

BIRDEROGRAPHIES | Insights into the lives of LA Audubon's bird walk guides.

Profile: Eleanor Osgood | By Lisa Freeman



LA Audubon former board member and volunteer/outreach coordinator, Eleanor Osgood has been leading bird walks for more than a decade.

Hometown

Los Angeles/Culver City

Career

Speech and language pathologist/teacher

First Time She Identified as a Birder

"It was 1988 and I was changing jobs at the time and being mentored by a woman who happened to know birds. I saw an interesting bird and asked her what it was and she said it was a European Starling. She was surprised I didn't know the name of such a common bird. That was the moment I realized how ignorant I was of urban birds. I wanted to learn more."

Favorite Bird

Western Scrubjay

Favorite Bird Book

"When I was a beginning birder I was hungry for information about birds. My bedtime reading was the *Birder's Handbook* by Paul R. Ehrlich, David S. Dobkin, and Darryl Wheye, a wonderful collection of short essays on all aspects of birds and brief species accounts of birds of North America. It is still in print.

Life-changing Birding Experience

"When I first joined Los Angeles Audubon, one of the events I attended was an open house hosted by Kimball Garratt, the manager of the bird collection at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County. I enjoyed looking at the drawers of study skins; but what intrigued me more was watching two volunteers. Both were carefully working with a dead bird in hand. Their responsibility was to transform these lifeless birds into the beautiful study skins that I saw in the drawers, many of them over 100 years. I wanted to be able to do that and it wasn't long before I became a volunteer. After almost 25 years I've prepped 545 specimens and learned more about bird anatomy and life cycles than I could ever have learned by being in the field only."



Binding Franklin Canyon | Photo by Randy Ehler

Year Joined LA Audubon

1988

Biggest Birding Accomplishment

"In 1995-2000 I had the opportunity to participate in the LA County Breeding Bird Atlas – a five-year volunteer project, the goal of which was to map out the breeding areas of birds across LA County. I was one of 12 Regional Coordinators. I was still pretty much a novice birder but bird I.D. skills weren't critical for this position. And besides, I was willing to take on one of the least desirable areas for birding—hard-core urbanized L.A. neighborhoods, which included my own. I was to recruit volunteers to survey one or more of three-mile by three-mile "blocks" that corresponded with a quadrant of a USGS map. I spent five years immersed in this project and had the opportunity to work with some of the best and most knowledgeable birders in the county. By the end of five years, due to the efforts of so many volunteers, we have important information about the nesting habits of our local breeding birds. The documentation we compiled is being used by researchers, biologists, and conservationists to further both our knowledge of bird biology and assist in conservation efforts.

Favorite LA Audubon Role

"I love introducing non-birders or beginning birders to the world of birds through various outreach activities. Leading bird walks, giving presentations to other organizations, tabling at various events - these all provided me opportunities to talk to the public about birds, about the need to protect and provide open space and save existing habitat for wildlife and to encourage people to open their eyes and see the nature that shares our urban neighborhoods."

Other Significant Birding Accomplishments

"Back in 2008 I was introduced to Linda Navroth, another L.A. Audubon member. We were both in a state of anguish; the month was May — a prime month for breeding birds. She had just observed wanton trimming and spraying of trees at and around UCLA where she worked; I had just observed the same activities at Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area where I led bird walks. We both had been observing birds nesting or searching for nest sites in both locations. Our frustration and anger led the two of us to collaborate on what became a Los Angeles Audubon publication titled "Bird-Friendly Guide to Tree and Shrub Trimming and Removal." It can be found in both Spanish and English on the LAAS website. We weren't able to stop the carnage at our respective locations but through subsequent outreach to places such as Culver City, Beverly Hills, the eastern section of County Parks and Recreation and many others, we were able to raise awareness. In Culver City, Lisa Fimiani (of L.A. Audubon and Culver City) and I were even successful in getting some bird friendly wording into the City of Culver City's tree trimming contract."

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Eleanor consulting field guide | Photo by Randy Ehler



Lisa Fimiani, Attendee & Eleanor Osgood at Culver City Garden Club | Photo by Rich Waters

Bird Guide Experience

"I first got involved in leading bird walks when Garry George and Pat Heirs, both L.A. Audubon board members at the time, approached the City of Beverly Hills Parks & Recreation in 2005 to suggest that L.A. Audubon teach a bird watching class and lead bird walks as part of their recreation program. They liked the idea; we did our first bird walk in Roxbury Park. I expanded the walks to Greystone Mansion. The walks were well received, but rapid development was occurring throughout the area, especially adjacent to the Greystone Mansion; after a while, we weren't seeing enough birds to excite beginning birders, hence the move to Franklin Canyon. It took a year and a half to build a good group. I'd go, but sometimes, no one, or one person, would show up. That's hardly the case today. On one recent drizzly Sunday, I looked out at the weather and thought, no one will show up today. I'll just skip it. A few beats later, I was dressed and out the door, knowing that at least a handful of diehard birders would be there. When I drove up saw and saw several of the regulars walking around in the rain with their binoculars raised, I just had to laugh; actually it turned out to be a pretty birdy day."

What Keeps Her Excited About Birding

"When I have those 'wow' moments: a pair of Northern Pygmy-owls popping up in front of me just as I round a bend in the trail, or I sight an Anna's Hummingbird engaged in an aerial display, or I simply catch the reddish gleam on the under wing feathers as the sun light shines just right on a Northern Flicker flying overhead. Those are the moments that keep me going back for more. I used to take birds, (actually all wild life), for granted. I don't any more. Over the years, I've learned that if I can just be observant and respectful, I can share a tiny part of the world they live in. Now, I look for nature everywhere: in nooks and crannies, at stop lights, in vacant lots, in the open sky, on my patio chairs, or under the eaves of outdoor bathrooms. I remember when lizards and salamanders, beetles and bumble bees were common. I wish I had paid more attention when wildlife was easier to find. My hope is that more people will find an intrinsic value in the wildlife that remains to us, both small and big, before it all disappears." 🐦

Besides leading bird walks Eleanor continues her conservation work through habitat restoration (a fancy name for weeding of invasive plants) at Kenneth Hahn Park in the Baldwin Hills. She also invites anyone who is interested in the on-going effort to distribute the tree trimming guide and to raise awareness around the impact on birds of improper tree trimming and removal within the urban basin to contact her.

Join Eleanor Osgood on the Upper Franklin Canyon Bird Walk, the 2nd Sunday of each month, from 8:30 a.m.–11:30 a.m. For more information, contact Osgood at birdwalks@laudubon.org. or call (310) 839-5420



Birding Franklin Canyon | Photo by Randy Ehler



Eleanor at the Natural History Museum with study skin of an albatross.