

Albatross

PHOEBASTRIA NIGRIPES



Favorite Bird

By David Suddjian

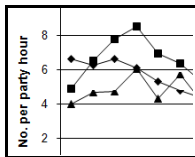
Most birders hold a particular species of bird close to their heart. It may be a once-in-a-lifetime rarity (a Ross's Gull at the Salton Sea), or a long-hoped for, elusive target bird that was finally found (Great Gray Owl at Yosemite perhaps). Or maybe a charismatic species from a foreign birding trip, one of those that is a goal for the trip – a spectacular species in a fabulous setting! Andean Cock-of-the-Rock along the Rio Urubamba below Machu Picchu comes to mind from my experience. But then there are those favorite birds that are among our “regulars,” those species we enjoy with some frequency in our home region. For some people, such a bird may be a totem of sorts, one to which they relate in a personal way, and the choice of a favorite might reveal something about the nature of the birder. Or maybe it is just a charming species that we have come to know well, such as the California Quail or Anna's Hummingbird. I think most of us have such favorites. For Santa Cruz County naturalist extraordinaire Randy Morgan it is the Turkey Vulture. For Clay Kempf it is the Black Oystercatcher. For late Bird Club great Bob Merrill it was the Brown Creeper.

I have a favorite bird, too. Actually, a progression of favorites have held that spot close to my heart. My first official favorite bird was the American Coot. Yes, the ubiquitous, funny looking and much ignored coot. When I began birding, as a young adult in 1983, the coot was a fixture of the places around Palo Alto where my new-found passion was blossoming. They ruled the waters at Boronda Lake in my beloved Foothills Park and dotted the ponds at the Palo Alto Baylands. They are feisty, battling with other coots that venture too close, flashing the white “tail lights” on their rear. They make interesting and amusing sounds, and I took a certain pleasure in listening to their voices. Their babies are (as Todd Newberry has said) so ugly they are cute. As teenagers, they get even uglier (or is it cuter?). The parents are most attentive and gentle, offering bits of food to their tiny new chicks. But mostly, I loved the coot because it was so generally ignored. You know the

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52nd CBC



Santa Cruz Birds



Yellow Warbler Survey



Big Year Glides

“Bigby”

Photo Album



scene...you arrive at a pond with other birders and begin to call out the species you are seeing. No need to mention the coot, right? Or distant birds across the slough catch the group's attention, and looking with binoculars we conclude, "Oh, they're just coots.")



American Coot and cute baby. Photo by Gypsy Flores.

The coot held favor for a couple years, but I guess such a bird could not sustain that honor for too long. When I moved to Santa Cruz County in late 1985, I became much more familiar with another species that had already captured my fancy. It was the tiny Winter Wren—*Troglodytes troglodytes*, the “cave-dweller”—one of those species whose scientific name has the same Latin word for both genus and specific epithet. They are bold and inquisitive, yet hidden in a world of shadowed green and brown. And that song! I think the Winter Wren rose to its position as my new favorite one spring day when one sang from very near atop an old redwood stump amid sword ferns, beside gently flowing Little Butano Creek. Tail sharply cocked, head thrown back, and beak wide open, its little body vibrated as it sang, and its tail wagged back and forth. In the shadowed understory, its orange tongue and mouth linings fairly glow as the long complex song pours forth. I still love Winter Wrens, but it was my official favorite for only a year or so.

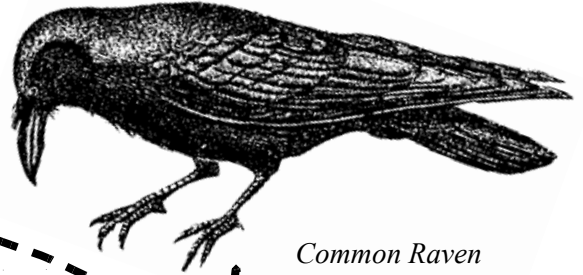
By 1987 I was thoroughly engaged in learning all I could about the birds of Santa Cruz County. I was charging everywhere, “getting the data,” pursuing the quest for knowledge in a lively, even aggressive fashion. It was at this time that the Common Raven captured my attention. The raven was then new on the local scene, expanding its range and population, and after a fashion its relentless increase paralleled my own quest to learn about our county's birds. Ravens, in their

way, were top dogs in the bird world, with their intelligence and cunning and even their ruthless plundering. My favorite was now a bird that most people loved to hate. Randy Morgan and I used to have fun thinking about a conclave of ravens gathered as a sort of avian Sanhedren, calling the shots from their elevated position over our other local birds. Playful thoughts aside, I was captivated by the raven's behavior, its varied and expressive vocalizations, and its mastery of the air. But as I became involved in researching the endangered Marbled Murrelet, it became harder and harder to love the villain, especially when I watched as a raven plundered an egg or a chick from a murrelet nest! To be fair, I do not view them as the villains, and I appreciate that they are simply doing what ravens do. The very real conflicts between ravens and murrelets (or Snowy Plovers) have their roots in our history of human land use and habitat destruction. So, with my respect and interest for the raven undiminished, after more than 10 years atop my personal totem pole it gave way to another spectacular forest bird.

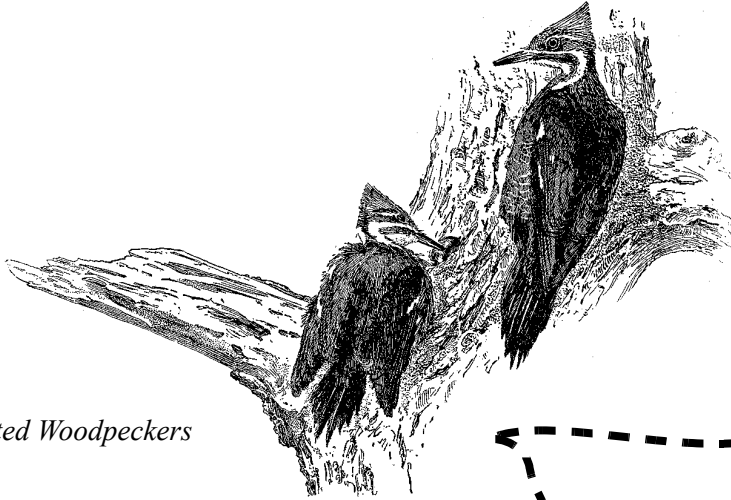
Sometime around the year 2000, I formally acknowledged in my heart a new favorite bird, one that had always been exciting and special—the Pileated Woodpecker. Our largest and loudest woodpecker, it is nonetheless elusive. When I began birding, the Pileated was rare in our central coast region, yet even on my visits to the Sierra Nevada where it was more numerous, it was a hard species for me to find and even harder to actually see. But by the late 1980s it began to expand its range here in the Santa Cruz Mountains, really picking up the pace in the mid-1990s, such that now it occurs virtually throughout the conifer forests of our mountains. So my experiences with the big woodpecker went from rare and treasured encounters—I still recall the excitement of seeing one on a snag-topped redwood at Big Basin in 1986 when I had my first encounter with the park's Marbled Murrelets—to becoming quite familiar with its ways and enjoying it on a daily basis during my forest studies. Their primeval calls, amazing foraging excavations, and tell-tale tree cavities are defining elements of the fabric of the forests in which they dwell. Even now, after listening to thousands of PIWO calls and drums, I still thrill to the sound each time. During dawn murrelet surveys, I look forward to that expected moment, sometime within 20 minutes after sunrise, when the



Winter Wren



Common Raven



Pileated Woodpeckers

big woodpecker's first rolling drum or wild call will command my attention. One of my all time favorite bird experiences has been standing at the base of a tree where a Pileated is drumming. That percussive sensation must be experienced first hand to be appreciated.

From lowly coot to mousy wren, from superior raven to wild woodpecker, a progression of favorites...and just this past season I think my favorite bird has changed again. Yes, I will make it official: it is now the Northern Pygmy-Owl! Who does not love this little owl? After searching for it in my first few years of birding, my "lifer" sighting was of a pair copulating in an alder snag along Gazos Creek! Since then I have savored every encounter with this fierce gnome. This spring and summer brought some of my best times with this owl, and I've been happy to track the presence of several pairs over the season and listen to their begging young. Even knowing where this owl holds a territory, one is never certain to hear or see it on a given outing, and so each time I feel fortunate. Most treasured are those ordinary encounters when it begins to call in the morning twilight, some 40 minutes before sunrise, one of the first bird voices of the day. Its simple "toot" carries over hundreds of yards of forest from

a perch atop a redwood or fir. Then it responds to my imitations (how can it hear my little whistle from so far off?), drawing nearer, until it is in the trees above me, winging from crown to crown with swoops or bursts of shrike-like wing beats. Then later in the day, with good fortune, I may see it perched in the upper crown of a tree, attracting and ignoring a mob of chickadees and Pygmy Nuthatches, looking so totally engaged in its world. Pygmy-Owl, you are my favorite bird. You don't care, I know, but I do.



Northern Pygmy-Owl

Events Calendar

November - December 2008

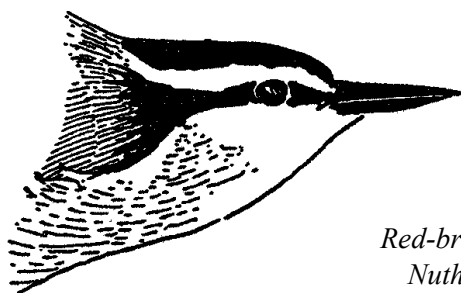
NOTICE: Please Check the SCBC Big Year calendar online for the latest calendar updates and any rescheduling information— http://www.santacruzbirdclub.org/Big_Year_Calendar.html



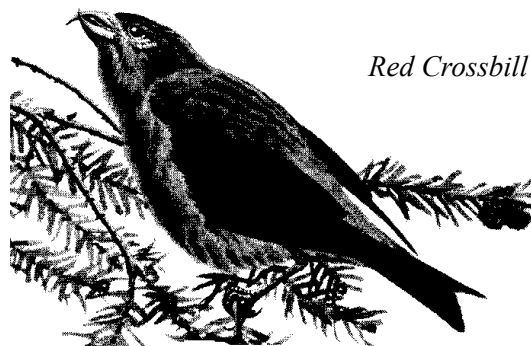
Big Year Saturday, November 1
New Brighton SB
and Mid-County

New Brighton and its Porter-Sesnon parcel offer a wide variety of bird habitats. We'll search for resident and wintering woodpeckers, sparrows, and songbird flocks, with a chance for irruptive species such as Red-breasted Nuthatch, Golden-crowned Kinglet, and Red Crossbill. We will also check the beaches and scope offshore for potential wintering Red-necked Grebe, Black Scoter, and Greater Scaup among loons and Western Grebes.

