

# El Tecolote

NEWSLETTER OF THE SANTA BARBARA AUDUBON SOCIETY



September 1992

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## Birds of September

by Joan Easton Lentz

**W**HEN the foggy mornings of summer give way to the cool, crisp ones of fall, Santa Barbara birders comb nearby beaches and tidal mudflats searching for the species that make up one of the most exciting events of the bird year — the shorebird migration. Shorebirds come by the hundreds this time of year, sometimes in huge flocks, often in little straggling clumps. Winging their way south hugging the western coastline, they fly across miles and miles of ocean and sandy beaches. These are “the wind birds,” as author Peter Matthiessen calls them, blowing south after their brief breeding season in the far reaches of northern Canada and the Arctic Circle.

From British Columbia to Baja and south to the tip of Argentina, the shorebirds chart their way, searching for inlets, estuaries and river mouths where they can rest and revive during their long journey. Above all, they seek gooeey mudflats where the prey they need to rebuild their fat reserves is waiting. They must also rest for a few hours or a few days, but never for very long. Urgently they get up and fly again, impelled southward.

As the days shorten and the sun lies lower and lower across the evening beach, the shorebirds sense the passage of the season. In order to survive, they must keep on the move. Those who linger too long may be doomed. Whether the bird begins migrating in July (like the western or least sandpiper) or in mid-September (like the dunlin), each has an optimum

time for making the journey. By late October, it's largely over; most have reached their wintering grounds.

An amazingly complex compass guides the birds. Imprinted in each of the shorebird species, their genetic memory leads them on a particular migratory path which ends at an age-old destination where they stay the winter. The surfbird, a west coast migrant, spends its brief breeding season on rushing streams in Alaska, then winters along rocky coasts as far south as the tip of Argentina. The western or “fulva” race of the lesser golden-plover nests near the Arctic Circle in Alaska and winters in southeast Asia, on several islands of the western Pacific and, in small numbers, along coastal California. In fact, many lesser golden-plovers fly from Alaska straight to Hawaii to winter, crossing nearly 3,000 miles of open ocean without stopping. These long-winged migrants with their far-ranging habits embody the mystery we attach to birds which can skillfully negotiate the flyways of the world. Looking at the slender legs and delicate bodies of the shorebirds, the distances they cover seem miraculous.

For a few weeks, we in Santa Barbara have ringside seats to this spectacle.

Here is an example of a typical day of birding, say at East Beach on a morning in mid-September: Loafing around the high-tide pools and picking at the piles of seaweed on the beach, the larger sandpipers such as the marbled godwit, whimbrel and willet can be found. A greater

(Please see *Shorebirds* on page 3)

### September Program

Friday, September 25

Farrand Hall, SBNH Museum

7:45 p.m. Refreshments

8:00 p.m. Slide program

#### *“The Los Padres Project”*

How can one man's dream help maintain and preserve Santa Barbara and Ventura Counties' pristine national forest? Join us for a fabulous journey through the seasons of the Los Padres backcountry as Santa Barbara Audubon Society kicks off its 1992/93 program series with an impressive slide show by Michael Moore, award-winning Santa Paula photographer and curator of the Brooks Institute gallery.

In the winter of 1990/91 Moore committed himself to an ambitious 5-year documentation project of the southern Los Padres National Forest. His project involves packing up to 100 pounds of equipment and cameras, and hiking wilderness areas to record his experiences on film.

“In photographing the forest, I strive to capture its unique aspects and varying qualities. Ventura County has a diversified backcountry that is rugged yet graceful and intoxicating to those who dare experience its challenging terrain,” Moore says.

Areas to be covered include Figueroa Mtn., Sespe River, Pine Mtn., Blue Point, Devils Potrero/Potholes and some Chumash rock art.

## Activities Calendar

### Saturday, September 12. Santa Clara River Estuary

Half-day birding trip to McGrath State Beach to see abundant gulls, terns and shorebirds. Past years have turned up rare birds such as eastern kingbird, parasitic jaeger, least tern, peregrine falcon, Franklin's gull, Baird's sandpiper and more. Meet at Andree Clark Bird Refuge at 7:30 a.m. or at Ventura Harbor (beach access point) at 8:30 a.m. Leader: Ron Hirst (967-0138).

