

# Albatross

PHOEBASTRIA NIGRIPES

## INSIDE

**No Events** due to Covid-19 Pandemic



## Birding By Ear



## Santa Cruz Birds



## PARTING SHOT

Wilson's Warbler - Margaret Perham

Snowy Plover - Gail West

Fledgling American Crow - Margaret Perham

## Nest Boxes Along a Songbird Farm Trail

- By Jo Ann Baumgartner

It was getting late on a Saturday evening in May and we had one more farm to visit. We were checking some of the nest boxes that were installed on 16 farms mostly in the Monterey Bay Area this past winter. Jerry Thomas met us out by their farm pond where one box was placed on a retractable pole. The occupants, who had already fledged, left the tell-tail signs of who they were- Western Bluebirds (WEBL). Well, to be fair, we could narrow it down to a few birds, since the box sports a hole guard which keeps out larger birds that might want to nest in the box themselves, or worse, prey on the nestlings. Inside was a grassy nest covered with weeks of bird poop. Yes, we could check off that the box was used! While we don't know for sure if the young successfully fledged, Cornell's NestWatch program, where weekly monitoring of nests is reported, estimated that about 75% of WEBLs' nest attempts were successful in California in 2019. Next, we checked the other box on the Thomas Farm—nothing, darn! Wait, we realized it was our fault. This box was placed too close to a line of conifers where a Red-shouldered Hawk pair had moved in to raise their own family. While the hawks would have had a hard time extracting young out of the box, raptors have been known to key into noisy, begging young as they get older and pick them off as they fledge, or capture them on the ground before they learn to effectively hide in the nearby shrubby vegetation. Okay, we'll move the box to a better location this fall.

Earlier that day, we had checked nest boxes on other farms along Pleasant Valley Road in Corralitos. This is part of a **Songbird Farm Trail** we've started that is expanding birds' nesting opportunities while helping farmers with pest control. The boxes bring in the birds closer to crop fields, making it more likely for them to consume pests. Researcher Julie Jedlicka found WEBLs were almost 10 times more likely to be present in vineyards when nest boxes are present. Wine grape growers like Steve and Pam Storrs, whose vineyard we also



One day-old WEBL young responded to a sound by opening wide.

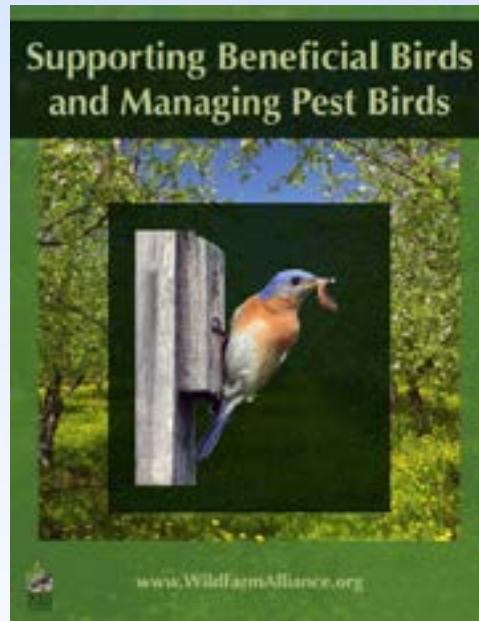
checked that day, are happy that Jedlicka's studies also showed these birds eat leafhoppers—some kinds of which can be devastating to vineyards because they vector a disease that kills vines.

Coming to this point has taken a long, circuitous route. While studying birds eating codling moth in local organic apple orchards in the mid-90s for my Master's degree, I got credit for helping David Sudjian from the Bird Club survey the aftermath of bird population crashes on the Pajaro River when misguided flood control decisions resulted in habitat destruction. David was kind enough to come out to my research trials, giving tips on how to get good data—from learning the songs to not wearing loud, swishing clothes. I had always enjoyed being around birds and was melding that love with my other interest—farming. My husband and I had been farming organically for a dozen years and were starting to shift to working with farmers instead of being some. Fast forward to last year... I and two co-author avian ecologists wrote *Supporting Beneficial Birds* and *Managing Pest Birds*, which was published by the nonprofit I work for, Wild Farm Alliance.

*Supporting Beneficial Birds* and *Managing Pest Birds* covers songbirds in vegetables, fruit, nuts, grasslands and pastures, and field crops, and raptors consuming rodents and discouraging pest birds. Of the almost 120 studies we reviewed that address pest control, 90% show beneficial birds reduce pests and 3% report the opposite. Scientists using different



*Sam Earnshaw, the author's husband, mounts a nest box on a farm post.*



*Birds can help farmers keep pest insects, rodents and pest birds at bay. To learn more, [download this free publication.](#)*

techniques to analyze bird benefits reported a variety of findings: 30% of the studies show birds decreased damage, and/or increased growth, and/or yield of the crops; 30% show benefit more near habitat vs. 3% the opposite; 20% documented pest control near nest boxes. However, 5% of the journal articles reported that the birds ate the crop, and while there are numerous studies that show pest birds cause crop damage, this 5% refers to bird pest control studies that found birds also consumed some types of crops. Lastly, 3% show birds killed beneficial insects enough to constrain pest control, which points to the fact that bird ecology on the farm is not black and white. Nonetheless, the vast majority of studies find birds are beneficial. And even those “pest” birds that eat crops are often beneficial the rest of the year.



Wild Farm Alliance has been in Watsonville for 20 years, sometimes working with local growers, but more often educating and advocating for biodiversity on farms nationwide. We receive support from government, foundations, and individuals; however, much of the initial funding for the *Trail* has come from the local Patagonia store, whose staff worked with us to expand our thinking of working beyond local growers to include the local community.

*WEBL mom waits patiently for the coast to be clear before feeding her young.*

Ken Collins, Elkhorn Slough Foundation Land Steward by day and woodworker at night, cut and drilled the redwood pieces for our boxes. Then we worked with the Live Earth Farm Discovery Program in Corralitos to have middle school students build the boxes at their farm. Ken helped educate us on where to put the boxes for likely occupancy since he has installed many on Elkhorn Slough Foundation lands. Jenny Anderson, helped start nest box projects at Quail Hollow Ranch County Park (QHRC) and UCSC in 2002 with Tonya Haff from the Bird Club and still participates in the monitoring of them, also shared the intricacies of locating boxes. At QHRC, where they have diversified habitat of open grasslands and forest edge, it was exciting to see boxes being used by Ash-throated Flycatchers (ATFL) all the way through the middle of July.

