



PAW PRINTS

Volume 41, Number 1

Newsletter of the Eaton Canyon Nature Center Associates January 2023

PUBLIC CALENDAR

Eaton Canyon Natural Area Park

Winter Hours: 8 am - 5 pm.

Nature Center Hours: 9 am - 5 pm
(includes restrooms)

Docent-Led Family Nature Walk

Every Saturday at 9 am. Meet in front of the Nature Center. No dogs please.

Nature Tails Story Hour

Every Saturday at 10:30 am on the Outdoor Patio. Stories and activities for children.

Saturday Nature Center Discovery

Saturday mornings on the Outdoor Patio. Animal Ambassadors: 10 am and 12 pm. Nature Discovery Tables: 10:30 am to 12:30 pm

Eaton Canyon Gardening Group

Every Wednesday at 9:30 am and second Sundays of the month at 10 am. Current volunteers only. Meet by Nature Center garage door.

Meetings:

Pasadena Audubon Society Meeting

Meetings are held on the third Wednesday of the month at 7:30 pm in the Eaton Canyon Nature Center Auditorium. No meeting in December.

California Native Plant Society Meeting

Meetings are held in the Eaton Canyon Nature Center Auditorium, the fourth Thursday of the month at 7:30 pm, except for November and December.

Pasadena Group Sierra Club Meeting

Program meetings are held on the first Wednesday of the month, 7 times a year, at 7:30 pm in the Eaton Canyon Nature Center Auditorium. Check their website for more information: www.sierraclub.org/angeles/pasadena

Happy New Year to everyone! 2023 is a great time to learn something new! If you're like me, you probably have a few pre-conceived ideas about a variety of things, including some from the natural world. For example, trying to learn a natural history topic can be a bit daunting, for instance, trying to identify all the oaks in Southern California or learn all the bird calls in Eaton Canyon can seem overwhelming.

One young woman, Ava, age 17, decided she wanted to take on a difficult task—gull identification! I admit, I thought that gulls were primarily found by the sea—seagulls. But did you know that many gulls spend much of their time around fresh water? Sure, they can be found strolling around on the beach, looking to snatch unsuspecting beach goers' lunch, but did you know that gulls can be found almost everywhere in North America, even in Eaton Canyon? A quick search in eBird turns up sightings of Western Gull, California Gull and Ring-billed Gull.

I hope you enjoy Ava's article as much as I did and that you learn something new this year too!

Introduction by Susan Gilliland, Co-Founder Los Angeles Birders

Gulls and Gulling: It's That Time of Year!

Article and photos by Ava, age 17, Los Angeles Birders



During the fall, non-birders must get the impression that we birders are all completely obsessed with warblers, no-going-back-full-time-die-hard-obsessed. And those people wouldn't be wrong. But different birds are associated with different seasons, and when many of the warblers move on in late fall, a bit of the warbler-craze goes with it.

Now what? One word: Gulls. Ugh, I hate gulls! They're so hard!! you might promptly exclaim, and these feelings are true for many of us. A good first rule of gulling is, there'll always be one that you can't identify. Gulling goes two ways in my opinion: extremely rewarding and/or extremely stressful. There's no middle, not with gulls.

Why, then, do people spend so much time watching these birds? Several words come to mind. Fun. Challenging. Rewarding. (Okay, fine, and stressful. These are gulls, after all.) Gulling is typically thought of as a sport more for "advanced birders." Not that beginners can't watch gulls—it's just that beginners tend to prefer easier birds. I tried and gave up several times in the past before finally starting to grasp it. Gulls appeal more to experienced birders because of the challenge. Once birders find and identify all the common birds in their areas, sometimes birding just doesn't have quite the same thrill anymore. Basically, normal birds can sometimes be too easy, and a little...boring. So birders turn to gulls. The beauty! The thrill! The struggle! The reward! The chance of a rarity! The chance of a lifer!

When I first determined to give gulling a try, a real try, not a half-hearted attempt, such as the ones I'd made in the past, I started with the simplest of identifications. There are many ages and behaviors gulls can be identified in: juvenile, first-cycle, second-cycle, third-cycle, adult, standing awake, standing asleep, sitting down, sitting down asleep, swimming, in flight, head in dumpster

Gulls continued on page 2



Paw Prints is a monthly publication of the ECNCA.

Articles and photographs are welcome on topics related to natural history and Nature Center activities. If you see something interesting in the canyon, please share it with us! The deadline for submissions to the February 2023 issue is January 15, 2023. Send submissions to Brenda Hurst eatonmember@gmail.com.

Contributors: Ava, Susan Gilliland, Marilyn Hildebrandt, Brenda Hurst

Paw Prints Production

Content Editor: Brenda Hurst

Layout: Carole Scurlock

Copy Editor: Laura Joseph

DOCENT AND MEMBER CALENDAR

Bag Lunch and Mini-Inservice:

There is no bag lunch in January.

