

Albatross

PHOEBASTRIA NIGRIPES

Santa Cruz Birds

“...a memorable fall for rare warblers”



A Chestnut-sided Warbler, seen near Lighthouse Field, looks ready to hop right out of this photo by Pete Solé.

By David Suddjian & Steve Gerow

Including reports from September 1 to October 31, 2011

A summering **Greater White-fronted Goose** continued at Pajaro Dunes to at least September 20 (LG, WG, KA). A number of reports of fall migrants came from September 22 onwards (v.ob.). Just two reports of **Brant** in October, both from the Pajaro Dunes area, show how scarce that species is as a migrant in our county (MP, JWa). October brought sightings of three small flocks of **Cackling Geese** (JG, CK, EL, DSu). A high count of 450 of our resident *moffetti* **Canada Geese** was reported from Watsonville Slough on September 13 (RR, BR). Flocks of a migratory form of Canadas were over Corralitos and Capitola on October 30 (DSu, NA). Single **Wood Ducks** at Harkins slough on September 17 (RR, CK) and Struve Slough on October 20 (SG) were rare for the Pajaro Valley. Reports of **Blue-winged Teal** from September 20 onwards included a high of six at Struve slough on October 22 (LL).

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Calendar

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Santa Cruz
Birds



Seabirding Trip



Birds
in the Movies:



Wetlands Watch
Docent Training



Events Calendar

January - February 2012

Check the online SCBC Calendar of Events for any recent updates:

<http://www.santacruzbirdclub.org>



Sunday, January 1 Moss Landing CBC

Event: Moss Landing Christmas Bird Count

Date/Time: January 1, 2012, dawn to dusk, with
countdown dinner to follow at Pajaro Dunes

For information contact: rjrainer@sbcglobal.net
Bob and Bernadette Ramer.



Saturday, January 7 Santa Cruz Rarity Roundup

Start your 2012 year list with a bang! Alex and Scott will lead a group on a quest to find our local wintering rarities in Santa Cruz County. The exact itinerary will depend on locations of continuing rarities, as well as what turns up during the Christmas Bird Counts. Based on late November sightings, our target birds may include Dusky Flycatcher, Eastern Phoebe, Swamp, White-throated, and Harris's Sparrow, and Red-naped Sapsucker. Of course, while searching for unusual birds, we will take time to enjoy our local residents. This trip is for all skill levels, and please come prepared to carpool so we minimize our carbon footprint. We will return to our meeting place around noon to either call it a day or strategize for the afternoon.

Directions:

Meet at Coffeetopia
on Mission Street
at 8:00 AM.

Leaders: Scott Smithson,
wscottsmithon@gmail.com
and Alex Rinkert,
arinkert12@comcast.net



Monday, January 9 Seascape and Rio Del Mar area

A Monday mini trip to explore two or three little known birding sites in the area of Seascape and Rio Del Mar, providing a chance to see a variety of wintering landbirds, and maybe a view birds of the bay and beach, too. The trip will last only 2-3 hours.

Rain cancels.

Directions: Meet at 8:00 AM at Seascape Park. From Highway 1, take San Andreas Road, turn right on Seascape Blvd and follow it to its end at Sumner Avenue and the entry to Seascape Resort. Cross Sumner Ave into the resort and turn left immediately on Seascape Resort Drive. Follow that to the park at the end of the road.

Leader: David Suddjian, dsuddjian@aol.com



Friday, January 13 San Lorenzo River

The river and nearby areas can have interesting wintering birds.

Directions: Meet at 8:00 AM at San Lorenzo Park by the duck pond.

Leader: Steve Gerow, (831) 426-2476,
stephengerow@aol.com

Santa Cruz Bird Club programs and field trips are open to the public—non-members are welcome. People needing rides to field trip sites are advised to contact field trip leaders. Carpooling is encouraged. Dress in layers and bring liquids. Lunches are optional on half-day trips. Heavy rain cancels.

Field trips can pose hazards. Reluctantly, we have decided we must publish and implement this policy:

The Santa Cruz Bird Club or its field trip leaders cannot be responsible for damage, injury, or loss incurred by the acts or omissions of any member or visitor during Club field trips or during commutes to or from them.

Field trip participants must release the Club from any liability for such damage, injury, or loss.

Ordinarily, field trip participants sign a waiver releasing the Club from such liability, but in the absence of such a signed waiver, participation on a Club field trip in itself implies consent to and agreement with this waiver.



