



Albatross

PHOEBASTRIA NIGRIPES

Long-time Birder, First-time Atlaser

- By Jeff Manker

Things sagging in your love for birds department? Having trouble getting out there for one-on-one time with the birds? Want to spice up your birding life? Looking for something different out in nature?

Try breeding bird atlas. Really. It will change you as a birder. It did me and I have been birding for more decades than I care to admit.

What is breeding bird atlas? A group of birders (maybe you?) spends time in the field observing bird behaviors that give varying degrees of certainty as to whether it is breeding in a particular area. That data is then published in an atlas.

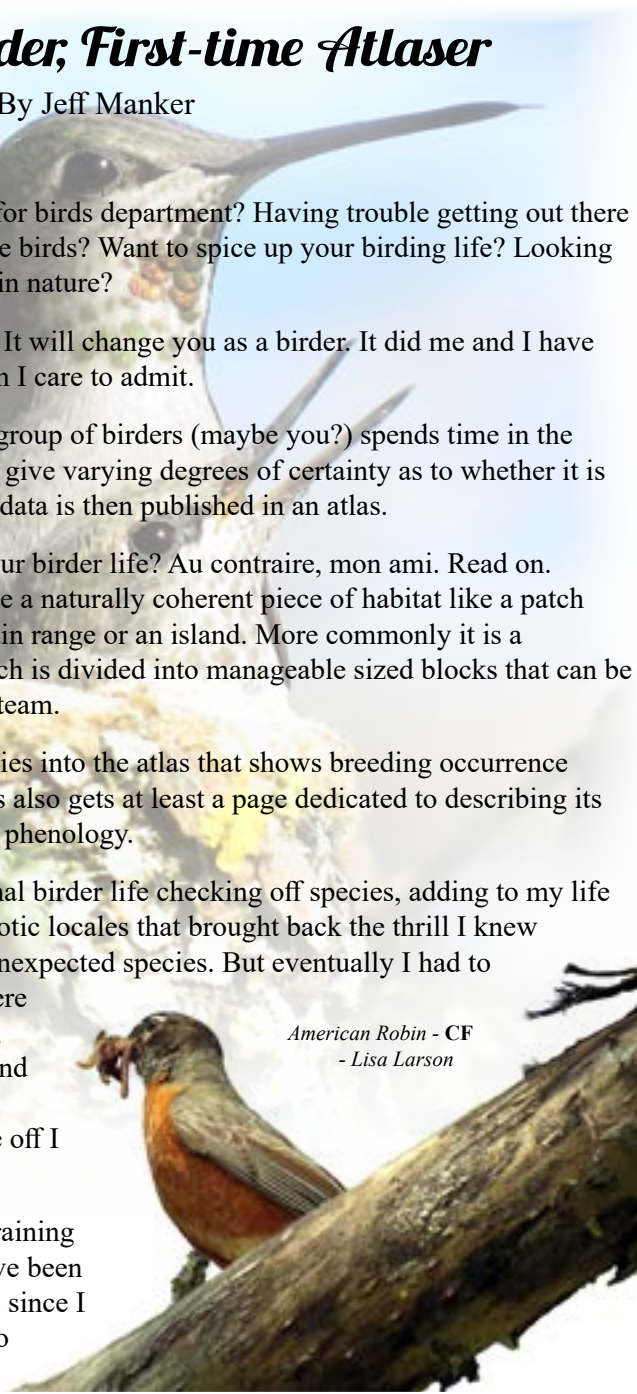
Don't think this will "spice up" your birder life? Au contraire, mon ami. Read on. The study area for an atlas could be a naturally coherent piece of habitat like a patch of woods, a desert basin, a mountain range or an island. More commonly it is a particular county, or state. The patch is divided into manageable sized blocks that can be reasonably studied by a person or team.

The data is then organized by species into the atlas that shows breeding occurrence within the study area. Each species also gets at least a page dedicated to describing its habitat, reproductive behavior and phenology.

For decades I went about my normal birder life checking off species, adding to my life list. Occasionally, I travelled to exotic locales that brought back the thrill I knew in my youth of discovering new, unexpected species. But eventually I had to return to the routines of home. There I found the day-to-day chickadees, juncos and the seasonal comings and goings of sparrows at my feeders.

When the glow of my travels wore off I felt like I was in a rut.

Last year, I heard about the atlas training and my curiosity was piqued. I have been interested in breeding bird surveys since I first came across the idea years ago as a teacher. After receiving a



American Robin - CF
- Lisa Larson

Inside
Atlasing Season Begins!
Calendar of Events



QUAIL HOLLOW NEST BOX PROJECT

Santa Cruz Birds



Birder's Notebook
PARTING SHOT

Anna's Hummingbirds - NY - Lisa Larson

Black-necked Stilt - Lisa Larson
Western Bluebirds - John Ellis



Titmouse - CF
- John Ellis

grant of a class set of binoculars I had grand illusions of my students compiling stacks of data about the birds breeding in and around our campus. Instead, I was lucky to get them out birding and identifying a few species. I quickly realized that it takes a whole different level of birding to do atlas work and my class management just wasn't up to the task.

example, a singing male (S = singing male) may be ready to find a mate and settle down, so he is a possible breeder... or, he is practicing until he gets to the boreal forest 1000 miles further north? If we see a male and female of the same species in the correct habitat at the right time of year (P = pair in suitable habitat) they may be ready to raise young so they could be probable breeders... or they may coincidentally be in the



Chestnut-backed Chickadee - FS
- Lisa Larson

Years later, I created a high school level ornithology class. Besides the classroom lessons, I took my students birding every week. The first key skill they worked on was field identification. They learned new birds as the seasons changed and migrations swept through. By springtime they were skilled enough to start focusing on behaviors. This coincided with studying reproduction in the classroom and breeding behaviors. Win-win!



Center
Hooded Oriole - NB
(nest building)
-Andy Knorr

Along with the explanation of the behaviors I gave my students the standard letter codes of breeding behaviors to memorize. I insisted that they add behavior codes in their eBird entries.

Atlasers have developed a standardized list of behaviors, in ascending order of certainty of breeding confirmation. Each is a one or two letter code, to help them determine whether a bird was a possible, probable or a confirmed breeder. For

same place at the same time but headed elsewhere separately. You see a bird carrying a white blob in its mouth (FS = carrying a fecal sac). You know the saying, "Don't foul your own nest"? This refers to many songbird hatchlings who release their feces in a membrane that the parents remove from the nest to prevent bacterial growth. Seeing this behavior confirms this species is a breeder. There are 23 codes used on eBird with varying

degrees of certainty from possible to confirmed.

