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Santa Cruz Bird Club Newsletter
Vol. 79 No. 3 March 2026

Welcome to The Albatross! A monthly eNewsletter that can be viewed directly from your email or a computer or mobile device. You can also download a pdf version from our **website**. We hope that you enjoy it and encourage your feedback and recommendations

Hooded Crest and Gladestem Plants photos courtesy of Bruce Lyon

Join Us For Our March Meeting Presentation
Hood coots, gladeweed plovers, and other charismatic birds of the High Andes of Argentina
By Bruce Lyon

The High Andean plateau is among the most remote places on earth, with a unique and endemic flora and fauna that is both poorly known but also charismatic and spectacular. Hundreds of thousands of waterbirds migrate to our Neotropical wetland birds from this region, the horned coot and gladeweed plover, both of which are very poorly studied. Horned coots need at extreme densities in high elevation lakes in the region. I will indicate the horned coot project by contrasting their breeding biology with findings from my research on American coots in Utah, including their breeding biology, ecology and migration in gladeweed plovers. This spectacular shorebird is very desirable target species for many birders, is often missed because they are absent from most Neotropical birding hotspots, and is very poorly studied. I will discuss a study to determine whether these birds are often missed because they are very choosy about nesting habitat (not at habitat we think they should like is what they want), alternatively, perhaps the birds are just too rare to fill up at suitable habitat. We are conducting a website tagging study to determine whether birds are in fact choosy or not. I will also discuss a study of the endemic and charismatic birds of the high Andean plateau and other aquatic habitats, like the pungent forest near Salta. There will lots of pretty bird photos!

Date: Thursday, March 26, 2026
Time: 7 PM
Place: Santa Cruz Museum of Natural History
1305 East Cliff Drive
Santa Cruz, CA

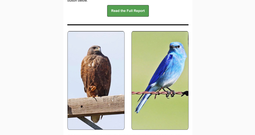
American Dipper photo taken by Alex Rinkner at Big Basin

SCBC March Field Trips

March 1st - 9:30 - 11:30 am - Quail Hollow
March 4th - 8:30 am - 11:30 am - Henry Cowell's Roaring Camp
March 14th - 8:30 - 11:30 am - Columbine Trail to Observation Deck
March 16th - 8:30 - 11:30 am - Juvenile hall to Ponderosa Lodge
March 18th - 8:30 - 11:00 am - Pogies Dunes South (Aptos/Seacliff)
March 25th - 8:30 - 11:30 am - Skypark Scrubs Valley

Get Field Trip Details Here

Join us in the gardens for a variety of activities taking place throughout March including tours, a photography workshop, and presentations. Click on the EVENTS PAGE for information about all of the activities taking place at the UCSC Arboretum in March.



Horned Grebe photo taken by Alex Rinkner

The 69th Annual Santa Cruz Christmas Bird Count
December 20, 2025
By Alex Rinkner and Nick Levendosky

The 69th Santa Cruz CBC was held on Saturday, December 20, 2025. The weather forecast leading up to count day was ominous with steady rain and thunderstorms predicted for the entirety of the count day. Fortunately and mind-prevailed. Landlocking was still alive and weathered conditions were tough with the fog and mist, but the light rain in the very early hours of the day did not deter some participants from finding most of the common rarity, and rain conditions even permitted a boat trip to cover the offshore section of the count circle.

Overall, the results of this year's count were average. The 172 total species tallied was a little below the average of 175 species, but the total count was well above the 30,000 total birds found this year, which is roughly similar to the recent average of 28,100 birds and squarely falls within the range from that period (25,984-35,858 birds). The 168 participants and 263.1 hours of field effort that year were also very close to the recent average of 167 participants and 260 hours of field effort.

Details of the count including rarities is available in the full article by clicking the button below.

