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## CLAREMONT CANYON

BY ERICA RUTHERFORD

*Explore one of the largest undeveloped canyons in the western East Bay.*

**I**t started as an exercise routine. In the spring of 2009, my partner, John Colbert, and I began a daily brisk climb up Claremont Canyon trail starting at Stonewall Road in Berkeley and ending at Panoramic Way, a 750-foot elevation gain in roughly three-quarters of a mile. One day on reaching the ridge, John excitedly pointed out a singing California Thrasher atop a pine tree not 15 feet away. Although I'd never seen or heard of this bird, its warbled song would over time become a familiar accompaniment on our hikes.

Situated behind the Claremont Hotel, Claremont Canyon Regional Preserve is part of a larger 500-acre watershed for Claremont Creek. Its 208 acres span both sides of Claremont Avenue, with Panoramic Ridge rising to the north and Gwin Canyon extending south. The diverse habitat of coastal scrub, oak/bay woodland, eucalyptus plantations, and coniferous forest attracts an assortment of wildlife. But the daily goings-on of the resident birds and the thrill of spotting migrants are what capture our attention and bring us back each day. Our list now exceeds 85 species across the seasons.

I delight each spring to hear the first juvenile Dark-eyed Juncos buzzing in the dry grasses foretelling that soon the fields and foot paths will be littered with young and busy parents alike. We spy Pygmy Nuthatches and Chestnut-backed Chickadees as they investigate cavities for nest sites, and watch in silent awe as an Orange-crowned Warbler disappears into a grassy ground nest to feed its young.

Fall and winter bring the sad-sounding song of the Golden-crowned Sparrow, the almost impossibly high-pitched sound of Cedar Waxwings and Golden-crowned Kinglets, and the muffled tapping of the Red-breasted Sapsucker. The jittery Morse-code chatter of the newly arrived Ruby-crowned Kinglet transforms into an ebullient song just before it departs for points north to breed.

Close observation brings rewards. This past summer, for example, we discovered an adult and pair of juvenile Chipping Sparrows. In May, John recorded a Yellow-breasted Chat chattering but hidden in the brush.

Claremont Canyon is something of an undiscovered birding spot. If you're looking for a different birding location, or perhaps a combination hiking/birding experience with unparalleled views, consider making your way to Claremont Canyon. And be sure to say "hi" to us. We're the couple with binoculars.

*For more information, including a map, go to [ebparks.org/parks/claremont\\_canyon](http://ebparks.org/parks/claremont_canyon). A longer, more detailed version of this article is at [goldengateaudubon.org/blog](http://goldengateaudubon.org/blog).*



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Clockwise from top left: View of the canyon from Panoramic Ridge; Dark-eyed Junco; Red-breasted Sapsucker.

Have a favorite birding site you'd like to share? Contact [idebare@goldengateaudubon.org](mailto:idebare@goldengateaudubon.org).