KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

This is a series of events presented in conjunction with The Vanishing Worlds of Audubon, on display in Doheny Memorial Library from March 3 to May 31, 2023.

EVENTS SCHEDULE:

Tuesday, March 21, at 6 p.m.: Panel discussion about the disappearance of birds and what it can teach us about environmental justice.

Saturday, April 1, at 10 a.m.: Birding walk for USC students at Debs Park, home to over 140 species of birds.

Saturday, April 15, at 1 p.m.: Guided L.A. River walk and creative workshop exploring the relationships between the natural and human-made environments of the L.A. River ecosystem.

THE NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY

The National Audubon Society is a nonprofit organization that protects birds and their habitats in the United States through science, advocacy, education, and conservation. State Audubon groups were founded starting in the 1890s, and the National Audubon Society was founded in 1905. Today the society has 23 state programs, 41 centers, more than 450 local chapters, and 600,000 members.

THE LEGACY OF JOHN JAMES AUDUBON

John James Audubon (1785–1851) was an ornithologist, naturalist, and artist. His paintings of hundreds of North American birds, published between 1827 and 1838 as Birds of America, were a landmark achievement of ornithology and wildlife art. For many, “John James Audubon is American birding,” writes J. Drew Lanham in Audubon magazine. Audubon was also an enslaver, as
well as a plagiarist who fabricated and falsified some of the scientific data he published. “What do we do with a racist, slave-owning birding god almost 200 years dead?” Lanham asks. It is a question that organizations bearing Audubon’s name are reckoning with.

In an article entitled “What Do We Do About John James Audubon?” Lanham, a Black American ornithologist, argues that questions about Audubon’s legacy are important to address in shaping the future of movements to help birds. Lanham writes of resigning from the board of the National Audubon Society “because the essential work of diversity and inclusion remained siloed, at the highest level, from priorities like climate change, habitat conservation, and community science.”

This disconnect, and the legacy of a white supremacist, colonial approach to conservation, is why some contemporary environmentalists use the frameworks of “environmental justice” and “climate justice”—calling for environmental movements that center social and economic justice as just as important as, and interrelated with, work to address climate change and conserve land and wildlife. This discourse is not limited to Audubon; it is a pivotal conversation in environmental movements broadly, where many of the large, long-established organizations are rooted in a colonial, racist approach to conservation. John Muir, the first president of the Sierra Club, known as “the father of our national parks,” is another monumental figure in environmental history who has been denounced in recent years for his racism by the organization once associated with him. In the pages of Audubon magazine, J. Drew Lanham calls on conservationists and conservation organizations not to ignore these legacies but to learn from them “to move, with eyes wider open, toward a more equitable, just, and inclusive conservation future.”

CLIMATE CHANGE—BIRDS ARE AT RISK.
THEY MAY ALSO OFFER SOLUTIONS.

A 2019 report by the National Audubon Society shows that two-thirds of North American bird species are at risk of extinction from climate change—but that if we can restore and protect their habitats, we can help improve the chances for many of the at-risk bird species. Another report by the organization found that protecting and restoring bird habitats will be good not only for birds, but for all life on the planet.

Ecosystems that are critical to carbon storage and ecosystems that are critical to birds often overlap, the Audubon report found. Places that are important to birds are in many cases the same places that will help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions because they naturally store and sequester carbon—if we restore, conserve, and manage them. Ecosystems that are beneficial to both birds and the other species (including humans) they share space with include forests, grasslands, wetlands, and well-maintained green spaces in cities and suburbs.
IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS

The Important Bird Areas Program identifies and conserves important places for bird populations. It’s a global initiative that relies on local stewardship, engaging individuals, landowners, communities, businesses, nonprofits, and government agencies in conservation. In the United States, more than 2,758 Important Bird Areas encompassing 417 million acres of public and private lands have been identified.

High-priority Global Important Bird Areas in the United States include Jamaica Bay in New York City, coastal sanctuaries in Texas, and areas in Alaska. Important Bird Areas in or near L.A. include the lower Los Angeles River, the Ballona Wetlands, Palos Verdes, and the Channel Islands.

The Important Bird Areas Program was launched in 1995. It is coordinated globally by BirdLife International, and spearheaded in the United States by the National Audubon Society.

Birds have been shown to be effective indicators of biodiversity in other animal groups and plants, according to the Important Bird Areas Program.

THE AUDUBON CENTER AT DEBS PARK

Debs Park is a 282-acre park and nature reserve in Montecito Hills, a neighborhood in northeast L.A. It has hiking trails, a pond, picnic areas, and picturesque views, and is home to more than 140 bird species.

The Audubon Center at Debs Park is an environmental education and conservation center that takes a people-focused approach to conservation, with a primary goal of restoring the connection between people and the land. People-focused approaches to conservation emerged as a critical alternative to a type of conservation that was often colonial in its approach, with organizations from colonizing nations conserving land and wildlife around the world by creating protected sanctuaries (sometimes called “fortresses”), displacing local communities—sometimes violently—in the process. Instead of disconnecting people from the wildlife they share habitats with, a people-focused approach to conservation centers the interdependence between people, communities, wildlife, and land.

When it was built in 2003, the Audubon Center at Debs Park was the first carbon-neutral building constructed in the United States.
SOME OF THE BIRDS YOU MIGHT SEE AT DEBS PARK AND THE L.A. RIVER

There are more than 140 species of birds living in and around Debs Park alone. This is just a brief list of a few of the possible bird sightings at Debs Park and the L.A. River.

- American Kestrel
- American White Pelican
- Anna’s Hummingbird (and several other kinds of hummingbirds)
- Great Blue Heron
- Great Egret
- Great Horned Owl
- Hawks: Cooper’s Hawk, Red-Tailed Hawk, Sharp-Skinned Hawk
- Mallard
- Northern Flicker
- Western Scrub-Jay
- Yellow-Rumped Warblers

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- How has the racism of some of the monumental figures of environmentalist history shaped environmental and conservation efforts? How does this legacy affect environmental movements today?
- How are birds’ lives and humans’ lives interrelated?
- What kinds of birds do you see on campus? In your neighborhood?
- What can you do to support protection and restoration of bird habitat?

IF YOU LIKED THIS EVENT, YOU MIGHT WANT TO CHECK OUT:

- The Vanishing Worlds of Audubon
  Doheny Memorial Library, March 3 to May 31, 2023
- Upcoming Visions and Voices events and current Arts in Action projects:
  - March 28–29: Precarity in Film: Experimental Ecologies
  - Fifty-One Miles, a multidisciplinary project that involves walking all 51 miles of the Los Angeles River
  - USC Arts and Climate Collective
- The National Audubon Society | audubon.org
- The Audubon Center at Debs Park | debspark.audubon.org
- eBird | ebird.org
- The Important Bird Areas Program audubon.org/important-bird-areas
- L.A. Urban Rangers | laurbanrangers.org
- Friends of the Los Angeles River | folar.org
- Clockshop | clockshop.org
DISCOVER MORE AT THE USC LIBRARIES

HUGH MCHARG and MICAELEA RODGERS of the USC Libraries selected the following resources to help you learn more about this event. Electronic resources are accessible through the search bar on the USC Libraries homepage at libraries.usc.edu but may require the user to log in using their USC credentials.

ARTICLE

BOOKS

DATABASE
- Environmental Issues Online

JOURNALS
- Bird Conservation International
- Ornithology

OTHER RESOURCES
- Background on the “Audubon” Legacy