

# EITecolote

Fall 2023 • Santa Barbara Audubon Society



**SBAS Turns 60**

**Birders of SB:  
Meet Sophie Cameron**

**The Day of the Gull**



## President's Message

*"The Bird Study Group of the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History, at its meeting on January 25, 1963, indicated by straw vote that it was interested in the formation of a local Audubon Branch . . . [to] join with others in promoting sound conservation measures and the preservation of green areas and natural wildlife habitats."*

**T**hus begins the oldest issue in our online *El Tecolote* archive, the Bird Study Group's January 1963 bulletin, which by October 1963 had become this Santa Barbara Audubon Society newsletter, *El Tecolote*.

To mark our 60th year milestone, we are printing this issue in color,\* with a look back at our history and stories of an exceptionally rare bird appearance this year – a first record for Santa Barbara County.

This year also brought a sequence of sad news with the passing of Joan Easton Lentz, Fred Emerson, and Brad Schram. All three were key threads in the rich tapestry of local birding history and Santa Barbara Audubon, and we honor them in this issue.

I can't help but think that, as leaders who leave a legacy of the love of birds and nature, Joan, Fred, and Brad would be pleased to read about the next generation of birders featured in this issue as well.

Stow Grove Park was again a shady oasis for our Annual Membership Meeting and Get-Together. Glendessary Jam provided music, and over 50 members and families shared hors d'oeuvres, perused the free drawing and giveaway tables, caught up with long-time friends, and made new ones. The 2023-2024 Board slate (listed on the next page) was accepted by unanimous vote of members present. New this year are Dane St. George, Field Trips Coordinator, and Jessica Prichard, Education Chair. Read more about Dane on page 15.

Many thanks to those who supported the event, including Board members, Alex Jillson for audio equipment, and Glendessary Jam for the fun music!

**Janice Levasheff, SBAS President**

### Thank You!

- Kevin Zimmer, Nancy Emerson, Gib Lentz, Rebecca Coulter, Paul Lehman, Jon Dunn, Libby Patten, Liz Muraoka, Dolores Pollock, and Joan Kent, who contributed to the tributes to Brad Schram, Fred Emerson, and Joan Lentz.
- The Unitarian Society of Santa Barbara for donating their May offering.
- Conservation/Science Committee members Scott Cooper, Lori Gaskin, and Steve Ferry for advocating for birds and habitat on Heritage Ridge and Strauss Wind Farm Project.
- Mark Holmgren, Adrian O'Loughlen, and David Levasheff for their work on the Breeding Bird Study and fielding bird questions for our chapter.
- The field trips team of Peter Thompson, Dane St. George, Nick Lethaby, Rob Lindsay, Guy Tingos, Jeff Hanson, and Peggy Kearns.
- CeCe Borhardt, for volunteering on our Winter Bird Count for Kids Committee.
- Eyes in the Sky volunteers for their heart and dedication. Special thanks to Coni Edick for volunteering many extra hours.
- Our talented staff: Katherine Emery, Hannah Atkinson, Vanessa Delnavaz, and Meet Your Wild Neighbor teachers Wendy Kanter and Patti Smart.
- Our Board, volunteers, members, grantors, and donors, for continued, generous support.
- Luke Swetland and team at the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History.
- Our Program Co-Presenters: Santa Barbara Botanic Garden, Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History, and UCSB Bren School of Environmental Science and Management.

\*Assistance with the cost of printing this special color edition of *El Tecolote* was provided by an anonymous donor. A listing of 2022-23 donors will appear in the Winter issue of *El Tecolote*.



Santiago Lupi with Janice Levasheff, SBAS Board President, at the Annual Membership Meeting.

*Photo by Jackie Pelaez*

### Birding into the Future

I started birding when I was in sixth grade and haven't looked back. The birding community in Santa Barbara and SBAS have been essential in my birding journey and a motivator to continue to where I am now. They have been immensely supportive, giving me opportunities to participate in various bird counts and getting the Western Field Ornithologists scholarship for last year's conference. I have now finished my senior year at Dos Pueblos High School and am about to go into my first year at UC Berkeley. I was inspired to major in environmental sciences at Berkeley because of my interest in birds and nature. I'm so excited to see where my passion for birds will take me!

**Santiago Lupi**

# SANTA BARBARA AUDUBON SOCIETY

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[sbcobirding.groups.io/g/main](http://sbcobirding.groups.io/g/main)

Officers and Chairs meet the second Wednesday of the month September through June. Members are welcome to attend.

Swallow-tailed Gull. Photo by Sophie Cameron

# El Tecolote

The magazine of the Santa Barbara Audubon Society

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Please fill out this form and mail it with your check (address below). Make checks out to: **SBAS**

I'll be a Chapter-Supporting Member!  New  Renewing

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Chapter memberships are separate from National Audubon memberships. 100% of your dues stay local and keep SBAS strong and sustainable so we can protect birds and their habitat now and into the future. You enable us to continue sharing the joys and importance of birds with all.

**Santa Barbara Audubon Society, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Your membership and any additional donation are tax deductible.**

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**Or, join at: [SantaBarbaraAudubon.org/join-sbas](http://SantaBarbaraAudubon.org/join-sbas)**

**SBAS does not share personal information with other organizations. Thank you for your support.**



## BABY KESTREL IN TRAINING

**A**t Eyes in the Sky, we're gathering a whole flock of new arrivals! Only a few months ago, we welcomed Ace the Peregrine Falcon; and last November, Mouse the American Kestrel joined the team. Now, we welcome a second American Kestrel: an adorable juvenile named Kiki.