Checking nest boxes is delightful. There's the anticipation of seeing not just the young, but the parents as we approach the area slowly, looking for them carrying nesting material or insect food. Capturing shots and video footage of birds with insects in their mouths is one of our objectives because farmers resonate with those—seeing

is believing. In Jedlicka's research, 97% of the insects WEBLs consumed were pests and only 3% were beneficial. If we don't see the parents, there are several possibilities we'll find when carefully opening the box: a) nothing, b) unused nesting material, c) a nest with eggs! d) a nest with young! e) a used nest! f) a pile of sticks or g) dead chicks. The unused nesting



*We waited a while for a parent to appear and when neither did, opened the box to find 7 CBCH. Gently closing the box and backing away, we saw why it had taken time – the parent was out stuffing its beak with insects for a hungry young crowd.*

material might be shaped into a cup made of grass (WEBLs), a grassy cup with feathers (Tree Swallows- TRES or Violet-green Swallow- VGSW), or a layer of moss (Chestnut-backed Chickadee (CBCH). The pile of sticks is likely from a House Wren- their nesting strategy of creating many dummy nests helps to fool predators but is hard on other birds needing cavities. Once we found a second grassy nest built on top of dead WEBL chicks. This may have been from the competition of other WEBLs in the area, or due to one of the WEBL parents dying since we didn't see ants, blowflies, or wasps, and it hadn't been

unusually hot or cold. We disposed of the nest away from the box so predators wouldn't find it and make the box part of their rounds; later that month a new WEBL family moved in. If we don't find a problem in the boxes, we leave the old nests through the fall and early winter for the birds to keep warm.

Besides checking about a hundred nest boxes we installed, we also monitored 32 boxes that had been up at Blue Heron Farm in Corralitos for several years. This farm is surrounded by native habitat and is adjacent to a wetland. The WEBLs, TRESs, and one VGSW family that occupied the boxes had both the farm and the habitat to forage. The WEBLs forage in the crops and on the ground and the Swallows swoop over vegetable and flower fields, catching airborne insects. Farmer Dennis Tamura says he notices an increase in flea beetle scarring on cole crops\* and the spread of the mosaic virus by



*Upper right: Chestnut-backed Chickadee with food  
Lower left: 7 Chestnut-backed Chickadee nestlings*

\*Cole crops include broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, collards, kale, mustard, turnips, and radishes.

cucumber beetles after the swallows leave the farm later in the summer.

Many farmers in the region have been putting up Barn Owl (BANO) boxes to keep rodents down. Not so usual is the installation of American Kestrel (AMKE) boxes. However, that may change as growers learn how valuable these birds can be at reducing pest bird damage in fruit crops. Even though AMKE mainly eats small rodents, they scare the heck out of American Robins, Cedar Waxwings, Great-tailed Grackles, and American Crows, saving cherry growers millions of dollars.

Besides putting up nest boxes, we are encouraging farmers to conserve and restore native habitat. Birds need places to hide, protection from the elements, and food sources, not just nesting sites. Native plants provide so much of what songbirds need, including insect food that they feed to their young. Some plants, such as oak and willow trees, are keystone genera because they support between 100-200 species of caterpillars in California—high protein food for many nestlings. We also encourage organic and/or integrated pest management strategies that replace the need for pesticides and make farms safer for the birds. Installing native plant hedgerows is a good way to do that because they also support beneficial insects.

I saw Jerry Thomas two months later in mid-July. He was happy to report that another WEBL family had used the box near their pond. We chatted about putting up more boxes on his son's farm this fall. Altogether, about 2/3rds of the 128 nest boxes we monitored were used. A little over half were WEBL, about 40% TRES and two were CBCH and VGSW.

You might wonder though if these boxes are making or will make a difference in our county. According to Alex Rinkert, preliminary Santa Cruz County Breeding Bird Atlas data show that TRESs are breeding in half the number of blocks (*see footnote*) in recent years (2017-2019) compared to earlier years (1987-1993)—they were in 16 and now are in 8. TRESs are missing in 11 blocks, still breeding in 5 blocks, and breeding in 3 new blocks. The data for WEBL show that they are breeding in a bit more blocks in recent years (2017-2019) than they used to (1987-1993)—they were in 24 and now are in 25. WEBLs are missing in 15 blocks, still breeding in 9 blocks, and breeding in 16 new blocks—this is a huge increase compared to most other species! The increased WEBL presence might be in part due to Blue Heron Farm and also a birder and farmer Roger Wolfe at Dos Aguilas Olive Farm. Roger had put up WEBL boxes years and years ago, and at that time estimated that his farm had the most WEBL in the county.



*TRES young nests are made of grass layered with feathers.*

Many birds on farms are common and we want it to stay that way. Some though are in decline- like the VGSW at Blue Heron Farm, or the AMKE I often see hunting on farms. As the planet heats up, birds like these and WEBLs, and BAOWs which many farmers support with nest boxes, are predicted to lose 50% of their current range in 30 to 60 years. So the more vegetative (plants) and structural (boxes) habitat on farms for birds, the more likely the birds will have suitable habitat to choose from in the future.

Like all people, we birders eat, and we can help to push for more biodiversity-friendly habitats on farms by understanding what it means to see the four elements

of good farming practices: 1) the soil is covered with crops, cover crops, grasses, and non-native and non-invasive plants—these can be used by ground- and low shrub-foraging birds; 2) flowers are present to support beneficial insects that reduce the need for toxic pesticides and to provide nectar some birds; 3) shrubs and trees are there providing structure, food, nesting and cover for birds; and 4) evidence of wildlife or their presence is seen, from insects to birds and mammals.

Nest boxes are valuable real estate in the bird world. We plan to put up another 100 nest boxes or so this fall and are looking for volunteers. We'd love help with installing the boxes then, cleaning out the current boxes in February, and monitoring all between May to July. With help, we'll track more than a snapshot of occupancy—we'll be able to learn the phenology of the birds' building, nesting and fledging throughout the season.



*Middle school students at Live Earth Farm Discovery Program help to build about 100 nest boxes.*

*Photos by Jo Ann Baumgartner*

Wild Farm Alliance is releasing one video a month about birds and their pest control services. Our latest is ***Corridors are for the Birds***. We also have an online scrolling platform containing beautiful images and helpful information- ***The Benefits of Birds on the Farm***.

The next time you go by a farm, really look at it- are the four elements present? Let's make that our collective vision for Santa Cruz County agriculture. If you want to buy from farms who are making a difference for birds—the birds that make our lives so much richer—you can see the list of who is working with us by going to the [Songbird Farm Trail](#).



*Jo Ann Baumgartner*

**Footnote:** The **Santa Cruz County Breeding Bird Atlas** project area is a grid of 72 blocks that encompass all of Santa Cruz County. Each block is 25 square kilometers and is visited by atlasers many times over the course of the five-year project.

