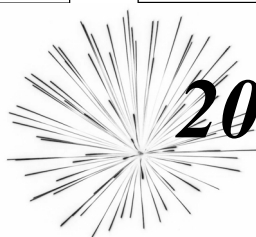




Albatross

PHOEBASTRIA NIGRIPES



2008! A Bird Club Big Year

By David Suddjian, SCBC Records Keeper

With the New Year the Santa Cruz Bird Club launches into its first ever “Big Year,” an effort to find as many species as we can within Santa Cruz County on SCBC field trips! We hope above all that our Big Year theme will bring a healthy measure of fun and challenge to our calendar of trips. It will be a great opportunity to visit new places, involve new leaders, and for many birders, to find new birds they’ve never seen in the county.

This fall we settled on some ground rules and an approach to the year. Species counted will be those found during any advertised SCBC field trip. It is tempting to include the local CBCs in the mix, but those events are not really field trips, so we will leave them out. (Of course, post-CBC rarity chases are fair game!) “Advertised SCBC trips” will be those published in the Alby calendar. A trip begins whenever people gather and then ends whenever there is any formal conclusion or parting of ways. Any species seen or heard to the satisfaction of the leader will count, including species reported by only one participant, provided the leader is satisfied with the report. Naturally, reports of species of great rarity for the county will have to be vetted, as usual.

Which species will be easy to find and which will be hard? I assigned a rank of 1 to 6 to each species on the county list to reflect the likelihood of finding it on a field trip in 2008. Rankings included: (1) Expected (easy with no special effort); (2) Expected (easy, but need to visit specific sites); (3) Probable (good possibility, but need to visit specific sites at specific times); (4) Possible (rarity with usually 3+ records/year, or highly local hard to find or irregular); (5) Unlikely (multiple modern records but does not occur annually, or only 1-3 per year); and (6) Very Unlikely (the rarest of the rare). Of 434 species on the county list, 240 species ranked on the easy side of this spectrum, as either “expected” or “probable.” So we set 240 species as our goal. Of course, we will no doubt find some of the more challenging species (and indeed some trips will aim especially at those), but we may also miss some of the easier species (after all, field trips have their limitations and there is always a measure of chance involved). In the end, 240 seems a modest goal and my personal goal for the trips will be 270 species. For what it is worth, over the last five years our cumulative annual county bird list (all species found in the county, not just on field trips) has ranged from 318-336 species, and the record for the most species found in one year by one person is 312.

In this issue:

**Happy New
Big
Year!**

Why Count?



300 Birds?



**Calendar
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**Santa Cruz
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**Trip Reports
Announcements**

We have planned an ambitious schedule of trips to all corners of the county, including long-favored destinations and outings to new places. Monterey Seabirds and Shearwater Journeys will provide advertised trips with discounts for SCBC members, providing a way for us to include pelagic trips in the program. Some productive spots will be visited several times during the year, as new species appear, and some trips will have an open itinerary to respond to current reports of rarities and other birds of interest. Many trips are planned specifically to put us out there in the paths of rare birds! And some trips will strategically target particular species that are local or hard to find in Santa Cruz County, offering great opportunities to find new county birds.

We hope you will come out and bring your eyes and ears to the challenge. The more the merrier. Let's have fun and enjoy each other's company! And those of you who can lead a trip but haven't tried yet, we hope you will step in and help to fill out our calendar of trips. I'll see you out there in 2008!



Big Years: Why Count? Who Cares?

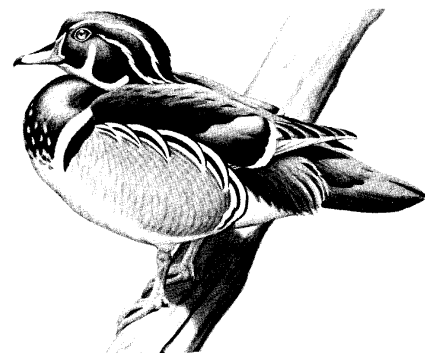
by *Bob Ramer*

As presidents of your bird club, Bernadette and I welcome you to 2008. This promises to be a very exciting year! A quick glance at the field trip offerings for January and February will give you an inkling of the birding activity that we will be undertaking in our pursuit of recording 240 bird species on Bird Club field trips within Santa Cruz County during the year. Our goal is to offer people the opportunity to travel to new places, meet new friends, and hopefully discover some new birds along the way. And by the end of the year, we will have created a pool of knowledge on regional distribution and the seasonal abundance of birds within our county. Local birders will use this information to pinpoint locations that might maximize their chances of seeing a Pileated Woodpecker. Or out-of-towners could use that information to determine where they should look for Marbled Murrelets, if they were visiting Santa Cruz in May or in September. This database will grow as the year progresses—so bookmark the SCBC URL in your web browser, and take advantage of this wealth of information when you plan your birding adventures.

Given birding camaraderie and friendly competition, big years frequently take on a life of their own. So if you catch the birding fever, you might attempt your own big year in 2008. For this personal pursuit,

you can tailor a list to suit your tastes. Perhaps you might mirror the SCBC attempt and limit your list to Santa Cruz County. Or you could condense your list to your backyard or expand it to cover the state or any place you visit this year. Likewise you might choose to restrict your list to native species or decide to include introduced birds, because, for example, European Starlings have made their presence known in every birding community that they have invaded. In any case, it would be your list and your choice!

If you decide to build a year list, the first 50 to 100 species are relatively easy to spot. For example, local birders who participate in the Moss Landing Christmas Bird Count could have 80 or more species on their list by the end of New Year's Day. The next 50 to 100 species require a little more effort, but an energetic birder could record 200 species in Santa Cruz County during January. After that things slow down considerably until spring and summer arrive, when locally

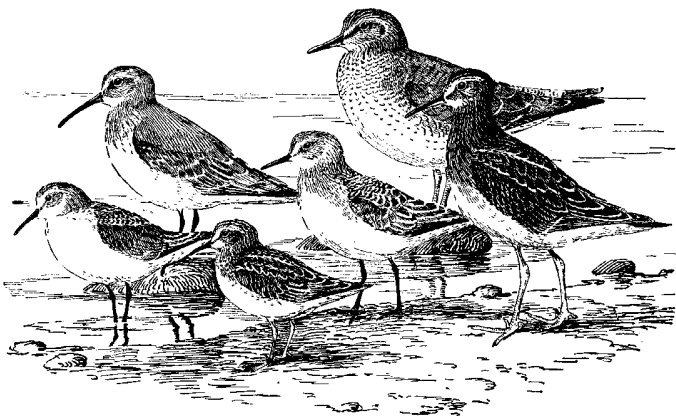


breeding birds make their appearance. The approach of fall, however, is when the full adrenaline rush hits, and an addicted lister can easily run from site to site trying to see each vagrant shorebird or eastern warbler as it passes through the county.

Will the Bird Club record 240 species during the year? I believe so. Will some members of the bird club exceed this number? Absolutely! My guess is that a few enthusiastic birders may see over 270 species during the year. Can anyone achieve the unfathomable and see 300 species in 2008? Perhaps. But a person would have to be compulsive (and extremely lucky) to reach this lofty goal and join Santa Cruz's 300 Club in one year's time. (See below for information on the SCBC 300 Club.)

Will I keep a list in 2008? That's a harder question to answer as my satisfaction comes from being in the field with the opportunity to see a variety of birds, which I value more than a series of tic marks on a piece of paper. But if I were to keep a list, and June came around with the check boxes before Poorwill, Purple Martin, and Black-chinned Sparrow empty, would this motivate me to forsake weeding in the backyard and join some friends to enjoy the spectacular scenery at the base of Loma Prieta? If so, then perhaps the list has served a noble purpose.

We are confident that the activities which the Bird Club is planning for this year should fulfill anyone's quest for more knowledge about our local birds. So at whatever level you decide to embrace the Big Year concept, we look forward to enjoying with you the many birding opportunities that will present themselves during 2008.



The New "300" Club

In the spirit of the coming SCBC Big Year we've launched a new page on the club website featuring members who have managed to see 300 or more species in the county. See it at:

http://www.santacruzbirdclub.org/300_Club.html

Currently there are seven members but we expect to add more birders to this list soon. Our hope is that the 300 club will motivate club members to work a patch, bird locally, and achieve better coverage for the second smallest county in California (only San Francisco County is smaller). There are currently 434 bird species on the Santa Cruz County list.

If you've seen 300 or more of those species, then you belong! Contact Roger Wolfe at 475-9465 or email: rogwolfe@cruzio.com

Albatross Goes Online!

Beginning with this issue, The Albatross will be posted on the SCBC web site in PDF format. You can read or print the newsletter, using Acrobat Reader. If you don't have the reader, download it (free) from the Adobe website: <http://www.adobe.com>

(Be sure to uncheck the other software they want to give you, unless you really want it.)

