

El Tecolote

Santa Barbara Audubon Society
Spring 2025





From the desk of Katherine Emery, Executive Director

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

Dear SBAS Members and Supporters,

First, we hope this email finds you and your loved ones well.

My heart goes to those impacted by the recent California fires and other events. Second, we thank you for your continued support of our chapter throughout these challenging times. At the 125th Christmas Bird Count, 187 volunteers counted 214 bird species in the Santa Barbara area. Thank you, CBC leaders and birders! At our 11th Winter Bird Count for Kids, 91 young birders and families led by 44 volunteers counted 66 bird species at Lake Los Carneros. Thank you to the City of Goleta for partnering with us to make this event possible. Coming together as a community is meaningful. We appreciate you.

Over the winter holiday, I reflected on how incredible and resilient people, animals, and plants are. I brought two of my children to Joshua Tree National

Park for the first time. Did we want to see a Greater Roadrunner? Yes. Did we see one? No. We saw barren, beautiful protected open space, scampered over boulders, and took a breath to pause and appreciate the stillness and sunsets. I learned that Joshua trees grow after the freeze damages their branch tips; they rely on the Yucca Moth for pollination. The tree's ability to thrive in frigid temperatures and its mutualistic relationship with the moth are a wonder and inspiration.

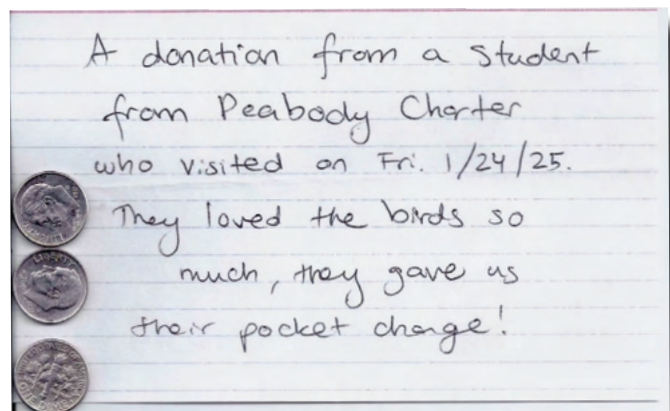
As we move into a new year, SBAS remains dedicated to protecting area birdlife and habitat and connecting people with birds through education, conservation, and science. Thank you to our community. I wish all of you the best for 2025.

Katherine Emery, PhD
Executive Director
Santa Barbara Audubon Society

Sharing Bird Joy

A recent Peabody Charter School classroom field trip to the Museum's Backyard resulted in a heartwarming donation from a student who was very excited to learn about the birds! Every gift makes a difference.

At the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History, SBAS ambassador birds can be viewed in their aviary from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily. Eyes in the Sky volunteers are present to teach guests about the birds 2-4 p.m. Thursday through Sunday.



OUR MISSION – SANTA BARBARA AUDUBON SOCIETY PROTECTS AREA BIRDLIFE AND HABITAT AND CONNECTS PEOPLE WITH BIRDS THROUGH EDUCATION, CONSERVATION AND SCIENCE.

ALL ARE WELCOME. LEARN MORE AT SantaBarbaraAudubon.org

SANTA BARBARA AUDUBON SOCIETY

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The Board meets the second Wednesday of the month September through June. Members are welcome to attend.

Santa Barbara County Birding:
sbcobirding.groups.io/g/main

El Tecolote

The magazine of the Santa Barbara Audubon Society

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On the cover: Long-billed Curlew. *Photo by John Callender*

Special thanks to an anonymous donor who sponsored the color printing for this issue of *El Tecolote*.



