

Valley Wilds

A publication of the LARPD Open Space Unit

Volume 20 | Issue 10

Autumn - It's all about the birds

Birders are nuts. Really. We're nuts about finding that rare bird, being able to identify a bird by the briefest vocalization, having great optics, recordkeeping ad nauseam, and, of course, seeing the return of the first seasonal species.

Right now birders are hitting the trail, the pavement, and the road in search of ... winter migrants. Even though they are referred to as "winter" migrants many of these birds start showing up in September. Kudos to the birder who glimpses the first White-crowned sparrow of the season. Huzzah to the man, woman, or child who reports the first-of-season (FOS) Hooded merganser or Ferruginous hawk. Regardless of the weather, work schedule, or family commitments, if word gets out that some rare or otherwise

interesting bird has been spotted, rest assured, birders are on the move.

Yep, we're nuts. So, why don't you join us?

Autumn is a great time to get a taste of what birding is all about. Colorful ducks, busy sparrows, long-legged wading birds, majestic raptors – there are many species that only visit our area in the fall/winter. Why not try something new and go out on one of the many birding field trips that are available at this time of year? I will be leading a birding field trip Sunday, October 9th in the south valley (see page 2 for details) and Ranger Pat will be leading one in November. In addition to the LARPD Ranger-led programs, you could also check out the local Audubon chapter web site for a list of their field trips (www.ohloneaudubon.org). East Bay Regional Park District's naturalist staff also leads wonderful birding hikes at many of their facilities around Alameda/Contra Costa counties (www.ebparks.org). Programs/field trips like these are an excellent way

By Ranger Patti Cole



White Crowned Sparrow
Photo by Wolfgang Wander / Wikimedia Commons

to get your feet wet. Experience how addictive birding can be. You'll learn more and more each time you go out. Just be careful or soon you'll find you've become one of the "nuts", too.

A few items of interest for birders:
 1) *The first film about birders, "The Big Year", is scheduled for release October 14th. It stars Steve Martin, Owen Wilson, and Jack Black, and has an impressive supporting cast. It is a comedic fictionalization of the non-fiction book, "The Big Year: A Tale of Man, Nature and Fowl Obsession" written by Mark Obmascik.*
 2) *The Audubon Christmas Bird Count event is taking place on December 16th. The past two years have seen growing interest in groups working eastern Alameda County for this event. Check the Ohlone Audubon web site for more information over the next couple of months.*
 3) *A bird list for Sycamore Grove Park is included on the back page of this Valley Wilds issue for your birding enjoyment.*

IN THIS Issue



Autumn - It's all about the birds



This Month's Ranger-led Programs and Activities



Winged Vampires

Livermore Area Recreation and Park District

4444 East Ave. Livermore, CA 94550
www.larpd.dst.ca.us
 Ranger Office: 925.960.2400

Ranger-led Programs

Experience nature in a special way. Programs are generally 1 - 2 hours in length. A \$2 donation is requested. A \$5 parking fee is charged at both park entrances.

October Programs

Quick Look:

Fall's Feathered Visitors
Sunday, October 9
8:30 am

Pumpkin Carving Campfire
Saturday, October 15
4:30 pm

Oaks and Acorns
Sunday, October 16
2:00 pm

October Meteors
Saturday, October 22
7:00 pm

Pre-Halloween Hike
Sunday, October 30
8:00 am

Fall's Feathered Visitors

Sunday, October 9

8:30 am

It's migratory bird season so we're heading out to see what species are stopping by or hanging out. We'll check a riparian area, woodland, grassland and also peek into the surround vineyards. Don't forget to bring drinking water and binoculars/scope, although there will be a few binocs to lend. You might also want to bring a field guide. This approximately 2 hour program will accommodate all levels of birding experience – beginners are encouraged to attend!

Ranger Patti Cole

Sycamore Grove Park

Nature Area Entrance

Pumpkin Carving Campfire

Saturday, October 15

4:30 pm

Halloween is fast approaching and decorations are going to be popping out left and right. Join me for an evening filled with one favorite – the pumpkin! We'll spend the first part of the evening carving this squash into works of art, or horror, depending on your point of view. **Please bring your own pumpkin and carving tools if you have them** (there will be a few tools to lend). Carving stencils will be provided. We will have a BBQ going if you would like to bring food to grill. We'll then head down to the campfire to hear about the history of Halloween and have some Halloween fun. Hot chocolate and s'mores fixins' will be provided. A \$4 per person donation is requested. Please RSVP by calling (925) 960-2400. Sign up early – space is limited.

