



# Albatross

PHOEBASTRIA NIGRIPES

## 2008—The Year that Was

### *From the Presidents' desk...*

Although I'm writing this article at the beginning of December, when you read it, 2008 will have drawn to a close. And what a year it was! Playing the role of the Janus, the Roman god who could simultaneously look forwards and backwards, it's good to reminisce over our accomplishments from this past year before we undertake the new adventures awaiting us in the coming year. So let the memories begin...



Far and away, we'll remember 2008 as the bird club's Big Year. During the planning stages, we hoped to record 240 species of birds on county field trips during the year. But, as we reached that mark by August 15th, we set a new stretch goal of 270 species—and we surpassed that mark on October 29th! There will be other articles in the Albatross highlighting various aspects of the Big Year; but as Presidents, we extend our thanks and appreciation to the many members of the bird club who made this effort such a tremendous success. The most visible champions were the field trip leaders who took novice and avid birders alike into familiar and remote locations looking for the common, uncommon, and not to be expected bird life around Santa Cruz County. But there are also many unsung heroes, who were working feverishly behind the scene, to keep the Big Year momentum going. Scheduling multiple field trips each week throughout the year, publishing them in the Albatross, updating the field trip calendar on the SCBC website, and compiling the sightings from each field trip into an online database required the dedicated efforts of a team of folks. A job well done by all!

Besides the plethora of planned field trips, bird club members had several other opportunities for encountering birds. We extend our thanks to Shearwater Journeys and Monterey Seabirds for their offering of discounted rates to club members. Living next to Monterey Bay, we may be tempted to take it for granted; but the bay is a phenomenal resource for pelagic birds and marine mammals, and we strongly recommend that people get onto the bay as often as their birding budget (or supply of Scopolamine patches) will allow. Unfortunately, it's a sad commentary of our times, but some places that are bird friendly can be people unfriendly, especially for a lone, female birder. So a women's birding group coalesced to overcome this challenge and paved the way for new friendships, additional trips near and far, and more birds discovered.

Offering an alternative to days afield, the evening bird club meetings continue to provide a wide-range of birding adventures to members and non-members alike. Special kudos go to our past and present program directors for their hard work in lining up the

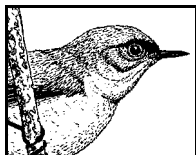
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**Should I report this bird?**



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guest speakers who have kept everyone entertained and informed during their presentations. And thanks to the speakers (many of whom are also bird club members) for sharing their expertise with us.

Providing people with the opportunity to expand their birding world is one of the more glamorous aspects of serving as a bird club board member, but the board also undertook a number of projects during 2008 to make operation of the club more efficient and to increase its outreach into the community. Noteworthy in this regard is the posting of an online version of the Albatross to the SCBC website. Those members who desire to do so can opt-out of receiving the printed version of the Albatross and save some trees and the bird club the fees of mailing their copy of the Albatross. Although we still receive our hardcopy version, for those days when I'm in the office and longing to be somewhere else, I've found it reassuring to check the online Albatross for weekend field trips and see that refreshing light at the end of the work tunnel.

The bird club also played a substantial role in the publishing of the "Birding and Wildlife Watch Kit for Santa Cruz County" by the Visitors' Center. Most of the area descriptions were derived from the bird club's Birding Guide, and several bird club members reviewed the final versions of the pamphlet and checklist and offered their educated comments for improving these documents. In addition to knowing that this kit was an immediate success (the initial mass printing was gone in a matter of months), the bird club received \$1500.00 for its active involvement in this project.

Other efforts were a little more mundane, such as the printing of remittance envelopes for membership dues. Besides simplifying the renewal process, we also distributed envelopes at organized events (San Lorenzo River Festival) and ad-hoc events (the Code 6 Cafe co-sponsored with the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory at the Dusky Warbler site). The results: our treasurer and the membership chairman reported dues were received more quickly for the current bird club year and that 40 new members joined the bird club over the summer. We're not so naive as to believe that the remittance envelopes were the sole motivator for these results, but I'm sure it was a contributing factor. Another process improvement was standardizing the way the bird club handles requests from other groups for bird club assistance. We amended our by-laws with a section on "Sponsorships" and created a form that people can complete when requesting aid from the bird club. Besides these "official" requests for help, several bird club members volunteered their services in fund-raising activities (such as the Mission Springs Outdoor Education's bird-a-thon) or leading field trips for the Monterey Bay Birding Festival.

Returning to other "group" events, after a several-year hiatus, the club sponsored a club picnic at De Laveaga Park on October 5th that was well-attended (30 members). Nice setting, good food, and great company—an unbeatable combination!

Remaining activities for 2008 include the upcoming Audubon Christmas Bird Counts, where bird club members play a key role in organizing and conducting the Santa Cruz and Moss Landing CBCs (as well as other counts outside the confines of Santa Cruz County). So it's been one fantastic year for the bird club, and Bernadette and I thank everyone for a productive year that was fun from beginning to end.

Wishing everyone happy birding in 2009!

***Bob and Bernadette Ramer***



*Members, friends, and families enjoyed the SCBC picnic on October 5, 2008. Photo: David Suddjian*

#### **ERRATA:**

In the print version of the Nov/Dec 2008 Albatross, the following acknowledgement was inadvertently left out of the article, "Habitat Associations and Nesting Success of Yellow Warblers in Santa Cruz County, CA" by Matthew Strusis-Timmer.

