

El Tecolote

Newsletter of the Santa Barbara Audubon Society, Inc.
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August–September 2011



Monitoring the White-tailed Kite

Elanus leucurus

by S.E. Vaughn

What might it take to create a formalized local monitoring program for the White-tailed Kite?

It would require dedicated observers, a committed coordinator, and a reliable database, say local experts.

But for over a decade, informal programs have made fits and starts, yet all, somehow, fizzled.

“It would be a big effort,” says Jeff Hanson, a self-described intermediate birder who leads SBAS field trips to Ventura and Carpinteria, and has monitored White-tailed Kites for five years. “And some territories may be hard to get to.”

Hanson has been monitoring kites at Lake Los Carneros, More Mesa, the Santa Barbara Airport, Ellwood Ocean Meadows Golf Course, Farren Road, UCSB (on a bluff below the new engineering building), and Cathedral Oaks at Winchester, where he studied early breeding.

Retired UCSB ornithologist Mark Holmgren organized a monitoring program from 1998 to 2000. “It was an informal citizen-based monitoring effort,” states Holmgren, which, in 1998, had 20 participants. But by the early 2000’s the program had stalled.

“Meanwhile I continue my own low level monitoring,” says Holmgren, who has been observing White-tailed Kites since 1987. “It’s pretty much me and a few other people. But it’s great fun.”

Holmgren currently monitors at More Mesa, West Isla Vista and Devereux Slough, Goleta Slough, San Marcos Foothills, Winchester Canyon, Lake Los Carneros, Upper San Marcos Creek above Tuckers Grove, and Ellwood, among other sites.

“I’d like to see an even and steady effort from year to year,” says Holmgren. “And a look at other things such as productivity—how many times the kites are nesting; how many young they’re producing; and where the young go to learn how to be adults.

“In winter, I would like to know what areas are foraging areas, where birds go to roost, and how many are occupying the roosts. But I can’t do these things alone.”

Don Schroeder, retired professional ornithologist



Photo: Lynn Watson

and current SBAS science advisor, emphasizes the need for an accurate, standardized database for kite monitoring. In 2010, he launched an email-based monitoring system to process data submitted by observers.

“But we never got past the test phase with about 15 people,” he says. “Participation was minimal and the project came to a stop.”

Schroeder would like to see implemented standardized names for kite sites and their observers.

“Some people will say, ‘I saw a pair at the Mesa,’” he says. “Well, which Mesa? And some observers post their nicknames or first names only. In later years, we may not recognize these posters.”

According to Schroeder, an ideal database reporting system would be similar to the one in use by ebird.com. But he adds that this would be a “pie in the sky best case scenario” because of its complexity and expense. Currently, the chapter website doesn’t have that ability, he says.

“In the past, there was quite a bit of interest. It was like a social happening, where people would meet on a regular basis. It was great.”

Can such interest be resurrected?

And why is the monitoring of White-tailed Kites so important?

“It’s really about the open spaces that support the kite,” says Holmgren. “It’s about studying its patterns of presence and absence.

“If we protect kites, we protect open spaces.”

ABOUT THE WHITE-TAILED KITE CONSERVATION

The White-tailed Kite is one of 13 fully protected California birds. It is also protected within the County of Santa Barbara.

In the early 20th century, the Kite became endangered due to hunting, egg collecting, and habitat loss. But between the 1940’s and 1970’s, its population recovered, possibly due to accelerating rodent populations in California’s agricultural

The mission of the Santa Barbara Audubon Society is to help conserve and restore the earth’s natural ecosystems and improve its biological diversity, principally in the Santa Barbara area, and to connect people with birds and nature through education, science-based projects and advocacy.

areas. The White-tailed Kite appears to follow vole population life cycles, which last three years, says Hanson.

According to the More Mesa Preservation Coalition, the White-tailed Kite still has challenges ahead. It has suffered a loss of 90% of its riparian habitat in parts of the state (but fortunately does not depend exclusively on that habitat), and between 1982 and 1991, its numbers declined in 11 of 14 California regions. The most significant reduction -- forty percent -- occurred in southern California grasslands. Still today there are more White-tailed Kites in California than in any other state.