The Albatross will still be mailed to members. However if you do not wish to receive a hard copy in the future—for environmental reasons or to save the Bird Club mailing costs—please notify David Ekdahl:

dek Dahl@earthlink.net

To see The Albatross online, click the "Alby" icon on the home page—

<http://santacruzbirdclub.org>



Events Calendar

January - February 2008



Tuesday, January 1, 2008
Moss Landing CBC



The Moss Landing count happens every New Year's Day, and the count circle covers some amazing birding areas—southern Santa Cruz county and the Moss Landing/Elkhorn Slough area. It's not too late to join this special New Year's Day outing.

Interested?: Contact Bob and Bernadette Ramer at 831-426-7342, or email: baramer@sbcglobal.net



Thursday, January 3
Moss Landing CBC Rarities Chase!

We'll try to track down some of the rare and uncommon species discovered on the New Year's Day CBC. There are always goodies, but who can guess what? Hopefully some interesting duck, raptor, warbler, or...? Although we may venture after some highlight in Monterey County, expect most effort to go to the Santa Cruz County portion of the CBC circle, as we kick off our Big Year. Rain cancels, but if that happens, a make-up effort will occur on January 4.

Directions: Meet at 7:30 a.m. at Coco's Restaurant, Green Valley Road and Main Street in Watsonville. Bring lunch and drink for a full day trip.

Leader: David Suddjian, liturgist@stjoscap.org



Friday, January 4
Neary Lagoon

We'll search for Wood Ducks and other waterfowl, Black-crowned Night-Herons, White-throated Sparrows, and whatever else might turn up.

Directions: Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the west entrance off

California Street near the intersection with Bay Street. Heavy rain cancels.

Leader: Steve Gerow, 426-2476, stephengerow@aol.com



Sunday, January 6
Beginning Birding Walk
Natural Bridges State Park

Directions: Meet at 8:30 a.m. at the Delaware Avenue entrance (back entrance) to Natural Bridges State Park. Heavy rain cancels.

Leader: Forthcoming



Wednesday, January 9
Mission Springs Conference Center,
Scotts Valley

Have you ever had the urge to bird in a new territory or on private property? Here's your chance to explore some of the 330 acres at Mission Springs Conference Center in Scotts Valley. This morning walk will explore the bird species associated with three distinct plant communities—redwood forest, mixed evergreen forest, and chaparral. We'll practice with the resident and wintering "Little Brown Birds" (see Nov./Dec. Albatross) and keep our eyes peeled for woodpeckers (last year's CBC turned up a red-breasted sapsucker) and hawks too.

Directions: Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the Wild Oak entrance to Mission Springs. To get there, take Mt. Hermon Rd. to Lockhart Gulch Rd. just West of Scotts Valley. After 0.5 mile, turn right on Nelson Rd. and continue 1 mile to Wild Oak. Heavy rain cancels.

Leader: Matthew Strusis-Timmer, 335-2259, thedutchguy@hotmail.com

Santa Cruz Bird Club programs and field trips are open to the public—non-members are welcome. People needing rides to field trip sites are advised to contact field trip leaders. Carpooling is encouraged. Dress in layers and bring liquids. Lunches are optional on half-day trips. Heavy rain cancels.

Field trips can pose hazards. Reluctantly, we have decided we must publish and implement this policy:

The Santa Cruz Bird Club or its field trip leaders cannot be responsible for damage, injury, or loss incurred by the acts or omissions of any member or visitor during Club field trips or during commutes to or from them.

Field trip participants must release the Club from any liability for such damage, injury, or loss.

Ordinarily, field trip participants sign a waiver releasing the Club from such liability, but in the absence of such a signed waiver, participation on a Club field trip in itself implies consent to and agreement with this waiver.



Friday, January 11
Long-Eared Owl Stakeout

A wintering Long-eared Owl has returned to O'Neill Ranch Open Space in Soquel. No guarantees it will still be there in January, but two were there at that time last year. We'll be in place at dusk to watch for one or more Long-eared Owls as they begin the evening food search. Last winter it was a fabulous sight. There is one steep hill to climb. If the weather is decent we might venture to one other spot to try for other owls.

Directions: Meet at Anna Jean Cummings Park ("Blue Ball Park") in Soquel at 4:30 p.m. Gather in the lower parking area near the playground. Dress warmly for standing around on a winter evening. From Highway 1, take Porter Street north, crossing Soquel Drive, where it becomes Old San Jose Road. Continue past Soquel High School and watch for the park on the left. Rain cancels.

Leader: David Suddjian liturgist@stjoscap.org



Saturday, January 12
Santa Cruz Sea Watch

Are you looking to see some of the thousands of birds that live on the water like shearwaters, alcids, and even albatrosses but don't want to get on a boat? We'll share the thrills, challenges, and tricks-of-the-trade in identifying birds over the ocean from shore.

Directions: Meet in front of Seymour Marine Discovery Center (at Terrace Point) on the westside of Santa Cruz at 8:00 a.m. Spotting scopes are highly recommended, but all are welcome regardless.

Leader: Kumaran Arul, 419-2838, kumaranarul@earthlink.net



Wednesday, January 16
Mid-county Gulls and Coastal Birds

This half day trip will seek gulls, shorebirds, and other coastal birds at a handful of spots from Aptos to Santa Cruz. Possible rarities include Glaucous Gull and Rock Sandpiper. We can hope for Thayer's Gulls and maybe Ruddy Turnstone and White-winged Scoter.

Directions. Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the Rio Del Mar flats, at the south end of Seacliff State Beach. From Highway 1, take Rio Del Mar Blvd coastward to its end

at the beach parking area.

Leader: David Suddjian liturgist@stjoscap.org



Friday, January 18
San Lorenzo River

We should find a variety of ducks, gulls, herons, sparrows, and possible surprises (maybe Swamp Sparrow?).

Directions: Meet at 8:00 a.m in San Lorenzo Park by the duck pond.

Leader: Steve Gerow, 426-2476, stephengerow@aol.com



Saturday, January 19
Watsonville Waterfowl Roundup

Join us to see how many species of waterfowl we can amass in a half-day field trip to the Watsonville area. If sufficient rainfall has occurred we will visit College Lake in addition to Watsonville, Struve, and Harkins Sloughs. We will also visit Sunset State Beach to look for sea ducks (\$6 entry fee per car)

Directions: Meet at Starbucks at the corner of Airport Rd. and Freedom Blvd. 8:00 a.m. Heavy rain cancels.

Leader: Roger Wolfe 475-9465, rogwolfe@cruzio.com



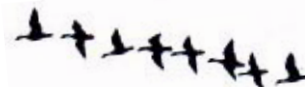
Saturday January 19
Forest Owling
For SCBC Members only

A special opportunity for SCBC members to seek Western Screech-Owl and Northern Saw-whet Owl, and perhaps other species! We'll likely hear them, and hopefully see them, too.

This trip will be limited to 8 SCBC Members. Reservations will be taken only by email, starting January 1. Please, no more than 2 people per reservation. Our destination and other details will be provided by the leader before the trip. Plan for up to two miles of fairly easy walking. Rain or windy conditions will cancel.

Trips are also scheduled for Feb. 7 and Feb. 23. The trip will probably meet around 5:00 pm.

Reservations: After Jan.1, contact David Suddjian, liturgist@stjoscap.org





**Wednesday, January 23
Swanton Road Area**

A half day outing to a beautiful and diverse area. Possible Western Bluebird, Tricolored Blackbird, American Dipper.

Directions: Meet at Whale City Bakery on Highway 1 in Davenport at 7:30 a.m. Plan to carpool from there.

Leader: David Suddjian liturgist@stjoscap.org



**Thursday, January 24,
SCBC Meeting @7:30 p.m.
Speaker: Peter Pyle**

**Topic: Transpacific Migrations—
from Albatross to Sharks to Salmon to Bats**

Peter Pyle worked as a Farallon Island Biologist for Point Reyes Bird Observatory (PRBO) for 24 years, studying bird, bat, butterfly, and white shark migrations. He currently works for the Institute for Bird Populations (IBP) and is a Research Associate for the California Academy of Sciences. Peter is perhaps best known for his book, *Identification Guide to North American Birds, Part 1*, which includes detailed criteria for aging and sexing birds in the hand.



**Saturday, January 26,
Baldwin Creek Beach &
North Coast**

Ocean, beaches, ponds, coastal scrub, fields, and riparian areas will provide a nice assemblage of birds. Possibilities: gulls, raptors, and Swamp Sparrow. Rain cancels.

Directions: Meet at 7:30 a.m. at Beckman's Bakery at 2341 Mission Street in Santa Cruz.

Leader: David Suddjian, liturgist@stjoscap.org



**Sunday, January 27
Long-Eared Owl Stakeout**

See details for January 11 trip, above. Rain cancels.

Leader: David Suddjian, liturgist@stjoscap.org



**Friday, February 1
Meder Canyon**

Interesting species have wintered here in the past, so who knows what we might find? Perhaps White-throated Sparrow or early Allen's Hummingbirds, as well as the resident thrashers and Fox Sparrows, etc. Heavy rain cancels.