# SPONSOR-A-SPECIES Campaign

## for the Breeding Bird Atlas Re-Launch

Our hearts go out to all those who have suffered losses with the fires!

We had hoped to re-launch Phase 2 of the Sponsor-A-Species fundraiser for the Breeding Bird Atlas on Sept. 1, but have decided to wait until the fire emergency & evacuations are lifted. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we had postponed our launch of the fundraiser in March due to the financial hardships many people were experiencing.

Once we re-launch, we hope that those of you who still have the resources to contribute to this project will consider sponsoring your favorite winged friend. Your sponsorship will further the scientific study of our local bird populations which will reveal and catalogue in detail the distribution and abundance of breeding birds, when and where they are nesting and their local life history.

With this Phase 2, those who have already contributed to the Breeding Bird Atlas financially and those who have helped with the atlasing effort will have advance opportunity to choose a bird to sponsor. If you meet that criteria, you will get an email as soon as Phase 2 opens.

Sponsors will receive a “BBA Sponsor” decal in the mail and, when the atlas is published, you will have your chosen name, group or organization listed as a sponsor. Each species sponsored has a \$200 fee. You can sponsor more than one species (we encourage you to do so!) and species choice is on a first come, first served basis.

### **\*\*\*SPECIAL OFFER\*\*\***

***By sponsoring a species now, your club membership will be extended through May, 2021***

Phase 3 will begin in October when the general membership of the club and general public can sponsor birds and contribute to the project.

As a reminder, if you are too busy migrating or roosting during September and October, there will be an auction for any unchosen species at the Annual SCBC Silent Auction (date and location TBD). Details for the date and location of the auction will be announced in a later edition of the Albatross and via the club email.

While the pandemic has cancelled many activities, our team of atlasers have been out in the field collecting data this breeding season. Thankfully the breeding season had ended before the fires began. We still plan to have the Atlas completed and published in 2023. With your support, the “Sponsor A Species” campaign will help cover a major portion of the cost to prepare and publish the Santa Cruz County Breeding Bird Atlas.

**Meanwhile, be thinking of that special bird you'd like to sponsor!**

*Great Egret - Lee Jaffe.*

# ATLASING SEASON CONCLUDES

Another atlasing season has come and gone. This was by and large our best year of atlasing since the project began four years ago, and enough progress was made that 2021 will be the last year of the project. While the datasheets are still trickling in at this time, we are poised to have found more species and breeding confirmations than in any previous year. Wow! By now I'm sure many atlasers are looking forward to a long break of nondescript sparrows and hybrid gulls this fall and winter. I sure am.

Please submit your observations to me before **September 10**. We look forward to sharing this year's results with you soon.

Alex Rinkert  
Atlas Director



*Pigeon Guillemot  
Nestling  
- Lisa Larson.*

## BREEDING BIRD ATLAS RECENT DONORS

Teresa Green  
Jenny & John Anderson  
Surrey Kent  
Lois Goldfrank  
and Anonymous

*Thank you!*



*There's one in every family! - Osprey, Harkins Slough - Lisa Larson.*

# After a **Wildfire**—Birding Safely

- By Chris Hartzell

*Originally published Sep/Oct 08*

*Birder Chris Hartzell, from Monterey County, works for CAL FIRE (formerly CDF), battling the wildfires that have been so much in the news lately. This article was assembled from his MBB postings regarding birding in burned areas.*

## **Lingering hazards**

After all of the fires this year, especially those affecting some of our favorite hiking and birding places, you may be interested in visiting those areas to see what has happened to them after the wildfire. However please be extremely cautious when visiting burned areas. Major hazards persist weeks after a fire—falling trees, unstable ground, falling rocks, rock slides, and more.

In the Basin Fire area of Los Padres National Forest, trees were still falling in areas that had burned three weeks earlier. A Northern California firefighter was recently killed by a falling tree. Oaks do not handle heat well and can dry out, crack, and break unexpectedly. It can take them many weeks to either stabilize or break, and they are surprisingly silent when they fall.

Hot stump holes are another source of firefighter injuries and a hazard to the unwary. They can retain dangerous heat levels for several months after a fire. Some have been found smoldering as late as five months after a fire. A burnt stump can also leave hollow ground extending as much as 20 feet from the original tree trunk, creating a booby-trap for unsuspecting walkers. Huge stumps that burn out during a fire can be many feet deep. (We found one on the Summit Fire in Santa Cruz that could have held the entire crew.)

When winter comes, flooding becomes a major hazard in the burned areas. Normally, dirt on a hillside absorbs water well, and it takes time for the ground to be saturated enough to cause surface runoff. However the carbon in ashes repels water, causing almost immediate runoff. A very small storm can produce dangerous slides and floods. This was spectacularly observed in the recent Kern County fires (which you may have seen on the news). One day firefighters were battling 100-foot flames. Hours later they were running for their lives from 20-foot walls of mud carrying car-sized boulders.

Burned areas can be great for birding because of the conditions and the extensive bird activity as they hunt for the exposed food. But again, be very careful when traveling through these areas. It is recommended that people stay out of burned areas altogether for at least two months after a fire. If you do travel through a burned area, avoid freshly burned steep terrain, and walk out of range of trees that could fall. Stay on proven paths and solid ground, and stay clear of stumps. Check weather forecasts and be aware that seemingly insignificant rain squalls could easily cause flooding.

## **Birding the burn**

While walking through a burned area should be held off until a safer time, birding by road can be done soon after the fire is out. When using dirt roads or parking areas, just remember to avoid burned trees for the previously stated reasons.

It may seem like you've lost some good spots, but burned areas can be good birding sites too. Hawks become very





prevalent and very visible. They don't shy from people as the "good hunting" takes precedence. Flycatchers and sparrows are also very common in the open areas, feeding on the burned insects. They are often found near the edges of the burn. Owls can be seen hunting near the fireline edges as well. The fire burns reptiles and insects, leaving them visible in open areas and attracting all kinds of birds. Areas with partly burned brush are best for perching birds. Grassy areas that have been burned clean have no hiding places for rodents, making them easy prey for raptors. Raptors that would normally steer clear of each other can often be found in close proximity. One fire I was on had a Cooper's Hawk, a White-tailed Kite, 4 Red-tailed Hawks, 6 Turkey Vultures, 3 American Kestrels, and a Golden Eagle—all within 1 square mile. At one point they were competing with a coyote for prey.

When burned areas begin to recover, fresh sprouting greens offer a ready food source for birds and animals. Insects start to traverse the area and become easy prey for waiting birds. Look for burned areas over 5 acres in size,



not steep, with mixed vegetation of completely burned grass and partially burned brush and perhaps some rock outcroppings or rock piles. Find safe walkable paths or open areas.

