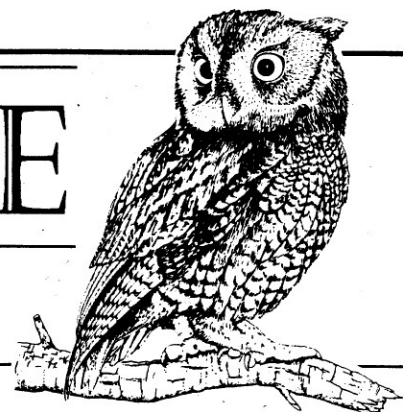


EL TECOLOTE

Newsletter of the Santa Barbara Audubon Society, Incorporated

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December 1996-January 1997



WHAT'S IN A NAME?

A ROSE-BREASTED GROSBEAK BY ANY OTHER NAME IS STILL A *PHEUCTICUS LUDOVICIANUS*
BY JEFF CHEMNICK

Many birders are unfamiliar with the basis for ordering, naming, and sequencing plants and animals according to their natural relationships. This is a shame because a good understanding of the basic principles of phylogeny, taxonomy, and systematics accesses information and predictability that are the design and purpose of scientific names. The culprit most responsible for misapprehensions under which many birders labor is the "common name." Common names in almost all other groups of plants and animals are vulgar appellations that vary geographically. They are often misapplied, vague, misleading, and confuse real relationships.

This problem was cleverly solved in the 18th c. by Swedish naturalist Carl von Linné, who devised the binomial (two names) system of naming all living things. Perhaps the most conspicuous aspect of his system is the use of Latin. This attempt to create a single international standard for scientific names was intended to neatly sidestep the many pitfalls of common names. He even Latinized his own name, better known to us today as Linnaeus.

You might recall the hierarchy of grouping organisms from some distant science class. Kingdom, phylum (division = phylum in plants), class, order, family, genus, species, and occasionally various intermediaries as needed. The nickel definition of a species is a group of individuals swimming in the same gene pool. A genus is a grouping of species most closely related. A genus belongs to a family, a family to an order, an order to a class, and so forth. The term "family" is often misapplied to mean any taxonomic level or grouping. I hear family most often

misused when the implication is actually genus. Family is a valid term used to designate a particular level of relationship. The family is the most convenient breakdown of living organisms into groups that even non-biologists readily recognize. Examples of family level in plants include orchids, roses, pines, and cacti. Examples of different mammalian families include cats, dogs, bears, and apes. Bird families are just as easy -- hummingbirds, parrots, kingfishers, and woodpeckers.

The italicized binomial that follows the common name in your field guide is divided into two parts: first the name of the genus and then the name of the species. The genus is capitalized and the species is not. The problem with Latin binomials is that non-biology types tend to avoid their use entirely and rely

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instead on the safe and familiar look and feel of English. That is too bad, for a little understanding of classical Greek and Latin can go a long way toward understanding the meaning of scientific names. In all other groups of animals and plants communication is almost entirely achieved with Latin names. Birding is different.

Why? Because birds have been historically very popular with people of all walks, not just scientists with backgrounds in taxonomy. Consequently, many lay enthusiasts demanded a comprehensive, self-referencing systematic role call of names even though a perfectly good one already existed! The result was the creation of organizations that have elevated common bird names to the dignified respectability of scientific binomials. In the world of birds English names now have a one-to-one correspondence with each and every species world wide and are considered as valid synonyms. The problem is that English names do not necessarily express clear or accurate relationships between species, genera, or even families.



Fig. 2.3. Linnaeus (Carl von Linne) (1707–1778), the founder of modern systematic botany. (Photo courtesy of New York Botanical Garden.)

The flaw of using English names is illustrated in the following examples: Knots, sanderlings, stints, some but not all sandpipers, and dunlins are in the same genus, *Calidris*. The term “sandpiper,” however can actually be in any of nine different genera. You’ll find that yellowlegs, greenshanks, redshanks, and some other sandpipers are in the same genus, *Tringa*. Even more misleading is that gadwalls, some teals (but not all teals), mallards, pintails, garganeys, shovelers, and some ducks (but not all ducks) are actually in the same genus, *Anas*. Somewhat confusing is the use of the term “grosbeak” which can refer to birds in fourteen different genera world wide. More confusing is the term “robin” which can mean any one of 83 species in 16 genera in 2 different families. The champion of ambiguity is the much over-worked “flycatcher” which can apply to over 200 species, in any one of 56 genera spread among 4 different families world wide!

