



# Albatross

PHOEBASTRIA NIGRIPES

**Inside**

**CALENDAR OF EVENTS**

*Quail Hollow*



**Christmas Bird Counts**

**SANTA CRUZ BIRDS**



**Birder's Notebook**

**PARTING SHOT**

## Native California Peregrine Falcons: Raising Awareness on Eyas' "Lethal Fledging Environments"

*By Melanie Kett Wirtanen,  
with contributions from James Roush, DVM,  
Founder of Santa Cruz Predatory Bird Research Group*

**A**s a California birder, have you ever raised your binoculars to an electric transmission tower and had the good fortune to find yourself gazing at a Peregrine Falcon? I have, and it is certainly a great moment on any day of birding, especially when we achieve that SSL, the "Soul Satisfying Look" at the majestic falcon. It is a testament to the fact that the Peregrine has fully recovered from the threat of extinction it faced 46 years ago when *Falco peregrinus* was placed on the Endangered Species List by the U.S. Department of the Interior.

Thanks to the efforts of dedicated conservationists, including falconers who were pivotal in the recovery of the Peregrine at a time when there were only two known pairs left in California, we now have many, many opportunities to see these magnificent birds of prey during a day of birding in this state.

But there may now be yet another unseen factor, as DDT was, that may limit these exciting views of the Peregrine.

Are you aware that here in the San Francisco Bay Area there are currently conditions in the nesting cycle of *Falco peregrinus anatum* that subject an unusual proportion of falcon fledglings to certain death? We don't allude to the typical conditions under the stresses of nature that are a factor in the survival of every bird of prey. We are talking here about conditions that have been referred to as "lethal fledging environments" (Stewart, 2008)—specifically bridge support columns. Falcons make their nests (termed an eyrie) on the tops of these columns—from which their babies take their first flights—and die from drowning. These offspring of bridge-nesting falcons have a mortality rate of 95%, and that is just too many in the minds of those who fought like tigers for their recovery in the first place.

You might ask, "95% mortality rate for falcons fledging on our bridges? Seriously?" Yes, because at a more typical nest site, say a cliff face, the young will take their first flight and will readily find ledges, rocks and trees to land on. Although those landings may not be graceful, the falcons will be safe on those perches, and parents will still support the fledglings for a while by bringing food to wherever they land. In the case of the bridge-

support nest, this is just not possible due to the height of the nests and the lack of nearby perching spots for those unpracticed landings the fledglings have to make. They often end up at water level, and

words “George and Gracie falcons” to read a fine article on a past rescue of eyasses in the Bay Area.

Most experienced birders know that even though the Peregrine Falcon came off the Federal Endangered Species List in 1999 and their populations are higher than ever recorded historically, they are still on the State of California "Fully Protected" List (Code Section 3511). Therefore, since these baby peregrines cannot be touched; they cannot be rescued. Fortunately, scientists and falconers have come together through their concern about what is happening to these baby falcons, these princes and princesses poised to take to the skies.

**The SOLUTION:** Mitigate the losses by regaining permission, through a special exception, to climb up to the nests and rescue the babies before they can fall to their deaths, then give them to falconers who would raise them and care for them. NOTE: the removal of the falcon eyasses at three weeks of age is ideal for their future adaptability and their removal is known to have no significant impact on the pairing of the adults; they see it as a predation and continue to pair up and breed in subsequent seasons. Rescue for use in falconry is an option that would ensure the success of the species through a manner in which this bird of prey has been employed for decades in this country, and worldwide, for thousands of years.

*Peregrine/Gyrfalcon hybrid - Cathy Summa-Wolfe*



*Peregrine eyasses- Nick Dunlop©*

quoting from a 2008 summary on the fledglings “...the first fledgling landed on the E-2 tower (SF Bay Bridge) footing and was immediately set upon by harassing gulls. It flew east with gulls in pursuit and soon landed in the water. The fledgling reversed directions and began swimming toward the E-2 tower footing. It swam strongly for about ten minutes, weakly for five minutes, and then its head slipped beneath the surface of the water.” (Stewart, 2008)

So, you see, they drown—nearly ALL of them. (In some cases, they may even end up on road surfaces.)

This fact is what motivates Jim Roush and me to appeal to you *NOW*. We ask: "How many more fledglings will have to be lost to the SF Bay waters until SOME type of sustained action is taken to save them?" Why not check it out for yourself? Do some research, and perhaps pay a visit to the Exploratorium in San Francisco, where the views of the western span of the SF Bay Bridge present the expanse of water any fledgling would have to cross to reach land safely. As a birder and a devotee to the Peregrine Falcon, it makes me (and others) want to sit under a nest site with a boat and a net poised to scoop them out of the water! You might also type in search-



## WHY rescue bridge Peregrine eyasses for falconry?

1) Throughout history, falconers are known to be the most passionate advocates for the Peregrine Falcon. Falconers have consistently demonstrated how they care and work to the benefit of all birds of prey. The average lifespan for a wild peregrine is 15.5 years; in captivity, up to 20-25.

2) Rather than stand by as bridge fledglings fall to their deaths, falconers want to rescue ALL of the falcon babies from their eyries on the bridge columns and train them to fly and hunt like any wild falcon, yet at the end of the day bring them safely home to the mews alongside the falconer and his dog.

3) Falconry—the practice of hunting with a bird of prey,—remarkably forges an alliance between four species: Man, horse, dog and falcon. The bond between the falconer and his/her raptor is very strong, and through this pairing, the falcon is given the utmost care and a life that parallels its natural state by being flown free on its native prey such as duck and pheasant.

4) It was Tom Cade, a lifelong falconer, who founded *The Peregrine Fund* in 1970 and developed a program to rear Peregrine Falcons in captivity and reintroduce them into the wild at the time of the DDT crisis. ("Handbook of Bird Biology," 2nd Ed., Cornell Lab of Ornithology, 2004)

5) With climate change becoming a growing concern for all species, the necessity to maintain a wild genotype would be served through acquisition of the bridge falcons for use in falconry.

6) Did you know that one of the most important books on Falconry, "The Art of Falconry" (1248) by Frederick II of Hohenstaufen also gives much factual information about birds and is the first scientific work known to contain illustrations of birds?

Sadly, the USF&WS and CADF&W have turned a deaf-ear to the plight of the bridge falcons, giving no explanation for abruptly denying the practice of rescuing the falcons (for any purpose) in these past two nesting seasons. California Department of Transportation, with jurisdiction over the bridges, is also unmotivated to take action. (NOTE: as recently as 2014,

rescue was allowed at the request of Glenn Stewart, Coordinator of the Santa Cruz Predatory Bird Research Group. Glenn is monitoring Peregrine Falcons in the Bay Area as well as other populations in Southern California, including those on bridge eyries).



*Peregrine Falcon - Michelle Lamberson*

One presumes that the denials come in tandem with concerns for California's Least Tern and Snowy Plover colonies. There are laws currently in place dictating that in locations where raptorial birds may be preying upon on the colonies, those raptors (including Peregrine Falcons) are trapped and translocated. If they return, which they frequently do, they can be shot, trapped and/or euthanized. So, in essence, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife allows the killing of "fully protected" Peregrine Falcons for their habit of feeding on two of the 450 species of bird known to comprise their diet on this continent. Even more concerning is the revelation that several California falcons have been secretly trapped and killed by the USFWS when they returned to established nesting sites after having been translocated to locales as far away as Oregon. So "fully protected status" comes with what, an asterisk? A bullet (in the eye)? Instead, we propose that if peregrines are given to falconers (who have much more respect for their bestowed position at the top of the food chain), management of their movements near endangered species colonies will be controlled.