I went to the meeting and my birding has been on fire ever since The Santa Cruz Bird Club is organizing the second effort in several decades to produce an atlas for our county. The county has been divided into seventy-two survey blocks that are three miles on a side. After the training atlasers were encouraged to either adopt a block or contact the block leaders and add our observations. The block



Left:
California Thrasher - CN
- Jeff Roisman



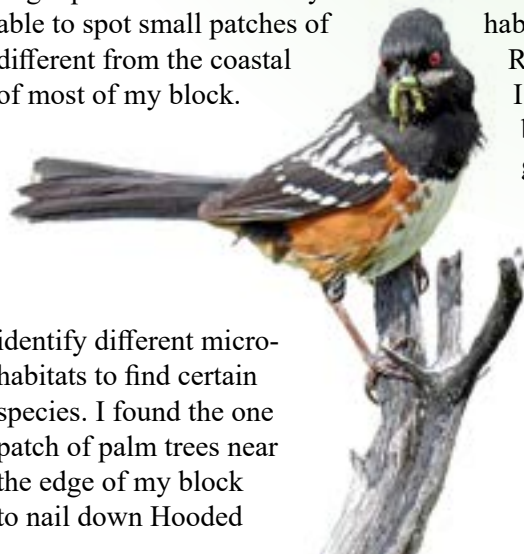
Right:
Pacific Wren - S
-Lisa Larson

where I live had not been adopted and I was told was one of the “most underbirded parts of the county”. I plunged in and took the challenge. I was a first time atlaser in charge of my own block!

Now what? I was given a map that delineated the boundaries of my territory and a list of species that were expected breeders. Now all I had to do was find them, but with a twist: I had to watch their behavior, carefully.

For so many years I have mostly focused on identification - “There it is, check it off.” This is different. I really have to pay attention. There are 72 species on my list. The stated goal for each atlas block is to observe “probable” level behavior of 90% of the species and “confirmed” level behavior for 60% of the species. Thank goodness this is a multi-year endeavor, because there are quite a few on my list that I have never seen in my block and I currently don’t even know where to look. This is one way atlasing has changed me as a birder.

I live in a rural, mountainous part of the county. Much of the nine square miles of my block is private, steep, forested land. There are 3 main public roads dissecting the block and each is in a canyon, so I had to figure out how to access as much habitat as I could without trespassing. I had to put my map reading skills to work to find my way to a couple of quasi-private, ridge-top roads that gave me views over larger pieces of the territory. From there I was able to spot small patches of different from the coastal Redwoods. I became a botanist and geographer to identify different micro-habitats to find certain species. I found the one patch of palm trees near the edge of my block to nail down Hooded



Center: California Scrub Jay nest
- NE
- Kelly Wakefield-Beytia

Left: Spotted Towhee
- CF
- Sharon Hull

Right: Pacific Slope Flycatcher - NY
- Lisa Larson

Orioles (ON = occupied nest). I looked for chaparral to find the California Thrashers (CF = carrying food) and incised river banks to find Belted Kingfisher burrows (N = visiting probable nest site).


As I began atlasing, I came to realize that specificity of habitat would help me to find my birds. How did I not realize this years ago? Most birds are not just scattered randomly across the landscape, but sometimes are only in very particular places. Even though some species reveal themselves quite easily for viewing, I would have to work very hard to find the place, time and behavior that proved they were breeding in my block.

I already knew that finding nests would not be easy. After all, breeding birds go to great lengths to make sure they are not seen by predators. I had to reorient my mind to look for behaviors, not field marks. Now instead of just identifying a bird I watched what it did.

Early on I had a bit of luck with a California Scrub Jay. One day in early spring I was walking to my neighbor’s orchard and a scrub jay loudly burst out of a tree right by my head. It startled me and I was surprised that I had clearly startled the jay. They usually see me coming and start squawking when I am far away. Then it hit me, it was hiding until the last minute hoping to go undetected. And why would it do that unless it had something to hide? I looked where it had fluttered out of the tree and there at eye level was a beautiful nest (NE = nest with eggs) with four turquoise and brown speckled eggs! Eureka!

I used this same technique (noticing a fluttering bird that startled me) to find nests of Band-tailed Pigeon, Dark-eyed Junco, Pacific Slope Flycatcher, Black Phoebe, Chestnut-backed Chickadee and Bewick’s Wren (ON = occupied nest and NY = nest with young).





Before I started atlasing I largely ignored young birds who were not in easily recognized adult plumage. Now, the best chance to confirm breeding activity outside of finding more nests is to find young birds that are out of the nest but still being fed by adults (FY = feeding young) or are still sporting telltale tufts of down that signal they are newly fledged (FL = recently fledged young). I went back to my field guides and learned to identify species by a whole new age group in all their fuzzy grandeur.

I spent a large amount of time watching sneaky Spotted and California Towhees coming and going from thick brush looking for carried nesting materials, food or toting fecal sacs with no success. Then within a few weeks half-molted juvenile towhees started showing up everywhere being fed by adults from my feeders. All I had to do was wait until later in the season to make a glut of confirmations! The same happened with Black-headed Grosbeaks. The parents came and went regularly from my feeders, but always flying far and high enough into the surrounding forest that I wasn't able to follow them to a nest. A few weeks later and the feeders were lousy with scruffy, teenage Grosbeaks begging for food.

Atlasing changed how I listen to bird songs. Now I listen not only for identification but also for what it means. Was it to defend territory, call a mate or a beg for food? I found a pair of Ash-throated Flycatchers by their calls and later was able to see them feed a fledgling (FY = feeding young) because I noticed the difference in calls.


I feel I have matured as a birder because of this experience. I have seen most of the species that will visit where I live and so there will be fewer times I experience the joy of new finds.

However, I have a renewed enthusiasm for birding not just for helping the atlas effort, but because I am seeing birds in a new way, each species with different behaviors and strategies for reproduction.

My favorite moment was confirming a species that was not expected in my block. In April I saw a pair of White-tailed Kites acrobatically sparring over a part of my block. It reminded me of how eagles locked talons in their mating behavior and I wondered if it was possible they could mate here? They are rarely even seen over the mountains here and were not on my list, so I put that thought on a back shelf.

They kept showing up, as a pair (P = pair in suitable habitat) from the ridge-top roads but I didn't see any further breeding behaviors. Finally, when most breeding behaviors were winding down for the season I took a final walk on one of the ridges. In a grove of trees away from the road edge I kept hearing a plaintive call that sounded like a raptor. I went up and down the road trying for a better look. Then an adult kite sailed right overhead to the grove and the tempo of cries increased. There was a flutter of wings and I saw them fly out through the trees and over the valley. I ran up the road for a better look and sure enough, two adults and three buffy-breasted juveniles (FL = recently fledged young) were soaring and chasing about! I jumped for joy.

That moment easily compares with finding a new life bird. I plotted, I patrolled, I studied and was patient for that confirmation and yet it still surprised me. I found a new way to love birds and know more about them. Don't we all want that?



*White-tailed Kite food exchange
courtship display -C
- Lee Jaffe*



*White-tailed Kite fledglings - FL
- Lee Jaffe*

I ended the season with thirty-nine of the forty-three species I needed to confirm in my block. I can't wait for next season. I am studying the holdouts on my list and am convinced I will be way over my target by this time next year. I am loving this so much I took on two more unclaimed blocks for 2019. I may be in over my head. Just like new love.