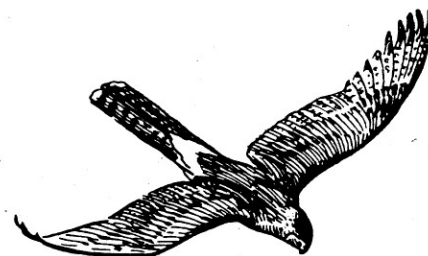
Part of the problem stems from early naturalists stumbling from the landing craft of European ships onto the shores of North America and Australia only to encounter a largely unknown avifauna. Unfortunately, they quickly applied already familiar common names to the birds they found based on perceived relationships with similar European birds, unaware that the superficial similarities borne to birds back home did not constitute real phylogenetic relationships. The damage from that practice is still being felt, mostly manifesting itself among birders who think that warblers are warblers, orioles are orioles, and sparrows are sparrows. Warblers and orioles of the New World belong to endemic families that are only ever rare vagrants to Europe. The term “warbler” originally applied to many of the Sylviids which are now known as Old World warblers because birds in the New World belonging to the family Parulidae were also called warblers, thus muddying the waters.

Further muddying is achieved by the use of the term “warbler” in Australasia to refer to some members of the almost endemic family Acanthizidae. “Sparrows” can belong to any of 19 genera in one of three different families world wide. The term

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

As I write this message, it's only early November and thinking about the holiday season, as exciting and joyful as it is, seems a bit overwhelming. At some point or another, I guess we all can get immersed in the hustle and bustle that surrounds this time of year. Recently, I made a call to a close friend of mine, a Native American woman. She had been going through a difficult time and I wanted to see how she was doing. Her voice and manner were calm and peaceful. I asked her how she had come to feel better. Her reply was inspiring and especially appropriate at this time of year.



"Get up before the sun rises. Take a walk on the beach or a hike in the mountains. Let all the sounds of life calm and relax you - the songs of the birds, the ocean waves, the rustling of the trees. Remember that we can see the miracle of life in all of these things. Perfection and peace are best seen in nature. Most importantly, remember that we are all a part of this incredible creation and within each of us is perfection and peace. This kind of experience doesn't require you to spend anything but your time, nor does it cost you to help others to experience it as well. These simple pleasures are everyone's gift."

Personally, I am thankful for friends whose wisdom and insight helps me to remember simple pleasures. I extend my sincere wishes for peace and joy to all members and their families. Have a happy and safe holiday season!

Lauren DeChant, President

GIVE THE GIFT OF EDUCATION

With the holiday season of giving upon us, please consider giving the gift of *Audubon Adventures Magazine* to a local school classroom by donating \$35.00 to SBAS. The Education Committee is also



gearing up to start an Audubon Adventurers Club for grades 4-6 and is in need of materials to make this possible. A list of suggested items can be obtained from the Audubon Office or by calling Elan Sutton, Education Committee Chair at 683-1143.

WEDNESDAY NIGHT AUDUBON

AS YOU HAVE probably already noticed, the 1996/97 Audubon programs are held on the fourth Wednesday of the month, except when near a holiday, such as in December, when the program will be held on the third Wednesday. This departure from the Friday night tradition is meant to accommodate more members' schedules. Let me know what you think. In the meantime, please jot down these upcoming program dates:

Dec. 18 (Larry Friesen); Jan. 22 (Joan Lentz & Don Desjardin); Feb. 26 (Steve Timbrook); March 26 (Kimball Garrett); April 23; May 28 (Ernest Brooks); June 25.

Many thanks.

Gage Ricard, Programs Committee Chair

FIELD TRIPS

RANCHO JOCOSO, east end Lake Cachuma

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 7, 7:00 A.M.

target birds: Wood Duck, Lewis's Woodpecker, Bald Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, American White Pelican, Mountain Bluebird

leader: Jeff Chemnick (805) 965-0895

Take 101 to State St. exit in Santa Barbara. Go east on State St. to Carl's Jr. parking lot in Five Points Shopping Center at 3925 State St. Car pool from there. Bring water. Back before lunch.

FIGUEROA MOUNTAIN, Santa Barbara County

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 15, 8:00 A.M.

target birds: Mountain Quail, Lewis's Woodpecker, White-headed Nuthatch, bluebirds, nuthatches, Mountain Chickadee, Golden-crowned Kinglet

leader: Dave Compton (805) 965-3153

Drivers may appreciate gas money.