DESCRIPTION

The White-tailed Kite's body measures 14 to 17 inches in length. It has a 40" wingspan. Its upper parts are mostly gray, with black shoulders. Its tail is white, with a small stripe of gray along the center of the tail's upper side. From below, the kite appears to be white, with black patches at its wrists and primaries. Its feet are yellow; its bill black; and its eyes red. Females have darker backs than males. Young kites have brown areas on their breasts and back; dark bands on pale gray tails; and yellow eyes.

The White-tailed Kite has three different calls. The most common is "keep," used for territory alerts, mate recognition, and interaction with young. The second call, "eegrack," is repeated many times, and used for pairing, incubation, and feeding of older chicks. The last call, "grkk," is employed to chase away intruders.

HUNTING

The California Vole or Meadow Mouse (*Microtus californicus*) is the White-Tailed Kite's major prey in California, but it also hunts birds, reptiles, and amphibians.

It has similar hunting strategies and prey preferences as the American kestrel. It tends to forage in early morning and late evening, and search for prey in soaring, flapping, or primarily hovering flight, while facing the wind. Though the White-tailed Kite is not known for migration, it may wander widely when prey is scarce.

When dropping to capture prey, the White-tailed Kite descends at an almost vertical angle of 75 degrees or greater. After capturing prey, the kite emits a series of rasping sounds that can be heard 100 meters away.

TERRITORY

The White-tailed Kite selects habitats based upon prey abundance, competition intensity, and vegetation structure. It prefers open spaces like grassy lowlands, marshes, wetlands, agricultural areas, and riparian regions near open grassland. It tends to remain for hours at a favorite perching spot near its nesting site, unlike many other bird species that habitually scout their territories' boundaries.

DEFENSE

Fluttering (hovering or "kiting") is the White-tailed Kite's most common territorial defensive behavior. It is also employed by the male in courtship. The White-tailed Kite also may bob its tail more than a hundred times in a day, in response to

trespassing intruders such as red-tailed hawks, marsh hawks, red shouldered hawks, barn owls, short-eared owls, common egrets, great blue herons, and Coopers hawks.

No physical contact occurs between birds; rather, the attacks consist of circling dives by the kite above the invading bird.

ROOSTING

The White-tailed Kite engages in communal night roosting. Two-thirds of the roosting groups are newly-fledged birds, particularly during late summer. These communal groups also provide an opportunity for pairs to bond.

Roost populations increase in fall and winter, reaching a maximum in January. More Mesa Preservation Coalition reports that a eucalyptus tree was used by 48 birds, while another forty were spread out amongst twenty lemon trees.

BREEDING

Monogamous pairs are formed in December, and remain together year-round. In California, nest-building begins in January at the tops of trees and may last until August. Vegetation used include toyon, eucalyptus, cottonwoods, coyote brush, oak, willow, and sagebrush. At More Mesa, White-tailed Kites nest primarily in oaks and elderberry. Both males and females construct the nest of twigs, and line it with grass, weeds, and leaves.

FLEDGING

The female incubates four eggs for a month. The hatchlings are bound to the nest for the next 5 or 6 weeks. Within a week of leaving the nest, the young begin to fly, but rely on the parents for food for another 20-30 days.

After fledging, young birds can cross into neighboring territories and nests without incurring aggression from other adults.

NAME DERIVATION

Elanus leucurus comes from the Greek words "elano," to press forward, dive onto; "leuko" meaning white, and "our" signifying a tail. "Kite" comes from the Old English word "cyta," which itself was derived from "skut," meaning to go swiftly.

The child's high-flying toy is named after these birds.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

More Mesa Preservation Coalition, http://www.moremesa.org/ mesa_kite_int.html

The Peregrine Fund, http://www.peregrinefund.org/ explore_raptors/kites/whitail.html

Seattle Audubon Society BirdWeb, http://www.birdweb.org/birdweb/bird_details.aspx?id=97

Help Audubon monitor the local White-tailed Kite population—send donations to Audubon or use Pay Pal at Audubon's website.