*Peregrine Falcon - Pete Solé*

A study on the 2013 Least Tern breeding season indicates that of the eight colonies in the SF Bay Area, just one Peregrine Falcon was reported as a documented predator of an adult Least Tern at Hayward Regional Shoreline, and three more also documented as predators, again on adults, at Alameda Point. Over all, there were 120 Least Tern fledglings

produced from 155 chicks. Depredations by Common Raven, American Crow, domestic cats, American Kestrels, Coyote, Northern Harrier and Great Horned Owl also occurred in those colonies. (Frost, Nancy 2014). As to the four documented peregrine predations, what was the fate of those falcons? Falcon advocates believe that actions to remove predators from endangered species sites should be documented and made public. A point to be made here: Let's admit that it's our human encroachment, our manipulation of the natural Least Tern and Snowy Plover environment, that precipitated the decline of some of these colonies in the first place, just as it was our indiscriminate use of DDT that imperiled the Peregrine.

We are asking you who are in the birding community these questions:

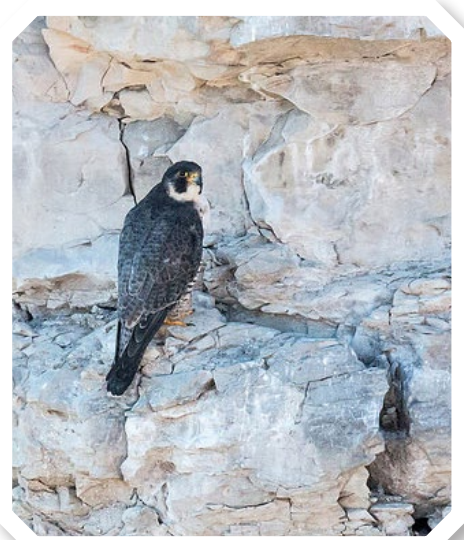
"Would birders support the rescue of the baby bridge falcons for use in falconry?"

*Peregrine Falcon illustration - Melanie Kett Wirtanen*



"Would the birding public be willing to get behind an effort to make a rescue exemption for the bridge offspring of *Falco peregrinus anatum* until it can be removed from fully protected status under CADF&G Sec. 3511?"

*Peregrine, Wilder Ranch - Lee Jaffe*



Should you have any misgivings about interfering with the course of nature, you might look for other cases in California where intervention on behalf of a fully protected species has taken place. For example, orphaned mountain lion cubs (a species specially protected in California since 1990) have been sent to zoos and wildlife education facilities. The precedent does exist for rescuing a protected species for a specific purpose, education, rather than allowing the offspring to perish needlessly. An advantage in rescuing the bridge babies for falconry is they are native falcons, which means they could be released back to the wild if necessary (away from Least Tern and Snowy Plover colonies). Meanwhile they will be fed, housed and flown on a regular basis as is required by the *Falconer's Creed*.

If it were legal to possess Peregrine Falcons through the proposed special exemption, it is inevitable that some of them would be used for captive propagation; in this manner they would constitute a "captive self-sustaining population" and serve to preserve the native California Peregrine Falcon gene pool; this could be valuable should there ever be another crisis which demanded captive breeding as a remedial measure.

No doubt you agree: The Peregrine Falcon is a magnificent bird worthy of our efforts to support its success. It has happened before; it MUST happen again. Please join us and reach out to the contacts listed below; may your

opinion and action have a positive impact toward the future of the California Peregrine Falcon, so generations to come can raise their bins to that thrilling view that has inspired thousands to develop a passion for birding.

If you feel as passionate about falcons as falconers, the general public and many birders do, and you wish to support the continued fecundity of the California Peregrine, please contact our fellow advocates of the Peregrine, Audubon California, and ask them to support legislation that would remove the *Falco peregrinus anatum* from California's "Fully Protected List" Sec. 3511 and that in the interim, you would like to see a special exemption to allow bridge babies to be rescued for use in falconry. The fact that the Peregrine Falcon has **fully recovered** and flourishes in the SF Bay Area warrants EVERY effort to save their young from the death sentence they have been given by those who would look the other way.



*Peregrine Falcon chick - Lisa Larson*

**Audubon California:**

Brigid McCormack – Executive Director of Audubon California/Vice President,  
National Audubon Society Headquarters (415) 644-4603 [bmccormack@audubon.org](mailto:bmccormack@audubon.org)  
Gaylon Parsons – Deputy Director  
Headquarters (415) 644-4605 [gparsons@audubon.org](mailto:gparsons@audubon.org)  
Stan Senner – Director of Bird Conservation, Pacific Flyway  
Remote – Oregon (907) 903-6796 [ssenner@audobon.org](mailto:ssenner@audobon.org)

**Facts on *Falco peregrinus* from Cornell University's Ornithology Lab website include:**

- ▶ The peregrines mate for life, and return to the same nesting territories year after year.
- ▶ Incubation period 29–32 days; when hatched, the nestlings are helpless, are covered in whitish down, with eyes closed, weighing about 1.5 ounces.
- ▶ The nestling period is 35-42 days, the end of which they are nearly full grown and prepared to take their first flight; they will have spent many days standing at the edge, exercising their powerful wings for that final moment when they leave the eyrie.



*Peregrine "Safe at Home"  
SC Harbor Light House  
- Lisa Fay Larson*



*SF Bay Bridge - Susan Schalbe*

**References:**

Stewart, Glenn R. 2008 "Lethal Fledging Environments for Peregrine Falcons in California" SCPBRG  
Martin, Glen 2007 "George and Gracie's offspring head to safety...to keep fledglings from drowning." SFGATE  
Frost, Nancy 2014 "California Least Tern Breeding Survey, 2013 Season" CA DF&W

**Glossary:**

Anatum: Native California Peregrine Falcon  
Eyas: unfledged nestling  
Eyrie: nesting site, or scrape, as on a cliff or bridge support

# EVENTS CALENDAR

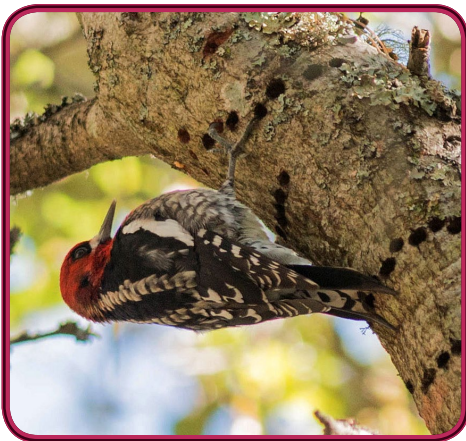
## November–December 2016



**Friday, November 11**  
**DeLaveaga Park- South Side**

As fall migration slows down, this is a good time to study some of our regular resident and winter species. We should find a good mix of the normal woodland species, including at least four species of woodpeckers, and maybe more.

**Directions:** Meet at 8:00 am at the trail head at the north end of Park Way (the section to the north of Highway 1), off Prospect Heights. Note that parking is limited in this area. There are a few parking spaces in a dirt lot by the park entrance, but these can be difficult for low-clearance vehicles.