Directions: Meet at 8:00 AM on New Brighton Rd.; pull off and park just before the railroad tracks. To get there, take the Park Ave exit off Hwy 1, go south one short block to the intersection with Kennedy/McGregor Dr., turn left on McGregor Dr., and go approximately a half mile (past the State Park entrance) before turning right at New Brighton Rd.
Leader: Matthew Strussis-Timmer, thedutchguy@hotmail.com



*Red-breasted
Nuthatch*



Red Crossbill



Big Year Sunday, November 2
Beginning Bird Walk
Quail Hollow County Park

Directions: Meet at 8:00 AM at the Quail Hollow CP parking lot. Heavy rain cancels.
Leader: Eric Feuss, (831) 477-0280



Big Year Friday, November 7
Arana Gulch

This large park on the east edge of Santa Cruz includes grassland, riparian, and live oak habitat, plus cypress and eucalyptus groves and even a bit of salt marsh.

Directions: Meet at 8:00 AM at the entrance on Agnes Street, by the end of Mentel Avenue (off the south side of Soquel Avenue two blocks east of Trevethan and Hagemann).
Leader: Steve Gerow, (831) 426-2476

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.



**Saturday, November 8
Rancho Del Oso**

A Bird Club favorite, Rancho Del Oso offers a variety of habitats and a pleasing array of species. Rarities are possible and sometimes Northern Pygmy-Owl and Hermit Warbler. Plan for about 4-5 miles of mostly easy walking, probably including West Trail, with moderate (but leisurely) uphill. If the weather is nice we may visit another spot or two on the coast as we return toward town. Bring water and something to eat. Rain cancels.

Directions: Meet at 7:00 AM at Whale City Bakery in Davenport or 7:15 AM at the Waddell Beach parking lot off Highway 1, immediately after crossing Waddell Creek.

Leader: David Suddjian, liturgist@stjoscap.org



**Sunday, November 9
Santa Cruz Seawatch**

Winter storms can bring rarities to the coast at this time of year. Let's see what we can find.

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

Leader: Kumaran Arul, (831) 419-2838, kumaranarul@earthlink.net

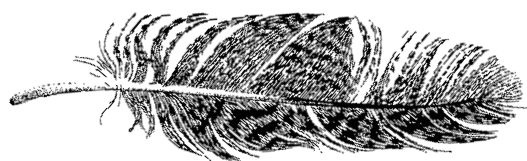


**Wednesday, November 12
North Coast**

This half day trip will explore a few places along the lovely north county coast, seeking raptors, sparrows (possible Swamp Sparrow), birds of the rocky shore, gulls, blackbirds, and more. Bring water and a snack. Possible \$6 day use fee if we go to Wilder Ranch. Rain cancels.

Directions: Meet at 7:30 AM at Beckmann's Bakery, 2341 Mission Street in Santa Cruz.

Leader: David Suddjian, liturgist@stjoscap.org



**Friday, November 14
Terrace Point, Wilder Ranch**

These areas of open fields, coastal bluffs, agricultural land, and coastal scrub often yield surprises. Note that there is a \$6 day use fee for Wilder Ranch

Directions: Meet at 7:30 AM at the west end of Delaware Avenue, by the intersection with Shaffer Road (past Antonelli Pond).

Leader: Steve Gerow, (831) 426-2476



**Saturday, November 15
UCSC Burrowing Owls**

We will be specifically looking for Burrowing Owls but will check for other raptors and grassland birds. This trip will be led by Jack Barclay, local Burrowing Owl expert. Please note that this is an *evening* trip. If rain cancels, we will try for either November 16th or 22nd.

Directions: Meet at 4:00 PM in the East Remote Parking Lot at UCSC. Parking here can be limited, so carpooling or alternative means of transportation are recommended.

Leader: Jack Barclay, JBarclay@albionenvironmental.com



Burrowing Owl



**Sunday, November 16
Lower UCSC**

We will search for Burrowing Owls, Golden Eagles, and other grassland birds.

Directions: Meet at 7:30 AM in the East Remote Parking Lot at UCSC. Parking here can be limited, so carpooling or alternative means of transportation are recommended.

Leader: Steve Gerow, (831) 426-2476



Tuesday, November 18
Wilder Ranch by Bicycle

We will bicycle/bird along the trail from Shaffer Rd. to Wilder Ranch and a bit beyond. This area includes a variety of coastal habitats such as riparian, scrub, agricultural, and coastal bluffs. It's a relatively easy ride on paved paths, with about a mile or so on dirt. This will be SCBC's first venture into greenbirding, and it promises to be a lot of fun!

To make it *true* greenbirding, try to arrive by bicycle. (See the "Bigby" article on page 20 for details.)

Rain cancels.

Directions: Meet at 8:00 AM at the Homeless Garden on Shaffer Rd. with your bicycle, water, and a snack. Helmets recommended.

Leaders: Bernadette Ramer, baramer@sbcglobal.net and Matthew Strussis-Timmer, thedutchguy@hotmail.com



Wednesday, November 19
Castle Rock and Long Ridge Open Space

We'll venture to the heights to seek forest birds and a chance of a rare montane visitor. In addition to Red-breasted Nuthatch, Golden-crowned Kinglet, and Pileated Woodpecker, we might encounter Red Cross-bill, White-breasted Nuthatch, or maybe even Townsend's Solitaire or Evening Grosbeak. Expect moderate hiking and some great views. Bring water and food in a day pack. Possible \$6 day use fee. Rain cancels.

Directions: Meet to carpool at 7:30 AM at the Felton Safeway parking lot along Graham Hill Road (gather on the side nearest Graham Hill) or at 8:15 AM. at the Saratoga Gap parking lot at Highway 9 x Highway 35. Allow 70 min. to drive up from Santa Cruz.

Leader: David Suddjian, liturgist@stjoscap.org



Thursday, November 20
SCBC Meeting @7:30 PM
Speaker: Michelle Kappes

Subject: Oceanographic Habitat Use and Energetics of Hawaiian Albatrosses in the Pacific Ocean

Michelle Kappes will present the work she has done investigating the oceanographic use of Laysan and Black-footed Albatrosses breeding on Tern Island in the Northwest Hawaiian Islands. This study is part of the Tagging of Pacific Pelagics project, a multi-disciplinary research program aimed at understanding the migration patterns of large, open-ocean animals in the North Pacific.

Location: Santa Cruz Museum of Natural History



Friday, November 21
Natural Bridges and Vicinity

We'll start at the usual meeting place and decide from there which direction seems best

Directions: Meet at 8:00 AM at the Delaware Avenue entrance to Natural Bridges State Beach

Leader: Steve Gerow, (831) 426-2476

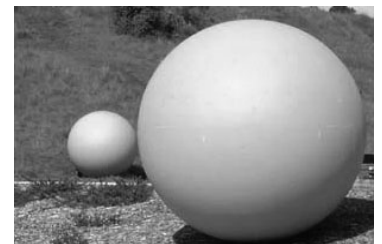


Friday, November 21
Long-Eared Owl Stakeout

Did you miss the wintering Long-eared Owl in January? If so, join us to try for it again at the O'Neill Ranch Open Space in Soquel. No guarantees it will return this winter, 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.

Directions: Meet at Anna Jean Cummings Park (Blue Ball Park) in Soquel at 4:30 PM. 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: Phil Brown, pdpbrown@gmail.com





Sunday, November 23
Raptor Search

We'll hit several spots seeking raptors and any rare migrant that happens along. Exact itinerary of the trip will be determined during trip week and will be dependent upon any recent sightings as well as species not already seen during Big Year. We'll be past primary migration, but one never knows! Current targets will be all hard finds and include Golden Eagle, Bald Eagle, Ferruginous Hawk, Rough-legged Hawk, Crested Caracara, Prairie Falcon, and Broad-winged Hawk. If desired, please call leader to obtain mobile number and arrange for other possible meeting times and locations.

Directions: This is an all-day trip. For the morning portion, meet at 7:00 AM at the Red Roof Inn, Beach Street, Watsonville (along Hwy. 1, near Hwy. 129). For the afternoon portion, meet at 12:30 PM on Shaffer Road, at the intersection with Mission Street, where Hwy. 1 North leaves Santa Cruz.

Leader: Eric Feuss, (831) 477-0280



Friday, November 28
Moore Creek Preserve

This time of year we should find good numbers of Western Meadowlarks, Say's Phoebes, and other grassland species. Rarer possibilities include Ferruginous Hawk, Prairie Falcon, and Horned Lark.

Directions: Meet at 8:00 AM on Shaffer Road across from the intersection of Mission Street

Leader: Steve Gerow, (831) 426-2476

Western Meadowlark



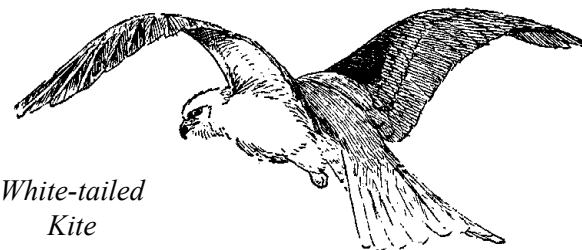
Saturday, November 29
Summit Ridge

Another opportunity to give thanks for our lovely mountains! See description for November 19 for some of the possibilities. On this half-day outing we'll make a series of hops, skips, and stops with easy walking, beginning near Castle Rock and continuing along the summit toward Loma Prieta, perhaps visiting the burned area of the Summit Fire (weather and time pending). Bring water and a snack.