### Wednesday, September 16. Carpinteria Creek

Half-day birding trip to find and identify the migrating birds in this local hot spot. The sometimes abundant migrant species often include an off-course rarity or two from states to the east. Meet at 8:30 a.m. at the Day Care Center parking lot, next to the creek, at the end of 6th Street in Carpinteria. Wear waterproof boots or wading shoes. Leader: Shawneen Finnegan (967-2450).

### Friday-Sunday, September 18-20. WFO meeting

The 17th annual meeting of the Western Field Ornithologists will be held in Sunnyvale, CA at the Holiday Inn. Hosted by San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory and featuring field trips, lectures, barbeque and banquet. Call SBAS office for details.

### Saturday, September 19. 5th Annual Adopt-a-Beach

9:00 a.m. to noon. Santa Barbara Audubon will again sponsor the clean-up of the Coal Oil Point (Devereux) beach on the UCSB West Campus. A state and nationwide coastal clean-up is held annually during Coastweek, and hundreds of tons of trash are picked up for scientific study, recycling and beach beautification. This community service is easy to do, fun, and very worthwhile. Join us and receive a free art poster, ice-cream token, tote bag or other gifts from our co-sponsors. Meet at the parking lot at Coal Oil Point. To get there, take the Devereux Slough road at the corner of Storke and El Colegio. Coordinators: Ron Hirst (967-0138) and Marie Dornan (968-4496).

### Saturday, September 26. Goleta Creeks

Half-day birding trip to find and identify migrant birds in our local creek habitats. Depending on the weather, some days can have birds of many species visiting these "rest stops" of the great Pacific Flyway. Meet at the Patterson Avenue bridge over San Jose Creek, a few hundred feet north of Cathedral Oaks Road at 8:30 a.m. Leader: Karen Bridgers (964-1316).

### Sat./Sun., October 17/18. Monterey Pelagic & Hot Spots

Two-day birding trip with special storm-petrel Study Tour on Monterey Bay all day Saturday. Sunday morning will be devoted to visiting sites known to be frequented by rare and vagrant birds. The deep-sea pelagic trip offers a good possibility of adding 20 pelagic birds to your life list including four of the storm-petrels, six shearwaters, jaegers, and alcids, plus whales and dolphins. Finding a truly rare bird in the migrant hot spots could be an added bonus.

For more information on birds, accommodations, travel arrangements, or to sign up, please call Ron Hirst or Shawneen Finnegan. The \$65 fee includes the pelagic trip but no food or accommodations. Limited to the first 12 to sign up.

## Conservation Notes

### LOCAL

◆ **Environmental Review Committee.** City staff has proposed elimination of its civilian/volunteer Environmental Review Committee as a "budget saving measure." The City E.R.C. has won wide plaudits for its fair and even handling of local issues relating to the California Environmental Quality Act. Through its regular, open public hearings, the E.R.C. has also given access to "average residents" to express their views on CEQA. Please write or phone Mayor Sheila Lodge at 735 Anapapa Street (564-5318) to OPPOSE disabling this invaluable grassroots review body.

◆ **Oil tankers in the Santa Barbara Channel.** Chevron is asking the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors to reconsider its opposition to mass-tankering. The cost and threat of litigation with Chevron may be weakening the Supervisors' will to resist. Please help them keep at bay the pollution (air and sea) of mass-tankering. Write or call Supervisors Ochoa (1st District), Rogers (2nd), Wallace (3rd) or Owens (4th) at 105 E. Anapapa Street (568-2191).

◆ **Mission Creek Flood Control.** The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' long-awaited "compromise" design plan for flood control along lower Mission Creek has been unveiled: an open, uncovered, unlandscaped 12-foot solid concrete box channel from Hwy 101 across East Beach into the Pacific. All flora and fauna now along the creek would be wiped out. Please contact Mayor Sheila Lodge and City Council members to oppose this "solution" to intermittent flooding of a key urban wetland area. Write 735 Anapapa Street, or call 564-5318.