Take 101 to State St. exit in Santa Barbara. Go east on State St. to Carl's Jr. parking lot in Five Points Shopping Center at 3925 State St. Car pool from there. Bring warm clothes, gloves, lunch, and water. Back by mid-afternoon.

EAST CAMINO CIELO, Santa Barbara

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 21, 7:30 A.M.

target birds: Mountain invasion rarities such as White-headed Woodpecker, Northern Goshawk, Townsend's Solitaire, Varied Thrush, Cassin's Finch, Red Crossbills.

leader: Rob Lindsay (805) 964-9514

Drivers may appreciate gas money.

Take 101 to State St. exit in Santa Barbara. Go east on State St. to Carl's Jr. parking lot in Five Points Shopping Center at 3925 State St. Car pool from there. Bring warm clothes. Back by 11:00 a.m.



CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT AREA

SATURDAY, JANUARY 11, 1997, 8:00 A.M.

target birds: Rare birds of previous week's Christmas Bird Count

leader: Paul Keller (805) 968-7804

Take 101 to State St. exit in Santa Barbara. Go east on State St. to Carl's Jr. parking lot in Five Points Shopping Center at 3925 State St. Car pool from there. Priority will be to get permission to look for rarities on private property. Trip over before lunch.

SANTA BARBARA BOTANIC GARDEN

SATURDAY, JANUARY 18, 1997

target birds: Nuttall's Woodpecker, Band-tailed Pigeon, Red-shouldered Hawk, American Dipper, kinglets, Wrentit, Gambel's White-crowned Sparrow, towhees, Townsend's Warbler

leader: Rob Lindsay (805) 964-9514

Take 101 to Santa Barbara exit on Mission St. and go north on Mission to T-intersection at Laguna St. and go left. Drive to stop sign and turn right on Mission Canyon Rd. Drive past the Mission to Foothill Rd. and turn right. The second left takes you on continuation of Mission Canyon Rd. which takes you to the Botanic Garden. Park in garden parking lot. Trip over before 11:00 a.m.

VENTURA COUNTY GAME PRESERVE in Oxnard

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 1997, 7:30 A.M.

target birds: Virginia Rail, Merlin, Peregrine Falcon, American Bittern, White-faced Ibis, Yellow-headed Blackbird

leader: Guy Tingos (805) 681-0026

From the east take 101 north to Cabrillo Blvd. (left lane exit just past town of Montecito). Take Cabrillo and turn right onto Los Patos Channel and look for Andree Clark Bird Refuge parking on the left. From the west take 101 south to Los Patos off ramp (after Milpas exit) and turn right into Bird Refuge parking. Carpool from here. If you want to meet at the Game Preserve, call Guy for directions and procedure. Trip over by noon.

All field trips are open to the public. Unless otherwise noted, trips are free and reservations are not needed. If you need a loaner pair of binoculars for a trip, call the leader several days in advance.

PROGRAMS

Programs begin at 8:00 p.m. at Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History — Farrand Hall, 1226 Puesta del Sol, Santa Barbara, CA 93105. Refreshments served at 7:30 p.m.

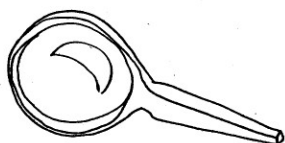
For details call (805) 964-1468

DECEMBER PROGRAM

SHORT STORIES OF SMALL SUBJECTS: SANTA BARBARA'S NATURE CLOSE-UP

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 18, AT 8:00 P.M.

Dr. Larry Jon Friesen, Chairman of the Biological Sciences Department at Santa Barbara City College, will present a collection of images of Santa Barbara's small-world natural history. Dr. Friesen's exquisite slides give truth to the cliché "small is beautiful." Although he teaches cell and molecular biology, his first loves remain natural history and photography. A popular guest speaker, his Audubon programs are always a treat.



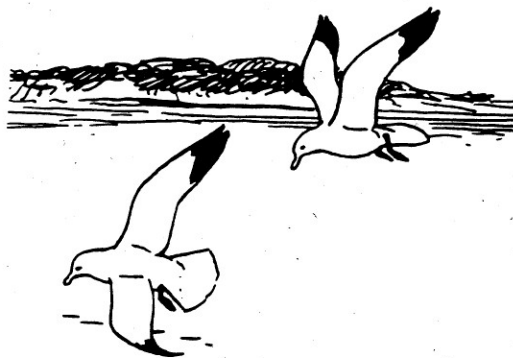
GULLS OF THE SANTA BARBARA COAST: A FIELD TRIP

SATURDAY, JANUARY 25, AT 8:00 A.M.

