

Albatross

PHOEBASTRIA NIGRIPES

"I'VE GOT A LITTLE LIST"

by Todd Newberry

Soon after some of us SCBCers set out on our annual Mother's Day walk at Rancho del Oso this spring, we encountered a superb MacGillivray's Warbler; it perched in the sun and sang nobly atop a bush close by the road. Even on Mother's Day, we had to declare this bird a male. It was the brightest one we had ever seen, the finest singer of its sort we had ever heard: a bird to remember. But I remember, too, the early sunlight at our backs that seemed to make the bird glow, and the smell of the sea, the valley's loveliness, the pleasure of companionship.



*The Great Mother's Day
MacGillivray's Warbler
Photo by David Sidle*

After a while the warbler wandered off along the slope. And that was probably just as well; the thrill subsiding, our attention was beginning to wander, too. We had enjoyed our bird of the day. Maybe the warbler had enjoyed his birdwatchers of the day. So had hikers, who smiled as they passed us on the road.

As we gathered our wits, somebody commented on how birdy the spot was. It hadn't seemed so when we had stopped for that warbler. Back then, disturbed by our arrival, birds must have melted into the thickets. Now some chickadees and a Downy Woodpecker and even two Pygmy Nuthatches were gleaning insects in the tree above us. Song Sparrows and a very fine yellowthroat approached us from below the slope; another MacGillivray's Warbler was singing atop a coyote bush—rather a duller bird than the first, we agreed expertly. Towhees were working the roadside dirt. A Wrenit—so often heard, so strange when seen—stared at us as it hopped through the underbrush. And now we heard a kingfisher rattling along Waddell Creek and the deep cooing of Band-tailed Pigeons up the slope and Purple Finches singing up there. Now we noticed a loose flock of swallows overhead—even a few White-throated Swifts—heard some distant grosbeaks singing in their frantic way—a Bewick's Wren where the warbler had been—jays abounding—two flickers calling—a Red-tail screaming near the ridge. *(continued on page 7)*

Inside:

Calendar of SCBC Events



Monterey Bay Birding Festival

Santa Cruz Birds



Trip Reports



Member Updates

#300



Events Calendar

September - October 2009

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

Welcome everyone!

We have a full schedule for the fall, and I am looking forward to seeing many of you on these trips. We have a variety of destinations in and out of the county, plus several afternoon trips for those of you who find the early morning times hard to manage.

Happy Birding!

Phil Brown, Field Trip Coordinator



Saturday, September 5 Monterey Seabirds SCBC Group Charter

An early fall pelagic outing reserved for SCBC members and guests only—limited to the first 25 who sign up. The fall season is the peak of seabird diversity and the time for megararities on the Monterey Bay. The list of possibilities is long. Weather permitting we plan to head directly to Santa Cruz County waters for the storm-petrel flocks (Ashy, Black, and possibly Least and Wilson's) if they are present. So come pad your county list.

Cost: For 25 participants the price will be \$66.00 per person, but with fewer, the scale will slide upward. If we only get 20, the price will be \$82.50 per person.

Directions: Meet at the Monterey Bay Whale Watch Center at the end of Fisherman's Wharf in Monterey. Be there by 7:00 AM to check in. Boat departs at 7:30 AM. Dress warmly in layers, bring lunch and beverages.

To reserve a spot, call (831) 375-4658

Or reserve and get more details online at:

<http://www.montereyseabirds.com>

Leader: Roger Wolfe, rogwolfe@cruzio.com



Friday, September 4 Neary Lagoon

We'll search for fall migrants. This can be a good time of year for uncommon western species like Willow Flycatcher, and in some years eastern rarities occur around this time.

Directions: Meet at the west entrance (near Bay and California in Santa Cruz) at 7:30 AM.

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



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

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

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

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

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



**Sunday, September 6
Gilroy Tour**

Meet with Gilroy resident, Jean Myers, to view local specialties such as Yellow-billed Magpie and Western Bluebird in a tour of 2-3 Gilroy hotspots. Half-day trip.

Directions: Meet at Jean's 14-acre property (with rare sycamore alluvial habitat) near Hwy 152 and Watsonville Rd. at 8:00 AM. Take Hwy 152 east from Hwy 1 towards Gilroy. Just after coming down the mountain, turn left onto Watsonville Rd. (poorly marked turn is shortly before nurseries and Gilroy Gardens). After 1 mile, turn left onto Redwood Retreat Road, 2nd driveway on the left (#4265). Bathroom available. Wear hiking shoes and long pants. Carpoolers can meet at County Offices in Santa Cruz at 7:00 AM.

Leader: Jean Myers, (408) 846-4655, birdermom@starband.net



**Monday, September 7
Labor Day at Elkhorn Slough**

Shorebirding is the best way for locals to spend this loopy weekend. Bring lunch.

Directions: Meet at Aptos Wells Fargo at 7:00 AM sharp; by 8:00 we will be on Jetty Rd. Itinerary depends on mobs and imagination and may include Struve Slough on return leg.

Leader: Todd Newberry, (831) 426-8741



**Wednesday, September 9
Late afternoon
at the Watsonville Sloughs**

An afternoon outing to seek shorebirds and other waterbirds at some spots along the sloughs west of Watsonville as the sun heads west. Chance for a rarity or two. Plan for some easy walking over moderate distances. Scopes will be helpful, and it may get cool if it is foggy or windy.

Directions: Meet at 3:30 PM at parking lot behind the West Marine building in Watsonville along Struve Slough, off Harkins Slough Road.

Leader: David Suddjian, dsuddjian@aol.com



**Friday, September 11
Natural Bridges area**

It's getting into the peak time for rare fall migrants. We'll see what surprises this September brings.

Directions: Meet at 7:30 AM at the Delaware Avenue entrance to Natural Bridges State Beach.

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



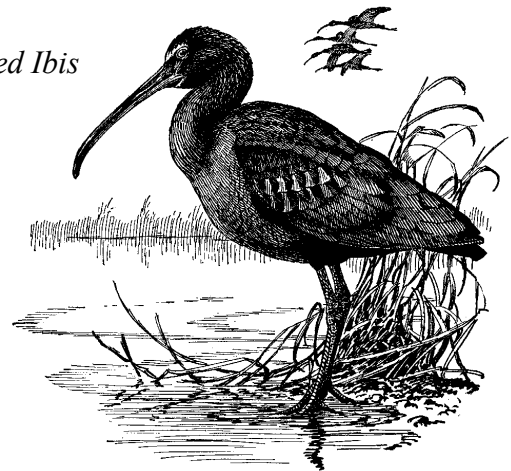
**Sunday, September 13
Quail Hollow**

The pond will be at its lowest point all year and the muddy shoreline may attract herons, egrets, and Wilson's Snipe. Unusual warblers and flycatchers are also possible at this time of year.

Directions: Meet in the Quail Hollow parking lot at 8:00 AM.

Leader: Alex Rinkert, arinkert12@comcast.net

White-faced Ibis



**Wednesday, September 16
Watsonville Sloughs
and Pajaro River mouth**

This is the leader's birthday, and he'll be hoping for some special bird as a nice present! We'll explore a handful of hotspots looking for migrant shorebirds and landbirds, with a chance for rare species. Plan for some easy walking over moderate distances. Scopes will be helpful, and plan for a range of possible temperatures. Half day trip, extending past noon if things are interesting.

Directions: Meet at 8:00 AM at parking lot behind the West Marine building in Watsonville along Struve Slough, off Harkins Slough Road.

Leader: David Suddjian, dsuddjian@aol.com



Friday, September 18
Arana Gulch

Another search for migrants and arriving wintering birds.