◆ **Andree Clark Bird Refuge.** If you want to help in our preservation/restoration effort (and join Auduboners like Helen Matelson, Ginger Puddicombe and Elan Sutton), please call the Audubon Office (964-1468). Because of the recession, the Bird Refuge water supply/dredging project has been postponed by the City yet again. Re-landscaping, educational signs and bird species segregation plans are ongoing.

◆ **Goleta Slough.** Conservation committee (and new Board member) Elan Sutton is representing Audubon on the Goleta Slough Task Force, a multi-group conference planning for preservation of the Slough in coming years. Contact Elan (683-1143) or Ms. Pat Saley (969-4605) if you have questions or suggestions.

### NATIONAL

Bad news on every front: U.S.A. was the only key non-signatory of important environmental agreements at Rio Earth Summit in June. California Desert Protection Bill "trapped" in Committee by California Senator Seymour, is pronounced "dead" for this year. Pacific northwest salmon yields are lowest in modern reporting history; political considerations prevented a complete ban for this year's "sport fishing season."

A coalition of big timber and anti-environmental groups is seeking, both in Congress and via federal courts, to block protection of Old Growth Forests (and the threatened northern spotted owl) from clear cutting. This is just a "tune-up" for their effort to get rid of the Endangered Species Act altogether.

—Lee Moldaver



## Shorebirds (Continued from page 1)

yellowlegs feeds in the deeper pools darting from side to side and long-billed dowitchers perform their characteristic "sewing machine" movement as they probe up and down with their long bills in the shallower pools. Along the muddy margins of the tidepools, the tiniest sandpipers — the western and least — hurriedly snatch at prey. They are often joined by the slightly larger dunlin. Plovers such as the black-bellied, the semipalmated and the snowy are present, resting in the dry sand. Out on the strand, the sanderlings perform their wind-up toy behavior, chasing the retreating waves in search of little sandcrabs.

A walk out on the breakwater at Santa Barbara Harbor can produce those shorebird migrants preferring to rest and feed in rocky habitats. The black turnstone and the ruddy turnstone nimbly scramble about the rocks there, as does the wandering tattler and, more often seen in spring, the surfbird. The surf-splashed rocks offer good foraging for these shorebirds, most easily spotted at low or mid-tide.

The Andree Clark Bird Refuge off Cabrillo Boulevard sometimes has shorebirds feeding around its edges. Unfortunately, Devereux Slough has nearly dried up — unless we have unexpected rains — but some shorebirds can usually be seen at the mouth of the slough at Coal Oil Point.

The three best shorebirding spots in the area require a little driving — north to the Santa Ynez and Santa Maria River mouths or south to the Santa Clara River

estuary, near McGrath State Beach, in Ventura County. Water levels here can fluctuate: when flooded, shorebirds are absent. Great viewing occurs after the river mouths are opened through tidal action, and the mudflats are drained. In order to take full advantage of these locations, you will need a spotting scope and rubber wading boots.

The Santa Ynez River estuary is reached by exiting U.S. 101 west to Lompoc and then following Ocean Ave. (California 246) to the turn-off to Ocean Beach County Park. To get to the Santa Maria River mouth, take the Main Street exit (California 166) west off U.S. 101 in Santa Maria to the county park at the coast (11 miles).

The most famous shorebird spot of all is the Santa Clara River estuary, reached by exiting U.S. 101 west in Ventura at Seaward Avenue and then turning south onto Harbor Boulevard. It is three miles to the bridge which spans the estuary. Due to the deep river channels, the only way to get out onto the mudflats is by parking (fee) in the day-use area at McGrath State Beach, at the south end of the bridge, and walking from there. You can also take Spinnaker Drive west off Harbor Boulevard, proceed to the beach and park. Walk left (south) along the beach towards the estuary.

Listen to the Rare Bird Alert (964-8240) for bird news at the locations mentioned above. Good shorebirding!



## Venezuela Adventure

Unfortunately, budgetary and space limitations won't allow us to carry the continuing episodes of Ron Hirst's "Birding in Venezuela" in *El Tecolote*.

