



Albatross

PHOEBASTRIA NIGRIPES

A decade with the Santa Cruz Bird Club

Part One (years 2004–2008)

By Phil Brown

INSIDE CALENDAR OF EVENTS



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Birds



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Notebook



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inherited an interest in birds from my father. He was never anything other than a casual birder, but he can still identify British birds from their songs and a constant throughout my childhood was his pointing out birds and identifying them, particularly on the family's regular Sunday walks. He still regales me with his observations, from Hawfinches at his feeder to comparing the songs of Lesser and Common Whitethroats singing in the same hedge as he picnicked in a field with my mother.

When I moved to the US, the company I worked for occupied offices at Willow Pond Plaza in Scotts Valley, and true to the name there is a pond out back. Because there were few people around the pond it attracted birds, and the easiest to identify were the ducks that arrived every fall. We looked forward to seeing the Ring-necked Ducks and Buffleheads, which would have to share the pond, with the rather fractious Coots. Once a Wilson's Snipe chose to sit by the rubbish bin on the pond's edge, and the occasional Heron or Hooded Merganser added interest.

In early 2003 my job moved over the hill, and I started running on the levees at the Sunnyvale Water Pollution Control plant. Huge flotillas of ducks come to the ponds in the winter, so there were more species to see, and I started keeping notes on my observations. There are Common Yellowthroats and Marsh Wrens everywhere on those levees; although I often heard them I never seemed able to see them. One of my colleagues who would join me on my runs was very patient when I would stop to pull a small pair of binoculars out of my running belt to check on the birds. Eventually though, in late 2003 he asked me if I knew how many different species I had seen. I did not, but checked through my notes and came up with a total of about 60. "Oh," he said, "a birder friend of mine says the first 100 are really easy."

There was nothing for it; I needed help. A brief internet search turned up the Santa Cruz Bird Club, and there was a walk scheduled for January 17th, 2004. On that morning I arrived at Wilder State Park and joined quite a large group, led by David Suddjian. At the end of the morning I had added 20 new birds to my list, and I had learned a couple of other things. Firstly, going to the right places to find birds helps a lot, and secondly, I was woefully ignorant. The birds were wonderful though, and included a Red-breasted Sapsucker and some Snowy Plovers on the beach, but I needed to borrow a scope with which to see them. I was also astonished at how people could identify birds which to me were just blurs in the distance. Little did I realize that the lure of better optics would seduce me down an ever more expensive path.



I joined the club, and so I also learnt about MBB (a Monterey Bay Birders' List Servers Digest for posting sightings) In February posted one of my first sightings—a (Eurasian) Tufted Duck at Willow Pond. I even helped a few club members find the bird. In April I took my first pelagic trip with Debi Shearwater. Although the weather was rough, the birds were spectacular: four species of Shearwater as well as Black-footed and Laysan Albatross. To this day I can clearly remember the Shearwaters doing wingtip 180s off the front of waves—their aerial skills were astounding.

Later that month I went to the Bonny Doon Reserve, where the lovely Bonnie Bedzin showed me my first summer migrant warblers: Wilson's and Black-throated Gray. Warblers are a perennial and frustrating favorite, a delight when you find them, but often elusive.

In early October I chased a rarity report from Steve Gerow, "the King of Bethany Curve," and was lucky enough to meet him at the end of Bethany Curve where he helped me see a Chestnut-sided Warbler. I was to spend a lot of time in the next ten years chasing his reports, with a surprising amount of success. For starters, in December Steve located a Dusky Flycatcher at Antonelli's Pond which he showed to participants of an SCBC walk. Steve was a wonderful teacher, patient and kind. His trips are now an established feature of the club, but back then he rarely led walks. I mostly met him out in the field.

That Christmas was my first ever CBC with the club, and though there were no new birds it was a great experience. In January 2005 Steve Rovell led a trip to Peachtree Valley where I saw some lifer grassland species including Ferruginous Hawk and Prairie Falcon. In February David Ekdahl led a trip to the Merced NWR, where we saw Sandhill Cranes, and Snow and Ross's Geese. In May Todd Newberry led a trip to Rancho del Oso where we saw a MacGillivray's Warbler (they still can be seen there). Todd is the paterfamilias of the club; he has led trips for many years and still shares his knowledge and love of birds with beginners and old hands alike.

In June I travelled to Yuba Pass for a trip to the Sierra Nevada led by Clay Kempf. I made the serious mistake of imagining that midsummer would be warm, and so, camped at the Yuba Pass campground with a couple of other birders. It snowed the first night and we got no sleep. A trickle of melted snow made its way into my tent and with great precision made its way down the middle of my back. The birds were great, though. There were lots of mountain species—including a bird I consider to be one of the most beautiful in America—the Evening Grosbeak. Another spectacular find was a kettle of Common Nighthawks circling in broad daylight in the Sierra Valley.

Access to Younger Lagoon is available to club members and this has provided me many hours of enjoyable birding. Late that fall there was a scattering of Red Phalaropes on the coast (instead of the usual Red-necked Phalaropes) and I found a couple at the lagoon. I was glad to share the find with a birder visiting from the East Coast.

That Christmas I joined David Ekdahl for the CBC in Davenport. It was cold and rainy, but we did see plenty of birds, including a lot of Red-throated Loons. I was to be part of David's group for the next few years. He is a wonderful birder who has astounded me with some of the most effective pishing I have ever observed. He provoked a complete flock of *Zonotrichia* sparrows to pop up for us to count. My main job was to count pelicans because the various spots we stopped at along the coast always had a steady trickle of them flying by. Often, there were Snowy Plovers, as well. Who can resist snowies? They are the cutest of shorebirds, especially when sitting in a footprint or divot with just their heads in view.

