

# El Tecolote

Newsletter of the Santa Barbara Audubon Society, Inc.

Volume 38, Issue 1

September 1999



## Focus on: Snowy Plover

by Kathleen Whitney

*It is 6:20 AM when I first spot the Snowy Plover on the beach at Guadalupe. I am still a bit groggy at this hour, but this bird definitely looks funny. I set up the spotting scope to get a better look at him. Yes, it is indeed a male Snowy Plover, but why is he squatting in the damp sand and why does he look so broad through the breast? He tries hard to appear nonchalant, casually looking about but pointedly ignoring me. I am still suspicious and I move in a bit closer just as three cotton ball chicks explode from his breast feathers in different directions leaving the poor male wild-eyed and calling after them frantically. In the next few minutes he manages to tuck one reluctant cotton ball under his wing but the others are uncooperative. He starts after first one, then the other, leaving the third to crouch in the sand. I retreat quietly and leave the poor guy to deal with his scattered brood. I have three children, I can relate.*

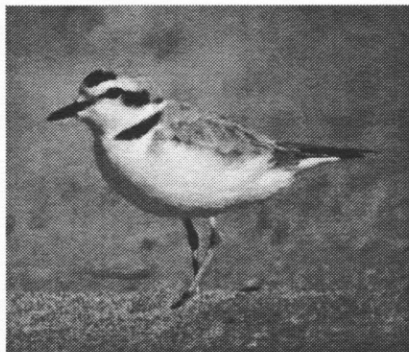


Photo: Jim and Margaret Greaves

When it gets right down to it, there are few birds that can compete with the huggable appeal of the Snowy Plover. The chicks really do look like dirty cotton balls teetering on toothpick legs. They can be quite difficult to see, however, since their plumage and behavior have evolved to facilitate their clever disappearing act in the beach and fore-dune habitat they call home in Santa Barbara County. Indeed, if they do crouch or stand quietly as you walk by (and they often do) you may never notice them at all.

The Snowy Plover is a small plover with grayish-tan dorsal coloration and white underparts and neck collar. In winter plumage, the sexes look similar but breeding males develop a small black bar at the front of the rufous-tinged crown patch, a black eye-stripe, and lateral patches on the sides of the breast thus distinguishing them from the unmarked females during the spring and summer months. Snowy Plovers are most often encountered above the wet sand on the beach foraging for beach-hoppers or other arthropods in the debris at the high tide line. When not actively foraging, they may be found in the dry sand of the fore-dunes motionless and all but invisible, their sand-colored plumage blending perfectly with the substrate.

Though at first they appear similar to other winter "peeps" such as Western and Least Sandpipers and Sanderlings which also frequent our beaches, there are subtle differences in behavior and appearance which help to distinguish the Snowy Plover from these other shorebirds. Foraging sandpipers barely lift their probing bills from the sand and when they do, they run to another spot and promptly begin to probe

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## Board of Directors 1999-2000 Board Position Open

In June we held our Annual Picnic and elected the slate of nominees for Santa Barbara Audubon's Board of Directors for the coming year. We changed our bylaws, created the Science Committee, and made the Science Committee Chair a Board position.

Kathleen Whitney is the Chair of the Science Committee. The membership also voted to expand the Board by two new At-large positions, and voted in Morgan Ball and Patrick McNulty. We welcome Catherine Graham, a retired teacher, to the board as Education Chair. Everett King was re-elected President, but will be leaving the Board to attend graduate school; Darlene Chirman will become President.

### There is still an opportunity to join our board!

We urge you to consider the position of Treasurer. If you have some basic financial management and computer skills, you could make a significant contribution to the work of Santa Barbara Audubon. The commitment is:

- 1) attend monthly board meetings, held in the evening the second Thursday of each month.
- 2) pay chapter bills/preparing financial statement for the board once a month-- about 3 hours.
- 3) assist other members of the Finance Committee to prepare a budget proposal for the

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## EDUCATION UPDATE

By Catherine Graham

### Audubon Adventures:

Audubon Adventures is a multi-media program from the National Audubon Society for 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> grade classrooms. The curriculum is based on birds, wildlife and their natural habitats.

We have been able to budget for only 35 classrooms this year. However, **YOU** can expand **Audubon Adventures** to more children by adopting a classroom or a school. This is a good way to do something for your children, grandchildren and all future citizens. Send your designated donation of \$35 per classroom to the Santa Barbara Audubon office. There is no cut-off date. Everyone will thank you!