Any romantics out there interested in helping?



The Atlasing Season Begins!

The core of the breeding season is nearly upon us. Significant progress was made in the first two years of field work for the Santa Cruz County Breeding Bird Atlas II, a five year project sponsored by the Santa Cruz Bird Club. Participation in the atlas has grown dramatically and generous donations continue to move the project forward.

Let's ride the momentum into our third year which is set to begin March 1! This year we are excited to unveil improvements to the atlas datasheet and offer atlasing internships for students. We will also begin focusing our attention on areas of Santa Cruz County that have received little atlasing coverage so far, namely the north coast and the mountains. What species will be found breeding in the expansive grassland and lush drainages on the north coast, and what will we learn about the distribution and habitat preferences of montane specialists such as Cassin's Vireo, Western Tanager, and Yellow-rumped Warbler? We also hope to receive more observations from backyards throughout the county as these observations increase our ability to answer questions about when birds breed. There is something for everyone this year!

To kick off the season, three trainings will be held at Sorrento Oaks. Trainings will be oriented for new atlasers but seasoned atlasers are also welcome to

BBA RECENT DONORS

*Kent Johnson
Arden Sweet
Community Foundation of
Santa Cruz County*



Just fledged Western Bluebird FL - John Ellis

attend for a refresher. Each training will begin with a slide show on breeding behavior and recording observations. We will then stroll through a private riparian corridor where we will practice interpreting breeding behavior. Last year we saw Cooper's Hawks collecting nest material, Oak Titmice courtship feeding, and more. All trainings will begin at the clubhouse inside Sorrento Oaks located at 800 Brommer Street, Santa Cruz. There is free parking inside Sorrento Oaks as well as on neighborhood streets outside the park. **Questions about the trainings** can be sent to Alex Rinkert, Atlas Director: arinkert12@comcast.net.

Saturday, March 9 9-11 AM
Thursday, March 14 2-4 PM
Saturday, March 16 9-11 AM

To make a tax-deductible contribution to the atlas, please visit the atlas website:
sfbbo.org/breeding-bird-atlas-project

Checks payable to "SFBBO" with a memo titled "Breeding Bird Atlas" can be sent to:

San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory
524 Valley Way
Milpitas, CA 95035

100% of your donation goes to the Santa Cruz County Breeding Bird Atlas II.

EVENTS CALENDAR

March-April 2019

Please see SCBC website Calendar for event details! Changes to event times/ place are sometimes necessary after publication. We suggest checking our Facebook page or our website Calendar for the latest information. Time permitting, we also send out a member-wide email notification. If you haven't been receiving these, please check your spam filter & let us know at: scbirdclub@gmail.com.

DATE	LOCATION	LEADER
Sunday, March 3	Quail Hollow County Park	Eric Feuss
Sunday, March 10	Beginners Walk at Natural Bridges	Phil Brown
Tuesday, March 12	Anna Jean Cummings	Lisa Fay Larson
Sunday, March 17	San Mateo Bayfront Coast	Eric Feuss
Sunday, March 24	Neary Lagoon	Phil Brown
Tuesday, March 26	Porter-Seson Property	Lisa Fay Larson
Tuesday, April 2	Schwan Lake	Lisa Fay Larson
Wednesday, April 3	Antonelli Pond/Homeless Garden	Jonah Svensson
Tuesday, April 16	DeLaveaga Park (Park Way)	Lisa Fay Larson
Saturday, April 20	Fremont Peak	Eric Feuss
Sunday, April 21	Upper Henry Cowell State Park	Phil Brown
Thursday, April 25	Moore Creek Preserve	Nick Levendosky
Sunday, April 28	El Jarro Point	Eric Feuss & Phil Brown

SCBC Meetings (Topics TBA): March 28 and April 25

*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. 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.



American Avocets - Lisa Larson

The Coot Who Loved Me

-by Larry Corridon

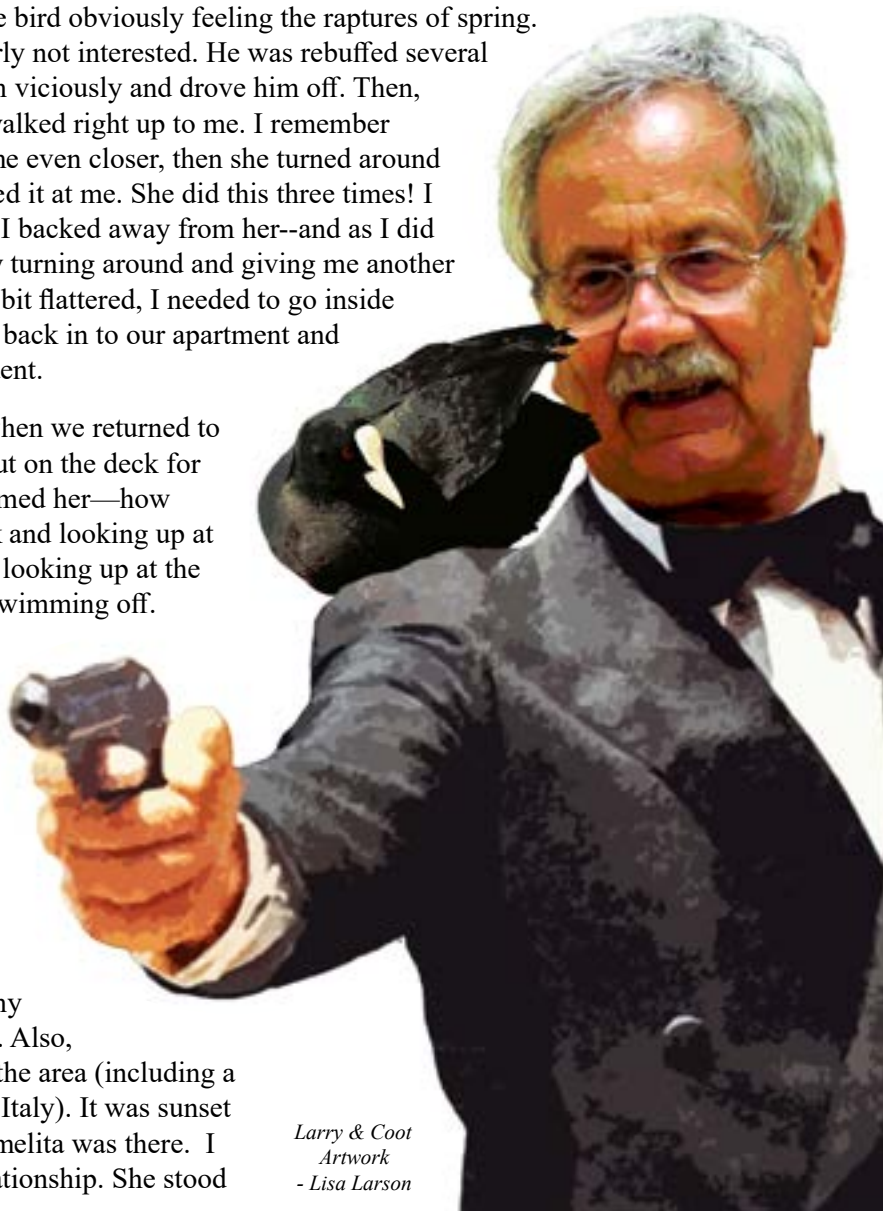
I'm sure every birder has had a close encounter with a bird at some time or another. Being dive bombed by a jay or hawk when getting too close to a nest, or a bird darting out from under a boot as you walk through the underbrush are common examples. But what about a somewhat erotic encounter? I'm not getting too kinky here; just read on.