In the summer of 2006 I went on another long-distance trip with Clay, this time down to the Salton Sea and points North. This is an outstandingly ugly area of the state with very few amenities. Tired after a long-days travel down there I tried to buy a beer. The local stores resolutely forego microbrews, and I resorted to Budweiser Select, hoping it would be better than ordinary Bud. Sadly it was worse. Much, much worse. Despite this, the trip itself was wonderful with lots of great birds (including four new doves), and Clay as entertaining as usual. I particularly remember getting up early one day and getting two new birds before breakfast—Cactus Wren and Lawrence's Goldfinch drinking from a sprinkler overflow.

Early September brought some rarer migrants to the coast and at Natural Bridges there was a report of a Hooded Warbler. On the back trail at marker #5 I found a couple of East Coast birders looking for the same bird. We were lucky enough to locate it, though most of the views were of its butt as it was high in the Cypress trees. Lois and Wally Goldfrank and I then wandered down to the butterfly boardwalk where we were astonished to find a Canada Warbler, and in short order a Wilson's Warbler for a trifecta of the *Wilsonia* warblers (a genus that is sadly now superseded and split).

In late September I attended the Monterey Bay Birding Festival, and saw a Clay-colored Sparrow at Andrew Molera State Park, as well as California Condors down the coast. This annual event is a great centerpiece for birders in the area,



and is a wonderful opportunity to bird around the Monterey Bay with some of the best birders from both Monterey and Santa Cruz Counties.

That winter David Suddjian started his owl surveys in Big Basin State Park and invited club members to go along with him. I was grateful for the opportunity and joined him on a few of his surveys. The process for each survey involved lots of racing around in the dark trying to keep up with David, with pauses for him to listen for owls calling while I tried not to pant too loudly. We heard plenty of Western Screech and Northern Saw-whet Owls on these trips (plus an occasional Great Horned or Barn Owl), but sadly never saw any. Owling is even more fraught with disappointment than ordinary birding.

By the start of 2007 I was exploring more on my own, and followed reports of a Short-eared Owl at Palo Alto Baylands, a Long-tailed Duck at Pillar Point, and a Townsend's Solitaire at Almaden Reservoir. In March I managed to find my own rarity—a Brown Booby at Natural Bridges—causing my wife and her friends much amusement.

In March Eric Feuss (another longtime stalwart of the club) led a trip to Pinnacles National Monument—now Pinnacles National Park. The location is spectacular and there were lots of great birds including Prairie Falcon, Phainopepla and Lawrence's Goldfinch, but what most attendees of that trip remember is clambering through the caves in pitch black darkness, trying not to fall in a stream or down a steep drop-off. On a pelagic trip that spring with Roger Wolfe we found Short-tailed Albatross and Ancient Murrelet. During another trip in the fall I found my first Long-tailed Jaeger.

In October, not having learnt my lesson, I went with Eric Feuss again on a trip to Point Reyes National Seashore to catch the fall migration and to look for rare vagrants. We saw nearly 100 species that day, but what I remember the most was the trek around Abbott's Lagoon. During a two-hour walk through brush and across streams we found five Least Sandpipers and one Pectoral Sandpiper. A longer version of this saga can be obtained from Tim Jolly, but in essence, the trails were great and the rewards slim.

A major change arrived at the start of 2008. I got a phone call from David Suddjian asking if I would consider being the Field Trip Officer for the club. When I agreed I did not realize that I had been sold a pig in a poke. David had conceived a plan to institute a "Big Year" for the club and so needed to arrange a lot of trips to try to get as high a species count as possible, all on a pre-arranged timetable. He had an extensive, well-researched plan which required many locations, leaders, and dates to be organized. This was going to be my job. Ultimately there were over 150 trips that year. Luckily for me, Google Calendar would prove to be invaluable in bringing this all together, and luckily for Barry McLaughlin (our webmaster), we could include a link to the calendar on the club website.

What followed was an amazing year of birding. The club trips found 280 species over the year (my total was 270 and I attended about half of the trips). There were some excellent finds during the year, including a Dusky Warbler at Antonelli's Pond, a Townsend's Solitaire at the UCSC Arboretum, and a Cape May Warbler in a backyard between Ocean Street and Branciforte Creek. The most impressive trip was led by David Suddjian to Baldwin Creek, which produced Swamp Sparrow, Orchard Oriole, Rough-legged Hawk, and an extraordinary and unexpected Mountain Plover—all in the same morning. The most outrageous chutzpah award went to Steve Gerow for a trip to the San Lorenzo River to look for the rare Solitary Sandpiper. He found one within three minutes! I even led a few trips myself and on one of them found a Blackburnian Warbler (with Alex Rinkert's help).

One of the perennial birds during this period was a Rock Sandpiper that I nicknamed Sylvester (because he had sequel, after sequel, after sequel). Many club trips and personal expeditions found this bird, and he returned year after year. Finding him again in the fall was a delight and a challenge as he was secretive and subtly different from the surfbirds and turnstones that he associated with. He is missed.

"Sylvester" - David Sidle

The year 2008 was a definite high point in my birding career, and the help and support of many people brought it all together, many of whom are listed above. I'm hoping Eric will forgive my ribbing, he is a wonderful birder with encyclopedic knowledge and a great eye. His trips are sometimes a bit of an adventure, but that just adds to the fun. This brings a close to my first five years of birding. Part 2 is to follow in the September/October issue.



Events Calendar

May - August 2015



Friday, May 1 San Lorenzo River

Migrant shorebirds, waterbirds, and land birds are all possible here at this time of year.