*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 Gerdts Research Fellowship; the latter two through the Department of Biological Sciences at San Jose State University.*

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# Events Calendar

## January-February 2009

Check the online SCBC Calendar of Events for any recent updates.  
<http://www.santacruzbirdclub.org>

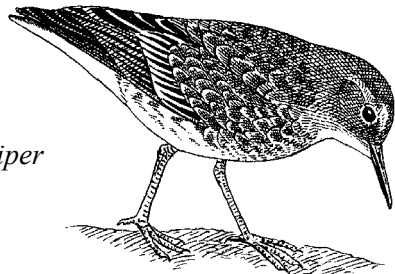


### Sunday, January 4 Beginning Bird Walk Natural Bridges State Beach

Let's check out the different habitats of Natural Bridges, Antonelli Pond, the Terrace Point fields and lookout, Younger Lagoon, and the Homeless Garden. Rain cancels.

**Directions:** Meet at 8:30 AM at the Delaware Avenue entrance to Natural Bridges State Beach.

**Leader:** Kathy Kuyper, [chswift@hotmail.com](mailto:chswift@hotmail.com)



*The elusive  
Rock Sandpiper*



### Friday, January 9 West Cliff Drive and Lighthouse Field

We'll look for seabirds and shorebirds (maybe including the elusive Rock Sandpiper) along West Cliff Drive and land birds in Bethany Curve Park and Lighthouse Field.

**Directions:** Meet at 8:00 AM at the corner of West Cliff Drive and Woodrow Avenue.

**Leader:** Steve Gerow, (831) 426-2476, [stephengerow@aol.com](mailto:stephengerow@aol.com)



### Saturday, January 10 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. (\$8 entry fee per car)

**Directions:** Meet 8:00 AM at Starbucks on the corner of Airport Rd. and Freedom Blvd. Heavy rain cancels.

**Leader:** Roger Wolfe, (831) 475-9465, [rogwolfe@cruzio.com](mailto:rogwolfe@cruzio.com)



### Wednesday, January 14 New Brighton State Beach and campground

We will be checking the RR tracks and the upper campground areas and scope the coastal area. This will be a half day trip, until around noon.

**Directions:** Park on New Brighton Road, about 0.5 mile along MacGregor Drive, past the main entrance at around 7:30 AM.

**Leader:** Michelle Scott, [surfscooter61@yahoo.com](mailto:surfscooter61@yahoo.com)



*The coast at New Brighton State Beach*

*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 16**  
**Afternoon at the**  
**Watsonville Sloughs**

This late afternoon-to-sunset foray will seek wintering waterbirds and others in the sloughs of Watsonville, with possible geese, ibis, bittern, and interesting ducks. Rain cancels.

**Directions:** Meet at 2:30 PM in the parking lot behind West Marine, along Struve Slough, off Harkins Slough Road.

**Leader:** David Suddjian, dsuddjian@aol.com



**Wednesday, January 21**  
**Rancho Del Oso**

Back we go to lovely RDO to explore the canyon from beach to forest and marsh to scrub. Possible Northern Pygmy-Owl and Hermit Warbler. Walking distances (mostly easy and leisurely) may range from 2-4 miles. We might visit another spot as we return toward town. Bring water and something to eat. Rain cancels.

**Directions:** Meet at 7:15 AM at Beckman's Bakery, 2341 Mission St. in Santa Cruz to carpool or at 7:45 AM at the Waddell Beach parking lot off Highway 1, immediately after crossing Waddell Creek.

**Leader:** David Suddjian, dsuddjian@aol.com



**Thursday, January 22**  
**SCBC Meeting @ 7:30 p.m.**  
**Speaker: David Suddjian**

**2008: A Look Back at the Bird Club's Big Year**

Big Year "czar", David Suddjian will lead us on a fun look back at our Big Year 2008, a record-breaking kaleidoscope of field trips seeking as many species as we could find in the county in one year. We can relive the year's successes, surprises, highlights, and some of the disappointments, and take a look at how the Big Year was planned. The program will feature photos of many of the trips, our destinations, the birds, and the birders too. Come and enjoy interesting trivia and learn a few things about our birds and local birding.

**Location:** Santa Cruz Museum of Natural History  
 1305 East Cliff Drive, Santa Cruz, CA

**Big**  
**Year**



**Friday, January 23**  
**San Lorenzo River**

This trip will focus in part on gull identification. We will check three or four regular gull areas and may find eight or more species, plus some hybrids, with multiple varied plumages. For those who prefer the saner side of birding, there will be diving ducks, sparrows, and other things to look at.

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

**Leader:** Steve Gerow, (831) 426-2476, stephengerow@aol.com



**Friday, January 23**  
**Long-Eared Owl stakeout**

Perhaps a wintering Long-eared Owl will return to O'Neill Ranch Open Space in Soquel. No guarantees, but 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. Dress warmly for standing around on a winter evening. Rain cancels.

**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. 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.

**Leader:** David Suddjian, dsuddjian@aol.com



**Saturday, January 31**  
**Upper UCSC**

We will look at both the birds and the habitats, passing through redwood, mixed evergreen and knobcone pine forest, maritime chaparral, and some coastal prairie. The chaparral could have two or three species of manzanita in bloom, which may attract early Allen's Hummingbirds. Learning the calls of common forest birds will be another focus of this trip. Expect 4-5 miles of walking, with some hills, but a fairly slow pace. Rain cancels.

**Directions:** Meet at 8:00 AM in the North Remote Parking Lot, at the north end of Heller Drive.

**Leader:** Steve Gerow, (831) 426-2476, stephengerow@aol.com



**Sunday, February 1**  
**Beginning Bird Walk**  
**Quail Hollow County Park**

Quail Hollow at this time of year has a good variety of woodpeckers, sparrows, and perhaps Wilson's Snipe. All welcome.