While on vacation in Northern Italy, I was staying at a rental on the shore of Lake Como. The property had a small, very rocky beach on the shore of the lake. On cold morning in late May, I was standing on that beach marveling at the view and keeping an eye out for any birds in the area. I saw two Eurasian Coots about 25 feet from shore, with one bird obviously feeling the raptures of spring. But the object of his affections was clearly not interested. He was rebuffed several times by her and finally she attacked him viciously and drove him off. Then, to my surprise, she swam to shore and walked right up to me. I remember stepping back a foot or two, and she came even closer, then she turned around with her tail lifted toward me and wiggled it at me. She did this three times! I was curious to see what she would do if I backed away from her--and as I did so she followed me closely, occasionally turning around and giving me another wiggle. Although I was mystified, and a bit flattered, I needed to go inside to begin our itinerary for the day. I went back in to our apartment and told my traveling partner about the incident.

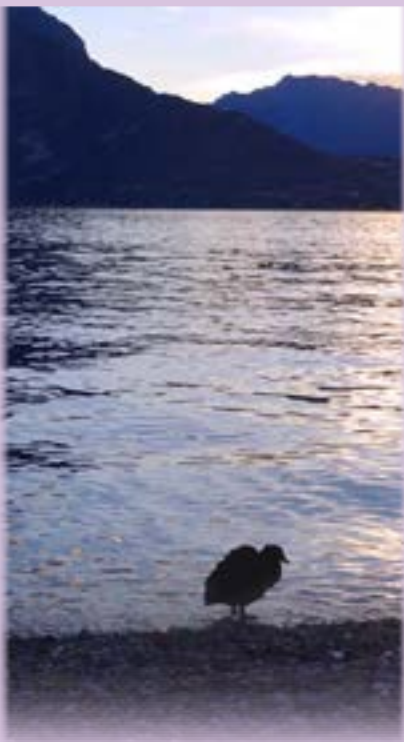
We then went about our day, but when we returned to the apartment that afternoon and went out on the deck for cocktails, there was Carmelita (yes, I named her—how could I not?) swimming toward the deck and looking up at us. She stayed and swam back and forth looking up at the deck for several minutes before finally swimming off.

For the rest of our stay, on every afternoon that we went out on the deck, she would either be there waiting or when I made a poor but somewhat coot-like sound, she would come swimming towards the deck, looking up at us.

I only went back onto that beach once more. It was difficult to walk on and I had stumbled and almost twisted my ankle during my first encounter with her. Also, there was so much else to see and do in the area (including a nice ornithological museum in Varenna, Italy). It was sunset the day before we had to leave, and Carmelita was there. I think she knew it was the end of our relationship. She stood



*Larry & Coot
Artwork
- Lisa Larson*



*Carmelita at Lake Como
- Larry Corridon*

on the shore with her gaze averted looking forlorn and a bit disheveled. I said goodbye and took one last photo of her. But I will always remember her fondly—Carmelita, The Amorous Italian Coot.

Note:

1. For those interested, the main difference between the Eurasian Coot and the American Coot is that the American Coot's upper facial shield often is red, but sometimes can be white or gray. The tip of its white bill has a dark ring. The Eurasian coot has a white bill and frontal shield.
2. Could this have been behavior for a food handout? I suppose it's possible, but her persistence and tail wagging have convinced me otherwise.
3. Am I being Anthropomorphic? Absolutely, and no apologies for it!



QUAIL HOLLOW NEST BOX PROJECT: CALL FOR 2019 SEASON VOLUNTEERS

The Quail Hollow Nest Box Project is currently seeking volunteers for the 2019 breeding season. The Nest Box Project was started in 2002 by the conservation arm of the Santa Cruz Bird Club, with the goals of providing nesting habitat for local cavity-nesting birds and gathering information about their breeding biology. Teams of volunteers check the boxes at least twice a week and carefully record observations, which are then reported to the Cornell Ornithology Lab and become part of a national database. Volunteering for the season only requires a commitment of a visit every other week, although more visits are, of course, welcome.

Volunteering is a great way to learn more about cavity-nesting species!

Although the Nest Box Project was initially focused on attracting and observing Western Bluebirds, the conservation work of the project extends to other local cavity-nesting birds. Seven years ago, the Bird Club asked us to add the Ash-throated Flycatcher as a target species. We have had at least one successful ATFL nest consistently since 2003 and we are now consciously locating boxes to accommodate this species.

Other birds using the boxes include Chestnut-backed Chickadees and Oak Titmice, who lay eggs in carefully-constructed moss and lichen nests, as well as Violet-green Swallows, who build nests using grasses and feathers. It is an amazing experience to open a box and see the nests and eggs firsthand. Those interested in volunteering can contact Dan Lazarus, the Park Interpreter, at 831-335-9348. The 2019 season is kicking off on March 17th, so contact us soon!

-The Quail Hollow Team



Young Birders of the SCBC



From left:
Jonah & sister Hanna
Lawrence's Goldfinch
- John Fox
Nico with scope & bins



Jonah Svensson

I started birding in 2013 at the age of ten when my father, a biologist, introduced the realm to me, but I didn't really get into it until summer 2016. My "spark" bird... I'm not sure, exactly, but there were quite a bit of waterfowl at Charleston Slough, which was one of our first birding locations. I am really interested in birding and exploring bird biology, and I'm interested in having an ornithological career.

My favorite bird would be the Black Phoebe. I'm not exactly sure why the Black Phoebe is my favorite, but I think I really enjoy seeing a species that has adapted to multiple environments and has a healthy population. I'm also fond of their sallying foraging behavior.

I don't have a particular favorite birding area, though I enjoy birding the Natural Bridges area where we often visit.

Nico Schnack

Birding truly stuck in the summer of 2017, with a visit to Kilauea Lighthouse in Kauai. It was simply awesome. Frigatebirds, shearwaters, and more—swooping, diving, chasing, each with their own personalities and traits. The guide shared her binoculars, and Nico spent what seems like hours picking through the cliffs and skies, calling out the wedge-tailed shearwaters. He was hooked.

We returned to what so-happens-to-be one of North America's great birding regions. After getting a proper set of binoculars for Christmas, Nico downloaded eBird for a day at the San Joaquin National Wildlife Refuge. He's been at it since, with near-weekly adventures. Nico's favorite spots are the Natural Bridges area (Antonelli, Younger, Homeless Garden), and Point Pinos. His dad appreciates the role-reversal, with Nico as the (relative) expert, and Brian as the understudy.

