



William MacGillivray (1796-1852)

USC

Native Species Project

Californian nature information & conservation
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Next hike: April 25, Claremont Wilderness Park (subject to change). Email sigurdse@usc.edu

Summer Project: Rare Birds in San Gabriel. Some of LA County's rarest birds are "hiding" in the hills of San Gabriel Mountains (around Mt. Baldy). The black swift is said to still nest in the area, but recent fires might have interrupted this. There are also many sightings of the relatively rare golden eagle (of course this bird is much larger and easier to spot), and a hopeful sign is that they are often spotted in pairs. This summer, the plan is to hike up several San Gabriel canyons, with an eye on the sky, to see if we can spot these rare birds. Keep in mind that these species can be extremely hard to spot, as they are low in numbers and tend to fly very high.

Black swift (*Cypseloides niger*). This is North America's largest swift. The color is actually uniformly dark brown, but it often looks black against the sky background. Look for a dark silhouette with long "scythe blade" wings and slightly forked tail. It is distinctly larger and darker than white-throated swifts (which are much more common). It usually forages for flying ants and other insects high in the sky, only landing near the nest (never on the ground or in trees). **Sound:** [a repeated rolling "ptee-ptee-prree"](#). **Fun fact:** This swift prefers to nest near waterfalls, and sometimes behind them. A slight water spray does not seem to bother the birds.



Typical black swift flight silhouette and a nest (which is usually next to a stream or waterfall). Photos: iNaturalist.org.

Golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) This large, powerful eagle has been covered in a previous newsletter (Feb. 2024). They look mostly dark brown but with a golden tint on the head feathers. Young individuals have white patches on the wings. Look for a flight silhouette somewhat similar to *Buteo* hawks (e.g. the common red-tailed hawk), but darker and much larger. Golden eagles are mostly silent.



Golden eagle flight silhouette and nest. Photos: iNaturalist.org.

Supporting local flora and fauna: Report observations and upload photographs on the iNaturalist app (or website). This way, you are adding to the data used by scientists in conservation efforts.



<https://dornsife.usc.edu/bisc/undergraduate/usc-native-species-project/>