Come to the September 22<sup>nd</sup> program at Farrand Hall for first-hand information. Hear an elementary teacher tell of the many adventures she and her students had with their Audubon Adventures kit. You may also inspect a sample kit. A live two-legged surprise is being planned! **We are asking all members to encourage their teacher acquaintances to take advantage of this acclaimed program.**



### Volunteer Presentations:

Slide shows and scripts are available for students and Volunteer Presenters are needed. Please look over the bird habitat kits at the September and October programs at Farrand Hall. If you are interested please sign up or call me at 682-1357.

### Rob Lindsay:

Local nature presentations are available from popular educator Rob Lindsay. Plan ahead and arrange a time with Rob. He is available evenings, weekends, and Wednesdays after 3:30 PM and can be reached at 964-9514.

**For more information about any of these wonderful programs, please call Catherine Graham at 682-1357.**



## RESTORATION ACTIVITIES

These restoration projects are sponsored by Santa Barbara Audubon, Santa Barbara Urban Creeks Council, or are joint projects of the two organizations.

Saturday September 4, 9-noon; sponsored by UCC  
**Mission Creek: Bohnett Park Clean-Up & Restoration**

Contact: Jason Nelson 682-5312

Meet at corner of Victoria & San Andres  
**FIRST SATURDAY OF EVERY MONTH**

Saturday September 18, 9-noon; sponsored by UCC  
**Cieneguitas Creek Restoration**

Contact: Stephanie Langsdorf 962-0996

Meet at Vieja Valley School--434 Nogal Dr.

Saturday September 25, 9-noon

Sponsored by Audubon & UCC

**San Jose Creek Clean-up & Restoration**

Contact: Darlene 692-2008

Meet at Berkeley Bike Bridge

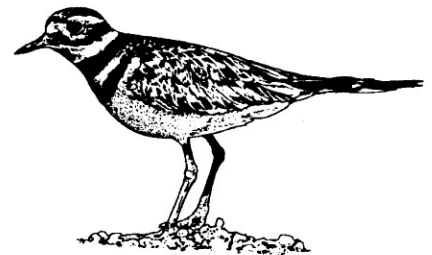
Sunday September 26, 8:30-12:30; sponsored by UCC

**Atascadero Creek Restoration**

Contact: Darlene 692-2008

Meet at site near Goleta Beach or call for directions

**Come and join the fun! Learn about our local creek and wetland areas and do something to improve water quality & wildlife habitat!**



(Board Position Open — Continued from page 1)

board--meet 2-3 times in the winter/spring.

4) prepare annual financial report.

For further information regarding this great opportunity, please call Darlene Chirman, incoming President, at 692-2008 or Chris Walden, who has served as Treasurer for the last two years, at 969-4256.

## ***SB AUDUBON FALL PROGRAM SERIES***

All programs - unless otherwise noted - will take place at **Farrand Hall, Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History**, Mission Canyon, Santa Barbara. Free on-site parking.

All programs - unless otherwise noted - will begin at **7:30 PM** (a change from last year). Doors will open at 7:00 PM.

All programs - unless otherwise noted - are **FREE** to the public; SB Audubon members are encouraged to bring friends and guests.



***Wednesday, September 22nd***

***JEFF CHEMNICK, Speaker***  
**"A Nature Tour Below the Equator"**

**Birds, plants, and animals of southern Africa, lower South America, and Australia, in words and pictures**

Funny and witty; tireless world traveler; a marvelous photographer; one of Audubon's most popular speakers, Jeff Chemnick is known nationally as a buyer of rare cycads and exotic plants. A fabulous birder, Santa Barbara Magazine dubbed him "Santa Barbara's own 'Indiana Jones'." Jeff will also offer tips on more effective bird watching and photography in the field.

**Don't miss it!**

### **Save these dates for upcoming Programs:**

**Wednesday, October 27th**  
**JILL SHIRLEY, Speaker**  
**"The Birds of the Salton Sea"**

**Wednesday, November 17th (note special date)**  
**GUY HAND, Speaker**  
**"A Natural History of the Highlands"**

**Wednesday, December 15th (note special date)**  
**KEVIN LAFFERTY, Guest Speaker**  
**"Endangered Snowy Plovers and the Coal Oil Point Ecosystem"**



