter and the number of participants increased. In 2012, Rod took over monitoring the bluebird nest boxes at Bonelli from Dick Moore. The spring walks often included a sneak peak inside a nest box to see baby Western Bluebirds or Tree Swallows.

I asked Pat and Rod what their greatest challenge has been over the years and Rod immediately replied, “Logistics.” Those of you who have attended the walks for a few years know that the meeting

location has changed several times. Large events at the park, like concerts and bike races, would often block our access. Thankfully, the new meeting place at Norm's Hanger Coffee Shop parking lot, located just outside the park, is working well.

When asked to share their most rewarding moments, Rod replied, “Seeing the excitement when a someone got a life-bird.” Whether a rarity or a fairly common species, their enthusiasm was always rewarding. Pat said that watching beginners evolve over the years into really good birders has always been very special. They both found it rewarding when professional bird tour guides would bring customers to Bonelli and they would help them find rare birds like the Arctic Loon that spent the summer of 2013 on Puddingstone Lake. They considered the Arctic Loon their biggest international bird celebrity as birders from all over the US and beyond came to see the bird. Whether looking for the Arctic Loon or other birds,

many strong friendships forged over the years between Pat and Rod and birders from out of state. As avid travelers themselves, their out of state birding friends would then return the favor and take Pat and Rod birding where they were visiting. Likewise, birders they met while traveling were invited to visit Bonelli.

Lastly, I asked if they would share some of their favorite memories of

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leading the walks. Several of them involved raptors. Rod recalled a walk where the group was between East Shore and the RV Park and a Golden Eagle flew over them giving everyone good looks. Another

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PHOTO BY GENESSI LASALDE



Field Trips

Chaparral Naturalist

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Winter 2021-22

Field Trips - Pomona Valley Audubon field trips are offered at no cost (unless otherwise specified) and open to all individuals. ALWAYS call the trip leader if you plan to attend and to verify start time, meeting location, and confirm trip status. In case of rain, call the trip leader the night before. Many of our trips originate at Memorial Park in Claremont but you have the option to meet on site. Distance estimates are from Memorial Park in Claremont and are round-trip. For your comfort and enjoyment, participants should plan to bring the following items: Binoculars, spotting scope, camera, water, snacks (check description for lunch needs), walking or hiking shoes, hat, sunscreen, weather appropriate clothing and a full tank of gas if driving. Trips are rated by difficulty to help you prepare.

COVID UPDATE: Carpooling should be restricted to members of the same household or fully vaccinated individuals who agree to carpool. You have the option to meet at Memorial Park and caravan to the site or you can meet at the site. Because distancing is difficult to maintain on a birding outing, unvaccinated participants are requested to wear a mask. NO sharing of optics, food or drink. Please note that some trips may be listed as vaccinated only.

Due to everchanging COVID restrictions all in-person events are subject to cancellation. Always contact the trip leader.

December 15, 2021 – Wednesday

Pre-CBC Scouting Trip at Bonelli Regional Park

120 Via Verde Ave., San Dimas, CA Difficulty: Easy to Moderate (walking approx. 2 mi.)

A morning search for birds prior to our Christmas Bird Count. Bring water and snacks. Contact trip leader for meeting instructions and time. Difficulty: Est. driving 16 mi.

Trip Leader: Rod Higbie (909) 599-6526 or warblerod@verizon.net

December 18, 2021 – Saturday

Annual Christmas Bird Count (CBC)

EVERYONE can help! The more eyes and ears, the better. You can count from home, your local park or other nearby birding spot. Or you can be added to a team to count at specific locations within our counting circle.

To join our 2021 census, contact CBC Coordinator Seth Thompson at pomonavalleyaudubon@gmail.com

January 8, 2022 – Saturday

Whittier Narrows Regional Park

(750 S. Santa Anita Ave., South El Monte, CA 91733) & the San Gabriel River Spreading Grounds - (Off Mines Avenue, Pico Rivera) Difficulty: Easy to Moderate (up to 4 miles.)

Dan will lead us in search of wintering waterfowl, sparrows, flycatchers and more. Both locations are great places to find winter vagrants. Meet at 7:00 a.m. at Memorial Park in Claremont. Bring snacks, water, and lunch for a full day trip. Est. driving 70 mi.

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

January 15, 2019 – Saturday

Orange County Big Day (multiple locations)

Difficulty: Moderate (up to 5 mi.)

Start your new year off with a big list from a tour of multiple coastal migrant traps and hot spots for wintering specialties. Possible sites include Bolsa Chica, the San Joaquin Marsh, Dana Point Harbor, and more. Meet at 7:00 a.m. at Memorial Park in Claremont. Bring snacks, water, and lunch for a full day trip. (Est. driving 175 mi.)

