Santa Cruz Bird Club Newsletter Vol. 66 No. 5: May/Aug 2022

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Breeding Bird Atlas Spring 2022 Update



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WHAT TIME IS IT?

Birder's Notebook PARTING SHOT





Joining the Club

- By Jeff Manker

don't even know when I started listing birds. It was probably when I was in Boy Scouts and was working on my Bird Studies merit badge fifty years ago. We were probably required to keep a list and that is when I made a check mark in my first Peterson Guide. No dates or places, just a check. It is probably better I started that way because I am sure many of those identifications would probably not have withstood any kind of real scrutiny.

Now I am trying to get my 300th bird species in Santa Cruz County. I am very close to gaining entry into the vaunted "300 Club". I found my two hundred and ninety-eighth species today: a Ring-necked Pheasant.

Earlier in the day I was birding with a friend at Jetty Road in Moss Landing and I wondered out loud if I would ever get bored with birding. She immediately gave me a look and said, "No. No way. It isn't just listing birds for you."

I had told her a little before about how close I was to 300 (I hadn't seen the pheasant yet) and how I was really learning to appreciate the fine distinctions between closely related species. A couple of weeks back I had picked a Tufted Duck out of a whole flock of scaups up in Oakland, CA. Granted, I knew it was there because others had reported it, but finding the one duck with a darker back and only a stub of a "tuft" was no easy task.

In the process of reaching 300 species I have learned to reliably tell a Lesser from a Greater Scaup, a Lesser from a Greater Yellowlegs, a Downy from a Hairy Woodpecker and so on.

Finding the Ring-necked Pheasant today told me

something else about this listing obsession. It teaches you about nature in general. It creates a connection and an understanding about how nature works.

When I left the location where I saw the pheasant I had a big grin on my face. Not because I was adding to my own glory of finding another species, but because I knew where to look and a

Ring-necked Pheasant - John Hickok



bird I have been told recently, "No longer existed in the County" showed up

right where I expected it to be.

I have lived in Santa Cruz
County for 30 years so I
have a fair knowledge of
its different habitats and
landscapes. That is what led
me to the pheasant today. I
had not given up on seeing
one in the county because I
knew there were patches of
habitat that could support them.

The trick was finding that patch. The very knowledgeable person who told me they no longer existed remembered when they were still abundant and

had seen their decline firsthand.

Much of where they used to live has been altered to high rotation farming that pushed them out.

But the beauty of birds is that they can fly and move around. Case in point, the Phainopepla and Townsend's Solitaires that were found on the County edges recently. This is not normal range for either species, but usable habitat exists out on Old Chittenden Road and Castle Rock State Park for these species. What is the saying, "Build it and they will come"? The Black Oaks at Castle Rock are like the Sierra Foothills where you would normally find Towsend's Solitaires in February. The Mistletoe infested Sycamores of Old Chittenden offer similar sanctuary for the Phainopepla who should be in the desert or Central Valley about this time.

Years ago I saw a Greater Roadrunner on Browns Valley Road in Corralitos near where I lived. I practically ran off the road when I saw it. This was before I became an eBirder and was at a lull in my birding so I never recorded it and have forgotten the date. But it was there. Somehow, that bird had found a patch that suited it, at least temporarily. I'm still hoping to catch another one that I can list this time.

That is what is fun about listing. Taking the puzzle pieces of habitat, species preference

and time of year to find the bird you are seeking. Which is exactly what I was thinking today when I found the pheasant. I thought, "Where

could I find a pheasant or a roadrunner?" I was on my way to the grocery store and decided I would take a detour because, maybe, just maybe, Pleasant Valley had the "right stuff" for those birds. I had birded the area frequently in the last few years as part of the Breeding Bird ryey effort and had never seen

