

## The Chaparral in Winter

### What you can do besides shopping

By **Kat Avila, Contributing Writer** | Published on LatinoLA: December 24, 2011



Seeds of coyote brush are flying in the chilly strong winds like snow. They lift past a dark asphalt road still wet from yesterday's downpour. Above it all, a half moon serenely occupies the sky where noise from a nearby water pipeline construction site can't reach it.

Dead leaves of Fremont cottonwoods scuttle like ocean crabs across a sandy gravel and dirt path. What's left on the thin skeletal trees is bright yellow and browning, and softly clitter-clattering in the wind.

You can hear Anna's hummingbirds: Zee-zee-zee...zee-zee-zee...zit-zit-zit, and variations. Tinsel-blue and white tree swallows skim the surface of a wind-rippled pond for flying insects. Fweet-fweet-fweet go the red-winged blackbirds as they pass overhead, recalling El Monte's grassy fields and marshes in the 1940s from your dad's childhood memories.

The morning sun feels good on your cold eyelids and cheeks. Welcome to California's chaparral, where any pine you smell this holiday season is uncut and alive.

You alert a photographer with a telephoto zoom lens about an osprey perched on an island branch. He says thanks and rushes off. You remember him for showing his photo of the vermilion flycatcher. It's a photogenic red bird, which appears at the wildlife sanctuary in a narrow window of time in November.

Plopping onto a bench, you munch away on mini-gingerbread men cookies. A pair of double-crested cormorants, then a snowy egret are buffeted by the wind as you watch them stubbornly fly against it.

When you get up, you spank your slightly wet butt. The bench wasn't as dry as you thought.

A helicopter flies over. The ripples on the pond have turned into waves. The winds are really strong today.

*A writer who gives two thumbs up to the team of editors, writers, and other contributors who made LatinoLA 2011 real. She also appreciates the readers who took the time to e-mail her this year with their thoughts and opinions.*

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