Contact Leader: Eric Smith (909) 477-7976 or bird4life28@gmail.com

February 12, 2022 – Saturday

Lake Perris and San Jacinto Wildlife Area

(Lake Perris 17801 Lake Perris Dr., Perris, CA 92571 and SJWA 17050 Davis St., Lakeview, CA 92567 - Difficulty: Easy to Moderate (up to 3 mi.)

We'll take a walk at Lake Perris and a drive at San Jacinto for wintering waterfowl, shorebirds, gulls, sparrows and raptors including Peregrine Falcon and Bald and Golden Eagle. 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 62+) at Lake Perris State Recreation Area. Est. driving 110 mi.

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

Bird Walks

California Botanic Garden

1500 N. College Ave. Claremont, CA 91711

Resumption of the California Botanic Garden First Sunday of the Month Family Friendly Bird Walks is being postponed until COVID restrictions lessen to a level more conducive to a safe and comfortable group walk at the garden.

Bonelli Regional Park

120 E. Via Verde Dr., San Dimas, CA 91773

Pat and Rod Higbie have announce their retirement from leadership of the Bonelli Park Fourth Sunday of the Month Nature Walks. The walk will now be led by various leaders (thank you to our volunteers!) We will continue to meet in the parking lot of Brackett Field (airport) at 1615 McKinley Ave., La Verne, CA (better known as the Norm's Hanger Coffee Shop parking lot.) To reach the parking lot, take McKinley Ave. west from Fairplex Drive to the parking area at the end of the road on the right. Meet at 7:45 a.m. to caravan into the park. Bring binoculars, comfortable shoes and your mask.

Sunday Dec. 26 – Leader: Brian Elliott (brianelli@aol.com)

Sunday Jan 23 – Leader: Keith Condon (catbird117@yahoo.com)

Sunday Feb 27 – Leaders: Dave and Donna Bedell (dwbedell44@gmail.com)



Meetings via Zoom (email pomonavalleyaudubon@gmail.com for link)

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Thursday – December 6, 2021 at 7 pm

Dr. Ashley Heers – From Baby Birds to Feathered Dinosaurs: Locomotor Development and the Evolution of Avian Flight

Birds are the Olympic athletes of the animal world. Flight is the most physically demanding mode of locomotion especially during extreme behaviors like hovering, long distance migration, high altitude flight, or even “flying” underwater at great depths. Birds can accomplish these feats due to a suite of specialized anatomical features, including large wings, hypertrophied muscles, and robust skeletons. But birds did not start out with these specializations — the developmental and evolutionary beginnings of birds look very different. Most hatchlings are flightless with very rudimentary anatomies: small or nonexistent wings, underdeveloped muscles, less specialized skeletons. This transition from flight-incapable hatchling to flight-capable adult is extremely dramatic. The evolutionary beginning of birds was equally dramatic as they evolved from a subset of theropod dinosaurs over millions of years, during one of Earth’s great evolutionary transformations. How do birds function during these major developmental or evolutionary transitions? In other words, what do birds with rudimentary or transitional anatomies do? Here, Dr. Ashley Heers will explore the functional relevance of rudimentary wings in birds and their extinct dinosaur ancestors. Ashley Heers is an Assistant Professor at California State University, Los Angeles. She teaches Anatomy and Physiology and Comparative Vertebrate Anatomy and has been fascinated by birds since high school — when she discovered that birds are living dinosaurs. <https://www.audubon.org/magazine/january-february-2015/which-came-first-dinosaur-or-bird>



Thursday – January 6, 2022 at 7 pm

Brian Elliott – Iceland: Birds, Whales, Geysers, Waterfalls, Ice, and an Erupting Volcano!

Iceland was one of the first countries to open up to tourism during the pandemic and is a popular and easy country to travel around on your own without having to join a tour group. Brian and a friend rented a 4-wheel drive camper van and spent 15 days in early July 2021 traveling through remote and some not so remote areas of Iceland, enjoying the incredible natural sights and sounds of the country. They visited immense cliffs speckled with thousands of nesting puffins, kittiwakes, gannets, and a host of other seabirds. Arctic terns were everywhere on the island nation. They took two whale watching trips, visited massive geyser areas and ice filled lagoons, and hiked up to see the erupting volcano that was drawing hundreds of visitors each day. Brian will share images from the trip and discuss his experience birding and nature viewing in Iceland. Brian has an MS in geology and worked as a geologist before teaching physics and environmental science for 29 years at San Dimas High School. A passionate and well-traveled birder, Brian is also an accomplished rock climber and wilderness adventurer enjoying these activities in 21 different countries around the world. He serves on the PVAS board as our conservation chair and is the chair of the Los Serranos Sierra Club group.



