Buena Vista Audubon Society

LAGOON FLYER

VOLUME 55 / NUMBER 9 / November-December 2026

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Buena Vista Audubon Society's Habitat Restoration Projects: Conservation through Land Acquisition and Restoration

Natalie Shapiro
Wednesday, November 18
Social: 6:45 p.m., Program: 7:00 p.m.
on Zoom

In 2015, the local community helped BVAS raise funds to acquire one of the last remaining unprotected coastal wetlands in North County—effectively protecting it from becoming a hotel. This 3.8-acre piece of land, located across the street from the Nature Center, is now in the process of being restored to native habitat.

In addition to the restoration of this aptly-named "Wetlands Reserve," BVAS has another piece of land that is in the final stages of habitat restoration—the 31-acre Andy Mauro Nature Preserve in northeast Oceanside. Natalie Shapiro will delve into the history and status of these restoration efforts, sharing why BVAS chose to acquire land for conservation and restoration and why these two pieces of land are important for rare and imperiled species of wildlife.

Natalie Shapiro

Natalie Shapiro has been Buena Vista Audubon Society's first Executive Director since 2018. A major part of her work is managing the restoration of these BVAS conservation lands.

Prior to her Executive Director position, Natalie served on the BVAS' Board of Directors and volunteered as a Nature Guide and Publicity Director. Natalie has a M.A. in Environmental Studies with a focus on studying sediment transport in Montana streams. She has helped protect roadless areas and old growth in the Northwest using community science and public education campaigns.

Mauro Preserve June 2026 by Barbara Swanson

RSVP for the program: We've moved to an online form! To join our Zoom program, please click here to RSVP by Monday, November 16, at 9:00 a.m., and fill out the Google form. You will receive the event link via email a few days before the program begins.

LET’S GO BIRDING!

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Grab your binoculars and join one or more of our free guided birding tours. New birders are always welcome!

Evening Grosbeak by Nancy Christensen

WHELAN LAKE BIRD SANCTUARY (Oceanside)
Saturday, Nov 7 — 8:00 a.m.
Saturday, Dec 5 — 8:00 a.m.
Gate is only open 7:45 - 8:00 a.m.; please be on time!
Join us as we explore various areas around the lake. Easy to moderate 2+ miles, some steep areas. Restroom.
Location: 3850 N River Road.
Leaders: Denise Riddle (driddle1855@att.net) and Patti Langen (plangen@bvaudubon.org)

SEEKING NEW BIRDERS!
Eve Martin is hosting a small, friendly group to introduce newcomers to the world’s best hobby—birding!
To join Eve’s beginning birders events (binoculars available), sign up on Meetup.com for the San Diego Beginning Birders group at https://www.meetup.com/the-san-diego-beginning-birders/
Location: Varies.
Leader: Eve Martin (message via meetup.com)

EL CORAZON GARRISON CREEK (Oceanside)
Wednesday, Nov 11 — 7:30 a.m.
Wednesday, Dec 9 — 7:30 a.m.
Easy flat trail, ~1+ mile.
Directions: From the intersection of El Camino Real and Oceanside Blvd., go east on Oceanside Blvd., turn left (north) into the first gate. Park to the left. No restrooms.
Leader: Denise Riddle (driddle1855@att.net)

STEVE BRAD’S BIRDING TRIPS
Join Steve for these surprise-location offerings that include a good dose of education on bird identification. When and where we go is Steve’s choice! Starting times and days vary, so send Steve an email if you are interested in being on his notification list.
Leader: Steve Brad (stevanbrad@gmail.com)

BIRDING WITH BARBARA
Saturday, Nov 21 — 8:00 a.m.
Capistrano Park in Oceanside
This month we will explore Capistrano Park and part of the nearby San Luis Rey river trail. The park has restrooms and flat, easy walking on trails or lawn. The river trail has one short steep section near the beginning. We will meet in the parking lot, located at 770 Capistrano Drive.
Leader: Barbara Swanson (baswanson100@hotmail.com)
There will not be a December outing.

COASTAL 101 BIRDING (Oceanside)
2202 S Coast Highway
Saturday, Nov 21 — 9:00 a.m.
Tuesday, Dec 29 — 9:00 a.m. (CBC)
We start along the Buena Vista Lagoon, visit Maxton Brown Park, travel to the ocean and weir, and return to the Nature Center along Coast Hwy. Easy 1.5 miles.
Location: Buena Vista Nature Center, 2202 S. Coast Hwy, Oceanside. Meet in the Nature Center parking lot.
Leader: Tom Troy (760-420-7328)

Kids' Nature Clubhouse

Sunday, Nov 8, 11:00 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.
Mammal Tracks and Traces

Join us to make tracks in clay and take a close look at the mammals in our taxidermy collection. At 11:30, we'll explore our trail in search of traces of the mammals that live by the lagoon.

