

The Great Tide Pool

TALES OF PACIFIC GROVE, CALIFORNIA

by local award-winning author, [Brad Herzog](#)



FOR THE BIRDS

Here's something you didn't know: February is National Bird-Feeding Month. Yup. There's a month for everything. But it got me thinking about October...

Each early October – for years that have become decades – I have enjoyed the festivities surrounding Pacific Grove's annual Butterfly Days. The parade through town. The Bazaar behind Robert Down School. The various peripheral activities that have ranged from pancake breakfasts to painting wooden butterflies to a Point Pinos Lighthouse Sunset Celebration. But there is another event that weekend, and it is largely overlooked by the masses: the Heritage Society of Pacific Grove's annual Birdhouse Competition and Auction.

It is a celebration of cute creations, locally made with imagination and ingenuity. These aren't (for the most part) simply backyard birdfeeders (which provide food and water but not shelter). These are miniature homes that cater to a cavity-nesting clientele – like wrens and woodpeckers and western bluebirds. Most call them birdhouses. I prefer another oft-used term: nesting boxes.

Every year, the creations are displayed throughout town before being moved (along with some handmade quilts) to either the Museum of Natural History (last year) or Chautauqua Hall for a silent auction – which essentially turns a historic building into an art gallery for the birds. The mayor judges the entrants – sometimes nearly two-dozen – and awards are handed out in various categories like “recycling/reuse/green” and “retro Pacific Grove” and “whimsical/eclectic.” There have been futuristic entrants, throwback entrants, wonderfully whimsical entrants, and hand-painted entrants that wish the birds “sweet tweets.” There have been entrants constructed out of bottle caps... or baskets... or wine corks... or pebbles... or driftwood... or twisted tree limbs. Two years ago, one birdhouse was made to look like an exact miniature replica of the first Pacific Grove Museum from the 19th century.

There are certainly practical should-do's regarding birdhouse creation: Make the hole the right size so it attracts birds but not predators (different hole sizes attract different birds). Incorporate a slanted roof to allow rainwater to run off easily. Make it a cozy space. Consider using aged wood as birds tend to prefer a natural look.

So yes, some entries in each year's competition are more functional while others focus on form, but that is the wonderful dichotomy of a nesting box. Is it a work of art or a useful vessel? Is it an ode to human creativity or an abode for feathered fliers? I think the magic of birdhouses is that they are often both. Carpentry and artistry.

I would suggest, in fact, that a birdhouse represents Pacific Grove in artistic form – beautiful yet practical, deceptively simple, a place where community seems to blend almost seamlessly with scenery, and welcoming – to the Monarch butterflies that migrate here every fall... to the tourists who have discovered a gem in the sanctuary by the sea... to the regional residents who head to the coast, pursuing a cool breeze during sweltering summers... to the residents who return from elsewhere and then grin upon glimpsing the tip of the peninsula jutting out into the Pacific.

*The Great
Tidepool*