Nico's favorite bird is the Lawrence's Goldfinch because of its mysterious migration habits. He is excited about the opportunities that await him with wildlife biology in general—getting outside to watch, uncover, and discover amazing things about the changing world of ours.



It is exciting that so many young birders are in the local birding community right now. They are making especially great contributions to eBird and the breeding bird atlas. The future is bright for these outstanding young birders.

Black Phoebe
- Lee Jaffe

- Alex Rinkert



Nico birding at Wilder Ranch

Santa Cruz Birds

By Alex Rinker

Including reports from November 1 to December 31, 2018

This winter got off to a slow start. There were no irruptive movements of any species, only a passage of southbound seabirds offshore, and few new wintering vagrants were found. However, the discovery of some unexpected birds kept morale high. A Red-footed Booby provided daily excitement at the Seacliff State Beach pier, an unprecedented number of Lesser Black-backed Gulls were found, some interesting hybrids were documented, and a new species was added to the county list bringing its total to 453 species.

At least 22 **Snow Geese** were reported; all but two seen at Terrace Point and Natural Bridges (AH, HB, RC) were from the Pajaro Valley (v.ob.). A was at College Lake from December 3-6 (JW, v.ob). In addition to a few flocks in the Pajaro Valley, 33 **Greater White-fronted Geese** flew over Live Oak on November 3 (GM). Single **Brant** were at Wilder Beach on November 24-26 (JS, HS, PS, NU) and West Cliff on November 22 (AR). Small flocks of **Cackling Geese** were reported through December; the largest flock was forty-four at Watsonville Slough on November 3 (NU). A **Canada Goose** at Quail Hollow Ranch on December 15 was noteworthy for being in the mountains in December (ER, JC). A **Tundra Swan** at Struve Slough on December 13 was refound at Pinto Lake the following day (RW, NU, DR, DG).

Two Wood Ducks continued at Swanton Pond through November 20 (KJ). A Wood Duck at College Lake on December 6 (RW) and three in a small pond on

Glen Canyon Road on December 15 (SPo, LSo, CH) were away from locations they regularly occur at. Ten **Blue-winged Teal** were reported from expected spots

in the Pajaro Valley and north coast (v.ob.). A male **Eurasian Wigeon** moved between College Lake and Pinto Lake from December 3-21 (JW, v.ob.) and a cryptic



female or immature was picked out among **American Wigeons** at Shorebirds Pond on November 16 (RW). The adult male **Eurasian x American Wigeon** returned for its fourth winter, being seen at Pinto Lake by December 14 (HSt, v.ob.). A **Canvasback** at Laguna Creek marsh on December 15 (DE) and Swanton Pond on December 26 (ST) was notable for the north coast. An immature male **Redhead** was a nice find at Westlake Pond, staying November 12 to December 12 (RAS, v.ob.).

A **Surf Scoter** with extensive white on its left wing was seen at Seacliff State Beach from December 9-31 (AR, VV). Could this be the same individual seen last winter off Santa Cruz and Wilder Ranch State Park, then in Año Nuevo Bay on August 25 (AR)? Two **White-winged Scoters** were at Waddell Beach on November 2 (AR) and one was at Seacliff State Beach beginning December 4 (JD, v.ob.). A female **Black Scoter** was at Seacliff State Beach from November 11-18 (WK, v.ob.),



Clockwise from top:
White-winged Scoter
- Alex Rinkert
Ring-necked Duck, Redhead
- Robin Abu-Shumays
Eurasian Wigeon, Wigeon
- Randy Wardle

then another was present from December 6-8 (JB, ST, SL, RW). A **Long-tailed Duck** was in the Pajaro River near Pajaro Dunes from December 14-26 (LK, GK, CR).

A rafter of 32 **Wild Turkeys** at the UCSC Arboretum on November 12 was one of the largest ever reported in the county (BL). Six to seven **Red-necked Grebes** were reported on the coast this period (v.ob.). A dazzling male **Anna's x Costa's Hummingbird** visited a feeder in Aptos beginning December 20 (RW, AR). The hummer was much more like a Costa's in

appearance but details in the plumage and structure were more like Anna's. The male was also recorded singing a perfect Anna's Hummingbird song! Interestingly, three Costa's hybrids have been reported in the county within the past three years compared to no reports of pure Costa's. All three of the hybrids have superficially resembled Costa's and without photo documentation would have otherwise probably been accepted as pure Costa's.



Anna's x Costa's Hummingbird
- Alex Rinkert
Red Phalarope
Long-billed Dowitcher
- Norm Uyeda

Two **American Avocets** at Struve Slough on November 3 were the only reported this period (CF, AG). **Black Oystercatchers** traditionally gather on the leeward side of Greyhound Rock to escape high tides. In several visits to this roost during high tides, over 50 were often present but a group of 60 was the highest counted (ST). At Seabright State Beach, **Snowy Plovers** annually form large winter flocks that can grow to over 100. A flock of 129 on December 25 was higher than usual perhaps the result of plovers dispersing from Pajaro Dunes during a period of high surf in the preceding week (AR). Three **Snowy Plovers** at Hidden Beach on December 30 were away from their usual winter haunts (RPM). A **Pectoral Sandpiper** at the Baldwin Creek mouth on November 2 was the last reported this fall (MB). The receding water level in the Watsonville Slough system attracted good numbers of shorebirds for November. Up to 336 **Long-billed Dowitchers** were present on November 12 in Struve Slough (AR, NL) and a flock of 27 **Semipalmated Plovers** at Watsonville Slough

on November 10 was a high count for the month (NU).

A **Willet** at Struve Slough on November 26 was also noteworthy inland (LM).

Red Phalaropes

were found inland at Struve Slough (1), Watsonville Slough (1), and the Pajaro River near Pajaro Dunes (3) after a strong storm between November 29-30 (all NU). Boat trips offshore reported small numbers of **Ancient Murrelets** on December 15 (NL) and December 22 (JY). A **Tufted Puffin** was offshore on December 22 as well (JY).

A third-cycle **Lesser Black-backed Gull** at Pinto Lake was the 3rd or 4th record for Santa Cruz County (AR). The bird stayed through the period (v.ob.), but in the meantime another third-cycle Lesser Black-backed was found at Pinto Lake on December 22 (RT, JO), distinguished from the other gull by its bill pattern. On December 18 an apparent adult was at Harkins Slough (NL), and then a third-cycle or adult Lesser Black-backed was photographed at the San Lorenzo River mouth on December 26 (AR) which, including a report earlier in October, makes five Lesser Black-backed found in the past two months! There were only one or two county records prior to this fall.

A **Royal Tern** flying up the coast past Greyhound Rock on December 9 was one of very few modern records for the county (AR). Several Royal

Terns were also seen flying up the coast at Point Pinos in Monterey County the day prior and day of the Santa Cruz record suggesting a small movement in the two day span. A

Black Skimmer was found roosting at the San Lorenzo River mouth on November 10 (AH, HB).