Barn Owl family. *Photo by Paul Bannick. See owl program information on page 11.*



The 125th Audubon Christmas Bird Count

by Libby Patten, Santa Barbara CBC Head Compiler

Prairie Falcon. Photo by Steve Hovey

So folks, weren't we fortunate to avoid an extreme weather event for this year's CBC? As always, there's a lot of scouting for birds in the weeks before CBC and watching the weather leading up to count day with fingers crossed for just the right amount of rain. The last two years, we had way too much of a good thing (rain) which definitely lowered our count totals. This year, on January 4, 2025, the weather obliged with a beautiful day and the birds cooperated, resulting in a whopping 214 species! Indeed, this was the highest species count total in over 10 years and tied with the fifth highest count ever reported for the Santa Barbara CBC. For comparison, the San Diego CBC was first in the state this year with a new record high count of 230 species. It appears Santa Barbara had the second highest count in California and will likely rank among

the top five in the country. Thank you to all our dedicated participants who numbered 187 this year!

Although negligible rain fell in the weeks leading up to the count, the creeks were still flowing from last winter's rain and that may have helped provide food in riparian areas. Eight less-common warbler species were found: two Lucy's Warblers at Dwight Murphy Field downtown, Chestnut-sided Warbler at Chase Palm Park, Black-and-white Warbler at the SB Botanic Garden, Nashville Warbler at UCSB, four Black-throated Gray Warblers, Hermit Warbler, five Wilson's Warblers and three Yellow Warblers. Four oriole species were also found: Bullock's, Orchard, Hooded, and Scott's. Happily, the lovely, wintering Warbling Vireo was found for an amazing 12th year at Bohnett Park!

Sea watchers from cliffs and birders by boat yielded the following pelagic species: Surf Scoter; Red-throated, Common and Pacific Loons; Parasitic Jaeger; and Rhinoceros Auklet. Thanks to Santa Barbara Channelkeeper for its generous support in providing an excellent boat and captain for the pelagic team. Owling efforts by our intrepid owlers yielded Spotted, Great Horned, Northern Saw-whet, Barn, Short-eared, Western Screech, Northern Pygmy, and Burrowing Owls.

A number of rare winter flycatchers were delightful finds: Gray Flycatcher (Fairview Gardens), Ash-throated Flycatcher (Arroyo Burro Open Space), Western Flycatcher (SB Museum of Natural History), three Vermilion Flycatchers (Goleta Beach, La Cumbre Country Club, and East Beach), and an Eastern Phoebe (Bohnett Park).

We also had rarities not observed for decades. A Prairie Falcon, seen on our CBC for the first time in 25 years, was a dramatic find for the team at the restored wetland, North Campus Open Space. Also discovered was an eastern vagrant, a Brown Thrasher (last seen in 1982), at Stow Grove Park. That along with a Sage Thrasher at Elings Park (also in a restoration area) and about 90 California Thrashers made for a highly unusual day with three species of thrasher. Finally, a Lark Bunting (in Isla Vista) was found for the first time on a Santa Barbara CBC.



Phainopepla. Photo by Lynn Scarlett



Vermilion Flycatcher. Photo by Lynn Scarlett

This was definitely not a montane year (what a contrast from last year!), so we were thrilled to eke out a single Brown Creeper and Red-breasted Nuthatch. Notable misses included some species recorded during Count Week but not on Count Day: Eurasian Wigeon and American Bittern (both seen somewhat reliably before CBC at Lake Los Carneros), Townsend's Solitaire, Caspian Tern, Mountain Quail, Summer Tanager and Black-vented Shearwater. Approximately 40 of the 214 species found had a count of one. (San Diego saw a similar trend.) Of these, many were true rarities we don't expect to see at the coast in winter, while the rest are species that have dwindled from relative abundance in earlier years. As we reported last year, the total number of individual birds counted has dropped about 40 percent – from 50,000 in 1980 to the current level of about 30,000 birds.

Those of us who organize this monster event are busy for weeks before and after, with CBC planning and execution using more technology than ever before. In years past, we met at Goleta Beach at noon to figure out species we'd missed in the morning, and

now we use a group tally sheet on our phones without the need for a gathering. This year, we continued to lean heavily on eBird checklists as the primary reporting tool. Several webtools used in this year's CBC were recently developed by local birders: **BirdView** developed by Steve Colwell was used to track rarities reported in the count circle just prior to CBC, and the **Santa Barbara CBC Areas Map** developed by Linus Blomqvist (linusblomqvist.shinyapps.io/sb_cbc_area_map/) which documents the perimeter borders of the many areas where we count species in our 15-mile diameter CBC circle. At our compilation evening in Fleischmann Auditorium, Linus gave an overview of some of these tools including one he developed last year to look at trends in historical CBC data from National Audubon: linusblomqvist.shinyapps.io/cbc_shiny/

Along with our mission of doing a detailed survey of all the bird species in our 15-mile count circle, we also see the CBC as an important time for fostering community among our birders. A new event this year – a “Big Sit” – was held in a picnic area at Tucker’s Grove Park, to offer birding in place, and as we know, sometimes picnic areas can be quite birdy! We hope to expand this type of CBC option next year.