Guided School Tours

School tours are conducted from October to the end of the school season. For reservations call the office 626-398-5420.

ECNCA Board Meetings

The ECNCA board meetings are held on the second Wednesday of the month at 7 pm via Zoom. If you are interested in joining a meeting, please send an email to eatonmember@gmail.com, at least 2 days prior to the meeting.



Dave Harrod with his Eaton Canyon 2022 Earth Steward Award

Gulls continued from page 1

... Yes, all this variability certainly adds to the challenge, so I began with the easiest age and behavior: adult gulls awake standing up. I could see that the adults were much simpler than the immatures, and this pose showed off maximum field marks for beginners like me. Some important field marks for distinguishing rare species and subspecies are sometimes found in flight, but these are usually best found with good photos. I'll review a few field marks to look for when identifying a gull before getting less technical.

- Overall size and "jizz"
- Mantle color: darker or lighter gray? What shade compared to other gulls?
- Head streaking in winter (heavy or light? What parts of the head? Direction of streaking?)
- Bill color/pattern
- Leg color
- Eye color (light or dark?)



These should serve you well for identifying gulls in any area. For example, if you were birding in Malibu Lagoon and spotted a large, bulky gull with a dark mantle, no head streaking, a large, bright yellow bill with a red spot at the tip, bright pink legs, and dusky eyes, that would be all you would need to identify it as an adult Western Gull.

As you know, most gulls are more complex than what I just described above, but if you're not super confident with gull identification, this is a great place to start! I was so happy the first time I was able to look at photos I'd taken and be able to say, oh yeah, that's an adult Western Gull with the dark back and pink feet; those are adult California Gulls with the greenish feet and paler backs!! I completely ignored the immatures for a while and honestly, I sometimes still do; they can be so confusing!

Currently, I'm into a self-described form of gulling: yard-gulling. And yes, it's probably what you're thinking. And yes, this tends to be even more stressful than normal gulling at the good ol' sewage ponds. But think of the gulls you could have on your yard list if you could identify the ones that fly over! (Then again, I'm also an obsessive yard-lister, and I understand if most birders aren't equally excited about this idea.) I have four gull species on my yard list (Western, California, Ring-billed, and Herring. Still waiting for Glaucous-winged and Iceland.) Most evenings in winter, there'll be an inconsistent trickle of gulls flying by my house; I believe they're commuting from their daytime foraging grounds (parking lots, shopping centers, dumpsters, etc.) to the Bard Reservoir for the night.

If you live near a landfill, shopping center, beach, any open water, you have a chance to see some gulls from your yard. Of course, identification in flight is challenging, and it takes a lot of practice to be good—not that I'm very good myself! A particular weakness of mine is distinguishing between Ring-billed and California Gulls in flight. Also, these problems are much worse in bad lighting or if the gulls are high in the sky. Patience is key, as it is in all kinds of gulling. As is acceptance of the frustrating fact that you can't identify them all.

Once you start gulling, it is, I admit, hard to stop. So why do gull-watchers put themselves through such agony? Simply put, it's the thrill of the challenge, and it's amazingly fun if you can find that uncommon or rare one if you can positively identify it. So what are you waiting for? Get out there and find some gulls!



Helen Wong, our superintendent of 25 years, has transferred to a new role in the County Parks and Recreation Department. We will miss her creativity, generosity, thoughtfulness, and kindness, as well as her deep dedication to the importance of the natural world and nature education for children. She has always been appreciative and a strong supporter of the ECNCA volunteers. We sincerely wish her happiness and great success with her new endeavors.

See more photos of Helen on page 4.

Plant of the Month

California Sagebrush, Coastal Sagebrush

Botanical Name: *Artemisia Californica*

Family: Asteraceae (Aster or Sunflower family)

Blooms: April - October

Lifeform: Shrub

Habitat: Coastal Sage Scrub, Coastal Strand

California sagebrush is a highly aromatic native perennial shrub that grows in the coastal strand and coastal sage scrub habitats. The plant grows in a rounded shape and its height can vary from one foot to eight feet tall. It grows from Oregon through California into Baja California along the coast and foothills generally below 3,000 feet. It is a dominant component of southern coastal sage scrub habitats.



California sagebrush has thin grey-green leaves with inconspicuous small disk flower clusters along the terminal stems of the plant. The plant is extremely drought tolerant and has adapted to our dry summers by having two types of leaves. In winter and spring with seasonal rain, the plant quickly grows long, tender, and feathery grey-green leaves. But, during the hot dry summer, these leaves wilt and are replaced by small, tough leaves. The plant goes dormant and can look dry or dead. The leaves produce soluble and volatile terpene compounds that are thought to inhibit germination and growth of some plants resulting in bare patches of soil under and around the plants. The shallow, fibrous root system

allows the plant to take advantage of early seasonal rains for rapid growth.