Ranger Dawn Soles

Sycamore Grove Park

Arroyo Road Entrance

Oaks and Acorns

Sunday, October 16

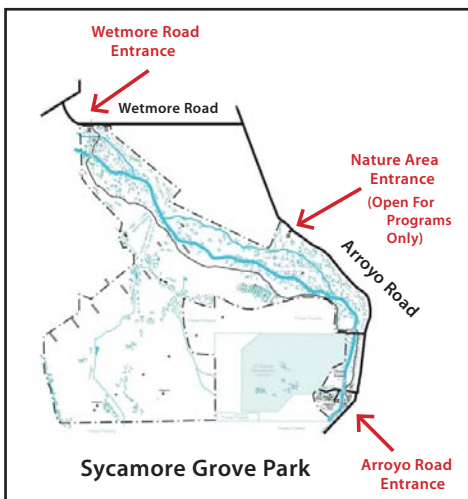
2:00 pm

Come for a short walk (less than 1/2 mile) to admire the different types of oaks that grow in our parks and help us collect some acorns for planting this winter. You'll also learn about how important oaks and acorns were to the Indians that lived in this area and the process they used to make these nuts edible. We will have some replicas of tools and baskets used in the process. You may even have an opportunity to make (and taste) acorn mush!

Ranger Amy Wolitzer

Sycamore Grove Park

Arroyo Road Entrance



Winged Vampires

Fact or Fiction?

By Ranger Amy Wolitzer



Common Vampire Bat
Photo from Wikimedia Commons

Ah, Halloween, time for creepy things like witches and skeletons and bats... Poor bats, such maligned creatures. We've all heard the myths: they'll fly in your hair, give you rabies, suck your blood... Vampire bats, what a crazy idea... Right?

Well, it turns out vampire bats really do exist! You won't find them in the bay area; all our local bats are insect eaters. In the southwest, there are some desert-living bats that feed on nectar, but if you keep heading south to Central and South America you can find three species of blood eating bats. Two of these bats prey primarily on birds but *Desmodus rotundus*, the common vampire bat, feeds on mammals. These little critters are not the fearsome cartoon vampire bats but are little furies with a 7 inch wingspan and weigh less than 2 ounces. They do have fangs but as they are only a few millimeters long they won't be causing much damage.

Vampire bats live in colonies, sometimes with as many as a few

thousand individuals. They roost in caves, wells or other dark places. When the sun sets, the bats head out in search of a warm meal, flying as far as five miles from their roost. They most often feed upon livestock like cows, pigs, horses, and goats. They use echolocation to navigate (emitting sounds and listening to the echo as they bounce off surrounding objects and terrain) but rely on two other senses to find a meal - good vision (they are said to be able to spot a lone cow from over 100 meters away) and a sound processing region of the brain evolved to hone in on the breathing patterns of large, sleeping mammals. When it finds one, the bat will sometimes land on an animal but often lands on the ground and approaches stealthily "on foot". Unlike other bats, vampire bats move well on the ground and are even able to run in a strange gallop, using both their hind legs and wings/wrists. (Click [here](#) to see a video of a vampire bat running!)

Once on their host, a vampire bat uses thermoreceptors on its nose to help locate a place where



Photo by Mokele / Wikimedia Commons



Photo by Sandstein / Wikimedia Commons
the blood flows close to the skin surface. The bat doesn't actually suck blood - it merely makes a small cut with those tiny, sharp teeth and uses its tongue to lap up the blood as it drips. The tongue has two grooves that expand and contract to help it feed. The bat's saliva contains anticoagulants to keep the blood from clotting. The bat will feed for twenty or thirty minutes, consuming only a tablespoon or so of blood (though this may be half the bat's weight!). The bat leaves, the wound heals. Usually the animal has no idea it was ever preyed upon.

Vampire bats digest their meal very quickly to allow for easier flight. They often begin urinating less than 2 minutes after feeding. Even after expelling water, they are a good bit heavier than their starting weight and have to do a silly little crouch and spring motion to launch skyward.

Here's something about vampire bats that may win you over - they provide one of the few examples in nature of altruistic behavior.

A vampire bat must eat at least

Winged Vampires (Continued)

every two days to survive. When a bat has a bad night and doesn't find a meal it may "beg" from another member of the colony and receive the favor of a bit of regurgitated blood to tide it over to the next feeding opportunity.