Black-vented Shearwaters



were scarce this winter; the high count was seven off West Cliff on November 22 (AR).

The highlight for many this period was a **Red-footed Booby** discovered roosting on the Seacliff State Beach pier by Laura Paulsen on November 1. Birders flocked to the booby which was seen almost daily through December (v.ob.) The booby would roost on the



Brown Pelicans and Red-footed Booby
- Elizabeth Van Dyke

pier from the late afternoon until the early morning when it would fly out to sea, presumably to forage. The booby would fly north or south far into the distance when leaving the pier, but so far it has not been seen elsewhere. Numerous birders reported **Brown Pelicans** aggressively lunging at the booby, sometimes so forcefully that the booby was forced to vacate the pier. But soon the booby found a favorite perch in the very center of the pier's outer metal gate . . . just out of reach of the pelicans perching on adjacent pylons. There is speculation that this is one of the Red-footed Boobies seen on pelagic trips on the Monterey Bay earlier in fall (September 30 and October 21) but given the number of boobies in California waters recently it seems just as likely that this is a different individual. I consider the Seacliff booby to be the 3rd record for Santa Cruz County, which became one of the most widely viewed birds ever in the county. Over 150 birders have reported the booby in eBird through December. Compare that with the 200+ birders who visited Watsonville Slough in 2012 to view the Common Cuckoo and 120+ who visited a backyard feeder in Santa Cruz that hosted a Broad-billed Hummingbird in 2017. While visiting Seacliff State Beach to see the booby, birders also saw **Brandt's Cormorants** carrying nest material to the cement ship

between November 3-5, providing evidence of some especially late nesting attempts (AR, CF, AG, JS, PS, TE, CM). One bird was even seen sitting on a nest as if incubating, but the contents of the nest were never seen and the nest was quickly abandoned (AR).

White-faced Ibis were present in small numbers in the Pajaro Valley this period; 16 at Struve Slough on November 12 was the high count (AR, NL). An impressive gathering of **White-tailed Kites** were observed congregating at a nighttime roost at Neary Lagoon (CB, JA, SS). Clive Bagshaw and Jenny Anderson report on the roost:

White-tailed Kites returned to their communal roost site at Neary Lagoon in October and reached a total of 26 individuals on November 7. The first kites arrived about 30 minutes before sunset and positioned themselves at the tops of trees. Others flew in from

the north and west in groups of 1-3, flying high over the American Crows that also gathered at the lagoon, before spiraling down to join the roost. On November 9, eight White-tailed Kites circled over the roost site but then left to the north, leaving the noisy crows below.

The thing that impressed me was how high they were flying, and with so little movement of their wings, until they spiraled down and landed with just a couple of flaps.

Winter kite roosts have been reported several times previously in the county. It is fun to ponder how far some of these kites flew to roost at Neary Lagoon and how they all found the roost coming from different directions and in small groups.

A **Northern Harrier** flying over Loma Prieta on December 12 was rare to see in the mountains (ST).



Bald Eagle - Norm Uyeda



The pair of **Bald Eagles** in Watsonville continued through the period (v.ob.). An adult circling over Silliman Road and then eventually heading east on November 25 may have been a different individual than one of the breeding pair (AR). Other Bald Eagles found this period include a second-year at College Lake on December 4 (GK, BM), a first- or second-year at Quail Hollow Ranch on December 15 (ER, JC), and an adult at Swanton Pond followed by two adults (perhaps one the same as at Swanton) at Dimeo Lane a few hours later on November 18 (EF, NS, BS). **Ferruginous Hawks** were found at Soda Lake and vicinity on November 4 (NU), Last Chance Road on November 24 (MB, FB), at Aptos Creek mouth on December 21 (JE), the Watsonville Airport on December 22 (RT, JO), and UCSC on December 7 (RR, BR, LJ) which later ended up at Wilder Ranch State Park that day (LG, KS). All reports were of juveniles except for the one found at Soda Lake and the continuing adult at Swanton Pond (v.ob.), and all remained through December. Single **Burrowing Owls** were found at Swanton Pond, Table Rock, UCSC East Meadow, Seabright State Beach, and Pajaro Dunes (v.ob.). A **Short-eared Owl** was seen flying over Pinto Lake on December 23, perhaps flooded out of its roost in a tidal marsh nearby (HSt).

The **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** in Soquel continued through December (AG, CF, PSo). An adult male **Red-naped Sapsucker** was found dead at a residence in Bonny Doon on December 9 (DWB). An intriguing hybrid sapsucker at Wilder Ranch State Park from December 7-15 showed characteristics of being a **Yellow-bellied x Red-breasted Sapsucker**, the first documented in the county (LG, KS, v.ob.).



Tropical Kingbird - Lee Jaffe

One of the more unorthodox breeding confirmations I've received came from reports of a **Peregrine Falcon** plucking Rock Pigeon squabs out of their nests hidden under the Seacliff State Beach pier in early November (LL, RW). A late "**Western**" **Flycatcher** was along Aptos Creek on November 10 (AH, HB). Four or five **Tropical Kingbirds** were found this period at Swanton Pond, the San Lorenzo River, Schwan Lake, and the Watsonville Slough system (BR, RR, LJ, JW, MM, DS). Ten **Loggerhead Shrikes** were found this period: four on the north coast and at UCSC, and six in the Pajaro Valley (v.ob.). Two **Horned Larks** at south Watsonville Slough on November 7 were the only reported (GK).

Violet-green Swallows are present in late fall and early winter in the Pajaro Valley and in smaller numbers on the north coast. This period there were numerous reports of Violet-greens away from areas where they regularly occur. There were six reports between December 15-31 on the mid-county coast and in the mountains (AR, PS, CF, LS). Most notable for being well into the mountains were a flock of 120 at Loma Prieta on December 30 (AR et al.) and two in a flock of **White-throated Swifts** at McCrary Ridge in Big Basin Redwoods State Park on December 29 (AR). During the span of observations a hatch of flying insects was noted throughout the region. The Santa Cruz Bird Club field trip to Loma Prieta saw this first hand when towering vortexes of flying insects appeared as the morning wind subsided and temperature rose. The swallows were on the scene shortly after to feast on the abundance of food.



Yellow-bellied x Red-breasted Sapsucker - Lois Goldfrank

Barn Swallows were at Swanton Pond on November 9 (PB, AR et al.), Pajaro Dunes on December 14

(LK), and Laguna Creek mouth on December 15 (DE, ST).

Red-breasted Nuthatches were scarce; the only reports were at Natural Bridges State Beach on November 6 and 14 (MB, ZH, JJ). White-breasted Nuthatches were along the Pajaro River at Chittenden on November 4 and 25 (NU, AR) where they are expected, and at both the city and county park at Pinto Lake on December 16 where less expected (AR, v.ob.). Four

Golden-crowned Kinglets at Natural Bridges State Beach on November 6 were the only reported in the lowlands (MB). Fourteen **Western Bluebirds** at the UCSC Arboretum on December 15 was a sizeable group (RR, BR). A Townsend's Solitaire was photographed near Chalk Mountain on December 29 (ZM).