**Directions:** Meet at 8:00 AM. at the Quail Hollow CP parking lot. Heavy rain cancels.

**Leader:** Alex Rinkert, arinkert12@comcast.net



**Wednesday, February 4**  
**Felton area**

We'll visit two or three areas to sample a variety of birds of evergreen forest, riverside riparian, and chaparral. Possible Pileated Woodpecker, Varied Thrush, Wood Duck, Northern Pygmy-Owl, and maybe Red Crossbill. Moderate, mostly easy hiking for up to a few miles. Rain cancels. Possible \$8 state park entrance fee, pending choice of stops.

**Directions:** Main start at 8:00 AM at Felton Covered Bridge Park at the intersection of Graham Hill Road and Mount Hermon Road.

**Leader:** David Suddjian, dsuddjian@aol.com



**Friday, February 6**  
**Natural Bridges and vicinity**

We'll start at Natural Bridges and from there, who knows? There is usually something unexpected around this area, no matter what the season.

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

**Leader:** Steve Gerow, (831) 426-2476, stephengerow@aol.com



**Saturday, February 7**  
**Panoche Valley**

Our annual trip to one of the pristine birding destinations in the state, first birded by departed SCBC members Carolyn Fredrickson and Steve Allison. We'll traverse through oak woodland and open grassland via back roads in search of a variety of California favorites. Targeted species include Phainopepla, Mountain Bluebird, Prairie Falcon, Ferruginous Hawk, and Bald and Golden Eagles. Other possibilities include Mountain Plover, Lewis's Woodpecker, Vesper Sparrow, Greater Roadrunner, Long-eared Owl, and Chukar. This is a full day trip, so bring lunch and a full tank of gas. Carpooling is strongly recommended, due to limited parking on the narrow roads.

**Directions:** People traveling from Santa Cruz wanting to carpool should meet at Aptos Wells Fargo at 6:30 AM. The drive to Paicines will take about 1 hour, 20 minutes. Everyone meet at Paicines Store on Hwy 25, approx. 11 miles south of Hollister, at 8:00 AM.

**Leader:** Clay Kempf, (831) 761-8260, ltjaeger@cruzio.com



**Wednesday, February 11**  
**New Brighton State Beach**

We will be checking the RR tracks and the upper campground areas and scope the coastal area. This will be a half day trip, until around noon.

**Directions:** Park on New Brighton Road, about 0.5 mile along MacGregor Drive past the main entrance at around 7:30 AM.

**Leader:** Michelle Scott, surfscoter61@yahoo.com



**Friday, February 13**  
**Meder Canyon**

There is always a good number of birds wintering here, including rarities in some years. We'll see what's around this season.

**Directions:** Meet at 8:00 AM at the southern end of the trail into the canyon (Grandview Street just west of Escalona)

**Leader:** Steve Gerow, (831) 426-2476, stephengerow@aol.com





**Sunday, February 15**  
**Merced and San Luis**  
**National Wildlife Refuges**

Come and enjoy the fun of birding in the Central Valley wildlife refuges. Merced and San Luis NWRs have been an almost annual field trip for the Santa Cruz Bird Club. Our target birds are the Sandhill Cranes, Snow/Ross's Geese, White-fronted Geese, White-faced Ibis, and the many ducks, shorebirds, and raptors of the Central Valley. Bring lunch and liquids for a full day of birding.

**Directions:** Meet at 6:30 AM at the Aptos Wells Fargo Bank, Soquel Avenue, off the State Park Drive exit from Hwy 1 or at 9:00 AM at the first viewing platform at Merced NWR. Get to Merced NWR by taking Hwy 152 east, past Los Banos, to Hwy 59 north. Follow Hwy 59 for several miles to Sandy Mush Rd, turn left, and watch for the wildlife refuge a short way on the left.

**Leaders:** David Ekdahl and Connie Vigno, (831) 335-5742, dekdahl@earthlink.net



**Wednesday, February 18**  
**Baldwin Creek and vicinity**

This trip will visit coastline, marsh, scrub, riparian, and ag. fields in search of a variety of species, including rails, sparrows (maybe Swamp), gulls (maybe Glaucous), and more. Plan for up to a few miles of mostly level walking. We may continue into the afternoon if the weather is favorable, so bring lunch and drink.

**Directions:** Meet at 7:15 AM at Beckman's Bakery, 2341 Mission Street in Santa Cruz.

**Leader:** David Suddjian, dsuddjian@aol.com



**Friday, February 20**  
**Neary Lagoon**

All the noisy projects of fall have ended, so we should finally be able to enjoy the sounds of birds and other wildlife. We will look for interesting wintering birds, and maybe find an early swallow or two or other signs of the approaching spring.

**Directions:** Meet at the west entrance at 8:00 AM.

**Leader:** Steve Gerow, (831) 426-2476, stephengerow@aol.com

*Aerial image of Neary Lagoon, 1906.*  
*(Photo: Library of Congress)*



**Sunday, February 22**  
**Pajaro Valley**  
**Ducks and Geese Extravaganza**

Visit South County for a half-day field trip to Watsonville, Struve, and Harkins sloughs. We'll also visit Col lege Lake if winter rains (come on rain!) have delivered enough water.