Surprisingly, this does not seem to be a case of an organism helping another because they share genes - several lineages live together in a roost. Whether a bat will help out another member of the colony seems to have less to do with shared genetics and more to do with a history of friendship. Vampire bats spend a lot of time grooming each other, forming tight social bonds. A hungry bat will call on those that it has shared a meal with when the situation was reversed. They are invariably reciprocated. Vampire bats are also known to "adopt" a baby bat if its mother dies. They are the only species of bat known to do this.

So now you know the truth about the "scary", tiny-toothed, social grooming, altruistic vampire bat!



More October Programs

October Meteors

Saturday, October 22 7:00 pm

The nights are getting longer and darker, but that only means more time for astronomy! Come out to Sycamore Grove this Saturday to experience the awe of the fall constellations. As an added bonus, the Orionid meteor shower is peaking this evening so we should have a good chance of seeing some meteors! Please dress warmly and wear sturdy walking shoes as we will be venturing about a mile and a half into the park to get to some darker skies. Cancelled if raining, night hike if cloudy.

*Ranger Glen Florey Sycamore Grove Park
Wetmore Road Entrance*

Pre-Halloween Hike

Sunday, October 30 8:00 am

No thrills and chills on this hike, unless you count the thrill of a good, long climb or the chill of an autumn morning. After a scorching September, we'll enjoy the cooler weather on a long hike in the hills of Sycamore Grove to see the sights and enjoy the colors and sounds of the park in autumn. This hike will cover 3 to 4 miles and include a steep climb, so be sure to bring some water and snacks to fuel your journey.

*Ranger Pat Sotelo Sycamore Grove Park
Wetmore Road Entrance*

Park News

Restoration Project

Restoration has begun on the largest pond in the park. The project will enhance habitat for native wildlife, like the California red-legged frog and the Western pond turtle. Cattails and sediment will be removed to create open water for wildlife, the pond's primary spillway and dam will be repaired to improve structural stability, and the trail re-routed to restore wetland habitat downstream.

Once restoration activities are complete (by Oct. 15th), an observation deck and educational kiosks will be installed.

This project is being managed for LARPD by the Alameda County Resource Conservation District and the Natural Resources Conservation Service. The project is funded by a grant that LARPD received from the California Coastal Conservancy.



Sycamore Grove Park is open daily from 7:00 a.m. until sunset. There is a parking fee at both entrances.

These 770-plus acres of open space provide opportunities for hiking, bicycling, horseback riding, picnicking, nature study and other outdoor activities. There is a group picnic area that can be rented between April and September.

Nature programs, including bird walks, are offered on various weekends throughout the year. Environmental education programs are available to school and community groups on a fee basis.



For information on programs or facilities, please contact the following:

General Park Information/Ranger Office
(925)960-2400

LARPD Main Office/Robert Livermore
Community Center
(925)373-5700

IN CASE OF EMERGENCY

From cell phone: Call Livermore
Police Dept. Emergency Dispatch
at (925) 371-4987.

From land line: Call 9-1-1.



Code of Birding Ethics

(adapted from the Audubon Society)

- Observe birds quietly. Do not throw things at or chase birds. Do not “thrash about” the bush to flush birds.
- Avoid approaching a nest, or parents at a nest, too closely. Do not handle eggs or young.
- Use tape recorders with discretion to prevent driving birds from their territories.
- Bird in small groups. Walk in a single file line or spread out to prevent damage to surrounding habitats.
- Do not “tree-whack” to arouse cavity dwellers.
- Avoid trampling fragile habitats, especially marshes, grasslands, and wildflowers. Stay on established trails.
- Do not trespass onto private property without written permission.
- Please do not litter.



Birds
of the
**Sycamore Grove/
Veterans Park**
Area



- Grebes**
- Eared Grebe
 - Pied-billed Grebe
- Cormorants**
- Double-crested Cormorant

- Herons, Bitterns**
- American bittern
 - Great Blue Heron
 - Green Heron
 - Black-crowned Night Heron
 - Great Egret
 - Snowy Egret
 - Cattle Egret

- Swans, Geese, Ducks**
- Canada Goose
 - American Wigeon
 - Barrow's Goldeneye
 - Bufflehead
 - Canvasback
 - Cinnamon Teal
 - Common Merganser
 - Hooded Merganser
 - Mallard
 - Northern Pintail
 - Northern Shoveler
 - Ring-neck Duck
 - Ruddy Duck
 - Wood Duck

- American Vulture**
- Turkey Vulture

- Kites, Hawks, Harriers, Eagles**
- White Tailed Kite
 - Cooper's Hawk
 - Ferruginous Hawk
 - Red-shouldered Hawk
 - Red-tailed Hawk
 - Sharp-shinned Hawk
 - Swainson's Hawk