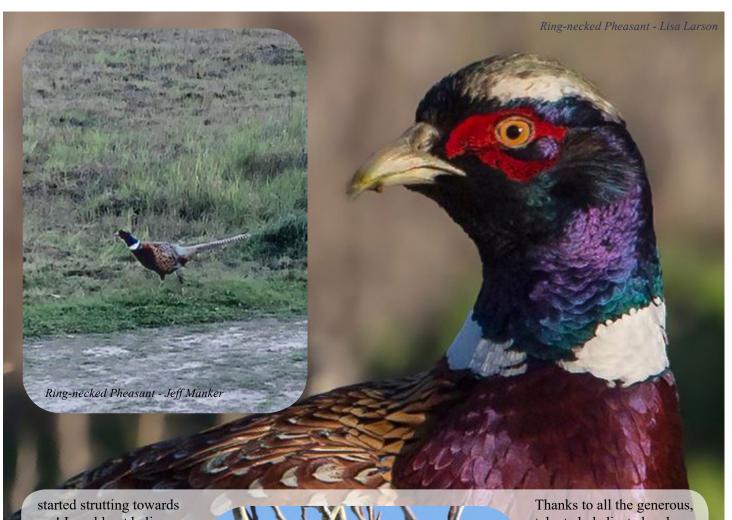
Survey effort and had never seen either. Half way up there I almost turned around, but instead kept going, thinking "I have to at least look."

I had planned on going all the way to the top of the road but when I got part way up I turned on to a side road I had walked many times. The sun was directly in my eyes so I could barely see anything. I decided this was nutty and I would turn around at the end of a straightaway in a dirt pull out. I hadn't seen a thing yet. I turned around and was just getting ready to

give up and head back to the store. Then there it was! I must have driven right past it. A brilliantly-colored male strutted out of a ditch into the road. I had left my brand new camera, binoculars and spotting scope at home because I wasn't "going birding". You would think I would know myself better by now.

I quickly pulled out my phone and started taking photos through the windshield. I backed up and rolled down my window and what did the bird do? He

> From top: Townsend's Solitaire - David Eckdahl Greater Roadrunner - John Fox Black-legged Kittiwake - Alex Rinkert



me! I could not believe my luck. I thought he was going to get close enough to ask me for a ride. He was probably 30 feet away when he finally turned away.

I could not stop smiling. What I knew about birds and what I knew about habitat had all come together almost subconsciously. I think at this point I don't really care what my species count is in Santa Cruz County as long as I can keep getting natural epiphanies like I had today. That is the joy that listing brings.



Phainopepla- Pete Solè

Thanks to all the generous, talented, dedicated and knowledgeable birders in the county who have helped me understand, find and appreciate the birds of our area.

Despite what I just said about not caring, hold a spot for me Phil. I'm almost there.

Postscript to writing this story: I did it. I have now identified 300 birds in the county. On March 4th I was standing on the cliffs at the end of Stockton Avenue in a gale force wind hoping for an unlisted seabird to blow in from the open sea when a Black-legged Kittiwake



zipped by right at eye level! On March 5th I had a hunch Old Chittenden

Road might have something interesting. As I drove up the road to look for a parking spot past the farm, out of the corner of my eye I saw a kingbird sitting on a wire. I thought "Western Kingbird? Seems kind of early." I drove on and

parked thinking I would see it when I walked back. I saw the bird but it turned out to be a Cassin's Kingbird and my 300th for the county! I texted Paul Heady and he came over so we each got a record bird. My 300th ever and his 200th already in 2022 – so far!

From Top clockwise: Jeff Manker & Paul Heady Greater Roadrunner silhouette - Lisa Larson Cassin's Kingbird - Jeff Manker Cassin's Kingbird: original photo - Jeff Manker, silhouette - Lisa Larson



Breeding Bird Atlas Spring 2022 Update

he breeding season is now nearly in full swing for many of our breeding species. Atlasers have been working on unfinished blocks in the outlying areas of the county as well as searching for some of the most "wanted" species for which we have few observations. This is the final year of fieldwork for the project and the last opportunity we have to find and confirm breeding for these most wanted species. Your help is needed! Whether you want to record observations during your normal birding outings or take on a small assignment, your effort this year will help complete coverage across the county and provide more data to describe where and when each species is breeding.