Walk to a location and stay for 10 minutes, then walk to a new location and wait again. If you don't noticed anything, try another area. If there is no activity within 20 minutes, it may be the area has been cleaned of food for the time being. Revisit at another time of the day or in a couple of weeks.

## New Members WELCOME

Karen Burnson	Jun 20
Teresa Green	Jun 20
Rachel McKay	Jun 20
Karen Bilgrai Cohen	Jun 20
Linda Strawn Family	Jun 20
Arthur Macmillan	Jun 20
Manu Koenig	Jun 20
Wendy Illingworth	Jun 20

## NOTICE!

**Santa Cruz Bird Club  
Officer Positions available:**

**Program Director  
Outreach/Publicity Director  
Hospitality Director**

Please see [santacruzbirdclub.org/club-information/club-officers](http://santacruzbirdclub.org/club-information/club-officers) for a description of officer duties.

# Birding By Ear

- By Dr. Judith White and Connie Unsicker

(Originally published in the Olympic Peninsula Audubon Society newsletter, Harlequin Happenings, July 2020, with permission of editor)



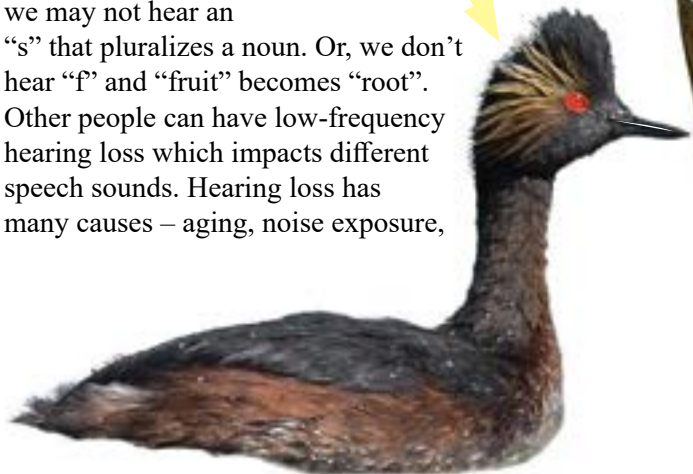
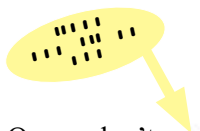
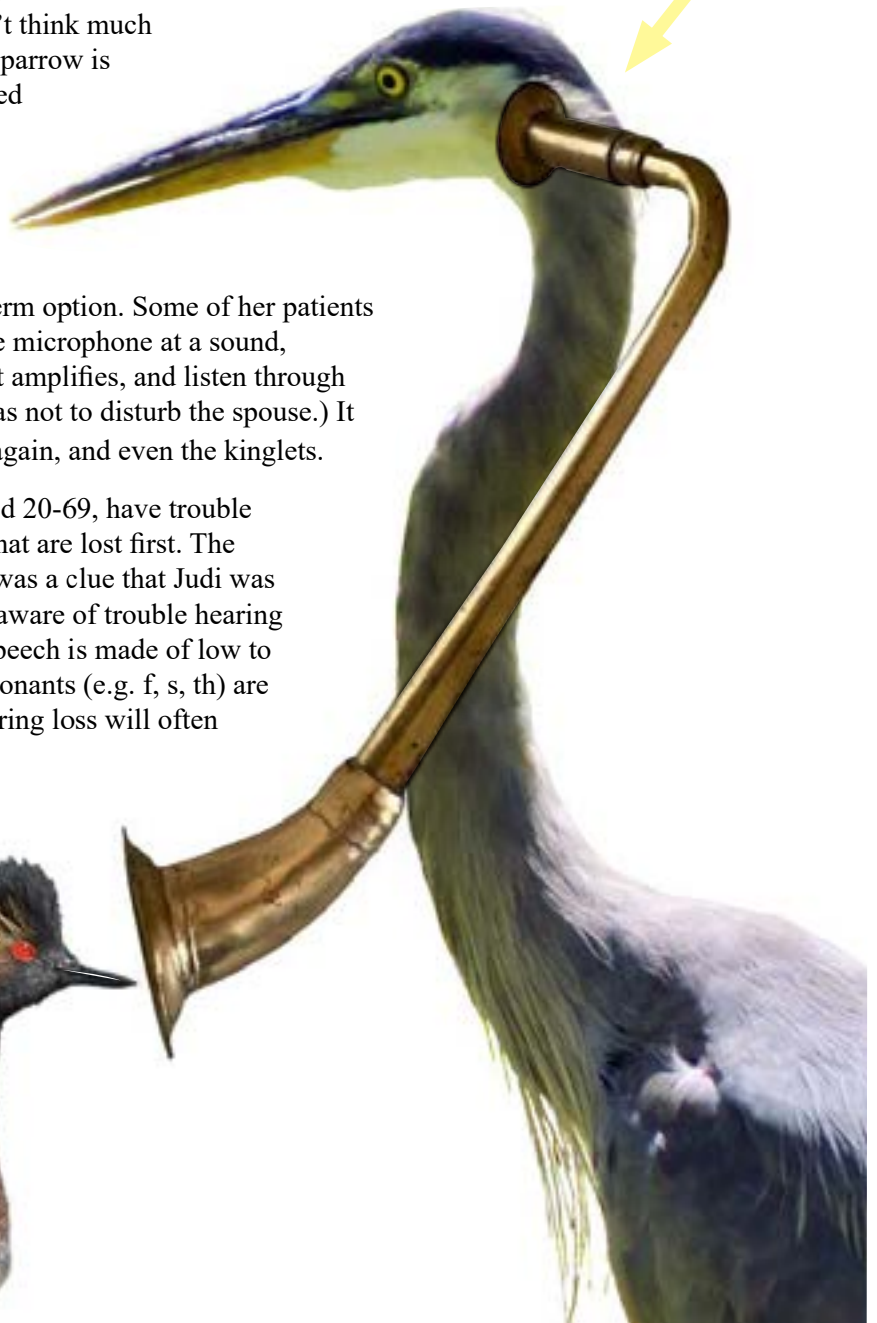
"The Savannah Sparrow was only a few feet away, busy declaring his territory with his beak opening wide and his throat visibly vibrating. I was lucky to chance upon him. But he must have a voice problem, since I could not hear the Savvy's song, like buzzy summer insects. Then another, and another Savannah Sparrow defied my wish to hear them." said Dr. White.