Thursday – February 3, 2022 at 7 pm

Sherry Schmidt - Poles Apart - A Contrast Between the Northern and Southern Polar Regions: A Tale of Two Journeys

The polar regions are some of the last true wilderness areas left on the planet. They have spectacular scenery and harbor abundant wildlife. However, they are quite different in terms of climate, plant diversity, mammal species, and bird species. Sherry Schmidt will give a presentation based on two trips: one to the Antarctic Peninsula and South Georgia in the southern hemisphere, the other to Svalbard which is surrounded by the Arctic ocean in the northern hemisphere. The Antarctic region features marine mammals and numerous species of penguins. The Arctic region provides habitat for charismatic mammals such as the polar bear and arctic fox. Svalbard is also an important nesting area for a number of species of sea birds including Atlantic puffins, thick-billed murres, and northern fulmars. Sherry will share images from both trips and will also discuss the natural history of selected sea birds she photographed. Sherry Schmidt has been teaching in the Biology Department at Mt. San Antonio College for over 30 years. Although she is retired, she continues to teach Conservation Biology during the 6-week intersessions. Her love of nature and travel has taken her to the world’s 7 continents. Sherry considers herself a conservation photographer and hopes that her work as a teacher and photographer will stimulate an interest in nature and concern for the planet’s vanishing species.

About Membership

We invite you to become a member of both National Audubon Society (NAS) and Pomona Valley Audubon Society (PVAS). Visit our website (pomonavalleyaudubon.org) and click on the "Membership" tab and then click on the link to NAS. Make a \$20 donation for a one-year individual (or family) membership. Make sure the chapter code is C08. For PVAS only (not NAS) membership, please email [pomonalleyaudubon@gmail.com](mailto:pomonavalleyaudubon@gmail.com) for full information. Thank You.

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favorite involved watching a Red-tailed Hawk eating a coot. The group stayed quiet and did not disturb the hawk allowing them good long looks at the circle of life in action.

They both agree that living in the park for 20 years was a wonderful opportunity and allowed them to see and do things others might not. One early morning in the fields near the airport they watched a Barn Owl silently flying low over the

Their extensive birding knowledge, willingness to share it with all who came to the walks and the gentle way of helping beginners get into birding are what most of us will remember about their 20 years at Bonelli.

grass hunting for rodents. On another occasion, they got to help Bob Everett, from Wild Wings of CA, release a rehabilitated Great Blue Heron.

Pat and Rod have many great memories of living at Bonelli and leading the bird walks for 20 years. They continue to make new memories as Rod drives a short distance from their new home to the park every day with Pat joining him every other day. Their extensive birding knowledge, willingness to share it with all who came to the walks and the gentle way of helping beginners get into birding are what most of us will remember about their 20 years at Bonelli. Thank you Pat and Rod! You will be missed.



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PVAS CHAPARRAL NATURALIST | WINTER 2021-22

Our Mission: To promote the protection, appreciation and enjoyment of birds and other wildlife through recreation, education and conservation.



The **PVAS Virtual Birding Owl Festival** is still going strong: www.pvasburrowingowlfestival.com. Check out the Burrowing Owl videos and slide shows, information and fun facts about Burrowing Owls in the Pomona Valley, activities for kids, and a festival store with Burrowing Owl t-shirts, pins, and stickers.

POMONA VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY'S
Family Friendly Virtual BURROWING OWL FESTIVAL

- ALL ABOUT BURROWING OWLS
- BURROWING OWLS IN THE POMONA VALLEY
- ACTIVITIES FOR KIDS
- STORE/DONATE/JOIN
- BÚHO DE MADRIGUERA EN ESPAÑOL

Time to Get Ready For the CBC

You can add to a century of community science by joining the PVAS Christmas Bird Count (CBC) on Saturday, December 18th. 2021 marks the 122nd CBC in the United States and Canada. (Our chapter has been participating in the count since 1972!) PVAS CBC teams will fan out in our 15-mile diameter count circle centered in Claremont to count each bird seen in our area. The team leaders are experienced birders and team members range from novice to expert. No prior experience required! Some participants make a full day of it; others can only spare a few hours. Contact Seth Thompson polpsych@gmail.com for more info or to volunteer to join a team counting in your neighborhood.