**Directions:** Meet at Erik's Deli by OSH on Green Valley Road at 8:00 AM. Heavy rain cancels.

**Leader:** Nanci Adams, nanciconchita@aol.com



**Thursday, February 26**  
**SCBC Meeting @ 7:30 p.m.**  
**Speakers: Bryan Largay & others**

**Topic: Elkhorn Slough Tidal Wetland Project**

Several presenters will provide an overview of the project, including a description of the rapid ecologic changes occurring in the slough, their root causes, and our process for understanding the ecosystem and developing management options.

**Location:** TBD—Please check the SCBC calendar online for information closer to the date.



**Saturday, February 28**  
**Pogonip**

Another look at birds and their habitats—we will explore several types of evergreen forest, some grassland, and edge habitats. There should already be several species of flowering plants in bloom, and we are likely to hear some just-arrived Orange-crowned Warblers, plus resident and wintering birds.

**Directions:** Meet at 8:00 AM at the north end of Spring Street.

**Leader:** Steve Gerow, (831) 426-2476, stephengerow@aol.com



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# Santa Cruz Birds

By David Suddjian & Steve Gerow  
Including reports from  
September 1 to October 31, 2008

Migrant **Greater White-fronted Geese** made a fairly strong appearance in October, starting with 22 at Harkins Slough on October 6 (JWa), and 49 there on October 14 (JLo). A flock of 38 flew over Capitola on October 16 (DSu), and a lone bird stayed along the San Lorenzo River near Soquel Avenue, October 22-24 (SG, v.ob.). The season's first **Snow Goose** accompanied a flock of Canada Geese flying by a boat offshore on October 12 (SJ), then two flew over Capitola on October 16 (DSu), and two were in West Struve Slough on October 18 (RN et al.). Four **Cackling Geese** flew over Capitola, adding to a goose-filled day on October 16 (DSu). Then single birds turned up grazing near West Struve Slough on October 18 (RN), flying over the west side of Santa Cruz on October 20 (SG) and wandering along the San Lorenzo River in Santa Cruz on October 22-24 (SG, v.ob.).

**Wood Ducks** gathered at Neary Lagoon in higher than usual numbers this October, with a peak count of 26 on October 28 (PVL). **Blue-winged Teal** reports included two at Struve Slough on October 3 (TN) and a female in the Baldwin Creek Marsh from October 29 into early November (DSu, v.ob.). A female **Common Merganser** was off Wilder Creek Beach on October 17 (SG, JW, et al.). This species has rarely been found on the ocean in Santa Cruz County, but earlier this season small numbers were noted flying up and down the county coast on several occasions.

A **Red-necked Grebe** was swimming off West Cliff Drive on October 23 (SG). The county's second **Laysan Albatross** sighting this fall was a highlight of a pelagic trip on September 26 (SJ). One to two **Flesh-footed Shearwaters** turned up on several pelagic trips from September 13 to October 12 (SJ, MS). A **Manx Shearwater** was studied and photographed from a boat off the county's north coast on September 13 (MS). **Black-vented Shearwaters** appeared in the bay in late September, with small numbers reported on several boat trips in county waters starting September 21 (MS, SJ). Numbers increased in October, with reports of observations from shore becoming regular after October 29 (v.ob.).



*Manx Shearwater photographed by Jeff Poklen on September 13.*

Swarming Storm-Petrels in the north part of the bay peaked in mid-September, declining noticeably after that, but with moderate numbers around until at least October 5. **Ashy Storm-Petrels**, the most abundant species, reached a high of about 10,000 on September 14 (SJ). **Black Storm-Petrels** were in much smaller numbers in county waters this year, with the highest count of 60 on September 14 (SJ). Among the rarer species, up to five **Wilson's Storm-Petrels** were found on pelagic trips from September 12-14 (SJ, MS). **Fork-tailed Storm-Petrels** included three on September 13, five on September 14 (SJ), and one still around September 19 (MS). Single **Leach's Storm-Petrels** found at different spots on September 13 and 14 were extremely rare finds in Santa Cruz County waters (SJ). While regular very far out off the coast of Central California, records of this species from pelagic trips off this county (or anywhere in Monterey Bay) are very few. **Least Storm-Petrels** included one on September 13 and 4 on October 5 (SJ).

**American White Pelicans** were apparently present in the south county sloughs throughout the period, though they are now becoming so ordinary in that area that fewer people are reporting them; we encourage reports of white pelicans to help monitor this species' changing status. The largest number reported this period was around 100 at Struve Slough on September 27 (TN), and numbers declined after early October. Rather startlingly out of context were two **American Bitterns** flying over Highway 1 toward West Struve Slough on September 5 (DSu), passing over the highway at a height of about 150-200 feet! There were several reports of **White-faced Ibis** in the Watsonville

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Slough system through the period, with a high count of 15 at Harkins Slough on October 29 (NA, KKy).

An adult **Broad-winged Hawk** flew over Soquel on September 25 (DSu). A juvenile **Rough-legged Hawk** was watched near Baldwin Creek on October 29 (DSu et al), then an hour later it was seen four miles down the coast, flying by Antonelli Pond (SG). **Merlins** were found in good numbers, with 31 reports in September and October.

A **Snowy Plover** at Baldwin Creek Beach on October 2 was away from usual locations for the species (LG, BRa). Undoubtedly, the most notable shorebird of the season was a cooperative **Mountain Plover**, enjoyed by many observers as it wandered some plowed fields near Table Rock in the western part of the Wilder Ranch coast from October 29-November 6 (PB, KKs, DSu, WN, LG, BB, JWa, v.ob.) This was only the fourth record for Santa Cruz County and the first since 1991 with multiple observers. Otherwise very rare shorebirds were lacking, and most “rare but regular” species were sparse.



