

AUGUST 2019

STUDIO CITY

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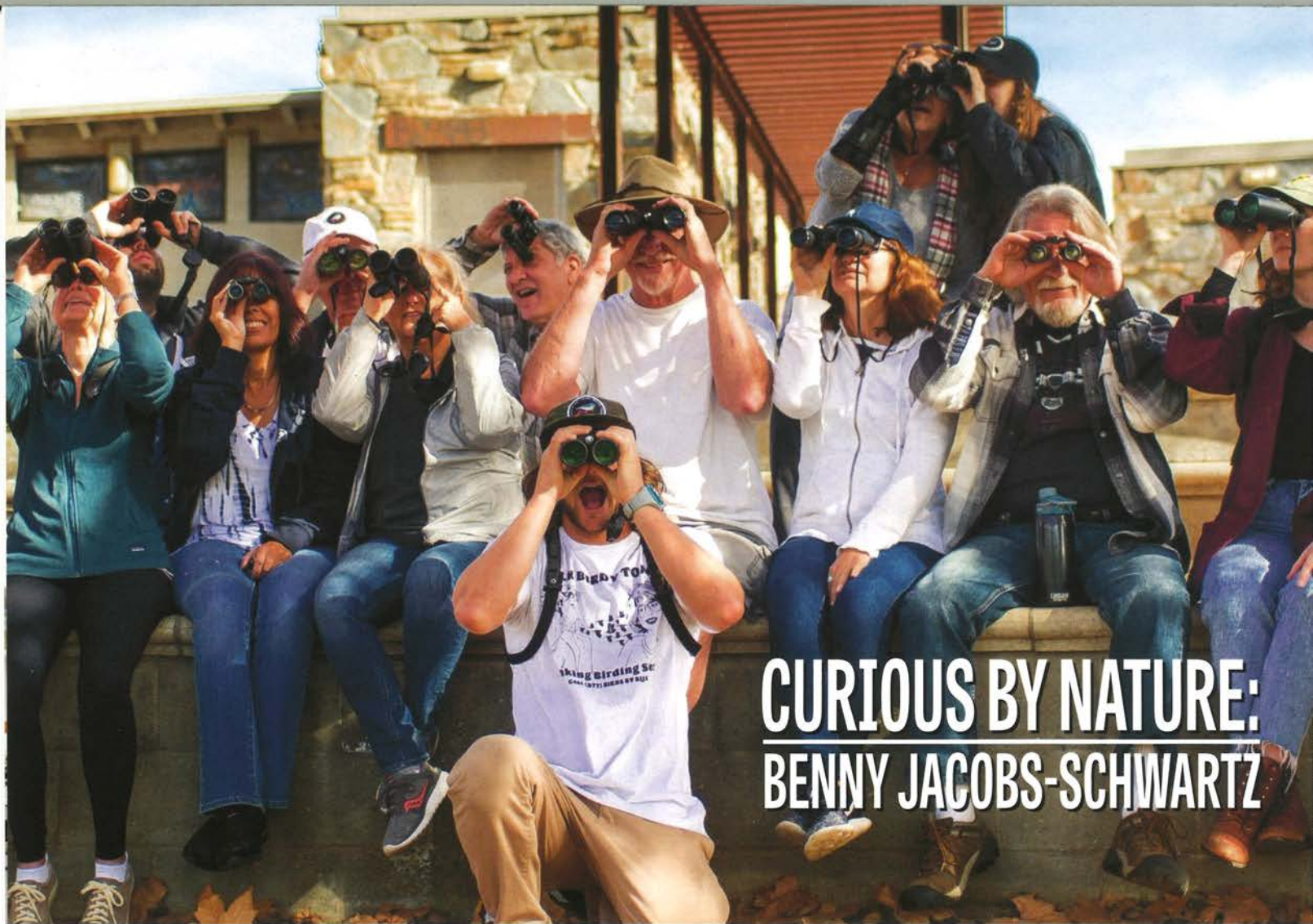


AUGUST CALENDAR

 Best Version Media

COVER PHOTO BY STEPHEN BENDER

An exclusive magazine serving the neighbors of Studio City, South of the BLVD



CURIOUS BY NATURE: BENNY JACOBS-SCHWARTZ

Elyse Glickman | Photos courtesy birdsbybijs.com

Los Angeles native and UC Santa Cruz graduate Benny Jacobs-Schwartz, 28, says that although his family relocated from the Laurel Canyon area to Studio City for its family-friendly setting and green spaces, his personal interest in bird watching took shape around 2011 while he was in Costa Rica on a study abroad program to support his university studies in Tropical Rainforest Biology.