Directions: Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the north end of the canyon, by the service road starting on the west side of University Terrace Park on Meder Street.

Leader: Steve Gerow, 426-2476, stephengerow@aol.com



**Saturday, February 2
Panoche Valley**

One of our most popular trips, with great scenery and often spectacular birding. Raptors, sparrows, and birds of oak woodland and grasslands are the specialties of this trip. Come and try for Mountain Bluebird, Mountain Plover, Ferruginous Hawk, and other winter visitors such as Lewis Woodpecker, Bald Eagle, Golden Eagle, Prairie Falcon, Merlin, Phainopepla, Horned Lark, Lark Sparrow, Vesper Sparrow, and Sage Sparrow.

Directions: Meet at 7:00 a.m. at Coco's parking lot (at the intersection of Main St/Hiway 152 & Green Valley Rd) in Watsonville, or at 8:00 a.m. at the general store in Paicines (corner of Highway 25 and Panoche Valley Road). To get to Paicines, take Highway 156 east from Highway 101 into Hollister. From Hollister, take Highway 25 south, past Tres Piños to the general store in Paicines. Bring lunch for a full day trip, and limit your morning coffee intake, as facilities are limited.

Leader: Clay Kempf, 761-8260



**Sunday, February 3
Beginning Birding Walk
Natural Bridges State Park**

Directions: Meet at 8:30 a.m. at the Delaware Avenue entrance (back entrance) to Natural Bridges State Park. Heavy rain cancels.

Leader: Forthcoming



**Thursday, February 7
Forest Owling
for SCBC Members only**

See January 19 details, above.

Limited to 8 SCBC Members, with reservations taken only by email beginning on Jan. 1. Please, no more than 2 people per reservation. Rain or windy conditions will cancel. Trips are also scheduled for Jan. 19 and Feb. 23.

The trip will probably meet around 5:00 pm.

Reservations: David Suddjian liturgist@stjoscap.org



Sunday, February 10
Watsonville Waterfowl Roundup

See information for January 19.
Leader: Roger Wolfe 475-9465, rogwolfe@cruzio.com



Tuesday February 12
Sunset State Beach & Vicinity

Gulls and other coastal birds, rails, sparrows, raptors and more. Who knows... maybe we'll find a first county record for Slaty-backed Gull! Half day trip. Bring a snack. We may walk a couple of miles. Rain Cancels. \$6 day use fee per car.
Directions. Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the entrance to Sunset State Beach. From Highway 1, take San Andreas Road through La Selva, and turn right on Sunset Beach Drive.
Leader: David Suddjian liturgist@stjoscap.org



Friday, February 15
West Cliff Drive

West Cliff offers rock and beach shorebirds, loons, grebes, scoters, gulls, and many other things. With luck, the local Rock Sandpiper may cooperate and appear for us. A short expedition inland along Bethany Curve Park will add a land bird component. Heavy rain cancels.
Directions: Meet 8:00 a.m. at West Cliff & Woodrow.
Leader: Steve Gerow, 426-2476, stephengerow@aol.com



Wednesday, February 20
Big Basin State Park

This morning trip will have an extra early start to try for calling Northern Pygmy-Owl, and a later start for sleepyheads. Real diehards can contact the leader about an extra-extra early start to also try for Screech and Saw-whet Owls. Otherwise, we can hope for Pileated Woodpecker, Varied Thrush, Wood Duck, and other forest birds. Plan for a three to four miles of hiking. Bring snack and drink, and dress warmly. Rain cancels. \$6 day use fee per car.
Directions: Meet at Park HQ along Highway 236. Early start will be 6:00 a.m., with a sleepy head meeting time at 7:30 a.m. From Santa Cruz take Highway 9 north to Boulder Creek. Turn left on Highway 236 and

go for 9 miles to park HQ. Allow about 50 min. to drive from Santa Cruz.
Leader: David Suddjian, liturgist@stjoscap.org



Saturday, February 23
Forest Owling
for SCBC Members only

See January 19 details, above.
Limited to 8 SCBC Members, with reservations taken only by email beginning on Jan.1. Please, no more than 2 people per reservation. Rain or windy conditions will cancel. Trips are also scheduled for Jan. 19 and Feb. 7.
The trip will probably meet around 5:00 pm.
Reservations: David Suddjian liturgist@stjoscap.org



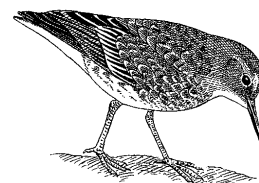
Thursday, January 24,
SCBC Meeting @ 7:30 PM
Speaker: Debi Shearwater
Topic: Penguins of The World

Debi is the founder of Shearwater Journeys and has been conducting seabirding trips in Monterey Bay and beyond since 1976. For the past several years, she has also been leading expeditions to remote areas of the world including Antarctica, Iceland, Spitsbergen, New Zealand's Sub-Antarctic Islands, and the Russian Far East. Debi is a life member and past officer of the Santa Cruz Bird Club.



Friday, February 29
Natural Bridges & Vicinity

We might go in any direction from the starting point—parts of Natural Bridges, Antonelli Pond, Terrace Point—looking for specialties that might be around, or otherwise just wander for a while to find birds.
Directions: Meet at 7:30 a.m. (it's starting to get light earlier now) at the Delaware Avenue entrance, across from the south end of Natural Bridges Drive. Heavy rain cancels.
Leader: Steve Gerow, 426-2476, stephengerow@aol.com



Santa Cruz Birds

by David Suddjian, SCBC Records Keeper

Reports from August 1 to October 31, 2007

It seemed a slow season in many regards, but there is still a slew of interesting things to share! Struve Slough had the spotlight as the shorebird hotspot this fall, with a couple of great visitors. But rare seabirds were lacking, and vagrant landbirds were sparse. Rare wood-warblers—often defining the fall vagrant season—had their poorest showing since 1997. All of the rare but regular wood-warblers were below average, variety was low, and we even missed two species that we expect every fall: Hermit Warbler and American Redstart! (However, we did finally log a Hermit in November.) First arrivals of wintering landbirds also deviated from recent patterns. Unlike most years, when early individuals have been found for many wintering landbirds, this season the first migrants came on time or were late. And, as of the end of October, irruptive landbirds were not...irrupting, that is.

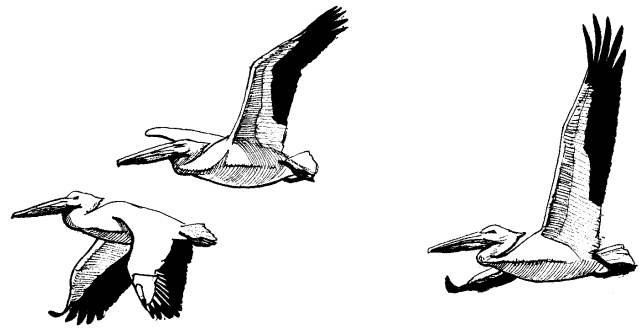
I offer thanks to Steve Gerow for collating most of the records covered in this report!

* * *

A Greater White-fronted Goose was at Harkins Slough on September 25-29. A number of flocks of up to 65 Cackling Geese were noted from September 30 to the end of October (KA, SG, JD, RW, BL). A male Eurasian Wigeon at Watsonville Slough on October 26 into November was one of our earliest ever (RW). The hybrid Mallard x Cinnamon Teal continued at Antonelli Pond and Natural Bridges to September 6, when it had molted to breeding plumage (SG). At least 12 Blue-winged Teal were reported from September 9 to October 26 (SG, RW, KA, DSu, SS, NA). A pair of Redheads flew over Santa Cruz streets toward the San Lorenzo River on the exceptional date of August 27 (KA). Our other modern fall records have been after October.

A male Black Scoter was at Waddell Creek Beach on October 30 (DS). Five White-winged Scoters flew past Terrace Point on October 18, providing a good count for this declining duck (SG). A Red-necked Grebe visited West Cliff Drive on October 27 (AG). No particularly unusual tubenoses were found in county waters this season. Highlights among the expected species were Flesh-footed Shearwaters observed on September 21, and October 20 and 28

(SJ, MS), and Wilson's Storm-Petrels reported on six trips from September 8-28 (SJ, MS). High counts of Wilson's included five on September 9 and 12 on September 21 (SJ). One to three Fork-tailed Storm-Petrels were found on three trips from September 11-21 (MS, SJ). Least Storm-Petrels were sparse; the only two reports were both from September 28, when six were found on a boat trip (SJ), and 20 were spotted during an aerial survey (TH et al.).