Directions: Meet at 7:30 AM at the entrance on Agnes Street, by the end of Mentel Avenue in east Santa Cruz (off the south side of Soquel Avenue, two blocks east of Trevethan and Hagemann).

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



Friday, September 18
Afternoon at the
Watsonville Sloughs

This late afternoon-to-sunset foray will seek waterbirds and others in the Watsonville sloughs. Rain cancels.

Directions: Meet at 3:00 PM in the parking lot behind the West Marine building along Struve slough, off Harkins Slough Road.

Leader: Rod Norden, rod.norden@gmail.com

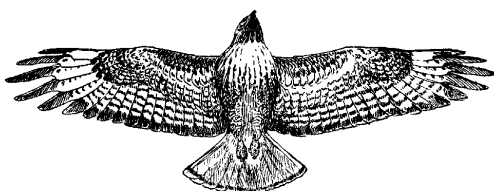


Saturday, September 19
Southern San Mateo County

Join a fall migration adventure in southern San Mateo County, as we cross the county line and head north along the coast. We'll carpool straight to Pescadero Marsh to look for migrant shorebirds, followed by a brief stop at Pigeon Point for some seabirding from shore, and finally, Gazos Creek Road for riparian zone landbirds. Target birds are any vagrants we can find, plus at least 100 common species. Whether you are learning about birds for the first time or building your San Mateo County bird list, this trip is for you! These two spots have boasted some wild vagrants in years past, including Bar-tailed Godwit and Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher, so let's see what we can dig up.

Directions: Meet at Coffeetopia, 1723 Mission Street, at 7:00 AM, and pack a lunch. We'll arrive back in Santa Cruz around 3:00 PM.

Leader: Scott Smithson, scottndawn@sbcglobal.net



SPECIAL WEEKEND
EVENT



5th Annual
Monterey Bay
Birding Festival

Friday, Saturday, Sunday,
September 24, 25, 26

"Bridging the Americas"

See details and registration information on page 7.

Thursday, September 24

Talk @ 7:00 p.m.

Speaker: Norma Ferriz

Subject: Veracruz River of Raptors

NOTE: This opening talk at the MBBF is being sponsored by the Santa Cruz Bird club. The September meeting is canceled so that members can attend this presentation.

The Veracruz River of Raptors sites monitor the world's largest concentration of migrating raptors, including most of the world's population of Broad-winged Hawks, Swainson's Hawks, and Mississippi Kites. Therefore, this project provides an unparalleled opportunity to monitor the health of migratory raptor populations of the Americas. Days of 50,000 are not rare, and 700,000 a day can also occur! About 4 million raptors belonging to 25 different species soar the Veracruz sky every fall in their way to Southern Mexico, Central and South America. Since raptors do not migrate over water, the eastern migrants are funneled into the Veracruz' narrow coastal plain of Mexico between the Sierra Madre Oriental and the Gulf of Mexico. The Veracruz River of Raptors project is a joint initiative among Pronatura in Mexico and Hawk Mountain Sanctuary and HawkWatch International in the United States.

Cost: \$10

Location: Watsonville Civic Plaza Council Chambers
275 Main St, Watsonville, CA



Wednesday, September 30
Gazos Creek and vicinity

The riparian corridor and adjacent scrub habitats along Gazos Creek can be very good for fall migrant land-birds, with a history of rarities, and good timing for enjoying returning wintering birds. Pending weather and interest we may visit some other nearby areas to add some varieties. Bring snack and liquids, and plan for a range of temperatures. We will walk about 3-4 miles round trip along Gazos Creek Road, mostly level at a slow pace. Half day trip.

Directions: Meet at 7:15 AM at the junction of Gazos Creek Road and Highway 1. From Santa Cruz, take Highway 1 north into San Mateo County, past Ano Nuevo State Reserve. Watch for Gazos Creek Road on the right immediately after the Gazos Grill.

Leader: David Suddjian, dsuddjian@aol.com



Friday, October 2
Antonelli Pond and Terrace Point

This area always attracts a good variety of species this time of year and has a history of notable rarities. If nothing else, we should find a nice assortment of regular species, and may spend some time focusing on sparrow identification.

Directions: Meet at 7:30 AM on the west side of Antonelli Pond, near the west end of Delaware Avenue in Santa Cruz.

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



Friday, October 2
Afternoon at the
Watsonville Sloughs

This late afternoon-to-sunset foray will seek waterbirds and others in the Watsonville sloughs. Rain cancels.

Directions: Meet at 3:00 PM in the parking lot behind the West Marine building along Struve slough, off Harkins Slough Road.

Leader: Rod Norden, rod.norden@gmail.com



Sunday, October 4
Beginning Bird Walk
at Natural Bridges

Our local birding hotspot is a great place to get an introduction to the birds of Santa Cruz County.

Directions: Meet at 8:30 AM. at the Delaware road entrance to Natural Bridges.

Leader: Rich Griffith and Margaret Perham, magpiejay@comcast.net



PICNIC!

Sunday October 4th
Santa Cruz Bird Club
Potluck Picnic
at DeLaveaga Park

Bring a dish to share and a beverage of your choice (no alcohol allowed). We will have access to a BBQ pit so if you want to BBQ something, hot coals will be blazing! The club will provide paper plates and utensils, but we encourage you to bring your own place settings to limit our contribution to the local landfill. You may want to bring a beach chair. Birds should be singing, so come and enjoy the afternoon festivities with the birds and your bird-loving friends.

Time/Place: 1:00-4:00 PM at the picnic area, 850 N. Branciforte Drive, in the main portion of the park, adjacent to the creek, between the playground area and the baseball fields. Come and enjoy the time with birds and other bird lovers.

Contact: Kathy Kuyper, chswift@hotmail.com



Wednesday, October 7
Rancho Del Oso

Once more to RDO, the north coast charmer, seeking migrants, wintering birds and possible rare species. We always enjoy a nice variety of species in the varied habitats, from ocean and beach to riparian and evergreen forest. Possible Hermit Warbler, Pileated Woodpecker and Northern Pygmy-Owl. Expect about 4 miles of walking, with some minor elevation change, but generally a slow pace. Bring liquids and something to eat. We'll continue to mid-day.

Directions: Meet at 7:30 AM at the Waddell Beach parking lot off Highway 1, immediately after crossing Waddell Creek. For late-comers, after scanning the sea and beach, we will head inland from there along the main road (Skyline to the Sea Trail).

Leader: David Suddjian, dsuddjian@aol.com



**Friday, October 9
Watsonville Slough area**

The focus will be on passerine migrants in the riparian and weedy habitats in this area, but we won't ignore any interesting waterbirds that might appear.

Directions: Meet at 7:30 AM at the Watsonville Wetlands Nature Center, 30 Harkins Slough Road (the south side of Ramsay Park) in Watsonville

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



**Sunday, October 11
Carmel River Warbler Chase**

This trip will focus on the Carmel River, a prime vagrant trap in the fall. Many rare warblers have been found at this spot, so lets see what is around. We may also chase other rarities reported in the area.

Directions: Meet at 7:00 AM at the Wells Fargo in Aptos to carpool to Carmel. Please contact the leader if you wish to meet in Carmel (at the back of the Crossroads shopping center, 8:00 AM). Please bring weatherproof clothing, water, and a snack.

Rain cancels.

Leader: Phil Brown, pdpbrown@gmail.com



**Friday, October 16
Harvey West Park**

The forested western slopes of this park are seldom birded, especially in fall. We'll find out what's here.

Directions: Meet at 7:30 AM at the start of the parking lot at the end of Evergreen Street, Santa Cruz. To get here, go north on River Street (Highway 9) one block north of Highway 1, and turn left onto Coral Street. Take Coral Street to the end, then turn left onto Evergreen Street.

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



**Sunday, October 18
Quail Hollow**

A nice variety of warblers and sparrows are expected, and some of the winter birds will have started to appear as well.