Santa Barbara Audubon Society Annual Membership Picnic At Skofield Park



Photo: Adam Lewis

2011-2012 Board Members: back row, left to right: Susan Vaughn, Programs Chair; Julie Kummel, Development Co-Chair; Steve Ferry, Conservation Chair; Darlene Chirman, President; Bobbie Offen, Treasurer; Liz Muraoka, Secretary; Maggie Sherriffs, Education Chair; Adam Lewis, Publicity Chair; Lee Moldaver, Vice-President; Marlene Mills, Newsletter/Communication Chair; Jack Sanford, Field Trips Chair. In front: Margo Kenney, Development Co-Chair; Dolores Pollock, Development Co-Chair



Photo: Adam Lewis

*Eyes In The Sky volunteers left to right:
Laurie Koc, Susan Vaughn, John O'Brien,
Judy Hogan, Maggie Sherriffs*

Audubon members enjoyed a shady picnic on July 16, complete with a delicious potluck, a welcoming BBQ, and the strains of Glendessary Jam's lively music. The new Board of Directors for 2011-12 was elected. We are fortunate to have Darlene Chirman return as President, along with other Board veterans. New Board members are Maggie Sherriffs and Susan Vaughn.

Raffle Results: Congratulations to Ann Steinmetz who won the case of wine generously donated by Los Cinco Locos and to the Crawfords who won the week at the Oregon cabin. Thanks to Julie and Marc Kummel for donating the cabin stay and thanks to everyone who supported Audubon by buying a raffle ticket.

S. B. Audubon Board of Directors 2011-12

Elected July 16, 2011

President Darlene Chirman
 Vice-President Lee Moldaver
 Secretary Liz Muraoka
 Treasurer Bobbie Offen
 Field Trips Chair Jack Sanford
 Programs Chair Susan Vaughn
 Conservation Chair Steve Ferry
 Education Chair Maggie Sherriffs

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 Publicity Chair Adam Lewis
 Development Dolores Pollock
 Development Julie Kummel
 Development Margo Kenney

El Tecolote is published 6 times a year by the Santa Barbara Audubon Society, Inc. Members are invited to send announcements, letters, articles, photos and drawings for consideration to:

SBAS, Marlene Mills Newsletter Chair
 5679 Hollister Avenue, Suite 5B
 Goleta, CA 93117
 or email: newsletter@SantaBarbaraAudubon.org
 Submissions deadline is the 10th of the month before publication.

Santa Barbara Audubon Programs

All programs will take place at Farrand Hall, Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History, Mission Canyon, Santa Barbara. Free on-site parking. All programs will begin at 7:30 p.m. and are free to the public. Doors open at 7:00 p.m. **SBAS** members are encouraged to bring guests.

Owens Lake

A Globally Significant Shorebird Bird IBA in the Making

Mike Prather

September 28

An enormous wildlife resource has returned to Owens Lake, once a migration stopover for tens of thousands of shorebirds and waterfowl that was lost nearly 100 years ago. The lake was dried as a result of water diversion by the City of Los Angeles, but now is receiving careful application of water by the L.A. Department of Water and Power (L.A.D.W.P.) to control the regional dust storms born with the lake's death. Roughly 40 square miles of the Owens Lake playa are covered with shallow ponds or sheet flooding resulting in thousands of acres of rich feeding habitat for sandpipers, snowy plovers, ducks and geese.

In 2001 Bird Life International designated Owens Lake a nationally significant Important Bird Area. Creation of a collaborative lake-wide conservation action plan was begun by Eastern Sierra Audubon and Audubon California in partnership with L.A.D.W.P., the California Department for Fish and Game and the State Lands Commission. This process has grown into a larger effort to design an Owens Lake "Master Plan" that would seek to save water for the City of Los Angeles in return for large tracts of designated habitat for shorebirds and waterfowl.

Today birders and wildlife watchers are visiting the lake on guided field trips to see this amazing migratory spectacle. Snowy Plovers, large flocks of Least and Western Sandpipers, thousands of American Avocets, Peregrine Falcons, White-faced Ibis and more are all observed on tours of the lake. Now the challenge is to determine how much of the rare resource can be protected in perpetuity. Can a balance be found between Los Angeles' need for water and the need to protect wildlife habitat in California?