Rain cancels.

Directions: Meet to carpool at 7:15 AM at the Santa Cruz County Government Center on Ocean Street or at 8:15 AM at the Saratoga Gap parking lot at Highway 9 x Highway 35. If you arrive late, look for us southeast along Skyline Blvd (Hwy 35).

Leader: David Suddjian, liturgist@stjoscap.org



White-tailed Kite



Tuesday, December 2
UCSC Arboretum and Vicinity

We'll search the Arboretum and also explore the adjacent grasslands and riparian habitats, and the nearby Farm area. We can expect varied sparrows and several species of raptors, and surprises are possible.

Directions: Meet at 8:00 AM in the lower parking lot at the Arboretum.

Leader: Steve Gerow, (831) 426-2476



Friday, December 5
San Lorenzo River

We'll look for sparrows, gulls, diving ducks, and whatever else might be around.

Directions: Meet at 8:00 AM at San Lorenzo Park by the duck pond.

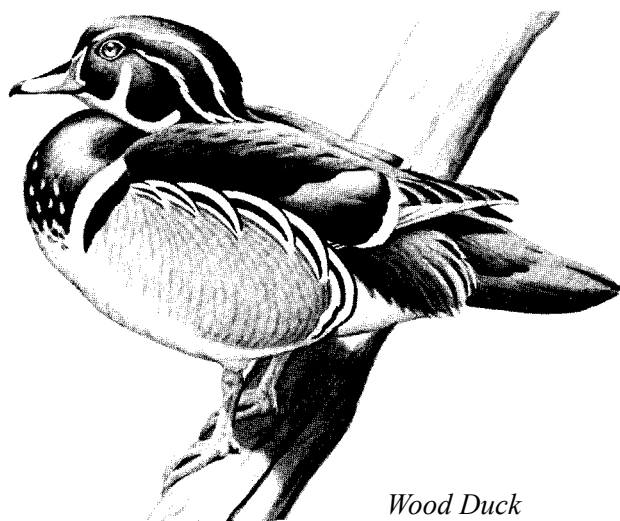
Leader: Steve Gerow, (831) 426-2476



Saturday, December 6
Big Basin State Park

This half-day trip will have three different meeting times to accommodate early owling (5:00 AM for Screech and Saw-whet Owls), later owling (6:30 AM, Nor. Pygmy-Owl), and regular daytime birding (7:30 AM). In spite of the early hour, it is a wonderful experience to be in the woods at dawn as the birds awaken. Beyond the owls, we can hope for Pileated Woodpecker, Varied Thrush, Wood Duck, Red-breasted Nuthatch, and other forest birds. If weather is favorable, we'll go up to China Grade to see if last winter's Williamson's Sapsucker returned or maybe find some other montane gift! Plan for three to four miles of moderate hiking or strolling. Bring snack and drink, and dress warmly. Rain cancels. \$6 day use fee per car.

Directions: Meet at Park HQ along Highway 236. Extra early meeting at 5:00 AM, early meeting at 6:30 AM, and regular meeting at 7:30 AM. 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



Wood Duck



Sunday December 7
Beginning Bird Walk
Natural Bridges State Park

Directions: Meet at 8:30AM at the Delaware Road entrance to Natural Bridges. Heavy rain cancels.
Leader: David Sidle, dsidle@hotmail.com



Tuesday, December 9
College Lake and vicinity

What we find on this half-day trip will depend partly on how much rain we have had by early December. Hopefully the lake will be partially flooded and will have a variety of waterbirds, many sparrows, and some swallows and raptors. Regardless, we can hope for a nice variety of birds at College Lake and nearby areas. Rain cancels.

Directions: Meet at 8:00 AM at Our Lady Help of Christians Catholic Church outside of Watsonville on Highway 152 (east of Holohan Road and across the street from St. Francis High School). Gather on the left-hand side of the lot.

Leader: David Suddjian, liturgist@stjoscap.org



Friday, December 12
Watsonville Sloughs

This trip will focus more on land birds in the riparian, marsh, scrub, and weedy habitats around the sloughs (though we won't ignore interesting water or shore birds.)

Directions: Meet at 8:00 AM at the rear of the parking lot behind West Marine, off Harkins Slough Rd. in Watsonville

Leader: Steve Gerow, (831) 426-2476



Saturday, December 13
San Lorenzo river and
Henry Cowell Campground

This half-day trip will begin near Roaring Camp, wend its way through the sycamores and box elders of the San Lorenzo River and Zayante Creek and end in the charparral and Ponderosa Pines of the Henry Cowell campground. This is a stronghold of wrens, kinglets, woodpeckers, and in good years, Varied Thrush.

Directions: Meet at 7:30 AM at the Graham Hill entrance to the Zayante Creek trail. This is poorly marked. It is to the right of the entrance to Pro-build. Parking is available in the church parking lot at the intersection of Graham Hill and Zayante Roads. We will carpool up to the campground where there is a \$6 day use fee.

Leader: Bonnie Bedzin, (831) 425-1335, bonnie@cruzio.com



**Sunday December 14
Santa Cruz Seawatch**

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 explore the thrills and challenges and share tricks-of-the-trade in identifying birds over the ocean from shore. Let's see what birds we can find on the ocean, just before the Christmas Bird Count.

Directions: Meet at 8:00 AM in front of Seymour Marine Discovery Center (at Terrace Point) on west-side Santa Cruz or at the front gate in case it is locked at that hour. Spotting scopes are highly recommended, but all are welcome regardless.

Leader: Rod Norden, (408) 656-4669, rod.norden@gmail.com



**Friday, December 19
Natural Bridges and Vicinity**

Some pre-CBC scouting and a general search for whatever might be around.

Directions: Meet at 8:00 AM at the Delaware Avenue entrance to Natural Bridges State Beach

Leader: Steve Gerow, (831) 426-2476

**CBC SANTA CRUZ COUNTY
CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT
Saturday, December 20**



Join our 52nd annual Christmas Bird Count and count-down dinner! The CBC helps us track the ups and downs of our local bird populations and is considered by many club members to be a highlight of the birding year! All birders are welcome to join this all-day event! Please email or call count compiler David Suddjian (dsuddjian@aol.com, 831 479-9603) to let him know you want to count. There is a \$5.00 fee for each participant. Potluck count-down dinner to follow at St. Joseph's Church parish hall, 435 Monterey Avenue, Capitola. More details on page 11.



**Monday, December 22
Post-CBC Rarities Search**

A morning trip to search for a few of the rare birds found on the Christmas Bird Count on Saturday, especially any species we may still need for our Big Year. Steady rain cancels, but we'll give it a go if just showers threaten.

Directions: Meet at 8:00 AM at Felker St. beside Denny's Restaurant (off Ocean St).

Leader: David Suddjian, liturgist@stjoscap.org



**Friday, December 26
Santa Cruz Wharf and
San Lorenzo River Mouth**

We'll look for gulls, sea ducks, and others in the wharf, Main Beach, and San Lorenzo River mouth areas.

Directions: Meet at 8:00 AM in the parking area by the start of the wharf, off Beach Street across from the end of Front Street

Leader: Steve Gerow, (831) 426-2476

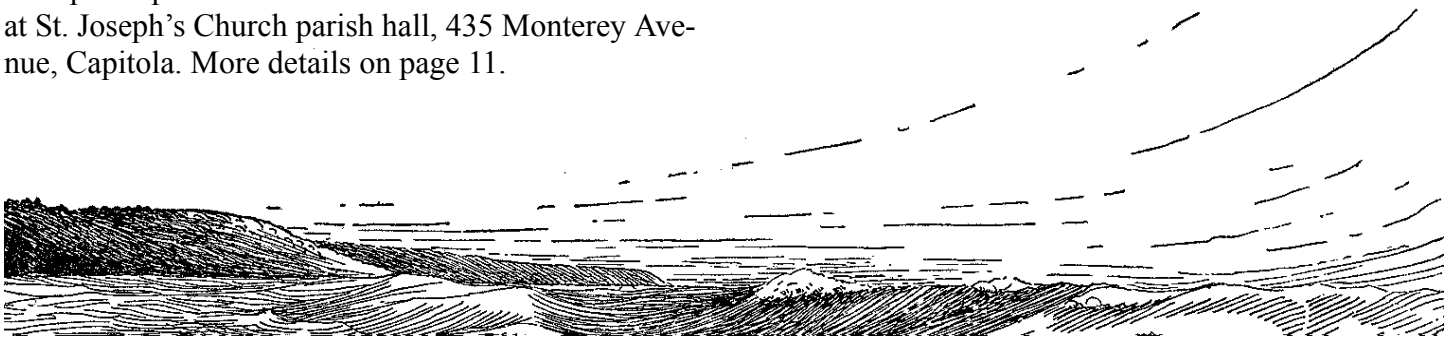


**Saturday, December 27
Sunset State Beach and vicinity**

A half-day outing to work off the Christmas candy! We'll scan the ocean and beach, and check marsh, coastal scrub, and pine and eucalyptus stands, enjoying a nice cross section of birds. Possibilities include White-winged and Black Scoters, Long-tailed Duck (maybe), and other rare ducks, interesting raptors, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, and rare sparrows. Possible \$6 day use fee at Sunset SB or Manresa Uplands. Rain cancels.

Directions: Meet at 7:30 AM at Red Roof Inn off West Beach Road near Lee Road in Watsonville. We'll carpool from there.