Kinglets were assumed to be perceptible to only the best human ears in her bird group, so she trusted the birders who heard them and didn't think much more about it. But a Savannah Sparrow is

another matter! As a retired ear doctor, Judi tried a few self-diagnostics. She could still hear a finger-rub next to each ear. She tried on-line hearing screening, but disregarded the findings as the company wished to sell her an expensive hearing aid. Eventually, she ordered an inexpensive device as a short-term option. Some of her patients had recommended, a "Pocket Talker" – aim the microphone at a sound, adjust the device's volume and the frequency it amplifies, and listen through headphones. (Also handy for late night TV so as not to disturb the spouse.) It was a relief to hear those Savannah Sparrows again, and even the kinglets.

Judi and I, like 38 million American adults aged 20-69, have trouble hearing. For many it is mainly the high tones that are lost first. The Savannah Sparrow, with his high buzzy song, was a clue that Judi was losing her upper frequencies, since she was unaware of trouble hearing human conversation. The majority of human speech is made of low to mid-frequency sounds but certain sibilant consonants (e.g. f, s, th) are high frequency. Folks with high frequency hearing loss will often

only hear part of a word and so misunderstand a message. For example, we may not hear an "s" that pluralizes a noun. Or, we don't hear "f" and "fruit" becomes "root". Other people can have low-frequency hearing loss which impacts different speech sounds. Hearing loss has many causes – aging, noise exposure,



medications, heredity or structural ear disease. Ear wax, surprisingly, rarely impedes hearing.

But hearing loss can cause way more than mere misunderstanding or inconvenience while birding. This is the motivation for our writing this article. Increasingly, research has associated hearing loss with social isolation, depression, and increased risk of falls. Now research shows a clear association between untreated hearing loss, even when mild, and declines in cognitive function. Hearing loss is the largest modifiable risk factor for developing dementia- exceeding smoking, high blood pressure, lack of exercise and social isolation according to an entire volume dedicated to dementia prevention in the respected journal Lancet (Livingston, G et al. July 20, 2017). Treating hearing loss in mid-life potentially decreases the risk of developing dementia by 9%.

Hearing loss appears to contribute to social isolation, even when people are with others. The extra work of processing unclear words and sounds in conversations seems to affect memory and other cognitive tasks. The affect is cumulative, since an unused memory tends to atrophy. Surprisingly, a measurable drop in cognitive ability occurs with even mild hearing loss (Golub, J. et al. JAMA Otolaryngology Head and Neck Surgery: November 14, 2019).

Birders are already tuned in to listening closely. If you notice a problem with hearing, talk with your doctor. Consider seeing a certified audiologist who may suggest a wide range of aids. These aids can now be personalized to meet an individual's specific needs and their cost appears to decrease annually. It will not only improve your ability to bird by ear, it can significantly improve your long-term quality of life.



*Photos in order of appearance:  
Savannah Sparrow - Jeff Bleam  
Eared Grebe - Jeff Bleam  
Great Blue Heron - Lisa Larson  
Long-eared Owl - Ame Hartzell*



*New Yard Babies!  
Two juvenile Lawrence's Goldfinches with parent  
- Lisa Sheridan*

# Santa Cruz Birds

By Alex Rinkert

*Including reports from March 1 to May 31, 2020*

**T**his spring Santa Cruz and the rest of the world was rocked by Covid-19, and with unprecedented health advisories and restrictions on outdoor activity—including an entire week of park closures—this spring seemed poised to be slow season for birding. However, by and large birders still managed to turn up a plethora of interesting observations. Rare birds found this spring were highlighted by Lesser Nighthawk, Lewis's Woodpecker, and our first inland record of Laysan Albatross. Breeding birds also did not disappoint with nests of Golden Eagle and Western Kingbird being found. And the Scaly-breasted Munias are still with us.

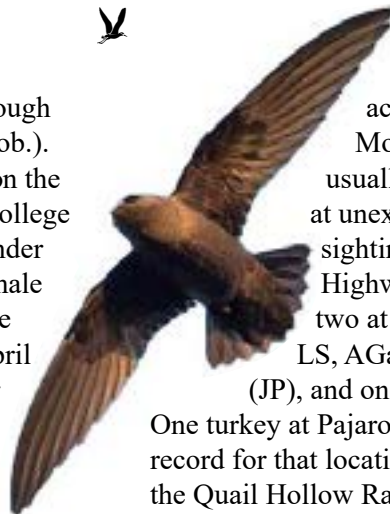
Spring migration was hot at Loma Prieta this year. Morning flights on April 15 (AR, NL) and 25 (STe, LT, v.ob.) broke previous high counts for a few species in Santa Cruz County, and recorded impressive numbers of others. New record high counts included 202 Rufous Hummingbirds on April 15 and 54 Black-throated Gray Warblers on April 25; twenty-nine Hermit and 32 Western Tanagers on the latter date did not break any records, but were still nice counts. These morning flights happen annually at Loma Prieta, but this year the combination of favorable weather conditions and regular observer presence generated by the hype on listservs locally and abroad resulted in a great season of birding on the ridge.

A **Snow Goose** lingering at College Lake through May 13 was especially late for the county (GK, v.ob.). **Canada Geese** were once again widely reported on the north coast this spring (v.ob.). A **Wood Duck** at College Lake on May 5 was noteworthy as they rarely wander from the Pajaro River where they breed (GK). A male **Northern Shoveler** present at Scotts Valley, where rare, beginning in late February stayed through April 22. Up to four **Redhead** were present in the lower Watsonville slough system this spring, including as late as May 24, but once again no evidence of breeding materialized (GK, MST, JWa, BB, PM). Are all these spring records of migrants? **Ring-necked Ducks** often gather in the hundreds at College Lake in winter and early spring, but a count of 521 on March 25 set a new high count for the county (GK). A male **Black Scoter** off Live Oak on April 12 (LM) and a male **White-winged Scoter** off Laguna

Beach on May 9 (AR) were the only reported this spring. The **Barrow's Goldeneye** wintering on the San Lorenzo River stayed through April 9 (AR, SP). Up to two **Ruddy Ducks** continued to visit the Quail Hollow Ranch pond through April 29 (BB, JR, v.ob.).

Nowadays **Wild Turkeys** are breeding

*Anna's X Costa's -  
Randy Wardle*



*Vaux's Swift - Michael Bolte*

across most of the Santa Cruz Mountains. Each spring there are usually some pioneering birds found at unexpected places. This year such sightings included a flock walking across Highway 1 at Laguna Beach (AR), up to two at Natural Bridges State Beach (DS, LS, AGa), five at Pinto Lake City Park (JP), and one at Manresa Uplands (DP, LM). One turkey at Pajaro Dunes on April 12 was the first record for that location (DP). A **Pied-billed Grebe** at the Quail Hollow Ranch pond on May 9 was unusual as they do not breed there (LL); migrants and wintering grebes leave the park in March.

