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Albatross

PHOEBASTRIA NIGRIPES

Santa Cruz Bird Club Newsletter
Vol. 70 No. 9 September 2026

Welcome to The Albatross! A monthly eNewsletter that can be viewed directly from your email on 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.

Female Hook-billed Kite by Ryan Phillips

Join Us For Our September Meeting Presentation

The Belize Bird Conservancy and Neotropical Raptor Research

Presented By Ryan Phillips

Belize Bird Conservancy, Hawk Watch Director

The Neotropical region holds the planet's greatest biological diversity and hosts the richest and most diverse raptor community in the world. However, most Neotropical raptor species remain unstudied, resulting in limited knowledge of their ecology making conservation efforts challenging. Due to most of these species being an enigma to the scientific community Ryan was inspired to study these species and work closely with local communities in research and conservation efforts. To fulfil this goal of protecting raptors and getting locals involved in conservation he co-founded a non-profit organization in Belize in 2009, now called the Belize Bird Conservancy. In this talk, Ryan will discuss the organization, its history, research and conservation efforts on Neotropical raptors such as the Solitary Eagle, Hook-billed Kite, and Stygian Owl. Ryan will also share some novel Belize raptor migration data from their Hawk Watch particularly on the Hook-billed Kite, a specialized Neotropical raptor, which was thought to be non-migratory, yet an average of 5,000 kites migrate through Belize each year on their southbound fall migration. By collecting ecological information on raptors, in combination with including local communities in raptor conservation, better conservation management strategies and efforts can be implemented to protect raptors and the habitats they reside in.

Date: Thursday, September 24, 2026
Time: 7 PM
Place: Santa Cruz Museum of Natural History
1305 East Cliff Drive
Santa Cruz, CA

Get More Information

Lesser and Greater Yellowlegs photo courtesy of Sharon Hull

SCBC September Field Trips

September 1st – 8:30 to 11:30 am – Quail Hollow

September 10th – 9:00 to 11:00 am – Slow Birding at Heart of Soquel Park

September 12th – 8:30 am to 12:00 pm – Biodiversity Week: San Lorenzo Riverwalk

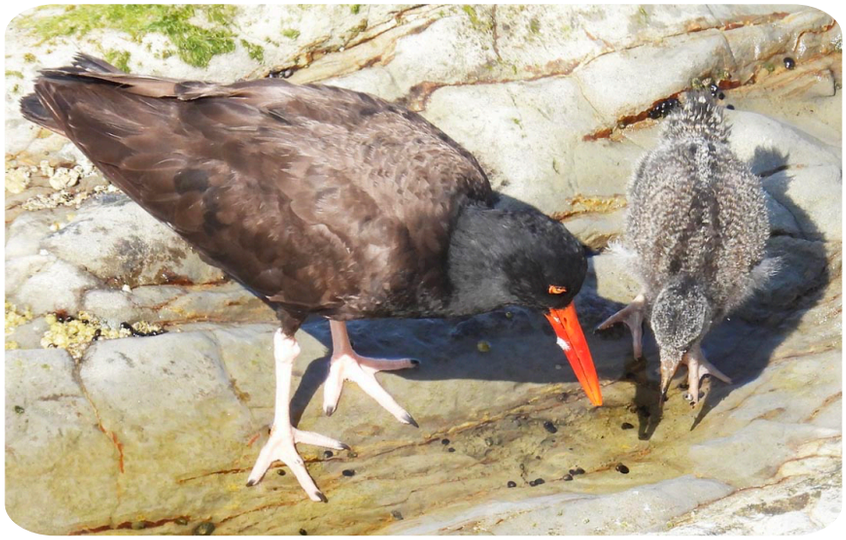
September 12th – 9:00 to 11:00 am – Loch Lomond

September 18th – 8:30 to 11:30 am – Juvenile Hall to Ponderosa Lodge

September 18th – 8:30 to 11:00 am – Parajo Dunes South - Members Only - Registration Required

September 26th – 8:00 to 11:00 am – Rancho del Oso

Get More Details Here



Black Oystercatcher with chick photo courtesy of Alex Rinkert

Wilder Ranch Field Trip Report
by Alex Rinkert

Sixteen of us gathered at the Wilder Ranch parking lot on a warm, humid morning. After getting views of California Thrasher and Northern Harrier, we caught up to the three Pacific Golden-Plovers in the farm fields on the way out to the coast. Wilder Beach had plenty of birds to sort through although only a handful of the expected shorebirds. Continuing along the coast we had a nice comparison of juvenile Cooper's and Red-shouldered Hawks perched on the same fence line, and hearts were warmed by two small Black Oystercatcher chicks on the tidal rocks. We could have easily spent another hour on the trail with all the bird activity, but had to call it a morning at 79 species.

