

# Phainopepla



Published by the  
**San Fernando Valley Audubon Society**  
A Chapter of the National Audubon Society



January 2010    Volume 61    No. 1

## PROGRAM NOTES

### **Guy Commeau to Speak at Thursday, January 28 SFVAS General Membership Meeting, 7:00 p.m.**

Guy Commeau, naturalist, world traveler, photographer, LA Zoo volunteer will once again present a program of his latest travels and adventures. An excellent photographer with an artistic bent, he will entertain us with his exciting adventures and photographs. Please see the Calendar Section for directions. ♣



### **SFVAS Annual Awards Banquet, Friday, March 5, 2010, Airtel Plaza Hotel, 6:00 p.m. Featured Speaker: Richard W. Halsey**

Richard W. Halsey is the director of the California Chaparral Institute, a nonprofit research and educational organization focusing on the ecology of California's shrubland plant communities, wildland fire, and how Mediterranean-type ecosystems have helped shape human culture. He has given more than 300 presentations over the past five years concerning chaparral ecology, how communities can adapt to fire-prone environments, and the importance of nature education. Mr. Halsey also provides living history performances focusing on the Middle East in the 1100s and California in the 1800s. He taught biology for over thirty years in both public and private schools and was honored as Teacher of the Year for San Diego City Schools in 1991.

Mr. Halsey also works with the San Diego Museum of Natural History, publishes *The Chaparralian*, a journal focusing on chaparral and wildfire issues, and continues to teach natural history throughout the state. Mr. Halsey earned undergraduate degrees from the University of California in environmental studies and anthropology. During graduate work he received teaching credentials in life, physical and social science and a masters in education. He has also been trained as a Type II wildland firefighter. The second edition of his book, *Fire, Chaparral, and Survival in Southern California*, was awarded the 2008 Best Nonfiction-Local Interest Book by the San Diego Book Awards Association. ♣



## THE LESSER GOLDFINCH LIKES TO EAT UPSIDE DOWN by Mathew Tekulsky

One summer, I decided to feed the Lesser Goldfinch some nyjer seed in an upside-down thistle feeder. In this case, the perch is just above the hole through which the bird picks out these tiny, black seeds. Well, I thought, how the heck are they going to do *that!* So I sat down and watched.

First, the bird lands on the narrow black bar that I stuck through two holes in the feeder to form a perch. He may look around briefly to be sure that everything is OK. Then he simply swings his feet around on the bar, like an acrobat, and suddenly, his body is facing down and his feet are clinging to the bar above him. He takes another look around, and then he starts pecking into the hole, withdrawing seed after seed and eating them on the spot.



Now, even though these nyjer seeds are extremely small, the Lesser Goldfinch must pry open the husk with his sharp bill in order to get at the kernel. He does this expertly, all the while hanging upside down and looking over at me. I still don't understand why he doesn't just fall to the ground, as his feet are not long enough to wrap around the perch completely. He must have extremely strong toe muscles!

The Lesser Goldfinch has a number of calls, but the two that I know best are a metallic, buzzy "chit," often followed by a plaintive, high-pitched "tseeoow" sound similar to the whistling noise that dolphins make. When a flock of Lesser Goldfinches travel through my yard, I am treated to a chorus of these "chits" and "tseeoows" so that I know absolutely that this species is around.

Now, the Lesser Goldfinch needs lots of water in order to digest the seeds that it eats, so if you have a birdbath in your garden, don't be surprised if the goldfinches stop by for a drink. In the canyon behind my house, there are plenty of seeds produced by the various grasses and flowers, and the lesser goldfinches are almost always seen when I walk down the road into the canyon. It's an open slope, so the birds have plenty of room to maneuver—and along one side of the road, runoff from the hillside emerges and flows down to the bottom of the hill. I often see the goldfinches drinking from this water supply, right on the pavement.