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

Leader: Steve Gerow, stephengerow@aol.com



Sunday, May 3 Loma Prieta

We will bird in chaparral habitat along the ridge that divides Santa Cruz and Santa Clara County. Specialties at this location we might see include Bell's and Black-chinned Sparrow, Purple Martin, Lawrence's Goldfinch, and higher elevation mountain breeders. Spring migrants passing over the ridge may be joined by something unexpected. Weather conditions are variable at the summit so prepare for both warm and cool temperature. Plan for 2-3 miles of mostly level walking.

Directions: If heading north on either Highway 17 or Soquel-San Jose Road, take a right onto Summit Road. Continue on Summit Road (which turns into Highland Way past Soquel-San Jose Road) and take a left onto Mt. Bache Road. Follow Mt. Bache Road for 0.95 miles and keep right at the Loma Prieta Avenue intersection to continue heading uphill. From this intersection, follow Loma Prieta Avenue 2.9 miles to its intersection with Summit/Mt. Madonna Road. There is a wide pullout at the summit where the field trip will begin. Meet at 7:00 AM.

Leader: Alex Rinkert, 831-431-0830, arinkert12@comcast.net



Loma Prieta X Summit
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher - Jeff Bleam



Wednesday, May 6 Pinto Lake County Park

The heron rookery should be hopping by this time, so we'll check out the Eucalyptus grove and then continue working our way through the county park.

Directions: Meet at 8:00 AM at the County Park at the north end of Pinto Lake. We'll assemble in the first parking lot area and then walk down the path to the lakeshore and boardwalk.

Leader: Bob Ramer, 831-426-7342, rjramer@sbcglobal.net



Friday, May 8 Corcoran Lagoon and vicinity

We'll check the lagoon and beach area, and may also visit Moran Lake or other spots along the Live Oak coast.

Directions: Meet at 8:00 AM at the north side of Corcoran Lagoon by the Live Oak Library parking lot, off Portola Drive.

Leader: Steve Gerow, stephengerow@aol.com



Great Egret - Lisa Fay Lanson

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

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

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

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

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



**Saturday, May 9
Santa Ana Valley**

Meet in Tres Pinos at 8:00 AM across the street from the post office on Saturday morning. There are many oak/savannah/grassland birds that we will look for throughout the day. Expected and hopeful species include kingbirds, Prairie Falcons, Golden Eagles and if lucky Bald Eagles, Lazuli Buntings, Lawrence's Goldfinchs, and more. It's a long drive from Santa Cruz so carpooling is a good idea. I'd like to keep the number of cars as low as possible; we can regroup in Tres Pinos.

Directions: From SC take Hwy 1 South to Riverside Exit, to Main St, Left on San Juan Rd to 101, North on 101 to 156 to Union Rd, Right on Hwy 25 (Airline Hwy) and two or three miles to Tres Pinos. The post office is just past the Flap Jacks Restaurant and shares the same parking lot.

Leader: Nelson Samuels, samnelo@razzolink.com, (831) 566-9026



Bald Eagle - Andy Knorr



**Sunday, May 10
Beginning Bird Walk at Henry Cowell**

The beginners' walk moves to upper Henry Cowell this month, looking to find breeding warblers such as Wilson's, Black-Throated Grey and Hermit. We will also look for Pileated Woodpeckers and Golden-crowned Kinglets.

Directions: Meet at the campground entrance to Henry Cowell at 8:30 AM. There is a \$10 day use fee to park there. There will be some moderate hiking on this trip.

Leader: Phil Brown, 831-334-4249, pdpbrown@gmail.com



**Friday, May 15
Upper Struve Slough**

There should be an interesting mix of breeding birds and some migrants at this time of year.

Directions: Meet at 8:00 AM. To get to our starting point, go into the Watsonville Square Shopping Center, on the north side of Main Street southeast of the intersection with Green Valley Road. Turn right after entering the parking lot, and continue to the extreme southeast part of the shopping center (nearest Struve Slough), where there is a small parking lot separated from the main parking area. The trail starts here.

Leader: Steve Gerow, stephengerow@aol.com



Black Oystercatcher - Ron Wolf



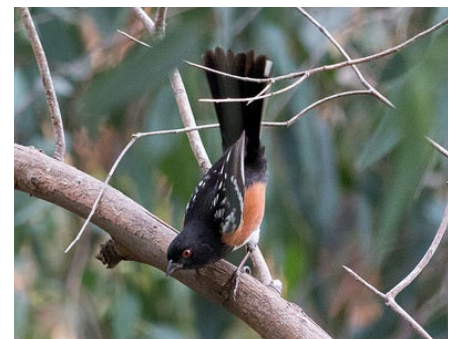
**Friday, May 22
Natural Bridges State Beach**

The late part of spring migration sometimes brings the unexpected, and if nothing else there is always a good variety of regular species here.

Directions: Meet at 8:00 AM at the Delaware Avenue entrance to the park, across from the south end of Natural Bridges Drive.

Leader: Steve Gerow, stephengerow@aol.com

Spotted Towhee - Lee Jaffe





Sunday, May 24
Coyote Lake-Harvey Bear Ranch
County Park

This park is a little over one hour from Santa Cruz. In late March, I had paired and courting Western Grebes, American White Pelicans, and Common Mergansers on the water in good numbers. In the oak grasslands, I had Lewis' Woodpecker, Canyon Wren, White-throated Swift, Grasshopper Sparrow, Lark Sparrow, Rufous-crowned Sparrow, nesting Bald Eagle, Golden Eagle, and quite a few paired Western Bluebirds. In May, we can expect some more summer residents: Western Kingbird, Bullock's Oriole, and Black-headed Grosbeak. We will begin with a few 'car stops' and then bird the beautiful rolling oak grasslands and woodlands, an approximate 5 mile easy-to-moderate hike at a birder's pace, including some great vistas.