*Mountain Plover, near Baldwin Creek Beach. Photographed on October 29 by Wendy Naruo.*

**Lesser Yellowlegs** were reported in small numbers in the Watsonville Slough system on several dates up to September 10 (v.ob.), with the highest count being four at Struve Slough on September 8 (RW). One appeared at the mouth of Waddell Creek on September 20 (GS), and two somewhat late birds were at Watsonville Slough on November 1 (RW). The second **Ruddy Turnstone** of the season was spotted on October 12 on the Santa Cruz Harbor breakwater from a boat heading out for a pelagic birding trip (LT et al.). The only certain **Semipalmated Sandpiper** found this season was

a juvenile in Watsonville Slough near Ford Street September 8-10 (RW, PB). **Baird's Sandpipers** were very scarce, the only reports being two at Watsonville Slough on September 5 (RW, DSu) and one quite late at West Struve Slough on November 1 (RW). **Pectoral Sandpipers** were also scarce, with a total of nine reported from four spots from September 16-October 18 (v.ob.). Around six **Short-billed Dowitchers** at Harkins Slough October 26-28 were very late for Santa Cruz County (TN), and one lingered there until November 1 (RW).

A juvenile **Sabine's Gull** made a rare onshore appearance at Capitola Beach on October 7 (DSu). Among several reports from pelagic trips, the high count was 19 on September 13 (SJ). There were no reports at all of Arctic Tern in the county this season, and Common Terns were quite uncommon. Four **Pigeon Guillemots** off Baldwin Creek Beach on October 30 were rare for this late in fall (OJ, RT, AS, MO). **Xantus's Murrelets** found on pelagic trips in county waters included one on September 13 (MS), and 11 on October 5 (SJ), which included six of the more expected subspecies *scrippsi*, plus five of the rarer southern subspecies *hypoleucus*. A **Tufted Puffin** was found on a pelagic trip on September 27 (SJ).

A **White-winged Dove** visited a Seacliff yard on September 22 (DSu, RG). Four **Northern Pygmy-Owls** calling in the same area at dusk in the headwaters of Boulder Creek in Big Basin Redwoods State Park on September 3 were exceptional, as it is rare to hear more than one or two at a time (DSu). Perhaps it was a family group. A Pygmy-Owl at Meder Canyon on October 27 was the first report from that site in several years, although the species was formerly resident there (KA). A wintering **Burrowing Owl** returned to UCSC by October 26 (JB), but others were at Wilder Ranch near Fern Grotto on October 21-23 (LG, MSc, BRa) and near Yellow Bank Creek on October 21-27 (AP). A **Lesser Nighthawk** cruised around Ocean View Summit at Big Basin on September 4 (DSu). A **Common Poorwill** calling near Ben Lomond on October 17 was likely a migrant (SN).

An aggregation of about 100 **Vaux's Swifts** at Sempervirens Reservoir in Big Basin, at dusk on September 9, included three **Chimney Swifts** for our 7th county record (DSu). Now five of our seven records are from that park! Sempervirens Reservoir has proven



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to be a productive spot to watch for migrant Vaux's as they congregate there at dusk, but it is closed to the public, and birding visits have only been sporadic. Elsewhere, counts of fall migrant Vaux's Swifts this season were all single-digit. Four more sightings of **Black-chinned Hummingbirds** (DSu, SG) brought this fall's tally to 10 birds for this season, spanning August 14 to September 20, about average for recent years. Ten **Willow Flycatchers** from August 31 to October 5 were fewer than in most recent years (v.ob.).

**Tropical Kingbirds** were at Harkins Slough on October 4 (CC, RK), Antonelli Pond on October 11 (SG), Lighthouse Field State Beach on October 14 (DSu et al), and Neary Lagoon on October 17-18 (RB). The season's 11 **Western Kingbirds** spanned August 3 to September 18 (v.ob.). Four migrant **Cassin's Vireos** were reported from August 15 to September 14 (DSu, AR). A **Horned Lark** at Wilder Ranch State Park on October 22 was the only one found in the county so far this year (DSu, KKy, WN). Migrant **Red-breasted Nuthatches** were widespread and fairly numerous in October, peaking at mid-month (v.ob.). It was their best fall showing in a number of years, but it remains to be seen if very many will stay to winter. A **White-breasted Nuthatch** visited a feeder north of Soquel from September 9-14 (CJ).

The most celebrated bird of the season was a **Dusky Warbler** that appeared at Antonelli Pond from October 16-18, for the 3rd county record (OJ, v.ob.). The bird was seen by dozens of birders and was photographed. Remarkably, it frequented the very same spot where the county's first Dusky was found in October 1997! Nine **Western Bluebirds** were at Last Chance Road on September 1 (BR, RR). Eight bluebirds at the Pajaro River near Thurwachter Road were unexpected in an area where none had ever been reported (VR). It was a great season for **Red-throated Pipits** in California, and we had our best showing in the county with at least six birds found, possibly seven. There were seven prior county records. This season's birds were all coastal, mostly found in agricultural settings: flying over Antonelli Pond on October 19 (OJ, AS, FO), near Swanton Pond on October 20 (CE), two or three at Wilder Ranch west of Dairy Gulch on October 20-24 (MB, RW), near Pajaro Dunes on October 20 (DS), and west of Baldwin Creek on October 26 (DSu, CE).