Sunday, January 15
Beginning Birding walk
Natural Bridges

Our local birding hotspot is a great place to get an introduction to the birds of Santa Cruz County. A relaxed walk with a local birder at this beautiful local park should yield a fair number of species.

Directions: Meet at 8:30 AM at the Delaware Ave. entrance to Natural Bridges.

Leader: Phil Brown, pdpbrown@gmail.com



Monday, January 16
Capitola Beach

A Monday mini trip (2-3 hours) to see what is hanging out at Capitola Beach, probably including a study of wintering gulls. Depending on how things go, we may visit another nearby spot. Rain cancels.

Directions: Meet at 8:00 AM at Esplanade Park at Capitola Beach. From Highway 1, take Bay Avenue over the railroad tracks and down into Capitola Village, and park near the beach. Metered parking in the village costs \$1.50/hour. Parking is cheaper in the city lot above City Hall, but plan for 5 min. of walking if parking in that lot.

Leader: David Suddjian, dsuddjian@aol.com



Friday, January 20
**West Cliff Drive/
 Lighthouse Field**

We should see a variety of seabirds and shorebirds, and we'll check Lighthouse Field and Bethany Curve Park for wintering passerines

Directions: Meet at 8:00 AM at the intersection of West Cliff Drive and Woodrow Avenue.

Leader: Steve Gerow, (831) 426-2476, stephengerow@aol.com



Saturday January 21
Monterey Seabirds
Half-day trip See page 5 for details.



Sunday, January 22
Quail Hollow County Park

We might encounter rails or Wilson's Snipe at the pond, and wintering Western Bluebirds could be around at this time.

Directions: Meet at Quail Hollow parking lot at 8:00 AM.

Leader: Alex Rinkert, arinkert12@comcast.net



Thursday, January 26
SCBC Meeting @7:30 PM
Speaker: Jack Barclay

**Topic: Burrowing Owls in the Santa Clara Valley –
 Past, present, and future**

Jack Barclay, who has been studying burrowing owls for over 20 years in the Santa Clara Valley, will review past and current population status and the likelihood of burrowing owls persisting into the future in the Santa Clara Valley. He will summarize the population research at San Jose International Airport, where he has been managing and monitoring the owl colony since 1990, and review results of a population viability analysis (PVA) of owls at the three largest remaining colonies in the valley. The PVA was used to evaluate the future status of owls in the valley and was incorporated into the burrowing owl conservation strategy in the Santa Clara Valley Habitat Conservation Plan. The final part of his talk will include a video, "Reversing the Trend"—about burrowing owl conservation—prepared by the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society.

Location: Santa Cruz Museum of Natural History
 1305 East Cliff Drive, Santa Cruz, CA



Friday, January 27
Natural Bridges area

An area that always has a good variety of birds.

Directions: Meet at 8:00 AM at the Delaware Avenue entrance to Natural Bridges State Beach.

Leader: Steve Gerow, (831) 426-2476, stephengerow@aol.com



Friday, February 3
Upper Watsonville Slough area

We'll look for both land and water birds and may also check parts of Struve Slough, depending on time and conditions.

Directions: Meet at 8:00 AM at the Watsonville Wetlands Nature Center, 30 Harkins Slough Road (the south side of Ramsay Park) in Watsonville.

Leader: Steve Gerow, (831) 426-2476, stephengerow@aol.com



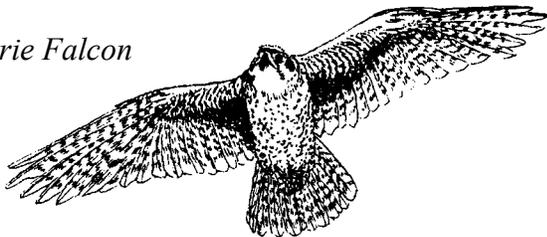
Saturday February 4 Panoche Valley

This annual birding trip will seek out all the regional specialities, including Phainopepla, Western and Mountain Bluebird, Lewis' Woodpecker, Greater Roadrunner, Prairie Falcon, Merlin, Ferruginous Hawk, Bald & Golden Eagle, Mountain Plover, Chukar, Vesper Sparrow, and Long-eared Owl. Carpooling encouraged.

Directions: Meet the leader at 8:00 AM at the Paicines Store on Hwy 25, approximately 12 miles south of Hollister. Those coming from Santa Cruz who want to carpool can meet at the Aptos Wells Fargo at 6:30 AM.