## ***FIELD TRIPS***

***September 9, Thursday, 5:30 PM***  
***Devereux Slough***  
***at UCSB West Campus, Goleta***

**Target: Snowy Plover, shorebirds, and migrants**  
**RON HIRST, 967-0138, sbtech@aol.com**

Take Hwy. 101 to the Glen Annie, Storke exit. Take Storke Rd. south to its end and turn right onto the Slough Rd. Go 0.1 mi. and turn left onto West Campus Lane. Drive 0.1 mi. to the University Children's Center and park between the Center and the horse stables. This sunset walk will focus on the diversity of birds and habitats to be seen near the Devereux Slough. Over 200 species of birds have been seen near this precious wetland. It is also an exceptionally scenic area. Wear walking shoes. Latecomers can catch up with us as we walk from the school along the Slough Rd. out to the beach and the Snowy Plovers. Trip over by 7:30.

***September 25, Saturday, 3:00 PM***  
***Carpinteria Salt Marsh Preserve and Car-***  
***pinteria Salt Marsh Nature Park***

3:00 PM (Preserve), 4:30 PM (Nature Park)  
**Target: shorebirds, waterfowl, Belding's Savannah Sparrow, fall flowering plants, butterflies and so forth**  
**WAYNE R. FERREN JR., 893-2506 (office)**

To get to the Preserve from Ventura take 101 north to Casitas Pass Rd. Go south and turn right on Carpinteria Ave. Drive west on Carpinteria Ave to Estero Way (Apple St on AAA map) turn left and drive to gate. From Santa Barbara take 101 south to Carpinteria Ave exit and take Carpinteria Ave to Estero Way (1st right). To get to the Nature Park from Ventura take 101 north to Linden Ave. Go south to Sandylane Rd, turn right and drive to the end at Ash Ave and park. From Santa Barbara exit Casitas Pass Rd. Go south to Carpinteria Ave. and turn right. At Linden Ave. turn left and proceed as above.

After birding and touring the normally gated Carpinteria Salt Marsh Preserve, Wayne, the Reserve Manager, will show us the new Nature Park of which he was instrumental in creating starting at 4:30 PM. The Nature Park is small so that late comers will be able to join the group. Feel welcome to attend just the Preserve or just the Nature Park segment of the trip. Those who wish to car-pool meet at the Andree Clarke Bird Refuge parking lot at 2:30 PM. Active birders will appreciate the opportunity to check out the Carpinteria salt marsh for fall shorebirds during fall migration. At the Nature Preserve birdwatching will be at a relaxed pace giving beginning birdwatchers a chance to admire marsh birds and other wildlife at their leisure while learning about marsh ecology from an authority who loves to share his knowledge.





## **WARBLERS, Wine, and Dessert!**

**With JON DUNN and KIMBALL GARRETT**

To benefit the journal *North American Birds* (formerly called *Field Notes*) join Jon Dunn and Kimball Garrett, two of the top field ornithologists in the country, for a reception, book signing, and slide show **WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 29, at 6:30 PM at the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History.**

Jon Dunn, chief consultant for the new edition of the National Geographic Society's Field Guide to North American Birds, and Kimball Garrett of the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County have collaborated on numerous books and articles. Most recently, they co-authored the highly acclaimed field guide on warblers in the Peterson series.

Jon and Kimball, as well as knowledgeable birders everywhere, know the importance of *North American Birds* as a journal that has chronicled bird distribution for the better part of a century. They are donating their time to support and raise funds for this benchmark publication, which keeps track of all the birds, you and I see, wherever we see them.

Admission to this special fundraising event is \$25 per person at the door. The reception with refreshments creekside at the Museum begins at 6:30 p.m. and the slide show and lecture on North American warblers starts at 7:30 p.m. in the Bird Habitat Hall.

**JOIN US FOR A FUN EVENING IN SUPPORT OF ORNITHOLOGY AND THE MAGAZINE THAT DOCUMENTS IT FOR NORTH AMERICA!**

Sponsored in cooperation with the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History and the Santa Barbara Audubon Society.