MIKE PRATHER has been residing in Inyo County since 1972 when he and wife Nancy moved to Death Valley to teach in a one-room schoolhouse. Mike has been actively working on land and water issues in the Owens Valley since 1980 with the Owens Valley Committee (past president), Eastern Sierra Audubon (past president) and Sierra Club (past chapter chair). The rewatering of 62 miles of the Lower Owens River and the massive wildlife return to Owens Lake as a result of the Los Angeles Owens Lake Dust Control Project have been the center of Mike's conservation focus since the early 1980's. The enhancement and protection of the Owens River and the Owens Lake Important Bird Area attracts most of his current efforts, and he invites everyone to join in the



Owens Lake
Photo by Mike Prather



Red-necked Phalaropes at Owens Lake
Photo by Michael Prather



Black-necked Stilt
Photo by Ali Sheehy

Santa Barbara Audubon Field Trips

*These trips are fun for both beginning and expert bird watchers. Binoculars are useful for enjoyment of birds, but if you don't have a pair please call the trip leader and we'll lend you a spare. Trips are free unless noted. Please contact **Jack Sanford** (805) 566-2191 or jacksanford@hotmail.com for details or questions.*

Oso Flaco Lake “Lake to the Ocean” Saturday August 20, 2011 9 a.m.-11:30 a.m. (7 a.m. car pool time)

Target Birds: Fresh water and salt water birds plus Northern Harriers and Wrens

Trip Leader: Jack Sanford

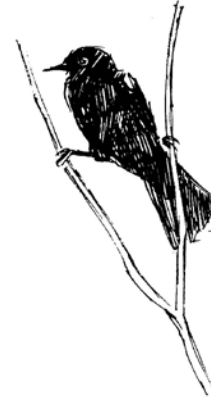
Cost: \$8.00 to car pool drivers + \$5 entrance fee per car (unless you have a State Park Pass)

We will be taking a leisurely 2-mile walk across the Oso Flaco Lake bridge and follow the boardwalk trail to the ocean. We will view this rare and unique ecosystem while spotting birds and enjoying the beauty of the area.

We will meet at the 5 Points Shopping Center (Carl's Jr.) at 7 a.m. and at the Kmart parking lot in Goleta at 7:15 a.m. and car pool to the Oso Flaco Lake parking area. If you would like to meet us at the lake at 9 a.m., take Hwy. 101 to Hwy. 166 (Main street exit in Santa Maria), and head west towards the town of Guadalupe. Turn right at the Hwy. 1 intersection, and go thru the town of Guadalupe. Travel 3 miles to the Oso Flaco Road, and turn left. Proceed 3 miles to the parking lot. Dress in layers and bring water and a snack.



Gull in Flight.
Artist: Kirsten Munson



Red-winged Blackbird
Artist: Kirsten Munson

Rancho Guadalupe Dunes “Wonder of the Sand Dunes” Saturday, September 10, 2011 9 a.m.-11 a.m. (7 a.m. car pool time)

Target Birds: Shorebirds

Trip Leader: Jack Sanford

Cost: \$8.00 to car pool drivers

We will enjoy a leisurely stroll at the Rancho Guadalupe Dunes Preserve. We will view both migratory and resident shorebirds along the beach and the Santa Maria River Estuary. We will meet at the 5 Points Shopping Center (Carl's Jr.) at 7 a.m. and at the Kmart parking lot in Goleta at 7:15 a.m. and car pool to the Rancho Guadalupe Dunes Preserve. If you would like to meet us at the dunes at 9 a.m., take Hwy. 101 north to Hwy. 166 (Main St. exit in Santa Maria) and head west towards the Guadalupe Dunes. Cross Hwy. 1 and continue on Hwy. 166 for 7 more miles to the parking lot. Possible added attraction: a visit to the Dunes Center in Guadalupe. Dress in layers and bring water and a snack.

Welcome!

SBAS extends a warm welcome to our newest members.

We look forward to seeing you at our programs and field trips. Thanks for joining!

Aaron Budgor
Patricia Clancy*
Joan Cotich*
G. A. Crivello*
Stephanie Dolmat-Connell
Robert Gagliardo

Henry R. Kilgore
Rose Kortright
Robherda Lange
Kristine Mainland White
Mr. & Mrs. Gregory M. Peterson
Carrie Steingruber*

Julie Uecker
Celia Weidemann
Peggy Wiley and Wilson Quarre*
John and Nancy Wurzel*

*Chapter Only Membership

Friday Bird Walks

*Join us on the second and fourth Fridays of each month at 8:30-10:30 a.m., except as otherwise noted. Please call Bird Walk leader **Jack Sanford 566-2191** or email at jacksanford@hotmail.com if you are interested in leading a future bird walk to your favorite birding location or have any questions.*

Lake Los Carneros Bird Walk

August 12

Target Birds: Water birds, songbirds

Directions: From Hwy. 101 take the Los Carneros off ramp and head towards the mountains. (Stow House is on the right.) Turn into the driveway by the fire station. We will meet in the parking lot behind the fire station.