*Red-breasted Sapsucker, DeLaveaga Park*  
*-Jeff Bleam*

There is usually some on-street parking available along Prospect Heights and on nearby side streets. Carpooling is suggested.

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



**Sunday, November 13**  
**Fort Ord National Monument / Fort Ord Dunes State Park / Jack's Peak**

This trip will start at the Fort Ord National Monument, moving to Fort Ord Dunes State Park. Current plan to stop off at Jack's Peak county park in Monterey (open at 10:00 am / park fee) on the way to Fort Ord Dunes State Park. If I think the day may be too windy for the state park (dunes area), we might stay at Jack's Peak. We will look for woodland and oak grassland species in the morning, then see if something has migrated or "blown in" to the Jack's Peak area, before moving to ocean side.

**Directions:** Meet at 7:00 am at the Aptos Wells Fargo Bank for carpooling or at 8:00 am at the Creekside Terrace Trailhead, Fort Ord National Monument. Come for a half day or all day trip.

**Leader:** Eric Feuss, 831-477-0280 (home); 408-717-0421 (mobile). For alternate meeting arrangements, please call *ahead* on home phone; mobile for day of trip only.



*Blackburnian Warbler, Monterey*  
*- Beth Hamel*

## WEDNESDAYS, November 2, 9, 16, 23, and 30

### Quail Hollow County Park

Join the folks at Quail Hollow for their special weekly bird-walk series around this diverse mountain park.

**Directions:** Meet at 8:00 am in the parking lot of Quail Hollow County Park.

**Leader:** Christian Schwarz, [waxwingboheme@gmail.com](mailto:waxwingboheme@gmail.com)



**Thursday, November 17**  
**SCBC Meeting @ 7:30 PM**  
**Speaker: Don Roberson**  
**Topic: Lesser-known Parks & Wildlife in Utah**

While California has 10 National Parks and Alaska boasts 8, southern Utah's five National Parks have made it famous for spectacular scenery. But Utah has more than that. Taking another look in September 2015, Rita and Don decided to visit some of the "lesser known" National Monuments in northern Utah and other interesting sites. They will show you whistling trains, ferocious dinosaurs, fall colors, unexpected wildlife, and will even throw in a few birds.

*Chuckar - JabBjerke*

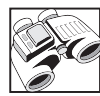


**Sunday, November 20**  
**Wilder Ranch**

The varied habitats of this park hold a good variety of birds and other wildlife. We will check along the coast for returning loons, grebes, and scoters. Expect a few miles of mostly easy walking

**Directions:** Meet at 7:30 am in the main parking lot. There is an entrance fee.

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



**Saturday & Sunday, December 3 & 4**  
**Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge & the Sutter Buttes**

Join us for a potentially spectacular weekend in the Butte Sink Basin, where we'll be observing the tremendous numbers of southbound and wintering waterfowl that visit the numerous wildlife refuges and rice fields of the area. Raptors are also present in large numbers, and our target birds include Bald & Golden Eagles, Peregrine & Prairie Falcon, Ferruginous Hawk, and maybe even a Rough-legged. White-faced Ibis are numerous, and Sandhill Cranes, Common Moorhen, Yellow-billed Magpies, and Ring-necked Pheasant are all expected. But the real attraction is the waterfowl; the sheer numbers of Ross and Snow Geese make for a spectacular trip and will be our focal point. Five species of geese are likely, and we'll also see tremendous numbers and varieties of ducks, including a high chance for Eurasian Wigeon. Tundra Swans are also likely. Exact itinerary will be decided as the trip unfolds, but we'll include a drive through the scenic Sutter Buttes, with a chance for Lark Sparrow and Mountain Bluebird. Bring cameras if you have them, and be prepared for lunch in the field.

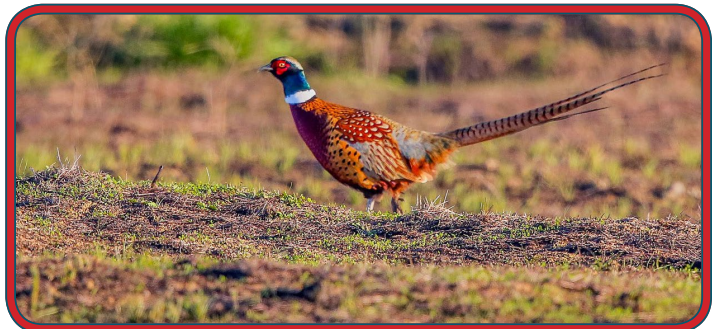
**Directions:** Meet on Saturday morning in the parking lot at the Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge (about 20 miles north of Williams, just off of Interstate 5) at 8:30 a.m. Bring hand held radios if you have them. The leader will have a few to share; please bring AAA batteries.

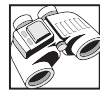
**Lodging:** Participants are recommended to arrive Friday evening and to stay in the town of Williams (about 175 miles north of Santa Cruz). Recommended hotels include the Granzella Inn, the Ramada Inn, Motel 6, or the Stage Stop Motel. Some of the refuges have an entrance fee.

**Leader:** Clay Kempf, LTJaeger@att.net.

**The trip will be limited to 20 participants. Please e-mail the leader if you want to attend.**

*Ring-necked Pheasant - Andy Knorr*





**Sunday, December 11  
Henry Cowell State Park**

We will walk along either the Zayante Trail or Pipeline Road looking for woodpeckers, sapsuckers, thrushes and more. Maybe we will be lucky with something special...

**Directions:** Meet at 8:00 am in the main parking lot near the Visitor Center (entrance fee).

**Leader:** Nick Levendosky, [nlevendosky@gmail.com](mailto:nlevendosky@gmail.com)



**Friday, December 9  
Natural Bridges**

This will be a relaxed-pace walk around some of the varied habitats here, which almost always produces a nice variety of species.

**Directions:** Meet at 8:00 am at the Delaware Avenue entrance, across from the intersection of Delaware Avenue and Natural Bridges Drive.

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



*Coyote, Bird Club Walk,  
both at  
Henry Cowell State Park  
- Jeff Bleam*

*Above:  
Wilder Ranch*

*Right:  
Pygmy Nuthatch,  
Natural Bridges*

*- Lisa Larson*



*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 Nicholas Levendosky: [nlevendosky@gmail.com](mailto:nlevendosky@gmail.com). 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.*



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## Nest Box Program - Quail Hollow

"Go ahead. Put your hand into the nest and gently feel if there are any eggs." It was my first day as a volunteer for the Bird Club's Nest Box Program at Quail Hollow Ranch County Park. I was standing under a wide oak tree with my mentor, Jenny Anderson. Despite the scolding of an Oak Titmouse in the branches above us, I reached into the nest. The nest box revealed a beautiful cross section of green moss and pale gray feathers. At the top of the nest was a perfect cup ready for laying. There were no eggs yet, but as the season progressed I would get to feel the eggs warm from the parent's incubation cycle. I would also get to see nests of Western Bluebirds, Violet-green Swallows, Chestnut-backed Chickadees, and my personal favorite, Ash-throated Flycatchers.