A **Lesser Nighthawk** flying low over eastside Santa Cruz on April 17 was the first in the county since 2011 (NL). The **Common Poorwill** wintering at the Santa Cruz Landfill was last seen on March 5 (GK). Several pairs of **Vaux's Swifts** showed interest in some chimneys in a neighborhood at Graham Hill in late May (AR). There were formerly several places in the county where this species bred in chimneys, however more recently there has been little evidence they continue to use that type of substrate for nesting in the county. All recent breeding records have been from old growth forest in the Santa Cruz Mountains.

**Black-chinned Hummingbirds** were at westside Santa Cruz on April 27 (GT), Aptos on April 7-8 and May 4 (RW), and Loma Prieta on April 22 and 24 (BB, JW, NU, AG). A male **Anna's x Costa's Hummingbird**

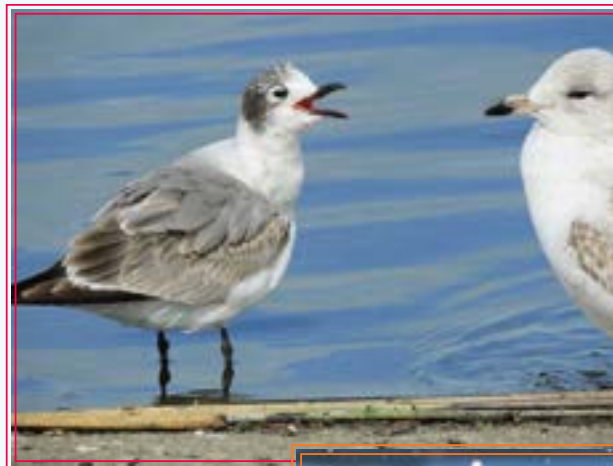
hybrid visited an Aptos feeder again on May 1 (RW). Is this the same male that has frequented this feeder in winter since 2018? Prior to the sighting in May, what is presumed to be the same hybrid was last seen on January 18. Another interesting hummingbird at westside Santa Cruz on May 11 showed characteristics of an immature male **Costa's**, but a hybrid may not be entirely ruled out (KB). In addition to the record high count of **Rufous Hummingbird** at Loma Prieta, the species was reported widely across the county with over 30 reports this spring (v.ob.). **Calliope Hummingbirds** were seen at Loma Prieta on April 15 (four), April 25 (one), and April 26 (two) (AR, NL, STe, LT, NU et al.).

A **Common Gallinule** at Neary Lagoon on March 4 was noteworthy away from the Pajaro Valley (SK), as was an **American Avocet** at Natural Bridges State Beach on April 24 (AI). A pair of **Snowy Plovers** nested at Laguna Beach providing a rare breeding record on the north coast (ST). The nest was active on April 24 and surprisingly managed to survive the masses of ravens and beachgoers the next few weeks to hatch small precocial chicks by May 14 (ST). A migrant **Ruddy Turnstone** was photographed at West Cliff on April 30 (AMM). Phalaropes were on the move offshore on May 17; in an hour seawatch off West Cliff, 620 **Red-necked** and 2 **Red Phalaropes** flew by heading west (AR, NL)

*Top right: Black Skimmer - Jonny Wahl  
Center: Franklin's and CA Gull - Lisa Larson  
Right: Black & Ruddy Turnstones - Arthur Macmillan  
Below: Franklins Gull amid American Coots - Lois Goldfrank*



Eight reports of **Black-legged Kittiwakes** in early March included a nice push of 11 during a brief seawatch from West Cliff (NL, AR). An immature **Franklin's Gull** at Pinto Lake City Park from February 22-March 15 was exceptional for early spring (JB, v.ob.), while an adult at Pajaro Dunes on May 6 was found on a more typical spring date (JW). An unusually large flock of 200 **Caspian Terns** was flying inland at Soquel on April 14 (PS). Flocks of this size seen early in the season are more likely migrants than commuting breeders from the San Francisco Bay. A **Black Skimmer** at the confluence of Watsonville and Struve Slough on April 25 was the



only reported this spring (JW, PM, BB).

The most remarkable bird this spring was a **Laysan Albatross** found grounded at the unlikely location of North Rodeo Gulch Road! The bird was

found in a meadow there on April 1 (JH) and transported to a recovery facility, then released out on the Monterey Bay on April 11 where it was joined at its release by a **Black-footed**. This is the first inland report of this species in the county. Two **Black-footed Albatrosses** seen from West Cliff on a windy April 5 were in a more expected setting (AR, NL).



**Northern Fulmars** were especially numerous in the nearshore waters in March, especially in the earlier half of the month. Some high counts from shore included 150 at El Jarro Point on March 8 (AR, JS), 85 from Terrace Point on March 15 (NL), and 80 at Waddell Bluffs on March 22 (AR). A die off reportedly happening around the same time on Monterey Bay beaches may have been related to the increased nearshore presence (DG, SW). A **Fork-tailed Storm-Petrel** found beachcast at New Brighton State Beach on March 17 was noteworthy (DLe).

A beachcast **Red-footed Booby** at Waddell State Beach on February 22 was a rare find, the 3rd record for the county (DC). The bird was not freshly beachcast and could have been there for weeks. Most unusual about this booby was that it was a white-morph adult; of the nearly 100 accepted records of this species in California, only about 5% are of white-morph individuals. A pair of **Pelagic Cormorants** were found nesting under the Santa Cruz Wharf this spring, where they have only nested once previously (GK). Single pairs were also found nesting at Sand Hill Bluff on May 9 and the bluffs west of Capitola Beach on April 7, both possibly the first nesting attempts at these locations (AR).

Reports of a **Great Blue Heron** nest a few miles north of Boulder Creek were noteworthy (fide SS). Local residents in the area nearby say the pair has nested in a redwood tree for “generations”. This species formerly bred at numerous locations in the county but more recently there have been only two locations—Pinto Lake and the Santa Cruz Harbor—where nesting has been observed. A **Cattle Egret** was at Harkins Slough on March 31 (GK). **Green Herons** continued nesting at Natural Bridges State Beach this year; a family group with fledglings was seen there on May 31 (EF).

Two **Turkey Vultures** observed copulating on a dead pine at Quail Hollow Ranch on March 1 offered a rare glimpse into the life of this breeding species (JW). We know they breed in Santa Cruz County, but the details of where and when are poorly known. **Ospreys**

bred on a platform atop a telephone pole near Pajaro Dunes this spring marking the first time they have nested at that location (NU). Active nests were also found at Harkins Slough, College Lake (two), and Henry Cowell State Park (v.ob.). A pair of **Ospreys** sky dancing over East Fork Waddell Creek on May 21 suggested they may be attempting to nest somewhere at Big Basin State Park, although no nest was found this year (AR).