However, Ron has generously offered to make copies of the complete unedited version available to anyone interested. Call the SBAS office at 964-1468.

## Recycling

Reflecting the commitment of the National Audubon Society to increase the use of recycled and recyclable materials, *El Tecolote* is, starting with this issue, making some changes.

We are now using paper that has a minimum 10% post-consumer fiber content (i.e. old newspapers, etc.), and is non-white, which means less chlorine bleaching that adds toxic compounds to the environment.

Also, the ink now used to print the newsletter is derived from soybeans, a biodegradable substance which makes recycling of your old newsletters easier. Unlike regular petroleum-based inks, it doesn't add any volatile organic compounds into the air — a health hazard to print-shop employees, and a contributing factor in the destruction of the ozone layer.

The additional cost of these changes is less than \$.03/copy — a small expense in the support of our environmental responsibility.

## Profile of our new President



**M**ANY of you have met Sally Walker, Santa Barbara Audubon Society's new President, at our regular monthly programs. As the energetic Program Chair for the last two years, she has organized topics and speakers on a variety of environmental and natural history issues.

Organizing programs has been just one of Sally's contributions to our chapter: she has also been active as the fund-raising chair, securing vital funding for office equipment, field trip gear, and Audubon Adventures education programs in our local elementary schools. National Audubon Society recently presented her with a national education award for her work in this area.

Sally moved to Santa Barbara 17 years ago from Florida. Formerly a newspaper reporter, she is now a fund-raising consultant with a busy private practice, assisting a variety of environmental, human service, health and arts organizations.

## President's Message

Our fund-raising activities took on a new impetus last month with a generous \$2,000 grant from United Way of Santa Barbara County to fund ten special Audubon field classroom experiences this year for the disabled, low-income and minority kids, and frail seniors. This is the third year that Audubon and United Way have joined up to provide this enrichment program.

Ron Hirst stepped down as President this June, leaving a wonderful legacy over the last two years of successful stewardship for this chapter. However, you can still expect great things from Ron: as our new Field Trip Chair, he is planning terrific trips for birders of all levels, and excursions to Baja and Monterey.

In fact all our Chapter volunteers are contributing at a high level. Feel free to call any of us when you have questions or comments. Chapter committees are

forming for the year ahead and your input and involvement are very much needed and appreciated.

On August 1 Board member Jim Greaves and I attended the Southern California Coordinating Council meeting in Irvine for Audubon chapters. Jim's impressive report on his 11-year study of the endangered least Bell's vireo around Gibraltar Reservoir and along the Santa Clara River was especially well received. His painstaking research (and cowbird control efforts) has dramatically boosted the survival rate of nestlings among the local population.

Of great concern to us all is the tough fight ahead to reauthorize the Endangered Species Act. Will this country move forward with species protection or retreat to the days of environmental neglect? You can make a dramatic difference by joining Audubon's Activist Network. See the sign-up form below for details.

— Sally Walker

### Join the Audubon Activist Network. You Can Make a Difference.

More than 100,000 Audubon members have joined and are making a difference for wildlife, wetland, forest, endangered species, and more. Stand up and be counted! To join you must be an Audubon member and make a pledge to **write at least two letters and make at least two phone calls a year on behalf of environmental issues.**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ (C13 7XCH)

Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_ Phone (optional) \_\_\_\_\_

Return this coupon to: Audubon Activist, Box AA, 950 Third Ave., New York, NY-10022.

## SANTA BARBARA AUDUBON SOCIETY

### OFFICERS & COMMITTEE CHAIRS

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Rare Bird Alert ..... (805) 964-8240  
SBAS Office ..... (805) 964-1468

### MEMBERSHIP

Special new member rate ..... \$20  
Individual ..... \$30  
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Please send *only* new member applications and *El Tecolote* subscriptions to: Santa Barbara Audubon Society, 5679 Hollister Ave., Suite 5B, Goleta, CA 93117.

### EL TECOLOTE

Editor: Dorin Mayes ..... 683-1079

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