Sunday, Dec 13, 11:00 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.
Celebrate the Season!

Create holiday decorations using native evergreens. At 11:30, travel our trail to learn about plants of our local sage scrub habitat that are green year round.

Questions? Call Sally, 760-525-2351

Raccoon at the Nature Center
by Sally Bickerton

Preschool Nature Storytime

Monday, Nov 23, 10:00 - 11:00 a.m.

Theme: **Mammals of the Lagoon**! What furry critters live at the lagoon? Come learn about raccoons, opossums, rabbits, and other mammals that live in our area. We will walk the trail looking for dens and lairs, weather permitting.

Monday, Dec. 28, 10:00 - 11:00 a.m.

Theme: **Trees Around the Trail**! Come learn about the trees at the lagoon, from Live Oaks to Sycamores, and create a nature leaf collage.

Questions? Contact Sally at 760-525-2351.

Nature Center Garden Crew

Join the Garden Crew every Monday from 9:00 - 11:00 a.m. to help maintain the grounds and to learn about native plants. Our regular group of 15 volunteers would love to hear about your yard and answer your questions.

Joan Bockman, BVAS Garden Crew

BVAS Gift Shop

The holiday season is flying toward us as quick as a hummingbird! Remember to check out the BVAS gift shop's wonderful assortment of T-shirts, table linens, books, children's gifts, and more. Please see p. 4 for the gift shop display.

Nature Journaling

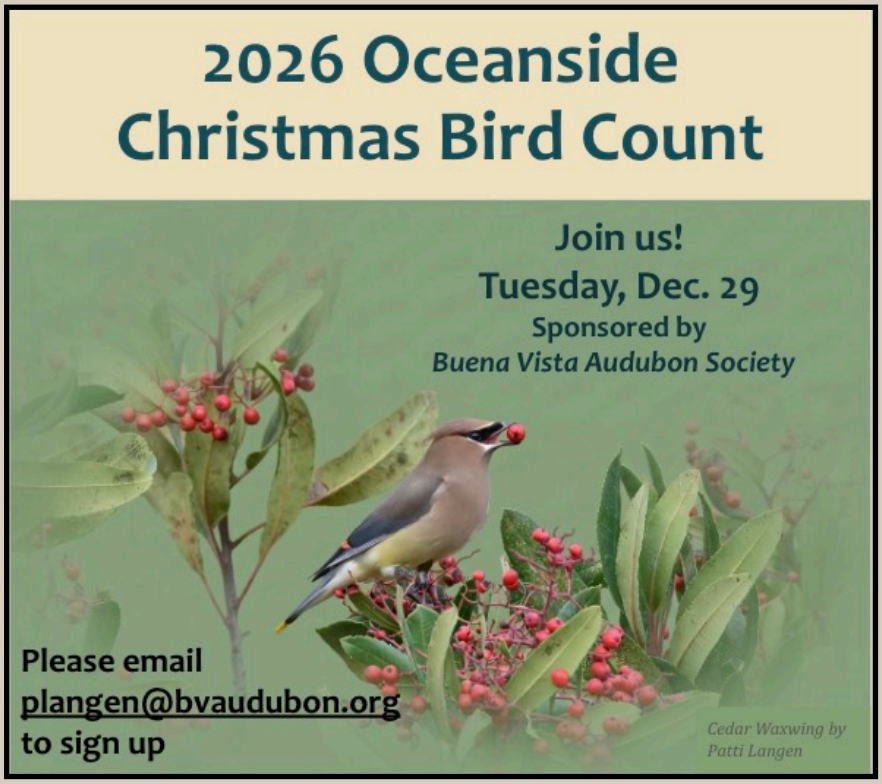
Sunday, Nov 15, 1:30 to 3:30 p.m.

Join us for November's Nature Journaling at Batiquitos Lagoon. We will meet near their Nature Center, located on the dirt trail at 7380 Gabbiano Lane in Carlsbad. There is a wide, flat dirt trail with benches that goes along the north side of the lagoon. Birds and native plants are usually abundant. Park on Gabbiano Lane or nearby residential streets. Restroom available until 3 p.m.

Please bring your art supplies, a hat, and a portable chair. If you have any questions, please contact Barbara (baswanson100@hotmail.com) or Jane (jmushinsky@gmail.com).

Our next outing will be in January.

Nature Center Gift Shop



Calling All Birders!