American White Pelican numbers peaked in September (v.ob.); the high count this season was about 200 at West Struve Slough on September 5 (RW). Brown Pelican oddities included a juvenile flying low over Neary Lagoon on October 7 and an adult ranging up the San Lorenzo River near Soquel Avenue on October 26 (SG). A Pelagic Cormorant up the San Lorenzo at Riverside Avenue on October 26 continued an unusual trend for that stream, but a young Brandt's Cormorant up near Broadway on October 11 had less local precedent off the ocean (SG). A small number of American Bitterns were found in September and October in the Pajaro Valley, where expected (v.ob.); one at Antonelli Pond on October 30 was more unusual (BMcL).

Up to five White-faced Ibis were reported sporadically at Watsonville, Struve and Harkins sloughs through the period (v.ob.). Three White-tailed Kites (including at least one juvenile) at the meadow in Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park on July 31 indicated a pair nested in the Felton area (DE). An immature Bald Eagle flew south past Waddell Beach on August 12, providing the county's only recent summer record (PM). An adult was near Corralitos on October 14 (EFe). A juvenile Broad-winged Hawk was at Rancho Del Oso on October 30 (DSu). Among 20 reports of Merlins from September 15 through October, one with characteristics of the subspecies richardsonii was at Harkins Slough on September 23 (MD et al.).

A Sora at Neary Lagoon on August 4 was early for a migrant (SG). Another skulked in a backyard garden (!) in Capitola on September 4 (DSu). American Coots are occasionally seen on the ocean during fall migration, but usually just an odd bird now and again. Thus, a tight flock of about 100 in the surf at Capitola Beach on October 24 were noteworthy (DSu et al.). An alternate-plumaged adult golden-plover at Watsonville Slough on August 16 was thought to be an American Golden-Plover (RW). Up to 35 Lesser Yellowlegs found from August 14 to October 15 were nearly all in the Pajaro Valley (v.ob.); the high count was 11 at Watsonville Slough on August 22 (RW). Reports of Wandering Tattler from the mid-county coast documented a fall migration spanning July 22 to September 23, with one straggler on October 19 (PB, SG, RW, NZ, MSc).

A flock of about 65 Long-billed Curlews high over Capitola on August 24 was a good number for fall (DSu). Marbled Godwits continued their new pattern of autumn use of the south county sloughs (v.ob.), with a high count of 65 at Harkins on October 12 (RW). The only Ruddy Turnstone was a juvenile at the mouth of Watsonville Slough on August 16 (RW). Five juvenile Semipalmated Sandpipers were found, with singles at Younger Lagoon on August 1-2 (SG, MSc, BAR, JD) and August 9 (SG), Watsonville Slough on August 17 (RW) and two at Struve Slough on September 9 (DWi).



A Buff-breasted Sandpiper was enjoyed by many observers at Struve Slough from September 1-13. Photo by Jeff Poklen.

Eight to 10 Baird's Sandpipers were found from August 11 to September 10, followed by 11-17 Pectoral Sandpipers from September 9 to October 10 (v.ob.) Except for two Baird's at the mid-county coast, all of

these sandpipers were at the south county sloughs. The county's seventh Stilt Sandpiper visited Struve and Watsonville sloughs September 1-10 (RW, v.ob.). The county's third-ever Buff-breasted Sandpiper—the first to be enjoyed by many and well-photographed—joined the Stilt at Struve Slough on September 1-13 (RW, v.ob.). A Ruff made a brief stop at Younger Lagoon on August 28 (LG). Five Wilson's Phalaropes were spotted at the south county sloughs from September 4-8 (RW, MSc, SG, JR). Red-necked Phalaropes had a strong presence along the coast and in the Pajaro Valley this fall, but 1-3 photographed at Loch Lomond on August 25-27 were unexpected at that mountain reservoir (JC).

A juvenile Mew Gull at West Cliff Drive on August 14 was very early (SG); the next fall arrival was not reported until October 20. Also out of season was a second-cycle Herring Gull at West Cliff on August 16 (SG). A Black Tern paused at Watsonville Slough on August 7 (RW). Two Black Skimmers were at the San Lorenzo River mouth on August 13 (DSu), followed by two (same?) at Pajaro Dunes on August 16 (RW). Two skimmers seen flying north at Año Nuevo Point in San Mateo County on August 3 presumably flew from Santa Cruz County to get there (fide PM). Six Eurasian Collared-Doves at Scotts Valley on August 22 were a first for that city (DSu). New high counts for other areas included a north coast record of 11 near Majors Creek on September 19 (JL), and a Santa Cruz record of 21 at Delaware Avenue on October 25 (SG).

Migrant Burrowing Owls were spied near Antonelli Pond on October 11 (SG), and at O'Neill Ranch Open Space in Soquel on October 21 (AG); the latter was the first report from Soquel in ages. Only one was evident on a thorough search of the species' regular wintering fields at UCSC on October 28 (JB). A Long-eared Owl spoke up at Soquel on August 1-2 (RW). A Common Nighthawk at Watsonville on August 11 was one of the season's best birds (EFr). A Common Poorwill photographed at the UCSC Arboretum on October 30 was perhaps a campus first (RFI). Migrant Black-chinned Hummingbirds appeared in numbers from Santa Cruz to Capitola for the 5th fall in a row. An impressive 15 were identified from August 24 to September 24 (DSu, SG, MC, MSc, LG, EL, AD), all females or immature males, visiting riparian habitat or backyards.

Among the late summer wave of *Selasphorus* hummers—hard to identify female and immature Rufous and Allen’s—a young male Rufous Hummingbird gave away his identity by displaying at Lighthouse Field State Beach on August 16 (SG); displays by this species have been very rarely noted in our county. A Lewis’s Woodpecker flew over Soquel on September 8 (DSu). Fourteen Willow Flycatchers were found from August 22 to October 1 (SG, DSu, PB, AD, MSc, DW). A Least Flycatcher at Neary Lagoon on October 3 was the first to be photographed in the county (SG, PB), and another was at Lighthouse Field on October 10 (SG). A strong seven Tropical Kingbirds were found from October 1-25 (LG, WG, JP, GK, DSu, JG). Western Kingbirds came earlier, as expected; eight were reported from August 18 to September 29 (SG, DSu, JH, BC, RW).

Eastern Kingbirds were at Long Ridge Open Space Preserve on August 22 (DSu) and at Merk Road in Corralitos on September 13 (S&WM). Loggerhead Shrikes have become quite scarce on the whole. Please report all encounters with this declining species. A Cassin’s Vireo at Antonelli Pond on October 24 was the only one identified this fall (SG); although another “Solitary” (Cassin’s or Blue-headed) was noted at Corralitos on October 14 (EFe). Undeterred by July’s martin-eating egret (see last issue), five migrant Purple Martins were spotted from August 4 to September 18 (SG, MSc, BAR). The only White-breasted Nuthatch was at Meder Canyon on September 8 (SG).

Tallies of House Wrens from two areas show how numerous this species can be in its preferred habitats during early fall: eight were at O’Neill Ranch Open Space on September 8 (DSu), and 10 were around the southeast corner of Wilder Ranch State Park on October 16 (SG). Three Western Bluebirds off upper Green Valley Road on October 28 were the only ones reported (EFe). Varied Thrush was decidedly sparse this season, after a huge influx in Fall 2006 (and good numbers in Fall 2005). For example, six hours in the forests around the north margin of Big Basin Redwoods State Park on October 30 yielded only four, but similar coverage in 2006 produced over 500!

Some of our rare migrant western wood-warblers were notably scarce: three Nashville Warblers (30% of average; MST, SG); 16 Black-throated Grays (90%; v.ob.); zero Hermits (we average ten), and two

MacGillivray’s (30%; (SG, DSu). A Tennessee Warbler was at the Forest of Nisene Marks State Park on September 21 (DSu). A record-setting three Virginia’s Warblers were the rarest of the wood-warblers to be found this season: at New Brighton on September 23 (MSc), near Antonelli Pond September 24 (SG), and at Meder Canyon on October 29 (SG). We’ve never had more than one in a fall. Chestnut-sided Warblers were at Arana Gulch on September 25 (SS) and New Brighton on September 28 to October 1 (RW). A Prairie Warbler visited Sunset State Beach on October 20 (SS).

Eight Palm Warblers from September 26 to October 27 were less than half of average (v.ob.), but the total increased slightly in November. Three Blackpolls from September 24 to October 12 (DSu, JP, MCr) was about one third of normal. A single Black-and-white Warbler at Sunset on September 21 (RW et al.) was the slimmest tally in 10 years. Of two Northern Waterthrushes found in August, one along the San Lorenzo River in Highlands County Park at Ben Lomond on August 10-11 was early and unusual for fall away from the coast (JHz). A Yellow-breasted Chat emerged at Lighthouse Field on September 24 (DSu).



This Vesper Sparrow was a highlight at the San Lorenzo River on October 25-26. Photo by Larry Selman (MostlyBirds.com).