Kiki came into rehab at only two days old, as the sole survivor of a destroyed nest. Human destruction of nesting sites, especially if trees are trimmed in the spring, displaces countless baby birds each year. Kiki was lucky to be rescued, but unluckily, there were no adult kestrels to raise her. She imprinted on humans immediately.

Like her fellow kestrel Mouse, and like Max the Great Horned Owl, Kiki now permanently believes humans to be her parents, competition, and even potential mates. Like all imprinted birds, she is considered non-releasable and wouldn't fare well in the wild. We were immensely lucky to receive her. She now lives beside Mouse, where she has begun training as an ambassador bird.

We are excited to welcome a new bird into the family!

**Hannah Atkinson, Eyes in the Sky Director**

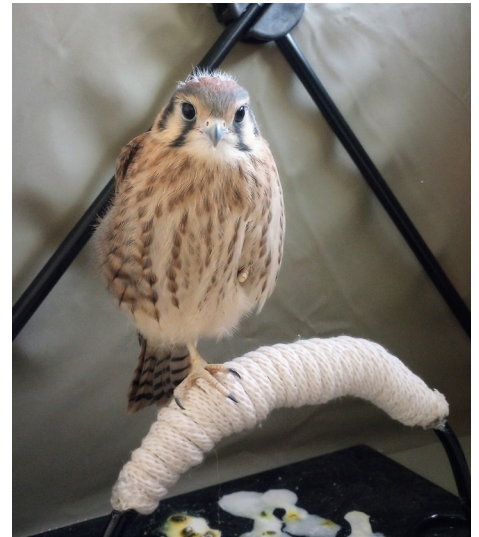


Photo by Hannah Atkinson



*Through our Education and Conservation/Science committees, Santa Barbara Audubon Society (SBAS) is actively working on initiatives. This update provides an overview of selected current projects, goals, and opportunities for member engagement.*



Dear SBAS Friends, Members, and Supporters,

SBAS protects area birdlife and habitat and connects people with birds through education, conservation, and science.

Throughout the summer, our Eyes in the Sky (EITS) program provided educational live raptor presentations at local camps, Santa Barbara County Parks (such as Cachuma Lake), other public venues, and the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History. This fall, we'll introduce to local schools a new SBAS Feather Box interactive exhibit with feather specimens and replica bones, and refresh and grow our Meet Your Wild Neighbor curriculum to meet increasing demand for our quality educational outreach.

Ongoing conservation and community science initiatives included work by Don Schroeder and his team monitoring Western

Bluebirds and Tree Swallows through the Next Box Project at Lake Los Carneros in Goleta. Thank you to Don Schroeder, Steve Senesac, and SBAS and UCSB volunteers for the care and logistics that make this Nest Box Project possible.

Our Conservation/Science committee proactively worked with the City of Goleta using Santa Barbara County Breeding Bird Study data to help inform management decisions at Ellwood Mesa/Sperling Preserve Open Space in Goleta. The purpose of the Nesting Bird Management Plan is to help avoid impacts to nesting birds (such as White-tailed Kites) in this important

natural area.

Protecting birds and their habitats is truly a community collaboration and we thank you, SBAS members, and our community partners for supporting these efforts.

As we begin the 2023-2024 fiscal year – marking our 60th year as a local, volunteer-driven, environmental nonprofit – we welcome you to share your passion for birds, invite a friend, attend a fun bird walk, and use your voice to protect local birdlife. Learn more at [SantaBarbaraAudubon.org](http://SantaBarbaraAudubon.org).

**Katherine Emery, Executive Director  
Santa Barbara Audubon Society**

### Trimming Time

Nesting activity is winding down. September is the month to start cutting back any vegetation to be removed. The best months for bird-friendly tree maintenance are September to February. Check for nests and watch for signs of nesting before trimming. Find our Conservation/Science Committee's guide to bird-friendly vegetation at [SantaBarbaraAudubon.org](http://SantaBarbaraAudubon.org) under Additional Resources.

# Birders of Santa Barbara: First of a Series

*Meet Sophie Cameron, a recent UCSB graduate in Biological Sciences. Sophie was interviewed by Peggy Kearns, retired SBCC science counselor, Santa Barbara resident for 48 years, and birder for 15 years.*

**Early memories:** Growing up in Santa Barbara and enjoying nature with my Dad, I began photographing animals when I received a point-and-shoot camera in grade school.

**Photo awards:** My photo of a House Finch and Tropical Kingbird vying for a perch was published in Macauley Library's Best Bird Photos 2023. I had no idea how much it would blow up in popularity! See cover photo.

**Bird numbers:** I've been birding for five years and have 350 birds on my County list. I look forward to joining the 400 Club! The Santa Barbara birding community is welcoming and supportive.

**Spark bird:** It's the Blue-footed Booby, which I saw on Santa Barbara Island during a pelagic trip a few years ago.

**Rare bird:** On July 19, I joined in the search for the Swallow-tailed Gull, looking at Ocean Park and Jalama Beach but coming up empty. When it was found again, I rushed back to photograph it.

**Bird Learning:** My work, volunteer time, and education prepared me well for teaching. I love sharing birds, nature, wildlife with others. As a student, I took a UC course "California Ecology and Conservation" which required seven weeks of camping throughout the UC Reserve System; my research was later published.