Sign up here to help with Year 6 fieldwork: https://forms.gle/bucS1E4rDsuaLCFK9

Atlasers who take on a small assignment are asked to visit a specific location to look for a certain species of interest. Examples of assignments that you could accept include checking if American Kestrels are breeding at Quail Hollow Ranch, which would provide more information on this rare breeding species in the mountains. Another assignment is to see if Oak Titmouses are breeding at Pajaro Dunes, a disjunct locale where this species has not been confirmed breeding during the atlas. Some expansive natural areas—Glenwood Preserve, the Wilder Ranch uplands, and Gray Whale Ranch—have also received very little coverage and need to be visited this spring and summer.

The atlas publication process is happening behind the scenes as fieldwork is being conducted this year. The detailed publication plan that was prepared this winter has been guiding the next steps we have been taking toward publishing the atlas. This spring we are compiling and digitizing many additional sources of data that will be utilized extensively while writing the book. Jonah Svensson, the atlas project assistant, is diligently digitizing the "Bird Files", which is the late Randy Morgan's compilation of an estimated 10,000 bird records in Santa Cruz County that span much of the 1900s. Jonah and I have also finished digitizing the habitat and locality details of

1,200 egg and nest specimens collected in the county at the turn of the 20th century. These are just a few of the many additional

sources of data that we will be using to describe the historical occurrence of each species in the county. All of the compiling we are doing this spring is leading up to writing the species accounts this fall. While the bulk of **Eves On The Prize!** the writing awaits, one introductory Ash-throated Flycatcher chapter and numerous species accounts - Lee Jaffe have already been written. I appreciate the many supporters of the atlas, and especially those who contributed to the Sponsor-a-Species campaign, for providing the means to get this publication process underway. See you in the field this summer.

Alex Rinkert

Project Director

arinkert12@comcast.net



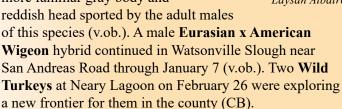
Santa Cruz Birds

By Alex Rinkert

Including reports from January 1 to February 28, 2022

his period was highlighted by the first Phainopepla to be widely seen by birders in the county, the continuing Neotropic Cormorant at Pinto Lake, and a record high count of Townsend's Solitaires at one location in the county. Scaly-breasted Munias were once again seen nest building at Pinto Lake, but it remained unclear whether eggs were laid in the nest or if it was used solely for roosting. A mudflat formed from the receding waters of Watsonville Slough in the latter half of January and into February, providing some unseasonal shorebird habitat in the county that attracted notable winter counts of some species.

A juvenile Snow Goose at the Quail Hollow Ranch pond on February 17 was a rare sighting of this species in the mountains (AR, ES). The immature male Eurasian Wigeon continued at Younger Lagoon through January 1, by which time it had acquired the more familiar gray body and



Counts of up to 33 Semipalmated Plovers at a mudflat by Watsonville Slough near San Andreas Road from January 6 through February were unusually many for the county in winter (AF, v.ob.). Other noteworthy shorebird counts at this location were up to 15 Western Sandpipers (BT) and 23 Wilson's Snipe (NS).

Glaucous Gulls found this winter included a first-cycle at the San Lorenzo River mouth on February 3 (AF, MMK) and an adult near the Pajaro River mouth on February 17 (PH). A second-cycle Glaucous-winged x



Laysan Albatross - Alex Rinkert

Glaucous Gull hybrid was seen during a boat trip on the Monterey Bay on February 5 (AR et al.) and a first-cycle was at the San Lorenzo River mouth on January 25 (PH). A Laysan Albatross landed close to a boat on the Monterey Bay on February 5 allowing it to be nicely

photographed. (NS et al.).

