

February/March/April 2026



# The Hoot Owl

San Joaquin Audubon Society



Chasing 90%: A Bird  
Photography Big Year  
Challenge in San  
Joaquin County  
by JIM GAIN

Learn about the  
California Bird Atlas  
by Sammy Cowell

Drawing to See: How Nature  
Journalling Deepens the  
Birder's Eye  
by Amy Weiser



# More Stories

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## House Wren Singing, taken by Jim Gain

### Meet Jim R

Jim Rowoth has spent a lifetime chasing birds—from local spots to jungles around the world. Read his interview to see how it all started and where it's taken him.

[Read More ....](#)

### Rare Bird Sightings

Read up on the latest rare bird sightings.

[Read More ....](#)

### Giving Back

On March 27, our team hosted 25 students from Central Valley Nature Kids at Oak Grove Park, rotating through hands-on stations designed for ages 4–15. Read more to see how the day unfolded.

[Read More ....](#)

# Meet our Authors



**Jim Gain**

Jim earned a biology degree that shaped how I see and share the world, leading to over 40 years in public education inspiring students with the wonders of nature, while also fueling decades of work in citizen science and conservation.



**Amy Weiser**

Amy Weiser is a nature journalist, artist, wildlife biologist, and teacher at Lincoln High School in Stockton, California. To view more of Amy's artwork, please check out her website and Instagram <https://linktr.ee/Amyweiserart>.



**Sammy Cowell**

Sammy Cowell is a full-time bird guide, photographer, podcaster, and educator! You can follow him on YouTube, Instagram, Facebook by looking for Birding with Sammy. Check out my website as well: [birdingwithsammy.com](http://birdingwithsammy.com)

# Recurring Field Trips

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## **Introductory Birding at Lodi Lake**

1st Saturdays

Join leader Cavan Allen along Laurel Avenue at Lodi Lake. Birders of all skill levels are welcome, but the focus will be on birding fundamentals. Extra binoculars and field guides will be available.



## **Cosumnes River Walk**

2nd Saturdays

Join leader Jim Rowoth for the monthly River Walk bird count through the varied habitats of the Cosumnes River Preserve. Meet at the visitor center on Franklin Blvd.

## **Woodbridge Wilderness Birding**

3rd Saturdays

Join leader Cavan Allen for our monthly census of this small riparian area on the banks of the Mokelumne River. Meet at the north end of Meadowlark Lane in Woodbridge.

## **Birding the Mokelumne River Fish Hatchery**

3rd Sundays

Join leader Liz West for our monthly census of this lovely riparian area on the Mokelumne River below Camanche Dam. Meet in the fish hatchery parking lot below the dam.

## **Beginner Birding South County**

4th Saturdays

Join leader Henry Koertzen for a beginner friendly bird walk. Binoculars and field guides will be available. The location varies by month.

# Recent Rare Bird Sightings

**Bird Sightings January 1<sup>st</sup> to May 31st.**

**By Liz West**

This has been a good winter for Short-eared Owls with them being reported at Staten Island, Flood Rd, Waverly Rd, and Copperopolis Rd. The last report of Short-eared Owls was February 5th.

On January 3rd, during the Wallace Bellota count Rich Petersen and John Blades reported a Hairy Woodpecker at Llewellyn Ranch.

During the Wallace-Bellota, January 3rd, count both Ralph Baker and Kasey Foley photographed two large flocks of Band-tailed Pigeons in the Clements area.

Daniel Welsh photographed a couple Pacific Golden Plovers at Lodi Waste Treatment plant on February 13th. In the past these used to be an annual occurrence at the ponds. They continued to be seen through February 22nd.

Andrew Chesley photographed a Rose-breasted Grosbeak visiting his feeder in Stockton on February 25th. He saw it again March 24th.

During a February 28th boat trip on Camanche Reservoir, Sammy Cowell and Donna Marciano saw four Red-breasted Mergansers in the San Joaquin portion of the reservoir.

On the March 7th Lodi Lake beginning bird walk Ralph Baker spotted a Swamp Sparrow, Cavan Allan identified it as a Swamp Sparrow and Mark Elness was able to get a photo of it. The Swamp Sparrow continued through March 9th.

On March 23rd, Jim Gain recorded an early Grasshopper Sparrow along Waverly Rd. Two were seen the following day. At the same time, he also photographed a Vesper Sparrow.

Eric VerSteeg photographed a Costa's Hummingbird at his Lodi feeder on March 28th. He reported that "it had been coming to the feeder for several weeks".