**Bird Ambassador:** I'm a naturalist at the Bacara in the "Ambassadors of the Environment" program, and a naturalist in the education department at the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History, camera monitoring wildlife at Point Conception and Coal Oil Point Reserve.

**Favorite Birding Spots:** Channel Islands, San Marcos Foothills, Refugio Canyon, Figueroa Mountain, and Point Conception. Recently,



High Island in Texas provided an unforgettable warbler fest.

**Top Birding Adventure:** New Cuyama with Linus Blomqvist. We started at 2 a.m. and ended late in the afternoon. We were drained, tired, and ready to leave when we spotted two California Condors flying overhead. We made sure our feet were in Santa Barbara County when we took photos of those condors!

**Bird Goals:** To understand habitat, migration, and the changing ranges of birds.

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## Love Film Goes to France

It was a pleasure working with SB Audubon to make the film "Why Are Birds Important?" and an honor being invited to screen the short film at



the prestigious Bird and Nature Film Festival in France.

The festival took place in Abbeville next to the National Nature Reserve of the Somme, a birding hotspot in France. On arriving in Abbeville we were welcomed at festival headquarters where we met other filmmakers and photographers from around the world. The film was translated and dubbed in French and screened eight times in different venues, engaging audiences in the question posed by its title.

A guided field trip brought the filmmakers and photographers on a wonderful day-long excursion to

the reserve to see nesting storks and many other area birds unfamiliar to me. I was delighted to hear my first Nightingales in the forest as well as to see how popular birding is with people of all ages there.

In addition to many amazing films, we saw exhibits of extraordinary birds. (Not surprisingly, the food was delicious.) It was a treat to attend the festival and represent Santa Barbara Audubon in France.

**Michael Love, film director  
Sage Hill Films**

*Special thanks to the Santa Barbara Foundation for support of this film.*





# SIXTY YEARS, AND COUNTING

By Joan Easton Lentz

Plumbeous Vireo. Photo by Hugh Ranson

The first time I was put in charge of a Christmas Bird Count area, I was terribly serious about getting it right. Not only that, I'd found a rare bird (they were all pretty much rare to me!) in Manning Park, and I was determined it would be a "stakeout" for the upcoming CBC. It was a Plumbeous Vireo, probably one of the plainest looking birds in the West. I'd found it and I thought I was an ace.

My friends decided I was crazy, spending all that time chasing birds. I was gradually learning more about birds, while taking classes, and doing field research. And it all started with the help of a local Audubon field trip.

That was in 1981. We had the following rarities on that CBC: Rufous Hummer, Allen's Hummer, Western Flycatcher, Gray-headed Junco, Hermit Warbler, Grace's Warbler, Warbling Vireo, Scott's Oriole (2), Baltimore Oriole, Bullock's Oriole, and Western Tanager (2). (Nowadays, some of those rarities have changed names.)

**But wait, congrats to Santa Barbara Audubon Society on its 60th Anniversary!** No other community group has such a pure sense of passion for birds. And

with that comes the strong support that Audubon gives to local habitats for birds. If there aren't places to live, the birds will leave. So we defend wetlands and grasslands, shores and streams – anywhere birds are likely to want to make their homes. We bring data to city and county officials, we help new birders, birders who want to take a class, and birders who want to go on a field trip. We offer presentations at our monthly meetings. We tell you which rare birds are in town, and we visit classrooms

so youngsters understand what a common bird is, and which ones live in Santa Barbara.

In summary, if you want to find out what's happening in the bird world, Santa Barbara Audubon Society is the place to go.

**When our Audubon chapter got started in the 1960s** it was led by a battleguard of women who stood up for birds, conservation of land, and preservation of habitat. Joy Parkinson, Margaret Millar, and Fifi Webster were ready to take on the world, if it was a cause that would help birds. And they did, too. Jan Hamber was the editor of *El Tecolote*. What a great group.

**Joan Easton Lentz wrote this article for *El Tecolote* to commemorate the 60th anniversary of SBAS. It was completed in the summer of 2023, just a few weeks before her passing. SBAS is honored to share her words here. Read more about Joan on page 9.**

Gradually, more and more folks got the birding bug. Through the 1990s and the early 2000s, birding began to take over as one of the most popular hobbies in the U.S. In some cases, birding and photography went hand in hand. A rewarding relationship existed between photographers as new birders, and birders who wanted to record their sightings through photography.

And our local Audubon Chapter began to grow, too: nest box programs, Eyes in the Sky, Winter Bird Count for Kids, restoration planting, San Marcos Foothills, and on and on.

**When I think of Santa Barbara Audubon, I know my brain goes to the words “Christmas Bird Count.”** The Christmas Bird Count is a census taken every year at the same coordinates, the center of a circle at the corner of San Marcos Pass and Foothill Road. Each group or individual tallies the number and type of bird to be found in their assigned territory. The duration is 24 hours, and the time clock is ticking. Santa Barbara is usually in the top five or ten in the U.S. when the grand totals come in. But whatever the results, the Bird Count has always been an outstanding way to bring together our community of birders and assign them a section to count.

When Paul Lehman left town, he assumed that I’d be taking over from him as compiler of the CBC. After an initial panic attack, I found myself learning more about the geography of southern Santa Barbara County than I’d thought possible. And I became acquainted with a lot of skilled birders, many in town, a few out of town. In addition, I was able to persuade students in my bird classes to sign up for their first Christmas Count. They had a blast, loved it all.