This year marks another chapter in the Oceanside Christmas Bird Count (CBC), a tradition that dates back to 1946 when it started with just six enthusiastic birding friends. These days, the count draws more than 100 birders and nature lovers for our event, and we'd love for you to be part of it.

Mark your calendars: The 2026 Oceanside Christmas Bird Count happens on **Tuesday, December 29**. Coming as it does late in December, the count has grown into an anticipated holiday tradition for birders throughout San Diego County. Early risers spread out across assigned areas spanning Oceanside, Vista, Carlsbad, San Marcos, and Camp Pendleton to tally bird sightings. This is community science at work. The data gathered over decades of Christmas Bird Counts is studied to track changes in bird populations and distribution driven by factors such as climate change. Once the morning's counting wraps up, everyone gathers at the Nature Center for a homemade chili lunch, where the group compiles and reports on the species spotted that day. It's always a lively gathering, bringing together familiar faces and newcomers alike to swap birding stories and sightings.

Who can participate?

Everyone is welcome—no matter your level of birding experience! If you can spot a bird and point it out, you can help! To join this exciting community science project, please email Patti Langen (plangen@bvaudubon.org) by December 11. Be sure to include your name and a brief note about your birding experience. If you'd like a shorter version of the CBC, we offer a 2.5-hour "mini-CBC" that starts and ends at the Nature Center (see the Coastal 101 Birding outing on page 2).

Other local CBC events

If you would like to participate in more than one CBC, San Diego County has six circles. If you are interested, please contact the coordinator to see if there is space available.

San Diego County CBC dates and coordinators:

San Diego - Dec. 19, 2026: Phil Unitt (punitt@sdnhm.org), Lesley Handa (handa@sandiegoaudubon.org)
Borrego Springs - Dec. 20, 2026: Katy Chappaz (kchappaz@gmail.com)
Lake Henshaw - Dec. 21, 2026: Chris Staurovsky (1stlbirdman@gmail.com)
Escondido - Dec. 27, 2026: Ken Weaver (gnatcatcher@sbcglobal.net), Jim Beckman (jbeckman@dslextreme.com)
Oceanside - Dec. 29, 2026: Patti Langen (plangen@bvaudubon.org)
Rancho Santa Fe - Jan. 3, 2027: Robert Patton (rpatton@san.rr.com)

Pinyon Jay

By Tina Mitchell

Introduction

Beginning in late August of this year, San Diego County eBird reports started popping up for Pinyon Jays in the Laguna Mountains, primarily in the Big Laguna Meadow area. A small group was also reported around Lake Cuyamaca. Although Pinyon Jays are common in the San Jacinto Mountains just a few miles north of the San Diego County line and in mountains a similarly short distance south of the county border, they occur here only as extremely rare vagrants. Of the montane birds prone to sporadic irruptions, the Pinyon Jay is one of the least frequent here, recorded in fewer than 15 seasons since 1877. This county's stands of pinyon pines—required habitat—must be too small to support a resident population.

Most San Diego County birders likely have little in-depth experience with Pinyon Jays, given their rarity here. My husband and I used to live on 40 acres of pinyon-juniper habitat in the central Colorado mountains. Wow, did we have experience with Pinyon Jays! And I have a confession to make. Pinyon Jays drove me crazy.

I know, I know. All species are important. Each one fills a special and critical niche. I can recite the whole spiel, chapter and verse. But still, I would hear their maniacal calls slicing through the air and I gritted my teeth. Central Colorado could be visited—nay, invaded—by massive Pinyon Jay flocks during some, but not all, late summers and falls. Good luck keeping your sunflower seed feeders

Pinyon Jay by Nancy Christensen

stocked. One year, a huge flock of rowdy, boisterous, jostling juvenile Pinyon Jays descended on our feeders every day for 16 weeks straight—16 WEEKS! We often estimated more than 125 individuals covering the ground, squabbling with each other, hanging from the trees, peering in the windows, casing the joint. We took down all of our seed feeders until the marauders departed for the day. No use trying to shoo them away or chase them out of the trees. They would just stare and utter those mocking, laughing calls. We never knew why they came. We never knew why they left.

As I said, Pinyon Jays drove me crazy.

Naming

The Pinyon Jay's scientific names is a real mouthful: *Gymnorhinus cyanocephalus*. "Bare beak" arises from *gumnos* ("naked") and *rino* ("nostrils"). The reference is to the large exposed nostrils. *Cyanocephalus* ("dark-blue-headed"), from Greek *kuanos* ("dark blue") and *kephale* ("head") refers to the slightly darker blue head. The common name is less cryptic: "Pinyon" comes from the pinyon pine habitat; "jay," from French *geai* (a kind of jay). This origin is unknown, although onomatopoeia of the call is a possibility.