Directions: Meet at Quail Hollow parking lot, 8:00 AM.

Leader: Alex Rinkert, arinkert12@comcast.net



**Sunday, October 18
Monterey Seabirds
MPAS Pelagic Charter**

Santa Cruz Bird Club members are invited on this pelagic charter with Monterey Peninsula Audubon. October brings the richest diversity of seabirds to Monterey Bay and the best chance for seeing megararities. Streaked Shearwaters were found the last two years on mid-October pelagic trips. Other past October highlights have included Manx and Flesh-footed Shearwater, South Polar Skua, Yellow-billed Loon, Laysan Albatross and Tufted Puffin. Whale sightings included Orca, Blue, Sei, and Humpbacks.

Cost: For 25 participants the price will be \$66.00 per person, but with fewer, the scale will slide upward. If we only get 20, the price will be \$82.50 per person.

Directions: Meet at the Monterey Bay Whale Watch Center at the end of Fisherman's Wharf in Monterey. Be there by 7:00 AM to check in. Boat departs at 7:30 AM. Dress warmly in layers, bring lunch and beverages.

To reserve a spot, call (831) 375-4658

Or reserve and get more details online at:

<http://www.montereyseabirds.com>

Leader: Roger Wolfe, rogwolfe@cruzio.com



**Wednesday, October 21
Santa Cruz County North Coast**

This outing will visit a few of the productive spots along the north coast, seeking especially a variety of species and some rare birds. Last year at this time Red-throated Pipits and Lapland Longspurs were around, so who knows? It is a good time of year for the unexpected. We'll choose our destinations based on what which spots seem most likely to have interesting birds. Plan for easy walking over moderate distances. Bring a snack and drinks. We'll continue to mid-day.

Directions: Meet at 7:30 AM. at the Homeless Garden Project along Shaffer Road, off Delaware Avenue at the west end of Santa Cruz (near Natural Bridges and Antonelli Pond)

Leader: David Suddjian, dsuddjian@aol.com North coast at Baldwin Creek. Photo: David Suddjian



Thursday, October 22
SCBC Meeting @7:30 pm
Speakers: Don Roberson & Rita Carratello

Topic: Southwestern Australia, the Red Center, and Tasmania

Don Roberson and Rita Carratello traveled for ten days in southwest Australia focused on searching Dryandra Forest for Numbat and birds; visiting coastal heathlands; trying the mallee for a Malleefowl; and seeking the remaining specialty birds at sites south or east of Perth in search of 16 endemic/near-endemic birds. They then visited the Red Center and Uluru/ Ayer's Rock for five days before venturing on to Tasmania in search of the 12 endemics found there. Travel with them via Don's photos and Rita's videos in a multimedia presentation.

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



New Holland Honeyeater

(from www.anbg.gov.au)



Friday, October 23
San Lorenzo River

There is usually some sort of unusual sparrow along the lower stretch of the river this time of year. Migrant waterfowl and other interesting birds are also possible.

Directions: Meet at 7:30 AM at San Lorenzo Park (downtown Santa Cruz) by the duck pond.

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



Friday, October 23
Afternoon at the Watsonville Sloughs

This late afternoon-to-sunset foray will seek water-birds and others in the sloughs of Watsonville. Rain cancels.

Directions: Meet at 3:00 p.m. at parking lot behind the West Marine building along Struve slough, off Harkins Slough Road.

Leader: Rod Norden, rod.norden@gmail.com



Friday, October 30
Natural Bridges area.

We'll search for late migrants and wintering birds.

Directions: Meet at 7:30 AM at the Delaware Avenue entrance to Natural Bridges State Beach

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



An immature Black-crowned Night Heron, photographed by David Sidle at the San Lorenzo River.



Additional excursions:
Nature/Birding

Two nature walks you might enjoy, sponsored by the Valley Women's Club with a grant from the San Lorenzo Valley Water District.

Participants must be in good health, mobile, and able to participate in 2-2 1/2 hours of walking over uneven and varied terrain.

Email Carol Carson for more information: carson@carolcarson.com

- **Saturday, September 19, 10:30 AM**
 Secret Sandhills Nature Walk
 Jodi McGraw, Sandhills Expert and Ecologist
 Location: Quail Hollow County Park,
- **Saturday, October 17, 10:30 AM**
 Birds of the San Lorenzo Valley Nature Walk
 David Suddjian, Bird Expert
 Location: Quail Hollow County Park.



5th Annual Monterey Bay Birding Festival September 24-27, 2009

Details and registration information at:

<http://www.montereybaybirding.org>.

Purchase and print your tickets at home. Registration for each birding event is offered separately, so that participants can mix and match outings according to personal interests.

Registration: \$40 for the weekend.

Activity costs: from \$5 to \$130.

This year's theme: **BRIDGING THE AMERICAS**
Internationally known trip leaders and lecturers from North, Central, and South America will make this year's event the best one yet.

Some highlights of the programs:

- Afternoon workshops include lectures on shorebird ID, seabirds of the Pacific, an update on condor reintroduction in the Pinnacles National Monument, and an overview of birding sites and festivals in North America.
- Many display booths will be at the festival headquarters in the Watsonville Civic Plaza, including all the major optics vendors, plus a variety of tour companies and artists.
- Field trips will visit local wetlands, vagrant traps, private ranches, etc. throughout the tri-county region of Monterey Bay. Most trips depart from the Watsonville Civic Plaza where parking is free, but some trips will meet at the site.

Volunteer for the Festival

We are seeking volunteers to help with registration, organization of outings, giving directions to out-of-town visitors, etc

If you can help, please contact Dobie Jenkins by email or phone—information below. There will be a briefing before the festival, in mid-September.

When not working during the event, volunteers may join outings or workshops where there is room for them.

To volunteer or to ask questions, contact:

Dobie Jenkins

ann_dobie@yahoo.com

831-722-4720

Beach Walk



A pair of Black Oystercatchers stroll along the beach at Scott Creek mouth. Photo by Jeff Poklen

I've Got a Little List (continued from page 1)

A Swainson's Thrush started to sing right beside us. It was like a play resuming.

Eventually we felt we had reached a break in the action and could add some names to our day's bird list. That warbler, of course. One of us even opened his book and quietly marked it then and there on his life list. And we added a tick for the second one, too. And the towhees on the road and that thrush and—nice!—that curious Wrentit. Those little gleaners in the canopy and the noisy swallows in the sky; there were several species up there but for now we'd just put down "swallows." Did someone actually see those swifts? or just hear their chatter? Were we sure they were not Vaux's? We had only heard the kingfisher, but who doubted its call? The grosbeaks: at that distance, could they be robins? No, listen to their slurs and glissandos and their long phrases; robins just go cheerily "cheerio." But should we put a little "h" next to those heard-only birds on our list? Such, such are birders' quandaries!

