THE 117TH CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

Rebecca Coulter, Jared Dawson, Liz Muraoka, & Joan Murdoch

As has been the case for several years now, our months of preparation for this large CBC effort focused on weather: the drought and its impacts; what was in store this winter; would our dwindling bodies of water get relief? A bit of early October rain quickly evaporated, but then December began to look like a normal rain year for Santa Barbara! Ponds and puddles brought waterfowl, dry sloughs and creek outfalls filled, overflowed, and opened to the ocean. Conditions improved along with our spirits. And as always, birders scouted the hotspots, turning up a few nice surprises—the returning Tufted Duck, Vermilion Flycatcher, and Warbling Vireo among them. But few other rarities popped up during December, and numbers of regular species seemed low by all accounts. Where were the warblers and sparrows?

Count Day dawned just as predicted: cold (for us), with all manner of precipitation depending on where you were birding. The mountains had fog, hail, snow, and wind. The coastal strip had drizzle and then steady rain, brief periods of bright sunlight, and generally stirred-up conditions. And finally, the weather became the story of the day. Small craft advisories scrubbed the boat outing, so our pelagic birding regulars did sea watches from various points of land. Mountain teams navigated road washouts by bicycle, hiked slippery trails, changed flat truck tires, and napped in their vehicles waiting for the dense fog to clear enough to see anything. Along the coast, birders ducked in and out of their assigned areas, seeking bird activity in the bright moments and refuge during the downpours. The noon checklist rundown at Goleta Beach was held in pelting rain under cover of the Beachside Restaurant patio. And even in these less than perfect birding conditions, it was hard not to be ecstatic over the rain!

The evening countdown confirmed our suspicion that we might be looking at a lower-than-normal species total, but all of us were surprised at just how low: 195 at the evening’s close, which rose by one to 196 in the final compilation (we thought we had missed Ospreys, but one was found at east Devereux). This total is Santa Barbara’s lowest in over 25 years, and many factors have played a part. The drought and its impact on wintering species has finally caught up to us—the birds are simply not here. The day’s weather conditions also made finding anything a challenge, so individual totals for many species—particularly land birds—were low. During the compiling process the week after Count Day, we consistently found many numbers down a third or more from normal. And as we are learning from other Southern California counts, similar trends were evident in many places. Our notable misses were legion this year: American Bittern, Virginia Rail, Dunlin, Western Sandpiper, Greater Roadrunner, Black-throated Gray Warbler, and all oriole species except Bullock’s. As in many Southern California counts this season, montane species were scarce: no Red-breasted Nuthatch, no Pine Siskin, no Mountain Chickadee. Our one montane exception was Townsend’s Solitaire, a nice surprise at the end of the day on La Cumbre Peak.

On the positive side, the 117th CBC brought two new species to our records: Laughing Gull, presumably the same bird lingering since first recorded early last summer, and Prairie Warbler, found just before count day. The returning Tufted Duck, Vermilion Flycatcher, and Warbling Vireo were all seen on count day, as were nice surprises such as an immature Bald Eagle, seen first at UCSB, then over Shoreline Park, then in Montecito, clearly moving east! Other highlights: six Common Mergansers flying up the Santa Ynez River toward Gibraltar Reservoir; American White Pelican at Gibraltar Reservoir (a record high count); Mountain Quail calling at West Camino Cielo; Spotted Owl and Northern Saw-whet Owl in the mountains; Tropical Kingbird at Chase Palm Park; Tennessee Warbler in Goleta; Swamp Sparrow at the Zoo; and stakeouts including Eurasian Wigeon, Costa’s Hummingbird, and Black-headed Grosbeak.

For those of you who enjoy rankings, here are a few national high counts (some totals may still be unofficial):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Total</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>229 Matagorda County/Mad Island Marsh, TX</td>
<td>200 Morro Bay, CA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>210 San Diego, CA</td>
<td>197 Point Reyes, CA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>206 Guadalupe River Delta, TX</td>
<td>196 Santa Barbara</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You can find all the bird totals on the Santa Barbara CBC website, casbbirdcount.org, by clicking on Latest Count Results. Our thanks go to all of you who make it possible, and especially to Santa Barbara Audubon and the dinner committee, area coordinators, the compilation committee, and the Museum of Natural History for supporting this community effort.

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.
WINTER BIRD COUNT 4 KIDS: A SOARING SUCCESS!

By Janice Levasheff

The sun shone brightly at Lake Los Carneros on January 21! Fifty-seven kids attended, and preliminary counts indicate that we observed about 50 species!

Highlights from one of the groups included: White-tailed Kites, a soaring pair of Red-tailed Hawks, and close views of Acorn Woodpeckers. We especially enjoyed a sighting of a Great Blue Heron and Great Egret standing near each other, motionless and majestic in the first grassy field we passed. The kids loved the giant goofy bills on the Northern Shovelers as well.