Along one side of my house, I have a long strip of rosemary, and whenever this shrub sports its pale lavender-blue flowers, the Lesser Goldfinches descend onto the plant and devour its light-green buds. They are often joined by the House Finch and, in winter, the Golden-crowned Sparrow. But when the Lesser Goldfinch is using the upside-down feeder, he does this alone. The House Finch perches on the bar, but he doesn't have the nerve to swing himself upside down in order to feed. Sometimes, the Lesser Goldfinch looks over at the House Finch, probably wondering why his relative isn't taking the nyjer seeds.

Of course, if you want to see the Lesser Goldfinch and the House Finch at the same thistle feeder, just make sure that the holes are above the perch. You'll have plenty of House Finches, and you'll use up a lot of nyjer seed. But you won't have the fun of watching that lesser goldfinch swing himself upside down and give you that "how ya doin'" look. This, as they say, is priceless. (Photo: Rebecca LeVine) ♪



**SAVE the DATE: Friday March, 5, 2010**  
**SFVAS Annual Awards Banquet**  
**Adults \$50**  
**Students \$35**

**Send in your reservation form found on the back page TODAY!**



The **Cornell** Lab  of Ornithology

**Take a Mid-Winter Nature Break With the  
Great Backyard Bird Count  
February 12–15, 2010**



New York, NY and Ithaca, NY—Bird watchers coast to coast are invited to take part in the 13th annual Great Backyard Bird Count, Friday, February 12, through Monday, February 15, 2010. Participants in the free event will join tens of thousands of volunteers of all levels of birding experience to count birds in their own backyards, local parks or wildlife refuges.

Each checklist submitted by these “citizen scientists” helps researchers at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society learn more about how the birds are doing—and how to protect them. Last year, participants turned in more than 93,600 checklists online, creating the continent’s largest instantaneous snapshot of bird populations ever recorded.

“Taking part in the Great Backyard Bird Count is a great way to get outside with family and friends, have fun, and help birds—all at the same time. Anyone who can identify even a few species can provide important information that enables scientists to learn more about how the environment is changing and how that affects our conservation priorities,” said Audubon Education Vice President, Judy Braus. “Everyone who participates in the GBBC—families, teachers, and young people—will get a chance to hone their observation skills, learn more about birds, and make a great contribution to the future!”

Anyone can take part in the Great Backyard Bird Count, from novice bird watchers to experts. Participants count birds for as little as 15 minutes (or as long as they wish) on one or more days of the event and report their sightings online at [www.birdcount.org](http://www.birdcount.org). One 2009 participant said, “Thank you for the opportunity to participate in citizen science. I have had my eyes opened to a whole new interest and I love it!”

“The GBBC is a perfect first step toward the sort of intensive monitoring needed to discover how birds are responding to environmental change,” said Janis Dickinson, director of Citizen Science at the Cornell Lab. “Winter is such a vulnerable period for birds, so winter bird distributions are likely to be very sensitive to change. There is only one way—citizen science—to gather data on private lands where people live and doing this across the continent over many years. GBBC has enormous potential both as an early warning system and in capturing and engaging people in more intensive sampling of birds across the landscape.”

Bird populations are always shifting and changing. For example, 2009 GBBC data highlighted a huge southern invasion of Pine Siskins across much of the eastern United States. Participants counted 279,469 Pine Siskins on 18,528 checklists, as compared to the previous high of 38,977 birds on 4,069 checklists in 2005. Failure of seed crops farther north caused the siskins to move south to find their favorite food.

On the [www.birdcount.org](http://www.birdcount.org) website, participants can explore real-time maps and charts that show what others are reporting during the count. The site has tips to help identify birds and special materials for educators. Participants may also enter the GBBC photo contest by uploading images taken during the count. Many images will be featured in the GBBC website’s photo gallery. All participants are entered in a drawing for prizes that include bird feeders, binoculars, books, CDs, and many other great birding products.