January is an ideal time of year to observe a variety of gulls along the Santa Barbara coast. Join expert birders Joan Lentz and Don Desjardin, who will help you identify gulls in all their varied plumages. The trip will begin at the Andree Clark Bird Refuge and continue across the street at East Beach. The trip is co-sponsored by the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History and Santa Barbara Audubon Society. Fee: Members (SBMNH or Audubon), \$12; non-members, \$15. To make a reservation, send your check, payable to SBMNH, to: Reservations, SBMNH, 2559 Puesta del Sol Rd., Santa Barbara, CA 93105. Please include your name, address, phone number(s), and number of reservations requested. Or you may stop by the SB Museum of Natural History Admissions Office to make your reservation in person. Sorry, no phone reservations accepted.

CCCBT -- The California Central Coast Birding Trail has its primary goal as conservation through education. The purpose of CCCBT will be to identify locations where birders may easily find birds during visits to the Central Coast. Modeled after successful trails in other states, it will include most of the tri-counties, with an emphasis on the coast. A pelican in flight logo will soon appear on maps and signs in the area.

BIRD FESTIVAL -- Kicking off public awareness of CCCBT will be the Morro Bay Winter Bird Festival January 17-20. The 3-day festival will include expert-led field trips, workshops, children's activities, Arnold Small speaking on the last 50 years of birding in California, and more! Contact Suedene Nelson, Morro Bay Chamber of Commerce, 880 Main St., Morro Bay, CA 93422 or (800) 231-0592.



“sparrow” implies close relationship of birds so named, but New World birds alone that are equally close in phylogenetic relationship include buntings, longspurs, juncos, finches, seedeaters, grassquits, towhees, brush-finches, and cardinals. Old World orioles are in the genus *Oriolus* in the family Oriolidae. Very nice and neat. Then along came those early birders (pun intended) to North America and immediately and incorrectly labeled similarly colored birds of the New World “orioles.” New World orioles are really part of the New World blackbird family, Icteridae. Even the term “blackbird,” however, isn’t safe. The European blackbird is really a thrush (dare I say “robin?”) in the Turdidae family and not a “blackbird” by New World standards at all. It is of course a bird that is black and that brings up yet another problem of this double lexicon of names.

Because English bird names are now valid synonyms for real species, one has to be very careful how nouns and adjectives are flung about. If you wish to direct attention to a jay that is blue, you must say so in that cumbersome manner, because to describe any one of the 26 or so species of New World jays that happen to be blue as “blue jays” is incorrect, unless one is referring to and only to *Cyanocitta cristata*, the Blue Jay of eastern North America.

As a poignant bit of retribution to those ethnocentric European naturalist of long ago who so screwed things up, I would like to offer this last example of common name pitfalls. Remember the song, “Bluebirds Over the White Cliffs of Dover?” Well, the writers, Burton and Kent, were no doubt not only American but probably not much in the way of birders since bluebirds only occur in North America, ranging as far south as Nicaragua (eastern bluebird). Correctly it should have been either “There’ll be Birds that are Blue over the White Cliffs of Dover” or perhaps “There’ll be Bluebirds over Nicaragua Occasionally During Migration.” If Burton and Kent had insisted on a European bird that is blue and yet still have the lyrics rhyme, they could have penned “There’ll be Bluethroats over the White Cliffs of Dover,” and they would have been biogeographically correct - but probably would not

have sold as many records.

So don’t be a *Meleagris*. Pay more attention to the scientific names of the birds you encounter. You will soon be in the Dumetella seat and gain the wisdom of wise old Tytonids and Strigids.

Footnote: Taxonomy is not an exact science. Classification designations are artificial contrivances to instill order and predictability among living things. The species concept is a dynamic entity subject to debate. Genera are frequently revised and then re-revised. Even families are not sacred. A couple of fellows named Sibley and Monroe stood the world of avian systematics on its head in 1990 by basing a phylogenetic scheme entirely on DNA relationships and in so doing wiped out many of the long-standing familial designations that we know and love. So be careful out there.



QUIZ ANSWER — AT LAST

Back in the May 1996 issue of *El Tecolote*, former editor Jim Greaves posed the question “Which bird appears in all 50 states as a winter or summer resident?” The correct answer was submitted by Florence Sanchez of Kokomo, Indiana: It is the Short-eared owl which appears in all 50 states as a winter or summer resident. Congratulations and thank you, Florence!