As a volunteer, I was asked to come every other week for two hours to check the nest boxes. The small time commitment was reasonable and there were weekend or weekday times available, so it fit into my schedule. Because we checked the boxes in the late morning, I still had time for my regular morning birding. Each time I visited Quail Hollow, there were interesting things happening. I learned what a badger hole looks like, and that Turkey Vultures really do look like turkeys when they are on the ground. I learned that Ash-throated Flycatchers use dung, fur, and even the occasional rock in their nests. It was an amazing experience and I can't wait for the next season to start. I would highly recommend the

experience as a volunteer. If you are interested, please contact [Jeremy.lin@santacruzcounty.us](mailto:Jeremy.lin@santacruzcounty.us) 831 335-9348

-Elisabeth Foster  
(previously Forrest)



*Left: Oak Titmouse nest  
Right: Violet-green Swallow nest  
- Elisabeth Foster  
CA Quail art - Lisa Fay Larson*



*The 60th Annual Santa Cruz County Christmas Bird Count  
Saturday, December 17 2016*

The National Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count (CBC) for Santa Cruz County will be held on Saturday, December 17th<sup>1</sup>. Please mark your calendars now and join us for a day of birding, fun and excitement for birders of all levels of experience.

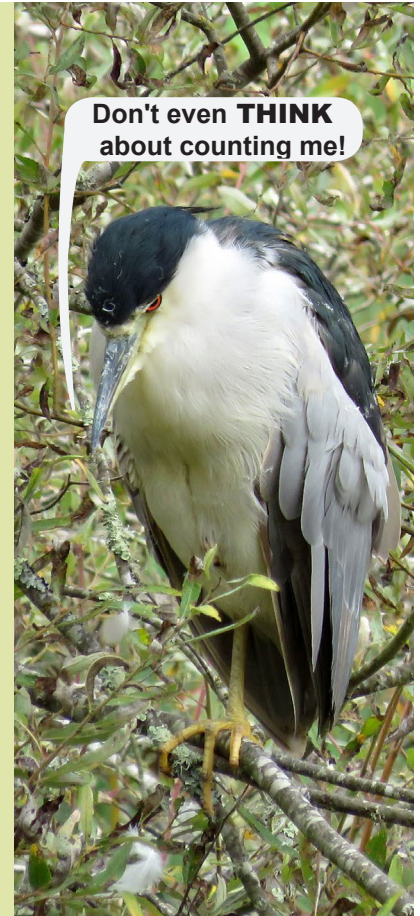
Come and see what birds join us for December; a surprising vagrant is always fun. However, as always, diversity and abundances remain the focus of the count. Last year, we had 169 species on count day and 176 species during count week, putting count under 10-year average (170) by one count. Everyone's help in maintaining participation and diversity (species count) is greatly desired and appreciated. Last year, we had 73 observers in the field, logging 243.55 total party hours, a higher effort than the ten-year average of 226.1 hours.

The 15-mile diameter count circle reaches from Davenport to New Brighton Beach, and from Boulder Creek to the ocean, thus encompassing a wide array of species habitats.

Please join the 60th Annual Christmas Bird Count, and then enjoy the countdown dinner! All are welcome to join the all-day event which happens rain or shine.

If you want to join the count, call or email Eric Feuss at (831) 477-0280 or [ericfeuss@sbcglobal.net](mailto:ericfeuss@sbcglobal.net).

<sup>1</sup>The Santa Cruz circle for the National Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count (CBC) is always on the first Saturday of the Audubon Society's official count period. The period always begins December 14th and ends January 5th.



*CBC Countdown Potluck Dinner  
Saturday Evening December 17*

This year the countdown dinner will be held at the Soquel Glen Mobile Home Park event center. There will be directional flyers provided to section leaders. However, for anyone who cannot attend the count, but wishes to partake in the countdown with food and friends, the mobile home park is along Noble Gulch Creek and is located at 5470 Soquel Dr, Soquel, CA 95073. (The cross street is Soquel Drive and Pepperwood Way (not Silver Birch Lane). There is a Stop and Go Market on the other side of Soquel Drive, to mark vicinity. The event center is along Del Rio Circle - the first left from Pepperwood Way (all within park).

Bring your bird list and a dish to share—main, vegetable, salad, dessert, or bread, and a beverage of choice if you want something special. There will be paper plates, cups, and utensils, but bringing your own tableware will reduce waste and cost. Soft drinks and hot water for tea or hot chocolate will be available.



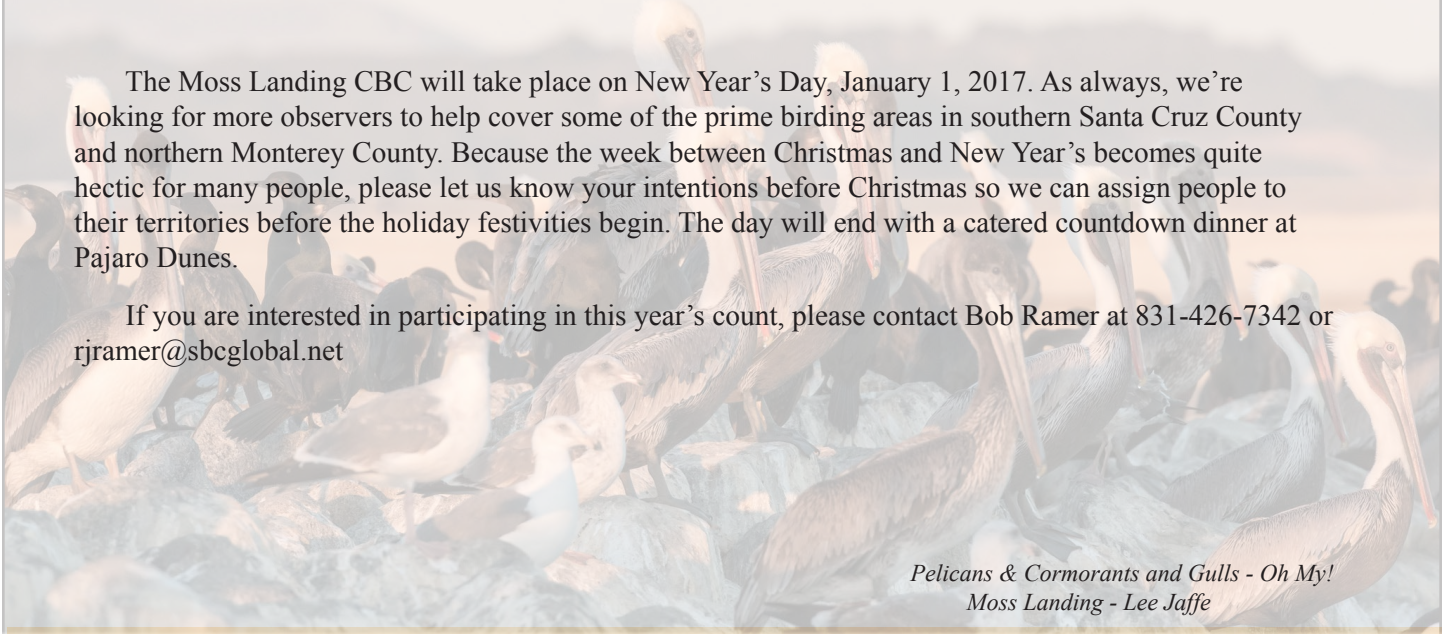
*Yummy! Persimmons! (White-crowned Sparrow)  
Top of page: 'Grumpy' the Black-crowned Night Heron  
Lisa Fay Larson*




*Moss Landing Christmas Bird Count*  
*Sunday, January 1, 2017*

The Moss Landing CBC will take place on New Year's Day, January 1, 2017. As always, we're looking for more observers to help cover some of the prime birding areas in southern Santa Cruz County and northern Monterey County. Because the week between Christmas and New Year's becomes quite hectic for many people, please let us know your intentions before Christmas so we can assign people to their territories before the holiday festivities begin. The day will end with a catered countdown dinner at Pajaro Dunes.