By now, our tiny CBC had blossomed to a community event. We were generously hosted by the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History for the Countdown, and selecting Fleischmann Auditorium as a gathering point was perfect. As dusk approached, everyone started filing into the Museum. We were offering a simple hot dinner for a ticket that could be purchased beforehand. Close to 200 people usually attended, and all had come to celebrate, hear what birds were found, and meet friends we hadn’t seen for awhile.

If I had to choose one time in my life which I will recall with pure joy, it would be those wonderful minutes standing in front of all those birders, reading off the names of exciting birds at the Countdown.

In 2006, our CBC was earmarked with a huge number of species. We were up to 224: a record. But were there rare birds as in 1981? No. With the exception of 2006, were bird numbers going up or down? Down.

On the coastal grasslands we were missing Horned Lark, Western Meadowlark, and Chipping Sparrow. Of the land birds which visit blooming Eucalyptus and various blossoming hedges, numbers were down in songbirds. Yellow-rumped Warbler, Black-and-white Warbler, White-crowned Sparrow, for example, as well as the orioles were all low.

And so it goes, until we come up to 2022, in which year the buckets of rain came down with a fury on our CBC day: hard to do much counting of birds, let alone finding them to count. But we did have lots of laughs... So drought-afflicted we were, we didn’t realize the cost of having an enormous storm aim at us on Count Day.



Rebecca Coulter, Chris Coulter, and a happy Joan Lentz at a Christmas Bird Count.  
*Photo by Liz Muraoka*

We’d like to thank Rebecca Coulter, for her leadership on subsequent Christmas Counts and her committee, Liz Muraoka, Joan Murdoch, and Libby Patten; Dave Compton, for his County record keeping over the past 20 years; Krista Fahy for monitoring Audubon records in digital storage. And a thank you to Katherine Emery for her help as our current Executive Director.

**We thank our Audubon presidents\*, former and current:**

- |                  |                  |                 |                   |              |
|------------------|------------------|-----------------|-------------------|--------------|
| Mary Ann Ambrose | Eileen Gray      | Nelson Metcalf  | Joy Parkinson     | Sally Walker |
| Chris Benesh     | Ron Hirst        | Margaret Millar | Dolores Pollock   | Fifi Webster |
| Darlene Chirman  | Everett King     | Rich Miller     | Ginger Puddicombe |              |
| Lauren DeChant   | Janice Levasheff | Jim Mills       | Brad Schram       |              |
| Steve Ferry      | Rob Lindsay      | Lee Moldaver    | Tomi Sollen       |              |

In honor of their leadership over the years, each of the folks above deserves a big thank you from those of us who’ve watched you work your magic. It’s been a great 60 years. Now for 60 more!

*\*The list of chapter presidents was compiled through a search of newsletter archives. If you know of a correction to this historical list, please reach out to SBAS with information.*





# PASSAGES

By Rebecca Coulter

**We all come to birding** along different paths. For some, spending time alone in nature is the best way to observe and learn about birds. For others, the energy of birding with friends is what we seek. For most of us, there is some of both in our birding story. And often, the people we meet in the field become our mentors, our teachers, and

our dear friends. The Santa Barbara Audubon community mourns the recent passing of Fred Emerson, Brad Schram and Joan Lentz – three people who touched the lives of so many of us over the decades. We are better birders, better stewards of nature, and better humans for having crossed paths with them.

## FRED EMERSON

Fred came to birding and teaching after two other careers—wildlife biology and medicine. He taught field birding classes for the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History for 25 years, and for many local birders taking his classes opened the door to a lifetime of enjoying nature. Whether he was waxing philosophical or offering sly comedy, birding with Fred was a memorable experience, underscored by his immense knowledge of habitat, behavior, and the natural history of our region. His ability to welcome all comers and put us at ease was a gift only great teachers possess. After moving to Solvang, Fred formed a long relationship with the UCSB Sedgwick Reserve, as a docent, hike leader, and docent trainer in addition to conducting weekly bird surveys of the site. His work at Sedgwick has deepened the understanding of bird status and distribution at this im-

portant location and throughout the Santa Ynez Valley. The ripples of Fred's passion for birding—and for teaching



*Photo courtesy of Nancy Emerson*

about birds—are wide indeed. We will deeply miss his commitment to our Audubon community, and honor his

memory every time we share the joys of birding with others.

**Rebecca Coulter**

Fred had the unique ability to describe the looks and sounds of birds with pithy humor, in a way you would always remember—like the Oak Titmouse with its “large, black innocent eye.” An excellent ear-birder, he could imitate key vocalizations such as the whit call of a Swainson's Thrush, only to have one then pop out unexpectedly from a creekside tangle. That's Fred—incredibly broad knowledge of the natural world with a dash of Doctor Doolittle. I imagine many of us will often remember Fred's brilliant insights and his playful, gentle spirit when we're out searching for birds or hear a particularly silly, but clever, play on words.