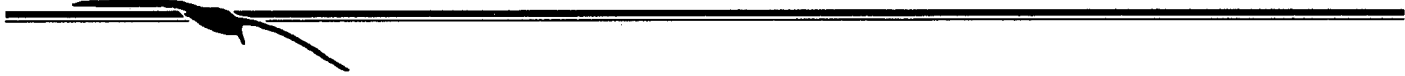
For my part, I willingly put down heard-only birds on my lists; I identify birds with my ears as much as with my eyes. For years, some birds even on my life list were ones I had only heard, never seen: a Great Gray Owl one night in Yosemite, a few Common Poor-wills out West and many Whip-poor-wills back East. Some of us hedge when it comes to listing birds we have heard but not seen, as if wholly aural encounters are not quite up to snuff. Why so? It is nice to both see and hear birds, but we all know plenty of them by their calls and songs. In fact, where foliage prevails, more often than not we bird with our ears first; our eyes merely confirm what our ears long since have noticed and recognized. Yes, we can be fooled by the birds we hear (but usually only at first, until something about the sound seems slightly off). We can be confused by similar vocalizations—say, Spotted Towhees singing like lusty Bewick's Wrens or titmice calling like hoarse chickadees or jays crying like hawks (or Merriam's Chipmunks whistling like Northern Pygmy-Owls!). And we can have lapses of memory about which dowitcher makes what call. Sometimes a bird even can sound uncannily like a species we would not expect it to sound like at all. Case in point: early this spring along the Rancho del Oso road I could have sworn I heard the distinctive "whit!" of a much-too-early Swainson's Thrush. David Suddjian has since

told me that a very few Song Sparrows there can confound even the veteran listener that way at that time of year. But if seeing is believing, so is hearing, and we have done our best. Shotguns and taxidermy settled some identifications in the old days, and cameras do that now; just patiently standing still can sort out surprisingly many others. But for the most part, I think that, on most of our lists, birds we have "only heard" rate equal standing with those we have "only seen."

My bird lists record my encounters with birds, and so their names evoke memories of places and times: field days alone or with friends, lucky glances from the kitchen or the car. Casual day-lists are as ephemeral as grocery lists, but a life list makes a big claim. A bird's name on my life list or a life-long state or even a county list should bring to mind now some encounter with that species—perhaps not the one that produced that first tick long ago, but at least one that would qualify for the list. If I cannot recall one (landlubber that I mostly am, where did I ever cross paths with a Sabine's Gull?), then the tick has lost its personal meaning. And since it is a personal list, that bird must come off my list until another occasion or better memory restores it. As my years increase but my memory doesn't, my lists risk growing shorter.

Besides their lengthening (so far!), what has happened over the decades is that my lists have changed in their importance in my life. When I started birding as a boy in New Jersey, my life list was all about names with feathers. Then the quality of birding's encounters came in. I found myself sharing with fine birders the thrills of discovering great rarities or simply of coming across impressive birds, rare or not, often in improbable settings. My lists recorded superb days in the field. Sometime toward middle age, perhaps with intimations of mortality, I felt the deep tug, like an undertow, of natural beauty. I began to notice with a new keenness then the small and charming, the grand and sublime. Lately I find the very idea of a life list both consoling and desperate.

Some encounters even with familiar birds are so striking they merit a life list in their own right. A peregrine's stoop, a crane's dance, a cloud of shearwaters or swifts, a thrush's song, a strange plumage, some outrageously cute fledglings: these belong in my album of special memories, my box of souvenirs. And around here—as once long ago in a secret, for-birders-



only New Jersey—field days often immerse me in natural beauty. That warbler: the beauty of the bird itself and of the place, the light, the very air—the superb coming-together of it all—all hidden in that tick on the list. Among our lists, we could compile one for our lives’ most exquisite birding moments, a project for sleepless nights.

Since the more enduring bird lists of the sort I have suggested record memorable encounters, and since I keep my best memories in my heart, I keep trying to deepen the sense of intimacy with nature that comes over me now and then during field days. Thoreau told us how to enhance our experience of nature: don’t rush into it, let it come to us. Birding is not about drive-up/wow!/drive-away vista points. In a birdy place like that one where the Mother’s Day warbler enchanted us, I slow down, pause, stand still or even sit, breathe, listen for tiny creatures, listen to the air. Big animals that we are, we make a wake of disturbance wherever we go. After being quiet for ten minutes or so, I can already feel the creatures in a habitat stirring, the place recovering at its own pace from my arrival. The best hunters and trackers speak of diminishing the wake of their disturbance and enlarging the wake of their awareness. We birders can do this.

To spread my wake of visual awareness, I may sketch some bird’s more evident traits—just the robin’s throat, the junco’s tail, the mockingbird’s wing-patch, the gull’s bill. I mean, sketch them from the bird itself, not from memory or a book. Then I surround the sketch with comments and arrows, in that way conversing graphically with that bird. My sketches resemble hen-scratching, but drawing helps me look much more slowly and closely at a bird, brings my hands into play, makes me pick out traits I can actually notice then and there. The sketch that results is like a list, but of my own perceptions.

Or, to widen my awareness now that I have settled in and things have settled down, I may focus on a bird’s behavior. I do this partly for the sheer pleasure of snooping into other creatures’ lives. Niko Tinbergen called it “watching and wondering.” Many “behavior” days are exercises in observational stamina; but, like a detective, I do gradually notice things about that bird’s ways, and sometimes these are details I never noticed before. Can I describe what I observe? Yes, by making diagrams—drawings of movements, like the steps in a

dance. Those ravens in the sky: I can draw their swoops and dives, draw what they are doing. I look at my diagram and back at the ravens. Oh, I missed that regular bank and turn, that slide to the side. But what are those ravens up there doing—playing? Well, maybe...I hear thrushes singing, but maybe—maybe—what they themselves hear is howling and barking. And why does that bird keep chasing the other bird away? No—wait—now it seems to be begging. Sometimes making sense of a bird’s behavior feels so complicated! When that happens, I try to get back to just watching and wondering.

Watching and wondering took hold of us on Mother’s Day as we stood gazing at that superb warbler and then noticed birds seeming to well up around us. Sure, most birding moments amount to less than this one did. But I think that occasions like this touch our hearts more as we open ourselves more to nature all through our lives. We birders go forth with an ingenuous trust in the natural world to return our embrace. When it does, I try to extend the moment, to make it not a brief spasm (so to speak) but an extended spell, an affair of the heart, which, after all, birding is. And then, of course, I put it on my list.

Further reading

Here are two excellent, relevant books: W. A. Mathieu’s *The Listening Book* (Shambala, 1991) reveals that our world teems with sounds and even with music and tells us how we can hear it if only we will listen. I think Jeremy Mynott’s *Birdscapes* (Princeton, 2009) is the finest book yet written about the hold birds exert in all our lives; it is a classic suddenly in our hands.

And here is a web site for people who, afflicted by “artistic” shyness, have convinced themselves that they cannot draw—Mike Patterson’s *How to write convincing details*:

www.pacifier.com/~mpatters/details/details.html

Near the end of his article, in “How to make sketches,” he suggests “eight steps to good details” and then provides “a short course in field sketching.” He helps you build three different shapes of birds from just a couple of ovals. The drawings grow before your very eyes! You realize you can do this! These are confidence-making lessons toward a singularly rewarding skill.

Santa Cruz Birds

By David Suddjian & Steve Gerow
Including reports from
March 1 to May 31, 2009

The **Greater White-fronted Goose** and **Cackling Goose** stayed at San Lorenzo Park until April 17, making a wintering stay of almost exactly six months (AG, DSu, SG). A pair of **Canada Geese** apparently had a nest on a sea stack near Baldwin Creek Beach, with a bird on the nest presumably incubating through at least April 29 (DSu, JWa et al.), but the outcome was not determined. Nesting is rare on our north county coast. As in past spring seasons, various pairs and small parties of Canada Geese roamed in the Santa Cruz area, but still no breeding record from the city of Santa Cruz (v.ob.). A **Wood Duck** at Rancho Del Oso on April 25 (DSu) was the only one reported away from the San Lorenzo River watershed and Neary Lagoon. Only two **Blue-winged Teal** were found: a pair at Younger Lagoon on April 25 (SG, LG). A late **Green-winged Teal** was at College Lake on May 12 (LG, JP).