If you are interested in participating in this year's count, please contact Bob Ramer at 831-426-7342 or [rjramer@sbcglobal.net](mailto:rjramer@sbcglobal.net)



*Pelicans & Cormorants and Gulls - Oh My!*  
*Moss Landing - Lee Jaffe*



*Pinnacles CBC*  
*Friday, December 30, 2016*

The Pinnacles count encompasses Pinnacles National Park as well as the town of Soledad and rural areas both east and west of the park.

We especially need counters for hiking routes inside the park, and will also need counters for driving routes outside the park.

Information about our count can be found on our website: [pinnaclescbc.yolasite.com](http://pinnaclescbc.yolasite.com). Scroll toward the bottom of the page to find maps of the count routes and other resources.

If you're interested in volunteering or have questions, please contact Daniel George, [strixspiral@yahoo.com](mailto:strixspiral@yahoo.com).

*Im not just another pretty face!*  
*California Condor - Chris Hartzell*



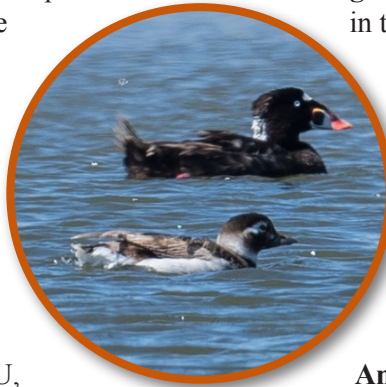
## Santa Cruz Birds

By Steve Gerow

*Including reports from June 1 to August 31, 2016*

**T**his season provided us with another good dose of the unexpected. There were a couple of quite rare species for the county, some unusual summer lingerers, notable nesting records, plus the usual mix of late and early things and so forth. Some of the most significant reports involved birds that are common at other seasons, providing a good illustration of how rarity is often a relative term. Read on for the details.

As usual, a few out-of-season waterfowl spent the summer in the county, including a couple of species that are rare even in winter. The **Black Scoter** cited last issue stayed around the Pajaro River mouth area until at least June 16 (AR, SP, MB, v.ob.). This same location also hosted a rare **Long-tailed Duck** from May 29 to August 22 (AG, CF, AR, LL, v.ob.). Ordinary in winter but rare for summer, a **Common Goldeneye** lingered with the other summering diving ducks near the Pajaro mouth until July 3 (NU, STh, v.ob.), and another stayed around the lower San Lorenzo River through the summer and into early fall (JMi, AR, BR, v.ob.) Another surprise was a **Hooded Merganser** photographed at Struve and West Struve Sloughs on August 13 (AR, NU), which at this date undoubtedly was a very rare record of a locally summering bird. More expected lingerers this period included up to five **Brant** around the Pajaro Dunes area (v.ob.), a **Bufflehead** in Struve Slough from June 25-July 16 (DS, NU), and up to three **Red-breasted Mergansers** at Pajaro Dunes through the period (v.ob.). The Pajaro Dunes summer aggregation also regularly included up to five **Common**



*Long-tailed Duck-& Surf Scoter - Michael Bolte  
Pacific Golden Plover - Tom Unsicker  
American White Pelicans - James Maughn*

**Mergansers** (v.ob.) which are generally uncommon in the Pajaro drainage.

Four pairs of **Great Egrets** nested at the Santa Cruz Harbor this season (RG, MP, v.ob.), for only the third nesting record here (or anywhere in the county away from Pinto Lake), and the first that involved more than one nest. Large young were observed in all these nests on July 6, with a total of seven young noted (AR). Late summer brought large numbers of **American White Pelicans** to the Watsonville Slough System, with the highest tally being 340 in Struve Slough on August 9 (SH). The adult **Bald Eagle** pair continued in the area, being seen around Harkins Slough off and on through the period (v.ob.), but there was no evidence of nesting. Unfortunately another Bald Eagle fell victim to a power line, an immature found dead at College Lake on June 1 (GK). An **American Avocet**, somewhat rare away from the Pajaro Valley, turned up along the lower San Lorenzo River on July 28 (JMi). Among the better shorebird finds this period were two adult **Pacific Golden-Plovers** at Wilder Ranch from August 12-16 (AR, NL, TU, v.ob.)



**Ruddy Turnstone** reports included an adult at Pajaro Dunes on July 24 (AR), and juveniles at Pajaro Dunes on August 20 and in the Natural Bridges area August 27-31



*Lesser Yellowlegs & Solitary Sandpiper - Sharon Hull*

(AR, v.ob.). A **Calidris sandpiper** (probably a **Least**) with all white plumage and bright orange legs and bill was an interesting addition to the shorebird mix in the lower Struve/Watsonville Slough area on August 11 (GK). Seven juvenile **Baird's Sandpipers** were from August 11-24 (STh, AR, NL, SG, v.ob.). A few **Wilson's Phalaropes**, almost all in the Pajaro Dunes area, visited the county starting June 29, with no reports involving more than six individuals (MB, NU, v.ob.). The only report elsewhere was of one at Younger Lagoon from August 15-18 (KA, v.ob.) A **Solitary Sandpiper** visited Struve Slough from August 7-11 (EL, CK, v.ob.), and one was at a pond near Scotts Valley on August 20 (CS). **Lesser Yellowlegs** were fairly well reported starting July 20 (PB, v.ob.), with high counts of six at Struve Slough (FF) and Pajaro Dunes (NL), both on August 12.

Among the summer's most exceptional reports involved up to three juvenile **Mew Gulls**, photo-documented at the San Lorenzo River mouth in late July (JMi), with one there on July 22, 3 on July 25, and 2 remaining on July 28. We have a very few August and some September records, but most Mew Gulls do not arrive in the area until October (and the fact that these were juveniles establishes that they were migrants arriving from their northern breeding grounds, not over-summering birds.) This is certainly a new early record



for juveniles locally, and possibly for all of California. A juvenile **Black Tern** was spotted in county waters on a pelagic trip on August 27 (AJ, MS). Rare onshore was an adult **Arctic Tern** along the lower Pajaro River on August 7 (CK, EL). A **Black Skimmer** was at Pajaro Dunes on June 10 (LK, AH), and two were there on July 29 (RW).

A **Common Nighthawk** flying over La Selva Beach on July 1 (GM) was one of only a handful of county records. Another species with few Santa Cruz County records is **Yellow-billed Cuckoo**, and one of those was photographed by Shorebirds Pond in Pajaro Dunes on June



*Yellow-billed Cuckoo - Norman Uyeda*

28 (NU). There was a scattering of **Black Swift** reports through the summer. Like last year, some observations around Sand Hill Bluff on the north coast between July 22-30 were suggestive of nesting (AR), but again there were no actual breeding confirmations, nor any really strong evidence that nesting was taking place. An immature male

**Black-chinned Hummingbird** near the Summit area on August 7 was a bit early, and the only August report (STe, LT), for an unusually sparse late-summer showing compared to other recent years. The leucistic young male **Anna's Hummingbird** continued to be a celebrity at the UCSC Arboretum through the period. **American Kestrels** have been sparse and apparently declining nesters in Santa Cruz County

*Mew Gull - Jane Mio*

in recent years. Three successful nesting efforts reported this season were somewhat encouraging, with broods of young noted at Watsonville Slough, Bonny Doon Ecological Reserve, and Quail Hollow Ranch (NU, SG, MC, AR).