The adult Neotropic Cormorant that was first reported in early December had not been seen since December 12 until it was refound at Pinto Lake on January 11 (RW, v.ob.). A roost of White-tailed Kites was found in a Watsonville neighborhood in January, with up to 20 observed coming to roost on one evening (NA et al.). A handful of kite roosts have been discovered in winter in the Pajaro Valley and in Santa Cruz, but they have always disbanded within a short amount of time and no roost location has been used consistently across years. Two Bald Eagles, a near-adult and a three-year old bird, were frequently seen along the coast between the Waddell Bluffs and Schwan Lake this period, and sometimes seen perching together suggesting a pair bond may be forming (v.ob.). These two eagles, considering the increasingly



In flight:17 Semipalmated Plovers - Arthur Macmillian

regular presence of this species away from the Pajaro Valley, may be the harbinger of a breeding pair on the coast or in the mountains sometime in the near future. The breeding pair of eagles in the Pajaro Valley were seen nest building and copulating on January 28, indicating there will be another breeding attempt by that pair this year (GK). Four **Burrowing** Owls were reported in the county this period, one at Wilder Ranch State Park and three in the Pajaro Valley (v.ob.). Another winter has passed and once again Burrowing Owls went unreported at UC Santa Cruz, which was until recently a longtime stronghold for this species in the county.

A Red-breasted Sapsucker of the "ruber" subspecies, which rarely occurs in the county, was photographed at Happy Valley in February (JO). Three Red-naped x Red-breasted Sapsucker hybrids were reported; one at the Seascape Golf Course from January 8–13 (GMK, v.ob.), one at upper Empire Grade on February 12 (SLM, BT), and one that had apparently returned to Natural Bridges State Beach for the second consecutive winter on January 23. The recent proliferation of digital photography has allowed a more critical evaluation of the sapsucker taxa that winter in the county, and was critical in identifying the three hybrids found this winter. While our understanding of the occurrence of these sapsucker taxa in the county is still improving, the records from the past few years suggest Red-naped x Red-breasted hybrids are more frequently encountered than pure Red-naped. A Lewis's Woodpecker was nicely photographed at Kelly-Thompson Ranch on January 1

where it remained through at least







Section 2 ➤ Check out Margaret's video of the eagles!



February 1 (NL, v.ob.). This was the first Lewis's to spend the winter in the county since 2007.

A "Black" Merlin was seen between Wilder Ranch State Park and a few miles north from January 8 to February 3 (AK, AR, v.ob.). A Prairie Falcon remained at Soda Lake through at least January 4 (v.ob.). Western Bluebirds were seen widely in the open space and urban areas along the north coast, the mid-county coast, and Pajaro Valley this period further reflecting

their rapidly growing population in the county (v.ob.). A **Townsend's Solitaire** was at Castle Rock State Park on January 22 (MH), and over the next few weeks at least five (!) were confirmed to be present in the same area and often in the same tree (LFL, SS, v.ob.). All were seen feeding on a bountiful crop of toyon and madrone fruits at the Partridge Farm. At least one remained in the area through

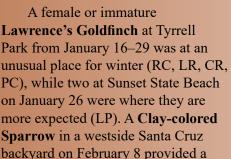
February 19 (NU).

A male **Phainopepla** at Old Chittenden Road from January 20–22 was the first in the county to be seen widely by birders (BT, SLM, v.ob.). The male was feeding on mistletoe berries high in the cottonwoods lining the Pajaro River (NS). Remarkably, another Phainopepla, a female, was at the Spring Hills Golf Course from February 1–7 bringing s fall and winter's total to

this fall and winter's total to three individuals! There were six previous records in the county.

From Top: Immature Bald Eagle - Margaret Perham Lewis' Woodpecker - Christian Schwarz Bald Eagles: A screen capture from her video - Margaret Perham Townsend's Solitaire - Lisa Larson







Clockwise from Upper Left:
Lawrence's Goldfinch - Robert Clark
Black-and-white Warbler - Norm Uyeda
Lucy's Warbler - Lisa Sheridan
Tennessee Warbler - Jasper Barnes
Clay-colored Sparrow - Erik Enbody
Nashville Warbler (same bird, different days)
- Karen Burnson
Nashville Warbler - Greg Meyer







rare winter record for the county (EE). The striking "Red" Fox Sparrow continued in a Soquel backyard through February, while another was photographed at Natural Bridges State Beach on February 6 (SH). Careful observations of a male Great-tailed Grackle continuing at Westlake Pond indicated that it belonged to the second clutch of the pair that nested at the pond in 2021 (RAS). Another or perhaps the same grackle was seen



at Neary Lagoon on January 13 (GK).