*A big gallery of birders enjoying a rare Dusky Warbler at Antonelli pond on October 18, 2008. Photo by Cindy Cummings.*

Rare fall warblers had a below average season, especially for the vagrant species, with a slow September and low diversity. Fall season-to-date totals for rare western species were six **Nashvilles**, 25 **Black-throated Grays**, 11 **Hermits** and five **MacGillivray's**. Four **Tennessee Warblers** from September 11 to October 16 was above average (SG, PB, RT, DSu). A **Northern Parula** at Sunset State Beach on October 31 was the latest county record by a couple days (VR). Four **Chestnut-sided Warblers** spanned September 11 to October 5 (DSu, DE et al., LG, TM). A **Magnolia Warbler** was at Arana Gulch on October 1 (DSu). A **Blackburnian Warbler** at Antonelli Pond on October 19-20 was nicely photographed (DSi, v.ob.). **Palm Warblers** had a below average showing, with 12 from September 30 to November 3 (v.ob.).

Eight **Blackpoll Warblers** were found from September 25 to October 20 (v.ob.); one flew around a pelagic birding boat well offshore on September 28 (SJ). Additional **Black-and-White Warblers** included one flying by an offshore boat on September 13 (SJ) and one at Natural Bridges on October 19 (AM). A **Hooded Warbler** was at New Brighton State Beach on September 21 (DSu). Natural Bridges' summering **Summer Tanagers** (staying to September 15, see last issue) were followed by a male at Rancho Del Oso on September 11 (DSu), a female at Natural Bridges on September 25-30 (SG, LG, MSc, BR), and a female or

imm. at King Street in Santa Cruz from October 20 to at least November 7 (RT, OJ). **Chipping Sparrows** had another strong fall showing, with 15-16 from September 3 to October 25 approaching last fall's record of 22, and about five times the recent average (v.ob.). Eleven **Clay-colored Sparrows** from September 29 to October 26 was a bit above average (v.ob.)



*Photo of the Blackburnian Warbler at Antonelli Pond, on October 19, by Pete Solé.*

**Vesper Sparrows** were picked out at Terrace Point on September 6 (SG, LG, WG) and Swanton Pond on September 29 (DSu). Three **Lark Sparrows** were found along the coast from September 11 to October 26 (DSu et al, BR & RR et al.). On the heels of August's **Black-throated Sparrow**, an immature at Natural Bridges from September 25-28 provided our third county record (PB, SG, LG, v.ob.). An above average number were found in Northern California this fall. A **Swamp Sparrow** was obliging at Natural Bridges on October 24 to November 2 (ST, RT, AS, v.ob.). **Lapland Longspurs** rattled our north county coast, with at least seven from October 20-26 (SG, PB, LG, DSu, EL, AR, CE), and more in November. This was our best showing in several years.

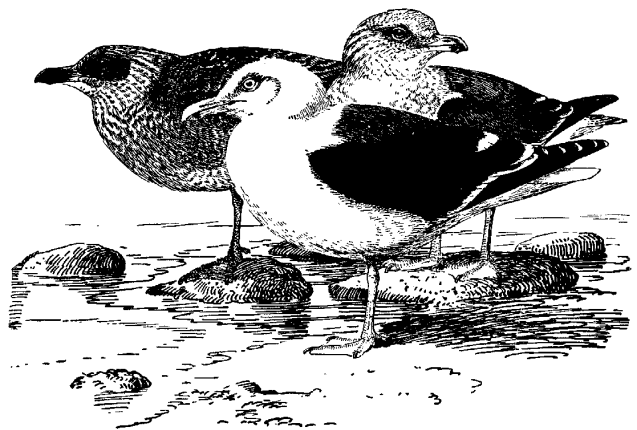
**Rose-breasted Grosbeaks** appeared at Capitola on September 1 (DSu) and Pinto Lake County Park on September 28 (PB et al.). An immature male **Indigo Bunting** popped up at the lower San Lorenzo River on October 22 (SG, LG, AR). The only large aggregation of **Tricolored Blackbirds** was in the usual area near the south end of Swanton Road, with over 1,000 on October 8 being a representative count (DSu et al.). A female **Orchard Oriole** was a treat at Baldwin Creek marsh on October 29 (DSu, KKs, PB, LG, JWa, BB,

WN). A tardy immature female **Hooded Oriole** at Natural Bridges on October 8 was about a month late (NA). Four reports of **Red Crossbills** from the northwest end of the county (three from Rancho Del Oso) continued a pattern from late summer, but there was no indication of any broader presence. **Pine Siskin** showed signs of a building fall invasion beginning in mid-October, with numerous flocks being widely noted (v.ob.).

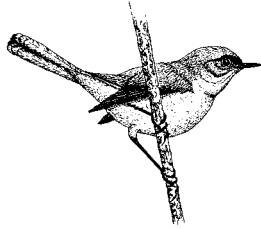
\* \* \*

**Cited Observers:** Nanci Adams, Kumaran Arul, Ruth Barcelon, Bonnie Bedzin, Phil Brown, Mary Crouser, Cindy Cummings, Judy Donaldson, Todd Easterla, Chris Emmons, Eric Feuss, Alexander Gaguine, Steve Gerow, Lois Goldfrank, Wally Goldfrank, Regina Gowan, Oscar Johnson, Carol Jordan, Ruth Kerr, Kim Kuska (KKs), Kathy Kuyper (KKy), Earl Lebow, Janet Linthicum, Jim Lomax (JLo), Amy McDonald, Paul Miller, Monterey Seabirds (MS) fide Roger Wolfe, Tom Morell, Wendy Naruo, Sydney Nash, Todd Newberry, Rod Norden, Meagan Oldfather, Francis Oliver, Alberto Palleroni, Jeff Poklen, Bernadette Ramer, Robert Ramer, Van Remsen, 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), Linda Terrill, Ryan Terrill, Scott Terrill, Paul Van Loan (PVL), Jeff Wall (JWa), Jim Williams (JWi), Roger Wolfe. "v.ob." means various observers.