Leader: David Suddjian, liturgist@stjoscap.org





Sunday, December 28
Pinto Lake

A half-day trip to see what Pinto Lake has to offer.
Directions: For those carpooling from Santa Cruz, meet at Aptos Wells Fargo Bank at 7:30 AM. We'll reassemble at the Pinto Lake City Park at 8:00 then go to Pinto Lake County Park at 8:30 (meet in first parking lot). Bring water and snacks, and plan on a 2 to 3 hour walk. Heavy rain cancels.
Leaders: Bernadette and Bob Ramer, (831) 426-7342, baramer@sbcglobal.net



Monday, December 29
Pajaro Valley

As the Big Year draws near to the end, we will once again work the productive areas of the Pajaro Valley, seeking over 100 species and possible rarities. With favorable weather, we'll continue into the afternoon. An early start (7:00 AM) will try a dawn seavatch at Pajaro Dunes (scope needed, dress warm!!), and then a later meeting (8:00 AM) will begin the rest of the day's travels. Rain cancels, but if so we'll try to announce a reschedule via MBB.
Directions: Early start at 7:00 AM at the ocean end of West Beach Road at Pajaro Dunes. Main start at 8:00 AM at Red Roof Inn off West Beach Road near Lee Road in Watsonville. We'll carpool from there.
Leader: David Suddjian, liturgist@stjoscap.org

...and finally!



December 31, 2008
The Last Waltz

Wind up the Big Year by joining us for a last gasp trip! If the weather is fine, we can go and look for a bird or two. If it rains we can have a cup of coffee and reminisce over the year's birding. Everyone welcome!
Directions: Meet at Kelly's Bakery 402 Ingalls Street (just off Swift on the westside). 8:00 am
Leader: Phil Brown, pdpbrown@gmail.com

Good-bye Big Year!



Happy 2009!
Start the new year with...



MOSS LANDING CBC
Thursday, Jan 1, 2009



The Moss Landing CBC will be held on Thursday, January 1, 2009. This count circle covers some of the prime birding areas in southern Santa Cruz County and northern Monterey County. As we are always in need of birders on this count, please join us for this special New Year's Day outing followed by our typically "exciting" countdown dinner at Pajaro Dunes. If you are interested in participating in the count, please contact Bob and Bernadette Ramer at (831) 426-7342, or email: baramer@sbcglobal.net



October Sea

**A pelagic trip
reminds me how much I like
the sound of wrentits**
—Anon.

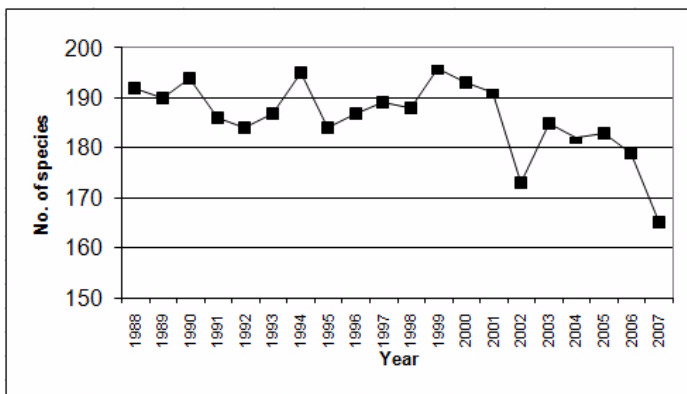
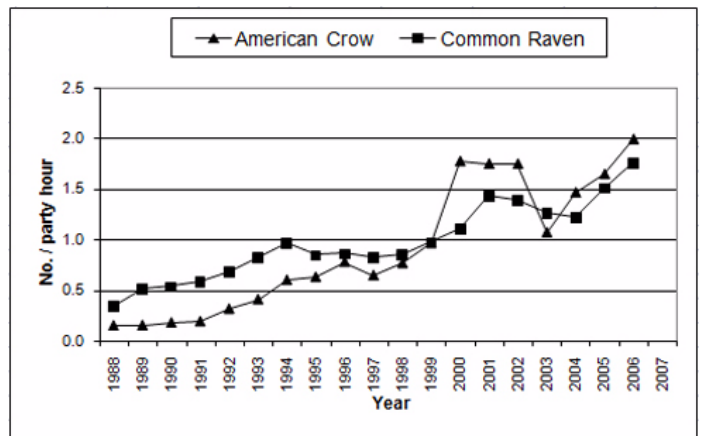
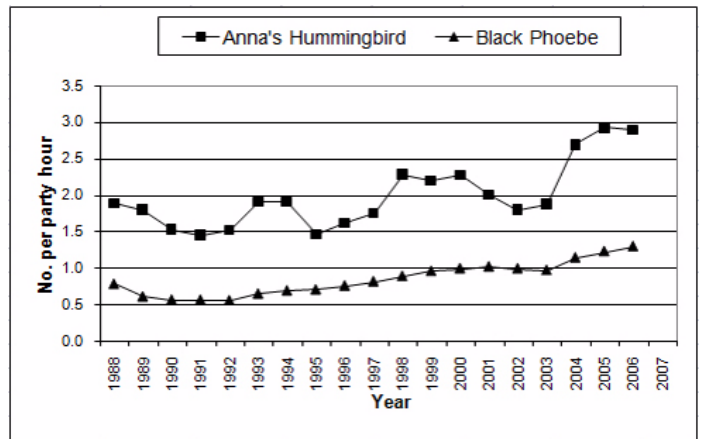
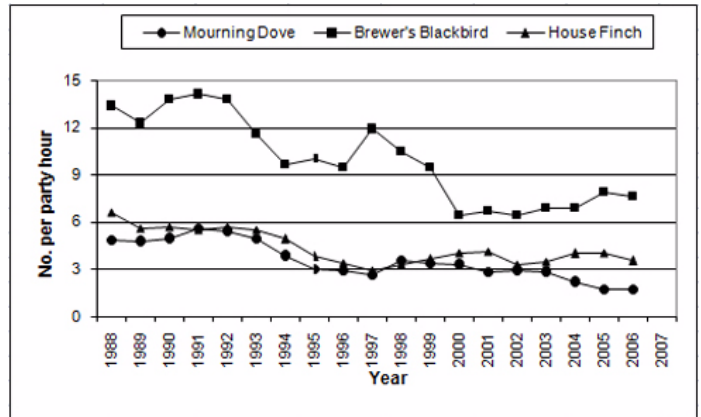
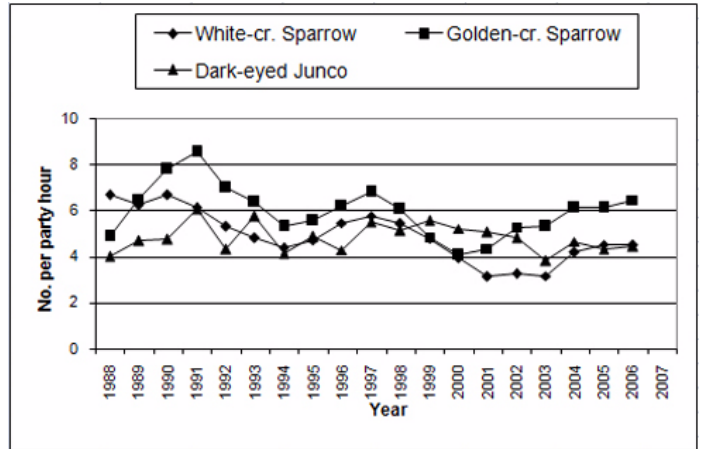


The 52nd Annual Santa Cruz County CBC December 20, 2008

What better way to spend a winter day along the central California coast than counting birds?! The Santa Cruz County CBC is a highlight of our birding year and is always fun for experienced and new birders alike. Our 15-mile diameter count circle reaches from Davenport to New Brighton and from Boulder Creek to the ocean, encompassing a wide array of habitats. Each year 60 to 80 birders join together to search the woods, walk the fields, and scan the seas. Rain or shine we'll be out there! Rare birds may get the limelight, but the best fun comes from counting the "regular" birds and seeking the uncommon ones in each counting area. Our long-term tracking of numbers of individuals of each species is the real fruit of the CBC. The end-of-the-day potluck dinner and species count down wraps it all up as we share the day's adventures and discoveries.

This year's Santa Cruz County CBC will be on December 20. Come join in the fun! Brave the elements, enjoy the birds and one of birding's best times. Contact compiler David Suddjian: dsuddjian@aol.com or (831) 479-9603. Potluck will be at St. Joseph's Church parish hall, 435 Monterey Ave., Capitola

Here are a few graphs of the long-term tracking data from 1988 to 2007. The first graph tracks the number of species found on each count, and the others show trends for 10 common local species.



Santa Cruz Birds

By David Suddjian & Steve Gerow

Including reports from June 1 to August 31, 2008

A suite of species were exceptional this season for providing the first documented occurrences of over-summering in Santa Cruz County: Gray Catbird, Summer Tanager (2), White-throated Sparrow (3!), and White-faced Ibis (2), not to mention the steadfast Dusky Flycatcher completing his third summer in the county. Top rarities were the county's second ever Black-throated Sparrow and third Scarlet Tanager and Wedge-tailed Shearwater.

* * *

A summering **Brant** stayed at Wilder Creek Beach from June 9-July 13 (CU, TU). Neary Lagoon continued to be a post-breeding gathering spot for **Wood Ducks** (the only such known in Santa Cruz County), with counts in the high twenties recorded most mornings through June and July (MC). A pair of **Gadwalls** nested again at Younger Lagoon, apparently the only regular breeding spot in the county away from the Pajaro Valley. Nesting success was not good this year, though, as only one duckling was present on July 4 (SG), and neither it nor any adults were reported after this date. The late lingering **Northern Shoveler** at Struve Slough stayed until June 14 (RW).

A female **Northern Pintail**, very rare in summer in Santa Cruz County, turned up at Younger Lagoon on July 9 (SG). Another Pintail at the mouth of Watsonville Slough on August 9 (BR, RR, et al.) could have been summering locally or was possibly an early fall migrant. There are very few summer records of **Green-winged Teal** in Santa Cruz County, so several birds this period in the Struve Slough area were quite notable. Two pairs were noted June 7, with one pair staying around until July 12, when the male had molted to eclipse plumage (RW). A female was still there July 25 (RF).