Directions: Meet at 6:45 AM at the Aptos Wells Fargo Bank for carpooling or at 8 AM at the Mendoza Entrance: sccgov.org/sites/parks/parkfinder/Pages/CoyoteLake (directions). There will be a \$6 entrance fee once we enter the main entrance heading toward the parking lot at the dam.

Leader: Eric Feuss 831-477-0280 (home); 408-717-0421 (work mobile for day of trip).



Canyon Wren, Coyote Lake - Beth Hamel



Thursday, May 28
SCBC Meeting @7:30 PM
Speaker: Allison Nelson
Topic: Solving the Mysteries of Hermit Thrush Migration

Hermit Thrushes are common wintering birds in this area, and they also nest in various parts of the Santa Cruz Mountains. But our nesting and wintering Hermit Thrushes are not the same birds—the wintering birds breed elsewhere, and the breeding birds leave the area in winter. Where do thrushes from these two populations go when they are not here? What paths do each set of birds follow? Allison Nelson recently began a study of the breeding population of Hermit Thrush in Big Basin, utilizing geolocator technology to learn about their migration paths and wintering grounds. She has also worked on a study based at Coyote Creek Field Station in Santa Clara County, using geolocators to learn more about the movements of wintering Hermit Thrushes when they leave for their breeding grounds. Learn more about her research, and what is being learned about the movements of Hermit Thrushes and its importance.



Hermit Thrush - Andy Knorr

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



Friday, May 29
Arana Gulch

We should find a varied mix of breeding species, and maybe still a few late spring migrants.

Directions: Meet at 8:00 AM at the entrance on Agnes Street, near the end of Mentel Street (off the south side of Soquel Avenue, two blocks east of the light at Trevethan and Hagemann)

Leader: Steve Gerow, stephengerow@aol.com



Pacific Slope Flycatcher - Lisa Larson



**Friday, June 5
Meder Canyon**

An interesting patch of habitat right in the middle of Santa Cruz's upper west side residential area.

Directions: Meet at 8:00 AM at the south end of the trail on Grandview Street, just past the Escalona intersection. To reach Grandview Street, turn north (inland) from Mission Street onto Swift Street. Swift Street makes a sharp left turn, and becomes Grandview.

References: www.nps.gov/pinn/index.htm
Participants are more than welcome to join later; please call me to make arrangements and obtain my mobile number.
Leader: Eric Feuss, 831-477-0280



Bullock's Oriole - Andy Knorr



**Friday, June 12
Felton area**

We will definitely explore the mature riparian forests along the San Lorenzo River in Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park, and may visit one or two other spots in the area, depending on time and conditions.

Directions: We'll meet at 8:00 AM in the parking lot at Felton Faire shopping center, at the intersection of Graham Hill Road and Mt. Hermon Road, on the side of the lot closest to Graham Hill. Note that an entrance fee or state park pass is required for Henry Cowell.

Leader: Steve Gerow, stephengerow@aol.com



**Saturday, June 13
Rancho Del Oso**

This is a regular spot to find MacGillivray's Warbler, and Swainson's Thrush is expected. We will look for some other expected breeding birds.

Directions: Meet at 8:00 AM at Waddell Creek Beach.
Leader: Nick Levendosky, n.levendosky@gmail.com



**Friday, June 19
Neary Lagoon**

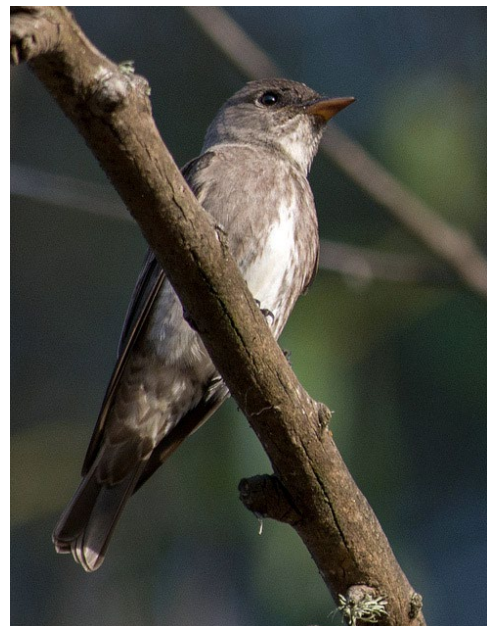


Molting Wood Ducks and much more!
Directions: Meet at 8:00 AM at the west entrance, off Bay and California Streets.
Leader: Steve Gerow, stephengerow@aol.com



**Friday, July 3
Moore Creek Preserve**

In addition to a mix of grassland and forest species, we should find good numbers of swallows foraging over the open slopes, with the possibility of a few swifts mixed in.
Directions: Meet at 8:00 AM on Shaffer Road near the intersection with Mission Street. Parking spaces can sometimes be hard to find in this area, so this is one of those spots where carpooling may be a good idea.
Leader: Steve Gerow, stephengerow@aol.com



Olive-sided Flycatcher - Jeff Bleam



Friday, July 17
Pogonip

This patchwork of redwood and mixed evergreen forests and grasslands holds an interesting mix of birds and other wildlife.

Directions: Meet at 8:00 AM at the north end of Spring Street, off High Street in Santa Cruz.

Leader: Steve Gerow, stephengerow@aol.com



Friday, July 24
Struve Slough

A look at this wetland area near the end of the breeding season. If conditions are right, some fall migrant shorebirds are also a possibility.

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

Leader: Steve Gerow, stephengerow@aol.com



Pygmy Nuthatch - LFL



Friday, July 31
Schwan Lake

We'll explore what summer brings in this mix of oaks, grassland, and riparian habitats.

Directions: Meet at 8:00 AM in the parking lot of the Simpkins Family Swim Center, 979 17th Avenue.