**Short-eared Owls  
Taken by Mark Elness  
Flood/Waverly**



# Del Puerto Canyon Fieldtrip

Photos by Mark Elness



**Golden Eagle**



**Red-breasted  
Sapsucker**



**Grasshopper Sparrow**



**Phainopepla**

# Chasing 90%: A Bird Photography Big Year Challenge in San Joaquin County



**Grasshopper Sparrow by Jim Gain**

**A Big Year is always a blend of strategy, persistence, and luck, but attempting one in real time with a camera adds a whole new layer of complexity. This year I've set myself a two-part challenge: to see at least 90% of all species reported in San Joaquin County on eBird, and to photograph 90% of those. Because more than 360 species have been recorded here, the numbers alone make this an ambitious undertaking—but the real story is how photography reshapes every decision, every outing, and every moment in the field.**

**San Joaquin County's habitats are the backbone of the challenge. The Delta's tidal channels and flooded fields hold wintering waterfowl, rails, and terns; the riparian corridors along the Mokelumne and Stanislaus Rivers shelter migrants and breeders; the east-side reservoirs attract loons, grebes, and the occasional surprise; and the grasslands and agricultural edges support everything from Burrowing Owls to Short-eared Owls. Each habitat demands a different photographic approach. In the Delta, birds are often distant and backlit. In riparian zones, they're close but fast. In grasslands, they appear suddenly and vanish just as quickly. The challenge isn't just finding the birds—it's finding them in a way that allows a meaningful image.**



Photography forces a slower, more attentive rhythm than birding alone. Instead of a quick confirmation and a checkmark, I often spend long stretches waiting for a bird to turn into the light, emerge from cover, or repeat a behavior. Some species have been unexpectedly cooperative: a Northern House Wren that perched on a branch and sang at full volume, a Loggerhead Shrike that perched perfectly on a wire, or a flock of Short-billed Gulls that settled close enough to show their keen small bills. Others have been far more challenging. Soras call from ten feet away but refuse to show themselves. A Hermit Thrush teased me for weeks before drifting close enough for a usable frame. And then there are the fleeting moments—a Peregrine Falcon streaking past at eye level while my camera is still on my shoulder—that remind me how thin the line is between success and a story about “the one that got away.”

eBird has become the strategic engine behind the effort. The collective knowledge of local birders—reports, comments, photos, and patterns—shapes my weekly target lists and helps me anticipate when certain species are most likely to appear. It’s a reminder that a Big Year, even a photography-focused one, is never a solitary pursuit. Every “still present” note, every shared sighting, every tip from another birder contributes to the momentum of the year. In return, I’m trying to give back by uploading high-quality images that help document plumage, age, and behavior for the community record.

Some of the most rewarding moments so far have had nothing to do with rarity. Watching a California Quail acting as a sentry at the top of a fence post, photographing a Bewick’s Wren singing with its whole body, or catching the exact moment a Northern Harrier banked in golden light—these experiences deepen my connection to the county I’ve birded for decades. The challenge pushes me into corners of San Joaquin I rarely visit and encourages me to revisit familiar places with new eyes. Over time, the year has become less about numbers and more about attention: noticing seasonal shifts, learning the habits of individual birds, and appreciating the subtle beauty of common species.



As spring approaches, my focus is shifting toward the incoming wave of neotropical migrants—warblers, tanagers, orioles, flycatchers—each bringing its own photographic challenges and opportunities. These species will define the next phase of the Big Year, and their brief windows of passage will require careful timing, early mornings, and a bit of luck.

The 90% goal remains a motivating benchmark, but the real reward is the deeper connection to place, community, and the birds themselves. This year is already teaching me that even in a well-birded county, there is always more to discover, more to appreciate, and more to share.

Follow my SJ Big Year 2026 at <https://tinyurl.com/SJBirds2026>

See all my SJ Species at <https://tinyurl.com/SJBirdsAlltime>



Donna hosted the bird quiz table where the kids learned about bird nest, feet and beaks and how they are used.

On Friday, March 27th, Donna, Michele, Lynette and Henry met with the Central Valley Nature Kids home school group at the Shumway Oak Grove Regional Park in Stockton. We had three tables set up for the 25 kids that attended. They were divided into three groups by age which ranged from four to fifteen years old.



Michele and Lynette hosted the art table where they could make seed bird feeders and also paint and assemble a wooden bird.

At the third table Henry provided each group with binoculars and explained the proper use of this essential bird watching tool. Fortunately there were Snowy Egret, Western Cattle Egret and Black-crowned Night Heron at the rookery on the island in the Oak Grove Lake that made easy targets to practice binocular and identification skill on. On the lake we identified Canada Goose, Pie-billed Grebe, Mallard, American Coot and Double-crested Cormorant. The less stationary California Scrub-Jays, Eurasian Collared-Doves and Barn Swallows provided opportunity to practice more advanced binocular skills.

We had a great time hosting the wonderful students and their parents and the positive feedback was certainly uplifting.