Santa Barbara Rare Bird Alert
(805) 964-8240

SOMEBODIES

BY DAVE WASS

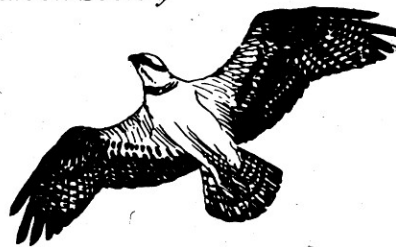
MORE OFTEN than you think, good things happen in the ongoing environmental struggle because of the dedication and vigilance of people in our own neighborhoods whose efforts may go unnoticed. Out there somewhere, somebodies keep a protective eye on a nearby parcel of bird habitat. They know everything that happens there -- the arrival and departure of migrants, the condition of the trees and shrubs, the machinations of politicians and developers that might affect the fate of this special part of their lives. If necessary, they will undertake restoration projects, put up signs, educate their neighbors, anything to protect this small world that is so important to them and their bird friends. These somebodies love the land for the life it supports and nourishes, not for the profit it might make. They also write letters to politicians, help teenagers become involved in conservation projects, lead field trips, and, yes, they give money. But more importantly, they give their time and lives and have a deep commitment and warm love for Santa Barbara. Are you a somebody?

Last week as I was relaxing at a street-side table at Hudson's, an old and wise friend plopped down beside me and launched into his latest observations about the passing parade in front of us. First, he bemoaned the cultural drive for both parents of a child-raising family to work full-time. This frantic economic activity prevents them from doing much community work, especially environmental work. However, he noted that in Santa Barbara there are more and more seniors and retired folks with plenty of skills, knowledge, and love of the land who might venture again into the field of conservation and environmental activism. That last remark struck a chord with me. You see, I never did anything for the "big E" until I was 63 years old! At that time, after an epiphany experience forced me to reevaluate my life, I determined to spend part of each week on work devoted to bettering our planet, for the rest of my life here. For me this decision was the beginning of an odyssey which daily brings me new challenges,

new discoveries, and new friends.

Keeping all of this in mind, I am inviting all seniors who would like to explore the possibilities of re-entry into the world of conservation and environmental activism to phone me to discuss your ideas. If, by chance, you are a neophyte, as I was five years ago, there will be a special place for you when we all gather for our first meeting at Hudson's.

Dave Wass is Conservation Chairman for Santa Barbara Audubon Society



CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

Saturday, January 4, 1997

It's not too late to sign up for this year's bird count. Simply fill out the coupon below and mail it to Pat Kelly by December 20.

Yes, I/we want to join the Bird Count team!

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Preferred area: _____

Would like to work with: _____

Dinner ☐ Leader ☐ Feeder Count ☐

Complete this form and send to:

Pat Kelly
554 Litchfield Lane
Santa Barbara, CA 93109
(805) 962-9916

CALENDAR OF EVENTS DECEMBER 1996 - JANUARY 1997

Saturday, December 7	Rancho Jocosco field trip
Sunday, December 15	Figueroa Mountain field trip
Wednesday, December 18	December Program: <i>Santa Barbara Nature Up-Close</i>
Saturday, December 21	East Camino Cielo field trip
Saturday, January 4	Christmas Bird Count
Saturday, January 11	Bird Count Area field trip
Wednesday, January 22	January Program: <i>Gull ID Workshop</i>
Saturday, January 18	SB Botanic Garden field trip
Saturday, January 25	Gull field trip
Morrow Bay Bird Festival	January 17-20
Saturday, February 1	Ventura County Game Preserve field trip

El Tecolote is published 8 times a year by the Santa Barbara Audubon Society, Inc. Non-member price for an annual subscription is \$10 per year. Audubon members are invited to send announcements, letters, articles, photos, and drawings for consideration to:

Janet Eastman, Editor
525 Lorraine Ave.
Santa Barbara, CA 93110
(805) 964-6486
(805) 969-4423 FAX
jeastman@silcom.com

Deadline for submissions is the 10th of the month.

SANTA BARBARA AUDUBON SOCIETY

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September 1996 - August 1997

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Rob Lindsay..... 964-9514
Sally Walker..... 569-5388

Officers and Committee Chairs meet the second Thursday of each month. Members are welcome to attend. Please call the office to verify dates and times at (805) 964-1468.

PEN & INK ON COVER BY DARYL HARRISON

EL TECOLOTE

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