

## Birds and Birding in Claremont Canyon

by Kay Loughman

INVITE YOUR BUDDIES TO GO BIRDING with you in Claremont Canyon and you may be met with excuses. Most serious birders don't spend time in Claremont Canyon, believing the effort to find birds unlikely to pay off.

But birds are around! And sometimes there are delightful surprises, as on December's bird walk with Dave Quady, when we were thrilled to hear northern saw-whet and western screech-owls in addition to the expected great horned owls.

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Dave, an experienced birder and field trip leader with an affinity for owls, has led Conservancy bird walks for several years. And for decades he has also led the team that covers Claremont Canyon for the Oakland Christmas Bird Count. Dave would probably agree that with wind,

traffic noise, and steep or narrow trails, bird finding in Claremont Canyon can be a challenge ... yet, he is remarkably good at locating whatever is around, and teaching us something about birds in the process.

Well over 100 bird species have been recorded in the canyon and on surrounding hillsides. Of these, about one third (e.g. red-tailed hawk, American robin, house finch, chestnut-backed chickadee, doves, jays, juncos, towhees) are resident, and findable year-round. Another third of the species are regular visitors for part of the year, either the breeding season (e.g. Wilson's and orange-crowned warblers, Pacific-slope flycatcher, black-headed grosbeak) or the fall and winter (e.g. most sparrows, Townsend's and yellow-rumped warblers, ruby-crowned kinglet).

The final third are neither year-round nor seasonal residents. These include 'flyovers' – species like American white pelican, seen in transit from one body of water to another; 'migrating stopovers' – like rufous hummingbird, which visit for a week or so enroute between their wintering and breeding grounds; and the very exciting 'vagrants' – species like indigo bunting or rose-breasted grosbeak whose normal range and migration route do not include northern California. Some vagrants show up in the Bay Area every year, and a few are discovered in Claremont Canyon.

Knowing where to look enhances the likelihood of seeing birds. Along the Panoramic Ridge Trail watch (and listen!) for red-shouldered hawk and pygmy nuthatch. Check the grasslands and low shrubs at Four Corners for western bluebirds and song sparrows; walk part way up Gelston (see photo above, right) to find residents and seasonal visitors. After the sun hits the oak trees, try Garber Park for American robin and oak titmouse. Gwin Canyon is usually good for California quail and wren-tit.

The restoration area, in transition for several years, can be filled with birds—or totally devoid of them. The willows to the south of the new steps have been good for chestnut-backed chickadee and orange-crowned warbler, while across the trail we've found lazuli bunting. Our intermittent Harwood/Claremont Creek is worth checking wherever it can be found.

♦♦

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*Birders along Gelston Street on last December's birdwalk follow the call of a song sparrow into a nearby live oak. Conservancy members interested in learning more about birding in the canyon are invited to join Dave and Kay on our next birdwalk, May 7.*

**Claremont Canyon** is the largest relatively undeveloped canyon on the western slope of the Oakland/Berkeley Hills. Most of the canyon's watershed is owned by the East Bay Regional Park District, the University of California, the East Bay Municipal Utility District and the City of Oakland, with about one-fifth in private hands.

**The Claremont Canyon Conservancy** promotes the long-term stewardship of the entire watershed, coordinated among the stakeholders to preserve or restore a healthy native ecosystem, reduce wildfire hazards, and foster education and research.

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**The Claremont Canyon Conservancy News** is edited by Marilyn Goldhaber and Joe Engbeck.