TINA’S WORDS ON BIRDS (continued)

Identification

Living predominantly in pinyon-juniper habitats of the West, this jay looks more like a small blue-gray crow than it does other jay species. Crestless, unlike the deep-blue Steller’s Jay, and smaller than a California Scrub-Jay, it has a long, sturdy beak; a slender body; and a very short tail. Except for a lighter throat and a slightly darker blue head, the bird sports a uniform dusty blue-gray color.

Foraging

Appropriately named, the Pinyon Jay’s diet relies heavily on pinyon pine seeds. At the edges of their range, where pinyons tend to be scarcer, they also use juniper habitat, consuming juniper "cones," which are really berries. But Pinyon Jays also eat other wild berries, nuts, and cultivated seeds such as sunflower seeds.

Pinyon Jays and pinyon pines have evolved as co-dependents. In summers of plenty, the jays harvest tremendous quantities of pinyon seeds, caching them in the ground. Estimates suggest that a good-sized flock can cache up to a million seeds in a season. The jays have an amazing ability to recover most of these seeds, but they miss roughly 5%. As a result, new pinyon pine sprouts get a chance to develop in different areas. The birds don’t typically migrate from their often-large territories, but they can travel far and wide—sometimes hundreds of miles—if the pinyon crop in their territory fails, which has likely been happening this year.

Pinyon Jays by Barbara Swanson

Conservation and Behavior

These stunningly gregarious birds nest in colonies containing several dozen pairs. Fledglings from various nests gather in “crèches,” where they wait for food from their parents. As the flying skills of the young birds improve, these crèches begin to move as vast, noisy, ravenous flocks. Since juvenile birds are grayer than the adults, you can identify such a crèche by the preponderance of grayish birds.

Based on Breeding Bird Survey data, most literature reports that the Pinyon Jay population has been declining in the last 50 years, likely due to the degradation and precipitous decline of their required pinyon-juniper habitat. The species is now waitlisted to be considered for Endangered Species status in 2028, although the current administration is working to gut the Endangered Species Act dramatically. Yet a comparison of 2013 and 2019 Partners in Flight data (the most recent available) gives a sense of a complicated picture. For example, California's population estimate of Pinyon Jays has increased 155% (20,000–51,000) while four other states' Pinyon Jay estimates have decreased 14%–24% during that period. So sorting out the status and needs of this species will be challenging.

As of this writing, other montane bird species likely experiencing irruptions this season include Red-breasted Nuthatches and Clark's Nutcrackers. My husband asked me if I was interested in venturing to the Laguna Mountains to see the Pinyons. That was a cold hard "no" from me. Just one bird uttering one call, even from far away or just on a recording, brings back stark memories of the onslaught of that summer and fall. Seriously. Pinyon Jays drive me crazy.

MEMBERSHIP

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Clark's Nutcracker by Cathie Canepa

Nature Center Quick Calendar

Evening Program – 3rd Wednesday at 7:00 p.m., usually on Zoom.
Garden Crew – Mondays, 9 – 11 a.m.
Nature Guides – 1st Friday, 10 a.m.
Birding – Page 2
Kids' Nature Clubhouse – Page 3
Preschool Nature Storytime – Page 3
Nature Journaling – Page 4
Membership – Page 8
BVAS Board Meeting – 3rd Friday

Please update Your Contact Information
Many email providers, such as Roadrunner, Gmail, Yahoo, Apple, Outlook, and others, either have or will be canceling or changing their services. Please ensure your email address is up-to-date. This will help us ensure you receive your Lagoon Flyer. Please contact Summer Gray at sgray@bvaudubon.org to make any changes in your contact information.

Newsletter Editors

Editor: Barbara Swanson

Copy Editor: Tina Mitchell

Become a Member!

Help support our work and become a member of BVAS. All donations of $25/year or more qualify as membership dues. As a BVAS member, you will receive the chapter newsletter, have voting privileges at our Annual Meeting and other member meetings, and enjoy the satisfaction of belonging to a group that supports nature in North County. All donations are tax-deductible.

https://bvaudubon.org/donate/

Our Mission: Conservation through education, advocacy, land management, and monitoring.

Buena Vista Audubon Nature Center
2202 S. Coast Highway
Oceanside, CA 92054 (760-439-2473)

Nature Center Hours
Monday - Sunday: 10 a.m. – 1 p.m.
Closed on major holidays
Website: https://BVAudubon.org

BVAS honors and respectfully acknowledges the Payómkawichum (also known as the Luiseños), who are of the land on which the BVAS Nature Center stands. The Tribal Nations of San Diego County are the Payómkawichum, the Kumeyaay, the Cupeño, and the Cahuilla.