Native Plants for Birds
Supporting bird habitat in our neighborhoods

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What’s Ahead

• Introductions:
  • A little about me
  • Santa Barbara Botanic Garden

• Native plants for birds

• Designing your backyard habitat

• Some great native plants for birds
A Little About Me

- Born and raised, San Diego
- B.A. Geography, UCLA 2005
- M.L.A, University of Arizona 2012
  Thesis: Sustainable campground design in southern New Mexico
- Work experience:
  - Environmental Educator (CA, CO, NM)
  - Land Management (Tejon Ranch, Lincoln National Forest)
- Father to three children: Calliandra (6), Micah (3), Ruby (3)

Observing a Carolina Wren with my oldest daughter, Calliandra at the Santa Fe River Preserve, 2016
About the Garden

• Founded in 1926 as the Blaksley Botanic Garden; Fredric Clements served as founding Director
• Among the earliest botanic gardens dedicated solely to the native plants of a region
• Dedicated to advancing CA native plant conservation through horticulture, research, restoration, and education
WHY BIRDS?
WHY BIRDS?

Studying them engages the whole brain!
WHY BIRDS?
Art Class
WHY BIRDS?

Art Class

Photo by Tom Taylor
BIRD HABITAT

Layers of Habitat
- Ground feeders
- Gleaners
- Flycatchers

Escape routes
- Edges
- Shadows

Roosting/Perching
- Mature canopy
- Cavities
- Snags?
BIRD HABITAT

Nesting

Location
• Height
• Foliage Density

Materials
• Weaving
• Spider webs
• Mud
BIRD HABITAT
Why do we emphasize *native* plants?

- Plants convert the sun’s energy to provide nutrients

- Herbivorous insects
  - Insects 50% of all biodiversity
  - 25-35% insects herbivorous
BIRD HABITAT

Why do we emphasize *native* plants?

- 96% of songbirds feed their young arthropods
- 70%+ eat arthropods as adults
- 50%+ diet is Lepidoptera
Plants for Birds

PLANNING
Goalsetting
Site analysis

DESIGN
Design for the birds
Design for yourself/your clients

MAINTENANCE
What’s your tolerance?
Timing

Design Sketch by Paige Minney

Santa Barbara Botanic Garden
Creating Your Bird Oasis

PLANNING

Step 1: Goalsetting

- What birds are you trying to attract (and when)?
- How much maintenance are you interested in?
- Does this effort dovetail with other home improvement projects (i.e., water harvesting)?
Creating Your Bird Oasis

PLANNING

Step 2: What are your site conditions?

- Right plant, right place (sun, shade, water, soils)
- Views you want to accentuate or hide
- Biotic/Abiotic Inventory
- Your comfort and enjoyment!

Plans and Design Sketches by Paige Minney
Creating Your Bird Oasis

Design Fundamentals

Elements of Design

- Unity and Variety
- Scale and Proportion
- Rhythm
- Emphasis
- Balance

Form Givers

- Circulation
- Views Into/Out of your site
- “Desire Lines”

- Existing Site Features (hardscape, plants to keep around)
- Activities you want to participate in within your yard.
Creating Your Bird Oasis

Considerations

Maintenance

• “Messy” Plants

• Good bird habitat can also be good habitat for pests, such as rodents.

• Be willing to hold off on deadheading and/or leaving standing dead materials.

• Firescaping considerations (defensible space, rooflines, ensuring plants closer to structures are well-watered)
SOME GREAT NATIVE PLANTS FOR BIRDS

Fruit Plants

Seed Plants

Nectar Plants

Insect Plants

High Performing Plants
SOME GREAT NATIVE PLANTS FOR BIRDS

Fruit Plants

• Catalina Cherry *Prunus ilicifolia*
• Toyon *Heteromeles arbutifolia*
• California Grape ‘Roger’s Red’
• Coffeeberry *Frangula californica*
• Lemonade berry *Rhus integrifolia*
• Elderberry *Sambucus nigra*
SOME GREAT NATIVE PLANTS FOR BIRDS

T oy on *Heteromeles arbutifolia*

- Medium to large shrub to 20’
- Tolerates many exposures, but part-shade is probably best
- Fall/Winter fruit attracts cedar waxwings, robins, and other frugivores
- Evergreen foliage
SOME GREAT NATIVE PLANTS FOR BIRDS