Lovely note from a parent "Thank you SO much!! ☐The kids came home and were drawing birds and studying after. You have inspired them and taught them a lot! Thank you! 🍷"

# Join California's First Ever Breeding Bird Atlas!

As some of you may know, California's first statewide Breeding Bird Atlas launched on January 1, 2026. If you haven't heard about the Atlas, well then, you've found the perfect article to introduce you to it!

**1) What is a Breeding Bird Atlas?** A Breeding Bird Atlas (BBA) is a systematic survey of a specific area (county or state) to understand how birds use, live, and reproduce in the landscape. Typically, an area is divided up into small-scale survey units (or "blocks"), generally about 9 sq. miles in size. This provides more detailed, fine-scale data to conservation managers and researchers.

California is one of only 6 states that have never conducted a state-wide BBA. And while 15 counties have conducted atlases of their own, there are still 43 counties without any coverage whatsoever. Additionally, most atlases have been in coastal areas, overrepresenting certain habitats and species.

A coordinated statewide effort can support the development of Atlas products in areas that have lacked the resources (money, people, time) to produce a dedicated atlas of their own. For counties that have already completed an atlas, results from the statewide BBA can be used to assess change over time.

## **2) How will this particular project work?**

The Atlas is being coordinated by California Bird Atlas (CBA), an independent nonprofit comprised of ecologists and researchers throughout the state. The Atlas will run for 5 years (2026-2030), and the data gathered from it will be used by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (in addition to other state and federal agencies) to make important conservation decisions in the state for years to come.

The Atlas divides the state into 16,500 different blocks and relies on a combination of volunteers and field technicians to survey blocks and record both bird presence and behaviors that indicate breeding. Breeding evidence is categorized using standardized codes, subdivided into three categories:

- Possible (e.g., singing birds or presence in suitable habitat)
- Probable (e.g., courtship, territorial behavior)
- Confirmed (e.g., carrying nesting material, feeding young, or attending active nests)

Once fieldwork concludes, scientists will spend four years analyzing the data, developing maps and models, and producing final Atlas products. These will include a published volume, digital tools, and regionally relevant summaries for land managers and conservation partners.

## **How is the data collected?**

The primary data collection and management platform is a custom-built eBird Atlas project, developed in partnership with the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. This platform is similar to those used in other successful atlases, such as in New York, New Zealand, and many other regions.

In addition to volunteer observations submitted through eBird, data will also be integrated from agencies, universities, NGOs, land trusts, and other sources including the Breeding Bird Survey, Bird Banding Laboratory, MAPS, Project Nestwatch, and iNaturalist.

## **How's it going so far?**

As of early March, 2,568 birders have submitted 43,721 checklists to the Atlas, spanning all 58 counties and 3,954 atlas blocks across California. The use of breeding codes on eBird in January and February is up a staggering +545% over last year.

By the end of January, 61 species had accepted Confirmed breeding codes. By the end of February, that number had risen to 102. The full February report is available in the latest edition of the Atlas Dispatch.

As of March 9:

- 42,885 checklists have been submitted to the Atlas
- 2,538 atlasers have joined the project and submitted at least one checklist
- 3,924 blocks have Atlas data
- All 58 counties have Atlas data

### **How do I join and/or support the project?**

Join the project by visiting the California Bird Atlas (CBA) eBird website [here](#). Click “Join Project” (or “Log In to Join Project”), and you will automatically be able to contribute checklists to the Atlas project.

The Atlas is fully integrated with the eBird mobile app. [This](#) Quick Start Tutorial video provides a brief overview of how to submit your first Atlas checklist. You can also submit checklists through the eBird website by entering your observation details and clicking “Submit” [here](#).

Please visit the Atlas 'About' page [here](#) for resources, basic guidance, and everything you need to begin contributing to this statewide initiative.

Project participation is very similar to how you already use eBird, but opting into the Atlas ensures your observations become part of the permanent statewide dataset being built to guide conservation and land management decisions for decades to come.

If you are interested in financially supporting the project, please consider making a tax-deductible contribution today to keep the Atlas going strong. We have been deeply encouraged by the number of individual donors stepping up to support the project — your support right now truly matters. [Donate here](#).

# Our Butterfly Count

40th Year as an Audubon Field Trip



Join us on Sunday, June 14, for this exciting annual event. No experience needed and each participant receives a four-page color butterfly field guide to keep. We start at Oak Grove at 8:30 and continue through the sometimes warm day until 3 or 4 pm. We always see and learn to identify several species of these beautiful insects. We spend most of the warm afternoon in shady forests of Woodbridge Road and Lodi Lake. Plan to bring water, lunch, sunscreen and a hat. Call leader Kathy Schick (209) 612-5130 to reserve your spot (and your field guide).