Leader: Clay Kempf, (831) 761-8260, or ltjaeger@att.net

Prairie Falcon



Monday, February 6 Porter-Sesnon Area - Corvids and more!

A Monday mini-trip to check out birds of this area of New Brighton SB, with an optional early start for those who want to see the dawn corvid flight. Early birders can gather to watch the dawn commuter flight of Crows and Ravens, and you just never know what else might be flying around at dawn. It will be cold and we will be standing in one place for a while, so warm clothes and boots are advised. Later we will walk the paths of Porter-Sesnon to see a variety of land birds. This second part of the trip will last just 2-3 hours. Paths may be muddy. Rain cancels. No restroom facilities.

Directions: Both segments of the trip will meet at New Brighton Road. From Highway 1, take Park Avenue in Capitola, head toward the ocean, and turn left at the first opportunity onto MacGregor Drive (frontage road). Go about a half mile, and turn right onto New Brighton Road. Park before crossing the railroad tracks. Early birders meet at 6:30 AM (we will be walking from there to the observation point), and later birders meet at 7:45 AM.

Leader: David Suddjian, dsuddjian@aol.com



Saturday, February 11 Upper UCSC Campus

We should find resident and wintering forest birds and probably good numbers of Allen's Hummingbirds around the blooming manzanitas. Expect up to three miles of walking, with some hills. Stormy weather cancels.

Directions: Meet at 8:00 AM in the North Remote parking lot, at the north end of Heller Drive.

Leader: Steve Gerow, (831) 426-2476, stephengerow@aol.com



Friday, February 17 Antonelli Pond and vicinity

There is often something interesting here.

Directions: Meet at 8:00 AM at the west end of Delaware Avenue, just past Antonelli Pond.

Leader: Steve Gerow, (831) 426-2476, stephengerow@aol.com



Thursday, February 23 SCBC Meeting @7:30 PM Speaker: Christopher Calonje Topic: Birding in Colombia

Colombia boasts the world's longest list of birds—over 1870 species (more than North America and Europe combined). Much of this diversity is due to the country's complex topography, which includes three Andean ranges and the valleys between them, Atlantic and Pacific coasts, vast grasslands bordering Venezuela, and a very large portion of the Amazon Basin. Calonje's program consists of photographic tour of Colombian birds. Included is information on Colombian geography, and Colombian food, culture, and people.

Christopher Calonje, a native of Colombia, has a degree in Natural Resources Planning from Humboldt State University. He has worked as an environmental consultant in the Pacific Northwest and specializes in wetland science, environmental restoration, botany, and environmental education. Birding is on the rise in Colombia, partly because the government has made great strides in making it safe, peaceful, and prosperous again. As Chris likes to say, "The only risk is wanting to stay...and boosting your list."

Location: Santa Cruz Museum of Natural History
1305 East Cliff Drive, Santa Cruz, CA



Duck parade at Neary Lagoon - Photo: Wendy Naruo



Friday, February 24
Neary Lagoon

Another spot with potential for interesting wintering birds, and maybe an early swallow or two.

Directions: Meet at the west entrance (off Bay and California) at 8:00 AM.

Leader: Steve Gerow, (831) 426-2476, stephengerow@aol.com



Saturday February 25
Mount Hermon and Mission Springs
Camp & Conference Center birding

Paul and Scott, former outdoor school directors at Mt. Hermon and Mission Springs, will lead birders on a half day of easy to moderate hiking through the ponderosa pine, mixed forest, redwoods and chaparral of these two beautiful camps—a great outing for beginners. We will stop to listen, observe, and identify common birds of our local forests. We'll also keep our eyes peeled for wayward sapsuckers and solitaires.

Directions: Meet at 8:00 AM in front of Coffee Cat, 255 Mt Hermon Rd, near Safeway in Scotts Valley.

Leaders: Paul Miller and Scott Smithson, wscottsmithson@gmail.com

Monterey Seabirds:
Gray Whales, Albatrosses and
Winter Seabirds—Half-day trip

Saturday, January 21, 2012

9:00 AM to 1:00 PM

Join us to witness the Gray Whales on their southbound migration. January is also the peak time for Laysan Albatross, Short-tailed Shearwater, and Yellow-billed Loon in Monterey Bay. We should also see Ancient Murrelets and Red-necked Grebes. (On our January trip in 2008, we observed a large pod of Southern Resident Killer Whales from Washington State.)