Catalina Cherry *Prunus ilicifolia lyonii*

- Medium to large tree to 35’
- Prefers sun to part-shade
- Spring flowers attract a variety of pollinators
- Summer fruits are attractive to a variety of birds, but can be messy
SOME GREAT NATIVE PLANTS FOR BIRDS

Coffeeberry *Frangula californica*

- Small to medium shrub to 15’
- Summer/fall fruit
- Evergreen foliage
- Flowers are attractive to bees
SOME GREAT NATIVE PLANTS FOR BIRDS

California Grape ‘Roger’s Red’

• Fast-growing vine or mounding groundcover

• Amazing fall color

• Summer fruit that can persist until fall

• Great as an accent or interplanted with shrubs and trees

Photo by Betsy Collins
SOME GREAT NATIVE PLANTS FOR BIRDS

Lemonade berry *Rhus integrifolia*

- Medium evergreen shrub to 20’
- Takes hard pruning
- Summer fruit
- For inland residents, consider sugarbush (*Rhus ovata*)
SOME GREAT NATIVE PLANTS FOR BIRDS

Elderberry *Sambucus nigra*

- Small, spreading tree to 25’
- Late summer/fall berries
- Can be deciduous in dry conditions
- Flowers are good for respiratory issues; straight stems can be used to make instruments and fire by friction

Photo by Betsy Collins
SOME GREAT NATIVE PLANTS FOR BIRDS

Seed Plants

• Goldenrod *Solidago*

• Buckwheats *Eriogonum*

• Deergrass *Muhlenbergia rigens*

• Sages *Salvia sp.*

• Conifers

• Bush sunflower *Encelia californica*
SOME GREAT NATIVE PLANTS FOR BIRDS

Goldenrod *Solidago sp.*

- Perennial herb
- Bright yellow inflorescences in fall
- Winter deciduous
- Great for pollinators
SOME GREAT NATIVE PLANTS FOR BIRDS

Buckwheats *Eriogonum sp.*

- Perennial herb to 5’ shrub
- Flowers range from cream to pink to yellow
- Great for pollinators and caterpillars
- Leave seed heads through winter
- Suggested species: *E. fasciculatum*, *E. wrightii*, *E. grande var. rubescens*, *E. cinereum*
SOME GREAT NATIVE PLANTS FOR BIRDS

Deergrass *Muhlenbergia rigens*

- Bunch grass to 4’
- Provides cover for birds and other wildlife
- Fast-growing
- Flowers in spring

Photo by Betsy Collins
SOME GREAT NATIVE PLANTS FOR BIRDS

Sages *Salvia sp.*

- Small shrubs to 6’
- Foliage is typically aromatic
- Flowers are attractive to many bees
- Sculptural seed heads provide food for birds into winter
SOME GREAT NATIVE PLANTS FOR BIRDS

Conifers

• Trees from 15’ to 80’

• Great plants for emphasis

• Needles, cones, sap can be messy
SOME GREAT NATIVE PLANTS FOR BIRDS

Bush Sunflower *Encelia californica*

- Shrub to 5’
- Flowers are great for pollinators; seeds for birds
- Summer deciduous, may look weedy if in a dry site
- Short-lived, good for filling space early in your garden’s lifetime

Photo by Betsy Collins
SOME GREAT NATIVE PLANTS FOR BIRDS

Nectar Plants

- *Epilobium*
- Desert willow *Chilopsis linearis*
- *Dudleya*
- Notable Penstemon
- Hummingbird Sage *Salvia spathacea*
SOME GREAT NATIVE PLANTS FOR BIRDS

California fuschia *Epilobium canum*

- Perennial herb to subshrub
- Creeping or mounding form
- Semi-deciduous in winter
- Reliable flowers can persist through winter
SOME GREAT NATIVE PLANTS FOR BIRDS

Desert Willow *Chilopsis linearis*

- Tree to 25’
- Mature plants have an attractive, sculptural form
- Winter deciduous
- Long potential flower season
SOME GREAT NATIVE PLANTS FOR BIRDS

Live-forever *Dudleya sp.*

- Succulents with geometric form
- Can be grown in containers
- Showy inflorescences
- Slow-growing, consider massing or highlighting as a specimen plant

Photos by Betsy Collins, Robert Muller
SOME GREAT NATIVE PLANTS FOR BIRDS

Hummingbird sage *Salvia spathacea*

- Herb to 2’
- Prefers part to full shade
- Showy inflorescences; look for ‘Avis Keedy’ selection for some variety
- Spreads rhizomally
SOME GREAT NATIVE PLANTS FOR BIRDS