Carpinteria Salt Marsh Nature Park

August 26

Target Birds: Curlews, ducks, Teals, Egrets, Godwits, Gulls, Herons, Killdeer, raptors

Directions: From the north on Hwy. 101 take Linden Ave. off ramp. From the south on Hwy. 101 take Casitas Pass Rd. off ramp, turn right on Carpinteria Ave., and left on Linden Ave. Follow Linden Ave. towards the ocean and turn right on Sandyland Rd. Go to the end, and the Nature Park entrance is directly ahead.



Ducks in Flight
Artist: Kirsten Munson



California Quail.
Artist: Kirsten Munson

Toro Canyon Park

September 9

Target Birds: Songbirds, raptors

Directions: From Hwy. 101 take exit #90 (Padero Lane off ramp coming from the north and Summerland off ramp from the south). Turn towards the mountains and turn right on Via Real. Turn left on Toro Canyon Road (2nd road on your left). Proceed on Toro Canyon until you reach the park sign on your right. Turn right and follow the road to the park. Enter the park and follow the park road to the last parking lot where we will meet. We will bird the loop trail (1 mile slightly uphill) and then in the park.

Honda Valley Open Space

September 23

Target Birds: Woodpeckers, Towhees, Jays, Mockingbirds, raptors

Directions: From Hwy. 101 take the Carrillo Street exit. Turn toward the south (away from downtown). Turn left onto Miramonte Drive. (It is only on the left and almost at the top of the hill.) We will park on the street and meet just a short distance from the first road on your right. From there we will bird a loop trail around the open space.

Bonus Afternoon Bird Walk during Creek Week (Sponsored by the Santa Barbara City Creeks Division and County Project Clean Water)

Santa Barbara Harbor

Thursday, Sept. 29, 5:30 p.m.-7:00 p.m.

Leader: Jack Sanford

Target Birds: Waterfowl, shorebirds, Peregrine Falcons, songbirds

Directions: Coming from the north on Hwy. 101, take the Castillo St. off ramp to Cabrillo Blvd. Coming from the south on Hwy. 101 take the Cabrillo Blvd. off ramp. Park on Bath or Mason St. (no time limit) or use paid city lot parking. We will meet on the sidewalk next to the Sea Landing Sport Fishing Building (301 W. Cabrillo Blvd.) We will bird the S.B. Harbor and Sterns Wharf area.

Field Trips/Bird Walks Do you have an idea?

We are always looking for suggestion for places to visit on our monthly field trips. If you have an idea and are not sure where or what to do next, or are interested in helping coordinate a field trip contact **Jack Sanford (805) 566-2191**.

OPPORTUNITIES

Volunteer Habitat Restoration

Audubon helps recruit volunteers for habitat restoration; come help to restore a creek or estuary while spending a morning in a beautiful bird habitat. Contact Darlene Chirman at President@SantaBarbaraAudubon.org or 692-2008. Contact Coal Oil Point Reserve: Reserve Steward Tara Longwell at tara.longwell@lifesci.ucsb.edu or 893-5092. Contact the land Trust for Arroyo Hondo Preserve: Volunteer Coordinator Sally Isaacson at 260-2252 or volunteer@sblandtrust.org

ARROYO HONDO

Contact: **Sally Isaacson**
 Sunday August 7 9 a.m.-12:30 p.m.
 Sunday September 4 9 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

COAL OIL POINT RESERVE

Contact: **Tara Longwell** or **Darlene Chirman**
 Saturday August 20 9 a.m.-12 noon
 Saturday September 17 9 a.m.-12:30 "Day of Caring"

CHANNEL ISLANDS RESTORATION

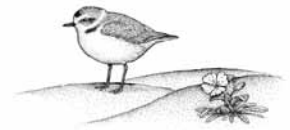
Contact: Volunteer Coordinator **Araceli Dominquez** at volunteer@cirweb.org or (323) 497-3578
 Please consult their website or Araceli on restoration projects including San Marcos Foothills, Santa Barbara Zoo, Carpinteria Creek, Anacapa Island and others.
 Their website is: www.cirweb.org

Plover Project Docent Training

Training takes place at Coal Oil Point Reserve

Trainings are usually once a month.