*Please report interesting observations to David Suddjian at [dsuddjian@aol.com](mailto:dsuddjian@aol.com) or 831 479-9603*



*Western Gulls*



## Should I report this bird?

Using resources on the Santa Cruz Bird Club website

By Cindy Cummings

One day in early November, I was birding on a trail by Baldwin Creek on the north coast of Santa Cruz. It was quite birdy, and I was having a lot of fun identifying the many species. I spotted a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher and was excited because I had only seen a couple of them in Santa Cruz County.

I got home, wondering if I should report seeing the bird, and went online to the Santa Cruz Bird Club website. I clicked on Local Bird Information and then clicked on Reporting Bird Sightings. For Gnatcatchers, it says to “report all records except those from breeding areas in the vicinity of Loma Prieta, Castle Rock and elsewhere along Summit Ridge.” “Hmm...guess I should report it.” I sent an email to MBB, reporting the Blue-gray Gnatcatcher sighting.

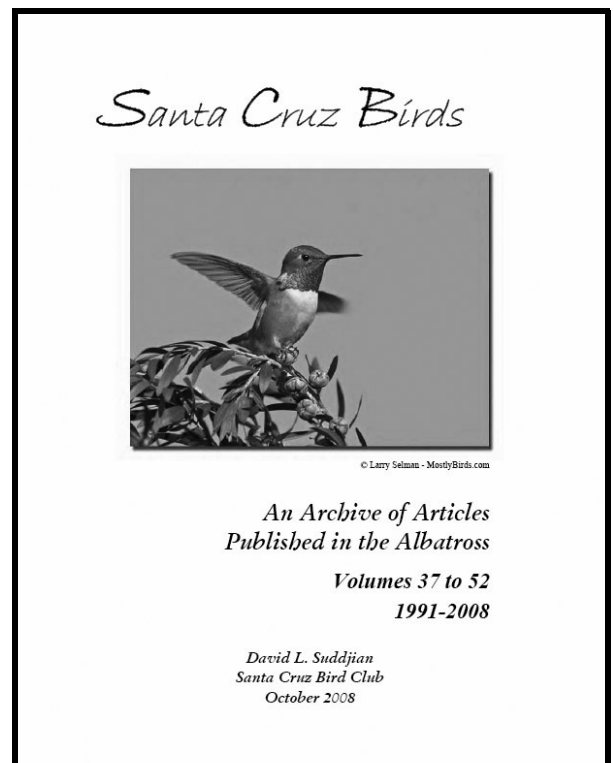
While on the computer, I decided to do a little research. A new document was recently added to the bird club website—*Santa Cruz Birds: An Archive of Articles Published in the Albatross*. This is a PDF document of articles from 1991 to the present. The articles, by David Suddjian and Steve Gerow, provide a summary of reports of bird sightings from Santa Cruz County. What’s nice about a PDF document is that it’s searchable. In the “Find” box at the top of the page, I entered “Blue-gray Gnatcatcher”, and it highlighted the first occurrence of the word in the document. I kept clicking the forward button and read all the instances of Blue-gray Gnatcatcher in the document. It was very interesting. I learned that Blue-gray Gnatcatchers are regular in scrub along the north coast in the winter, but quite rare otherwise. The few reported sightings are probably due to little coverage of this north coast area. So if you want to see a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher in the winter, head for the scrub along the north Santa Cruz coast.

This searchable document is very useful in other ways. I typed in a few uncommon and rare birds that I’d like to see and learned a little more about when and where I should be looking. For example, I’ve wanted to see an Evening Grosbeak in Santa Cruz County. So I searched the document and found that since I started birding 10 years ago, there have only been 3 or 4 years that more than a couple of them were seen. And none have been reported since 2004. Sycamore Grove and Zayante Creek were places they have been seen a few times, so I will try to spend some time this winter staking out these areas.

This useful document can be found on the *Local Bird Information* page of the Santa Cruz Bird Club website. Other useful and interesting information accessible from this page includes *SCZ Bird Data Summaries* (Bird Data Reports from David Suddjian) and *SC Year List* (Annual Bird Records).

Check it out! <http://santacruzbirdclub.org>

*Cover page of the PDF archive document*



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## Big Year 2008 Settles in for Winter

*Progress report through November 30, 2008*

The Bird Club's Big Year 2008 kept up the hunt for new birds in late fall and came up with 274 species found through the end of November! We met our upgraded goal of 270 species with an Orchard Oriole at Baldwin Creek on October 29 and passed it the same day with a nearby Mountain Plover. We have fielded an eye popping 132 trips so far this year, increasing our pace for the year to one trip every 2.5 days!

October and November trips mostly came off without hitches, although rain shortened one and winds and Christmas tree traffic hindered another. Several trips experienced very warm temperatures that slowed the bird action by mid-morning. Our most frequent destinations included sites in western Santa Cruz (11 trips) and areas along the county's north coast (10 trips). We added two more Big Year pelagic adventures thanks to Shearwater Journeys and Monterey Seabirds. We ventured up to the summit area in hopes of montane visitors and also had a special Burrowing Owl search and the Club's first-ever bicycle field trip. 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](http://www.santacruzbirdclub.org/The_Big_Year.html)



*Blackburnian Warbler again, with wings spread.*  
*Photo by Pete Solé.*

Table 1 lists the 14 new species we found since September 30 (the cutoff for the last progress report). We added 12 species in October, but just two in November. Rare shorebirds continued to disappoint, the Mountain

Plover notwithstanding. And the vagrant landbird season remained very slow until a flurry in the last half of October. We had many trips scouring the usually productive areas on the westside of Santa Cruz in early October, but this year there was little rarity action at that key time. Thankfully, things picked up in the second half of the month. By the end of October, our hopes for new species were mostly pinned on the rare end of the spectrum, always unpredictable and difficult to catch up with on field trips planned one or two months in advance. Even so, our trips have enjoyed a wide array of rare species that were never—or hardly ever—seen before on Club field trips in the county in prior years.