California sagebrush has some adaptation to fire and can sometimes resprout from the root crown, and can germinate from seed, especially the second year after a fire. The plant is highly flammable in summer due to substantial amounts of oil in the leaves.

California sagebrush is an important wildlife plant. It provides foraging and nesting habitat for many birds including the threatened California gnatcatcher and the endemic Bell's sage sparrow. Additionally, California sagebrush communities support a number of amphibians, reptiles and small mammals including the dusky-footed and desert woodrats who preferentially feed on California sagebrush.

The plant has been used medicinally by native Americans for numerous medical conditions and was also used ceremonially. The Spanish Californians used the plant medically as well. Early miners also used sprays of the plant to drive fleas away from their beds.

There are several nursery cultivars available for the garden most notably, 'Canyon Grey' that spreads along the ground and 'Montara' which forms a mound of fragrant foliage. These plants require full sun with decent drainage and are drought tolerant once established. The species California sagebrush can be found all around Eaton Canyon Natural Area, and there are a couple of 'Canyon Grey' specimens growing near the flag pole in front of the Nature Center.

Marilynn Hildebrandt



Mike and Ann Regan receiving their 15 Year Volunteer Badge and Certificate.

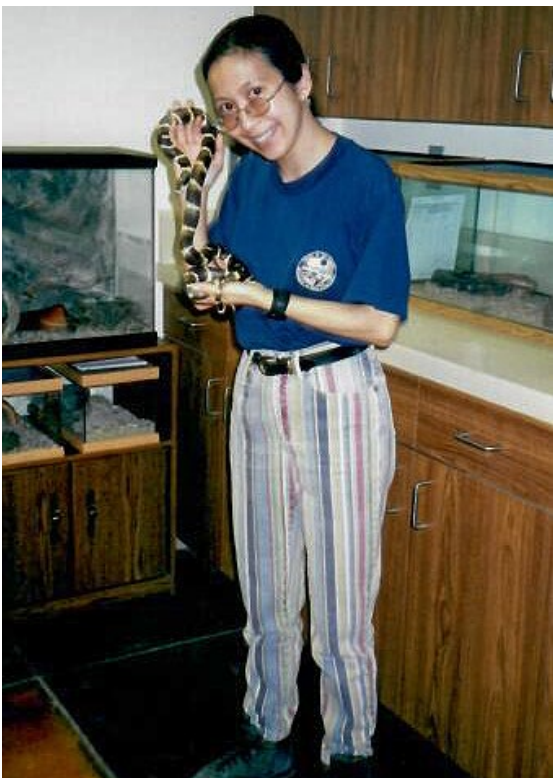




Photo: Carole Scurlock

ECNCA BOARD MEMBERS

President: Brenda Hurst

Vice-President: Diane Marcussen

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Corresponding Secretary: Mary Veselich

Treasurer: Terry Ginsberg

Membership Chair: Brenda Hurst

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NCA President: Laura Nicholson

NCA Representative: Terry Ginsberg

Eaton Canyon Nature Center Associates (ECNCA) is a chapter of the Nature Center Associates (NCA), a non-profit support group of the natural area park system of Los Angeles County. Founded for educational and scientific purposes, its primary mission is to develop in children and adults an appreciation of the natural world and to preserve Eaton Canyon as a natural area for future generations.

The Eaton Canyon Nature Center and Natural Area Park are located within the unincorporated area of Los Angeles County in the Supervisorial district of Kathryn Barger. The Natural Area and Nature Center are operated by the County of Los Angeles, Department of Parks and Recreation, in partnership with the Eaton Canyon Nature Center Associates.

Become A Member of the ECNCA (Eaton Canyon Nature Center Associates)

Membership benefits include the ECNCA newsletter, program announcements and a 10% discount at the gift shop. To join the Eaton Canyon Nature Center Associates, fill out the form below and mail with your check, payable to the ECNCA, 1750 North Altadena Drive, Pasadena, CA 91107.

Name: _____ Email: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____ Phone: _____

Please check appropriate box and mark return envelope "Membership"

☐ Individual \$30 ☐ Family \$45 ☐ Senior \$15 ☐ Senior Family \$30 ☐ Student \$15

☐ Friend of the Canyon \$75 ☐ Sage Saver \$100 ☐ Chaparral Contributor \$250 ☐ Riparian Guardian \$500

☐ Oak Woodlands Protector \$750 ☐ Wildlands Angel \$1000 ☐ NEW ☐ RENEWAL

Enclosed is my MEMBERSHIP in the amount of \$_____

Enclosed is my additional DONATION in the amount of \$_____

Please make checks payable to the ECNCA. All contributions are tax deductible.