Thank you to the WBC4KIDS committee, leaders, and volunteers, and to Coni Edick for bringing a special guest: Ivan the Red-tailed Hawk! And to the City of Goleta, the UCSB Associated Students Coastal Fund, Nothing Bundt Cakes, Smart & Final, and Trader Joe’s - your support contributed to the success of this event. Our committee is already looking forward to another fun WBC4KIDS next year!

SALVATION ARMY KIDS AFTER-SCHOOL BIRD TRIPS

By Judy Blue

After seeing our WBC4KIDS flyer, teacher Mark Matthias of the Salvation Army contacted Santa Barbara Audubon to ask if a monthly field trip could be arranged for children in their After-School Program. It sounded like a fun commitment, so I jumped at the chance to participate and share information about our local birds and environment. Often, other leaders join me. Thanks to Carol Rae, Jayne, Karen, Libby, Dennis and others for their enthusiasm and assistance.

Since February 2016, we have had one field trip each month from 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m., usually visiting Goleta Beach or Lake Los Carneros. The children are divided into two groups by grade level (K-2 and 3-6) with approximately 20 in each group, and the groups participate in alternating months. The kids are eager to learn about birds, lizards, snakes, or anything else that crawls or flies!

Our visit to the Audubon Aviary at the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History was a big hit. Seven wonderful birds of prey were out with handlers. Following a discussion of each bird’s species and individual history, the children observed the birds being fed, leading to some surprised exclamations. As the raptors tore into their prey, the kids learned about the cycle of nature, too!

Mark Matthias wrote, “It may not always seem like it, but they are soaking up knowledge and the whole experience. Our relationship with you and the Audubon Society is really wonderful! Thank you so much for all you do for the children of the After-School Program.”
CACHUMA LAKE RESERVOIR: BODY OF WATER, BODY OF CONTRADICTIONS
Presentation by Liz Gaspar
Wednesday, April 26, 7:30 p.m. (Doors open at 7:00 p.m.)
Location: Farrand Hall, Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History

Created during the 1950s, Cachuma Lake stores water for the communities and agricultural industry of Santa Barbara County. Although it is managed for human use, the reservoir often behaves as a natural lake does. Join Liz Gaspar for a look at the many ways Cachuma Lake serves alternately as benefit and detriment to both humans and wildlife. We’ll take a detailed look at the lake’s contradictory effects on birds.

Liz Gaspar worked for Santa Barbara County Parks as a park naturalist at Cachuma Lake for 20 years, leading the lake cruises and managing the outdoor education program. In addition, she conducted numerous seasonal bird surveys, including the annual bald eagle count. Liz retired from Cachuma in 2015, but, as so many people do these days, eagerly monitors the lake level.

DRAGONFLIES OF SANTA BARBARA COUNTY
Presented by Hugh Ranson
Wednesday, May 24, 7:30 p.m. (Doors open at 7:00 p.m.)
Location: Farrand Hall, Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History

Hugh’s interest in birds began at an early age in his native England. More recently, he became fascinated by dragonflies, and in the past five years he has spent hundreds of hours in the field, helping further our understanding of the dragonflies of Santa Barbara County. He teaches fifth grade in Goleta, and can always be found on his lunch break at a local pond, watching, netting, and photographing dragonflies.

Hugh will talk about the natural history of dragonflies, briefly explaining how, when, and where to study members of order odonata (often called “ode” by their admirers). He will then devote the bulk of his time to showing photos of some of the more common dragonflies and pointing out the key features that help identify them.
SBAS: FIELD TRIPS

Everyone is welcome! These trips are fun for both beginning and expert bird lovers. Trips are free unless otherwise noted. Please contact Jack Sanford, email: birdsandtennis@hotmail.com for details or questions.

RANCHO LA VINA

4455 Santa Rosa Road, between Buellton & Lompoc

Saturday, April 15, 2017 (9:00 a.m. -12:00 noon; 8:00 a.m. at carpool location)

Target Birds: Spring Migrants, Songbirds, Woodpeckers, etc.

Leader: Paul Keller

Directions: We will carpool at 8:00 a.m. from the upper corner parking lot of the Sears Shopping Center ($8 gas money to drivers). Directions to the Rancho are as follows: Hwy 101 to Santa Rosa Road off-ramp just before Buellton. We will park and meet at #4455 Santa Rosa Road at 9:00 a.m. Bring water and a snack, and wear shoes that are comfortable for some leisurely walking. Binoculars and spotting scopes are useful. Enjoy ranch owner Jose Baer’s generous hospitality in allowing us to bird his ranch.

NOJOQUI FALLS COUNTY PARK

Saturday, May 20, 2017 (9:00 a.m.-12:00 noon; 8:00 a.m. at carpool location)

Target Birds: Yellow-billed Magpies, Purple Martins, Blue Grosbeaks, Lazuli Buntings, Barn Owls, Vireos, Towhees, Woodpeckers, and Orioles.