This half day trip (4 hours) is longer than most winter whale watches, allowing time for observing both whales and seabirds, and is suitable for families and children.

Cost: Adults - \$45, kids under 12 - \$30 **Special: \$5 off regular prices for SCBC members**

In the case of stormy weather this trip will be cancelled. Please call the number below to confirm if necessary.

Reservations: Call (831) 375-4658 to reserve or do it online at www.montereyseabirds.com

Departure will be from the Monterey Bay Whale Watch Center at 84 Fisherman's Wharf in Monterey.

Leader: Roger Wolfe et al.



Santa Cruz Birds (continued)

A female **Cinnamon Teal** at Quail Hollow Ranch from October 24 into November was rare for the San Lorenzo Valley region (JWi, AR). A **Common Loon** flying over Quail Hollow on October 13 was a notable fall record for the mountains (AR et al.). Pelagic trips generated just one report of **Flesh-footed Shearwater** in the county this fall, with one on September 9 (SJ). Similarly, a **Wilson's Storm-Petrel** on September 11 was the only one this season (SJ). The peak count of **Ashy Storm-Petrels** was 2000 on September 17, but the season high of **Black Storm Petrels** was only 20 on August 28 (MS). A **Red-billed Tropicbird** photographed from a cruise ship passing through the far outer county waters on September 27 was just the second county record of this species, although there are a few reports of unidentified tropicbirds (JW, OS, CW et al.).

Brown Boobies were sighted from a pelagic trip on September 9 (WF, DSh, SJ) and over the cement ship at Seacliff State Beach on September 17 (DSu). September brought five reports of 1-22 **White-faced Ibis** along the coast from Capitola to Waddell Creek (v.ob.), along with others more expected in the Pajaro Valley. A dusk watch at College Lake on October 13 revealed an impressive 34 **White-tailed Kites** flying in to roost (DSu, SS). A **Broad-winged Hawk** flew over Capitola on October 11, and a **Prairie Falcon** passed over there on September 28 (DSu). A flock of seven **Sandhill Cranes** passing over Lighthouse Field on October 25 were a surprise (MSc)!

High water conditions and a lack of exposed mud at the sloughs made this the slowest shorebird season in recent memory. A **Mountain Plover** at the Pajaro River mouth on October 17 was the rarest shorebird, providing the 5th county record (CE). Next best was a **Ruff** at Scott Creek Beach on October 4 (PB). Other notables included **Pacific Golden-Plover** at Wilder Ranch on October 9 (GK), two **Solitary Sandpipers** at Struve Slough on September 16 (TN, DG), and a **Red Knot** at Wilder Creek Beach on October 1 (JG, CS). There were no reports of Lesser Yellowlegs (!) and just six **Baird's Sandpipers** (September 5-13) and about 12 **Pectoral Sandpipers** (September 10-30) (v.ob). Three single **Wilson's Phalaropes** were sighted at Watsonville Slough August 13 to September 16 (v.ob.).

A juvenile **Sabine's Gull** came ashore at Aptos Creek mouth September 23-24 (DSu et al.). An early **Mew Gull** was there on September 14 and 23 (JP, JM). An **Arctic Tern** rested on the sand at Seacliff State Beach on September 22 (DSu). A **Pigeon Guillemot** off West Cliff Drive on October 21 was rare for fall (SG).



Pete Solé photographed this Sabine's Gull as it rested on the beach at Aptos Creek, September 24, 2011.

Santa Cruz County's third **Common Ground-Dove** visited the Homeless Garden Project near Antonelli Pond from September 30-October 2 (CS, ASe, CL, v.ob.), exactly the same spot that hosted the county's second record of this species in October, 2006! A **Burrowing Owl** returned to a regular wintering spot in the UCSC campus grasslands by October 22 (JG). Another one was at **Younger Lagoon** starting October 28 (LG, v.ob.), likely the bird that wintered there last year, and another arrived near Hanson Slough in late October (fide JPi). A **Short-eared Owl**, quite rare locally in recent years, flew over the Terrace Point field on October 19 (JWa).