The remarkably late presence of **Redheads** in Struve Slough continued into June, with a pair there on June 1 and a male still around June 7 (RW). A female **Bufflehead** at Struve and Watsonville sloughs from June 7-July 12 was also rare, though with more precedent than some of the other summering waterfowl (RW). Only one brood of young **Common Mergan-**

ers were observed at Loch Lomond this summer (AR, DSu), indicating poor nesting success at this important breeding site. They seemed to have a better season on the lower San Lorenzo River, where the 2-3 broods of young reported was closer to average success (SG, v.ob.). Three females were at the Pajaro River mouth, where unexpected, on August 13 (AR et al.).

A **Laysan Albatross** was off the north coast on August 22 (SJ), with perhaps the same bird found the next day just over the line in San Mateo County waters (MS). The rarest seabird of the season was a light morph **Wedge-tailed Shearwater** ranging over both Santa Cruz and San Mateo County waters on August 23 (MS; TE, photographed JP). This represents the 3rd record for Santa Cruz County, pending CBRC approval. **Sooty Shearwaters** appeared in better numbers this year than in the last few summers, with numerous shore-based reports of tens of thousands and approaching one hundred thousand birds (v.ob.). They were especially numerous near shore from Capitola to the east side of Santa Cruz. Overall, though, this represented a fairly average season by the standards of earlier years. Not normal by any standards was one found grounded about 2.75 miles inland, on the shoulder of Highway 17 near Pasatiempo (AG)! The bird was alive, and was taken to a rehabilitation center.



A light-morph **Wedge-tailed Shearwater**, photographed by Jeff Poklen on August 23.

©2008 Jeff Poklen

A **Fork-tailed Storm-Petrel** was offshore on August 22 (SJ). A **Wilson's** and a **Least Storm-Petrel** were notables among the first large storm-petrel aggregation reported in county waters this year on August 23 (MS). **American White Pelicans** stayed around in good numbers through the summer in the Pajaro Valley, with the largest concentration of 120 at Struve and Watsonville sloughs on July 26-28 (SG, MSc, BR, RR). An immature **Brown Pelican** was out of place there on July 26, and another inland bird was at Harkins Slough on August 6 (RW). The big news involving **Brown Pelicans** this period, though, was the huge number that appeared in early August, mostly from Capitola to Santa Cruz (DSu, JD, v.ob.). During the peak of this amazing spectacle from August 4-10, unprecedented aggregations of up to 2000 pelicans were swarming around such spots as the Capitola Wharf and off the Santa Cruz Main Beach, often accompanied by big numbers of **Brandt's Cormorants**, **Heermann's Gulls**, and other species.



*The huge flock of **Brown Pelicans** seen from Capitola Wharf on August 8, 2008. Photo by David Suddjian.*

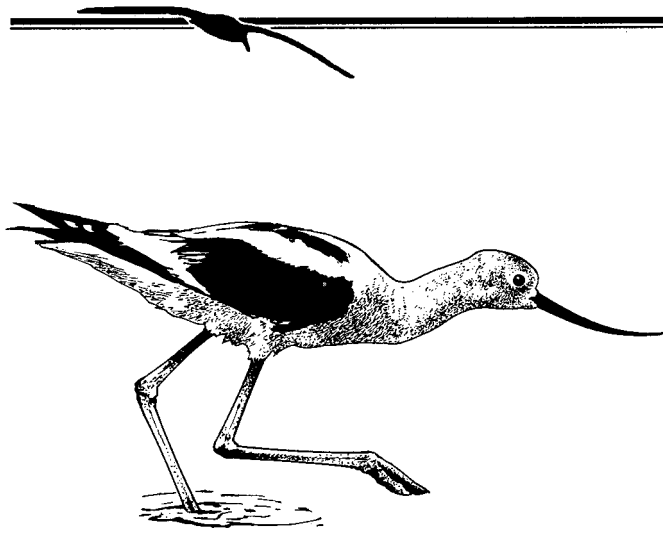
Brandt's Cormorants nested in three spots this season, with 23 nests on the remains of the old Davenport Pier, 44 at Natural Bridges and 157 nests on the expanding colony on the cement ship at Seacliff State Beach (DSu, SG). **Double-crested Cormorants** nested at their two regular colonies with 38 nests at Pinto Lake and 93 at Schwann Lake (DSu). There was also a late-starting colony of about ten nests in the eucalyptus grove near the mouth of the San Lorenzo River, first reported on July 7 (DSu, BR, MSc, SG) and only the second time this site has been used (just one nest was there in 2002.) One or two pairs of **American**

Bitterns nested at Struve Slough this year with young present from August 2 on (RW, NA, HS, RS, v.ob). A bittern at Pinto Lake on June 23 was the only report away from Struve this period (AG).

One or two **White-faced Ibis** were reported at Struve Slough and vicinity on several dates through the period (v.ob.), and it seems likely that both birds stayed through the summer for the first documented over-summering by this species in the county, including the first ever June records. Additional ibis appeared in August with a high of four at Watsonville Slough on August 13 (DSu, AR). A pair of **White-tailed Kites** nested at Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park for a second year in a row with a family group present in the meadow near the main entrance beginning in early July confirming another rare nesting for the San Lorenzo Valley (AK).

There were only two reports of successful nestings by **American Kestrels** in the county this year, both in the Santa Cruz area (SG). While some nesting pairs likely went unreported, kestrels do seem to be declining as a breeding species here and in some other parts of coastal central California. An extremely early **Merlin** sped by Pajaro Dunes on July 27, continuing southward over the Pajaro River mouth (EF, JWa, JWi, KK). This is the earliest ever for Santa Cruz County by almost a month, the prior early record being August 24. While there are still few July and early August records in California, early migrant Merlins may be increasing in the state, possibly related to a southward expansion of their breeding range in the Pacific Northwest. Another early Merlin at Capitola on August 21 (DSu) was the second-earliest record for the county.

Common Moorhens were confirmed breeding at two Pajaro Valley locations this year with dependent young at Harkins Slough on June 6 (RW) and at Pinto Lake on June 23 (AG). An **American Avocet** at Corcoran Lagoon on July 11 (DSd) and another at the San Lorenzo River mouth on August 4 (DSu) were rare away from the Pajaro Valley. Avocets were also rare in the Pajaro Valley this season, though, with one at Watsonville Slough on July 26 being the only one reported all summer (RR, BR, MSc, SG). Six **Lesser Yellowlegs** were in various spots from August 11-27 (v.ob). An adult **Ruddy Turnstone** turned up at Wilder Creek Beach on July 23 (AR), and another was near the Pajaro River mouth from August 9-14 (BR, RR, AR, v.ob.). An adult **Red Knot** was a nice find at the mouth of Watsonville Slough on July 27 (EF, JWa, JWi, KK).



American Avocet

Up to 22 **Wilson's Phalaropes** were found around the Watsonville Slough system and the lower Pajaro River from July 24-August 15 (v.ob.). In general, though, the mudflat-favoring shorebird species were noted as being unusually scarce in the county this season, with most of the rarer species lacking and even the common species hard to find at many regular shorebird spots. Shore-based observations of **Common Terns** included one off Capitola Beach on July 29 (DSu), and one resting on Wilder Creek Beach on August 16 (AR). While nothing like last year's invasion, an immature **Horned Puffin** off Waddell Creek Beach on July 14 was a nice find (DSu), with perhaps a different bird appearing there again on July 26 (ADeM).

A **Eurasian Collared-Dove** at Lockhart Gulch west of Scotts Valley on August 27 reached beyond recently colonized areas of the county (MST). Begging young **Northern Pygmy-Owls** were noted with adults at four locations in Big Basin this July (DSu). A **Burrowing Owl** at Back Ranch Road at the end of May—presumably a late migrant—was exceptional, as we have no other recent county records later than early April (TH). A **Long-eared Owl** was heard at Soquel on June 21 (RW).

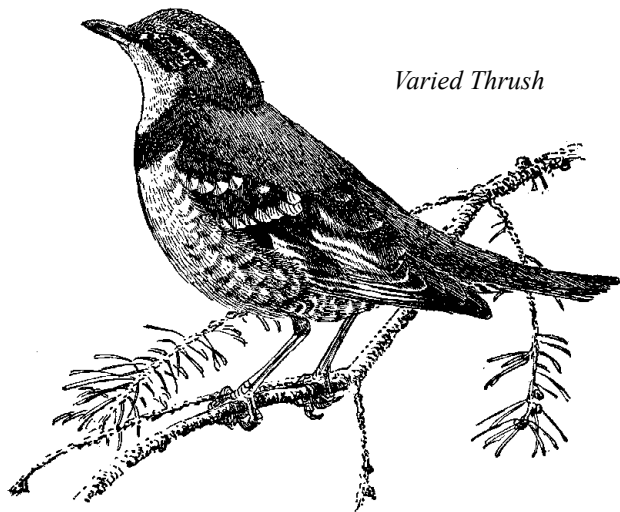
Reports of **Black Swifts** continued a pattern quite like other recent years. Three reports of 2-6 birds in early June fit within the main thrust of spring migration (CH, TH, SG, WG). Then we had four scattered reports of 1-3 birds from late June through July from coastal areas with no consistent presence in any area (JL, SG et al, DSu et al., RRa, BRa). Again there was no evidence or strong suggestion of nesting in the county, and checks of former breeding sites came up

empty. The species reportedly failed to appear at all this breeding season at Año Nuevo State Reserve in San Mateo County (GS), the only other coastal area north of Big Sur where the species has historically nested in California. Two **Black Swifts** over Rancho Del Oso on August 29 were among few records of fall migrants in the county files (DSu).