A spring migrant **Willow Flycatcher** was near Pescadero Creek in the southeast corner of Santa Cruz County on June 12 (AR), and the first fall migrant appeared at Natural Bridges on August 23 (SG). A juvenile **Say's Phoebe** at Wilder Ranch from August 12-14 (TU, MB, FB) was most likely a post-breeding wanderer from some nearby inland breeding population; the first regular fall migrants arrived on-time in September. Four **Loggerhead Shrikes** were found starting July 24. At least one pair of **Horned Larks** were present in the dune area at Pajaro Dunes through the summer (DH, AR, LL, v.ob.), suggesting possible nesting there. This is not far from the county's only known regular nesting area in recent years. **Purple Martins** nested within the county at Bonny Doon Ecological Reserve for a second year, with at least one nest fledging young by July 29 (AR, v.ob.) Martins were also present through the period in the Loma Prieta area, where a colony exists not far from the county border in Santa Clara County. In addition, five reports of dispersant and/or migrant Purple Martins in coastal lowland areas from June 20 to August 26 was more than usual. A **Canyon Wren** was seen again in Castle Rock State Park on June 17 (AR), but there was no evidence of any others present or any nesting effort.

The normal breeding range of **Cedar Waxwings** in California goes south only to Humboldt County, but occasionally they have been known to breed well outside their normal range. Up until this year, the only evidence of breeding in Santa Cruz County was one record of carrying nesting material. This



summer, however, two pairs (a pair of adults and a pair of second year birds) were found to be nesting at Pajaro Dunes (AR). The adult pair's nest, first discovered on July 9, had hatched young by July 16, but both of these nesting efforts were apparently depredated by late July. But then a third (!) nest was found, this apparently being a second nesting effort by the adult pair. Large young were in this nest on August 20. This nest was found empty on September 26, with no evidence of depredation, suggesting that the young successfully fledged.

A very early **Northern Waterthrush** was photographed along Corralitos Creek on August 5 (GK), apparently setting a new early record for a fall migrant in Santa Cruz County. A spring migrant **Black-and-white Warbler** was at Rancho Del Oso on June 3 (AH). One reported at Bonny Doon Ecological Reserve on July 30 perhaps summered locally (JMa, TU, CU). A **Hooded Warbler** was a rare find at Natural Bridges State Beach on August 28 (AK). Another late spring migrant was a **Yellow-breasted Chat** at Natural Bridges on June 5 (TE). **Black-chinned Sparrows** nested successfully again in the Loma Prieta area this season, with recently fledged young observed on June 18 and August 5 (AR). A singing **Lark Sparrow** near Pescadero Creek in the extreme southeast portion of the county on June 12 (AR) was in an area where some likely still nest. Three fall migrant Lark Sparrows were found in various spots between August 19-22 (TU, RW, JR).

A **Summer Tanager** was along Swanton Road on June 5 (AR). It was a very good season for **Rose-breasted**

*Photos from top:  
Northern Waterthrush - Gary Kittleson  
Loggerhead Shrike - Andy Knorr  
Horned Lark female - Lisa Larson  
Cedar Waxwing on nest - Eugene Becks*

**Grosbeaks**, with ten late spring and summer birds found from June 4 to August 12 (v.ob.). A pair of **Blue Grosbeaks** was feeding two young along the Pajaro River on July 3 (AR), in the southeast corner of Santa Cruz County about 1.3 km from the Santa Clara County border. This provides the strongest evidence yet of these breeding inside the county, though they have been known to nest just outside the county border for a number of years. A female/immature **Orchard Oriole** visited a feeder northeast of Scotts Valley on August 30 (BM). The **Red Crossbill** irruption ended by late spring, with no reports after June 5. Three **Lawrence's Goldfinches** were found along Old Chittenden Road in the upper Pajaro Valley on July 10 (NU); the only other reports this period were singles in the Loma Prieta area on June 18, August 3, and August 5 (AR). Quite unexpected was a lone **Evening Grosbeak** that turned up near the campground in Henry Cowell State Park on the exceptionally late date of June 13 (JMc).



*Blue Grosbeak - Gail West*

**Cited Observers:** Kumaran Arul, Frances Bolte, Michael Bolte, Phil Brown, Mary Crouser, Theodore Emery, Farnaz Fatemi, Craig Fosdick, Aaron Gabbe, Steve Gerow, Rich Griffith, Alfred Hochstaedter, Sharon Hull, Diane Humple, Alvaro Jaramillo, Logan Kahle, Clay Kempf, Gary Kittleson, Anna Kopitov, Lisa Larson, Earl Lebow, Nick Levendosky, Jeff Manker (JMa), Gary Martindale, Jimmy McMorran (JMc), Jane Mio (JMio), Barbara Monahan, Margaret Perham, Shantanu Phukan, Alex Rinkert, Barbara Riverwoman, Jeff Roisman, Christian Schwarz, Monterey Seabirds, David Styer, Scott Terrill (STe), Linda Terrill, Simon Thornhill (STh), Connie Unsicker, Tom Unsicker, Norman Uyeda, Randy Wardle, v.ob. = various observers

## 20th ANNUAL CENTRAL VALLEY BIRDING SYMPOSIUM

November 17-20 2016

Hosted at the Stockton Hilton, by the CENTRAL VALLEY BIRD CLUB

*Please join us for this special 20th anniversary CVBS!*



*Pintail, Merced NWR - Andy Knorr*

- ▶ Thursday Night: Professional bird photographer Bob Steele, presents "Birding in the Central Valley Over the Past 20 Years".
- ▶ Friday Night: Kimball Garrett presents "The Central Valley's Prominent Place in the Past and Present of California Field Ornithology".
- ▶ Saturday Night: Our final keynote program presented by Ed Harper and friends is "Celebrating 20 Years of the CVBC and the CVBS."

The CVBS offers informative workshops, Friday, Saturday and Sunday field trips (exciting birds always turn up!), and art and gifts at the Birder's Market—there's something for everyone interested in birds. Come and join us to bird, learn, and just have fun!

To look over the line-up of speakers, workshops, and fieldtrips, check out our website at: [www.cvbsreg.org](http://www.cvbsreg.org).

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Birder's Notebook and Poet-Tree

*Dino Hummer*

little bird  
spin high  
--- let me see  
what  
--- you really look like  
encased in feathers  
who  
--- would know  
a dinosaur lurks  
in your heart

-Tru Dillon



*Anna's Hummer*  
- Chris Hartzell

*Say's Phoebe*

With understated elegance  
the first Say's Phoebe appears  
in the Autumn mist.  
Unassuming, she does not  
command the attention  
of her tuxedoed cousin.  
Deftly she gleans winged prey, and  
realights her perch to dine alone.  
Dilute colors don her torso—  
a fading sun on an overcast day.  
She is gently present,  
almost a mirage  
in dried grass expanses.