Rare warblers this period included a **Tennessee Warbler** continuing at Corcoran Lagoon on January 1 (LFL) and another seen at Tyrrell Park and vicinity from January 7–22 (AK,



v.ob.). The Lucy's Warbler at Tyrrell Park remained in the willows and live oaks through February (v.ob.). A Black-and-white Warbler was at Pinto Lake from February 27–28 (NU, v.ob.) and two Nashville Warblers continued in a westside Santa Cruz neighborhood through February (KB, GM, EM, v.ob.). Other wintering rarities included Black-headed Grosbeaks at Day Valley (SL) and Corralitos (fide NA), and a Western Tanager in a westside Santa Cruz neighborhood on February 3 (LG, SH).

Flocks of Scaly-breasted Munias continued at a feeder in Interlaken and at Pinto Lake, where at the latter





location nest building was observed for the second time this winter on February 27 (NU). The nest was being built in a non-native pine where several other munia nests had been built and apparently abandoned at some point. Whether eggs were eventually laid in this nest or if it was solely used for roosting is unknown. Munias also continued at a feeder in Larkin Valley (BK), at Neary Lagoon (DS, v.ob.), and nine were found at DeAnza Mobile Home Park (SS, JA).

Cited Observers:

Robin Abu-Shumays, Nanci Adams, Jenny Anderson, Clive Bagshaw, Karen Burnson, Pamela Clark, Robert Clark, Erik Enbody, Abram Fleishman, Lois Goldfrank, Paul Heady, Marcel Holyoak, Sharon Hull, Bryan Kett, Andrew Kenny, Gary Kittleson, Lisa Fay Larson, Storey LaMontagne, Nick Levendosky, Sharon Lucchesi, Gabe McKenna, Matthew McKown, Greg Meyer, Eileen Murphy, Jane Orbuch, Laura Paulson, Alex Rinkert, Carol Rose, Larry Rose, Nico Schnack, Elena Scott, Suzie Shook, Dessi Sieburth, Stephanie Singer, Breck Tyler, Norman Uyeda, "v.ob." means various observers. *Please enter interesting observations into eBird or report them to Alex Rinkert at arinkert12@comcast.net*.

Upper Left: Scaly-breasted Munia gathering nesting - Norm Uyeda Left: Scaly-breasted Munia - Lois Goldfrank Lower left: Great-tailed Grackle
- Robin Abu-Shumays
Below: Great-tailed Grackle
- Robin Abu-Shumays
Lower right corner: Great-tailed Grackle

- Sam Eberhard



I've been checking on this bird periodically since it fledged. It is from the second clutch recorded in the city of Santa Cruz proper. It had some white on the feathers and one white claw. I wondered if the white claw could be a stable marker to id this individual...so have been watching that white claw as the bird matures. Figured if the cells that gave rise to the outer part of the claw can't make pigment, the claw would stay white. That idea was wrong. Now the base of the claw is black and only the tip is white.

- Robin Abu-Shumays



Birder's Notebook

Elizabeth Romanini www.thenaturalline.com

My art focuses on a subtle exploration of shapes and structure that can be found in the natural world through single-plane studies of birds, insects and plants in their natural environment. These pieces are rendered using Pigma Micron pen, some also having a wash of translucent watercolours. Each work is an intimate portrait of the subject, so as to magnify the beauty that is in nature if we are just willing to look!

I try to show a respect for nature in my work by maintaining a sense of realism, but a wee bit of whimsy sometimes creeps into my work. Extensive research is done on the habits and habitats of all my subjects before I begin a drawing. The images I create are made from several sources including field sketches of live animal, or preserved specimens, along foliage and other background material that is brought into my studio.