Read the Full Report

Dark-eyed Junco photo taken by Alex Rinkner; Bluebill photo taken by Clay Sawyer at Panoche Valley

Panoche Valley Field Trip Report
By Clay Kempf

The February 7th field trip to Panoche Valley was embraced by 34 enthusiasts who braved the cold and wind to see the birds. The birding was fantastic, lasting nearly all day, with no birds of prey, but unique views of singing CALIFORNIA THRASHERS, and hard-only WRENTITS. A couple people spotted a CHIPPING SPARROW, and we had great views of Lark Sparrows, Brewer's Sparrows, and GOLDEN CROWNED SPARROWS were seen by most people, and first-time birds of the day. Two BIRD EXPERTS had their status for "birds of the day" when an AMERICAN BADGER was spotted nearby, and paradoxically declared "the guaranteed best bird of the day". Good sightings continued throughout the day, including a GOLDEN EAGLE, a pair of Prairie Falcons, and a dark-phase, a dark-morph FERRUGINOUS HAWK, offering some potential bird of the day competition. Early morning requests for a PRAIRIE FALCON were fulfilled, and we had great views of a pair of Prairie Falcons on nest with young. LARK SPARROWS were spotted along the way, and early before we stopped for lunch at the Panoche Inn. At the Inn and surrounding area, a RED-BREASTED SAPSUCKER, a GOLDEN EAGLE, and another PRAIRIE FALCON were spotted. After lunch, we had our few MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRDS and a few AMERICAN PIPITS, and a few WESTERN MEADOWLARKS appeared everywhere. One field above held Dot "Everyone" along with a couple NORTHERN HARRIERS and more PRAIRIE FALCONS. LEGGEHEADED MEADOWLARKS were spotted, and a few LONG-EARED OWLS were found in ROADRUNNERS. We spotted another endangered mammal with several WELDON'S KATELOPE SQUIRRELS, but efforts to find Mountain Plovers were in vain. However, scanning for the plovers led to seeing a KITT FOX (too scaring up the afternoon sun, and entering into the "bird of the day" candidacy. HORNED LARKS and a MERLIN were an added bonus.

Photos of the dark (juvenile) male Ferruginous and the Badger can be seen here. Photos of the Prairie Falcon and Leggeheaded Meadowlark photos can be seen photo taken last week of other birds we saw today.

Thanks to everyone who joined in, helped find birds and mammals, and contributed to a fun and productive day in the field. I'm looking forward to our next trip already.

Tree Swallow Photo taken by Kimberly Bailey at Elkhorn Slough Ranch

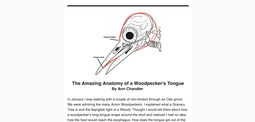
Elkhorn Slough Ranch Field Trip Report
By Lisa Sheridan

On the beautiful Saturday morning of February 21st, some 35 members of the Santa Cruz Bird Club (SCBC) visited Elkhorn Slough Ranch. Situated on private land on the northwestern side of Elkhorn Slough, overlooking Moss Landing Harbor, the ranch has a variety of habitats: pastures, cultivated fields, brackish and freshwater ponds and ranch buildings.

The walk was hosted by Lisa Sheridan, SCBC president, and Robert Stephens and led by Bruce Lyon, retired UCSC Professor of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology. Participants enjoyed a fine walk that yielded about 60 bird species. A total of 5 species of raptors, 3 of which were Red-tailed Hawks, 1 WESTERN KINGBIRD, breeding Ianiarian resident WESTERN BLUEBIRDS and abundant TREE SWALLOWS squabbling over nesting boxes, white-multiple RED-TAILED HAWKS, and a WESTERN MEADOWLARK. Other birds seen included 20 ducks, including AMERICAN WIGEON, GADWALL, NORTHERN SHOVELER, GREEN WINGED TEAL, and a few CINNAMON TEAL. Shorebirds were represented by BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER, LESSER YELLOWLEGS, DUNLIN, and SPOTTED AND AMERICAN AVOCETS. Four species of sparrows, SONG SPARROWS, GOLDEN CROWNED SPARROWS, SAVANNAH SPARROWS, and many WHITE-CROWNED SPARROWS were seen. Other notable birds included a single AMERICAN PIPIT, a BELTED KINGFISHER, PURPLE MARTINS, and a GREAT BLUE HERON. Participants enjoyed the day, full of birds, including participant photos, and seen a curious horse checking in on the action, see the photo report at:

https://www.scribd.com/embed/1763263853

Thanks to Lisa, Bruce, and Robert for sharing the birds and area with the Bird Club.



Western Flycatcher Photo Courtesy of Ken Bade

Be On The Lookout for These Birds in March

March has arrived and so has the first big month of spring migration here in Santa Cruz County. Many birds are on the move and are appearing during this month, many of the Spring/Summer species will begin to arrive.