**Libby Patten**

## BRAD SCHRAM

Brad had deep roots in Santa Barbara County and was a former SBAS president (1978-80). His presence was a highlight at every rare bird event in our Chapter's history. In the early 1970s, he was part of a rarified group of young birders who defined a new approach to studying, tracking, and confirming status and distribution of species—particularly vagrants—in our county and region, discovering new hotspots and finding several important county bird records. After moving to San Luis Obispo County, Brad kept a close eye on Santa Barbara County bird activity, appeared at most rare bird sightings, and regularly

participated in our CBC. His books on bird-finding in Southern California, and popular tours as a guide with Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT) enriched many of our own birding explorations at home and abroad. When meeting him in the field, Brad's deeply kind and welcoming spirit was offered to veteran and novice birder alike; the shared joy in a discovery was the common language, regardless of experience. He embodied the generosity of the birding community, and we will miss his presence whenever rarities appear and friends gather to enjoy them.

**Rebecca Coulter**



*Photo by Liz Muraoka*



When I moved to Santa Barbara as a freshman, and car-less, in 1974, I contacted Brad, who was incredibly generous in showing and birding with me at all the local hotspots at the time—especially in Goleta—soon expanding elsewhere along the South Coast and the mountains. He was also a great buddy on long-distance rare-bird chases for the following decade, a collaborator on magazine articles, the master of ceremonies at my wedding, and just an all-around kind, generous, and funny fellow. He, along with Richard Webster, was one of the earliest blazers of modern-day birding in Santa Barbara County.

**Paul Lehman**

I knew Brad best when he lived in San Luis Obispo County (Arroyo Grande). I had many fine visits and birded there often. In the fall of 1988 I picked him up in Arroyo Grande three separate times and we drove to the Monterey area for these first state records: Terek Sandpiper, Long-toed Stint, and Gray Wagtail. They are still the only California records. Brad and I often had long talks about the scene, talking about much, including politics. Our views often differed, but they were always politely exchanged and we agreed about more than we thought. I was grateful for those talks.

Brad was always kind, polite, and respectful. The last time I saw him was in January of this year in connection

with the Morro Bay Birding Festival. Brad had found a book to give me and to then pass on to Lara Tseng, a young ornithologist I am mentoring along with Gillian Martin. It was Ralph Hoffmann's *Birds of the Pacific States*, published by Houghton Mifflin in 1927. We both loved the way Hoffmann wrote, and when Brad got the copy of the book he thought of Lara and wanted her to have it.

Always savor the times with old friends as they will live on with you and bring a smile as your own clock ticks on. All who knew Brad will always remember him as a class act. His distinctive voice will long live on with those who knew him.

**Jon Dunn**

## JOAN EASTON LENTZ

The birding community lost a true giant on July 25 with the passing of Joan E. Lentz. I would like to think of her as the Queen of present-day birding in Santa Barbara County. A lifelong Santa Barbara resident, she was instrumental in so many ways in maintaining high standards of avian record-keeping and, even more important, in introducing and furthering an interest in local birds and natural history to countless legions of observers.

I first met Joan in the late 1970s and we quickly became birding buds and explored many of the county's nooks and crannies together—from the South Coast to Santa Maria to Big Pine Mountain to the Cuyama Valley. When I moved out of the county in 1994, I turned over most of my local birding duties to her: maintaining the county record keeping, organizing and compiling the Santa Barbara Christmas Bird Count, and teaching adult education bird classes.

Joan did an excellent job compiling the seasonal bird reports for a good number of years, before turning over that job to Dave

Compton. She grew the Santa Barbara CBC into a truly major event, from one that easily fit the small compilation dinner in the Museum's Bird Habitat Hall to a grand event barely fitting the gathering in Fleischmann Auditorium, and all the while maintaining high standards of accuracy. She held this compiler's position for many, many years until recently turning the reins over to Rebecca Coulter. And Joan became an extremely popular teacher of adult education birding classes. Through both her teaching and authorship of multiple popular books covering regional birds and natural history, including *Birdwatching: A Guide for Beginners* and *A Naturalist's Guide to the Santa Barbara Region*, she introduced and provided the "hook" to so many of today's field observers. Joan also wrote technical papers, such as one summarizing the birdlife of the region's highest, conifer-clad peaks.

Joan was also simply one of the nicest and most generous of people. Smart. Fun. A little silly. Always kind and good-natured. Her and Gib's home in Montecito was my home-away-from-home when I would make regular visits to Santa Barbara since



Photo by Liz Muraoka

moving away some 30 years ago. I will sorely miss that close friendship and her infectious enthusiasm. I will miss hearing her voice proclaiming, "Jeezo."

I think many lovers of Santa Barbara birds and natural history whose spark began between the early 1990s and 2020s, can, in some major way, thank Joan Lentz for helping ignite that fire by being a true mentor and inspiration.

**Paul Lehman**

# THE DAY OF THE GULL



Swallow-tailed Gull at Goleta Beach. Photo by Eunice Schroeder

I started birding in September 2021, once I finally had ample time after retiring from my job as a UCSB librarian earlier that year. My first birding experiences were that fall and early winter in the terrific birding classes taught by Rebecca Coulter and Guy Tingos through the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History. Since then, I've birded far and wide around the county and much of the western U.S.

On the morning of July 19, 2023, I'd gone to Campus Point at UCSB to see if there was anything there of interest. While driving home, I decided to make a quick stop at Goleta Beach—you never know what you might find. There was nothing very notable until, looking down into the east end of the slough, I saw among a flock of Western Gulls a striking, black-headed gull I didn't recognize. With good views through a scope, I further noticed the bird's distinct red eye ring, large dark eyes, and pale gray and white markings at either end of a black bill. Trying to think of all the black-headed gulls I could remember, and checking my online field guides, I puzzled

over the bird and took a lot of photos in the favorable morning light. I thought this might indeed be a rarity and knew I'd need help on the ID.