Celebrate California Biodiversity Week With Us
September 5th through 13th, 2026

Can you find 30 species of birds to celebrate and support California Biodiversity week? 30 species represent “30 x 30 California” an initiative to conserve 30 percent of California’s lands and coastal waters by 2030.

Share your ebird checklists with “California Biodiversity Day” between September 5th and 13th to have it appear in the California Biodiversity Week 2026 trip report.

Check-out the Biodiversity Day link to find more events happening around California.

San Lorenzo River Walk Series
Discover the River that Connects our Community

Join us for free guided walks exploring the San Lorenzo River, from the redwoods to Monterey Bay. Discover birds, steelhead, native plants, history, and the connections between people and nature from different perspectives.

All walks are free and open to the public, and are best suited for school-age children and older. Walks are easy to moderate, and will cover between 1 and 2 miles. Please wear good walking shoes, dress for the weather, bring water, and please leave pets at home. Heavy rain may cancel.

Sponsored by the Santa Cruz Bird Club, Monterey Bay Salmon & Trout Project, Santa Cruz Natural History Museum, and the Coastal Watershed Council.

Schedule of Walks:

September 12th – 9:00 am to 12:00 pm - celebrating California Biodiversity Week
October 3rd – 10:00 am to 12:00 pm – The Urban River
October 24th – 9:00 to 11:30 am – Nature & Mindfulness
November 7th – 9:30 to 11:30 am – Where River Meets Ocean

Get details about each walk and sign-up by clicking the button below.

Get Details Here

2026 Monterey Bay Festival of Birds
October 9th through 11th 2026

The Bird School Project is excited to celebrate the birds of the Monterey Bay with the Festival of Birds during the second weekend in October! With lots of field trips and workshops to sign up for, there will be birding activities for everyone.

Tickets are on sale now!

Get More Info Here

American Golden-plover photo courtesy of Pete Sole

Be On The Lookout for These Birds in September

September is one of the best months for fall migration in Santa Cruz County. There should be a lot of bird activity all month long on land and at sea.

Many of our wintering landbirds will return this month: Ruby-crowned Kinglets, American Pipits, Yellow-rumped Warblers, Merlin, Fox and Lincoln's Sparrows, Red-breasted Sapsuckers, and about the third week of September the White-crowned and Golden-crowned Sparrows will be making their way back to your feeders! Although Hooded Orioles, Olive-sided Flycatchers and Western Wood-Pewees will be mostly gone by the end of the month, wintering Western Meadowlarks start arriving in good numbers.

Shorebird diversity will be at its highest this month. As the south county sloughs begin to see lower water levels and more mud, continue to look for Baird's, Pectoral, and Semipalmated Sandpipers as well as rarer species such as Ruff or Buff-breasted Sandpipers. Evening feeding frenzies just offshore should continue with Elegant Terns, Brown Pelicans, Sooty Shearwaters and maybe even Black-vented Shearwaters should they push north. Corcoran Lagoon has a nicely developing sandbar where terns have been seen roosting.

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

These articles are archived 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 Wardle and the photos and compilation are by Pete Sole.

Read the Article Here

Field Sparrow Photo Courtesy of Chris Henry

Young Birder's Discovery: Documenting Santa Cruz County's First Field Sparrow

By Chris Henry

On the morning of November 11, 2025, while birding along San Vicente Street in Davenport, I came across a single Field Sparrow (*Spizella pusilla*). The California Bird Records Committee (CBRC) has since accepted this observation (CBRC #2025-104) as the first confirmed record of the species for Santa Cruz County.

As a high school junior and active Central Coast birder, I wanted to share these details now so local observers know to check coastal thickets as fall migration picks up, since vagrant Spizella sparrows often reoccur in these same spots.

I first picked up the bird around 10:06 AM as a mixed-species songbird flock moved through a roadside willow (*Salix* sp.) patch next to a residential garden on an overcast, windless morning. The small, pale, buffy-cream sparrow flew into the trailing edge of the flock. Watching it through binoculars and a telephoto lens for about two minutes alongside nearby Dark-eyed Juncos *(Junco hyemalis*), I noted several diagnostic field marks outlined in Peter Pyle's identification guides: an unstreaked buff-cinnamon wash across the breast and flanks, a plain gray face set off by a bold white eyering, a bright rufous crown, and a completely pink bill showing no dark pigment along the culmen.