Vaux's Swift is a challenging species to monitor, but several lines of evidence have developed to indicate a declining population in Santa Cruz County over the recent 10+ years. Careful attention paid to Vaux's Swifts this season in two traditional breeding areas—Big Basin and western Santa Cruz—found indications that nesting effort was very low, and/or perhaps was not successful (DSu, SG). No family groups were found at Big Basin until August 7, where some are normally evident by the 3rd week of July, and the pattern of activity in June and early July was off from prior years with swifts being very hard to locate at all. Specific sites or areas of the park that have supported nesting in recent years had no activity or very infrequent activity. The family groups appeared in the park in early August associated with migrants, and it is not clear that they were from local breeding efforts. Similarly, western Santa Cruz had a gap of no sightings from June 24–July 25. A family group seen at Antonelli Pond on July 26 may or may not have been local, and none were seen after.

Black-chinned Hummingbirds put in their anticipated late summer appearances, with six from August 14-31 (SG, BN, DSu, BS), and others in September. All were females or immature males. Two away from the mid-county coast were noteworthy: at Rancho Del Oso on August 29 (DSu) and near Scotts Valley on August 31 (BS). A female **Anna's Hummingbird** visiting azalea blossoms in old growth redwood forest at Blooms Creek Campground in Big Basin on June 2-3 was exceptional in that habitat, providing the first such occurrence for the park (DSu). Reports of seven adult male **Rufous Hummingbirds** in the mid-county region from June 28-July 8 were at the vanguard of the expected summer influx of *Selasphorus* hummers (largely female and immature birds), which we suspect to be mostly Rufous; but adult males have only infrequently been reported in the county in summer (DSu, SG, RW).

A **Red-breasted Sapsucker** in mixed evergreen forest at Sky Meadow Lane in Big Basin on July 5 was likely a post-breeding dispersant from a breeding site in riparian habitat (DSu); such dispersants have seldom been noted in the county. We had three spring migrant **Willow Flycatchers** from June 9-15 (RW, SG, PB). The **Dusky Flycatcher** summering at Ocean View Summit in Big Basin was last reported on July 30 (DSu). An **Eastern Phoebe** photographed at Natural Bridges on June 6 provided our second spring record (AS, RT, v.ob.). Families of **American Crows** pushing the distributional envelope were at Summit Road near Highway 17 on July 11 and at Swanton Road on July 24 (DSu). One at China Grade in Big Basin Redwoods State Park on August 1 was the first summer record for the park's interior.



Varied Thrush

Single migrant **Purple Martins** were at Soquel on June 5 (RW) and Rancho Del Oso on August 11 (DSu). Two **Bank Swallows** were reported at Antonelli Pond on July 26 (ADeM). A **White-breasted Nuthatch** at Long Ridge Open Space Preserve on August 25 was the first reported in the county in about a year (DSu). Following up on Spring's **Western Bluebird** news, a second brood was successfully reared at Quail Hollow, fledging on July 21 (JA et al.), and nesting was confirmed along Summit Road and Skyline Boulevard at two places northwest of Highway 17 (DS, PM). Up to five Western Bluebirds at Moore Creek Preserve on August 26-27 were the first noted in that area in several years (JWa, SG). A female **Varied Thrush** carrying nest material in the Sempervirens Creek watershed

on June 3 provided another breeding confirmation for Big Basin Redwoods SP (DSu).

One of the season's most exciting birds was the county's 4th or 5th **Gray Catbird**, providing the first summer record for the county and a rare over-summering record for California. It was found along Moore Creek north of Antonelli Pond on June 21 (SG), disappearing downstream. It was re-found nearby at Natural Bridges on July 29 (SG), where it stayed until September 15, being well photographed and enjoyed by dozens of birders, especially as it fed in its favorite coffeeberry bush. A **Northern Mockingbird** at Ocean View Summit in Big Basin on August 14 was a surprise and the first record from the park's interior (DSu). A singing **Northern Parula** was at Zayante Creek in Henry Cowell State Park on June 7 (BB et al., v.ob.), adding to a pattern of late spring occurrences in that area.

Matthew Strusis-Timmer conducted a significant study of our **Yellow Warblers** this season, documenting distribution, habitat associations, and nesting success, and providing valuable information for a species that has declined markedly in our county. Read about his effort on page 17. Six **Black-throated Gray** and four **Hermit Warblers** near China Grade in Big Basin on August 27 were exceptional tallies for a single day in fall migration in Santa Cruz County (DSu), but it may be that moderate numbers of these species move through our forested highlands in late summer when birding coverage is very light in such areas. A returning **Townsend's Warbler** at Big Basin on August 8 was just shy of a record early date (DSu)..

Vagrant warblers of early fall migration included a **Black-and-white Warbler** near China Grade on August 27 (DSu) and a **Northern Waterthrush** at Natural Bridges on August 25 (LG). A singing male **Scarlet Tanager** near Big Basin HQ on June 5 was the 3rd county record (DSu). Two immature male **Summer Tanagers** at Natural Bridges were documented to do what none had been shown to do before in the county—they summered! One was initially identified on July 25 (DSd) following an unconfirmed report on July 16. Then two were seen together on July 26 (ADeM). Both lingered into mid-August, with at least one staying to September 15 (v.ob.), molting to an adult appearance by September 1.



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Black-throated Sparrow at the UCSC Arboretum on August 25.

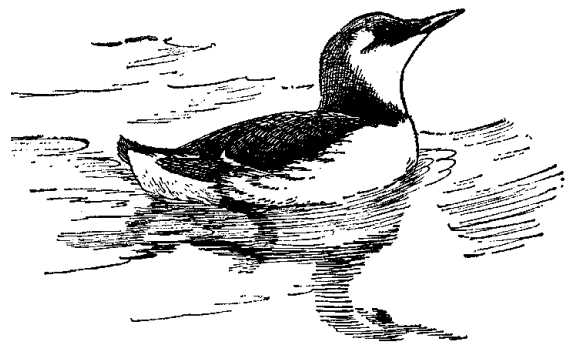
Among just a few reports of **Chipping Sparrows** at known or presumed breeding stations, four at Last Chance Road on June 29 were notable, as they represented the first breeding season occurrence from the county's North Coast in several years (EL et al.). An adult at Bethany Curve Park in Santa Cruz on July 12 and a juvenile at Terrace Point on July 23 were unexpected in town in July (SGe). The county's 2nd ever **Black-throated Sparrow** was an adult photographed at the U.C.S.C. Arboretum on August 25 (CG), 10 years after our initial county record. At least three pairs of **Song Sparrows** nesting in plantings at a parking garage at Cabrillo College were unusual for our county in a developed, landscaped setting (DSu). Three summering **White-throated Sparrows** were without precedent and quite unexpected. Two were together at a feeding station at Larkin Valley Road in early July, with one lingering to July 26 (photographed; CB, JB). Another was photographed as it visited a Ben Lomond feeding station from July 18 to August 4 (AW, JWi). **Rose-breasted Grosbeaks** at Aptos on June 3 (CA) and Bonny Doon on June 16 (BB) bumped the spring total to a paltry three, the lowest number in years. A fall migrant was at Santa Cruz on August 13 (KA). A male **Indigo Bunting** paused at Eagle Rock on June 3 (DSu). Single **Tricolored Blackbirds** at Natural Bridges on June 7 (AR) and nearby on June 29 (SG) were unexpected in town in the summer. A female **Great-tailed Grackle** carrying food to a nest at

Harkins Slough on June 6 provided the first breeding evidence from that slough (RW). A pioneering pair of **House Finches** continued at Big Basin to August 20 (DSu). A scattering of **Red Crossbill** reports from June to August were widely dispersed in the northern half of the county (DSu, EL et al.). A flock of 18 at Last Chance Road on June 29 included some juvenile birds that may have been from local breeding (EL). A juvenile at the famous coffeeberry shrub in Natural Bridges on August 24 was the only report from the Santa Cruz area (ADeM).

* * *

Cited Observers: Cindie Ambar, Jenny Anderson, Kumaran Arul, Cathy Bradley, Jack Bradley, Phil Brown, Bonnie Bedzin, Mary Crouser, Al DeMartini, Judy Donaldson, Todd Easterla, Eric Feuss, Rick Fournier, Alexander Gaguine, Carla Galloway, Steve Gerow, Lois Goldfrank, Wally Goldfrank, Tonya Haff, Craig Himmelwright, Antonina Karnaugh, Kim Kuska, Earl Lebow, Janet Linthicum, Paul Miller, Monterey Seabirds (MS) fide Roger Wolfe, Barbara Novelli, Jeff Poklen, Bernadette Ramer, Robert Ramer, Alex Rinkert, Heidi Sandkuhle, Richard Sandkuhle, Barbara Scharfenstein, Michelle Scott (MSc), Adam Searcy, Larry Selman, Shearwater Journeys (SJ) fide Debi Shearwater, David Sidle (DSd), Gary Strachan, Matthew Strusis-Timmer, David Suddjian (DSu), Ryan Terrill, Connie Unsicker, Tom Unsicker, Jeff Wall (JWa), Anne Williams, Jim Williams (JWi), Roger Wolfe. "v.ob." means various observers.

Please report interesting observations to David Suddjian at dsuddjian@aol.com or 831 479-9603



Common Murre

Habitat Associations and Nesting Success of Yellow Warblers in Santa Cruz County, CA

by Matthew Strusis-Timmer

Yellow Warblers have experienced both local and regional population declines, earning them a “Species of Special Concern” status in California. These declines are often attributed to habitat loss, predation, and cowbird parasitism. Therefore, it is imperative to understand the specific habitat requirements of this declining species as well as predation and parasitism pressures in order to effectively conserve remaining populations. This spring and summer I investigated which ecological factors best explain the presence of Yellow Warblers by conducting point counts and recording vegetation characteristics at 176 stations randomly placed along 33 miles of streams in Santa Cruz County. I examined predation and parasitism pressures by finding and monitoring nests at the Pajaro River, where the warblers were most numerous.