A Vesper Sparrow at the San Lorenzo River in Santa Cruz on October 25-27 was the first one to be photographed in the county (SG, et al.). Chipping

Sparrows, often a sparse fall migrant, came out of the thatchwork this year! A record-smashing 22 were found from September 23 to October 25, including several reports of 3-4 at one area (EFe, SG, PB, MSc, RR, BAR, RW). Our recent average has been only three per fall. In contrast, four Clay-colored Sparrows found from September 24 to October 17 were below average (SG, PB, v.ob.). A Brewer's Sparrow near Antonelli Pond on September 27 was the rarest sparrow of the season (RFo). Two Lark Sparrows were found from September 2-23 (SG, DSi et al). Three male Rose-breasted Grosbeaks included one each in August, September and October (CB, SS, MST, SW).

Blue Grosbeaks were at Santa Cruz on August 24 (SG) and Soquel on September 27 (DSu). An Indigo Bunting was at Lighthouse Field on September 11 (SG). An Orchard Oriole enjoyed apples in a Santa Cruz yard on October 3-7 (MSc). A female Hooded Oriole at Glen Canyon Road on October 14 was a month late (BS). A female Baltimore Oriole fed at bottlebrush flowers in Soquel on October 16 (DSu). Two Lawrence's Goldfinches were at Sunset on September 20 (SS) and two were at Wilder Ranch on October 9 (SG).

* * *

Cited Observers: Nanci Adams, Kumaran Arul, Jack Barclay, Cliff Bixler, Phil Brown, Bob Cohen, Judie Cole, Mary Crouser (Mcr), Mary Cunningham, Al DeMartini, Matthew Dodder, Judy Donaldson, David Ekdahl, Eric Feuss (EFe), Rick Flores, Rick Fournier, Ed Frost (Efr), Alexander Gaguine, Jeff Garcia, Steve Gerow, Lois Goldfrank, Wally Goldfrank, Alison Graff, Tonya Haff, Jane Henderson, John Hutz (JHz), Gary Kittleson, Brian Latta, Earl Lebow, Janet Linthicum, Sylvia & Wayne Macon, Barry McLaughlin, Peter Metropulos, Barbara Monahan (BMon), Monterey Seabirds (fide Roger Wolfe), Bryan Mori, Janna Pauser, Jeff Poklen, Bernadette A. Ramer (BAR), Robert Ramer, Jennifer Rycenga, Barbara Scharfenstein, Michelle Scott (MSc), Shearwater Journeys (fide Debi Shearwater), David Sidle (DSi), Scott Smithson, Matthew Strusis-Timmer, David Suddjian (DSu), Mike Tyner, David Weber, David Wimpfheimer (DWi), Roger Wolfe, Sandra Wusher, Nickie Zavinski. "v.ob." means various observers.

Please report interesting observations to David Suddjian at liturgist@stjoscap.org or 831 479-9603

Minimizing Predation: You Can Help

by *Matthew Timmer, Conservation Officer*

Recently, while planning my master's research on Yellow Warblers in Santa Cruz County, I have found myself reading and thinking about predation. There are numerous scientific studies on songbird predation, investigating nest concealment, habitat and landscape characteristics, and other factors thought to influence predation rates. In our area, predators of adult songbirds and their nests are typically mammalian or avian. Mammalian predators include sciurid rodents (such as squirrels and chipmunks), opossum, raccoons, skunks, foxes, and bobcats. Avian predators are mainly corvids (ravens, jays, and crows) and accipiters (Cooper's and Sharp-shinned Hawks). I was astonished to find that in natural and undisturbed habitats, nest predation rates of 50% or more are typical. In fact, predation is the main cause of nest failure for songbirds and a major factor in determining the health of a population. For instance, in the eastern Sierra Nevada, nest predation caused the failure of 10 times as many nests (of Dusky Flycatcher, Willow Flycatcher, and Yellow Warbler combined) as Brown-headed Cowbird parasitism and severe weather combined and were responsible for 93% of Yellow Warbler nest failures. (Cain et al. 2003) Likewise, in a study conducted in Marin County, nest predation (73%) was responsible for more Wilson's Warbler nest failures than cowbird parasitism (13.5%). (Michaud et al. 2004)



In a naturally functioning ecosystem, predator/prey relationships are balanced. Unfortunately, human disturbance can create an imbalance in the system that favors predators. Research has shown that predator densities and predation pressure are higher in areas near suburban landscapes due to an abundance of non-native predators and a sustained surplus of natural

predators (Michaud et al. 2004). Domestic and feral cats are one such non-native predator. I know that I risk stepping on cat-lovers' toes, but research indicates that domestic cats are responsible for an estimated 4.4 million birds killed in the U.S. each day! (Stallcup 1991) I am not a cat owner, but I do have a confession to make: my uncovered (and frequently scavenged) compost pile in our redwood forest backyard has undoubtedly sustained an unnatural population of native predators—skunks, raccoons, and rodents. Indiscriminate bird feeding may also inflate the populations of mammalian and avian predators. These preventable actions can increase predation rates from their natural “background” rate to levels that threaten bird populations.

Bird conservation usually boils down to an action step. We continually need to ask ourselves, “What can I do?” Here are some suggestions for cat-lovers, compost pile-keepers, and bird feeders:

- Eliminate outdoor sources of food, including pet food dishes, garbage, and open compost piles that may attract stray cats, jays, raccoons, rats, and opossums.
- Avoid indiscriminate open tray bird feeders or seed scattered on the ground that may attract jays, cowbirds, ravens, rats, squirrels, etc. and support unhealthy populations of predators.
- If you maintain bird nest boxes, make sure they are predator-proof.
- Keep pet cats indoors.
- Don't abandon unwanted cats; rather, give them to the local SPCA or Humane Society.
- If you keep cats on a ranch or farm to control rodent populations, keep them to a minimum. Spayed females tend not to stray or wander from the barn area. Trapping rodents can also be more effective than relying on cats to do the job.
- Do not feed stray or feral cat populations. A more humane alternative for cats (that is beneficial to wildlife) is to reduce the unwanted cat population by limiting reproduction and facilitating adoption by responsible pet owners (RHJV, 2004).
- Finally, spay and neuter your pets. Formerly, I thought Bob Barker was crazy for offering this odd tidbit of advice at the conclusion of each “Price is Right” show, but now I see its value for bird conservation!

We can all take small steps to increase the health and persistence of bird populations. Collectively, these small steps can make a big difference. By the way, I still maintain a compost pile, but now it is covered with a secure lid, so that even the wily raccoons cannot gain access!

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Wilson's Warbler

Banding Hummingbirds Near Scotts Valley— Over 400 Hummers in One Yard!

by *Barbara Monahan*

Dawn in May came very early, but I needed to set up the traps for the ongoing hummingbird banding project on our deck in the Santa Cruz Mountains. Trapping begins 15 minutes before dawn and continues for 5 hours of trapping, banding and recording. No matter how early, the thought of learning more about hummingbirds would get my blood flowing and my energy up.

In March of 2007, hummingbird banding commenced and continued every two weeks, for a full year of research. Rita Colwell of the Hummingbird Monitoring Network (www.hummonnet.org) had been to our home on several occasions to “pre-test” the area for potential Allen’s sightings and general ease of banding. The site passed the review, and banding started with a small number of birds in the early spring. As the season progressed, we saw startling numbers of hummers at the five required feeders. Rufous, Allen’s, and Anna’s zipped about and some chose to stay to breed. Rufous made a quick appearance and then moved on for better flowers farther north. (They would reappear for a fueling stop on the return trip south.) Soon hatch-year birds were out among the adults and further taxing the feeders. During a particularly busy time, I was filling feeders every day with over 64 ounces of sugar water! (I’d also carefully planted sage and other plants to attract hummers when all feeders were full.)

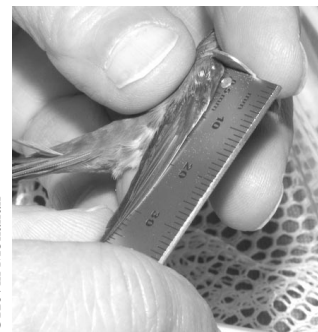
The numbers we banded were staggering! 400 Anna’s Hummingbirds, 11 Rufous Hummingbirds, 35 Allen’s Hummingbirds, plus one unidentified selasphorus hummer, for a total of 447. In addition, we recaptured 102 birds for a grand total of 549 captures.

Our research focused on gathering basic information such as age, sex, weight, bill length, and reproductive evidence, especially for the Allen's, which has been little studied. An Allen’s becomes “trap” shy very quickly and often will not return to a feeder once it has been caught. Our likely lone breeding male did an exceptional job of managing his harem of females.

Although a number of adult male Allen's were in the yard early on, we believe the breeding bird successfully chased off the other males.

Although it is hard to summarize a year’s worth of research, I can tell you what fascinated me was the movement of these birds. One week we’d trap 30 Anna’s. Two weeks later we’d trap 30 Anna’s, but only two of them would be the same birds—28 new birds had replaced the others that were missing. I formerly believed that the vast majority of the birds that swirled around the feeders were the same birds, but that just isn’t the case. Where do all these Anna’s go? Do they go up-slope and down-slope? Do they go to Arizona as some have suggested? Do they move up and down the coast? Who knows?