“I started to see birds through high-powered binoculars and was wowed by colorful tropical birds I never knew existed,” he says on that discovery bringing out childlike wonder. “Earlier, I was into insects, and then tropical fish. However, the bird surveys I did with my instructors instilled my passion for birding.”

As he got deeper into his graduate studies and post-graduate life, he realized that bird watching was not only a great outdoor activity for families on vacations and staycations but also an exciting tool to get kids of any age excited about exploring nature and putting down their gaming consoles and iPads.

Benny built a resume that included serving as a wildlife guide at Alaska Wildland Adventure on its Kenai Peninsula, Bird/Photography Guide Assistant at Tandayapa Bird Lodge in Ecuador, wilderness leader at Yosemite’s Camp Tawonga leading multi-week adventure road trips, and multi-day backpacking trips for kids and work in environmental education inside and outside the classroom, and an education leader at Biocitizen Los Angeles.





“Birds come in a variety of shapes and colors, and move quickly so they manage to grab and hold onto one’s attention,” he says. “They can be seen as keys that help unlock kids’ nature consciousness and help them wake up to the wilderness just outside their front door.”

The combination of passion and hard work led to his founding, BIRDS by BIJS, with the clear goal of getting people outside to experience nature in a unique way. Tours integrate aspects of photography, wildlife documentary filmmaking, educational nature walks, and even wildlife inspired clothing to acquaint locals and visitors with the outdoors and then get involved with local environmental advocacy and nature conservation organizations.

“Living in Los Angeles and other large cities, I’ve noticed it’s easy for most of us to go about our day or life without paying much mind to the nature around us,” he explains. “However, when people come out on a bird walk to a beautiful park or wild setting right here in Los Angeles, they often realize how accessible and vibrant the bird and wildlife is here!”

When it comes to the entrepreneurial spirit in the Schwartz family, meanwhile, it has truly flown from generation to generation.

“I think it is super interesting is that both my father (Ken Jacobs, 71) and I have very unique businesses,” he says. “My dad owns and operates ‘Wanna Buy A Watch?’, a vintage watch and jewelry shop in West Hollywood. He started out as a psychologist, and for the last 30 years has been very successful sharing his passion for watches and jewelry. We both followed our own path and created our own niche businesses that revolve around our personal interests. When you do something you love, people will feel you shining and naturally want to be around that energy and enthusiasm.”

He notes his family (also including mother Sharon Schwartz, 63, and sister Emmy Jacobs-Schwartz, 23) has been tremendously supportive of his journey and his a one-of-a-kind career

path uniting his interests in nature and the greater good of the community.

In his spare time, Benny stays rooted in the great outdoors. His pastimes include surfing, rock climbing, mountain biking, backpacking, snowboarding, yoga, bird photography, wildlife documentary filmmaking, and spending quality time with Junior, his eight-year-old English cocker spaniel. Rather than drive to the Studio City Farmer’s market for weekly produce, he gets there by bike.

He also volunteers his time as a board member at San Fernando Valley Audubon, involved with event planning, outreach, and bird ecology education. He also enjoys entertaining and catching up with his friends on their career and interests. And at Halloween, his place becomes a must-visit stop for trick-or-treaters with its purple string lights on the fence out front, carved pumpkins, and a fog machine at the front door. He offers this advice for parents interested in keeping kids thrilled for the rest of the year.

“Parents can get involved with their kids, and what I have been noticing —especially with young kids—is that there is so much reliance on iPads and technology,” he suggests. “A good strategy is to encourage them to see bird watching as a real life, real time ‘Pokémon Go.’ When you consider that there are over 800 species of birds North America, and 500 recorded in LA County, it becomes a game to see how many species you can spot, driving excitement and curiosity.”

Better still, there are many locales right in our backyard where everybody can get into the game.