Notable Penstemon *Penstemon spectabilis*

- Short-lived perennial to 3’
- In addition to nectar, this plant hosts a number of cool butterflies
- Self-seeding
SOME GREAT NATIVE PLANTS FOR BIRDS

Plants for Insects

• Oaks *Quercus*
• Coyote bush *Baccharis pilularis*
• Bigpod ceanothus *Ceanothus megacarpus*
• Mountain mahogany *Cercocarpus betuloides*
SOME GREAT NATIVE PLANTS FOR BIRDS

Oaks *Quercus sp.*

- Trees to 60’
- Diverse, iconic genus
- Host hundreds of insect species
- Flowers in early spring
SOME GREAT NATIVE PLANTS FOR BIRDS

Coyote Bush *Baccharis pilularis*

- Shrub to 15’
- Dioecious; consider whether you want to attract more insects or seed-eaters, or both
- Growth form can be rangy
- ‘Pigeon Point’ cultivar is compact
SOME GREAT NATIVE PLANTS FOR BIRDS

Bigpod Ceanothus *Ceanothus megacarpus*

- Shrub to 25’
- *Ceanothus* is an incredible genus and many members are worth mentioning
- Growth form can be rangy
- If looking for a more shapely selection, consider *Ceanothus thyrsiflorus* (blue flowers), or *Ceanothus greggii*
SOME GREAT NATIVE PLANTS FOR BIRDS

Mountain Mahogany *Cercocarpus betuloides*

- Shrub to 20’
- Mostly vertical structure makes it a great screening plant or part of a hedge
- Host plant for many caterpillars
- Feathery fruits add visual interest in summer
SOME GREAT NATIVE PLANTS FOR BIRDS

Habitat Plants

• Oaks *Quercus*

• California sagebrush *Artemisia californica*

• Saltbush *Atriplex*

• Gooseberry/Currant *Ribes*

• Willow *Salix sp.*
SOME GREAT NATIVE PLANTS FOR BIRDS

Oaks *Quercus sp.*

- Diverse group. If you’re space deprived, consider a scrub oak such as *Q. berberidifolia*
- Most species respond poorly to summer water
- Most are evergreen, but it is possible to grow the deciduous *Q. kelloggii*, *Q. lobata* (better in valleys), or *Q. douglasii*
SOME GREAT NATIVE PLANTS FOR BIRDS

California Sagebrush *Artemisia californica*

- Shrub to 6’
- Aromatic foliage
- Available in more upright (straight species) or creeping/mounding form (*A. californica ‘Canyon Gray’*)
- Drought deciduous

Photo by Carol Bornstein
Photo by Betsy Collins
SOME GREAT NATIVE PLANTS FOR BIRDS

Saltbush *Atriplex sp.*

- Shrubs to 15’
- Quail bush (*A. lentiformis*) is a great plant for “instant habitat”
- Summer blooms are inconspicuous, but attract many insects
- Member of the Chenopodiaceae family (spinach, beets, swiss chard)

Photo by Betsy Collins
SOME GREAT NATIVE PLANTS FOR BIRDS

Gooseberry/Currant *Ribes sp.*

- Shrubs to 10’
- Depending on water, most can be either summer deciduous or winter deciduous; *R. viburnifolium* is evergreen
- Late winter and spring blooms add early color
- Gooseberries tend to be spiny, currants less so
SOME GREAT NATIVE PLANTS FOR BIRDS

Sandbar Willow *Salix exigua*

- Shrubby tree to 20’
- Great for areas that receive greywater or tend to retain moisture
- Dioecious, so separate plants have staminate (pollen-bearing) and pistillate (pollen-receiving) parts
- Spreads via rhizome
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

• Santa Barbara Botanic Garden
  • Check out our grounds and retail nursery. Someone is always ready to talk plants for your yard!

• Calscape- A Service of the California Native Plant Society
  • [www.calscape.org](http://www.calscape.org)

• National Audubon Society Plants for Birds Program
  • [www.audubon.org/plantsforbirds](http://www.audubon.org/plantsforbirds)

• Books
  • *California Native Plants for the Garden* by Bornstein, Fross, O’Brien
  • *The California Native Landscape: The Homeowner’s Design Guide to Restoring its Beauty and Balance* by Rubin and Warren
SPECIAL THANKS

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