Redheads were present in the Watsonville Slough system for the 4th spring in a row, with a high count of six at Struve Slough on April 28, and at least one staying to May 25 (AM, JWa). They have been found in this area each spring, with probably some of the same birds each year. Redheads have never been confirmed to nest in the county, but some careful watching would be in order if their spring presence continues. Migrant **White-winged Scoters** were found on just three dates from March 5 to April 5, totaling 5-6 individuals (AK, KA, KK). A female **Common Goldeneye** at Waddell Creek mouth from May 11-29 was very late (DSu). A **Red-necked Grebe** lingered at the Santa Cruz Municipal Wharf from April 10 to May 7, molting to alternate plumage by the end of its stay, and providing good looks for many birders (KJ, v.ob.). It was unusual to have a spring bird stay so long, and it may have been injured.

Rare off the ocean in the county during spring were an **Eared Grebe** at Struve Slough on April 4 (JWa) and a **Clark's Grebe** at Waddell Creek lagoon on May 8-16 (DSu et al.). Single **Laysan Albatrosses** were seen in county waters off Santa Cruz on May 20 and 23 (MF, MS). **Murphy's Petrels** were found within Monterey Bay— as close as six nautical miles to shore

—for the first time ever, with two to four seen in Santa Cruz County waters; the only prior county record was from April 1991. Two Murphy's were seen on May 20, and one on May 22 (MF). Two on May 23 included one in Santa Cruz waters and another in Monterey waters, with the first photographic evidence obtained for our county (MS, RW, JP). A rare spring record of **Flesh-footed Shearwater** was provided by one southwest of Santa Cruz on May 20 (MF).



Laysan Albatross (above) and Murphy's Petrel (below), May 23, 2009. Both photos by Jeff Poklen.



American White Pelicans were present in the Watsonville Sloughs area and Pajaro Dunes through the period, with a high count of 65 at Harkins slough on May 11 (JD). Significant mortality of **Brandt's Cormorants** due to poor food supplies occurred in March and April, coinciding with failure of early nesting

Santa Cruz Birds (continued)

efforts this season and an unusual early spring influx of adults, perhaps from failed nesting efforts elsewhere (v.ob.). Six Brandt's in mid-Bay waters on May 31 were unusually far offshore for this near-coastal species (MS). A **Pelagic Cormorant** swimming in Younger Lagoon on April 25-26 was in an unexpected spot (SG, LG), while one up the San Lorenzo River past Riverside Avenue continued the unusual local pattern of use of that river (SG et al.). Meanwhile, a flock of about 100 adults flying past Baldwin Creek Beach on May 15 was an exceptional concentration (JP).

Breeding season **American Bitterns** continued at Struve Slough and Pinto Lake (AR-G, AG, NA, BR, v.ob.). **Great Blue Herons** had four nests at Pinto Lake this year (BR, LG); nest building near the Santa Cruz Harbor was the only other nesting evidence reported for the county, but it is unknown how many nests were present there. Does anyone know? **Great Egrets** had 10 nests at Pinto Lake, the county's only regularly-used rookery (BR, LG). Four reports of **White-faced Ibis** from Struve Slough included high counts of 11 on March 22 (SH, PMy) and 13 on April 11 (AM), with the last report of seven on April 28 (JW). A tagged adult **Bald Eagle** passed over Glen Canyon Road on May 31 and was photographed in Scotts Valley on June 1 (BS, MB). According to the Ventana Wilderness Society, it was a 6-year old female that had been released on Santa Rosa Island and had spent time this past winter with California Condors at a condor feeding station at Big Sur.

A light morph adult **Swainson's Hawk** was at Harkins Slough on April 18 (MST, SS). The only reports of **American Kestrel** were from the Santa Cruz area, of about three pairs (v.ob.). Twenty reports of **Merlins** this reporting period concluded with a late bird at Pajaro Dunes on May 3 (PMe). The only nests of **Peregrine Falcon** confirmed for the county this year both failed (fide JL). A **Prairie Falcon** at Quail Hollow Ranch on April 19 was rare for spring and exceptional in the Santa Cruz Mountains (KJ). In addition to a handful of reports of **American Avocet** in the Pajaro Valley, one was at Capitola Beach on April 18 (DS, SS). A **Solitary Sandpiper** satisfied a number of viewers and photographers at the San Lorenzo River on May 1-4 (SG, vob), and was likely the same one that was in the same spot on May 2, 2008.



Solitary Sandpiper photographed on May 4, 2009 by Jeff Poklen.

Three reports of migrant **Ruddy Turnstones** included two at Capitola Beach on May 3 (DSu), 14 at West Cliff Drive on May 7 (LG) and one there on May 8 (SG). The flock of 14 tied our county's record high count for recent years, and in an impressive coincidence, Lois also had the previous high of 14 at West Cliff, three years prior, but just one day later—May 8, 2006. A **Black Turnstone** at Pajaro Dunes on May 3 was feeding with **Sanderlings** on extensive sandy beach, away from its typical habitat (PMe). Three **Red Knots** flying up the coast at West Cliff Drive on April 5 were very rare for the county in spring and were the 2nd earliest ever. Even odder, though, were seven alternate-plumaged Red Knots that were found disheveled and injured in Santa Cruz urban yards near May Avenue and Glenwood Avenue on May 9 (EM et al.). All seven subsequently expired, and three are now specimens in the collection at UCSC. There was no unusual weather associated with the occurrence, and except for occasional storm and wind-caused “wrecks” of Red Phalaropes, the event was otherwise unprecedented among shorebirds in our county.

A **Baird's Sandpiper** at the San Lorenzo River on April 29 provided just the 4th (and earliest) spring record for the county (RL, EC). The wintering **Rock Sandpiper** stayed until April 6, having molted into alternate plumage by March 29 (v.ob.). Seven **Franklin's Gulls** were spotted from May 9-23 (DSu, OJ, AH, MS). Late gulls included a **Mew** at Santa Cruz on May 19 (SG), **Herring** at Scott Creek Beach on May 15 (JP), and **Thayer's** at the San Lorenzo River on May 1-4 (SG). Two to four **Glaucous Gulls** were at Wad-

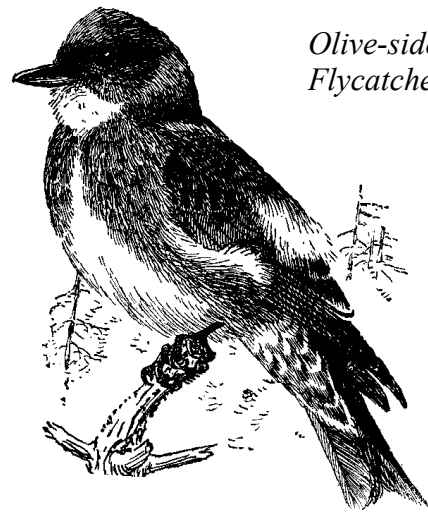
dell Creek Beach from March 19-30 (JP, TN, DSu). Late Glaucous were at Capitola Beach on April 18 (SS) and (exceptionally so) at Waddell Creek Beach on May 15 (DSu). A **Black Skimmer** was at Waddell Creek Beach on May 29 (DSu). A tally of 189 **Pigeon Guillemots** flying west past Lighthouse Point during 30 minutes on the evening of April 8 was a very high count (OJ).

Reports of **Xantus's Murrelets** in May provided the first spring records that are known with certainty to have been in Santa Cruz County. One was seen on May 22 (MF), while two were seen on May 31 (MS). Another amazing pelagic occurrence was provided by the oiled remains of a **Parakeet Auklet** found on Manresa State Beach on May 2 (JG fide HN). Documented by photographs, this was just the 2nd record for Santa Cruz County. However, as with the first record—also a beachcast specimen, found in spring 1947—it is unknown where the bird was when it died, and a carcass might possibly be carried by ocean currents some distance before being found on shore. Parakeet Auklets were found by pelagic trips off Southern California this past winter. Two **Tufted Puffins** were on the Bay on May 31 (MS).