# Drawing to See:

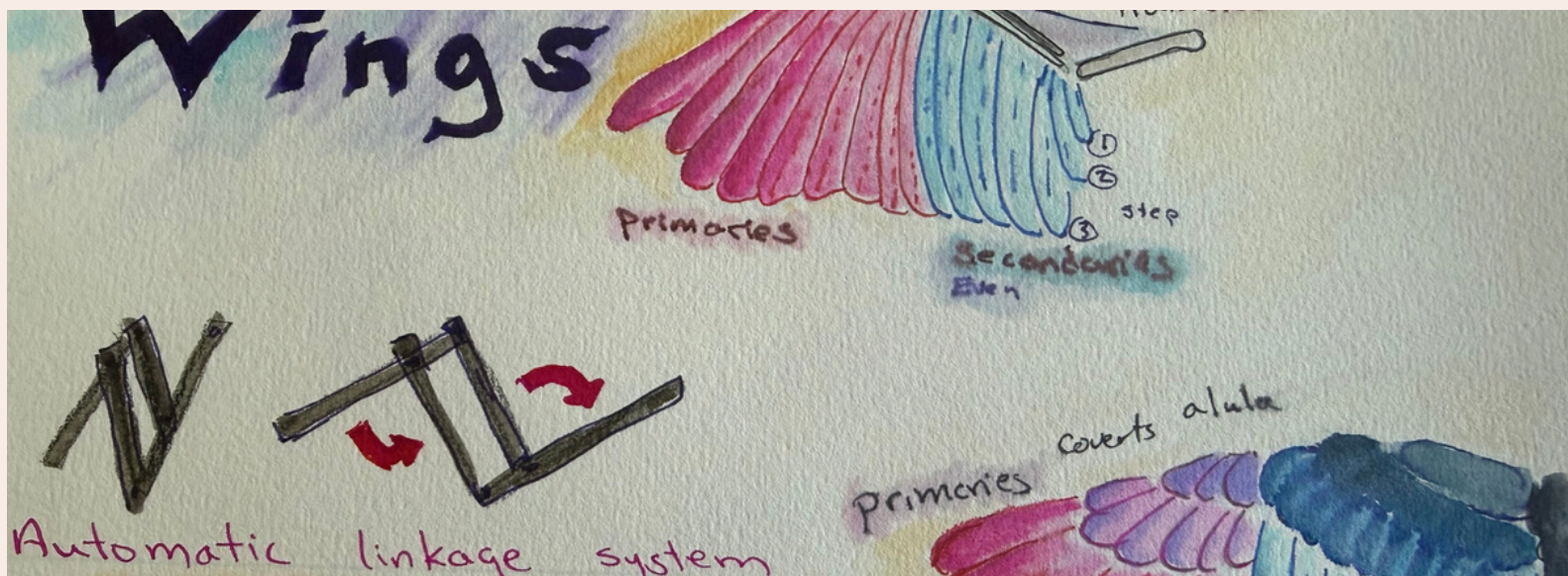
## How Nature Journalling Deepens the Birder's Eye by Amy Weiser

For many birders, the path to birding begins with a “spark bird”- that may be a hawk circling far above, a shorebird probing the tideline, or a small ruby-crowned kinglet bouncing through the trees. Identification is the focus: field marks, calls, range maps, and now, for many an identification through apps on their phone. Many birders focus on listing, and their list grows. Over time, their life list grows, the skills sharpen, but the development of skills can stagnate. Many birding trips I have gone on with people are more about quickly moving through the environment to list as many birds as possible, to add them to their list. Birders begin to recognize birds quickly - but do we truly see them and understand them?

Nature Journaling and bird-focused artwork provide a powerful way to move beyond recognition into deep observation. Drawing a bird is not just an artistic act; it is a cognitive shift. It slows down the observer, sharpens attention, and reveals layers of structure, behavior, and ecology that even an experienced birder can overlook. The pencil or pen becomes a tool not only of expression, but of discovery and understanding.

Birding often rewards speed, Aa fast glance, a flash of color, another bird added to a checklist, another bird on the life list- and we have identification. A competition to see the most birds. But, are you truly seeing them? But dDrawing requires the opposite approach. To sketch even a rough impression of a bird, you must linger and slow down. You must ask yourself questions: Where does the wing attach? How long is the tail relative to the body? Does the bird have three toes forward and one back, or two toes forward and two back? Is the forehead of the duck flat or rounded?

In this slowing down, something remarkable happens. Details that once seemed invisible begin to emerge. Feather groups are no longer a blur; they become structured groups, primaries, secondaries, and coverts come in patterns. Posture becomes meaningful. Even the negative space- the shape around the bird- informs your understanding.



Nature Journaling trains the brain to notice relationships: proportion, alignment, repetition, and variation. These are the same skills that help a beginning birder become an expert. The act of journaling reinforces the skills and understanding through active engagement rather than just passive recognition.