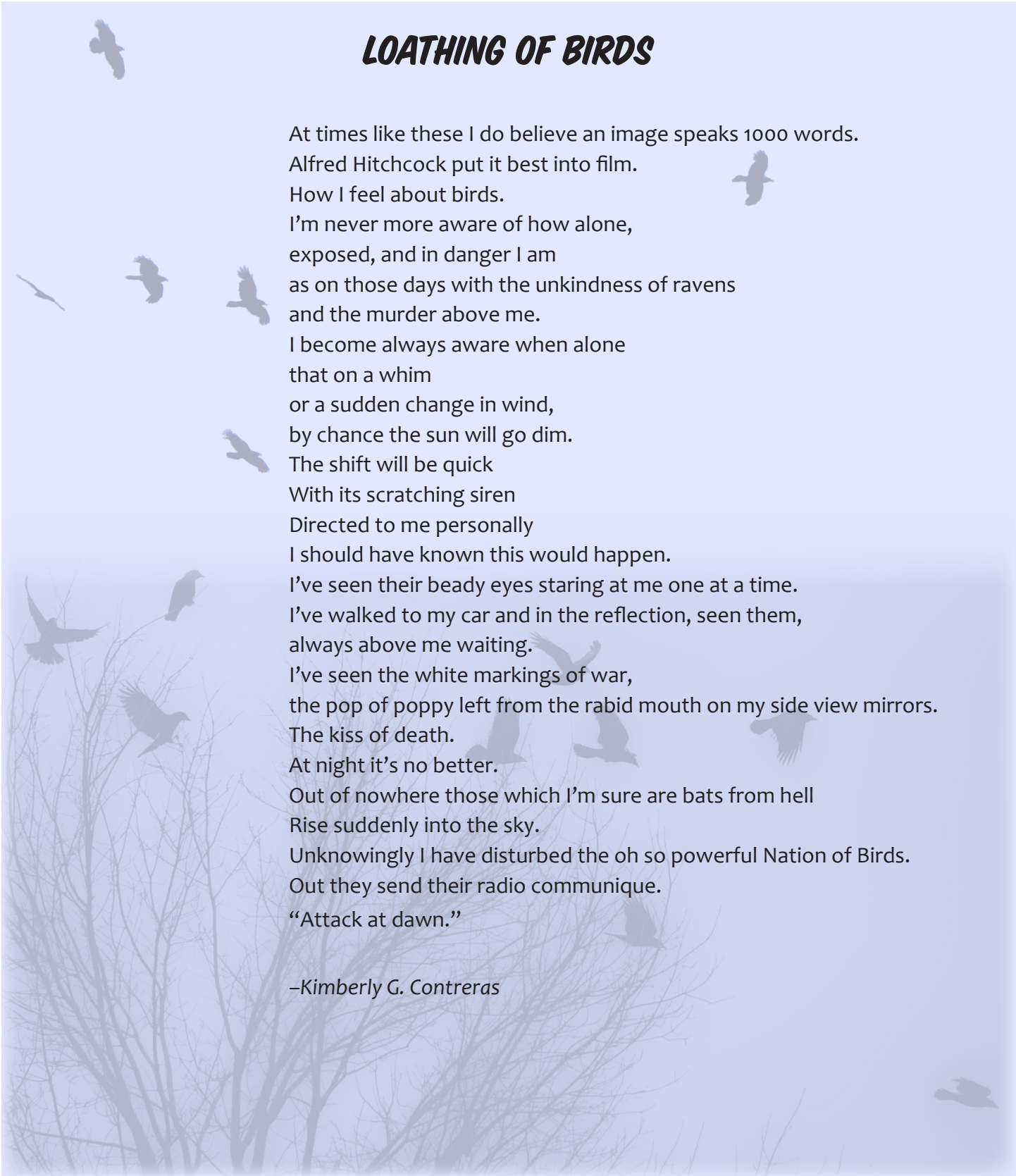
-Lisa Fay Larson

*Say's art - Lisa Fay Larson*





## LOATHING OF BIRDS



At times like these I do believe an image speaks 1000 words.  
Alfred Hitchcock put it best into film.  
How I feel about birds.  
I'm never more aware of how alone,  
exposed, and in danger I am  
as on those days with the unkindness of ravens  
and the murder above me.  
I become always aware when alone  
that on a whim  
or a sudden change in wind,  
by chance the sun will go dim.  
The shift will be quick  
With its scratching siren  
Directed to me personally  
I should have known this would happen.  
I've seen their beady eyes staring at me one at a time.  
I've walked to my car and in the reflection, seen them,  
always above me waiting.  
I've seen the white markings of war,  
the pop of poppy left from the rabid mouth on my side view mirrors.  
The kiss of death.  
At night it's no better.  
Out of nowhere those which I'm sure are bats from hell  
Rise suddenly into the sky.  
Unknowingly I have disturbed the oh so powerful Nation of Birds.  
Out they send their radio communique.  
"Attack at dawn."

—Kimberly G. Contreras

# Stephanie Martin Etchings

[stephaniemartinfineart.com](http://stephaniemartinfineart.com)

Clockwise:  
Ruby-crowned Kinglet,  
Screech Owl,  
Audobon's Warbler,  
Prairie Falcon,  
"Four Crowns"



10/20 et Four Crowns Martin



These intaglio prints are made using copper plates and traditional etching techniques: hard ground, soap ground, and rosin aquatint.





## CLIMATE CHANGE ENDANGERS NORTH AMERICAN BIRDS

*from a Report of National Audubon Society, 9/8/2014*

It's fall, Mexican sage is a riot of violet  
blooms. Hummingbirds are back, wings blurring,  
sipping nectar. A bluebird poses at the peak  
of the ginkgo, blue hood cloaking rusty breast.

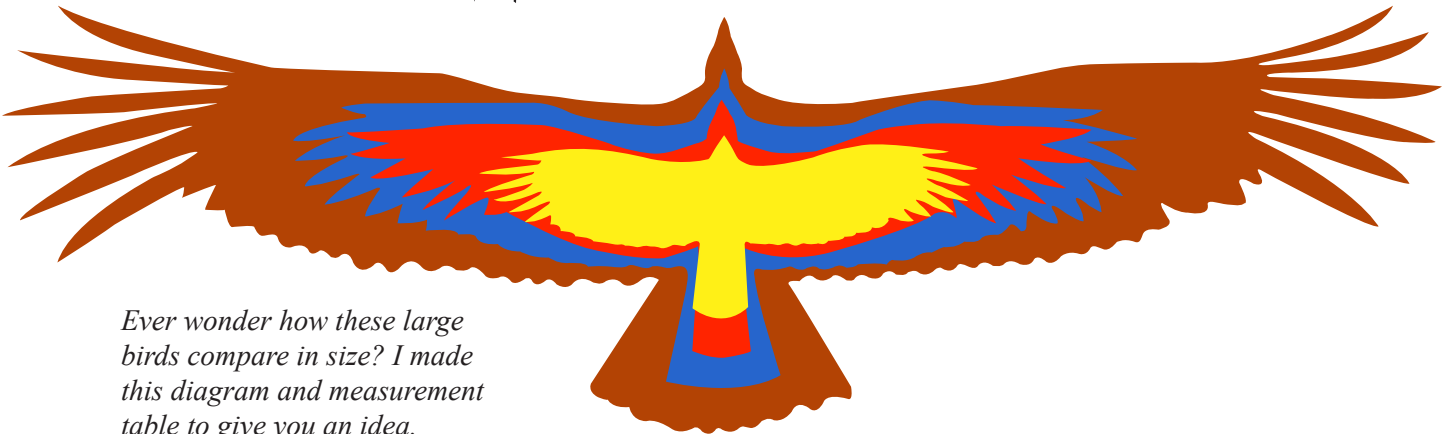
I watch them through sunroom glass, recall myself  
as I was then, survivor of brain surgery,  
dull eyes, hair like tangled scrub. I fed on  
birds' nectar, immersed in their healing color.