When I contacted local birders and Alex Castelein, they immediately identified the bird as a Swallow-tailed Gull, a mega-rarity straight from the Galapagos! It was all a bit overwhelming. From there the day turned into an emotional roller coaster: first the dismay that the bird was no longer at the original location, then awe at how quickly local birders coordinated and fanned out to search for it all over county beaches, and, finally, joy that it had been re-found at Sands Beach, where many more would likely be able to share the probable once-in-a-lifetime experience of seeing and marveling at it.

This rare find that just dropped into my lap made me feel lucky indeed to have discovered the wonders of birding, and lucky to be part of such a generous and inspiring birding community.

**Eunice Schroeder**



## Connecting Points

The story didn't end at Goleta Beach because Eunice had the curiosity to pose the question: What was this unusual bird? Betsy Moles picks up the story.

Just as news of the Swallow-tailed Gull sighting began to surface, Betsy, an experienced local birder, was finishing a morning of birding that had started at North Campus Open Space. Her two-hour trek had brought her to the Snowy Plover Critical Habitat and Coal Oil Point Reserve area. At the mouth of the Devereux Slough, just as a flock of gulls took flight, she noted an unusual bird amongst the more expected gull species: one with a black head. It made her pause and wonder, but unaware of the rarity just being reported—and with no other field marks and no further views of the bird—she continued on her path.

At the same time, local birders had mobilized, checking every stretch of shore, hurriedly trying to re-find the bird. Online posts were zipping with search updates.

When Betsy finally checked her phone and found a flood of messages on a Swallow-tailed Gull, she called Hugh Ranson to share what she had seen. Though she hadn't seen enough to identify it definitively as the Swallow-tailed Gull, the pieces were starting to come together. And she had a hunch.

Birders got word of Betsy's sighting and doubled back for repeat searches of Devereux Slough. Success! Cody Quach, Lynn Scarlett, and others soon reported the bird had been refound at Sands Beach at the mouth of Devereux Slough, resting amidst a large, mixed flock.

Many birders, including the duo of Betsy Moles and Guy Tingos (the same person who taught Eunice's birding



Aaron and Emily Kreisberg (past SBAS Board Program Co-Chairs) and "baby birder" Leon joined friends at Sands Beach to see the rarity. *Photo by Bill Pollock* (class) raced to the area and were able to get good views of the Swallow-tailed Gull, a first record in Santa Barbara County, and only the sixth recorded in the U.S. Some drove hours to arrive before sundown, hoping the bird would not leave before they got to the beach.

As the sun set that evening, the Swallow-tailed Gull flew again, to places unknown. Its fleeting visit to Santa Barbara had brought the bird community together, first to search, then to see, and, standing on the beach on a perfect summer day, to wonder: What brought this extraordinary bird here? And where will it land next . . .



Swallow-tailed Gull at Sands Beach. *Photo by Ali Nygaard*



Swallow-tailed Gull at Sands Beach. *Photo by Nick Belardes*

*After a long wait, the bird finally took flight—it was incredible seeing its tail and the extended wings in the air. I've been birding for almost two years now. I still have so much to learn, but each season brings new and exciting birds, birders, and experiences! The Swallow-tailed Gull sighting brought my life list count to 275 species. I'm looking forward to seeing what other surprises the future might have in store.*

**Ali Nygaard**



# SWIFTLY SPEAKING . . .



White-throated Swift. Photo by Sue Cook

Recently I've become what you might call a "swiftie." I'm not obsessed with Taylor Swift; the swifts I'm interested in are of the feathered variety. Specifically, I've been watching White-throated Swifts (*Aeronautes saxatalis*), Santa Barbara's most common swift species and the only one that breeds in town. They are also, in my opinion, the prettiest swift in North America, with a forked tail and dapper white markings that make it seem like the birds are wearing tuxedos.

My adventure with swifts began on a regular day in May as I was monitoring a Northern Rough-winged Swallow colony on an underpass. Then came a surprise: a White-throated Swift flew right past my head and into one of the holes that the swallows were nesting in. This was the closest look I ever had at a swift. It took my breath away. These birds spend most of their time in the air flying, where it's hard to get a good look at them if you're a birder, only touching down when nesting and roosting.

I was hooked on swifts. So, I went back to the nest site. And then back again. And again. Every time I visit the nests I learn something new! Soon I realized that there were four nests, a total of eight nesting adults. They're committed parents, feeding their young about every 15 minutes. They also take on parenting as a team;

both parents feed the young, and the entire nesting flock circles above the nest site at feeding time, waiting for every parent to feed their chicks before leaving for another foraging trip. Previously, I had no idea how social and smart these birds are. After all, it's hard to get to know a bird if they're just a blur in the sky! They call to each other constantly, and both parents always greet each other when entering the nest.

If that's not cool enough, swifts are also fast—really fast! Some have speculated that White-throated Swifts can go 200 mph in level flight, and while I can't confirm this, I would believe it. In addition to all of this, this local colony of swifts is particularly special; they're nesting on a man-made structure (a highway underpass), and very low to the ground. Usually, White-throated Swifts nest on cliffs, but they're beginning to adapt to city life. Not only that, but this is one of very few nesting records of White-throated Swifts in Santa Barbara.