For more information about the GBBC, visit the website at [www.birdcount.org](http://www.birdcount.org). Or contact the Cornell Lab of Ornithology at [gbbc@cornell.edu](mailto:gbbc@cornell.edu), or Audubon at [citizenscience@audubon.org](mailto:citizenscience@audubon.org) or (215) 355-9588, Ext 16. ♪



# Calendar of Events



**Saturday, January 2. Upper Las Virgenes Canyon Open Space Bird Walk. 8:00–11:00 a.m.** Directions: Exit the Ventura Freeway (U.S. 101) at Las Virgenes Canyon Road and proceed north to the trailhead parking area at the end of the road. Please bring plenty of water and wear proper shoes. No toilets are available on site. Leader: Jim Hardesty (818) 346-6712, jim.hardesty@sfvaudubon.org.

**Saturday, January 2. Castaic Lake Bird Walk. 8:00–10:00 a.m.** Directions: Take closest freeway to I-5 North and exit at Parker Road. Turn right and proceed to stop sign (Castaic Road), proceed to next stop sign (Lake Hughes Road), proceed to next stop sign (Castaic Lake Drive) and turn right. Entrance to the park is on the right. Parking is in Lot 4, so make a right turn after the kiosk, then an immediate left turn into the lot, parking to the left. Leader: Roger McClure. For information, contact the staff of LA Co Parks at (661) 257-4050.

**Sunday, January 3. Sepulveda Basin Bird Walk. 8:00 a.m.** Directions: Exit the San Diego Freeway (I-405) on Burbank Blvd. Go west about one-half mile to Woodley Avenue and turn right (north). Travel about one-half mile to the second possible right turn (at sign for the Water Reclamation Plant and Japanese Garden). Turn right and go east about one-half mile to Wildlife Area parking at the end of the road. Leader: Kris Ohlenkamp. For more information contact him at (818) 986-7785 or kris.ohlenkamp@sfvaudubon.org.

**Saturday, January 9. High Desert Bird Prowl. 8:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m.** Here is an opportunity to seek out wintering hawks, owls, Mountain Plovers, Mountain Bluebirds, longspurs, sparrows, etc. Directions: Take the 405 or 5 Freeway north to the 14 Freeway. Exit the 14 at Avenue S south of Palmdale and drive to the Park-n-Ride Lot just east of the off-ramp. We will meet at the west end of the lot and carpool for the morning. Bring snacks and beverages. Scopes and FRS radios will be helpful. We will return to the meeting spot about 1:00 p.m. No fee, no reservation. Leaders: Jim Hardesty, (818) 346-6712, and Jim Moore, (661) 298-1130.

**Saturday, January 9. Beginners and Family Bird Walk. 9:00–11:00 a.m.** Come on out for a fun bird walk at Sepulveda Basin! The White Pelicans are starting to return why don't you? These popular walks, designed for beginning birders and school-age children, have resumed for the current cool season. Directions: Exit the San Diego Freeway (I-405) on Burbank Blvd. Go west about one-half mile to Woodley Avenue and turn right (north). Travel about one-half mile to the second possible right turn (at sign for the

Water Reclamation Plant and Japanese Garden). Turn right and go east about one-half mile to Wildlife Area parking at the end of the road. Meet across the road from the parking lot at the low buildings. Leader(s): Muriel Kotin, (310) 457-5796 or Linda Jones, (818) 831-6061. Reservations are not needed except for large groups. Rain Cancels. Please visit our Website [www.sfvaudubon.org](http://www.sfvaudubon.org).

**Saturday, January 9. Placerita Canyon Nature Center Docents' Bird Walk. 9:00 a.m.** Directions: Take the 405 or 5 Freeway north to the 14 Freeway. Exit the 14 at Placerita Canyon. Turn right at the end of the off ramp and continue about 1.5 miles to the park entrance. Turn right and park at the Nature Center. Leader: Bob Fischer. For more information, call the Nature Center at (661) 259-7721.