Where will the birds go? How many die of hunger?  
What will feed me if they fly away?

*-Barbara Leon*

*Western Bluebird - Lee Jaffe  
Ginkgo Leaves - Lisa Larson*

# Just How **BIG** is a California Condor?



*Ever wonder how these large birds compare in size? I made this diagram and measurement table to give you an idea.*

One day, my husband and I were lucky enough to witness 2 condors, a Red-tailed Hawk and Turkey Vultures soaring together between the hills above Partington Cove in Big Sur. No diagram compares to seeing the real thing!

My brother came to visit from Oklahoma and he had never seen a condor. Partington Cove didn't produce. Then we took the pull out just to the south and among the displays, there was a *life-size* condor depicted in the walkway. I stretched out as far as I could next to it while Curt took the photo. I am 5'8". I wasn't even close in length!

Finally, I spotted a condor soaring north toward us along the mountains about 1/2 way up

<b>CA Condor</b>	<b>9-9.5'</b>	<b>109-114 inches</b>
<b>Golden Eagle</b>	<b>7.1'</b>	<b>85 inches</b>
<b>Turkey Vulture</b>	<b>5.0'</b>	<b>60 inches</b>
<b>Red-tailed Hawk</b>	<b>4.2'</b>	<b>50 inches</b>

to the summit. I hurriedly gave Curt the binos and he got to see, but it was distant. I didn't feel Curt REALLY got a feel of how huge the bird was. Just after it went over the range, a Red-tailed Hawk landed on a pole at the same elevation where the condor had passed. I rushed to show Curt and ask him to compare it to the condor he just saw. Much to my satisfaction he said, "Wow, that condor really was huge!"



## New SCBC Members *Welcome!*

Ann Brohmer	Sept 2016
Tim Thompson	Sept 2016
Nancy Lewis	Sept 2016
David Apgar	Sept 2016
Eva Gruber	Oct 2016
& Nathan Slattery	
Nan & Ray Sherrod	Oct 2016
Bruce Stenman	Oct 2016
Susan Hillyard	Oct 2016



**SCBC Officers are improving communication with our members:**

### *Coming Soon:*

**New email communication system** for our members.

We wanted to make sure you know what's going on and don't miss out! Soon, we will be able to tweet you between the publications of the Albatross Newsletter. This would include cancellations of Bird Walks, adding new Bird Walks, community events that relate to birds, and reminders about guests speakers and other events you may not have on your radar!



*NEW SCBC Logo & Albatross newsletter design refresh  
- Lisa Larson*

**Pay Pal  
Membership**  
is now up & running!  
Sign-ups at  
no cost to  
members!

## *Do we have your current email address?*

If you didn't receive an email from us in mid-September (subject line: "SCBC New Member Service"), either we don't have your current email, or it's stuck in your spam filter. To update your address, contact me (see below).

Club Officers will use this list to notify members about changes in field trips and meeting dates, details for special events, local news of particular impact to birds, and the like; and for membership renewal reminders. By providing your email address, you give your approval to receive such emails, but you may unsubscribe at any time.

*It is club policy to respect the privacy of our members' information, and we will not sell or share our email list.*

Please let me know if...

...you wish to receive only renewal information by email;

...you wish to read the **ALBATROSS** online, instead of receiving a hard copy.

If you don't use email, not to worry, the Albatross will continue to soar to your mailbox!

Thank you,  
Stephanie Singer, Membership  
singersa@aol.com

**GOING GREEN—IT'S FOR THE BIRDS!**



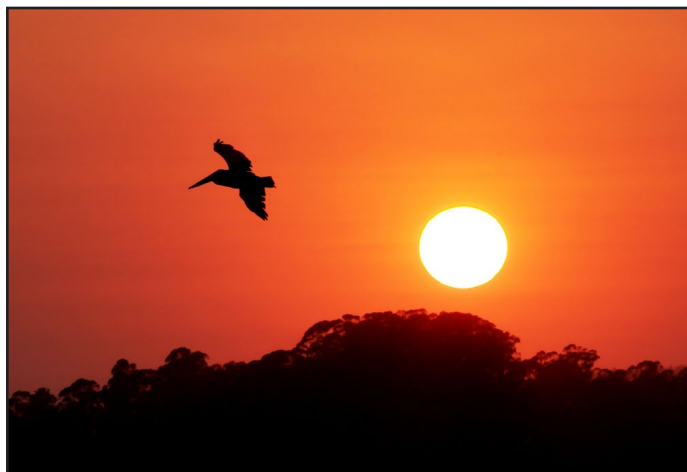
Submissions NEEDED



**DEADLINE**

for Jan/Feb issue

**DEC 1, 2016**



*Smokey Sunset Brown Pelican - Pete Solé*

**THE ALBATROSS  
NEEDS YOUR CONTRIBUTION**

Please help to keep your SCBC  
newsletter SOARING!

Your stories, photos, book reviews, tips,  
quotes, poems, artwork—anything that is  
bird-related is your opportunity to share!

A large photograph of several albatrosses in flight over a body of water under a blue sky with light clouds. The birds are white with dark wings and are captured in various stages of flight.

Assembling Your  
**ALBATROSS**  
Newsletter

## Submission to the Albatross Guidelines

In addition to regular features—*Events Calendar*, photos for *Santa Cruz Birds*, *Birders Notebook* and *Parting Shot*—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 birds or birders, serious or comic
- Reviews of birding literature or guides
- Conservation & outreach reports/stories
- Birding tips, descriptions of local sites
- Poetry, quotes, field sketches, artwork or photos
- Photos of BIRDS or people at our events (jpg, tif)

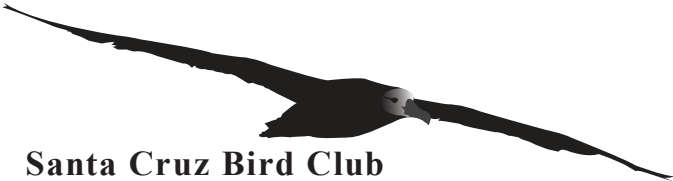
If you wish to submit an article, please contact the editor about it **AT LEAST 2 weeks before** the submission deadline.

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

~Lisa Fay Larson, Editor

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PARTING SHOT: "THE OPUS STRUT"  
DARK-EYED JUNCO (LEUCISTIC) - BARBARA AND KEVIN MONAHAN



## 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, *Albatross*. Santa Cruz Bird Club memberships run June-May.

Dues are \$20 Individual, \$25 Family, \$5 Youth, \$400 Life.

JOIN/RENEW ONLINE: [santacruzbirdclub.org/join-or-renew-online](http://santacruzbirdclub.org/join-or-renew-online).

Or make checks payable to Santa Cruz Bird Club and mail to:  
Box 1304, Santa Cruz, CA 95061, Attention: Membership.



## ALBATROSS

ROSS

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