One of the most transformative aspects of drawing an animal is learning their underlying structure and anatomy. At first, a bird may appear as a simple outline, but as you attempt to render it, you quickly realize that this outline is supported by a complex anatomical structure. Feather tracts- those distinct regions where feathers grow- are essential. You can see how the scapulars overlap the wing, and the tertials come over the primaries, and how the crown feathers differ from the feathers found on the nape. You learn that these are not just artistic details but are critical identification features. In addition, coloration becomes more evident.

Instead of just noting, “yellow belly” or “gray back,” you can start to perceive subtle shifts, contrasts, and color patterns. You notice how light interacts with the feather texture, and how iridescence changes with angle, and how shadow defines the form.

Wing patterns, which are crucial for the identification of birds in flight, become clearer through drawing. You can internalize the placement of wing bars, the contrast between the shape of the primaries and secondaries, and the overall geometry of the wing. If the wing is long and thin for distance and speed, or short and round for movement through a forest. The knowledge of the wing pattern and shape helps in better field identification, especially in challenging conditions, where you might only see part of the wing or be viewing from an unusual angle.

Drawing a perched bird is one challenge, but capturing a moving bird is even more challenging. Even quick gesture sketches- simple lines indicating posture and motion can reveal patterns in behavior. In a trip to Hog Island in Maine, with the organization Wild Wonder and the instruction of Charlotte Belland from Columbus College of the Arts, we practiced 30-second, one-minute, and two-minute gesture sketches. How much information can you take in with just a glimpse of the bird, then look away and try to get as much information as quickly as possible on the page? How few lines can you draw to get the essence of the bird form, flight, and body posture?



As you put in more practice, you start to notice how different species of birds carry themselves. A sparrow on the ground jumps with both feet and scratches, which are heavy, deliberate movements in contrast with the restless energy of the ruby-crowned kinglet. A heron's slow, measured steps differ greatly from the quick, bouncing of a solitary sandpiper. Flight patterns become more distinctive: the steady flapping of a mallard duck, the undulating flight of a Northern Flicker or other woodpecker, the soaring of a red-tailed hawk, or the kiting behavior of an American kestrel. These observations and drawings deepen your understanding of how birds interact with their environment. You see not just the bird to identify it, but also the bird's context. How it uses the branches for cover, how it positions itself relative to light, how it responds to cold, wind, and other organisms.

Nature Journaling encourages you to ask questions: Why is the bird perched here? Why is this other bird going to stand in the water at night? You then relate the behaviors to the understanding of the bird's anatomy. As you ask more questions, you look more deeply and see more, which leads to more questions. These questions transform birding from a checklist activity into a study of living systems.

Once at an art demonstration, when I told the professional charcoal artist that I draw birds, he told me, "Well birds are easier to draw than people, you can't tell one bird from another. But for a person, you have to get it exactly correct. If you are one millimeter off, you don't get the exact likeness." His point was not that birds lack the complexity to draw as people, but that the general public lacks the visual literacy to distinguish between different related bird species and individual birds. But a well-trained biologist, like myself, or an artist can distinguish between similar bird species and individual birds. A slightly misplaced feather tract, an inaccurate wing proportion, and an incorrect foot structure, a tail extending beyond the body rather than folded wings, and an inaccurate curve of a bill, might go unnoticed by most, especially a non-birder. In contrast, a portrait of a human face demands near-perfect accuracy; even small errors are immediately apparent to most observers. For birders, however, the situation is reversed. We can tell one bird species from another, and that knowledge raises the stakes in capturing the image of the bird. Drawing becomes both more challenging and more rewarding. It pushes us to honor the specifics—the exact curve of a bill, the precise spacing of wing bars, the subtle difference in head to bill length, forehead shape, leg length, and posture. Not that you are drawing every detail of every feather, but you have the correct proportions and shape. That instructor's comments stayed with me as the comment highlighted a truth: it is not about fooling the viewer or about a pretty picture; it is about training the observer. The act of drawing sharpens the skills that define good birding. Now, as I look at art, it has me reflect on the artist's skills not just for their drawing skills, but also on their skills as a trained observer.



There is a noticeable difference between artwork created by someone who does not study birds, and art created by one that truly observes birds. In the latter, there is a genuineness that goes beyond aesthetics. Feathers are not just decorative for color and texture; they are placed with intention, following the correct tracts and layering. Wing patterns are accurate, not generalized. Again, this does not mean that you have to draw every exact feather detail, but what is drawn of the feather pattern is accurate. The posture reflects real behavior rather than a generic stance.