A **Golden Eagle** was observed building a nest in a Douglas-fir near UCSC in March. Unfortunately, the nest never became active. The resident pair of **Bald Eagles** at Watsonville nested again, hatching a chick by May 30 (GK). A second-year Bald Eagle was seen eating a fish on the San Lorenzo River at Henry Cowell State Park on April 4 (PB). A mostly white, partially-albino **Red-tailed Hawk** flying around Davenport on February 13 must have been striking to see (AM). Two **Burrowing Owls** on the slopes of a dry pond near San Andreas Road on March 8 were noteworthy for that area of the county (GK).

A pair of **Belted Kingfishers** were building a nest in the banks of Corralitos Creek up Eureka Canyon Road on March 22 (JM). Where and when this species nests in the county is poorly known, and in recent years there have been few breeding confirmations. A **Red-breasted Sapsucker** in the upper Soquel Creek watershed on April 30 may have been a late migrant or rare breeder (LM). A

**Lewis’s Woodpecker** made a surprise appearance in an apple orchard at Chittenden on April 18 (BP, KON). The woodpecker stayed through May 3 (PBa) to become the most widely seen record of this species in the county; four other spring records and almost all fall records in the county were one-day-wonders. A male “**Yellow-shafted**” **Northern Flicker** was on the lower San Lorenzo River on March 24 (GK).

**Hammond’s** and **Dusky Flycatchers** were at Loma Prieta on April 15 (AR, NL) and May 2 (JV), respectively. A **Say’s Phoebe** photographed near



Photos:  
Lewis's Woodpecker  
- Michael Bolte





fields near Pajaro Dunes and the Pajaro River on May 6 was away from their known breeding range (AR). A **Northern Rough-winged Swallow** nest in the face of a coastal bluff, found on May 25, was in a substrate they do not nest in frequently in the county (PB). A high count of 11 **Purple Martins** were found at Bonny Doon Ecological Reserve this spring, the highest count at this location since they resumed breeding there in 2014. At least three active nests were found in the same burnt Ponderosa pine stump in May (AR, ES, v.ob.). Martins were also present as usual at Loma Prieta, presumably breeding at the colony in Santa Clara County. Once again there was a smattering of sightings elsewhere in the county. Some of these may involve migrants but the increasing number of sightings

Davenport on May 17-19 was unusually late (BME, LG, SH, KS). Nearly all wintering Say's depart the county by the end of March, and there are very few records of them between that time and when fall migrants and dispersants arrive in August. Wintering **Tropical Kingbirds** stayed until April 10 on the lower San Lorenzo River (AR), April 17 at Schwan Lake (ZM), and March 19 at Struve Slough (PF). A **Western Kingbird** nest in a blue gum eucalypt was found at Chittenden on May 22 (NU, EL). There are only a few breeding records for the county, all from the Pajaro Hills and vicinity.

A few **Horned Larks** were seen this spring in the area of the Watsonville slough system they are known to breed at (v.ob.). One singing in agricultural



each spring and summer suggest they may also be breeding away from Bonny Doon and Loma Prieta. **Tree Swallows** bred again this spring in the nest boxes at Arana Gulch (MS, NL).



A significant find this spring was a **Bushtit** nest, not one hanging from a tree, but rather one inside an old woodpecker cavity. This may be the first report of a pendulous-nesting bird species nesting inside a cavity or any other enclosed space. The nest was first found with young on April 16 (JM) and by May 1 the nest had fledged and the pair was already rebuilding the nest inside the cavity for a second attempt (AR). Adding to this already interesting situation was

*Osprey Pair on Beach St.- Lisa Larson  
Purple Martin Pair, Bonny Doon E.P.  
- Arthur Macmillan  
Juv. Bald Eagle with fish, Henry Cowell  
Redwoods S.P. - Phil Brown*

that during both observations, a Tree Swallow repeatedly attempted to usurp the cavity while the Bushtits had young inside and while they were nest building during their second attempt. The swallow would repeatedly guard the cavity entrance and go inside for several minutes, and sometimes engage in an altercation with the Bushtits at the cavity entrance. An Oak Titmouse also was seen visiting the cavity, but it was later discovered the titmouse had an active nest at the base of an adjacent tree so it was likely more interested in the commotion than the real estate.

An **American Dipper** along Corralitos Creek up Eureka Canyon Road on April 18 was the first report from that watershed in over a decade (JM). Maybe there has been less effort to find them there in recent years, but across the county dippers seem to be in fewer places they were historically. A pair of **Western Bluebirds** bred again at the new boxes placed at Arana Gulch in 2019 (MS, AR). **Townsend's Solitaires** were found on upper Soquel-San Jose Road on March 12 (STe) and Loma Prieta on April 26 (STe, LT, v.ob.).

Three **Evening Grosbeaks** made a somewhat unexpected visit at Manresa Uplands from March 26-April 2 (AB, v.ob.). They were widely observed during this period feasting on the fruiting coffeeberries in the uplands. Sound recordings of their calls confirmed them to belong to the "type 1" group found across much of the western United States (AR). Only one previous record of this species has been identified to call type in the county, and it also belonged to the type 1 group.



*Evening Grosbeaks - Alex Rinkert  
Bushtit with food at nest hole - Lisa Larson*



**Red Crossbills** continued to be reported through May (v.ob.) An apparent migratory push brought more crossbills to the area in March but was then followed by a decrease in reports in April and May. All those identified to call type were "type 2" (AR, STe, NL). A pair of **Lawrence's Goldfinches** lingering at a feeder at Soquel from May 20 onward was notable for being away from the few places the species is known to breed in the county (LSh).

A **Clay-colored Sparrow** singing in an eastside Santa Cruz backyard on May 30 was a rare spring record (DL). Up to two singing **Black-chinned Sparrows** and two **Bell's Sparrows** were found at Loma Prieta this spring (CF, AG, BP, KON, v.ob.). Two or three pairs of **Lark Sparrows** were found on territory in the Pajaro Hills, the last place they presumably breed in the county (NU, EL). Two "**Thick-billed**" **Fox Sparrows** at Loma Prieta on April 3 set a new late date in the county for this wintering subspecies (AR). A late push of **Golden-crowned Sparrows** brought at least four to the county between May 10-15 (NU, AR, BME, ARG); one of these near Soquel stayed through May 30 (ARG). A Vesper Sparrow was found at coastal Wilder Ranch State Park on March 17 (NL).

A **Yellow-breasted Chat** singing at Natural Bridges





State Beach from May 11-12 was the only reported this spring (NL, SPh). A male **Yellow-headed Blackbird** was at CARE Park along the Pajaro River from April 12-17 (NS, BS, v.ob.). A **Western Meadowlark** nest with young found on May 1 and recently fledged young seen on May 26, both at Soda Lake, provided the first evidence of nesting by this species in many years. (EL, NU). Soda Lake may be the last place this rare breeding species can be found in the county. Two **Hooded Orioles**—an immature male and female—near downtown Boulder Creek on May 18 may have been a breeding pair (EL). The furthest up the San Lorenzo Valley they have been nested is Brook Lomond.