Leader: Steve Gerow, stephengerow@aol.com



Friday, August 7
Antonelli Pond

Late summer can be very active in this area, with many young birds, post-breeding dispersants, and probably some early fall migrants.

Directions: Meet at 8:00 AM on the west side of the pond, near the west end of Delaware Avenue.

Leader: Steve Gerow, stephengerow@aol.com



Friday, August 14
West Cliff Drive

The full mix of rocky shore specialists should be present by now. We will also check Lighthouse Field and/or Bethany Curve Park for migrant landbirds.

Directions: Meet at 8:00 AM on West Cliff Drive at Woodrow Avenue.

Leader: Steve Gerow, stephengerow@aol.com



Red-breasted Mergansers - Andy Knorr



Friday, August 21
Natural Bridges State Beach

Fall migration should be picking up, and surprises are possible.

Directions: Meet at 8:00 AM at the Delaware Avenue entrance to the park, across from the south end of Natural Bridges Drive.

Leader: Steve Gerow, stephengerow@aol.com



Friday, August 28
New Brighton State Beach

The mix of beach and ocean, riparian, pines, and other habitat could hold an interesting mix of species this time of year.

Directions: Meet at 8:00 AM in the beach parking lot. There is a fee for driving in.

Leader: Steve Gerow, stephengerow@aol.com



Birding Along the San Lorenzo River Walk

The Santa Cruz Museum of Natural History, in partnership with the Santa Cruz Bird Club, invites you to join in our wonderful birding series along the San Lorenzo River. The San Lorenzo River has over two hundred bird species known to migrate through or live on the river! Expert birders from the Santa Cruz Bird Club will be guiding these early morning workshops, open to families and bird lovers of all ages.

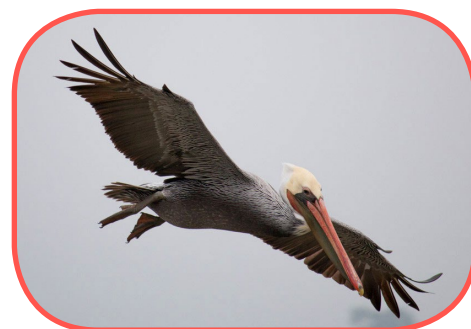
FREE Admission. Pre-Registration required, space is limited.

May 2, 8:30am | With Nanci Adams | FULL*

May 9, 8:30am | With Phil Brown | FULL*

May 16, 8:30am | With Steve Gerow | register soon by calling the museum at 831-420-6115, ext. 12

May 30, 8:30am | With John Garret | register soon by calling the museum at 831-420-6115, ext. 12



Brown Pelican - Lee Jaffe

*Registration is currently full for the May 2nd and 9th walks. Please call the museum at 831-420-6115 ex. 12 if you would like to be put on a waiting list. Keep an eye out for future program offerings.

Where to meet?

This program will be meeting in downtown Santa Cruz at the southwest side of the Soquel Avenue Bridge over the San Lorenzo River, south of the CVS/Trader Joe's parking lot. Your expert guide will meet you on the River Walk behind the Wells Fargo Home Mortgage building (530 Front Street, Santa Cruz, CA 95060) at 8:30am sharp.

Where to park?

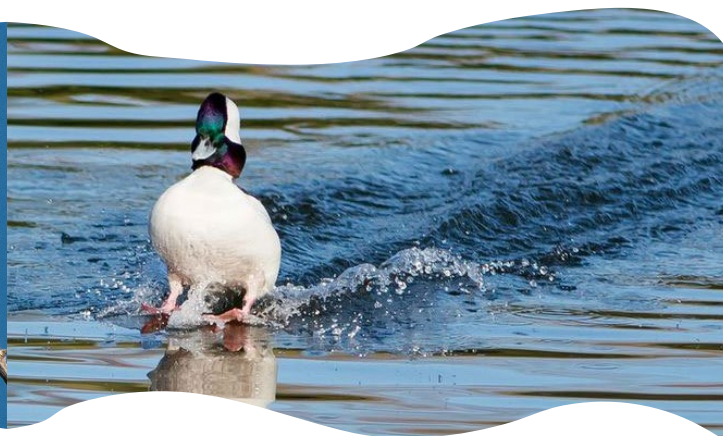
Parking downtown is available for a small fee. There is a multi-level parking garage across the street. If parking in a metered spot, be sure to feed the meter until about 11am. Parking in the CVS/Trader Joe's parking lot is illegal unless you are actively shopping there, and if you do it, you may get a ticket, or a tow.

Please see santacruzmuseum.org for more details.

See you at the river!



Peregrine Falcon - Lee Jaffe



Bufflehead - Lisa Sheridan

Santa Cruz Birds

By Steve Gerow

Including reports from January 1 to February 28, 2015

☆☆☆☆

Greater White-fronted Geese continued in fairly good numbers through mid-January, with reports of up to 33, mostly from the usual Pajaro Valley locations (v.ob.). Only a few lingered later. Up to five **Snow Geese** were around the Watsonville Slough System through January 24 (v.ob.). Mid-county reports included one at Wilder Ranch on January 10 (MBo), and maybe the same bird at Westlake Pond January 13-15 (AR, JGa, LG). One or two **Ross's Geese** were reported from a few Watsonville Slough System sites through January 5. More **Brant** than usual turned up along the Santa Cruz County coastline this winter, with the largest count being 20 off the Laguna Creek mouth on January 14 (AR). **Cackling Goose** reports included up to ten at College Lake and 1-2 in the sloughs through mid-February.