- Elizabeth Romanini



Saw-whet Owl, working materials





Saw-whet Owl, completed

Top left: Male Acorn Woodpecker

Below: Red-tailed Hawk





Left: Female Allen's Hummingbird and Flowering Currant

Below: Detail, Female Allen's Hummingbird and Flowering Currant





Left: Female Nuttall's Woodpecker Below: Male American Goldfinch



Below left & right: Bewick's Wren working materials & finished work





WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

3	() Y ()
Linda Brackenbury	Mar 2022
Howard Graham Family	Mar 2022
Lynn Szanto	Mar 2022
Vanesa Gaspar Family	Mar 2022
Kevin Kilpatrick Family	Mar 2022
Jeff Hobbs	Mar 2022
Beth Austin	Mar 2022
Samuel Baxter-Bray	Mar 2022
Lisa Mills	Mar 2022
Elizabeth Powers	Mar 2022
Kathleen Halat	Mar 2022
Susan Manabe Family	Mar 2022
Janet Wyner-Maze	Mar 2022
Marilee & Steve Westen Family	Mar 2022
[Renewed after a few years off!]	
Jenn Mahley	Mar 2022
Lynne Lynne Greene	Mar 2022
Marie Reed Family	Mar 2022
Sheila Bongiovanni	Mar 2022
Alison Chesley	Mar 2022
Peter Shaw	Mar 2022
Dana Crompton	Mar 2022
Thomas Marini Family	Mar 2022
Shannon Morris	Mar 2022
Katherine Roberts	Mar 2022
Julia van der Wyk	Apr 2022
Mary Park	Apr 2022
Ileana Davis	Apr 2022
Cathy Herbert	Apr 2022
Samantha Roger	Apr 2022
Desiree Mulligan	Apr 2022
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Birders on Brookwood Drive SCBC bird walk



Red-tailed Hawk Chicks - David Lewit



Baldwin Creek Loop - Lee Jaffe

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Oak Titmouse - Lisa Larson

American Kestrel - Beth Hamel



It may be TIME to RENEW your Santa Cruz Bird Club MEMBERSHIP

Is now the time to renew your Bird Club membership? If you have questions, please contact our membership officer, Brian Schnack - scbirdclub@gmail.com to be sure. **Note:** **the membership year runs from June to May.**

A Bird Club membership is still a great value—dues have been at the same low level since 2007!

For your convenience, you can pay online, using PayPal. Just go to the website and follow the links: santacruzbirdclub.org/join-or-renew-online/.

Why not take a moment now, so you won't miss the next great issue of the ALBATROSS?

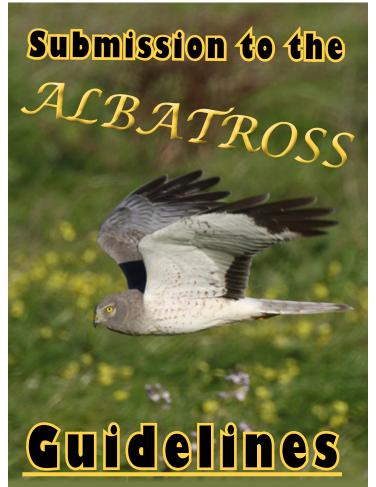
A Gift of Birds and Birding?

Do you have a friend or know a child who is interested in birds? An SBSC membership would be a thoughtful—and perhaps inspiring—gift. Fill in the information for the giftee, and send in the payment.





Anna's Hummer Mom - Margaret Perham



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 <u>AT LEAST 2 weeks before</u> the submission deadline!

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

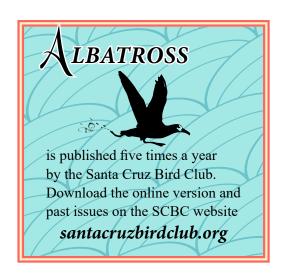
~ Lisa Fay Larson, Editor

Northern Harrier - Pete Solè



Spring carpet - Lisa Larson

Chestnut-backed Chickadee gathering nesting material - Lisa Fay Larson



PARTING SHOT: "THIS BEAUTY TREATMENT WILL MAKE ALL THE OTHER HENS SO JEALOUS!"

WILD TURKEY DIRT BATH - LEE JAFFE



