Remember when you used to go on Sea and Sage field trips or informal outings with friends and then go find picnic tables and sit around and eat lunch and just talk about birds and birding?

Remember when you went early to the monthly meeting and congregated around the refreshment table and munched and chatted with each other?

Remember the wonderful Annual Dinner, Summer Barbeque, Pancake Breakfast, all of which involved shared meals and casual conversation—all of which were canceled this year?

Now who do you have those conversations with? Maybe you live alone and just talk to your dog (or cat or bird) who listens politely. Or maybe you live with other people, and their eyes glaze over, not so politely, when you bring up birds once too often.

Being confined at home except for necessary, usually uninteresting excursions to the store or the doctor is becoming harder and harder for all of us as the months go by. Studies have shown that some people are even suffering from actual depression. Humans have been social animals since antiquity and truly need to interact face to face with others.

I came up with an idea to help us all connect with people who actually want to talk about birds, birding, conservation, education about nature, and other things that are part of Sea and Sage’s mission.

In this age of the internet, Zoom (and other such services) has come along to help us get together remotely if we have a computer or tablet and a decent internet connection.

Ever since the pandemic started last March, Sea and Sage has been providing access to our monthly General Meetings and Tuesday Conservation Lectures via Zoom. You listened to the speaker, and that was it—no interaction with other attendees.

My idea is just the opposite of this. Let’s open a Zoom get-together for an hour or two to a reasonable number of people (I’m thinking 8 to 18) and just have a good conversation.

Since Zoom is such a foreign medium, and all those faces—including your own(!)—in squares staring at you might be sort of off-putting, I thought maybe each get-together ought to have one announced subject to start it out and a leader to keep some semblance of order among the talkers. If the conversation diverges from the announced subject after a while and everyone is having fun, that’s just fine.

What might we discuss? It should be a question which everyone can talk about easily for a few minutes. Of course, we all love to talk about ourselves! So maybe it could be “How I got interested in birds” or “What is my favorite bird?” or any of several other personal subjects.

Another suggestion, which will probably be one of our first meetings because we already have leaders for it is, “What good book about birds or nature have you read recently? Tell us a little bit about it and why you liked it.” This could even lead to regular monthly (?) get-togethers for which everyone reads a particular book, and then you all get together and talk about it.

Lots of people are photographers. Maybe we could have photo-sharing sessions.

There are other creative hobbies besides photography. People could show the bird-related products of whatever craft or art form they enjoy, such as drawing, painting, embroidery, wood carving, even making bird figures out of scrap metal and driftwood. (Don’t laugh. I know someone who’s doing just that.)

A get-together might be combined with a socially distanced field trip. Instead of all going together to a particular park or refuge, everyone would go on their own or with a household mate during a defined week to, say, Mile Square Park or Upper Newport Bay. Then everyone would get together at the end of the week and talk about the birds they saw and where in the refuge they found them. You might even be introduced to a part of the park you weren’t familiar with or told about a bird you could go back and hunt for.

A get-together might attempt to find ways to solve challenging problems, such as how to attract more young adults or members of underrepresented ethnic groups to Sea and Sage membership.

You might want to play some sort of trivia game in which each person brings a question and others try to answer it. The questions could either be ones of opinion ("What is the ugliest bird?") or those with right or wrong answers.

And on and on: gardening for birds, bird feeding tips, birder behavior (good and bad), travel, games of various types, etc.

Will this work out? The only way to find out is to schedule a few get-togethers and see if there’s interest and how they go. Since this idea was only approved by the Board three days before the Wandering Tattler deadline, nothing is scheduled yet. However, our webmaster will be posting meeting subjects, leaders, and times as they are scheduled. They will start in early October. So take a look at our website (the link will be on the home page) near the end of September, and keep looking at it frequently; the meetings (get-togethers) will be added as we find leaders. The procedure for signing up will be on the website, too.

We’re still in the process of organizing this whole project. We have a coordinator and may get a second one. We envision a wide variety of topics and many different leaders. How about you? Pick a topic that interests you and schedule it with a coordinator. Then meet your group on Zoom and get the conversation going. It should be fun!