Reports of **Wood Ducks** in the Pajaro Valley (where they are uncommon) include single birds at Pinto Lake and Drew Lake on January 1 (RR, BR, PB), and a pair in a pond near San Andreas Road on February 16 (AR). Reports of 1-2 **Eurasian Wigeon** came from three Pajaro Valley sites through February 1 (v.ob.) There were also various reports of 1-2 **Blue-winged Teal** from the Pajaro Valley and Baldwin Creek mouth. **Redheads** were in larger than usual numbers, reaching a peak of 14 in College Lake on February 22 (CK). Six to seven were also noted on Struve and West Struve Sloughs February 12-15 (RW, DSt). Various **White-winged Scoter** reports this period involved up to four birds (v.ob.), all from the county's south coast. Additional **Black Scoter** reports included one off Natural Bridges on January 20 (JE, DT), and one off Zils Road February 16-21 (AR, JGa).

There were several reports of **Red-necked Grebes** from various coastal spots, including a high count of nine off La Selva Beach on February 16 (AR). **Black-vented Shearwaters** stayed around in good numbers through the winter, with a high total of about 6000 off the Santa Cruz Municipal Wharf on February 2 (BR). One of the winter's most surprising observations was a **Blue-footed Booby** (adult or nearly so) flying up the coast off Terrace Point on February 10 (AJ et al.) This is the first record for the county other than those associated with the 2013 "invasion" into California waters. A **Cattle Egret** visited Struve Slough on February 15 (NA), providing the only report in the count this winter.

The Pajaro Valley's resident pair of **Bald Eagles** had begun nesting again by early February (GK, v.ob.); more on that next issue. Other Bald Eagle reports included an adult at Loch Lomond on January 6 (KK), an immature over Anna Jean Cummings Park on January 21 (NZ), and another young bird moving around the lower Watsonville Slough System on January 24 (NZ, KS, AGb, CF). Adult **Ferruginous Hawks** were near Baldwin Creek on January 4 (AR), and in the Soda Lake area January 8-24 (AR, LG, JW, v.ob.). Schwan Lake's **Common Gallinule** was last seen on January 16 (SG). An **American Avocet** at the mouth of Laguna Creek on February 20 was unexpected for the north coast, especially in winter (NL, BM). Up to two **Lesser Yellowlegs** were noted along the lower Pajaro River January 25-February 16 (NS, WS, PB). A single **Dunlin** were in the Pajaro Dunes area on January 11 and February 12 (AGb, JGa); this species is surprisingly



Brant - Gail West



Ferruginous Hawk - Beth Hamel

difficult to find within the Santa Cruz County borders in winter.

Ancient Murrelets stuck around the area into early January, with an impressive 112 recorded within Santa Cruz County waters on the January 1 Moss Landing Christmas Bird Count (JGr). Most or all seemed to leave by mid-January, with none reported this period after January 19. A 1st-cycle **Glaucous Gull** was at the Buena Vista Road landfill on January 8 (JH), perhaps the same one that was nearby in Harkins Slough at the end of December. Another was along the Wilder Ranch coast on January 28 (NL).

Six additional **Burrowing Owls** found in January brought the total for this winter in the county to eleven, a healthy total compared to most recent years. Two **Long-eared Owls** were near Lombardi Creek in Wilder Ranch January 5-26 (AGb, v.ob.) **Short-eared Owls** had not been reported in winter in Santa Cruz County since 2007, so it was nice to have four found in the county this winter—two in the lower Watsonville Slough System on January 1 (CK et al.), and two frequenting fields near El Jarro Point from January 2-February 14 (AR, v.ob.). It was another good sapsucker winter, with an impressive three **Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers** found—an immature in Aptos from January into March (RW, v.ob.), another young bird in Mt. Hermon on February 10 (HR), and an adult along Green Valley Creek on February 14 (AR). The **Red-naped Sapsucker** continued in Henry Cowell State Park through the period (v.ob.), and another male Red-naped (or possibly a hybrid) was at Mount Hermon on February 10 (HR).

A **Crested Caracara** made a brief stop in Santa Cruz County on January 6, when one was photographed at the Buena Vista Road Landfill (JF). This is the third for the county, pending California Bird Records Committee review. The wintering **“Western” Flycatcher** was found again and photographed in Polo Grounds Park

in Aptos on January 20 (RW). At least two **Tropical Kingbirds** continued in the Watsonville Slough System into late February (v.ob.), perhaps a different individual was east of Watsonville at Drew Lake on January 1 (PB, AGa), and one was at El Jarro Point on February 1 (MBr).

Considerably rarer for this time of year was a **Western Kingbird** at Aptos Creek mouth January 3-5 (RW, SM, v.ob.) This species is very rarely found anywhere in California in winter, and this is just the second January record for the county; a good photo passed through the grapevine from a visiting birder helped confirm the identification.

A few more **Loggerhead Shrikes** were found, bringing the winter total to seven. The **Plumbeous Vireo** continued near the

Santa Cruz County Government Center through at least February 5 (SG, v.ob.) Surveys of the Watsonville Slough System from February 12-14 found about nine **Horned Larks** (PB, AR, NL, BR, RR), all in or near the only known area in Santa Cruz County where the species is resident. The lower part of the slough system also had a rare wintering **Northern Rough-winged Swallow** on January 1 (CK et al.) Spring arrival of Rough-wingeds came early this year, with the first found on February 11 (BJS), and more arriving by February 15. Fairly expected in winter in recent years were one or two **Barn Swallows** found at a few spots around the Watsonville Slough System in January and early February (v.ob.).