Nikhil Deshmukh and Charlotte Chang led a CBC team birding along San Antonio Creek. Photo by Angela Coady



CBC birders Susy Barrymore (center) and friends counted species in Tucker’s Grove Park. Photo by Dolores Pollock

Thank you for your steadfast support of the CBC: Santa Barbara Audubon and the hard-working coordinating and compiling team: Glenn Kincaid, Linus Blomqvist, Conor McMahon, Steve Hovey, Andy McGrath, and Wim van Dam. This energetic team continues to bring fresh ideas to how we conduct our CBC. Also, many thanks to the efforts of our local and visiting birders who scout, mobilize and inspire us to do it each year. As always, CBC data are so important to tracking the overall health of all our bird populations. The full list of species and numbers of birds recorded in CBC counts will be available soon on the SBAS website: SantaBarbaraAudubon.org/santa-barbara-christmas-bird-count/



Current and past SBAS presidents at the CBC compilation dinner: (l to r) Janice Levasheff, Rob Lindsay, Sally Walker, Ron Hirst, and Dolores Pollock. *Photo by Crispin Barrymore*

Santa Barbara County is home to six Christmas Bird Counts. Visit SantaBarbaraAudubon.org to learn more about the various count circles and dates. Below are additional CBC tallies:

CBC	Head Compiler	Total Species	Rarities/Highlights
Santa Maria/Guadalupe	John Deacon	144	Vermilion Flycatcher, Pacific Golden-Plover
La Purisima/Lompoc	Alex Abela	127	Bald Eagle, Brown Creeper
Cachuma	Cruz Phillips	139	Zone-tailed Hawk, White-winged Dove, Yellow Warbler, Swamp Sparrow
Carpinteria	John Callender	170	Black-necked Stilt, Short-billed Dowitcher, Horned Lark, Painted Bunting, Greater Pewee
Santa Cruz Island	Jessie Altstatt	86	Summer Tanager, Hooded Oriole, Eastern Phoebe, Varied Thrush, Long-eared Owl



CBC team on Santa Cruz Island. *Photo by Jessie Altstatt*



Winter Bird Count for Kids at Stow House. Photo by Betsy Mooney

Winter Bird Count for Kids 2025 – A Huge Success!

by Jessica Prichard

On January 25, the Stow House lawn and Lake Los Carneros were humming with activity! Smiles were abundant when the first child and parent showed up, eager and ready to learn. Each bird seen resulted in a buzz of excitement. A total of 62 bird species was tallied, and an additional 4 were reported near the dam. This was a banner year for attendance – 91 kids participated! Plus, 35 schools were represented, 11 of them new to our event. Hats off to our Communications Chair, Christy Zwicke, who helped us promote the event, and to our committee of volunteers for delivering event flyers to local schools and community hubs.

We also had fantastic support! Special thanks to the City of Goleta for support of the event. Lisa Potter, the park caretaker, enthusiastically made sure we had what we needed. Anthem Chapel allowed us to use its lot for overflow parking. Two current and three former Quasars were there to lead groups

and assist. (The Quasars to Sea Stars program at the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History is a four-year commitment for teen interns wanting to explore careers in science and museums.) Many of the 44 volunteers who helped this year have done so every year, while new volunteers quickly joined in the energy of the event. Teamwork and dedication are a big part of this event's success, and we are extremely grateful to every one of our volunteers.