About 14-16 additional **Black-chinned Hummingbirds** were reported through September 24 (SG, DSu, JD, v.ob.), bringing the fall total to 17-20 individuals, at least tying the previous record. All the September reports involved females or immature males, and were from expected locations near the coast from Santa Cruz to Capitola. Two immature male **Rufous/Allen's Hummingbirds** at the UCSC Arboretum on October 24 were notably late (SG). One had an almost complete adult-like gorget, but a white chin and white-

tipped tail feathers betrayed its young age. **Willow Flycatcher** numbers were somewhat below average this fall, with 8-10 reported between August 27 and October 7 (v.ob.). A **Least Flycatcher** visited Lighthouse Field on October 3-4 (SGe, PB, AR, v.ob.). Other rare empids included a **Hammond's Flycatcher** along Soquel Creek in Capitola on September 18 (DSu) and a **Dusky Flycatcher** in the Porter-Sesnon area of New Brighton State Beach on October 8 (DSu). **Tropical Kingbirds** appeared at Swanton Pond on October 5 (JWa), Capitola on October 7 (DSu) and Swanton Pond again on October 26 (JWa). Nine **Western Kingbirds** were reported from August 16 to September 27 (v.ob.).

Loggerhead Shrikes, now rare in the county, turned up at Moore Creek Preserve September 3-October 17 (SG, JG, v.ob.), the lower UCSC campus October 5-24 (AR, JG, SG), and College Lake on October 13 (DSu, SS). One of the rarest birds this fall was a **Bell's Vireo** near the butterfly pond at Natural Bridges, well seen and heard singing (surprising for fall) by an observer familiar with the species (LT). The bird showed characteristics of one of the grayer western subspecies and was just the second record for Santa Cruz County, and the first for fall. Three **Cassin's Vireos** were reported from September 27 to October 23 (SG, SN, ASc, CK, EL). Another vireo highlight this season was the county's third **Yellow-green Vireo**, seen and photographed by many at Neary Lagoon from October 16-19 (SG, JR, PM, v.ob.).



A rare Yellow-green Vireo was photographed by Scott Terrill at Neary Lagoon on October 16, 2011.

Large numbers of **American Crows** were again found roosting at College Lake this fall, with a substantial 2372 counted flying in on the evening of October 13 (DSu, SS). They also resumed their long morning and evening commuting flights, with large numbers flying daily from this roost to and from the mid-county area (DSu) and presumably beyond. A migrant **Horned Lark** stopped near Antonelli Pond on October 26 (SG). Rare swallow reports included two **Purple Martins** over Terrace Point on September 11 (KA) and a **Bank Swallow** at Natural Bridges Beach, on September 12 (SG, RR, BR, NL). Only a very few **Red-breasted Nuthatches** were reported this period, with no evidence of a fall irruption. **Western Bluebirds** in unexpected spots included two in Rio Del Mar on October 7 (KK) and two in Capitola on October 8 (DSu), for only the second report for that city in recent years. Regular presence of bluebirds on the lower UCSC campus through the fall was encouraging, with a high count of 10 reported on October 26 (AR).



A Prairie Warbler visited near Lighthouse Field in Santa Cruz. Photo by Scott Terrill, September 25, 2011.

It was a memorable fall for rare warblers, featuring good diversity and total reported numbers that were the highest in a decade. Among the rarer species, a **Prothonotary Warbler** visited a backyard pond in Capitola on September 24 (DSu), for the first record in the county since 2005 and the first for fall since 2002. A **Lucy's Warbler** was a highlight in the Natural Bridges willows on October 9 (SG, JG, PB, v.ob.). A very rare **Cape May Warbler** was photographed at

Lighthouse Field on September 30 (JM), for the first fall migrant in the county since 1997. Then a second Cape May appeared at the UCSC Arboretum on October 23 (JG)! A **Northern Parula** was at Rancho Del Oso on September 22 (JR et al.), and another was along Soquel Creek in Capitola on October 4 (DSu). **Magnolia Warblers** included a long-staying bird studied by many at Lighthouse Field September 24-October 14 (JG, CS, v.ob.) and one at New Brighton State Beach on September 26 (DSu). A **Blackburnian Warbler** was at Lighthouse Field September 27-28 (KP, JPa, SM, v.ob.), and one visited Seacliff State Beach on September 28 (DSu). A **Prairie Warbler** was in Santa Cruz near Lighthouse Field on September 24 (ER, JG, v.ob.), and one was at Noble Gulch in Capitola from October 17-21 (DSu). **Yellow-breasted Chats**, quite rare in fall, were spotted at Lighthouse Field on September 30 (KW, JWt) and at Pajaro Dunes on October 8 (MST et al.)