Perhaps inspired by the warmer and drier than usual winter, there were a few unusually early nesting efforts reported this period, including a **Chestnut-backed Chickadee** in Live Oak repeatedly gathering nesting material on February 26 (SH), and a pair of

Western Bluebirds working on a nest in a Soquel nest box starting on February 9 (JE)! A **White-breasted Nuthatch** continued in DeLaveaga Park until February 25 (SG, v.ob.) UCSC's wintering **Rock Wren** remained until February 15 (JGa, v.ob.). **Varied Thrush** continued to be considerably



Long-eared Owl - Michael Bolte



Western Bluebird - John Ellis

more numerous and widespread than usual through the winter period. Four wintering **Black-and-white Warblers** were found: the continuing one in Bethany Curve Park through January 21 (v.ob.), one at Corralitos Lagoon from January 1-18 (LG, WG, SG, v.ob.), one in Live Oak on January 15 (JHW), and one at Neary Lagoon from January 7-27 (DE, CV, v.ob.) The **Nashville Warbler** in the Meder Canyon area of Santa Cruz was last seen January 17 (AR), and another was along Corralitos Creek on January 1 (AGb, DSi).

The UCSC Arboretum had a **Tennessee Warbler** from January 14-February 10 (JG). The rarest wintering warbler this season was a male **Hooded Warbler**, which drew an audience at the Natural Bridges Butterfly Boardwalk from January 15-February 16 (JM, LB, v.ob.) for just the second wintering record for Santa Cruz County. A **Yellow Warbler** continued at Struve Slough until February 14 (DSt, PS), and another was in the Santa Cruz Gardens area on January 22 (ARG). Continuing **Palm Warblers** were along the lower San Lorenzo River until February 5, and at Baldwin Creek mouth until January 4 (v.ob.); another was found near Watsonville Slough starting February 14 (NL, BR, JW). **Hermit Warblers** were at Rancho Del Oso on January 10 (LG, NL), and Schwan Lake on January 27 (GM). A **Wilson's Warbler** was in the Harkins Slough area on January 1 (CK et al.)

The **Green-tailed Towhee** at the UCSC Farm stayed until at least February 25 (v.ob.). A **Clay-colored Sparrow** was along Litchfield Lane northeast of Watsonville on February 14 (AR). Following the discovery of "**Thick-billed**" **Fox Sparrows** near Loma Prieta earlier this winter, a series of transect surveys on January 19 yielded ten individuals of this form in 6.3 km of Summit Road (AR), further documenting the presence of a wintering population in chaparral habitat along the Santa Cruz Mountains summit. Hopefully there will be some more focused

birding in these upper elevation chaparral habitats in future winters, so the status of these birds can be better clarified. Uncommon but regular sparrows reported in January and

February included eight **Swamp Sparrows**, about 30 **White-throated Sparrows**, and six "**Slate-colored**" **Dark-eyed Juncos**.

The male **Summer Tanager** in the Meder Street/Western Drive area of Santa Cruz continued through the period (AR, AGb, v.ob.), and another Summer Tanager turned up in Natural Bridges State Beach starting February 25 (WB). A

Black-headed Grosbeak was at Natural Bridges on January 30 (DM, MP), and one was in Santa Cruz near the UCSC Campus on February 9 (JG). Natural Bridges also had a young male **Bullock's Oriole** from January 9-February 11 (BD, JGa, v.ob.).

There were no Red Crossbills reported at all, but **Pine Siskins** continued to be in above average numbers through the period. A **Lawrence's Goldfinch** was along Old Chittenden Road on January 8 (AR).

Cited Observers: Nanci Adams, Michael Bolte (MBo), William Bousman, Lindsay Brady, Michael Brawner (MBr), Phil Brown, Bob Dunn, Jeff Eddy (JEd), David Ekdahl, John Ellis (JEl), Jon Ford,

Craig Fosdick, Aaron Gabbe (AGb), Alexander Gaguine (AGa), John Garrett (JGa), Steve Gerow, Lois Goldfrank, Wally Goldfrank, Jennifer Green (JGr), Justin Hite, Sharon Hull, Benny Jacobs-Schwartz, Alvaro Jaramillo, Ken Kellman, Clay Kempf, Gary Kittleson, Nick Levendosky, Gary Martindale, Bobbie Mayer, Jack Mazza, Dominik Mosur, Shirley Murphy, Michael Park, Bernadette Ramer, Robert Ramer, Harold Reeve, Alex Rinkert, Adam Romswinkel-Guisse (ARG), Nelson Samuels, Warren Samuels, David Sidle (DSi), Pete Solé, Kitty Stein, David Styer (DSt), Dale Trexel, Connie Vigno, Jeff Wall, Randy Wardle, Nickie Zavinsky, v.ob. = various observers



Hooded Warbler - Glen Tepke



Summer Tanager - Jeff Bleam



Time Flies!



"Horus Hours" - Lisa Fay Larson

It's TIME to RENEW your Santa Cruz Bird Club MEMBERSHIP!

For easy dues-paying, a remittance envelope is enclosed in this issue. To send in a renewal (or a donation), fill in the relevant information, put in your check, add postage, and mail.

Please pay the dues now, while the envelope is in hand, so you won't miss the September/October issue of the *ALBATROSS* in the fall. "*The bad news is time flies. The good news is you're the pilot.*" - Michael Altahuler

A Gift of Birds and Birding?

Do you have a friend who is interested in birds? An SCBC membership would be a thoughtful—and perhaps inspiring—gift. Fill in the information for the giftee, and send in the payment. Additional envelopes are usually available from club officers and trip leaders.

Birder's Notebook



Great Blue Heron-Inspired Jewelry by Elisabeth Forrest

The material is sterling silver. I make the wax piece by hand carving and heating. I then send it to a caster who makes a plaster type mold of the piece then injects molten silver inside of it, destroying the wax original. I get the raw silver piece back and spend more time grinding, polishing, and finishing the piece. I also do fabricated work using sheet metal and a torch. It's fun!



Original Sketch

Completed Pendant



Sketches, photos, description - Elisabeth Forrest



Monterey Bay Birding Festival Update!

We would like to find apprentices...