Breeding confirmations elsewhere from their core range this spring came from Mountain Charlie Road (STe) and Davenport where at least two nests were found (LG, SH, KS). The only colony of **Tricolored Blackbirds** apparently active this spring was at Last Chance Road (RR, BR).

An **Ovenbird** was singing near Cascade Creek on May 20 (AR). The wintering **Black-and-white Warbler** at Bethany Curve was last seen on March 8 (PB et al.). This species has wintered at Bethany Curve in six of the past eight years; the last date seen has ranged from March 8 to April 15, with the average being March 23. Two **Common Yellowthroats** passing over Loma Prieta on April 15 were rare at that location (AR, NL). A **Northern Parula** was singing from trees in the county building parking lot in Santa Cruz on May 20 (ZM, TB).

From top: *Yellow-headed Blackbird - Sharon Hull*  
*Rose-breasted Grosbeak - Pete Solé*  
*Scaly-breasted Munias - Norman Uyeda*

A male **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** visited a feeder at Soquel from May 22-23 (PS). **Scaly-breasted Munias** continued this spring at three locations they were present earlier in winter: Interlaken, Pinto Lake City Park, and Seascape (NU, JM, ES, v.ob.). All were visiting feeders and involved a mix of immatures and adults. Most impressive was up to 45 (!) visiting the feeder at Interlaken on some days (NU).

#### Cited Observers:

Patricia Bacchetti (PBa), Jack Bark, Aaron Bartley, Theadora Block, Phil Brown, Brian Bullard, Karen Burnson, David Cruz, Paul Ferguson, Craig Fosdick, Elisabeth Foster, Aaron Gabbe, Alexander Gaguine (AGa), Don Glasco, Lois Goldfrank, Jesse Hersh, Sharon Hull, Alison Irwin, Gary Kittleson, Spencer Klinefelter, Erica Lanctot, Lisa Larson, Dave Lavorando, Earl Lebow, Nick Levendosky, David Lewis (DLe), Bruce Lyon, Arthur Macmillan (AMM), Jeff Manker, Alexander Marse, Brian McElroy, Zack Mikalonis, Paul Miller, Liam Murphy, Kitty ONeil, Bill Pelletier, Sandi Pensinger, John Perry, Shantanu Phukan (SPh), Doug Pio, Bernadette Ramer, Robert Ramer, Alex Rinkert, Jim Roe, Adam Romswinkel-Guise, Brian Schnack, Nico Schnack, Elena Scott, Lisa Sheridan (LSh), David Sidle, Stephanie Singer, Pete Solé, Logan Southall,

Madeline Spencer, Kitty Stein, Matthew Strusis-Timmer, Jonah Svensson, Glen Tepke, Linda Terrill, Scott Terrill (STe), Simon Thornhill, Norman Uyeda, Jason Vassallo, Jonny Wahl (JWa), Randy Wardle, Sophie Webb, Jim Williams, “v.ob.” means various observers. **Please enter interesting observations into eBird or report them to Alex Rinkert at [arinkert12@comcast.net](mailto:arinkert12@comcast.net).**



Cornell Lab of Ornithology is offering:

SCIENCE AND NATURE  
ACTIVITIES FOR COOPED  
UP KIDS



I am on the advisory Board for K-12 Education at the *Cornell Lab of Ornithology* and have been asked by the director Jennifer Fee, to get the word out about the free lessons they are generating weekly for students out of school.

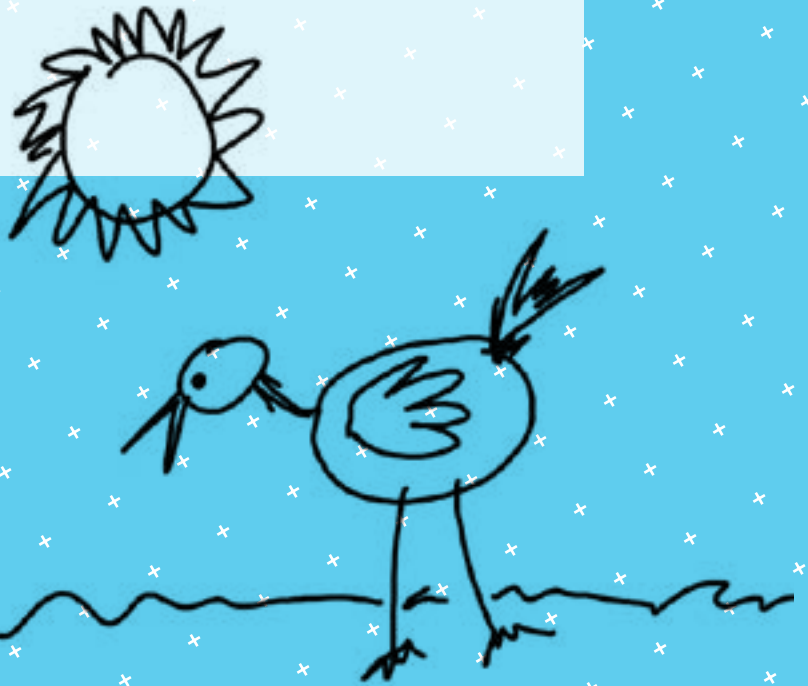
Despite being generated quickly, these are high quality, engaging activities that are mostly bird oriented and science based. They are also grade leveled by K-2, 3-5, 6-8 and High School.

They could be a god-send for parents and also get the next generation interested in birds!

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[www.birds.cornell.edu/k12/science-nature-activities-for-cooped-up-kids](http://www.birds.cornell.edu/k12/science-nature-activities-for-cooped-up-kids)

Thank you,  
Jeff Manker



# DEADLINE

submissions for  
NOV/DEC issue

OCT 1, 2020



Western Gull - Lisa Larson



Above: Red-tailed Hawk Pair - Jeff Roisman  
Right: Forest of Nisene Marks - Lisa Larson

# 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, 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](mailto:scbirdclubeditor@gmail.com)

~ Lisa Fay Larson, Editor



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Above: Upper Struve Mallards topped by one female Cinnamon Teal - Lisa Larson  
Right: Killdeer - Margaret Perham

**ALBATROSS**



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**PARTING SHOT: "FLEXIBILITY"**  
MALE EVENING GROSBEAK  
- ALEX RINKERT



"Watching the Evening Grosbeaks eat coffee berries was reminiscent of parrots."

- Alex Rinkert

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