Among those departing this month are Gray's Phoebe, and Ruddy Ducks will mostly be gone by month's end. Ducks and gulls will still be around, but many like American Wigeon start leaving soon, others as well by the end of the month.

Among passerines, there will be more and more singing as the month goes on. Species like Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Hermit Thrush and Fox Sparrow will often sing on sunny days near the end of the month before they leave for the season.

These species arriving by the middle of the month include Wintering Vireo, Hermit Warbler, Black-throated Gray Warbler, Townsend's Warbler, and by the end of the month by Audron Orioles, Black-headed Grosbeaks, Western Kingbirds, Grasshopper Sparrows and a few Chipping Sparrows. All 5 species of swallows should also be here by the end of March. Up at Lake Frolla, watch for Blue-gray Gnatcatchers and House Wrens as they also return.

There are many more birds described in the full article available by clicking on the button below.

These articles are published on the Santa Cruz Bird Club website from previous years and provide an informal list of birds that are leaving and those arriving as well as the most likely places to see them. The text is by Randy Mantle and the photos and compilation are by Pete Sinn.

Read the Full Article Here

Hummingbird Tongue

The Amazing Anatomy of a Woodpecker's Tongue
By Ann Chandler

In January I was walking with a couple of non-birders through an Oak grove. We were admiring the many Acorn Woodpeckers. I explained what a Granary Tree is and how the birds use it to store food. One of the women asked if there is a woodpecker's long tongue wraps around the skull and wasn't I her no idea how the food would reach the esophagus. How does the tongue get out of the way? I later asked Alex Rinkner and he sent me the link below and the following information. The graphic shows where the esophagus is in relation to the tongue. Alex also sent a link to a Smithsonian Magazine where the tongue turns out to going underneath and around the skull.

Apparently, this confuses the brain while drumming on a tree. Check out this **LINK** for more information about the woodpecker's tongue. The illustration above was taken from the website at the attached link.

This is fascinating stuff!
Ann Chandler

Thank you to Alex Rinkner for providing technical assistance for this article

Golden-crowned Sparrow photo taken by Andrea Mason in the yard among the Acorn Woodpecker Granary

Important Club Announcements

Todd Newberry Fondly Remembered

Our hearts were saddened to learn that Santa Cruz Bird Club member Todd Newberry passed on February 9, 2026. Not only was Todd a respected Professor of Ecology and Biology at UCSC, where he inspired generations of students, he was also a passionate birder and a beloved member of our club. Todd was a wonderfully kind-hearted soul, a lover of Todd's enthusiasm and philosophy. Todd, along with Gene Hellum, authored a delightful book entitled *The Anderi Birder - On the Cradle of Birdwatching*, which is now out of print, but available at used book stores.

We have created a page on our website comprising tributes published on the NBB list server. Please click HERE to view them.

This archived story published on NSBeyondpar provides insight into this legendary educator's philosophy of birding. Todd will be missed by us and the entire birding community.

Welcome New Members!

We are pleased to welcome the following new members to the Santa Cruz Bird Club!

Robin and Erik Elias, Ruth McGurk, Vincenzo Pianetti, Katrina Rogers, Bill Samuel, and Scott Thomas

It is easy to join as a new member or renew your membership on our website.
Currently dues are as follows:

Individual membership: $25.00 per year

Family membership: $35.00 per year

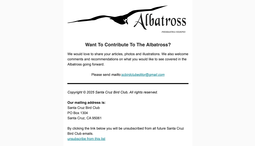
Life membership: $400.00 one time fee

Announcing an easier way to donate to the Bird Club!

We're happy to announce that you can now make donations on our website via PayPal. Simply go to the Join Renew section of our website and the "Donate" button is at the bottom below the Automatic Renewal options. You can enter any amount you desire. We appreciate any and all donations, which are used to enhance club activities for members.

Of course, you can always mail us a check, to PO Box 1304, Santa Cruz, CA 95061!

Join or Renew Your Membership, or Donate Here



Want To Contribute To The Albatross?

We would love to share your photos, photos and illustrations. We also welcome comments and recommendations on what you would like to see covered in the Albatross going forward.

Please send media scbirdclubsc@gmail.com

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