At right, measuring wing length on a selasphorous hummingbird.



©Kevin Monahan



At left, holding an adult Allen's Hummingbird male.

Photos: Kevin Monahan

See the above photos and more, in color and full size, on the web at:

<http://www.trogon.com/birds/banding/>

You can help by letting us know if you see a hummer with a band. Call 831-425-0845, or send email to Monahan@trogon.com

We will be continuing the research in 2008. If you’d like to rub the sleep out of your eyes and help with the banding process, contact me at the same phone or email. Many thanks to David Suddjian for recommending my house as a potential banding site!



Trip Reports

October 12, Neary Lagoon

With moderate rain up until just a few minutes before start time, only a small group showed up for this walk. But at the appointed hour, the weather cooperated, and we were treated to two rainless hours and 43 bird species. Highlights included good views of a juvenile Cooper's Hawk and an adult Black-crowned Night-Heron, rattling kingfishers, glimpses of Wood Ducks, sounds of a Virginia Rail's pig-like calls in the marsh, and a nice range of other species. Steve Gerow

October 21, Salinas River Mouth

We birded this morning amidst seasonal gunfire, but no ducks actually fell on us as we strolled from the SRM parking lot to the beach. Flocks of songbirds that ignored the barrage afforded us comparisons of "confusion species", such as House and Purple finches, two kinds of goldfinch, and various sparrows. An impressive flock of Long-billed Curlews straggled southward as we approached the lagoon, where Dunlins and peeps gave us some of their own exercises in identification. The dunes harbored American Pipits among finches. On the beach we stood amidst flocks of Snowy and Semipalmated plovers, and so we had the chance to compare these two species closely over and over again. What John Dewey urged – going from recognition to acquaintance – infused our brief encounters. Returning to our cars, we compared various raptors – kites, harriers, buteos, and an accipiter or two—and vultures (once a raptor, then a cousin of storks, and now, well, maybe a raptor after all once again). Birds are so much more than plumages with names! And at the lot itself, there were the duck-hunters themselves: a sorry bunch, bereft of feather or flesh, but... could they have been envious that we had had such a successful morning? Todd Newberry



October 24, Gull ID at Capitola Beach

Seven of us gathered on Capitola Beach to sift through the gull flock. An oddity right off the bat was a flock of about 100 American Coots on the ocean at the surf line! I've occasionally seen a coot on the ocean, but I don't recall ever seeing such a flock on the sea before. Perhaps it was a flock of migrants that had plopped down there. They eventually moved east of the rock jetty and out among the kelp, but later they swam back toward the wharf and in near the shore. A couple of Ruddy Ducks were with them. Small

flocks of Eared Grebes and Surf Scoters were among the few other waterbirds just off the beach today.

The gull flock had many Western, California, and Heermann's gulls, without too much else. Not exciting, but good for beginning inquiries into gull identification. There were also a few Ring-billeds, one Glaucous-winged, and one Glaucous-winged X Western hybrid. Three young Bonaparte's Gulls popped in briefly for a nice treat. We focused on the common species and worked on determining the age of different individuals. This is a good strategy: become very familiar with the common species (the "reference species") such as Western and California gulls, and learn how to age them (as some field marks vary with age). All told, we studied 16 age-species plumage combinations.

An adult female Peregrine Falcon hunting at the beach was the highlight. We first saw her as she passed over the beach and spooked the gull flock, and continued on to perch atop a cypress on the inland side of Capitola Village. A while later she stooped over the lagoon, scattering the gulls, and nabbed a rusty-colored Rock Pigeon. To our delight, the falcon landed on the beach with her meal and she began to pluck and eat it. We oogled her lovely coloration and admired the wide no-bird zone around her, as the gulls and others left her a wide berth. After a time she took off and, with somewhat labored flight, carried the pigeon back to the cypress to finish the meal. The cypress limb was later white with plucked pigeon feathers. David Suddjian

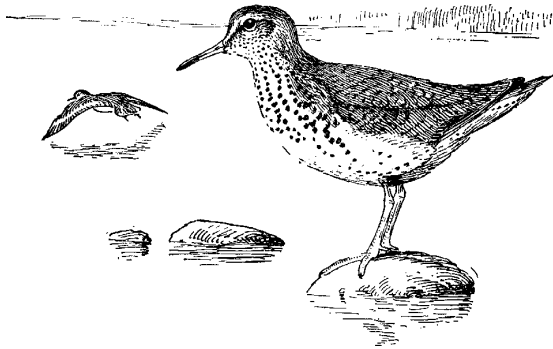
October 26, San Lorenzo River

About ten of us explored the levees from just above Soquel Avenue to close to the river mouth.

The rarest bird of the day was a Vesper Sparrow, found the previous evening and surprisingly cooperative, several times coming out to feed in the open in close view of the group. In the river near here, a male Greater Scaup was a new arrival and several times flew short distances, showing off its long white wing-stripe. An up-river Pelagic Cormorant was also swimming around in this area. Even further out of expected habitat was an adult Brown Pelican, flying upstream all the way to Soquel Avenue before it turned around. (Maybe the looming county building up ahead convinced it that something was wrong. . .) Other ducks today included 10 or so Buffleheads, 4 Common Merganser, 2 female Green-winged Teal between Soquel and Broadway, and of course lots of Mallards. Several species of gulls and numerous sparrows gave opportunities for comparative studies. Good views of a Belted Kingfisher, Great Blue Heron, Pied-billed Grebes and other "regulars" also helped keep it interesting. Altogether we found 47 species, right in the middle of downtown Santa Cruz. Steve Gerow

November 9, Natural Bridges State Beach

Participants in this Santa Cruz Bird Club field trip had good views of several shorebird species, including a Spotted Sandpiper, first spotted by Jeff Wall at the Moore Creek Lagoon, plus Whimbrels, a Marbled Godwit, Surfbirds, 6 Black Oystercatchers, etc. The beach had hundreds of gulls first thing in the morning, including about 300 Heerman's, plus a lot of Western and California, and at least one each Glaucous-winged, Ring-billed, and Mew to keep it interesting. The showery weather dampened passerine activity a bit, but there was still enough to make it interesting (56 species altogether). Steve Gerow



November 11, Local Mid-County Birding

Five birders started this trip. The chosen itinerary was to stop at inland locations from Aptos to Santa Cruz in the morning, circling back around to Aptos, along the coast in the afternoon, with the light always at our backs, but we did not make the circle.

We began at Aptos Creek County Park where a large mixed group of passerines greeted us. However, other than Acorn Woodpeckers, American Robins, and Northern ("Red-shafted") Flickers, the birding along the creek became quiet and slow and stayed that way. Next was a quick stop at the Porter-Sesnon property, Porter Gulch. Quiet...very quiet. Then Cherry Valley Road had birds. Cedar Waxwings, Purple Finch, American and Lesser Goldfinches, Bushtits, White-crowned and Golden-crowned Sparrows, California Quail, and many more species were seen. I called a White-throated Sparrow, which never materialized and, most likely, one of the juvenile Zonotrichia sparrows. The best sighting was a close view of a Cooper's Hawk. The open space (O'Neill Ranch) behind Anna Jean Cummings Park (a.k.a Blue Ball Park) had many of the raptors for the day, but was short on other species. Raptors seen included Sharp-shinned Hawk, White-tailed Kites (usually close views, but not today), and a male Northern Harrier, which has been seen here on-and-off throughout the Fall. Final stops were at Sycamore Grove and Antonelli's Pond. Sycamore Grove had not a sound and Antonelli's Pond had

a Western Grebe among the typical sighted birds. The day had become much too quiet to continue birding. A walk down the Natural Bridges State Park Moore Creek trail ended the day. Happy Birding, Eric Feuss.