As a result of their high-flying lifestyle, swifts are hard to study, so not very much is known about them. I'm just a high school student, and watching these birds gave me the opportunity to see something very few people have seen. That's pretty incredible! Sometimes, the best surprises are right in your backyard.

**Lucy London, SBAS Student Representative**



# Fall 2023 Programs



Santa Barbara Botanic Garden



## Nora Livingston

**Following the Phalaropes: A Journey along the Migration Route of a Shorebird (illustrated)**

**Wednesday, September 27 • Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History, Farrand Hall • 7:30 p.m. • Free**

*Presented by Santa Barbara Audubon Society*

Wilson's Phalaropes (*Phalaropus tricolor*) are small shorebirds that travel over 5,000 miles each year between their breeding grounds in upper North America and their wintering grounds in South America. They depend on saline lakes for survival because the simple yet



Wilson's Phalaropes. Photo by David Lavasheff

productive ecosystem provides ample food to fuel these epic journeys. Nora Livingston will talk about the natural history of the Wilson's Phalarope and what she has learned by following the phalaropes along the longest leg of their migration route, from Mono Lake, a major migration staging area for phalaropes, to Laguna Mar Chiquita in Argentina, where 60 percent of the world's Wilson's Phalarope population spends their winters.

**Nora Livingston** is the Mono Lake Committee Lead Naturalist Guide in Lee Vining, California. She



Nora Livingston. Photo by Janice Lavasheff is a passionate naturalist who grew up immersed in nature. She leads field seminars and guided trips in the Mono Basin to inspire connection with and understanding of Mono Lake and its surrounding ecosystems.

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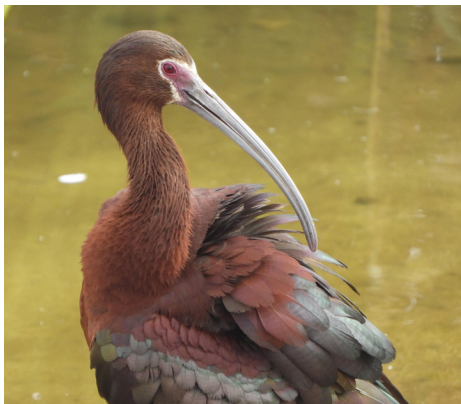
## Lynn Scarlett

**Bird Conservation around the World and in Our Own Backyards: From Awe to Action (illustrated)**

**Wednesday, October 18 • Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History, Fleischmann Auditorium • 7:30 p.m. • Free**

*Presented by Santa Barbara Audubon Society, Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History, Santa Barbara Botanic Garden, and the UCSB Bren School of Environmental Science and Management*

A landmark 2019 report in *SCIENCE* describes a loss of three billion birds in North America since 1970.



White-faced Ibis. Photo by Lynn Scarlett

advances in regenerative agriculture, smart siting of land-transforming renewable energy, investments in green infrastructure and nature's contributions to climate resilience, and collaborations for large landscape conservation.

This presentation will draw upon years of executive leadership experience in national government, nonprofit and collaborative partnerships for insight on conservation opportunities and their relevance to California and Santa Barbara.

**Lynn Scarlett** retired in 2021 as Global Chief External Affairs Officer for The Nature Conservancy and is former Deputy Secretary/Chief Operating Officer of the U.S. Department of the Interior, and former chair of the Science Advisory Board of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric



Lynn Scarlett. Photo by Susie Clothier

Administration. She serves on the advisory board of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, the Dean's Advisory Council of the UCSB Bren School of Environmental Science and Management, and the boards of the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation, National Wildlife Refuge Association, Sand County Foundation, Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative, and the Santa Barbara Foundation. She is a UCSB alumna and an avid birder and hiker.

Seventy bird species have lost two-thirds of their population over this period, and losses continue. Yet conservation opportunities, informed by science, bring pathways to reversing and avoiding declines:

# Fall 2023 Programs

## Benny Isaac Jacobs-Schwartz

The Magic of Central America: Costa Rica's Birds and Ecology (illustrated)

Wednesday, November 15 • Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History, Farrand Hall • 7:30 p.m. • Free

Presented by the Santa Barbara Audubon Society

Costa Rica has long been regarded as one of the top tropical birding destinations in the world. Roughly the size



Three-wattled Bellbird

Photo by Benny Isaac Jacobs-Schwartz

of West Virginia, this small country is home to approximately five percent of the world's biodiversity, with more

than 900 species of birds and many endemics found only in Costa Rica and Western Panama.

This presentation will cover ecosystems including the cloud forest, the Caribbean lowlands, and the Pacific tropical dry forest, and explore ecological factors that have made Costa Rica an international birding mecca.

**Benny Isaac Jacobs-Schwartz** graduated from UC Santa Cruz and now owns and operates an international bird-guiding business and lifestyle brand called BIRDS by BIJS (pronounced Bee-jus). He has over 10 years of experience as an avian field biologist, wildlife photographer, and



Benny Isaac Jacobs-Schwartz. Self portrait

naturalist guide, working in coastal Alaska, Central America, Trinidad and Tobago, and the Ecuadorian Amazon.

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## Bird Walks and Field Trips: Fall/Winter 2023

### FRIDAY BIRD WALKS

All Friday Bird Walks are 8:30-10:30 a.m. Free and open to all; no reservation needed.