## **Mark your Calendar for these upcoming Field Trips:**

### **Lake Los Carneros, Goleta**

October 9, Thursday, 5:00 PM

Target: Fall song birds

**Karen Bridgers**, 964-1316, kbridgers@msn.com

### **Atascadero Creek, Goleta**

October 24, Sunday, 8:00 AM

Target: Fall migrant song birds and wetland birds

**Mark Holmgren**, UCSB Museum of Systematics and Ecology (Call Darlene Chirman 692-2008 for trip questions.)

### **Santa Barbara Christmas Bird Count Area**

January 8, 2000 Saturday, 8:00 AM

Target: Rare birds of last week's Christmas Bird Count-

**Paul Keller**, 968-7804, wrentit@gte.net

### **Ventura County Game Preserve in Oxnard, Ventura County**

February 05, Saturday, 7:30 AM

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

**Guy Tingos**, 681-0026, gtingos@west.net

## **THANK YOU!**

We would like to express our appreciation to the following people who have shared their enthusiasm and knowledge of our bird life with us in the field this past year: **Karen Bridgers, Jeff Chemnick, Dave Compton, Wayne R. Ferren, Jr., Jim Greaves, Ron Hirst, Alison Kent, David Kisner, Don Rathbun, Grace Smith, Guy Tingos, Kathleen Whitney.**

## **National Audubon Society Membership Application**



**Yes!**

I want to join Audubon and help protect wildlife and wildlife habitats.

Special new-member rate of \$20

*Make check payable and send to:*

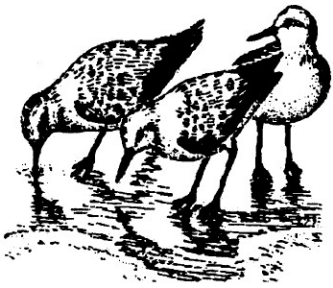
National Audubon Society  
Membership Data Center  
P.O. Box 5100  
Boulder, CO 80321-1000

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_  
State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

*Local Chapter - Santa Barbara Audubon Society C13 7XCH*

(Continued from page 1)

the sand again. Plovers are more Zen in their approach to mealtime. They run a short distance and freeze. They run a bit more and freeze again before seizing a prey item from the ground. Snowy Plovers tend to forage at or above the



*Sanderlings*

high tide line where kelp and other washed-up debris provides habitat for a variety of delectable invertebrate snacks. Sandpipers forage lower on the beach in the wet sand, from the surf to the high-tide line.

Though the coloration is indeed similar on these wintering shorebirds, look carefully at their overall body shape and at

the shape of the head and bill in particular. Snowy Plovers are "plumper" and more compact looking with larger rounder heads, bigger eyes, and stubbier-looking bills than sandpipers.

The Snowy Plover is related to the more commonly encountered Killdeer and Black-bellied Plover. Like these plover "cousins", Snowy Plovers nest in simple scrapes which they excavate on the ground. The male creates the scrape by scratching with his feet while spinning in a circle, a process which completes the nest in minutes and is most amusing to watch. Both male and female then collect nearby items to complete the nest structure. A bit of shell, a small pink stone, one by one the selected objects are tossed into the scrape until it is lined in an attractive, though somewhat uncomfortable, style. Their three egg clutch is as cryptic as the bird itself with dark squiggles and dots on a buff (you got it - sand colored!) background. The nest and eggs can be almost impossible to detect in the sandy or gravelly substrate that characterizes the typical plover nesting site. This is a good news/bad news situation making the nests more difficult for a potential predator to locate but also rendering them vulnerable to trampling by humans, their pets, livestock, and vehicles.

Nesting on the ground is risky business and Snowy Plovers have consequently evolved clever strategies and unique behaviors which help to minimize nest predation and maximize reproductive output. In the open nesting habitat preferred by Snowy Plovers, it is unlikely that an approaching predator will escape detection by the incubating adult. When an intruder is spotted, the incubating bird simply sneaks away from the camouflaged nest which may then go unnoticed. If hatching is imminent or if chicks are present, the Snowy Plover will abandon the stealth tactics in favor of all-out theatrics designed to engage and attract the gullible human or the peckish predator. The normally sedate plover then explodes into action, calling to attract attention to itself, scurrying across the sand with its spread tail dragging on the ground, flopping about and

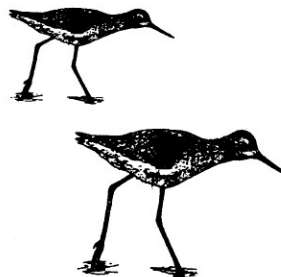
"helplessly" flailing its wings while lying flat on its belly. Other nesting plovers in the vicinity may join in the show, adding to the general chaos and mayhem and baffling all but the most wily or focused predator.

Unfortunately, eggs and young still succumb to predation. But the Snowy Plover has another ace up its proverbial sleeve when it comes to reproductive success.