Seeing the excitement in everyone's faces is an inspiration. It provides hope for a healthy future for our local birds and environment, and we look forward to next year. If you wish to get involved and experience the magic of Winter Bird Count for Kids, please contact us: Jessica Prichard, Page Hiller-Adams, Kathleen Boehm, CeCe Borchardt, Coni Edick, Wendy Kanter, Hilary Peattie, Cherie Topper, and Janice Levasheff – 2025 Winter Bird Count for Kids Committee.



Young birders observe Kiki the American Kestrel, an EITS ambassador bird.
Photo by Dolores Pollock



Learning about optics at binocular boot camp. Photo by Janice Levasheff

Birders of Santa Barbara: Conor McMahon

Conor McMahon is president of Goleta Coast Audubon.

He shared his birding stories with Peggy Kearns, SBAS field trip leader

What was your spark bird?

I started birding at age 9. My spark bird was a Downy Woodpecker that I identified myself. Years later I was in a birding class and the leader mentioned the LeConte's Sparrow's creamsicle eyebrow. That statement grabbed me and I have gone on from there.

How long have you been birding?

In 2020, as I was completing my undergrad and master's at the University of Texas, I enrolled in an ornithology class – Biology of Birds. The professor stated the class would learn three areas of birding: diagnosing, describing, and the culture of birding. It was an intensive course and I applied myself. My first year I had 400 birds!

Why do you bird?

It's meditative – being outside in nature helps me unwind from indoor science research. And I enjoy getting to know the birding community and getting others involved.

What do you use first?

I use my ears first, then my binoculars, auto recording instruments, and, lastly, camera.

Where has birding led you?

Birding has led me to my career path. I received my BS in biology and mechanical engineering. In the UT master's program I had the opportunity to teach the same birding course I'd taken. As a result of that birding class, I switched to the PhD program in UCSB's Geography Department, with emphasis in remote sensing, conservation, and bioacoustics.

Favorite place to bird?

I enjoy Stow Grove Park. I live near there and can bicycle to many good birding places.

Where to go next?

I have never been south of the border, so the Neotropics would be interesting.

Most dramatic/difficult birding experience?

My most dramatic birding experience was a 17-mile hike in Cuyama Valley with Linus Blomqvist. We hiked to our cars in two hours of darkness.



How did Goleta Coast Audubon get started?

When I came to UCSB, I was looking for an environmental organization. I found Santa Barbara Audubon's Conservation/Science committee in July 2019. Jessie Altstatt, chair of that committee, had just returned from the National Audubon Society conference and shared with me that NAS wanted to create chapters on university campuses. NAS offered a small stipend for binoculars, leading students on birding walks, and establishing the chapter. In 2020, Linus Blomqvist and I founded the Goleta Coast Audubon.

(continued)

Next step?

The leadership component has been exciting and fruitful. I have mingled with the best experts in Santa Barbara County. I am now looking for a postdoc

research grant in my field outside of UCSB. I am also looking for a student interested in birding to embrace the president's role of Goleta Coast Audubon.



Yellow-crowned Night Heron. Photo by Conor McMahon



Allen's Hummingbird. Photo by Conor McMahon

To learn more about Goleta Coast Audubon, explore free student resources, and get in touch: visit goletacoastaudubon.com or connect on social media. Santa Barbara Audubon Society welcomes students from Goleta Coast Audubon. See community birding events on page 13.

SBAS in the Community

Board members and volunteers shared information with visitors during Santa Barbara Zoo Saving Species Day.



Mark Your Calendar

- SBAS plans to be at the Santa Barbara Earth Day Festival on Saturday, April 26, at Alameda Park. Please stop by and see us!
- The SBAS Annual Membership Meeting and Celebration is planned for Saturday, June 14, 2025, 3-5 p.m. at Stow Grove Park. Watch for more details.

Spring 2025 Programs

Program start time is 7:00 p.m.



Many thanks to our hotel sponsor,
Simpson House Inn.

Paul Bannick

Owl: A Year in the Lives of North American Owls (illustrated)

Wednesday, May 7 | Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History, Fleischmann Auditorium | 7:00 p.m.
\$5 general admission. Tickets available in advance on the Museum website and at the door the evening of the event, if still available.