Details at [SantaBarbaraAudubon.org/activities](http://SantaBarbaraAudubon.org/activities)

September 8: Goleta Beach/Atascadero Estuary

September 22: Ennisbrook Preserve

October 13: Rocky Nook Park

October 27: Ellwood Mesa

November 10: Stevens Park

November 24: Elings Park

December 15: Santa Barbara Harbor

December 29: San Marcos Foothills Preserve



### SATURDAY FIELD TRIPS

Free and open to all; no reservation needed

Santa Barbara Harbor and Andrée Clark Bird Refuge • Saturday, September 16, 8-10:30 a.m.

Target Birds: Shorebirds and waterbirds

Leader: Rob Lindsay

Trip Coordinator/Contact: Dane St. George, [danestgeorge@gmail.com](mailto:danestgeorge@gmail.com)

Directions: We will start at the base of the breakwater at the Santa Barbara Harbor to observe at that area. From there, we will drive to the Andree Clark Bird Refuge to explore this freshwater ecosystem.

Lake Los Carneros • Saturday, October 21, 8-11 a.m., and Saturday, November 18, 8-11 a.m.

Target Birds: Freshwater ducks and other waterfowl, raptors, and winter woodland birds

Leader: Rob Lindsay

Trip Coordinator/Contact: Dane St. George, [danestgeorge@gmail.com](mailto:danestgeorge@gmail.com)

Directions: We will meet at the Stow House parking lot and complete a counter-clockwise loop around the lake.

See the film *Birds of Lake Los Carneros* on our website. The film was produced by Michael Love, Sage Hill Films, and funded by the Mosher Foundation.



# Field Trips

## MEMBER FIELD TRIPS

**POINT MUGU NAVAL AIR STATION** • Friday, December 1, 7:45 a.m. - Noon

**Target Birds:** This trip offers a unique opportunity to visit some 2,000 acres bordered by the Pacific Ocean. Marsh, coastal wetlands, riparian habitat, and grasslands provide a stopover for thousands of migrating birds each year and habitat for seven endangered bird species. The area is so rich in wildlife that the half-day trip typically counts 80 species, including waders, rails, songbirds, waterfowl, shorebirds, raptors, and more.

**Leaders:** Jeff Hanson, Peggy Kearns, and base ecologist Martin Ruane

**Reservation required (no cost):** SBAS or GCAS members only. Limit of 14. Priority for first-time visitors. This field trip is on an active Navy base. NO CAMERAS allowed on base. Participants must be U.S. citizens and complete the Navy's required Access Pass Registration Form. Visit [SantaBarbaraAudubon.org/activities](http://SantaBarbaraAudubon.org/activities) for instructions.

**Trip Coordinator/Contact:** Jeff Hanson, [jlh749@cox.net](mailto:jlh749@cox.net) or 805-964-8854.

**HOLLISTER RANCH** • Saturday, December 9, 8 a.m. – 1 p.m.

**Target Birds:** Songbirds, ocean and pond waterfowl, and raptors

**Leaders:** Guy Tingos

**Reservation required (no cost):** SBAS members only. Limit of 17.

**Trip Coordinator/Contact:** Email Dane St. George, [danestgeorge@gmail.com](mailto:danestgeorge@gmail.com), and include the name, email address, and phone number of each member requesting a spot.

## PELAGIC EXCURSION

**Santa Barbara Channel Pelagic Boat Trip** • Saturday, November 4

**Depart** from Ventura Harbor at 9 a.m., return at approximately 5:45 p.m.

The Island Packers boat will travel through the Anacapa Passage and along the north side of the Santa Cruz Basin to south of Santa Rosa Island.

**Target Birds:** Shearwaters, jaegers, Rhinoceros Auklet, Common Murre, Northern Fulmar, and (with luck) Black-legged Kittiwake.

**Leader:** Nick Lethaby

**Reservation required. Cost: \$145.** For registration details, email: [nlethaby@gmail.com](mailto:nlethaby@gmail.com)

→ *Note: Prior to attending any event or program, please check [SantaBarbaraAudubon.org/activities](http://SantaBarbaraAudubon.org/activities) for schedule updates. Events could be canceled due to road closures or inclement weather, etc.*

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## Dane St. George Joins Field Trip Team

Hello SBAS! I am excited to be stepping into the field trip coordinator role. I have been a regular attendee



of the Friday Bird Walks over the past couple years and have had the fortune of joining several of the Saturday and Sunday field trips. Luckily for me our previous coordinator, Rob

Lindsay, has carefully curated the field trip line-up over his many years in the role and developed relationships with the various landowners, so I will mostly be responsible with scheduling and logistics for the trips. Fear not, Rob will still be serving as leader for many of the field trips going forward.

I have been a Santa Barbara resident, birder, and SBAS member for about five years. I initially caught the birding bug in high school in my hometown of Wayland, NY. In 2014, I made my great migration westward, trading the Ovenbirds and Gray Catbirds I had become familiar with in New York for the Oak Titmice and California Quail of the Golden

State. Shortly after I received my master's degree in wildlife biology from California Polytechnic University, Humboldt, and for my thesis research I studied the role of Barn Owls as pest control agents in Napa Valley vineyards. Now I work as an Environmental Scientist for California Department of Fish and Wildlife and oversee steelhead trout monitoring in southern California. I am hoping to meet and engage with as many SBAS members as possible, so if you want to chat about the field trip schedule, steelhead, Barn Owls, or your favorite place to bird in Santa Barbara County, please drop me a line!

**Dane St. George**



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Wilson's Phalaropes. Photo by David Levasheff