A **Red Crossbill** visiting a *Pyracantha* near Scotts Valley on November 6 was the only reported (ML). **Lawrence's Goldfinches** were at Chittenden on November 25 (AR) and Bonny Doon Ecological Reserve on December 2 (AR).

A **Clay-colored Sparrow** was at Swanton Pond from November 13-15 (WBT, PB, NS, BS) and one continued at the Homeless Garden to November 1 (CF). Lark Sparrows were found at Hanson Slough on November 10 (BR, RR) and the Homeless Garden on November 14 (JS, PS). Two "**Thick-billed**" **Fox Sparrows** were at Loma Prieta on December 12 (ST) and then four were found on the Santa Cruz Bird Club field trip on December 30 (AR et al.). Two "**Slate-colored**" **Fox Sparrows** near Soquel-San Jose Road on November 17 were the only reported (STe, LT). "**Slate-colored**" **Dark-eyed Juncos** visited feeders in Soquel and Aptos this period (RW, PSo). An adult **Harris's Sparrow** was at Swanton Road near Last Chance Road from November 17-December 10 (AR, v.ob.). At least 28 **White-throated Sparrows** and 7 **Swamp Sparrows** were reported this period (v.ob.).

A flock of 570 "**Red-winged**"



Red-winged Blackbirds at College Lake on

December 24 was possibly a record count for the county (AR). This subspecies group can be found from fall to early spring in agricultural fields on the north coast and in the Pajaro Valley, normally in flocks with the more familiar "Bicolored" Red-winged Blackbird, and other blackbirds and starlings. The vast majority of individuals reported are females or immatures. Since 2014 a flock has wintered at College Lake that is substantially larger than those occurring elsewhere in the county. A flock of 225 **Tricolored Blackbirds** at Swanton Road near Last Chance Road on November 24 was the highest count this period (CF, AG). Trike numbers were down this winter on the north coast—most counts were well under 100—compared to recent winters when over 1,000 could be found feeding in fallow agricultural fields and grassland.



A **Black-and-white Warbler** continued at Bethany Curve through December (AH, HB, v.ob.). A late **American Redstart** was at CARE Park on the Pajaro River on November 19 (HSt). Nine **Palm Warblers** were reported this period (v.ob.). A **Black-throated Gray Warbler** was at Pogonip on December 19 (PS). Late **Black-headed Grosbeaks** turned up at four feeders in Aptos, Soquel, and Capitola in November and December (EF, PSo, AB, SPe).

Last but not least, **Scaly-breasted Munias** were found at several locations in the Pajaro Valley this winter. The first report was of four visiting a feeder in Corralitos

on December 15 (NA), then two were found at Pinto Lake City Park the following day (AR) along with ten visiting a feeder near Watsonville (NU). Up to six munias were subsequently seen at Pinto Lake City Park



From top:
Harris' Sparrow
- Lisa Sheridan
Swamp Sparrow
- Randy Wardle
White-throated Sparrow
- Carol Panofsky

through December 19, while flocks persisted at Corralitos and Watsonville feeders through December. At all locations there was a good mix of adults and immatures, and all appeared to be of the nominate subspecies *L. p. punctulata* which is established in coastal southern California north to San Luis Obispo County. There is also a small established population breeding in Santa Clara County. In early winter 2017 and 2018, birders in Monterey County reported a sudden influx of Scaly-breasted Munias but their presence was short lived at most locations (SR, EM, SL, SP, DKB, PF, DRi). There was also a Scaly-breasted Munia in coastal San Mateo County from November 11-12 (DnP, DgP, LF, GMh). The munias in the Pajaro Valley this winter are the first reported in the county during the era the species has been considered established in southern California, and given the broad geographic area and synchrony of



Scaly-breasted Munia female - Alex Rinkert

Goldfrank, Zach Hampson, Adrian Hinkle, Cole Heim, Lee Jaffe, Jazmine Jensen, Kent Johnson, Logan Kahle, Deven Kammerichs-Berke, Will Kennerley, Gary Kittleson, Sarah Lane, Lisa Larson, Margaret Leonard, Nick Levendosky, Stephen Long, Bruce Lyon, Ginny Marshall, Mike Martin, Gary Martindale, Curtis Marantz, Zack Mikalonis, Ethan Monk, Bryan Mori, Liam Murphy, Jessica Oswald, Laura Paulson, Sandi Pensinger (SPe), Donna Pomeroy (DnP), Doug Pomeroy (DgP), Steve Pousty (SPo), Roseanne Prevost-Morgan, Simon Priestnall, Bernadette Ramer, Robert Ramer, Devii Rao, Dan Richards (DRi), Alex Rinkert, Caroline Rodgers, Steve Rovell, Erica Rutherford, Brian Schnack, Nico Schnack, Lisa Sheridan, David Sidle, Stephanie Singer, Pete Sole (PSo), Logan Southall (LSO), Kitty Stein, Howard Stephenson (HSt), Hanna Svensson, Jonah Svensson, Peter Svensson, Ryan Terrill, Linda Terrill, Scott Terrill (STe), Simon Thornhill, W. Breck Tyler, Norman Uyeda, Vicens Vila, Jonny Wahl, Randy Wardle, Diane West-Bourke, Joe Yuhas, "v.ob." means various observers. **Please enter interesting observations into eBird or report them to Alex Rinkert at arinkert12@comcast.net.**



Scaly-breasted Munia male - Norman Uyeda

reports in central coastal California, these munias are unlikely to have originated from isolated releases or escapes but rather established populations in southern California or Santa Clara County.

Cited Observers: Nanci Adams, Jenny Anderson, Clive Bagshaw, Jeff Blean, Henry Burton, Robin Abu-Shumays, Frances Bolte, Mike Bolte, Ann Brohmer, Phil Brown, Ryan Carle, John Colbert, Jim Danzenbaker, Craig Fosdick, Tom Edell, David Ekdahl, John Ellis, Paul Fenwick, Eric Feuss, Leslie Flint, Aaron Gabbe, Daniel George, Lois



Western Bluebird - Sharon Hull

Birder's Notebook

Me and a Dipper

-by John Perry

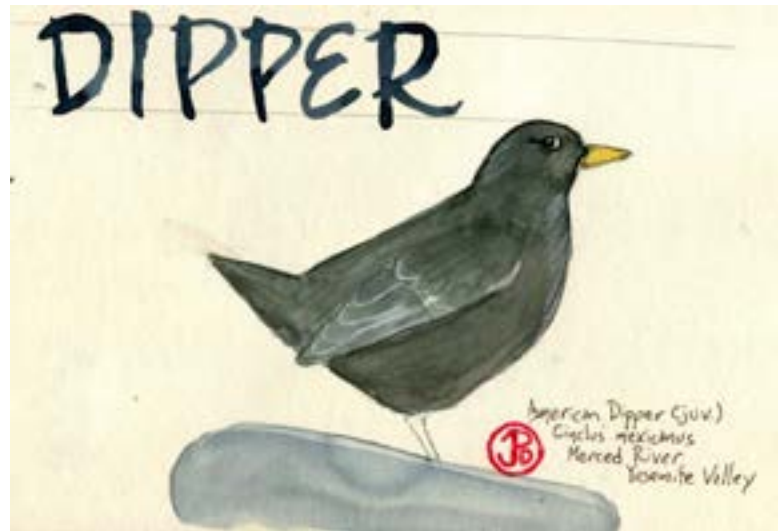
I came down to the valley to sketch the monolith El Capitain but instead I stopped at the banks of the Merced River, Bridelveil Falls falling silencing across the valley and I sketched a dipper.