Foot structure is often a giveaway. Artists who are not birders may simplify or obscure the feet, treating them like an afterthought. Birders, on the other hand, understand that the feet, like the beak, are integral to how a bird lives. The grasp of a perching bird, the splayed toes of a shorebird on mud, the webbing of a swimming species- those details are rendered with care, taking notes of details such as: which toes are the longest? How many articulations or joints are in each toe?

Habitat too becomes part of the composition. A birder who is an artist observes and places the bird in a believable environment, reflecting on how the bird actually uses its surroundings. The angle of a branch, the relationship of water or sky- all of these elements are important to the story being documented in the artwork. When you see such an artwork, a trained observer can recognize it immediately. It carries the weight of the observation. It tells you that the artist has spent time not just counting birds, but truly observing them and trying to understand them.



One of the most formative experiences in my own journey with Nature Journaling took place during a summer trip to Hog Island, Maine, with the organization Wild Wonder. Surrounded by the rugged beauty of the North Atlantic, it was an environment that invited observation, growth, and reflection. Under the guidance of naturalist and artist John Muir Laws, the focus was not on producing a polished work, but on cultivating attention. Journals were filled with quick sketches, notes, questions, more questions, graphs, measurements, observations, and reflections. The emphasis was on the process of observation rather than perfection.

A highlight of the trip was a visit to Egg Rock Island, home to a colony of North Atlantic Puffins. Seeing these birds in their natural habitat was extraordinary- their bright bills, their compact bodies, their rapid wingbeats as they returned from the sea with fish. Trying to draw them was another matter entirely, especially on a boat. Puffins move quickly; their features are deceptively complex. Capturing the shape of the bill, the placement of the eye, and the contrast of the back and white plumage. My sketches were not perfect, often incomplete, but each attempt revealed something new.

I began to notice how the puffins held their bodies when landing, how their wings moved in a blur, and how they navigated the rocky terrain. I observed their interactions, flight, and rhythm of activity. The act of drawing anchored the observations in a way that simple watching or observing could not.

By the end of the trip, my journal was not filled with what many would call masterpieces, but with evidence of learning and experiencing. Each page represented a moment of attention, questions asked, and details noticed. It was a record of deep seeing.



Nature Journaling does not replace traditional birding skills: it enriches them. Field guides, binoculars, and checklists are essential tools. But journaling adds another dimension that engages curiosity, creativity, and patience. It encourages the birder to move beyond the question of “what is it?” Nature Journaling encourages a deeper connection to place, as you begin to notice patterns, not just in the birds but the places and ecosystems they inhabit.

Perhaps most importantly, it cultivates a sense of wonder. In a world that often rewards speed, efficiency, and the most birds on your list. Taking the time to draw a bird is an act of intentional attention. It is a way of saying: this moment matters. This detail is worth noticing. As John Muir Laws said many times, “Where your attention is, that is where your love is.”

You do not need to be an accomplished artist to begin Nature Journaling. In fact, the process works best when you let go of the pressure to create something “good” and quiet the inner critic. The goal is not to impress others, but to train your own observational skills.

Start with simple sketches, focus on shape, proportion, and posture. Add notes on habitat, conditions, and color. Over time, your drawings will improve, but more importantly, your observational skills will deepen. You may find that the birds that you once overlooked become fascinating. Common specials often reveal new complexities. Even brief encounters may take on greater significance.

In the end, Nature Journaling is not about producing art: it is about becoming more attentive, more curious, and more connected. It transforms birding from a pursuit of identification into a practice of observation and understanding- and doing so, it opens a richer and more detailed world. As David Attenborough once said, “If children don’t grow up knowing about nature and appreciating it, they will not understand it, and if they don’t understand it, they won’t protect it. And if they don’t protect it, who will?” And once you begin to see birds this way, you may find you never quite look at them the same way again!

# Amy's Art



# Meet the Birder

## Jim Rowoth

**Can you tell us a bit about yourself? (Name, what do you do, where do you live (city))**

Jim Rowoth, retired federal employee, Stockton

**What got you into bird watching?**

I've always been interested in nature. My first passion was turtles; I had a collection of as many as 30 box turtles in a back yard pen when I was a kid in northern Missouri. Whenever we'd see a turtle on the road and in danger of being squashed by cars, we'd stop and pick it up. In fall, they would dig into the ground to hibernate and reappear the following spring.

**How did you first become interested in birds?**

My grandmother was always commenting on her yard birds, esp. catbird and redbird. Instead of collecting model cars, I collected--painted and assembled--bird models (made by Bachman Plastics).