**Sunday, January 10. Descanso Gardens Bird Walk. 8:00 a.m.** Meet at the first wide place after entering the gardens. Admission is free for early birders. Located at 1418 Descanso Drive, La Cañada. Leader: Karen Johnson or Nancy Herron Knode. For more information, contact Karen at [karen.johnson@sfvaudubon.org](mailto:karen.johnson@sfvaudubon.org) or (818) 790-1687.

**Saturday, January 16. Monthly Field Trip: Upper Newport Bay and San Joaquin Wildlife Sanctuary. Meet at 8:00 a.m.** Bring lunch and drinks. Allow about 1.5 hours driving time from the San Fernando Valley. Directions: Take the 405 Fwy. south into Orange County; exit Jamboree Road in the city of Irvine. Turn right (south) on Jamboree Road and proceed about 4 miles to San Joaquin Hills Road, turn right and drive down to the bay. Park on San Joaquin Hills Road just before the dead end. In the afternoon we will bird the nearby San Joaquin Wildlife Sanctuary. Leader: Richard Barth (310) 276-0342.

**Saturday, January 16. Santa Monica Mts. Conservancy Bird Walk at Towsley Canyon. 8:00–10:00 a.m.** Directions: Go north on I-5 through Santa Clarita, exit Calgrove and turn west (left) under the freeway and then left again on the Old Road. Watch for the sign, "Ed Davis Park at Towsley Canyon." Turn right and park in the back lot. Meet at the kiosk. Leader: Roger McClure. For further information, call (661) 252-6187.

**Sunday, January 17. Malibu Creek State Park Bird Walk. 8:00 a.m.** Meet at the second (lower) day-use parking lot. Entrance to the park is on the west side of Las Virgenes Road, just south of Mulholland Hwy. Entrance fee is \$12 per car. Leader(s): Muriel Kotin, (310) 457-5796, [muriel.kotin@sfvaudubon.org](mailto:muriel.kotin@sfvaudubon.org) and/or Art Langton, (818) 887-0973.



**Tuesday, January 19. O'Melveny Weekday Walk at O'Melveny Park, Granada Hills. 9:00 a.m.** Directions: Take the 118/Ronald Reagan Freeway and exit at Balboa Blvd. Turn north, driving two miles to Sesnon, turn left going west 0.6 miles, turn right at park entrance. Meet in the parking lot. RAIN CANCELS. Contact Carolyn Oppenheimer at, (818) 885-7493, with any questions (before 7 p.m.) or carolyn.oppenheimer@sfvaudubon.org.

**Sunday, January 24. Descanso Gardens Bird Walk. 8:00 a.m.** See January 10 for details.

**Monday, January 25. SFVAS Board Meeting. 7:00 p.m.** Balboa Mission Town Hall, 16916 San Fernando Mission Blvd., at Balboa (southeast corner) in Granada Hills.

**Thursday, January 28. General Membership Meeting. 7:00 p.m.** Encino Community Center, 4935 Balboa Blvd., Encino. Located between Moorpark and Ventura Blvd.,

on the west side of Balboa, just south of the Presbyterian Church. Come early for social hour. Our speaker will be naturalist, Guy Commeau, who will delight us with his nature photographs. See "Program Notes" on page 1.

**Saturday, February 6. Upper Las Virgenes Canyon Open Space Bird Walk. 8:00–11:00 a.m.**  
See January 2 for details.

**Saturday, February 6. Castaic Lake Bird Walk. 8:00–10:00 a.m.** See January 2 for details.

**Sunday, February 7. Sepulveda Basin Bird Walk. 8:00 a.m.** See January 3 for details.

Future Field Trips: (Details later)

**February 20. Private Game Preserve in Ventura County**

**March 20–21. Morro Bay Weekend** ♪

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## Monthly Field Trip Report

by Richard Barth

On November 21 we visited Ventura Harbor and Water Treatment Ponds, with bonus birding along Canada Larga Road and at Ormond Beach. Perfect weather attracted a strong turnout of birders, and our species total for the day was ninety-two!