1. North Weddington Recreation Center, Studio City
2. Franklin Canyon Park, Beverly Hills
3. Bette Davis Picnic Area: Griffin Park + LA River, Glendale
4. Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Center, Van Nuys,
5. Malibu Lagoon State Beach, Malibu
6. Wilacre Park, Studio City

Benny also points out birding is also sustainable as it merely demands everybody gets outdoors. It then can be taken to the next level when you take what’s observed and record it on iNaturalist.com or eBird.org. The data is then sent over to scientists regularly monitoring changes in bird populations over time, tracking things like global warming and how it affects bird populations of different areas in disproportionate ways.

“You can start kids out as citizen scientists, and that spark can make them want to learn more about the world around them,” he says. “(Birding) can also alleviate the pressure and anxiety that we create for ourselves when pinned to our screens, phones, and computer games for extended periods of time, as well as effortlessly get in more outdoor exercise. There is much to discover...even in your own neighborhood if you tune in and just start looking.”





as promote immune system health. With that in mind, Benny recently developed a new nature connection-based wellness program combining bird watching as a mindfulness approach, along with native plant gardening, and five ways to reduce one's carbon footprint and improve his or her sustainability habits.

"There are so many amazing ways to connect with nature, self, and principles of sustainability in the city, I'm excited to share them with you," he says. "Connecting with nature, your best self, and your local community has never been so easy and approachable. The curriculum is geared to relax, empower, and re-connect you to your best self all right here in Los Angeles."

For more information about Benny's tours or nature connection-based wellness program, visit birdsbybjs.com

Benny says that the most satisfying aspect of his business is getting feedback from nature lovers of all ages is that they are now hearing birds they didn't notice before. "They stop to listen, and they'll send me pictures or video of birds they are seeing in their daily life," he says. "This shows that not only am I reaching folks through my education style but that they are so moved that they want to tell me about their new experiences."

The numerous benefits of nature connection have been well documented to reduce stress, anxiety, and depression as well



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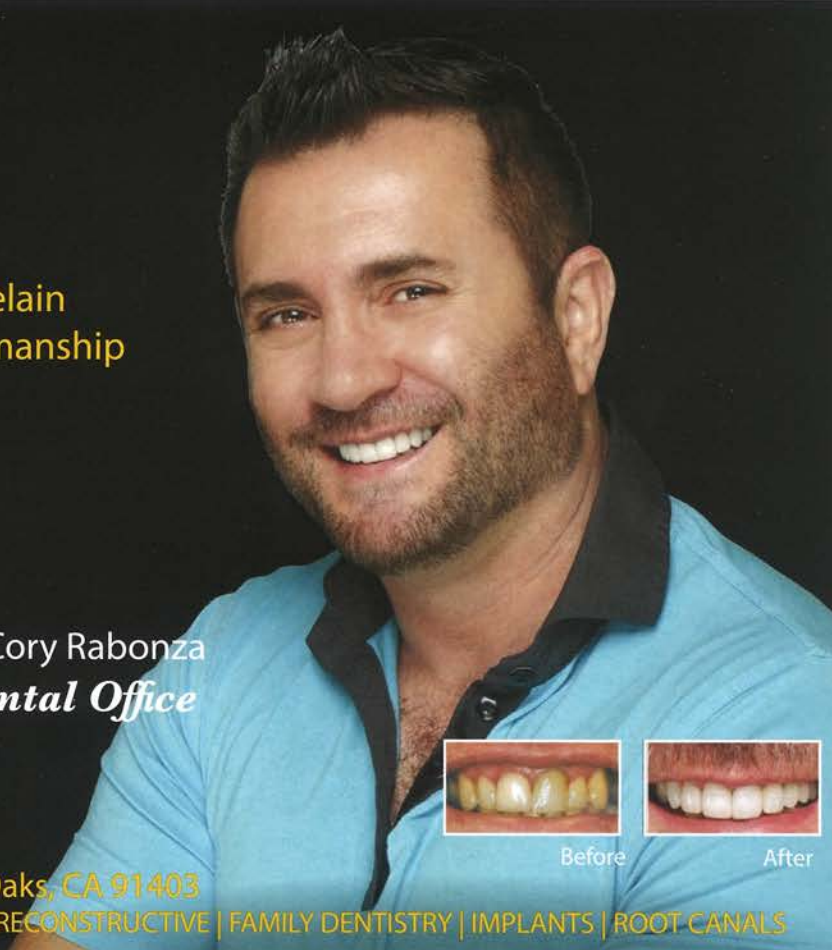
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