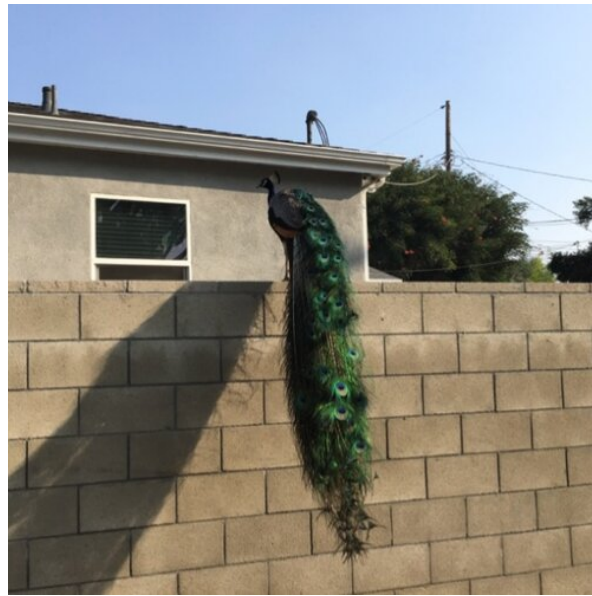


“Snipe Hunting in Los Angeles” by Lorelei Laird

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Snipe Hunting in Los Angeles

I was biking down a narrow neighborhood street, thinking only of getting home in time to shower, when I saw a large bird silhouetted in the road ahead of me. A bird with a little crown of feathers. Trailing a ludicrously long tail.

“I found him!” I whooped to no one. It was the West L.A. peacock, my iridescent white whale.

I had been biking through the neighborhood for weeks at that

point, seeking out the peacock. My interest was piqued in late May, after a peahen – the peacock’s female counterpart – inexplicably showed up in my own neighborhood. I was fascinated. Why were these peafowl, the symbol of Indian royalty, hanging around decidedly urban Los Angeles?

Frankly, I was also a bit disappointed with the peahen. I have always loved the bright, beautiful colors on blue peacocks (the species I encountered), which have electric-blue heads and necks, shading down to iridescent tails of blue, green, and gold. I would dress like that every day if I could. The girls, by contrast, have ordinary tails in a practical brown and white. I was glad to meet the peahen, but I wanted to see that beautiful boy bird.

I was also in the market for more interesting cardio workouts. Due to a series of unfortunate sports injuries, I’m not supposed to run on pavement. With gyms and swimming pools closed for the pandemic, that left bicycling – and noodling around my neighborhood was getting boring. When I discovered there was a peacock just hanging around a few miles to the west of me, I decided to dedicate my bike rides to finding him. Even if I never found him, it would give my rides some structure.

For weeks, that was all it gave me. I studied a [Google Map of peacock sightings](#) kept by the neighborhood and devised a route that hit the areas he seemed to like most. I would bike west on one street and return east on another, head swiveling at every intersection. I went

down side streets too, but mostly I relied on the body language of the other people on the street in these early mornings. If the peacock were near, I reasoned, surely they'd be clustered around him, rather than staring at their phones like it was a normal Tuesday.

This strategy failed. But in the process, I discovered the pleasure of simply exploring. I had driven through this neighborhood plenty of times before, but I was always just passing through. At bicycle speeds, I got to know the place house-by-house, street-by-street. Paint jobs, remodel jobs, and landscaping can tell you a lot about a person – how much money they have, how interested they are in gardening, how offbeat they like to look. I developed favorites.

But 2020 was also the summer of the yard sign. Initially, those signs praised essential workers or congratulated graduates of the local schools. Based on the names and grade levels of the graduates, I constructed pretend back stories for them, imagining what it must be like to be 18 or 12 or 5 in this environment.

Then, as May rolled into June, the Black Lives Matter signs started appearing. Those were usually homemade, especially at first, and they were everywhere within a couple of weeks. For about two weeks, a board with "RIP BIG FLOYD" was propped up against the fence at the park.

But I never found the peacock. Bored, I tried tracking him down in other neighborhoods, referring back to the peacock-sighting map. I spent a couple of weeks exploring a neighborhood with grueling hills

and seas of money. I did not find the peacock, although I did find gorgeous views and interesting modern architecture. Then I went west toward the beach, where things get artsier, and found small, brightly-colored metal sculptures hung from all the streetlights. I feasted my eyes on all of it, enjoying the novelty I wasn't getting in any other part of my life.

I was coming back from one of those excursions the morning I finally saw the peacock. I was just cutting through "his" neighborhood because it was the fastest route home; I was not planning to linger. Then I glanced up and saw the bird in my path.

Abandoning my bike at the side of the road, I watched him cross the street, oblivious to an approaching car (which gave him plenty of space). After that, followed a woman with a serious-looking camera. I fell in line behind her, and we watched him linger on some random person's lawn, showing off his bling. When he grew tired of our admiration, he flew to the roof and then disappeared.

I saw him twice more before California opened up outdoor swimming pools, and my rides became Sunday-only. I'd be happy to see him again, but I'm pretty sure he's already given me what I needed: a bit of novelty. As my world has become very small, exploring west-L.A. by bike helps re-enlarge it – not by taking me far from home, but by magnifying the everyday details that I might have missed from the car. I see who's still commuting, who likes to drink coffee on their porch, who's gardening and what they grow. I've found a home deliberately

built around a living tree and any number of wonderful Little Free Libraries.

And if I come down a certain street at the right time, I might get a glimpse of an electric-blue bird, trailing his gorgeous fan of feathers down a concrete wall.



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Headshot: American Bar Association

Photo Credit: Lorelei Laird