Eurasian Collared-Doves spread further this spring. The first inland record for the north coast portion of the county was one at Big Creek on May 1 (LG, JP), then one was 0.9 mile inland at Rancho Del Oso on May 9 (DSu). Others in new places included one in the hills northeast of Scotts Valley on May 25 (BMn, KM), and a new colony at Pajaro Dunes (PMe, JWa, JW, RWa). Farther afield, four perched on the deck of a research vessel on May 22, nine nautical miles off of Lighthouse Point (MF) (and the same day a **Mourning Dove** also flew around that ship.) **Burrowing Owls** generated some excitement near Swanton Pond. One bird first reported March 10 was joined by a second owl at the same burrow by March 14 (JWa, JL, JB, v.ob.). The pair lingered until March 22, but no courtship activity or other evidence of nesting was observed, and none were found on multiple checks after that date.

Three **Black Swifts** flew over China Grade in Big Basin on May 19 (DSu), the only ones reported this period. Rancho Del Oso hosted two rare migrant hummingbirds this spring—a male **Black-chinned Hummingbird**, the first spring migrant in four years, on

May 15 (PB, DSu); and a female **Calliope Hummingbird** on April 21 (DSu). A drumming **Red-breasted Sapsucker** along Waddell Creek downstream from Swing Hill on April 25 (DSu) was at a regular breeding spot. A couple more **Pileated Woodpeckers** turned up in unexpected locations, continuing a pattern of spring-time wandering. One along Soquel Creek downstream from Highway 1 on March 31 was just the second record for Capitola (DSu). The first ever for Natural Bridges State Beach roamed through the eucalyptus and cypress groves on April 29 (SG, HS, MSw).



*Olive-sided
Flycatcher*

An **Olive-sided Flycatcher** arrived unusually early again on the east side of DeLaveaga Park on April 1 (BR). This was the same spot where one was recorded last spring on March 31, tying the early-arrival record for the county. The lone male **Dusky Flycatcher** was back on territory at Ocean View Summit in the Big Basin area on May 6, returning for its fourth year (DSu, v.ob.). A rare migrant **Cassin's Kingbird** gave a good start to a field trip at the west edge of Santa Cruz on April 10 (SG et al.), at first along Shaffer Road, then across Highway 1 in Moore Creek Preserve. A singing **Red-eyed Vireo** was at Sky Meadow Lane in Big Basin on May 19 (DSu). Rare migrant swallows included a **Purple Martin** over Soquel on March 30 (RW), and a **Bank Swallow** at Rancho Del Oso on April 28 (DSu).

Two **Red-breasted Nuthatches** at Natural Bridges on April 19 (MST) were the last lingerers from this winter's moderate incursion. A pair of **House Wrens** nested at Quail Hollow this season, first reported nest-

Santa Cruz Birds (continued)

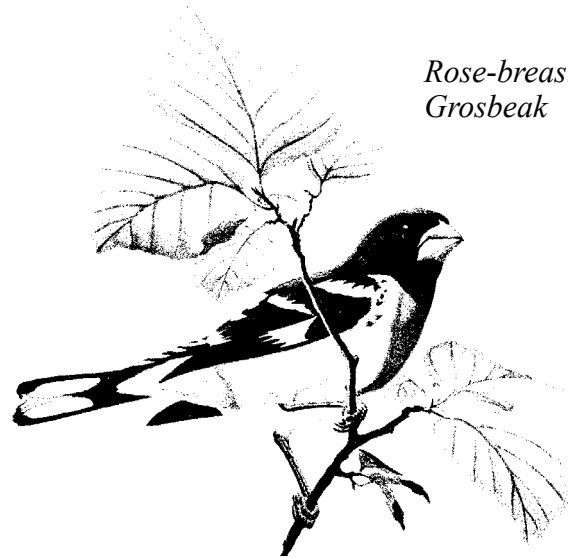
building on April 13, and with young on the nest by May 23 (AR, v.ob.). This is the first confirmed nesting report for anywhere in the San Lorenzo Valley. The species is a very local breeder in Santa Cruz County, occurring mostly along the crest of the Santa Cruz Mountains, and in the Pajaro Valley area east of Watsonville. One singing at Sunset State Beach on April 18 (SS) was at the only other disjunct site where nesting has been confirmed in the county in recent years, though it is not known if any nested there this year.

Western Bluebird news was again encouraging, with nesting confirmed at new locations along Valencia School Road (KP), which was the first in the Aptos area in many years, and along Larkin Valley Road (FM). Bluebirds also returned to nesting sites occupied last year at Merk Road, Quail Hollow, and Last Chance Road (HS, RS, DSu, PR, JA, AR, LG, v.ob.). A **Northern Mockingbird** was out of its usual range at Davenport Landing on March 25 (DSu); mockingbirds are rare along the coast northwest of Wilder Ranch.

A **Nashville Warbler** at Rancho Del Oso on April 25 was the only one reported this season (DSu). A **Townsend's Warbler** was lost at sea over 12 miles offshore on May 22 (MF). A spring migrant **Hermit Warbler** along the Pajaro River May 3 (PMe) was in lowland riparian habitat, where they are rare. A **Palm Warbler** foraged through the willows at Natural Bridges March 13 to April 8 (PB, SG, v.ob), most likely a bird that wintered locally. **MacGillivray's Warblers** returned to their breeding area around Rancho Del Oso, with the first appearing April 21, and at least four males on territories by May 6 (DSu, v.ob.). The only **Yellow-breasted Chat** found this season sang at Pajaro Dunes on April 26 (CR). A **Western Tanager** in Meder Canyon on March 17 (SG) was probably a wintering bird. Spring migrant tanagers came rather late, the first not until April 22 (SG), and were generally noted as sparse this season.

A **Chipping Sparrow**, rare away from breeding habitat in spring migration, was along the San Lorenzo River in Santa Cruz on April 17 (SG et al.). The first (and so far only) **Lark Sparrow** for the county in 2009 was at Antonelli Pond May 28 (LG, BR). A **Fox Sparrow** at Ocean View Summit in Big Basin on May 6 was notably late (DSu). Ten **White-throated Sparrows** were reported this period, only one of them previously reported (v.ob.). The last wintering bird lingered at a

Glen Canyon feeding station until April 26 (BS), then a late migrant stopped at a Ben Lomond feeder on May 5 (AW). In recent years **Dark-eyed Juncos** have started to nest in urban and suburban lowlands along the mid-county coast, away from their usual forest habitats. This spring the pace of this expansion accelerated, as illustrated by a total of 21 males found singing on territories in Capitola during the period (DSu). There were only 2-3 pairs breeding in Capitola the prior few years, and none at all before that.



*Rose-breasted
Grosbeak*

One of the wintering male **Rose-breasted Grosbeaks** reported the last issue turned up for one last visit to a Soquel feeder on March 31 (NC, PS). Spring migration brought more to the county, with five reported from various spots May 21-30 (KM, DSu, SG, JWa), including an adult male on May 22 photographed on board a research ship seven nautical miles offshore (MF)! A female **Indigo Bunting** stopped at Antonelli Pond May 28 (LG, BR).

Tricolored Blackbirds were confirmed to be breeding again this year at the Last Chance Road pond on April 22 (DSu, JWa), currently the only active breeding colony known in the county. A wandering flock of 55-60 flew over Neary Lagoon on May 21 (SG). A male **Yellow-headed Blackbird** stayed along Shaffer Road on the west side of Santa Cruz from April 24-29 (AG, EB, v.ob.), and a female visited the Swanton Pond area and nearby Scott Creek Marsh on April 25-26 (DSu, LW.)