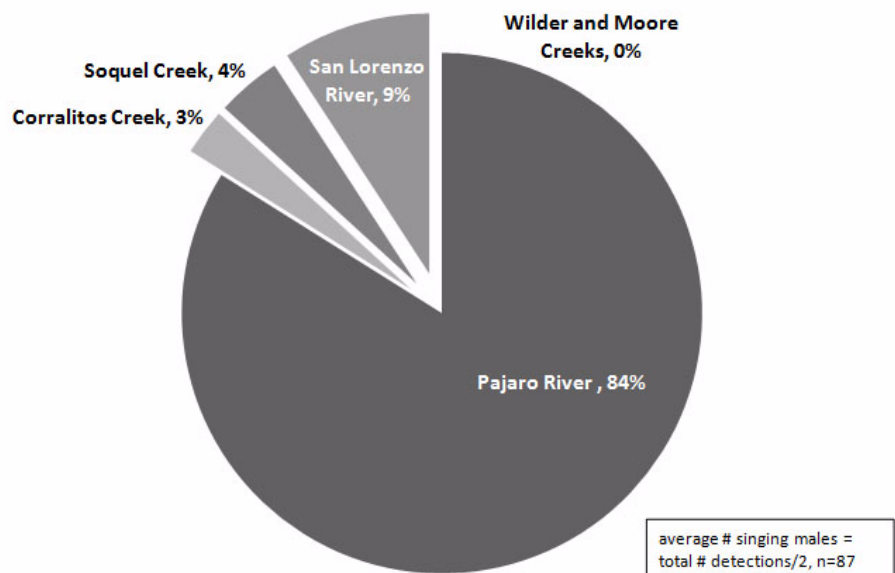
Can you identify the Brown Cowbird egg in this nest?

Habitat factors that best predicted the presence of Yellow Warblers at a site were low canopy height, increasing willow cover, and increasing willow height. Overall, Yellow Warblers were found at 34% of the stations, but most (84%) were along the Pajaro River (see graph). Nesting success along the Pajaro was very low. I found 26 nests but only two (8%) were successful, each fledging one young. Many of the nests were depredated (77%) and of those that reached the egg-laying stage, 61% were parasitized by Brown-headed Cowbirds

The downstream stretches of the Pajaro River, where the research was conducted, is leveed and managed for flood control through annual vegetation reduction regimes. This ongoing maintenance to the levee benches, coupled with flood disturbance, produces conditions that are attractive to this species through the creation of large areas of patchy willow thickets. However, the Yellow Warbler’s partiality to this heavily disturbed system is met with low nesting success. It will take creative biologists and land managers to remediate the problems of predation and nest parasitism.

This research was funded by a San Lorenzo Valley Water District Education Program Grant, Arthur and Karin Nelson Scholarship, and Arthur and Karin Nelson & Evelyn Gerds Research Fellowship; the latter two through the Department of Biological Sciences at San Jose State University.

Distribution of Yellow Warblers among streams in Santa Cruz Co. 2008



Big Year 2008 Glides Into Fall

Progress report through September 30, 2008

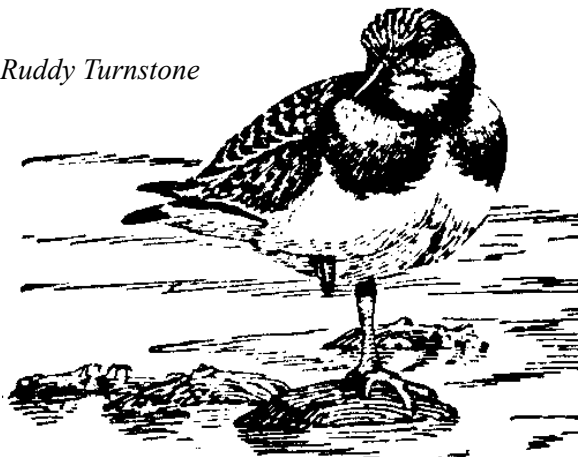
The Bird Club's Big Year 2008 glides into the heart of the fall migration season with 260 species found through the end of September! We met our official goal of 240 species on August 15 with a Black-chinned Hummingbird at Natural Bridges. We have fielded an amazing 96 trips so far this year. It is dizzying to think of it, but that translates into an official field trip every 2.8 days! We must be crazy...bird crazy, that is.

August and September trips came off without any hitches. Our destinations leaned heavily to the wetlands of the Pajaro Valley (visited on nine trips), and the migrant hot spots of western Santa Cruz (10 trips). We also enjoyed our first three Big Year pelagic adventures, beginning September 13. We are grateful for Bird Club discounts offered on the September trips by Monterey Seabirds (two trips) and Shearwater Journeys (one trip). Be sure and check out our Big Year page on the SCBC website for a full list of sightings, trip reports and more.

http://www.santacruzbirdclub.org/The_Big_Year.html

Table 1 lists the 25 new species we found since July 31 (the cutoff for the last progress report). We added six species in August, then a big 19 new ones in September, thanks largely to the pelagic trips which contributed 17 new species. The first Big Year pelagic trip alone added 13 species, our largest one-day grab since January. Onshore, habitat conditions were ripe for unusual shorebirds at our sloughs and creek mouths and we surely tried to find them, but for some reason shorebirds were scarce and the uncommon to rare species were nearly lacking.

Ruddy Turnstone



By the end of September, most of the seasonal wetlands had dried up, and we have perhaps lost our opportunity to capture some of the shorebirds we'd hoped (and even expected) to add to the Big Year list. Rare migrant landbirds were spotty in early fall, with no real influx of vagrants until the end of September. Hopefully October will be hopping!



The Gray Catbird photographed at Natural Bridges State Park by Ron Wolf.

Among the more difficult species, we added two new "Code 6" species: Gray Catbird and Black-throated Sparrow, both outstanding county birds! The summering Catbird was encountered on a remarkable five trips, revealing more than anything how often we returned to Natural Bridges in August

We found three more Code 5 species: Laysan Albatross, Manx Shearwater, and Summer Tanager. Five new Code 4 species were: Wilson's Storm-Petrel, Ruddy Turnstone, Wilson's Phalarope, Xantus's Murrelet, and Black-chinned Hummingbird.

Through September we have logged 103 Code 1 species (100%), 99 Code 2s (99%), 28 Code 3s (76%), 18 Code 4s (46%), eight Code 5s (13%) and four Code 6s (4%). The lone Code 2 species yet to be found is Short-tailed Shearwater, which we might score on an October pelagic trip or during a late fall seawatch.

There have been some "misses," species we could have expected to find—both rarities we narrowly missed and regulars that did not appear. Hope lives on

for some of these. Among the staked out rarities or uncommon species that were seen before and after field trips, and sought on one or more trips, were Semipalmated and Baird's sandpipers, Red-naped Sapsucker, Yellow-breasted Chat, and Rose-breasted Grosbeak. Arctic Tern and Lawrence's Goldfinch have yet to appear in the county this year. Golden Eagle has remained surprisingly scarce, but we'll leave the light on.

Check out our calendar of great opportunities that the Bird Club is offering this fall and winter as we round out our Big Year effort. We'll return to the highlands to seek montane wanderers, stare out to sea for murrelets and shearwaters, scan the hills for raptors, and scour the willows, woods, and wetlands for other exciting new birds. We hope to see you out there!

Table 1. New species found between August 1 and September 30.

Species	Date	Location
Gray Catbird	8/01/2008	Natural Bridges SB
Summer Tanager	8/01/2008	Natural Bridges SB
Wilson's Phalarope	8/02/2008	Watsonville Slough
Ruddy Turnstone	8/09/2008	Pajaro Dunes
Black-chinned Hummingbird	8/15/2008	Natural Bridges SB
Lesser Yellowlegs	8/27/2008	Struve Slough
Willow Flycatcher	9/05/2008	Bethany Curve, S.C.
Black-footed Albatross	9/13/2008	Offshore
Northern Fulmar	9/13/2008	Offshore
Pink-footed Shearwater	9/13/2008	Offshore
Flesh-footed Shearwater	9/13/2008	Offshore
Buller's Shearwater	9/13/2008	Offshore
Manx Shearwater	9/13/2008	Offshore
Wilson's Storm-Petrel	9/13/2008	Offshore
Ashy Storm-Petrel	9/13/2008	Offshore
Black Storm-Petrel	9/13/2008	Offshore
South Polar Skua	9/13/2008	Offshore
Pomarine Jaeger	9/13/2008	Offshore
Sabine's Gull	9/13/2008	Offshore
Xantus's Murrelet	9/13/2008	Offshore
Black-throated Sparrow	9/25/2008	Natural Bridges SB
Laysan Albatross	9/26/2008	Offshore
Black-vented Shearwater	9/26/2008	Offshore
Parasitic Jaeger	9/26/2008	Offshore
Long-tailed Jaeger	9/26/2008	Offshore



"BIGBY"—REINVENTING THE BIG YEAR

by Matthew Strusis-Timmer
Conservation Officer

Does this year's Bird Club Big Year have you excited to start your own next year? The traditional Big Year concept is simple: log as many different species as possible in a pre-defined space in one calendar year. However, before you grab your binocs and zoom off to the farthest corner of the county, state, or country to see the latest rarity, you should at least consider what environmental impact such an endeavor may have. Does our lust for seeing new birds or the competitiveness of a Big Year cause us to compromise our conservation values? Can one both conserve and chase birds?

The Big Green Big Year (BGBY)—affectionately called the "Bigby" by its inventors and participants—provides a creative alternative to the traditional Big Year. It eschews fossil fuel consumption in an attempt to reconcile the irony of polluting the atmosphere in search of birds. The Bigby motto is simple: "Self-propelled birders birding locally". The concept was dreamed up in late 2007, in Montreal, by a group of birders who were feeling guilty for consuming large amounts of fossil fuels in order to see birds. They pledged to do a Big Year centered at their homes without the aid of the internal combustion engine. They posted their idea on the internet, and voila! By the end of February 2008, over 250 like-minded people from 8 countries had registered to participate.