Both male and female Snowy Plover share the arduous duty of incubation, sometimes enduring heinous weather conditions to protect and nurture their precious clutch. Particularly tenacious individuals will sit tight through monstrous winds, pouring rain, hailstorms, and blowing sand that would etch your binocular lenses. As with other ground-nesting species, Snowy Plover chicks are precocial on hatching, feathered and self feeding from the get-go. They still rely on the adults to protect and educate them for a time but one parent can do the job and guess who gets to do the childcare? Not the female - she abandons her new family after a few days and goes off in search of another mate. In this way, she may produce two or even three broods in a single nesting season. As for the male, for the next month he's Mr. Mom. After that, he too may re-nest.

Until the early 1940's, this drama played out every year on our local beaches. Then, Snowy Plovers nested at Carpinteria, Sandylane, and Coal Oil Point. Snowy Plovers attempted nesting at Coal Oil Point as recently as 1982 but have not been found nesting there since. As with so many of their former nesting areas, increased recreational use of these beaches and the resulting degradation of the beach habitat eventually resulted in the loss of nesting habitat for the Snowy Plover. This persistent trend of nesting habitat loss and resulting population declines on the west coast of the United States over the last three decades prompted the listing of the Pacific Coast population of Snowy Plover as Threatened by the US Fish and Wildlife Service in 1993.

We are fortunate in that we continue to host a wintering population of Snowy Plovers "in our own backyard" at Coal Oil Point Reserve. As many as 140 individuals are present there through the fall and winter months and into the early spring. After March, most of our Snowy Plover neighbors will have departed for breeding areas elsewhere but come September and they can again be found at Coal Oil Point.



**If you are interested in meeting these charming and increasingly rare winter guests to our local beaches, Ron Hirst will be leading a sunset field trip to their sandy haunts in Devereux Slough on Thursday, September 9th from 5:30-7:30 PM.**



## Calendar of Events

Thursday, Sept. 9	Devereux Slough Field Trip
Wednesday, Sept. 22	"A Tour Below the Equator" Jeff Chemnick
Saturday, Sept. 25	Carpinteria Salt Marsh Field Trip
Wednesday, Sept. 29	Wine, Warblers and Dessert!

## Fall Birding Classes

Check with Santa Barbara Botanic Garden, 682-4726, and Santa Barbara City College Adult Education, 687-0812, for Fall Birding Classes.

## SBAS Website

**SANTA BARBARA AUDUBON** now has a website. Come visit us at: [www.audubon.org/chapter/ca/santabarbara](http://www.audubon.org/chapter/ca/santabarbara). You can find up-to-date information on field trips, programs, volunteer opportunities, restoration dates, conservation committee issues, science committee projects, and more! Please take a look and give us feedback at:

[sbaudubon@silcom.com](mailto:sbaudubon@silcom.com)

**El Tecolote** is published for the benefit of SBAS members. Members are invited to send submissions for consideration to

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Santa Barbara, CA 93111  
[tecolotesb@aol.com](mailto:tecolotesb@aol.com)

Non-member subscriptions (\$15.00/year) may be mailed to  
Santa Barbara Audubon Society  
5679 Hollister Avenue 5B  
Goleta, CA 93117

Please make checks payable to SBAS.

## Santa Barbara Audubon Society

[saudubon@silcom.com](mailto:saudubon@silcom.com)  
July 1999 - June 2000

### Officers

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### Vice-President

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### Treasurer

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Education	Catherine Graham	682-1357
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Field Trips	Paul Keller	968-7804
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Membership	Mary Wenzel	685-5601
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Newsletter	Bill & Elaine Uomini	964-9401
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Programs	Lee Moldaver	682-2120
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Publicity	Sheila Golburgh-Johnson	682-4618
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Science	Kathleen Whitney	687-0842
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At Large	Morgan Ball	968-0827
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	Patrick McNulty	967-9900
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	Chris Walden	969-4256
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HOSPITALITY	Don & Florence Stivers	967-3690
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BIRD REFUGE	Sally Walker	569-5388
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RARE BIRDS	Karen Bridgers	964-1316
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RARE BIRD ALERT	Recent rare bird sightings	964-8240
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Officers and Committee Chairs meet the second Thursday of the month. Members are welcome to attend. Please call the Audubon office to verify dates and times (805) 964-1468; FAX (805) 967-7718. Cover art by Daryl Harrison.

## El Tecolote

Santa Barbara Audubon Society, Inc.  
5679 Hollister Avenue - Suite 5B  
Goleta, CA 93117

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SEPTEMBER 1999

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Permit Number 125



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**In This Issue...**

**Snowy Plover**