A Red-necked Grebe, having been recently reported from the Marina Park area of the harbor, was seen briefly by four of our participants from well across the harbor, but unfortunately could not be found later from Marina Park by the group. An immature Tundra Swan had been reported all week at the treatment ponds, and we were able to find it immediately in the first pond inside the gate. Canada Larga Road, off Hwy 33 toward Ojai, was said to be hosting several Lewis's Woodpeckers...we checked it out and found three individuals doing their unique flycatching routine from trees at the end of the road.

Other species of interest were observed on the trip. An immature Herring Gull was spotted by Frank Gilliland and well-studied by the group. Two "late" (rare in winter) warblers were seen, Yellow and Wilson's. Sora, Common Moorhen and Belted Kingfisher were nice finds. Northern Harrier, White-tailed Kite, Sharpshinned Hawk and Osprey headed our list of eight raptors. The notable rock shorebirds were Surfbird, Black Turnstone, Ruddy Turnstone and Black Oystercatcher. A very short duck list was highlighted by Blue-winged Teal. We saw all the expected gulls, but our only Glaucous-winged was a fly-over and we did not find Mew Gulls and a Bonaparte's until we stopped by the Ormond Beach area on the way home. We ended up with six species of grebes and saw the three expected species of cormorants. Other sightings included Red-breasted Sapsucker, American Pipit, Marsh Wren, Hermit Thrush, Western Bluebird, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Western Bluebird, Say's Phoebe, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Orange-crowned Warbler and Eurasian Collared-Dove. ♪

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## Audubon-at-Home Mailbox

by Alan Pollack

In this now and then column, Alan Pollack, our Audubon-at-Home Chair, will answer your questions about gardening for wildlife and sustainable gardening practices. Please e-mail him with any questions you have regarding creating a wildlife-friendly garden that can be used for publication. Alan also offers free consultation/landscape design to help you make your yard wildlife friendly. He also gives a free, PowerPoint slide show/lecture to community groups, high school, and college classes on attracting wildlife to your garden and sustainable gardening practices. He can be contacted at (818) 340-2347 or at alan.pollack@sfvaudubon.org. ♪



Cedar Waxwing  
*Bombycilla cedrorum*

Picture by Jay Tomkins

## Cedar Waxwing, *Bombycilla cedrorum*

It is that time of year when we may begin to see that “most elegant” of winter visitors, the Cedar Waxwing. They are facultative migrants, which means that they breed in the north and come only as far south as they want to. They breed in Alaska, Canada and the northern U.S. as far south as extreme northern California. Winter migrations depend on food availability. Here in our area, we sometimes see them in winter in large numbers and other times, not at all. They travel in compact flocks of twenty or so, emitting a call that is a thin high-pitched zeee. It is rare to see a single waxwing. They are berry eaters and love the many berry-bearing plants found in suburban

gardens, although they wouldn't say no to a nice juicy insect. These delightful birds, often described as elegant, were designated “designer birds” by certain members of our chapter. A very interesting photo article about this fascinating bird's visit to South Carolina may be found online at <http://www.hiltonpond.org/ThisWeek091111.html>. —Submitted by Linda Jones ♡

## Membership

SFVAS is pleased to welcome the following new members. We hope you will get involved with our many field trips and activities. Please contact Rose Leibowitz, Membership Chair, with any questions at [rose.leibowitz@sfaudubon.org](mailto:rose.leibowitz@sfaudubon.org).

(Photo: SFVAS Members: Rebecca LeVine, Muriel Kotin, and Mathew Tekulsky) ♡



Barbara L. Abramson  
Edward Alfano  
Betsy Allen  
Mary Andersen  
Michelle Armitage  
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Fujiwara T. B  
Sahag A. Baghdassar-  
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Joan Vandertuin  
Vincent Varsh  
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Dorothy White  
Jerry White  
Mamie Wurzel  
Judy Young



**JOIN THE SAN FERNANDO VALLEY AUDUBON**  
**To get started with your membership,**  
 use the following form and mail to:  
 SFV Audubon Society  
 Attn: Membership  
 P.O. Box 7769  
 Van Nuys, CA 91409  
 Make all checks payable to SFV Audubon.

