Birds of September
by Joan Easton Lentz

When 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 gooey 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 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)
Activities Calendar

Saturday, September 12. Santa Clara River Estuary
Half-day birding trip to McGrath State Beach to see abundant
birds, terns and shorebirds. Past years have turned up rare
species such as eastern kingbird, parasitic jaeger, least tern, peregrine
falcons, 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: Shawnee 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 spots” 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 Shawnee
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
Anacapa 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’
willingness 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.
Anacapa 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, unlined 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 Anacapa 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.
Plows such as the black-bellied, the
semipalmated and the snowy are present,
resting in the dry sand. Out on the strand,
the sandpipers 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 shore-
bird 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 wander-
ing 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 shore-
birds feeding around its edges. Unfortu-
nately, 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 com-
pounds 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 respon-
sibility.

Profile of our new President

MANY 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 equip-
ment, 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
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