Among more regular eastern rarities, there was just one **Northern Waterthrush**, at Natural Bridges on September 19 (AR); a low count. Four **Black-and-white Warblers** were noted between September 16-October 16 (DSu, AR, PS, NC, v.ob.). Six **Tennessee Warblers** September 7-30 set a new record for the county (SG, LB, DSu, ST, LT, AR, NA, SB, v.ob.), while a total of four **American Redstarts** from September 5-28 (PB, DSu, ST, v.ob.) was close to the recent average. A surprising ten **Chestnut-sided Warblers** were seen from September 11 to October 21 (SG, PS, DSu, BM, JR, PM v.ob.), for our second highest fall tally of that species. Nine **Blackpoll Warblers** appeared from September 16-October 28 (JG, DSu, SG, AR, NL v.ob.), and there were 16 **Palm Warblers** reported from September 19-October 30 (v.ob.). August to October totals for our uncommon but regular western migrant warblers included 13 **Nashville Warblers**, 4 **MacGillivray's Warblers**, a record-breaking 46 **Black-throated Gray Warblers**, and 7 **Hermit Warblers** (v.ob.).

Two rare **Green-tailed Towhees** were found—one photographed at Lighthouse Field on September 13 (AR, NL) and one at Porter-Sesnon on October 14 (DSu). **Chipping Sparrow** numbers were well above average, with about 15 reported (v.ob.), including a flock of up to five at the UCSC Farm from October 15-25 (SG, JG, AR). A healthy total of seven **Clay-colored Sparrows** turned up from September 20 to October 20

(JG, SG, DSu, KA, v.ob.) The Porter-Sesnon area of New Brighton featured a **Brewer's Sparrow** on September 21 (DSu). **Vesper Sparrows** stopped at the Homeless Garden on October 1 (AR) and Seacliff State Beach on October 16 (DSu). A count of ten **Lark Sparrows** recorded from September 3-October 29 was an unusually high for that fairly rare fall migrant (v.ob.). All were on or near the coast from Seacliff to western Santa Cruz. An immature **Black-throated Sparrow** was the star of Monterey Avenue Park in Capitola on September 18-19 (DSu, PS, ST, v.ob.), for just the fifth record for Santa Cruz County and the first that was not in Santa Cruz. Seven **White-throated Sparrows** were found from October 11-30 (v.ob.).



An immature Painted Bunting appeared at Lighthouse Field on September 15, 2011 Photo by Alex Rinkert.

A young male **Summer Tanager** visited Natural Bridges on September 27 (JPa, EB, et al.). A male **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** was at Arana Gulch on October 1 (WSS). Two **Blue Grosbeaks** appeared at Lighthouse Field on September 13 (SG, AR, v.ob.), with one sticking around until September 20. Another paid a quick visit to Natural Bridges on October 9 (SG). Four **Indigo Buntings** were noted in the mid-county coastal area from September 2 to October 7 (SG, JWa, DSu, v.ob.). Another of this fall's rarity highlights was an immature **Painted Bunting**, seen by many at Lighthouse Field from September 15-23 (SG, WN, WBT, WSS, DSi, v.ob.). During the first few days, it was often seen in association with a young Blue Grosbeak—sometimes sitting on the same limb as its larger cousin!



A Blue Grosbeak, photographed at Lighthouse field by David Sidle on September 16, 2011.

An immature male **Yellow-headed Blackbird** was a nice find near Rancho Del Oso on September 2 (KK). **Great-tailed Grackles** away from their usual Pajaro Valley haunts included one flying over Seacliff State Beach on September 22 (DSu) and two flying over Swanton Pond on October 29 (AR). Two female/immature type **Orchard Orioles** made a brief stop at Lighthouse Field on September 26 (JG). More than usual **Lawrence's Goldfinches** were found this period, with nine reports involving eleven birds from

September 19 to October 26 (JG, DSu, SG). All were fairly near the coast, from Capitola to Wilder Ranch, and all involved calling birds flying over.