It says a lot about the American dipper that John Muir devoted an entire chapter of *The Mountains of California* to this small, drab bird. The water-ouzel, as the dipper was known then, rewards the observer with the amount of time put in by simply sitting down on the river bank and watching.

The dipper is seldom still, making sketching a challenging yet exhilarating experience. Just when you start one sketch you stop and restart because the dipper has disappeared under the river, appearing again, perched on a submerged rock, making the bird appear to be standing on water. And the dipper never just perches. Like it's name implies, it's constantly dipping it's body up and down.

As so I passed part of my morning in Yosemite Valley, with my back facing the largest chunk of granite in the world but my eyes focused on one of the most captivating creatures to be found in any National Park: the American Dipper.

And as Muir wrote about the dipper, "Among all the mountain birds, none has cheered me so much in my lonely wanderings, - none so unfailingly." And I couldn't agree with John Muir more.



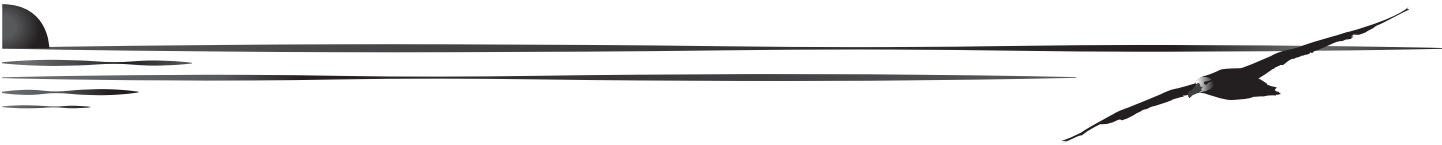
See more on John's Blog!
corvidsketcher.wordpress.com

Waste by Man, Beautiful Art by Nature

An artistic crane in local sea glass!

- found by Ted Jones





Birds of Our County's Wetlands

A wetlands bird project was suggested by Nanci Adams to adult education art instructor Jane Reyes. Nanci provided the nature cards of Patricia McQuade (1943-2017) for inspiration for an artistic representation of some of our local birds. Here are some of the resulting pieces.



Black-necked Stilt ceramic dish - Meris Schwager



Long-billed Curlew, glass - Cindy Hegenrother



Belted Kingfisher print - Alpha Gardner



Egret ceramic vessel - Tori Beale



Great Blue Heron collage - Annie McNeill



Western Grebes dancing - Leonard Greiner



Great Horned Owl print - Cayley Lanctot

IMPORTANT SCBC MEMBERS!



This will be the last printed issue of the *Albatross*! However, it will continue to be available in color online.

If you haven't been receiving club emails*, we may not have your current email. (*The last ones were sent on Jan 18 & Jan 22.) **Please let us know:** scbirdclub@gmail.com. We'll let you know when a new issue of the *Albatross* is posted on the website.



A membership remittance envelope is included with this issue for your convenience since there will be no printed issue for May/Aug—but renewing is easy to do through the SCBC website.

Monterey Bay Birding Festival Association

is currently seeking people interested in helping to run the festival on September 20-22, 2019. If you have a passion for birds and birding and have the skills and/or expertise in the following areas and the desire to be a part of our regional festival we would love for you to join our team.

Festival Director (a paid, part-time, temporary position), Sponsorship Director, Field Trip Coordinator, Volunteer Coordinator, Exhibit Hall Coordinator, Photo Contest Coordinator

If you are interested please send an email to montereybaybirdingfestival@gmail.com.



The Monterey Bay Birding Festival Association

is pleased to announce that **John Muir Laws** will be presenting the Friday evening keynote presentation on Friday, September 20, 2019 and two workshops on Saturday, September 21, 2019.

John's keynote presentation, entitled "*Thinking Like A Naturalist: Reclaiming The Art Of Natural History*" will explore how your powers of observation and curiosity are skills that you can develop and enhance.



John Muir Laws

New Members WELCOME!

Nancy Lockwood	Oct-18
Kathy Stowell	Nov-18
David DePue	Nov-18
Matthew Ward	Nov-18
Jonathan Wahl	Nov-18
Brajesh Friedberg	Dec-18
Richard VanStolk	Dec-18
Arden Sweet	Dec-18
Kathleen Hughes Family	Dec-18
Michelle Boomer	Dec-18
Hayne Bendick	Dec-18
Sandy Helin	Dec-18
Regina Keller	Jan-19
Valerie Chase	Feb-19
Edward Gough Family	Feb-19
Arnold Alper Family	Feb-19
Elizabeth Miller	Feb-19
Chris Campton	Feb-19
Ellen Murtha	Feb-19
Annika Flink Family	Feb-19
Holly Thomas	Feb-19



DEADLINE

submissions for
MAY/AUG issue
APR 1, 2019



Red-tailed Hawk with garter snake - Lisa Larson

Sharp-shinned Hawk - John Hickok



SUBMISSION TO THE

ALBATROSS

Guidelines



Loggerhead Shrike - Pete Solt

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, birding, or birders**
- 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)

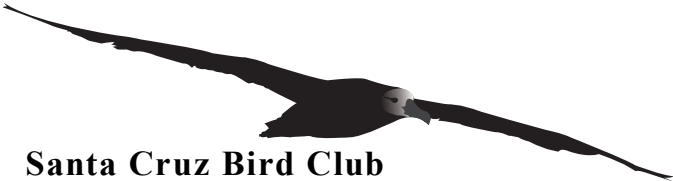
If you wish to submit an article, please contact the editor about it **AT LEAST 2 weeks before** the submission deadline.

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

~ Lisa Fay Larson, Editor

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Cooper's Hawk - Lee Jaffe

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PARTING SHOTS (FROM RIGHT):
"TIPTOEING PAST THE GRAVEYARD" CATTLE EGRET - LISA SHERIDAN
"HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT" CATTLE EGRET - LISA LARSON



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See the online version and past
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santacruzbirdclub.org

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Enjoy walks in and around the County of Santa Cruz, discounted boat trips on Monterey Bay, summer picnics and annual dinners, meetings September through May featuring informative, illustrated talks on wild birds and related topics, and receive the bimonthly newsletter, *Albatross*. Santa Cruz Bird Club memberships run June-May.

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

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