Presented by the Santa Barbara Audubon Society and the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History

Courtesy of Chaucer's, books by Paul Bannick will be available for purchase and signing at the event.

Award-winning photographer Paul Bannick will use his intimate and dramatic images to illustrate four owl species – Northern Pygmy-Owl, Burrowing Owl, Great Gray Owl, and Snowy Owl – throughout the course of the year in four distinct habitats. Each stage in an owl's life will be presented through rare images: courtship, mating, and nesting in spring; fledging and feeding of young in summer; dispersal and learning independence in fall; and, finally, winter migration and competition for food.

In addition to the four featured owls, photos and videos of the 15 other species of North American owls are also included in the lecture. Bannick's images reveal shared owl behaviors as well as surprising exceptions and adaptations. More than just a backdrop, the four featured owl habitats – forest, grassland and steppe, boreal, and Arctic – are rich with stories of their own.



Paul Bannick with a Northern Hawk Owl



Long-eared Owl. Photo by Paul Bannick

Paul Bannick is an award-winning author and wildlife photographer specializing in the natural history of North America with a focus on birds and habitat. His books include *The Owl and the Woodpecker: Encounters with North America's Most Iconic Birds*. His work can be found prominently in bird guides from Audubon, Peterson, The Smithsonian, Stokes, the National Wildlife Federation and in several volumes of *The Handbook of the Birds of the World*.



Burrowing Owl family. Photo by Paul Bannick

Dr. Elizabeth Gray

An Evening with the CEO of the National Audubon Society

Wednesday, May 28 | Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History, Fleischmann Auditorium | 7:00 p.m.
\$5 general admission. Tickets available in advance on the Museum website and at the door the evening of the event, if still available.

Presented by the Santa Barbara Audubon Society

Dr. Elizabeth Gray serves as the Chief Executive Officer of the National Audubon Society, leading the organization toward its vision of a future where birds thrive. A champion of science-based conservation and a renowned expert in global conservation and climate change, she joined Audubon in March 2021 as President and Chief Conservation Officer and was named CEO later that year – the first woman since Audubon's founding in 1905 to hold the role. She leads more than 800 staff working across the Americas to alter the course of climate change and habitat loss. Since her arrival, she has led a landmark \$826 million campaign, the groundbreaking release of the Migratory Bird Explorer, and the unifying Flight Plan strategy, reinforcing Audubon's commitment to hemispheric conservation through the power of birds. Under Gray's leadership, Audubon has embraced a multicultural, multigenerational approach, ensuring its work reflects and engages all the communities connected to conservation across the Western Hemisphere.



Dr. Elizabeth Gray. Photo by Jair Coll

Birding Events

Spring 2025



SBAS members, Board leaders, and volunteers gathered at North Campus Open Space for a bird walk with author and illustrator Kenn Kaufman (front), who was the featured speaker at the SBAS program in January. *Photo by Roman Baratiak*

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

March 28: UCSB Lagoon

April 11: Tucker's Grove

April 25: Lake Los Carneros

May 2: Goleta Beach/Atascadero Estuary

May 9: Farren Road

Saturday Field Trip

Nojoqui Falls Park

Saturday, May 17

8:45 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.

Habitat for: Yellow-billed Magpie, Purple Martin, Blue Grosbeak, Lazuli Bunting, Barn Owl, vireos, woodpeckers, and orioles

Leader: Rob Lindsay

Detailed directions to the meeting place can be found at SantaBarbaraAudubon.org/field-trips

Free and open to all. No reservation needed.



SBAS bird walk at North Campus Open Space. *Photo by Dolores Pollock*



Redheads. Photo by Dean Wrench

Member Field Trips

For SBAS or GCA members.

Visit SantaBarbaraAudubon.org to become an SBAS member for just \$26 per household.

Rancho Santa Barbara (Santa Ynez)

Saturday, March 15

8:15 a.m. – Noon

Habitat for: Geese, Common Goldeneye, Wood Duck, Lewis's Woodpecker, Clark's Grebe, American White Pelican, and other waterbirds and passerines

Leader: Rob Lindsay

Attendance Limit: 25 people

Reservation Required (no cost)

Email Dane St. George, danestgeorge@gmail.com, to reserve your spot. Include name, e-mail address, and phone number for all people in your party.