Field Sparrows breed across eastern North America and are exceptionally rare vagrants in California, with fewer than 40 accepted records statewide according to CBRC historical data. As documented in Rare Birds of California, most autumn vagrants show up along the Pacific coast in mid to late fall and sometimes stay for the winter. Coastal thickets like the Davenport willows serve as vital stopover habitat for lost eastern songbirds, so keep an eye out in similar coastal riparian patches this season!

Check out Birding with Chris on youtube for more exciting birding adventures.

Lisa Sheridan receiving painting of Green Heron photo courtesy of Bob Meads

The Annual Steve Gerow Summer Picnic Recap

A huge Thank You to all that attended the picnic and brought tasty food. We had a wonderful time catching-up with friends and sharing birding stories. Thank you Larry for bringing samples of the new Santa Cruz Bird Club t-shirts, Barb for bringing the bird books, and Phil for leading the bird walk.

The club presented a beautiful painting of a Green Heron to Lisa Sheridan in thanks for her 10 years as President of the club. Thank you Lisa for all your dedication and hard work!

If you are missing a small plastic container or a nice blue jacket, come and get them at the September 24th club meeting. Free books will also be available.

Thank you again,
Ann Chandler
Hospitality Officer

Double-crested Cormorant photo courtesy of Norman Kikuchi

Important Club Announcements

Fresh Threads! Order Your New Santa Cruz Bird Club T-Shirt Today!

We are pleased to introduce new SCBC t-shirts featuring a design by local club member and artist, Tanya L. Rogers. This is a wonderful way to show your club pride! The shirts are available in five different color/style options including both unisex and women's cuts. Orders are open - you can order anytime between now and September 30th.

Want to check them out in person? We will have a few samples at our next club meeting on September 24th.

Important Details:

- **Order Deadline:** September 30th
- **Delivery:** Shipped directly to your address in mid-October
- **Cost:** $25-29 each, plus $9.99 shipping per order
- **How to Buy:** click the link to order
- **Order Link:** https://www.customink.com/g/uyr0-00d3-9j92

Thank You New Donors!

Anne Bourdeau

Welcome New Members!

Paul Winn
Janet Byrd
Christine Tucker
Denise Mohsenin
Susan Douglass
Carolyn Nelson
Sara Culley
Gail McCredie
Patrick Grube
Seraphina Landgrebe
Brooke Doverspike
Jean Doverspike
Laura Jordan
Renee Winter

Kathy Kernan
Jeffrey Kernan
Grace Nakamura
Cheryl Marelich
Special thanks go to Bud Colligan who joined directly as a Life Member

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Call for Conservation Subcommittee Members

I would like to build a team of people to assist with bird conservation efforts in Santa Cruz County. Are you interested in any of the following environmental activities?

- writing articles for the Albatross newsletter
- updating the club conservation web page
- staying abreast of bird conservation issues in the county
- writing letters addressing conservation issues
- attending hearings and attending a couple conservation subcommittee meetings a year

You may want to check out conservation web page
letters https://santacruzbirdclub.org/conservation-news/ (note this page needs updating) for recent actions.

If you would like to become more involved with local conservation then please email Jane Orbuch (conservation@santacruzbirdclub.org) and share your interests.

Thank you,
Jane Orbuch
SCBC Conservation Director

Supporting Our Local Community

We thought that you would like to know that your bird club supports a diverse group of organizations in our community. We donate annually to support the Bird School Project's Monterey Festival of Birds. Other organizations are supported on an as-needed basis for special projects or in support of SCBC activities including:

Native Animal Rescue – urgent assistance during the pelican starvation crisis
Homeless Garden Project - in support of their land purchase and in thanks for their hospitality to birders
Land Trust of Santa Cruz County - in thanks for supporting birding field trips
Quail Hollow Nest Box Project – started as an SCBC project and is now being managed by Friends of Quail Hollow

We are able to provide this support through your membership fees and generous donations and we thank you for all you do!

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 and to support the good work that other organizations are accomplishing for the benefit of all.

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

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Want To Contribute To The Albatross?

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

Please send *mailto:scbirdclubeditor@gmail.com*

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