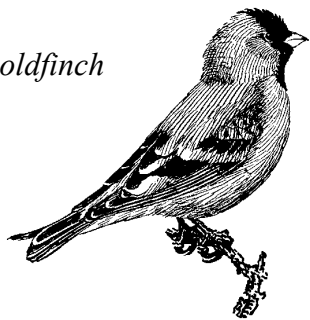
A **Great-tailed Grackle** in the Antonelli Pond/Natural Bridges area April 5-13 (SvS, SpS, SG), then two in a nearby west Santa Cruz neighborhood April 18, were rare for the mid-county area. There have been few records in recent years away from their

Pajaro Valley stronghold. A **Hooded Oriole** at Frederick Street Park in Santa Cruz on March 8 set a new early arrival record for the county (BR, RR), a week ahead of the previous early arrival date, and almost three weeks ahead of average. Further evidence that rarities can show up anywhere was provided by a female **Baltimore Oriole** flying around a NOAA research ship nine nautical miles off Lighthouse Point on May 22 (MF). **Four Red Crossbills** flying over Middle Ridge Road in Big Basin on May 6 were the only ones reported during this period. A **Lawrence's Goldfinch** at Rancho del Oso on May 10 (TN et al) was the first reported in the county in about 19 months.

Cited Observers: Nanci Adams, Jennie Anderson, Kumaran Arul, Eileen Balian, Jack Barclay, Michael Boyd, Phil Brown, Nancy Collins, Elizabeth Crawford, Jeff Davis, Michael Force, Alexander Gaguine, Judy Garrison, Steve Gerow, Lois Goldfrank, Wally Goldfrank, Alex Harper, Sharon Hull, Kent Johnson, Oscar Johnson, Anne Koeppe, Kathy Kuyper, Richard Lange, Janet Linthicum, Amy McDonald, Freddie Menge, Peter Metropoulos (PMe), Eric Miller, Barbara Monahan (BMn), Kevin Monahan, Monterey Seabirds (fide RW), Pam Myers, Hannah Nevins, Todd Newberry, Kenneth Peterson, Jeff Poklen, Bernadette Ramer, Robert Ramer, Patricia Raven, Alex Rinkert, Caroline Rodgers, Adam Romswinkel-Guise, Barbara Scharfenstein, Heidi Sandkuhle, Richard Sandkuhle, Steve Singer (SvS), Stephanie Singer (SpS), Scott Smithson, Pete Solé, Marie Stewart (MSw), Matthew Strusis-Timmer, David Suddjian (DSu), Jeff Wall (JWa), John Warriner, Ricky Warriner (RWa), Anne Williams, Lisa Willis, Roger Wolfe. "v.ob." means various observers.

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

Lawrence's Goldfinch



Trip Reports April - July

April 10—Moore Creek Preserve

The unexpected sometimes arrives early in the course of a field trip. While we were still at the meeting place on Shaffer Road, a kingbird flew in and landed on a wire. Despite bad lighting, this one looked a little odd—a little too dark, the white on the tail edges seemed to be lacking, that white throat was awfully contrasty, then it called—a wheezy “chiburrr”—a rare migrant Cassin's Kingbird! It crossed into the preserve, where we had much better views as it perched on a trail sign. Further up the hill there were the grassland specialists the preserve is known for, with Grasshopper and Savannah Sparrows singing on territory and a large flock of wintering Western Meadowlarks. The wooded areas contributed flocks of Pine Siskins and Cedar Waxwings, as singing Orange-crowned and Wilson's Warblers reminded us that it was spring. Topping it off, the display of native flowers in the Vernal Ridge area was one of the best in recent years.

~Steve Gerow

April 24—Watsonville Sloughs

Water birds are less varied this time of year, but the habitats surrounding the sloughs were a large part of our focus for this trip. We started with the riparian woodland around Watsonville Slough near Ramsey Park, where we had good studies of some Bullock's Orioles, and heard our first migrant Cassin's Vireo of the year singing deep in the willows. The Harkins Slough Road bridge provided a good opportunity to watch nesting swallows, with Cliff Swallows building their mud nests, and Northern Rough-wings carrying material into holes under the bridge. The area south of this road added some ducks and herons, but also more orioles, a Western Tanager, and an unexpected White-throated Swift among the swallows. Then some of us visited Struve Slough—first a stop near West Marine for the resident Great-tailed Grackles, then we walked the Upper Slough Trail north of Main Street. This area added more interesting passerine migrants, including another Cassin's Vireo and a Western Wood-Pewee, plus more orioles (both Bullock's and Hooded). On the way back we paused to watch some nesting Pied-billed Grebes, and a couple of colorful Cinnamon Teal made a last-minute appearance.

~Steve Gerow

Trip Reports (continued)

May 9—Upper UCSC Campus

Sound is an important part of the experience of forest birding, and springtime in the UCSC Upper Campus area is a great place to hear some of the characteristic sounds of the Santa Cruz Mountains, beginning with a nice variety around our starting point at the North Remote Parking Area. Heading up West Road, we left the redwoods and entered a patchwork of chaparral, mixed with bits of mixed evergreen forest and knob-cone pines. Here we heard (and sometimes saw) brush-favoring birds like Spotted Towhees, Wrentits, and Allen's Hummingbirds. We also heard our first Hermit Thrush here, a common breeding bird on the upper campus. At least twenty of these over the course of our walk contributed to an ethereal chorus that followed us through the morning. Moving into some dryer mixed evergreen along Fuel Break Road, a buzzy song led us to a pair of Black-throated Gray Warblers, actually getting some quite good studies of one of these carrying nesting material or food. Then higher up into more redwood-dominated forest, the higher buzzy songs of a few Hermit Warblers and the yet higher-pitched songs of Golden-crowned Kinglets had us looking toward the tree tops (but of course, not seeing any). Never narrowing our focus solely to birds, forest plants, banana slugs, a yellow-spotted millepede, and an odd yellow caterpillar were among several other interesting encounters. Then finally, on the way down, a Pileated Woodpecker called from the thick forest of upper West Road, sounding very close, but those big woodpeckers can really hide.

~Steve Gerow



Yellow-spotted Millipede

Photo: Steve Gerow



Mother's Day birders at Rancho del Oso
Photo by David Sidle

May 10—Rancho del Oso, Mother's Day

For the day, we declared all adult birds to be mothers, even if they were in bright plumages and singing. And we felt vindicated from the start, since the first lustily singing one inside the Hwy 1 gate, a Purple Finch, was indeed female. Fifty yards on an unexpected Lawrence's Goldfinch—well, male despite the day—perched atop nearby bushes and flitted about the road. But already we were birding mostly by ear, essential in such thick foliage, separating species of towhees, flycatchers, wrens, finches, vireos, blackbirds, thrushes, warblers. Another hundred yards brought us to a wonderfully close encounter with the brightest and most songful MacGillivray's Warbler any of us had ever seen or heard; David Sidle took a splendid photo of it, which many of you saw on MBB. And fifty yards beyond it was still another, a duller one in full song—hmm, was the day's rule back in play? White-throated and possibly a few invisible but audible Vaux's swifts careened and twittered overhead and on the nearby ridgeline. Along Sapsucker Alley we focused on seeing as well as hearing Swainson's Thrushes. As we came to the woods at Swing Hill, a Western Wood-Pewee regaled us (if monotonously), eventually perching in full (if dull) view; what a strange family the tyrant flycatchers are! At the farm, Black-headed Grosbeaks added to the spectacle, as did, all along the way in and back out, dozens more species and several nests (including a superb Bushtit nest) on this glorious spring morning.