**How long have you been birding?**

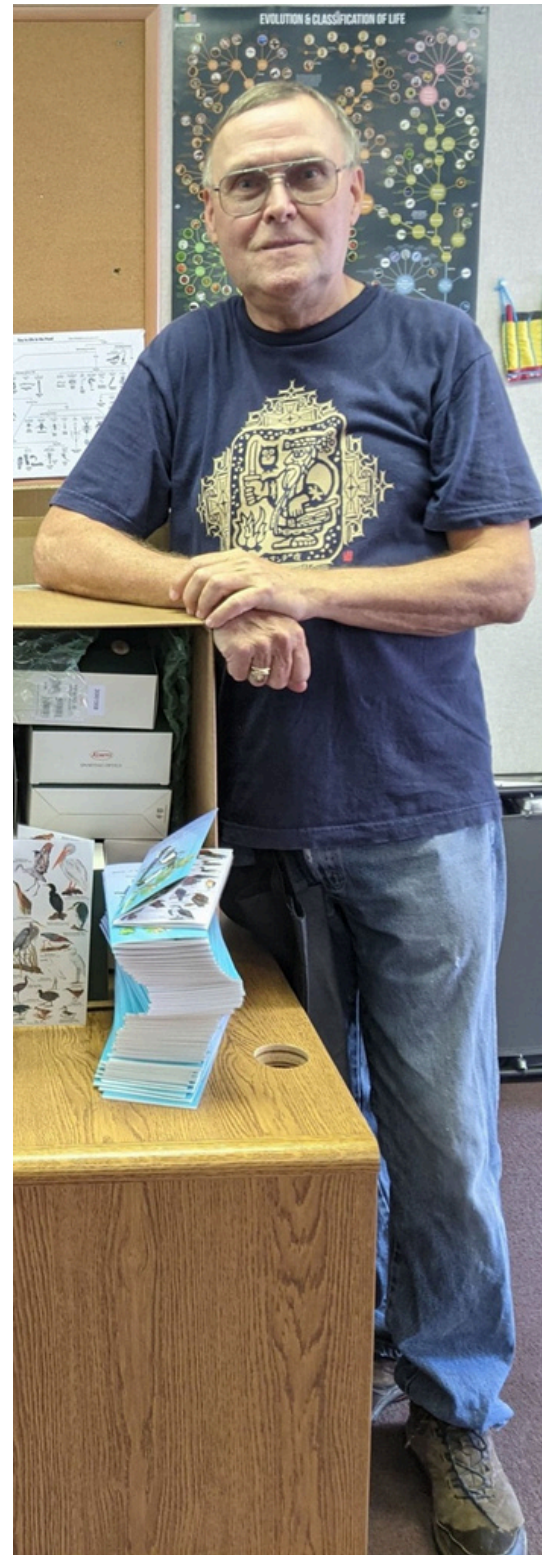
I became an active birder after moving to California in 1982, so let's say since about 1987.

**How often do you go bird watching?**

Has varied widely over the years--anywhere from nearly every day to 1-2 times a week now.

**Do you do birding alone or with friends or any Audubon chapter?**

Of course, most of my birding has been with San Joaquin Audubon, where I served on the board and as field trip leader for some 30 years. I enjoy the social aspect of birding with others, but I do prefer to keep talking and noise to a minimum. I really enjoy sharing the joy of birding with beginners. I also enjoy the peace found in solo birding, but it's always more fun to find a real "rarity" in the company of others.



**Who inspired you to get into birding?**

Grandma Long, my maternal grandmother.

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**What's your favorite bird or birds?**

This is so tough--like choosing your favorite child. I like cheeky birds, birds that have real character. Examples, Hermit Thrush, Spotted Towhee, Hooded Merganser--any many, many others!

**What rare bird do you most want to see? Why?**

Another hard to answer question. Prior to this past weekend, I might have said Swamp Sparrow in SJ Co. High on my list this year are Spectacled Eider, Boreal Chickadee, and Northern Hawk Owl. (I have an Alaska trip scheduled for this June.).

**What is the coolest bird you've ever seen?**

Another toughie. I've done considerable international birding since retirement, so there are thousands to choose from. Capuchinbird (formerly Calfbird) in Guyana was extraordinary. "Wry" (crooked) birds--wrynecks in Europe and Africa, Wrybill in New Zealand, and the list goes on and on!

**What unusual things have you done or places have you gone to see**

**birds?** I've slogged through muddy jungles in the dark in South America, New Guinea and Indonesia, sat in weedy, buggy forests in the presence of gorillas and chimpanzees in Uganda, swum in deep, tannin-stained lagoons in the Amazon with electric eels, and hiked to the top of a volcano in Galapagos to observe hundreds of giant tortoises.

**What's the farthest you've gone to see birds? What was that like?**

Farthest point would probably be Sri Lanka. Incredible experience with truly unique birds and culture. Large, continental land masses, like the US, have incredible species diversity, but nothing can compare to island endemism. Islands--both large and small--are evolutionary laboratories which often yield truly unique varieties of plants and animals, including birds.