Among the more difficult species, we added two more “code 6” species: Dusky Warbler and Mountain Plover, 3rd and 4th county records respectively! We found five new “Code 5s”: Rough-legged Hawk, Blackburnian Warbler, Harris's Sparrow, Lapland Longspur, and Orchard Oriole. Four new “Code 4” species were: Tropical Kingbird, Horned Lark, Lark Sparrow and Swamp Sparrow. The unexpectedly elusive Golden Eagle (Code 3) was finally spotted at UCSC on November 23. Through November we have logged 103 Code 1 species (100%), 99 Code 2s (99%), 31 Code 3s (84%), 22 Code 4s (56%), 13 Code 5s (21%) and six Code 6s (7%). Short-tailed Shearwater remains the lone Code 2 species yet to be found, and odds are slim we will spot one from shore in December.

There have been some “misses”—species we could have expected to find—both rarities we tried for and missed and regulars that did not appear. Along with Short-tailed Shearwater, other misses were Fork-tailed Storm-Petrel, Semipalmated and Baird's sandpipers, Red-naped Sapsucker, Eastern Phoebe, Red-throated Pipit, Blackpoll Warbler, Yellow-breasted Chat, and Rose-breasted Grosbeak. Arctic Tern and Lawrence's Goldfinch did not appear in the county this year and are not expected in December.

By the time this summary reaches our readers, the Big Year will be over, or very nearly so. And you will know how things played out in our final month. We have a decent chance to add a few more species by the end of the Big Year, but we'll be hard pressed to push 280. Some reasonable possibilities include Black-legged Kittiwake, Ancient Murrelet, Red-naped Sapsucker, or Rose-breasted Grosbeak. And equally likely might be some rarer bird from a broad array of exciting possibilities.

—David Suddjian

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**Table 1. New species found between October 1 and November 30.**

Species	Date	Location
Pectoral Sandpiper	10/1/2008	Natural Bridges SB
Cassin's Auklet	10/12/2008	Offshore
Tropical Kingbird	10/14/2008	Lighthouse Field SB
Dusky Warbler	10/17/2008	Antonelli Pond
Lark Sparrow	10/17/2008	Wilder Ranch SP
Blackburnian Warbler	10/19/2008	Antonelli Pond
Horned Lark	10/22/2008	Wilder Ranch SP
Lapland Longspur	10/22/2008	Wilder Ranch SP
Rough-legged Hawk	10/29/2008	near Table Rock
Mountain Plover	10/29/2008	near Table Rock
Swamp Sparrow	10/29/2008	Natural Bridges SB
Orchard Oriole	10/29/2008	Baldwin Creek
Harris's Sparrow	11/15/2008	Meder Canyon
Golden Eagle	11/23/2008	U. C. Santa Cruz



*A large group of birders wait at sunset for a Burrowing Owl to appear at the UCSC campus, November 15. Trip leader, Jack Barclay, is third from the right. Photo by David Suddjian.*

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# Photo Album



*Steve Gerow at Younger Lagoon, October 3.*



*Barry McLaughlin, Michele Scott, and Judy Donaldson at the picnic. Photo: Bob Ramer*



*Kathy Kuyper scans the North Coast, October 8.*



*Heading out at Terrace Point, October 3.*



*David Sidle and Tom Morell at Natural Bridges, October 12.*

*Photos are by David Suddjian unless otherwise noted.*

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## **New SCBC Members**

Arden Sweet	11/08
David Meyers	11/08
Inger Marie Laursen	11/08
Toni Danzig	11/08
Steven Davidson	12/08

**Welcome!**



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## **Assembling**



## **Albatross**

### **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](mailto:calqua@sbcglobal.net)

—Judy Donaldson, Editor



*White-faced Ibis*

**Input deadline for  
March/April issue  
of The Albatross  
is February 1, 2009**

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## Watsonville Wetlands Watch 2009 Docent Training Program



Enrollment for the Watsonville Wetlands Watch 2009 docent class is now open. New docents will attend a six-week training course beginning Feb. 18, 2009. The course costs \$40 and will be held Wednesday evenings and Saturday mornings.

Birders are ideal candidates to become Watsonville Wetlands Watch docents. Bird enthusiasts are given the opportunity to share their passion with others, which helps inspire stewardship of the wetlands and bird populations.

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

Docents also have the opportunity to help with wetlands restoration, work in the library or greenhouse at the Fitz Wetlands Education Resource Center, and 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, visit our website:

[www.watsonvillewetlandswatch.org](http://www.watsonvillewetlandswatch.org)

To enroll in the 2009 Docent Training Program, please contact the Volunteer Coordinator, Kathy Fieberling, at 831-427-0654, or email [kathyfiebing@yahoo.com](mailto:kathyfiebing@yahoo.com). The deadline for enrollment is Feb. 10, 2009.

### The ALBATROSS

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<http://santacruzbirdclub.org/>

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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.