November 14, Rancho del Oso,

Ten of us gathered at this favorite spot on a lovely autumn morning. There were the usual joys provided by a variety of birds of the ocean, beach, coastal scrub, and diverse forests. A female Hermit Warbler in a mixed flock was a hoped-for treat, but she was not too cooperative amid the dozens of birds flitting over our heads in the pines and oaks. The prize of the day came a little later, as we strolled along West Trail on the north side of Swing Hill. We paused now and again to sort through mixed flocks, drawing their attention with "pishing" and imitations of Northern Pygmy-Owl. After a time I pointed out the chirps of a Merriam's chipmunk, easily mistaken for a pygmy-owl (and so dubbed the "chipmowl"). Listening to the chipmunk, I imitated the pygmy-owl for contrast. Within a minute or two I heard the real thing calling in the trees just ahead on the trail! We hustled onward and listened to the owl calling overhead from high in the canopy of a Douglas-fir. We waited for it to move to reveal its position, but then Jean Myers spotted it in plain view, its position given away by a mobbing Anna's Hummingbird! And so we enjoyed scope views of the little owl as it perched, and watched it fly here and there, always the center of attention of warblers, nuthatches, chickadees and kinglets. Great fun! David Suddjian

November 17, Rancho del Oso

The high point of this walk did not involve birds; it was the astonishing play of light that greeted us as we started into the reserve. Mist and light—fleeting shafts of sunlight on distant treetops that glowed golden before vanishing even as we watched—we tiny birders stopped in our tracks between hillside and field as the earth steamed enormously around us—Turner and Constable combining their brushes—now for this reporter, the feebleness of words when nature puts on such a show. So I merely remind the twenty of us who were there of one of those life-at-its-best moments that reward the early riser. Then the fog asserted itself, the air chilled, and the birds grew mostly silent. A dogged wait for the Northern Pygmy Owl's call paid off, but only distantly. . . or was even that a chipmunk, like the "owl" calling from among the roots of a walnut tree? At the farm, we came upon a nice flock of sparrows, including handsome Lincoln's. That farm is one of the best places for winter sparrows, of which we had nine kinds in the course of this quiet morning. Todd Newberry

November 23, Lighthouse Field

. This morning's field trip to turned into primarily a raptor study session, with a continuous flow of migrant hawks moving down the coast. The majority were Red-tailed Hawks, with 20 or more flying over through the morning. About three quarters of these were juveniles. Other raptors included a Peregrine Falcon, 2-3 Sharp-shinned Hawks, 1 Cooper's Hawk, an unidentified Accipiter, 2 Red-shouldered Hawks, and the cooperative resident pair of American Kestrels. Also interesting were about a dozen Violet-green Swallows that appeared briefly over the field. Toward the end of the morning, a smaller group of us checked a section of West Cliff Drive, comparing gull and cormorant species and searching for other swimmers and divers. During the course of the morning, 46 species turned up. Steve Gerow

November 28, Sunset Beach

During a mid-week, late November birding session at Sunset Beach SP, I felt like a minor leaguer pulled up to the majors to pinch-hit for the hometown star slugger, David Suddjian, who was on the DL with an injured back. Could I pull off the pinch-hit homerun by finding a first county-record Slaty-backed Gull? Windy and cold conditions in the parking lot at the scheduled meeting time made me nervous, but the wind nearly ceased once the walk was underway. We searched the scrub and Monterey Pines along the entrance road and campground and soon found Hairy and Downy Woodpeckers, Northern Flickers, and a large number of Pygmy Nuthatches. Other birds found in the campground were common winter residents: Hutton's Vireos, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Yellow-rumped Warblers, crowned sparrows, and a huge flock of Bushtits. Skulking along the brushy edge of the campground were Fox Sparrows and Hermit Thrush.

Later at the marsh, we were given a good comparison between male House and Purple Finches, perched next to each other in the trees. The marsh trail was unusually devoid of bird activity, despite giving it a fair shake. American Pipits greeted us at the beach, where we also watched an American Kestrel, Northern Harrier, and adult and juvenile Red-tailed Hawks soaring above the dunes. Two Sandirlings and one Willet were seen in flight only, accounting for the only shorebirds of the trip. We got close-up examinations of Northern Fulmars, Western/Clark's and Horned Grebes, although only of deceased beach-littered birds. We spotted a couple of White-winged Scoters mixed in with the Surf Scoters in and beyond the surf; life list birds for some. Common and Red-throated Loons were also picked out of the mix. The group put out their best effort with the gull flock; identifying two Ring-billed Gulls in with the

California and Western Gulls, as well as a handful of Glaucous-winged, Heerman's, and at least one Herring Gull. The Slaty-backed Gull was nowhere to be found. I tallied around 50 species, not including those identified post-mortem. Thanks to all participants, especially those who willingly toted scopes for the 3.5 mile walk. Overall, it was a wonderful morning and I left impressed by the knowledge and skill of the attendees. Matthew Strusis-Timmer

December 1, South County Birding

A group of nine hearty birders started this trip... and we couldn't stop; it was one of those trips. We achieved almost 100 species, 98 species upon my final count. It was a great day for raptors, though no accipiters were seen (one possible brief sighting).

Our first stop was the Ramsay Park Nature Center, birding along Watsonville Slough. Highlights included 11 Great-tailed Grackles, a White-faced Ibis, and an adult Golden Eagle. The next stop was the Struve Sough and Struve Slough West (branch), as seen from Lee Road. These areas yielded two Ross' Geese, at least three Snow Geese, another 10+ Great-tailed Grackles, and an almost full contingent of duck species including a (the?) male Eurasian Wigeon, but not including any Blue-winged Teal. Additional sightings at this location included many Wilson's Snipe in great light, Black-necked Stilts (3), American Avocets, etc. A single American White Pelican sharing, side-by-side, a "mud clump" with a Great Egret, as if best of bosom buddies, was an interesting sight for the day. However, a more memorable sighting also occurred at this location. A well-placed, sized, and painted sprinkler head was "perched" upon one of the low lying fences in the middle of a large mixed flock of Red-winged and Brewers Blackbirds. "Yellow-headed Blackbird" was the cry of the day... well, until we got a scope on this great "bird." We were still on the hunt for Hooded Mergansers and Blue-winged Teal, which were attempted but "missed" at the Kearney Road Extension access point (backside) to Watsonville Slough. At this location, a Common Moorhen was added to list. No American Bittern or rail species were found at Pinto Lake board walk area, but good birding was had along the riparian woodland trails. Species added to list included Nuttall's Woodpecker and Orange-crowned Warbler. The sight of Merk Pond was unexpected. We found "Merk Meadow" instead, the pond being completely dry. Considering College lake was still being farmed (dry, too), I guess this occurrence should not have been surprising. The group ended the day birding Struve Slough between Hwy One and Main Street. Three White-faced Ibis were seen by all of the group, this time in much better light. The extension of Struve Slough boarded by Ohlone Way/Pkwy. contained the Hooded Mergansers that we sought, two

males with two females. These birds are indeed stunning. The final species of the day was Say's Phoebe (2), seen from the backside of the Pajaro Valley High School. Fading light ended our day. Happy Birding, Eric

December 7, Wilder Ranch

Four hardy souls made a show of it this morning at Wilder. The weather continually threatened, but never actually broke. We went out to the overlook, with lots of Zonotrichia seep noises around us, but little seen. American Pipits flew over, and foraged on the beach, and Jim managed to put his scope on a Snowy Plover hiding in a pile of kelp. Distant raptors included a couple of Northern Harriers, Red-tailed Hawk, Turkey Vulture, and an American Kestrel on the wire at the parking lot. Sanderlings visited the beach with one Western/Least Sandpiper (too far to distinguish). In the huge surf were a large flock of Aechmophorus grebes, again too far for separation of Western/Clarke's. A pod of dolphins (one or two leaping completely out of the waves), a sea otter, and seals were all out in the bay, despite the huge waves (spray was being flung higher than the cliff tops, 50 feet up at least). One Common Murre was seen out on the sea. Western Meadowlarks and Mourning Doves perched on the wires, and Norm wondered how to separate Brewer's Blackbirds from Red-winged in flight as they travel away from you (Steve?). From the flight call, I thought Brewer's.

We came across a group of gulls sheltering in the lee of a rock, so easy to examine as they were very reluctant to move. In amongst 15 or so Western Gulls were one Herring Gull and a Glaucous Winged gull. Close examination by Norm of a 1st year bird with a light brown "frosty" appearance resulted in calling it a Thayer's Gull. (Pale edging to the primaries was the conclusive field mark.) Some cormorants were clinging to the cliff face (on the lee side again), and we put the scope on them to separate a couple of Pelagic from the Brandt's.

On the way out, I found a Red-breasted Sapsucker on the tree in front of the ranch house. It was desperately looking for some space to make new a hole, or to find one that had not already been thoroughly sucked dry on previous visits. Phil Brown

December 8, Henry Cowell Redwoods

This morning trip started out cold in temperature and slow in birds, but as the day warmed up, so did the birding. Roaring Camp was very quiet. Our annual surprises at the wooden bridge were a well camouflaged Great Blue Heron, a Double-crested Cormorant and a flying coot. (Yes, Todd, coots do fly.) A probable Sharp-shinned Hawk flew over and Northern Flickers were calling and swooping by.

American Crows outnumbered the Common Ravens, and we had ample opportunities to ponder their differences.

After seeing the resident Red-Shouldered Hawk, I made the statement that we hardly see any raptors on this trip. One by one, three White-tailed Kites and an American Kestrel appeared, followed by an accipiter (probably a Cooper's Hawk). American Goldfinches, White-crowned and Golden-crowned sparrows were along the entrance road. But the trail alongside the dam out to Zayante Creek and Graham Hill was stellar. Thanks to the sharp eyes of the group (particularly Alex) we added Red-breasted Sapsucker (an obliging individual) and enough Hairy and Downy Woodpeckers to allow almost everyone to see relative bill sizes and the lack of spotting on the outer tail feathers of the Hairy Woodpeckers. At the campground we finally found Acorn Woodpeckers which until then had been notable for their absence. Then Alex glimpsed a Pileated Woodpecker. We quickly followed its path and located the bird, a female, and were rewarded with excellent views.