~Todd Newberry

Trip Reports (continued)



Northern Pygmy-Owl photographed by Wendy Naruo

May 15—Rancho Del Oso

Eleven birders joined this trip for a lovely spring hike at Rancho Del Oso. In addition to a nice assortment of breeding birds, we enjoyed spring wildflowers and took note of 18 species of trees along our path. Wilson's Warblers, Swainson's Thrushes, Black-headed Grosbeaks were singing everywhere, and we enjoyed rare eye-level views of two Olive-sided Flycatchers. My tally of 80 Wilson's shows just how abundant they are at RDO. A male Black-chinned Hummingbird feeding at monkeyflowers on Swing Hill was the rarity highlight, but it did not cooperate for the group. The real highlight was provided by Northern Pygmy-Owl. We heard three calling during the morning, and I managed to coax one in close near Alder Camp. It rewarded us with numerous views as it flew from tree top to tree top. It was a bit of neck-craning to be sure, but it was great fun to see the owl perched in the open in nice light. Later on the walk out we were treated to good looks at a singing male MacGillivray's Warbler.

~David Suddjian



Wally and Lois Goldfrank looking up at a Northern Pygmy-owl. Photo by David Suddjian

May 30—Butano State Park and Gazos Creek

Butano is one of my favorite parks—lush and green, lovely fern-filled forest, and a variety of plants that are common there but missing or rare in the Santa Cruz area (osoberry, baneberry, thimbleberry, salmonberry, twinberry, western burning bush). Early birders met before dawn to try for Marbled Murrelets, but none appeared. However, we were more than rewarded by the cascade of song gushing forth from the riparian along Little Butano Creek. It was like the proverbial wall of sound, with songs of Swainson's Thrush, Robin and Black-headed Grosbeak forming the main framework, and highlights of stratospherically high-pitched Golden-crowned Kinglet songs offering a nice counter play to the food solicitation calls of a female Great Horned Owl. By the time the "normal" start time of 7:00 a.m. rolled around the dawn chorus had subsided, but for the incoming birders it still seemed very songful. You never know what you miss if you are not out there by dawn on a May day. Still, the unquestioned highlight of this trip came later as we took a short stroll to call on a Northern Pygmy-Owl that I'd become acquainted with along Gazos Creek. We had to knock at his door awhile, and the birders got distracted enjoying the lively area. But there! He was calling up the slope to the southeast. And here he comes, landing in a snaggy top of an alder! Alders are not so tall, so the viewing was comfortable and close. And there he stayed for a long time, mobbed by 6-7 Allen's Hummers, Pacific-slope Flycatcher, Purple Finches, chickadees, Wilson's Warblers, and more. It was especially fun to watch the hummers darting about the little owl, like so many large mosquitoes.

~David Suddjian

June 17 & July 16—Common Poorwill at Big Basin

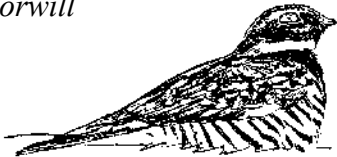
There is a spot in the upper part of the park that is convenient for seeing the locally rare Poorwill. We tried with fantastic success on two trips in summer 2008, and our two trips this summer were similarly blessed. On June 17 I played a recording and a Poorwill began responding within a few minutes. Soon it was flying around us and perching on the road close by, calling. This went on for a number of minutes, and we eventually heard two or maybe three. We also saw one perched on a shrub, and up on some rocks. A very satisfying visual and aural encounter! That was pretty much what I had come to expect at that spot in

Trip Reports (continued)

summer. But July 16 was different. Before I even played the recording, a Poorwill flew right past us at eye level and landed on the road nearby. It remained there a few minutes, making short sallies off the ground to catch insects. Then it flew off, but came floating back our way, before eventually moving out of view down the road. We heard only brief calls in response to the recording, probably from a second bird. The twilight blue sky was alive with bats.

~David Suddjian

Common Poorwill



June 21, Elkhorn Slough Father's Day

This year a sunny Father's Day fell by coincidence on the summer solstice. (If the solstice, by the calendar "the first day of summer," is already Midsummer's Day, when does summer really start—back on May Day? Odder still, birders here know that by now, while many local birds still have nestlings or even another brood to come, fall is already in the air along the shore.)

The tides this weekend were extreme, some nine feet. At 8 o'clock Jetty Rd skirted mudflats dotted with little flocks of shorebirds and a few egrets, scattered gulls (and, marking the end of spring, bunches of Heermann's Gulls returning to the sand bars); only an hour later these flats were awash with the flooding tide. Divers and ducks swam in the lagoons. At the jetties we had nice comparisons of murrets and guillemots and all three cormorants. A large raft of Western Grebes floated serenely offshore. White-crowned and Savannah sparrows sang in the fields and dunes, and cowbirds seemed everywhere.

Moon Glow Dairy's eucalyptus patch surprised us with its noisy rookery of cormorants and herons. They sounded like sea lions in the treetops. Outsized heron chicks teetered in rickety nests. Two photographers aimed huge lenses at them from the dikes. High up in other trees tiny siskins and goldfinches, even a very few Lawrence's, tantalized us. In the woods, House and Purple finches, Brown Creepers, Spotted and California towhees, Song Sparrows, and Bewick's and

Winter wrens sang. The patch, bland to the viewer, bustled for the listener—a dozen species holding forth at once. Along the bluff many Tricolored and Brewer's blackbirds flocked in the corrals, and four kinds of swallows swooped about. A superb Ruddy Duck graced the farthest pond. Today all grown-up birds were fathers, if only for their Day, just as they were all mothers a month ago. Among their babies, far and away the cutest were in Moon Glow's ponds: Mallard ducklings—the most ordinary, the sweetest!

~Todd Newberry

July 3, Moore Creek Preserve

Back up this grassy hill again, and at an uncharacteristic 3:00 PM starting time. A goal of this walk was Black Swifts, which sometimes forage over the fields here on summer afternoons. Heading up the slope among the cattle, we picked through a mob of circling swallows, comparing the five species present. Further up, and more swallows, then finally something bigger and darker flew in from the east—a swift—a Black Swift! It came closer, then there was another, then a third flying fairly low right over our heads. They moved on, but further uphill we came upon a family of American Kestrels learning their hunting skills. Moving up to the oaks and douglas-firs bordering the Vernal Ridge Trail, we added a variety of regular forest species, and a young Great Horned Owl in open view provided another highlight. Then as we headed back and neared the entrance gate, a couple of Black Swifts returned for one more pass over the fields.

~Steve Gerow



Black Swift photographed by Wendy Naruo.

New SCBC Members

Elaine Posner	6/09
Alice Weigel	6/09
Patricia Lynch	7/09
Julia Weber	7/09
Gabrielle Newbold	7/09
Jaime & Tyler Karaszewski	7/09

Welcome!

New Club Officers

Members have approved the nominated SCBC officers for the new term. The updated list is on the back page of this newsletter. Here's a brief summary of the changes:

Steve Gerow is the new President (also continuing as Treasurer). Kathy Kuyper will manage Hospitality, and Bernadette Ramer is stepping up to Outreach. Jeff Wall is the new Secretary.

Many thanks to the retiring officers—Bob & Bernadette Ramer (Presidents), Patricia McQuade (Hospitality), Nanci Adams (Outreach), and Steve Gerow (Secretary).

CBC



Early Warning!

**SANTA CRUZ COUNTY
CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT
Saturday, December 19**

**Input deadline for
Nov/Dec issue
of *The Albatross*
is October 1, 2009**

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

~Judy Donaldson, Editor

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Bird #300



Yellow-headed Blackbird. Photo by David Sidle

When Phil Brown saw the Yellow-headed Blackbird on April 27, it was his 300th bird species in Santa Cruz County! I think Phil has only been birding about six years, so he must be among the fastest to join the 300 Club. Congratulations to Phil.
~ David Sidle

More about the 300 Club: http://santacruzbirdclub.org/300_Club.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.