Bigby birders adhere to a few general rules to add species to their list:

- The birder will have been birding from a consistent base. Normally this will be the birder's home or their place of work or some other location they will usually be at during the count period.
- The birder may move about their count area by any legitimate means of self-propulsion such as walking, by cycle, on skis, on snowshoes, in a canoe or other small non-powered watercraft, even on horseback.

- The use of any powered vehicle is forbidden, with the sole exception of the occasional use of scheduled public ground or ferry transport. If public transport is used at all then birds counted should be included on a separate list from those seen by other means of transport.

Two Santa Cruz County birders are participating in the Bigby inaugural year. Alex Rinkert (AR), 16, is a sophomore at San Lorenzo High School, lives in Ben Lomond, and frequents nearby Quail Hollow County Park in search of birds. Paul Miller (PM), 41, teaches high school biology and lives in Scotts Valley. Here are their answers to questions I asked about their Bigby experiences.



Why are you participating in a Bigby this year?

AR: Save gas, which = money, reduce carbon footprint while birding at the same time.

PM: There are several reasons I am participating in a Bigby. First, I was very attracted to the idea of "birding green"—not using my car, less cars on the road, more human power—so Bigbying fit in very well with my philosophy. I also am an avid biker, so searching for birds while biking just made sense. I'm out there riding anyway, so adding an activity which I enjoy along the way was a winning combination. I am competitive as well, so I was hoping to be in the top few Bigbyists.

Do you have a target number of species for the year?

AR: 250 was my goal this year.

PM: 250 I suppose. It was sort of a vague target in the beginning, but now that I'm up to 210 or so, I think it's very doable.

How many bird species have you seen to date this year and how many do you expect to finish with?

AR: 188 as of 9/12/08. I'll probably finish with about 230 or so if I get down to the Pajaro Valley Wetlands.

PM: 210. Around 250.

What is the greatest distance you have propelled yourself to see a bird?

AR: Down to West Beach Street in Watsonville—about 42 miles round trip; a single Castle Rock and Big Basin trip was 40 miles round trip.

PM: I think 60—some miles. I rode to Ano Nuevo to see a Scissor-tailed flycatcher (yes, any bird is legal, not just county birds, as long as you're self-propelled...). I did not see it that day. I also rode 72 miles one day with no target bird in mind, [seeking] a few species I hadn't seen on my Bigby rides to date. That ride was to the Watsonville sloughs and Pajaro Dunes.

Any recommendations, highlights, or interesting facts you want to share about your experience?

AR: It's always hard to ride home empty handed but is certainly worth it when you see that elusive rarity.

PM: Don't drive so much. Walk or bike more. It's good for health, both mentally and physically, and you'll get to appreciate what you see more (you work harder for it). I've seen and heard several Bigby lifers and county birds while riding: several owls, Gray Catbird, Townsend's Solitaire, Summer Tanager, Nashville Warbler, etc.

The Bigby is now part of a larger movement called Greenbirding. While carbon-neutral and local-patch birding may not heal all of our planet's climate problems, it provides us with a challenging and practical way to reduce our carbon footprint while still participating in our noble and beloved hobby. Greenbirding will benefit the birds and the environment, our physical health, and with rising gas prices, our pocketbooks as well. Are you up to the challenge?

For more information, check out GreenBirding at: <http://www.sparroworks.ca/greenbirding/index.htm>

WARNING: Beware of the Poodle-dog Bush!

Birding has some hazards, and here's another plant—like poison oak—to be avoided. The CalFire press release below came out in February 2008. Although the range of the plant (see map link) is south and east of our area, it could show up in areas burned by this year's fires too. Submitted by Chris Hartzell.

Beware of the flowers

Riverside – As many of our local foothill areas continue the natural healing process from the fire scars of the last few years, Mother Nature is providing a few surprises in the process. One worth mentioning is in the colorful Poodle-dog bush, *Turricula parryi*. This beautiful purple flowered plant has populated many of the burned areas from the 2003 fires and will likewise do so within the areas burned in the fires of 2007. Touching this beautiful flowering plant can lead to severe dermatitis in many people, typical of that associated with poison oak. Symptoms include blistering of the skin, itchy irritated skin, and swelling. Symptoms may not present themselves for 12-36 hours after exposure, and no pain is experienced at the time of contact. All contact with the plant including touching, smelling flowers, and breathing particulate matter should be avoided as you would avoid poison oak.

Here is a map of its range... [includes links to pictures]

http://www.calflora.org/cgi-bin/species_query.cgi?where-cname=Turricula

Photo Album

Jeff Wall (right) and Norm Kikuchi (below) at the Watsonville sloughs on September 3. Photos by David Suddjian



SCBC group (above) on the Monterey Seabirds pelagic trip, September 13. Photo by Doris White



Debra Shearwater and Steve Gerow—Debi giving pre-trip instructions for the Shearwater Journeys pelagic trip, September 26. Photo by David Suddjian

New SCBC Members

Lyn Dremalas	8/08
Connie & Tom Unsicker	8/08
Paula Maxfield	9/08
Carol Jordan	9/08
Julio & Mary Gomez	9/08
Shantanu Phukan	9/08
Janet King	10/08
Richard Shanahan	10/08

Welcome!

Assembling



Submission for The Albatross—Guidelines

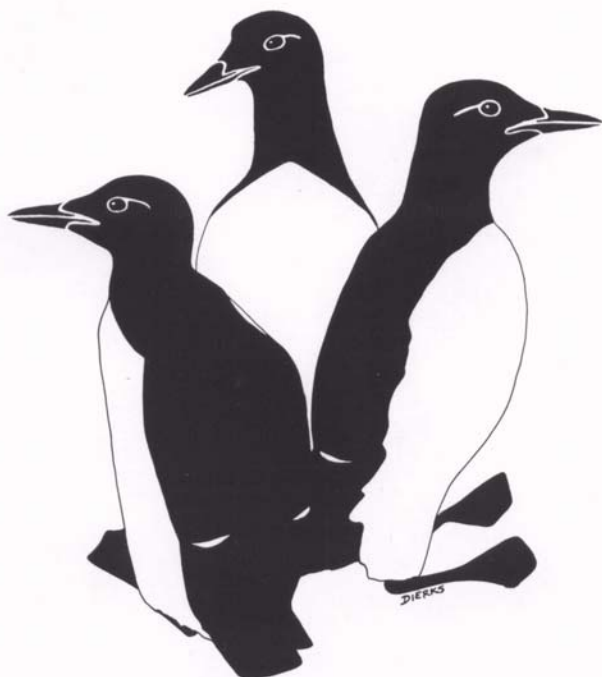
In addition to regular features—calendar, Santa Cruz Birds, trip reports—the newsletter can include almost anything related to birding in general and to local birding in particular. Depending on space, submissions of any of the following are welcome:

- 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 (jpg, tif)

If you wish to submit a large article, please contact me about it before the submission deadline.

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

—Judy Donaldson, Editor



COMMON MURRES

**Input deadline for
Jan/Feb 2009 issue
of The Albatross
is December 1, 2008**

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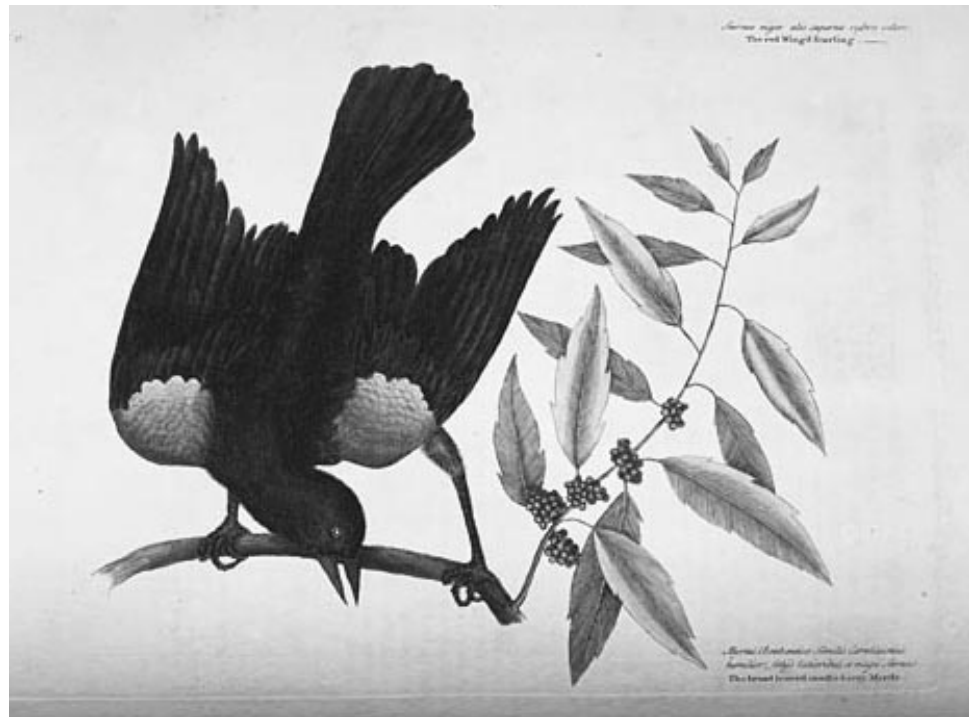
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Artist's Bird—Red-winged Blackbird

Mark Catesby published his painting of a red-winged blackbird (titled "red Wing'd Starling") in 1754. Linnaeus gave the bird its scientific name, *Agelaius phoeniceus*, in 1766, based on Catesby's painting. *Agelaius* is from the Greek word "agelaios" (flocking), and *phoeniceus* is from Greek "phoinikeos" (red). See it in color here:

<http://www.learner.org/jnorth/tm/spring/RedwingFacts.html>



The ALBATROSS

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<http://santacruzbirdclub.org/>

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 Youth, \$400 Life. Make checks payable to Santa Cruz Bird Club and mail to Box 1304, Santa Cruz, CA 95061, Attention: Membership Chairman.