Please call 893-3703 to see if training will occur in August or September. There will be trainings in October and November.



Snowy Plover by Peter Gaede

AUDUBON VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Would you like to help Santa Barbara Audubon? Here are several opportunities:

Hospitality for Monthly Public Programs

Volunteer (or 2 to share job) brings snacks (reimbursed) to programs, generally the 4th Wednesday of the month. Nancy Rohrer would like to retire! We may need to discontinue the refreshments if no one steps in. Contact President Darlene.

Eyes in the Sky

Ongoing opportunities for new volunteers to work with our birds of prey.

Must be available during daytime hours. Call Gabriele (805) 898-0347.



Peregrine Falcon in flight.
 Artist: Kirsten Munson

Audubon Society Membership Application

Option 1: Local Chapter-only Membership

- This is my choice of membership!
 Cost: \$25 Annually
 Make check payable to: Santa Barbara Audubon Society

Option 2: National and Local Membership

Santa Barbara Code: COZC130Z

- This is my choice of membership!
- This is a Senior/Student membership.
- Please do NOT share my contact information.

Introductory \$20, or \$15 for senior/student; \$35 annually thereafter.

Make check payable to: National Audubon Society

For more information on these options please go to our website at: www.SantaBarbaraAudubon.org or call (805) 964-1468

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

E-mail: _____

Amount Enclosed: _____

Mail to: Santa Barbara Audubon Society
 5679 Hollister Ave, Suite 5B
 Goleta CA 93117

SBAS Needs Your E-mail Address

To be added to the SBAS e-mail list, just send an e-mail message with the subject line, "Add + your name" to Membership@SantaBarbaraAudubon.org

The SBAS e-mail list will only be used for SBAS business and will not be sold or shared with any other group.

El Tecolote
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Goleta, CA 93117

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<http://www.SantaBarbaraAudubon.org>

OFFICERS

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Secretary	Liz Muraoka	743-3314	Secretary@SantaBarbaraAudubon.org
Treasurer	Bobbie Offen	220-6522	Treasurer@SantaBarbaraAudubon.org

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Publicity	Adam Lewis	967-7213	Publicity@SantaBarbaraAudubon.org
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Development	Julie Kummel	403-3203	Development-2@SantaBarbaraAudubon.org
Development	Margo Kenney	963-3011	Development-3@SantaBarbaraAudubon.org

APPOINTED POSITIONS

Webmaster:	David Levasheff	967-8767	Treasurer@SantaBarbaraAudubon.org
Eyes In The Sky:	Gabriele Drozdowski	898-0347	EITS@SantaBarbaraAudubon.org
Hospitality:	Nancy Rohrer	687-7587	Hospitality-2@SantaBarbaraAudubon.org
Science Advisor	Don Schroeder	403-2090	ScienceAdvisor@SantaBarbaraAudubon.org
ET Editor	Andy Lentz	968-6011	NewsLayout@SantaBarbaraAudubon.org

Rare Birds sbcobirding <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/sbcobirding>

Officers and Chairs meet the 2nd Wednesday of the month. Members are welcomed to attend. Call the SBAS office to verify dates and times. FAX: 967-7718. Cover art by Daryl Harrison.

Calendar of Events

Check our website for any changes or late additions to our Bird Walks, Field Trips or Programs:
<http://www.SantaBarbaraAudubon.org>

Aug.

Aug.	7	Restore Arroyo Hondo
Aug.	12	Lake Los Carneros Bird Walk
Aug.	20	Restor Coal Oil Pont Reserve
Aug.	20	Field Trip: Oso Flaco Lake
Aug.	26	Carpinteria Salt Marsh Bird Walk

Sept.

Sept.	4	Restore Arroyo Hondo
Sept.	9	Toro Canyon Park Bird Walk
Sept.	10	Field Trip: Guadalupe Dunes
Sept.	17	Restore Coal Oil Point Reserve
Sept.	23	Honda Valley Bird Walk
Sept.	28	Program: Owens Lake
Sept.	29	Santa Barbara Harbor Bird Walk

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