Ruby-crowned Kinglets were abundant, as were Anna's Hummingbirds. Other species were House and Purple Finches, Oak Titmouse, Black Phoebe, Bewick's Wren, Red-tailed Hawk, Hermit Thrush, American Robin, Cedar Waxwing, Townsend's Warbler, single Audubon's and Orange-crowned warblers, Steller's Jay, Western Scrub-jay, Wrentit, Dark-eyed Junco and just as we were leaving, a cacophony of Pygmy Nuthatches.

Thanks to all the folks who came on the trip and were such interactive participants. It was great fun. Bonnie Bedzin

States' Flights: Birds on Quarters

by William Park

The George Washington quarter appeared in 1932, the 200th anniversary of Washington's birth. Its reverse featured our national bird, the Bald Eagle, looking very imperial and perched on or clutching fasces (a bundle of arrows). This was an icon of the Roman Republic—*e pluribus Unum*—meaning “from the many, one.” Starting in 1999, the U.S. Mint replaced the eagle with designs commemorating the individual states. The mint has produced five quarters each year, in the order that the states came into the Union. The New York Times claims that half the people in the country collect them.

Bird lovers surely do not mind the temporary removal of a once endangered species from the back of their quarters. Happily a number of states—the governors made the final decision—chose to honor their associations with birds. Let us praise Governor Schwarzenegger for including the Condor on the California quarter. South Carolina depicted its state bird, the Carolina Wren, as did Louisiana, the Brown Pelican, and South Dakota, the Ring-necked Pheasant. As this bird is also known as the Chinese Ring-necked Pheasant, one wonders if the coin is prophetic, for we see the bird soaring over Mount Rushmore and our favorite presidents. The first quarter of 2008 will be Oklahoma, which also features its state bird, the Scissor-tail Flycatcher.



Commemorative quarters from California (left) and Idaho (right). (U.S. Mint images)

Four other states' coins include images of birds. Minnesota's quarter shows a Common Loon in the foreground, content to be part of a State that boasts so much fresh water. Arkansas is also water proud. Its quarter shows a Mallard taking flight. Idaho selected a Peregrine Falcon, whose head in profile takes up most of the coin. Maine barely makes it. Its quarter shows a famous light house and a windjammer sailing by, but in the air above the ship we can see two birds,

presumably gulls, Herring Gulls perhaps. That's it. Five states—Connecticut, Vermont, Florida, Iowa, Oregon—all display trees, but no birds.

As our earlier survey of Birds in the NFL indicated, we might have expected that other animals would have appeared more frequently than birds. But they don't. It's a tie. Nine to nine. Among the others, horses come in first. We see them on Delaware, Kentucky, Nevada, and Wyoming. Next come the Bison. They appear in Kansas, North Dakota, and Montana (but only a skull). Nebraska shows oxen pulling a covered wagon, and Wisconsin shows, appropriately, a dairy cow. Next year's Alaska quarter will show a Grizzly Bear. Utah, the last state for 2007, considered displaying insects—that is, a beehive, the logo of the state—but voted instead to show the Golden Spike and the joining of the railroads.

There's a bill before Congress now to allow our Territories to participate in this fun. They want their quarters too. So in 2009 we might see birds rise above the rest of the animal world. Even more, we might hope that Guam, American Samoa, or the Marianas will include as part of their image an Albatross.



Early notice of an important event—

**Ventana Wildlife Society
15th Annual
Big Sur Ornithology Lab Birdathon Fundraiser
April 26 – June 15, 2008 and July 11, 2008**

This year our Birdathon will open with a Birdathon Big Day on Saturday, April 26, 2008. Full- and half-day eco-experiences will be offered by VWS and other expert biologists. Simultaneously, our Big Day birder team will comb Monterey County in an effort to top our one-day best of 252 species.

Between April 26 and June 15, pick any 24-hour period and bird on your own or as part of a team, then collect your pledges to raise funds for Ventana Wildlife Society's Big Sur Ornithology Lab!

On Saturday, July 12, join us for the Birdathon Awards Dinner, where we will give prizes to groups and individuals who raise the most in pledge donations. We will also report our best counter totals, Birdathon Big Day totals, and the total number of species seen by all participants.

Bird, pledge, or do both, and raise funding and awareness for the important conservation efforts of the Ventana Wildlife Society's Big Sur Ornithology Lab!

For more details, see www.ventanaws.org

Assembling



Albatross

February 1, 2008

is the input deadline
for the March/April issue
of The Albatross.

Extra weight, short runway!

Putting Alby together this month was a bit of a challenge. Trip leaders outdid themselves in proposing some 25 trips to get a start on the Big Year, and it took extra time to work out the logistics. Since, the calendar is the first major item after the front page, we could say that the starting problem had to do with added weight up front and a shorter runway (late submissions). Certainly it took a lot of figurative “running and flapping” to get The Albatross to “fly” on time. (If you’ve ever seen an Albatross take off on land, you know what I’m talking about.) But here it is, with a minimum of ruffled feathers. Fortunately, the only instance of anyone “going postal” was in the literal sense—getting the issue to the post office.

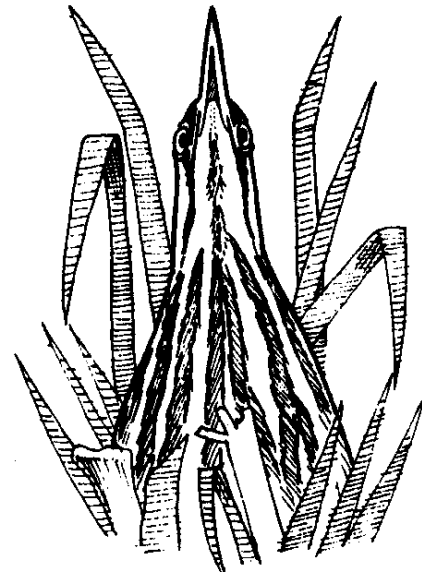
In addition to regular features—calendar, Santa Cruz Birds, trip reports—the newsletter can include almost anything related to birding in general and to local birding in particular. Depending on space, submissions of any of the following are welcome:

- Feature articles
- Birding event announcements
- Stories about birders, serious or comic
- Reviews of birding literature or guides
- Conservation & outreach reports/stories
- Birding tips, descriptions of local sites
- Filler tidbits: Quotes or images
- Photos of people at our events (jpeg, tif)

To submit a large article, please contact me about it before the submission deadline.

I accept plain text or Word files. Send items by email to: calqua@sbcglobal.net

~Judy Donaldson, Editor



New SCBC members

Evelyn Pogrowski 10/07

Troy Rose and Joelle Truett 10/07

Laura Smith 10/07

Karen Cooper 10/07

Sherry Day 11/07

Larry Gourley 11/07

Jean Brubeck Family 11/07

Gordon Lee Family 11/07

Richard Josephson & Loretta Rao 11/07

Matthew Coale 11/07

Welcome!

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Watsonville Wetlands Watch 2008 Docent Training Program

Enrollment for the Watsonville Wetlands Watch 2008 docent class is now open. New docents will attend a six-week training course beginning Feb. 20. The course will be held Wednesday evenings and Saturday mornings at a cost of \$35.

Volunteers who enroll will be treated to an inside look at the Pajaro Valley and its wide network of wetlands. Training will cover the ecology, wildlife with an emphasis on birds, history, and restoration of the wetlands and will prepare new docents to lead walks and assist teachers during field trips.

Birders are ideal candidates to become Watsonville Wetlands Watch docents. Bird enthusiasts who share their passion with others help inspire stewardship of the wetlands and bird populations.

Docents also have opportunities to help with wetlands restoration, work in the library or greenhouse at the Fitz Wetlands Education Resource Center, or work on special projects.

The Watsonville Wetlands Watch is a nonprofit, community-based organization dedicated to the protection, restoration, and appreciation of the wetlands of Pajaro Valley.

For more information or to enroll in the training program, please contact the Volunteer Coordinator, Kathy Fieberling, at 831-427-0654. The deadline for enrollment is Feb. 10, 2008.

Join the Santa Cruz Bird Club

Enjoy walks in and around the County of Santa Cruz, discounted boat trips on Monterey Bay, summer picnics and annual dinners, meetings September through May featuring informative, illustrated talks on wild birds and related topics, and receive the bimonthly newsletter, The Albatross. Memberships run June-May. Dues are \$20 Individual, \$25 Family, \$5 Student \$400 Life. Make checks payable to Santa Cruz Bird Club and mail to Box 1304, Santa Cruz, CA 95061, Attention: Membership Chairman.