### **Where is your favorite place to bird? Why?**

Having grown up in the Mid West, I love the variety and color of eastern wood warblers. We have them here in California as well, but not to the degree that occurs back east. Locally, I love wooded areas like Oak Grove (Ripon) and the Mokelumne Day Use area.

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### **What is your favorite field guide?**

My first guide was the old Golden guide, but my preferred guide was the old National Geographic. I liked the artwork and the placement of range maps.

### **Do you use Ebird**

Duh!

### **Have you participated in Christmas Bird Count? If so, where?**

I've been a loyal participant in our two local CBCs, Stockton CBC (which I compiled for many years) and Wallace-Bellota CBC.

### **Share your favorite Ebird checklist link, if you would like to share.**

I love watching other ebirders submit their lists in real time (<https://ebird.org/livesubs>). I do not have a favorite checklist of my own.

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### **Do you belong to any local birdwatching groups or organizations?**

San Joaquin Audubon Society and Central Valley Bird Club

### **What can the chapter do to create enthusiasm for bird watching?**

Continue to remain in the public eye by offering bird watching experiences to the public and to remain active in local environmental controversies, as well as offering opinions on selected national and international controversies affecting birds and the environment.

### **How could one become more interested in bird watching?**

By spending more time outdoors and truly opening your eyes, ears, and other senses to the outside world. Interest in one aspect of nature inevitably leads to a broader interest in the natural world--plants, bugs, herps, fishes, etc. Take advantage of public field trips, learn from others, follow your curiosity. There is an incredible world of marvels out there just waiting for you to notice!

# FOURTH-GRADE STUDENTS. BIRDING DURING THE GREAT HIKE FIELD TRIP AT DURHAM FERRY



# FOURTH-GRADE STUDENTS. BIRDING DURING THE GREAT HIKE FIELD TRIP AT DURHAM FERRY

Dear San Joaquin Audubon Society,

Thank you for your continued support of our programs at Durham Ferry Outdoor Education Center. Your generous contribution of binoculars continues to make a meaningful impact, and since receiving your support, more than 18,000 students will have used them during their field trip experiences.

Students use the binoculars during birding on the levee alongside Audubon bird guides, helping them identify local species and build observation skills. They also participate in a hawk data activity (attached data sheet for April), where they record red-tailed hawk sightings to better understand breeding and feeding patterns. In addition, students engage in a social-emotional learning activity where they reflect on “If you were a bird, what bird would you be,” using bird traits to describe their own personalities. The binoculars and guides are also incorporated into nature journaling during our Biodiverse Schoolyards field trip, where students document and reflect on their favorite local birds. Please see attached [slides with photos](#).

We are deeply grateful for your organization’s support. Your investment continues to enrich student learning experiences year after year, and we look forward to continued partnership in the future.

Sincerely,  
Kristine

# SJAS Board Members

A California Chapter of the National Audubon Society serving the communities of Stockton, Lodi, Tracy, Manteca, Escalon, Ripon and Lathrop. All of San Joaquin County. Read our [Bylaws](#).

## Officers:

Henry Koertzen - President  
Srini Raman - Past President  
President Elect - vacant  
Kathy Schick - Secretary  
Elizabeth West - Treasurer  
Donna Marciano - Director  
Michele Marta - Director  
Ralph Baker - Interim Director  
Ernie Maier - Director, had been President elect  
Amy Weiser - Director

## Teams:

Conservation Chair - Dave Fries  
Hospitality - Michele Marta  
Hoot Owl - Philip Fiorio (Editor), Elizabeth Olin, Srini Raman  
Education & Grants - Donna Marciano, Amy Weiser, Michele Marta  
Programs & Scholarship - Donna Marciano  
Social Media - Henry Koertzen, Srini Raman



# Grants

## San Joaquin Audubon Grant Opportunities

San Joaquin Audubon Society provides grant funds for organizations and schools working to conserve our local environment. We encourage groups to apply that are interested in birding, conservation, restoration, and environmental literacy.

This year, we funded the following projects:

### **Linden High School**

Sent three students to Nature Bridge, an outdoor and environmental education camp in Yosemite National Park  
Bought four sets of binoculars

### **John McCandless STEM Charter School**

Built two new raised garden beds  
Provided seven solar powered fans for the school greenhouse to improve ventilation

### **Lathrop High School**

Sent 50 eleventh and twelfth grade students to the Youth Environmental Literacy Summit at Knights Ferry.

The Webster Foundation gives San Joaquin Audubon \$6,000 per year. The funds are used to help support San Joaquin County citizen scientists, conservation organizations, and schools that have conservation projects and environmental literacy activities. Applications are limited to \$1,500 so that multiple projects can be funded each year.

If you are interested in applying for funds, the application is available on the San Joaquin Audubon Society website. We will accept applications for the 2025-26 year now until November 21<sup>st</sup>.

Written by Michele Marta