Cited Observers: Nanci Adams, Kumaran Arul, Ellen Bateman, Lion Baumgartner, Scott Benthall, Phil Brown, Nanci Collins, Judy Donaldson, Carleton Eyster, Wes Fritz, John Garrett, Steve Gerow, Don Glasco, Lois Goldfrank, Wally Goldfrank, Clay Kempf, Gary Kittleston, Kathy Kuyper, Lisa Larson, Chris Lay, Nick Levendosky, Earl Lebow, Peggy Macres, Barry McLaughlin, Monterey Seabirds (MS), Joe Morlan, Shirley Murphy, Jean Myers, Sydney Nash, Wendy Naruo, Todd Newberry, Kathy Parker, Janna Pauser (JPa), Jonathan Pilch (JPi), Jeff Poklen, Mel Preston, Bernadette Ramer, Robert Ramer, Alex Rinkert, Eric Rogers, Jennifer Rycenga, Andrew Schneider (ASc), Owen Schmidt, Christian Schwarz, Michelle Scott (MSc), Adam Searcy (ASe), Debra Shearwater (DSH), Shearwater Journeys (SJ), David Sidle (DSi), W. Scott Smithson, Pete Solé, Matthew Strusis-Timmer, David Suddjian (DSu), Stephen Suddjian, Linda Terrill, Scott Terrill, Leslie Tucci, W. Breck Tyler, Jeff Wall (JWa), Catherine Waters, John Watkins (JWt), Kendall Watkins, Jim Williams (JWi), Jay Withgott. "v.ob." means various observers.

Please report unusual or interesting observations to dsuddjian@aol.com

Birds in the movies: The Big Year

by William Park

Birds figure in many movies; birders are harder to find. A 2001 comedy entitled *Rare Birds* told of a foolish scheme to revive a hotel in Newfoundland by attracting birders to a forlorn and un-birdy site. It starred William Hurt but had little else to offer. Far different is *The Big Year*. It stars Owen Wilson, Steve Martin, and Jack Black, and they are supported by Anjelica Huston, Brian Dennehy, Dianne Wiest, and JoBeth Williams. John Cleese delivers a voice over that briefly recounts the history of birding, while Al Roker, the New York weatherman, appears as himself. David Frankel directed the film, he who directed *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006) and *Marley & Me* (2008), which also starred Wilson. This is an A production.

The film is based on the book of the same name, written by Mark Obmascik. The book tells the real story of the competition of Sandy Komito, Al Levantin, and Greg Miller to break Komito's record for seeing the most species of North American birds (or birds in North America) in one year. The film fictionalizes this story, telling us at the outset that Kenny Botsick (Owen Wilson) now holds Komito's record and that he, not Komito, is the aggres-

sive defender. Levantin becomes Stu Preissler (Steve Martin) and Miller, Brad Harris (Jack Black). As in the book, Wilson (Komito/Botsik) is the least likeable of the three; Martin (Levantin/Preissler) is a semi-retired successful businessman; and Black (Miller/Harris) a ne'er do well underdog, who has a great ear.

Whereas the book concentrates on how the three achieved their mighty totals, the film focuses on their personal lives. Owen has a beautiful wife (Rosamund Pike) who wishing to have a child needs Wilson's cooperation, except that the Rare Bird Alert proves more attractive to him than a visit to the fertility clinic. In contrast, Martin's wife (JoBeth Williams) supports his birding efforts; he is distracted by his business partners who can't seem to make it without him. Black, the most sympathetic of the three, is divorced, poor, and lonely, and has a big problem with his dad's (Brian Dennehy's) unrelenting contempt for his unsuccessful and nerdy son.

The film treats these dilemmas in an up-beat and sentimental way that would warm the heart of Joe Breen, Hollywood's censor, the head of the Production Code Administration during the 30s and 40s. For instance, the film teases us into thinking that while Wilson is away, his frustrated wife commences an affair with the handsome contractor remodeling her house. Not so, although she does ultimately leave Wilson—the price he pays for winning. As in a 30s comedy, Black converts the skeptical blocking figure Dad into an ardent birder, wins the heart of a female birder who is very good at imitating bird calls, while he and Martin win the best prize of all, friendship. Such sweetness might well poison one's appreciation of the film, given the ironic, sensationalistic, and pornographic conventions of contemporary Hollywood, but I found it refreshing.

The picturesque scenes of birding but punctuate these personal histories. They provide the laughs of the show, as Black and Martin bumble about being outsmarted by Wilson. The locations rush past us, identified by titles. Ardent birders can look upon this in two ways. One is to be annoyed by the fakery: one location serves as several different sites; and the more sustained scenes, such as the one on Attu, are obviously filmed elsewhere. One can understand why Debbie Shearwater becomes Annie Auklet, but why film Anjelica Huston, doing a debatable imitation of our Debbie, in Coos Bay Oregon and not here on Monterey Bay? The bird identifications are even worse: mechanical hummingbirds; a Pink Footed Goose bathing in a Rocky Mountain geothermal pool; species where they have never been seen, or at seasons when they never occur. The other way is to be amused at all this nonsense, so typical of Hollywood hokum, feel a bit superior at one's own knowledge of reality, and enjoy the good natured look at birders which the film provides.