The Monterey Bay Birding Festival is no longer in jeopardy of disappearing. It may be a little shorter this year or maybe not, but it will happen and it will be successful. Thanks to all of you who read of our plight and responded with offers of help and to those who could not help but sent their good wishes and encouragement.

Susan Swanson has taken on two major tasks. She is our new field trip director and will also manage publicity and marketing. Please welcome her to the festival and show your appreciation with a friendly response if she should call on you.

Help has arrived to coordinate volunteers, hire speakers, and assist our leaders. As the old saying goes, many hands make the task lighter, and to that end the Steering Committee would like to find a few more members who will take on some of the easier, less demanding tasks. Looking forward, we would like to find apprentices for registration, the Birder's Market, and the website. This would mean that someone else takes on the full responsibility while you assist and learn. We remain hopeful that one of you could give us two or three hours a month to record our discussions and action items at the monthly meetings. Hospitality is another job that is not terribly time consuming but so necessary and rewarding.

The next Steering Committee meeting will be at 3:30pm, Wednesday, May 12th at 250 Main Street in Watsonville. Come by and check us out. You will be welcome.

For more detailed information, call or email Sue Dumller: 831-423-8248 or sdumller@sbcglobal.net.

ALBATROSS SUPERLATIVE STORY CHALLENGE



Alby Face - LFL

Hello SCBC Members! The SCBC Editor challenges YOU to write and submit one of the following:

- Best "unexpected" encounter birding
- Most "memorable" birder you've met
- "Funniest" birding experience
- "Scariest" bird encounter or birding experience
- Most "miserable" birding experience
- Most "unusual" bird you have seen and/or photographed
- Superlative story of your choice

Please help to keep
your SCBC newsletter soaring high!
Don't hesitate to contact the Editor with any questions!
Your stories, photos, sketches, book reviews, tips, quotes—
all things bird-related are NEEDED!



BOOK REVIEW

DOWN & DIRTY BIRDING

From the Sublime to the Ridiculous—

Here's All the Outrageous But True Stuff You Ever Wanted to Know about North American Birds

BY JOEY SLINGER



A Very Funny and Informative Summer Read

-Lisa Fay Larson

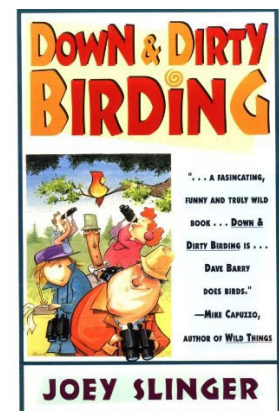
How many bird identification books are in your possession? I probably have at least ten. But this book is different. It goes beyond identification tips; it also can enlighten and de-lighten (*sic*) the reader in many other ways. Joey delves into behavior, anatomy, garb/equipment, listing, "birdiquette", endangered and extinct species (which undoubtedly has changed since copyright date 2006 but still warrants reading), drawings vs. photos in field guides, and even (finally!) terms, verbiage and pronunciation. "So?" you say, "I probably have a bunch of books covering that stuff. And if I don't I can Google it." But do you find yourself laughing over and over as you read your books and articles? I didn't think so. Don't be skeptical—there is an earnest eight-page index at the end for quick references to essential information.

Prepare to be well-entertained and maybe even learn a few things you did not know. Joey offers hilarious advice throughout the book. Be forewarned that the book is often irreverent and has a sporadic sprinkling of some salty language. He reminds us not to take ourselves or our passion for birding too seriously! Let's face it, there are some utterly ridiculous aspects of birding! His use of footnotes for multi-layered witticisms is likened to the style of author/humorist Dave Barry.

I would quote some of his funnies, but I don't want to spoil a thing! Honestly, this book made me laugh—hard.

Joey Slinger is a Canadian journalist and author, particularly known as a long-standing humor columnist for the Toronto Star—from which he retired in 2008.

Read it!





"And I hope each morning you wake like a bird in a nest and fly without a thought."

~ Bill Callahan



Nesting Time!

<i>Lisa Larson</i>	<i>Cliff Swallow</i>
<i>Andy Knorr</i>	<i>Anna's Hummers</i>
<i>Lisa Sheridan</i>	<i>Western Bluebird</i>
<i>John Ellis</i>	<i>CB Chick Hatchlings</i>
<i>Lisa Larson</i>	<i>Osprey Pair</i>
<i>Andy Knorr</i>	<i>Pied-billed Grebe</i>
<i>Lisa Larson</i>	<i>Barn Swallow</i>
<i>Andy Knorr</i>	<i>Bald Eagles</i>



(Photos clockwise from 12:00)



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See the schedule of trips here: www.shearwaterjourneys.com/schedule.shtml for more information.



New SCBC Members Welcome!

Laurie Talcott	Mar 2015
Lynn Narlesky	Mar 2015
Barbara Spencer	Apr 2015
Ursi Barshi	Apr 2015
Patty Alvarez	Apr 2015



Lazuli Bunting at Loma Prieta - Randy Wardle

Submissions NEEDED!

**DEADLINE for
Sep-Oct issue
August 1,
2015**

Submission for the Albatross—Guidelines



Your participation is WELCOME!

In addition to regular features—calendar, Santa Cruz Birds, photos—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 **needed**:

- 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 BIRDS or people at our events (jpg, tif)

If you wish to submit an article, please contact me about it **a couple of weeks before** the submission deadline.

I accept plain text, Word, or PDF files. Send items by email to: scbirdclubeditor@gmail.com

~Lisa Fay Larson, Editor

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PARTING SHOT: "WILD TURKEY SURPRISE!"
WILD TURKEYS - RANDY WARDLE



Randy Wardle sure was surprised when he came upon this unexpected group of Wild Turkeys at the viewing platform of Younger Lagoon on March 1st, 2015.

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. Santa Cruz Bird Club 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.