**SFVAS Membership**

Regular 1-yr Chapter Membership....\$20      \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Student 1-yr Chapter Membership....\$10      \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Optional First-Class Postage.....\$5      \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Contributions to SFVAS.....      \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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How did you learn about SFVAS? \_\_\_\_\_

**Save a tree! I DO NOT** want to receive a hardcopy of the *Phainopepla*; I'll get my news online

The PHAINOPEPLA, published ten times a year, is the newsletter of the San Fernando Valley Audubon Society, P.O. Box 7769, Van Nuys, CA 91409, 818-347-3205. San Fernando Valley Audubon Society is a chapter of the National Audubon Society, a non-profit conservation/education organization, and is dedicated to "the conservation of wildlife and natural resources."

Articles, letters, drawings, and photographs concerning conservation, the science and ecology, birding, chapter activities, and articles of interest to the membership are welcome for publication in the PHAINOPEPLA.

Material from other newsletters or newspaper should include the source and date. Copy for the PHAINOPEPLA should be in the hands of the editor by the 3rd of the month to be included in the following month's newsletter.

An introductory membership to the National Audubon Society is \$20 and should be sent separately to:  
 National Audubon Society, Membership Data Center  
 P.O. Box 52529, Boulder, CO 80322. Be sure to write "C12" on the form to assure assignment to our chapter. For renewals, use the form in the National Audubon magazine, "Audubon".

If you have any questions about membership, renewals, change of address or any other membership concerns, please contact Rose Leibowitz at (818) 990-5405 or e-mail her at [rose.leibowitz@sfvaudubon.org](mailto:rose.leibowitz@sfvaudubon.org).

**SAN FERNANDO VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY**

**EXECUTIVE OFFICERS**

President:	Jim Moore	(661) 298-1130
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Mathew Tekulsky	(310) 962-5653

**COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSONS**

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Christmas Bird Count:	Art Langton	(818) 887-0973
Community Outreach:	Sharon Ford	(818) 780-5816
Conservation:	Kris Ohlenkamp	(818) 986-7785
Coordinating Council Rep:	Jim Hardesty	(818) 346-6712
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Descanso Bird Walks:	Nancy Herron Knode	unpublished
Descanso Bird Walks:	Karen Johnson	(818) 790-1687
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Youth Activities:	Muriel Kotin	(310) 457-5796

For Chapter leaders email addresses, see our web site:

**[www.SFVAudubon.org](http://www.SFVAudubon.org)**

**CHAPTER PHONE (818) 347-3205**

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# Phainopepla

San Fernando Valley Audubon Society  
PO Box 7769  
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## Dated Material

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to see this issue in full color!  
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**Phainopepla** January 2010



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San Fernando Valley Audubon Society Awards Banquet  
**Friday, March 5, 2010 \_ 6:00 p.m. No Host Bar \_ 7:00 p.m. Dinner**  
Airtel Plaza Hotel, 7277 Valjean Avenue, Van Nuys

**Featured Speaker:** Richard W. Halsey, Director California Chaparral Institute  
**Conservation Award Recipient: TBA**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

Enclosed is my check (\$50.00/person, \$35.00/student) for \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Additional Names \_\_\_\_\_

**Please make check payable to: San Fernando Valley Audubon Society.**

Mail to: Jeanne Polak-Recht, 11002 Garden Grove Avenue, Northridge, CA 91326

The buffet-style dinner will also include selections for vegetarians. The cost is \$50.00 (\$35.00 for college students) including tax and tip. Reservations must be made in advance. Please list names of all guests in your party and mail in this form by February 26, 2010. THERE IS NO RESERVED SEATING. Reduced parking fee at Airtel or street parking is FREE. You will not receive a confirmation of your reservation. Reservations will be held at the door.

For further information call Jeanne Polak-Recht, Chairperson, at (818) 360-1438.