- Falcons**
- American Kestrel
 - Merlin
 - Peregrine Falcon
 - Prairie Falcon

- Osprey**
- Osprey
- Quail, Pheasants**
- California Quail
 - Ring-necked Pheasant
 - Wild Turkey

- Rails, Moorhens, Coots**
- American Coot
 - Common Moorhen
 - Sora
 - Virginia Rail

- Plovers, Turnstones**
- Killdeer

- Sandpipers**
- Common Snipe
 - Greater Yellowlegs
 - Least Sandpiper
 - Long-billed Curlew
 - Long-billed Dowitcher
 - Spotted Sandpiper

- Gulls, Terns**
- California Gull
 - Ring-billed Gull
 - Forster's Tern
 - Caspian Tern

- Doves, Pigeons**
- Band-tailed Pigeon
 - Rock Pigeon
 - Mourning Dove

- Roadrunner**
- Greater Roadrunner

- Owls**
- Burrowing Owl
 - Common Barn Owl
 - Great Horned Owl
 - Northern Pygmy Owl
 - Short-eared Owl
 - Western Screech Owl

- Poorwill**
- Common Poorwill
 - Lesser Nighthawk

- Swifts**
- White-throated Swift

- Hummingbirds**
- Allen's Hummingbird
 - Anna's Hummingbird
 - Rufous Hummingbird

- Kingfisher**
- Belted Kingfisher

- Woodpeckers**
- Acorn Woodpecker
 - Downy Woodpecker
 - Lewis' Woodpecker
 - Northern Flicker
 - Nuttall's Woodpecker
 - Red-breasted Sapsucker

- Tyrant Flycatcher**
- Ash-throated Flycatcher
 - Hammond's Flycatcher
 - Olive-sided Flycatcher
 - Willow Flycatcher
 - Black Phoebe
 - Say's Phoebe
 - Western Kingbird
 - Western Wood-Pewee

- Swallows**
- Bank Swallow
 - Barn Swallow
 - Cliff Swallow
 - Northern Rough-winged Swallow
 - Tree Swallow
 - Violet-green Swallow

- Jays, Crows**
- American Crow
 - Common Raven
 - Scrub Jay
 - Steller's Jay
 - Yellow-billed Magpie

- Chickadee, Titmouse, Bushtit**
- Bushtit
 - Chestnut-backed Chickadee
 - Oak Titmouse

- Nuthatch**
- White-breasted Nuthatch

- Creepers**
- Brown Creeper

- Wrens**
- Bewick's Wren
 - House Wren
 - Rock Wren
 - Winter Wren

- Kinglets**
- Golden-crowned Kinglet
 - Ruby-crowned Kinglet

- Thrushes, Solitaires**
- American Robin
 - Hermit Thrush
 - Swainson's Thrush
 - Varied Thrush
 - Western Bluebird

- Wrenit**
- Wrenit

- Mockingbird, Thrasher**
- California Thrasher
 - Northern Mockingbird

- Pipit**
- Water Pipit

- Waxwing**
- Cedar Waxwing

- Silky-Flycatcher**
- Phainopepla

- Shrike**
- Loggerhead Shrike

- Starling**
- European Starling

- Vireos**
- Hutton's Vireo
 - Warbling Vireo

- Wood Warblers**
- Black-throated Grey Warbler
 - Common Yellowthroat
 - Macgillivray's Warbler
 - Northern Parula
 - Orange-crowned Warbler
 - Townsend's Warbler
 - Yellow-breasted Chat
 - Yellow Warbler
 - Yellow-rumped Warbler
 - Wilson's Warbler

- Tanager**
- Western Tanager
- Cardinaline Finches**
- Black-headed Grosbeak

- Sparrows**
- California Towhee
 - Chipping Sparrow
 - Dark-eyed Junco
 - Fox Sparrow
 - Golden-crowned Sparrow
 - Lark Sparrow
 - Lincoln's Sparrow
 - Rufous-crowned Sparrow
 - Savannah Sparrow
 - Song Sparrow
 - Spotted Towhee
 - White-crowned Sparrow
 - White-throated Sparrow

- Blackbirds, Orioles**
- Brewer's Blackbird
 - Brown-headed Crowbird
 - Northern Oriole
 - Red-winged Blackbird
 - Tricolored Blackbird
 - Western Meadowlark

- Cardueline Finches**
- American Goldfinch
 - House Finch
 - Lawrence's Goldfinch
 - Lesser Goldfinch
 - Pine Siskin
 - Purple Finch

- Weaver Finch**
- House Sparrow