On a personal note, I had hoped to break into the movies through this film. Last year Debbie Shearwater announced a pelagic trip on which scenes for the film would be shot. I imagined mingling with Owen, Steve, and Jack, of saying "Hi" to Anjelica, telling her my birthday was the same as her grandfather's, and ultimately seeing myself as an extra on the big screen. But alas, the filming consisted only of two guys with video cameras attempting to film the birds, particularly a Cook's Petrel, the target bird which was never seen. It was still a great day, and I had the pleasure of talking to the real Greg Miller. Which reminds me that on another pelagic trip, I got to meet Sandy Komito. This took place in December some twenty years ago, out of Montauk Point. The weather was freezing; ice forming on the rails of the heaving vessel. So shivering and despairing of seeing my target bird of the day, a Dovekie, I went below for warmth. There I met Sandy, who introduced himself as the Indiana Jones of birding and sold me, on the spot, his book about his first big year. Just at this moment, someone from above called out "Dovekie," but by the time I arrived on deck the bird had flown away.

Bill Park created the occasional Birds in the Movies feature when he was the editor of the Albatross.



**New SCBC
Members
Welcome!**

Arden Sweet	Aug 2011
Nicholas Levendosky	Aug 2011
Simon & Susan Thornhill	Aug 2011
Nelson Samuels	Sep 2011
Jeff & Ruthe Smith	Sep 2011
Walt Brown	Sep 2011
Deborah Pembroke	Oct 2011
Harold La Font	Oct 2011
Annie Nixon	Oct 2011
Oliva Millard & Bill Waldman	Nov 2011
Watsonville Wetlands Watch	Nov 2011
Jan Nelson	Nov 2011
Erika & John Arulanantham	Nov 2011
Lise Peterson & Don Peathe	Nov 2011
Alice Weige	Nov 2011
Lindsay Black	Nov 2011
Donna Little	Nov 2011



**Input deadline for
Mar/Apr issue
of the Albatross—
February 1, 2012**

Assembling



Albatross

**Guide for Albatross
submissions**

In addition to regular features—calendar, Santa Cruz Birds, trip reports—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 welcome:

- Feature articles
- Birding event announcements
- Stories about birders, serious or comic
- Reviews of birding literature or guides
- Conservation & outreach reports/stories
- Birding tips, descriptions of local sites
- Filler tidbits: Quotes or images
- Photos of people at our events (jpg, tif)

If you wish to submit an article, please contact me about it *before* the submission deadline. All material is subject to editing. I accept plain text, Word, or PDF files. Email items to:

calqua@sbcglobal.net

~Judy Donaldson, Editor



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Watsonville Wetlands Watch 2012 Docent Training Program



The Watsonville Wetlands Watch 2012 Docent Training Program will begin on January 25. Local experts will provide an inside look at the wetlands of Watsonville, including the ecology, birds, history, and restoration of the wetlands. This 7-week program includes Wednesday evening presentations and Saturday morning field trips.

New docents will be prepared to lead walks and assist with field trips. Docents also have the opportunity to help with community events, participate in wetlands restoration, work in the library or greenhouse at the Fitz Wetlands Education Resource Center, and work on special projects. Many of our activities focus on birds, and birders are always needed.

The Watsonville Wetlands Watch is a nonprofit community-based organization dedicated to the protection, restoration and appreciation of the wetlands of Pajaro Valley. For more information, visit our website:

www.watsonvillewetlandswatch.org

For details and to enroll, please contact the Volunteer Coordinator—

Kathy Fieberling

Phone: 831-345-1226

Email: kathyfiebing@yahoo.com

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<http://santacruzbirdclub.org/>

Join the Santa Cruz Bird Club

Enjoy walks in and around the County of Santa Cruz, discounted boat trips on Monterey Bay, summer picnics and annual dinners, meetings September through May featuring informative, illustrated talks on wild birds and related topics, and receive the bimonthly newsletter, The Albatross. Memberships run June-May. Dues are \$20 Individual, \$25 Family, \$5 Youth, \$400 Life. Make checks payable to Santa Cruz Bird Club and mail to Box 1304, Santa Cruz, CA 95061, Attention: Membership Chairman.