Leader: Rob Lindsay

Directions: We will carpool at 8:00 a.m. from the upper corner parking lot of the Sears Shopping Center ($8.00 gas money to drivers). We will take Hwy 101 north to the Nojoqui Falls turn off (the next turn off after a large truck parking area). We will hike to the falls (an easy walk) and then bird the entire park. If you plan on meeting us there, we will park and meet at the parking area nearest the falls at 9:00 a.m. Bring water, a snack, or lunch.

Photos by David Levasheff
SBAS: FRIDAY BIRD WALKS

ENNISBROOK NATURE TRAIL
April 14, 2017 (8:30 a.m.-10:30 a.m.)
Target Birds: Nuthatches, Common Yellowthroats, Townsend’s Warblers, Spotted Towhees, etc.
Directions: Take Hwy 101 to the Sheffield Drive exit. Follow Sheffield Drive and turn left on San Leandro Lane (first left). The nature trail is located on the right side of the road, past a white picket fence near a pump house. We will park and meet near the entrance gate.

TUCKER’S GROVE AND KIWANIS MEADOWS
April 28, 2017 (8:30 a.m.-10:30 a.m.)
Target Birds: Cooper’s Hawks, American Robins, Lesser Goldfinches, Towhees, etc.
Directions: Take Hwy 101 and exit Turnpike Road off-ramp. Turn towards the mountains and cross Cathedral Oaks Road. Enter San Antonio County Park (Tucker’s Grove). We will park and meet near the playground restroom area.

UCSB CAMPUS LAGOON
May 12, 2017 (8:30 a.m.-10:30 a.m.)
Target Birds: Grebes, Herons, Dowitchers, Ducks, Godwits, Plovers, etc.
Directions: From Hwy 101 south, take the Ward Memorial Blvd. exit. From Ward Memorial Blvd., take the Goleta Beach County Park exit and park at the west end (nearest UCSB campus) of the Goleta Beach parking lot. Coming from the north on Hwy 101, take the Fairview Avenue off-ramp and head towards the ocean. Follow Fairview Avenue, which turns into Fowler Road, and turn right into the Goleta Beach County Park. We will park and meet at the west end of the Goleta Beach parking lot (nearest the UCSB campus).

SAN JOSE CREEK & OPEN SPACE
May 26, 2017 (8:30 a.m.-10:30 a.m.)
Target Birds: Hummingbirds, Woodpeckers, Songbirds, maybe even an Owl, etc.
Directions: Take Hwy 101 to the Patterson Avenue off-ramp and turn north towards the mountains. Turn left on Parejo Drive (second street from Hwy 101). Follow Parejo Drive to the end. Turn right on Merida Drive. We will meet and park at the end of Merida Drive.

WATCH YOUR STEP!
WHEN VISITING COAL OIL POINT
PLEASE BE CAREFUL OF ME!
THANK YOU

Judy Blue, Joan Cotich, their committee and many volunteers who supported our successful Winter Bird Count 4 Kids. Thanks to community supporters Nothing Bundt Cakes, Smart & Final, & Trader Joe’s.

Nancy States for donating six new pairs of binoculars for our young people’s programs.

Jack Sanford for organizing our free bird walks and field trips.

Trent Watanabe of Montecito Journal and Santa Barbara Sentinel for his professional layout of El Tecolote!

GO PAPERLESS!

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Susan Levine
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Enjoying the CBC dinner.
**SBAS: NEWS FROM EYES IN THE SKY**

**ARIES – AUDUBON RAPTORS INTERACTIVE EDUCATION FOR SENIORS**

*by Coni Edick, Eyes in the Sky volunteer*

In January, Eyes in the Sky launched a new program created specifically for seniors—ARIES (Audubon Raptors Interactive Education for Seniors). This program offers up-close-and-personal raptor presentations in Santa Barbara area retirement homes. It also provides an important training opportunity for EITS volunteers seeking to develop their presentation skills. ARIES is funded by a generous $14,000 grant from the Legacy Foundation.

Six ARIES presentations have been given so far, at Maravilla, Wood Glen Hall, Alexander Gardens, Garden Court, Free Methodist Church, and Atterdag Village in Solvang. A total of 186 seniors have delighted in having close-up encounters with the birds and hearing the moving stories they inspire.

In addition to group presentations, ARIES also provides an option where birds can be taken directly to individual seniors who are bedridden. Wood Glen Hall will be the first facility to participate in this one-on-one format.

If the measure of a program’s success is gauged by the number of smiles it generates, ARIES has been very successful indeed! Thanks to everyone participating in the program, and a special thanks to Sean McGrath, the local contact for the Legacy Foundation.

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For information, please contact:

Dolores Pollock at president@SantaBarbaraAudubon.com

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SATURDAY, APRIL 22
ALAMEDA PARK
11:00 a.m. - 7:00 p.m.