Hollister Ranch

Saturday, April 19

8:45 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

Habitat for: Songbirds, ocean and pond waterfowl, raptors

Leader: Rob Lindsay

Attendance Limit: 17 people

Reservation required (no cost)

Email Dane St. George, danestgeorge@gmail.com, to reserve your spot. Include name, e-mail address, and phone number for all people in your party.

Salton Sea 4-Day Trip

Thursday, April 24 – Sunday, April 27

Habitat for: Desert birds and sea birds

Leader: Ron Hirst

Attendance Limit: 18 people

Reservation required.

For information, a detailed itinerary, and to register, contact Ron Hirst at ron@SantaBarbaraAudubon.org.

Find more details at SantaBarbaraAudubon.org/activities. Please check the website for any updates prior to the event.

How You Can Help

You know the importance of SBAS's work: conservation of important habitats and education for people of all ages to learn about birds. If you'd like to help with these goals, please reach out for details on how you can get involved and make a difference in our community.

We have openings on our Board for a **Development Chair** to lead our fundraising and donor appreciation efforts and strategy and a **Membership Chair** to lead membership outreach efforts.. The Board meets monthly, with ongoing opportunities to support events and activities.

Joining one of our committees is a great way to help with tasks such as educational outreach, communications/publicity, conservation research and letter writing, event planning and logistics, and other areas.

To explore these openings, please contact our Board President at janice@SantaBarbaraAudubon.org or talk with any Board member (see page 3 or use the contact form on our website: SantaBarbaraAudubon.org/board-of-directors/). Veteran SBAS volunteers are happy to discuss the rewards of making a difference for our local birds and habitat.

Thank you:

- Hardworking SB CBC Compilation Coordinators Libby Patten, Glenn Kincaid, Linus Blomqvist, Conor McMahon, Steve Hovey, Andy McGrath, and Wim van Dam - and all birders who participated!
- CBC Compilation Dinner Chair Kris Mainland White and the dinner team of Gayle Hackamack, Joan Kent, Pat Woodward, Bonnie Ray, Kathleen Boehm, and Carol Shulmistras, with a huge shout out to Joan for baking all those delicious cookies, as she has since this event started.
- Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History for support in co-presenting the Kenn Kaufman program.
- Rosina Garcia for Fleischmann tech support during the CBC compilation and Kenn Kaufman's program.
- Simpson House Inn for providing accommodations.
- Winter Bird Count for Kids Committee and volunteers for a successful 11th annual event.
- City of Goleta for its generous support of Winter Bird Count for Kids.
- *The Voice* for publishing our WBC for Kids flyer and the Bird of the Month column.
- Our Conservation/Science Committee, which works tirelessly and with a high level of professionalism, often behind the scenes, to advocate for our local birds and habitat.
- Our dedicated Eyes in the Sky staff and volunteers who lovingly care for our raptors every day of the year.
- Colette Becker and Dennis Power, our editor and layout designer respectively, for crafting this publication so professionally.



Help Birds Soar!

Join, Renew Your Membership, and/or Donate to Santa Barbara Audubon Society

Please donate online, scan the QR code, or mail this form with your check to **SBAS** (address below).

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

☐ \$26 Feathered Friends ☐ \$50 Plover Protector ☐ \$100 Songbird Stewards

☐ \$500 Heron Heroes ☐ \$1,000 Great Horned Owl Guardians

Chapter memberships are separate from National Audubon memberships. 100% of your chapter dues stay local and keep SBAS strong and sustainable, so we can protect birds and their habitat now and into the future.

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City, State, Zip Code

Email

Mail membership form or donation with check to:
SBAS, P.O. Box 6737, Santa Barbara, CA 93160
Or join or donate at: SantaBarbaraAudubon.org/join-sbas

() Phone

Visit our website to receive your newsletter electronically and/or to gift a membership to someone. SBAS does not share personal information with other organizations. Santa Barbara Audubon Society, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, EIN 23-7051362.



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Black Skimmer. Photo by David Levasheff