

AVOCET

SANTA CLARA VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY

Volume 72 • Number 2 • March 2024 • SPRING



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Our Mission

The Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society (SCVAS) promotes the enjoyment, understanding, and protection of birds and other wildlife by engaging people of all ages in birding, education, and conservation



www.scvas.org

Cover Story

Matthew Dodder
Executive Director, SCVAS
director@scvas.org

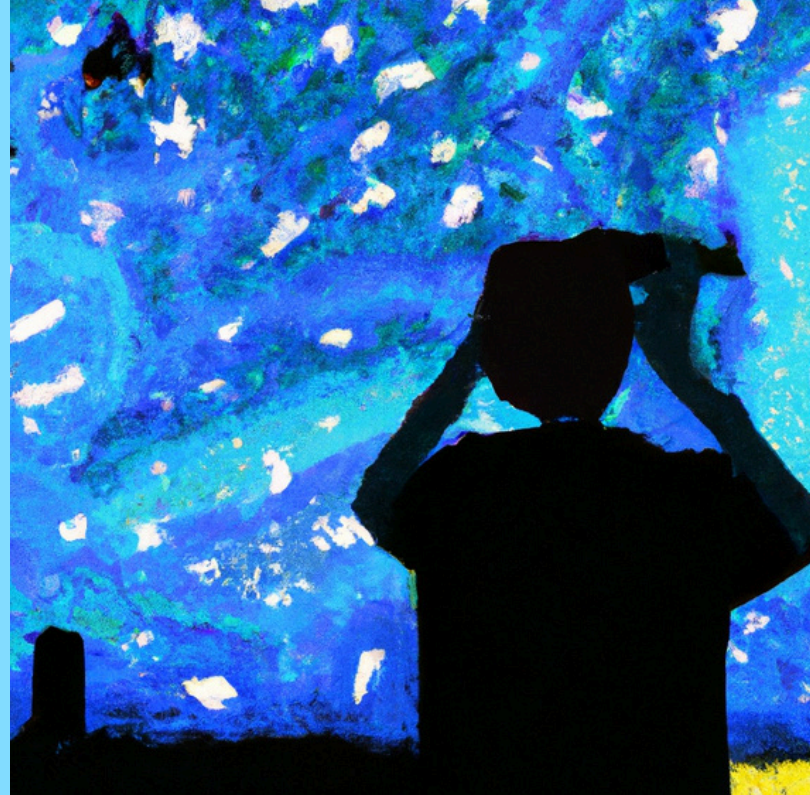
Why we bird

One winter morning in 1977, I awoke to find I had become a birder. The steps leading to that state are easy to follow: Heavy snow. Bitter cold. Hungry birds. A curious and worried boy... a Northern Cardinal! The change happened quite fast, almost overnight. But the *why* of this transformation is more nuanced. What was I getting out of the activity in the beginning? What do I get out of it *now*? What do *any of us* get out of birding?

Of course, there is no single answer to why we all bird. The motivations are as varied as the birds themselves. It does seem however, that a few reasons are common among us, and oftentimes, are present in combinations, or develop and change as we age. Here are just a few that come to mind. Maybe some will be familiar to you.

Curiosity

Birding has exerted a strong force on my life from that first shock of red in our Boston backyard, pulling me toward a life



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devoted to birds and their welfare. It has shaped my travel plans, my personal library, and my career. What began as a way of satisfying a youthful curiosity about the birds outside our frosty window was an equally deep concern for their survival. I remember how sad I became when I learned that some birds had been driven to extinction within recent history and that many more were in danger of disappearing before I'd even reach my 20s. As it turned out, extinction was not limited to ancient lumbering beasts.

Teaching

Like many of you, the desire to communicate what I learned was impossible to ignore. From an early age I tried to teach and show the people around me how fascinating and precious our birds were. Within a short period of time, the why of birding had broadened from the initial curiosity and concern, to a new interest in sharing. It's often said that your best teachers are those with an unwavering love of their subject. The joy of sharing that love became my why.

Beauty

Soon, I began to feel a new kind of pull. The urge to find the other birds in my field guide. The Snow Bunting, the Black-throated Blue Warbler, the Scarlet Tanager, and the Ruby-throated Hummingbird. These beautiful creatures shown in the colorful pages of my guide seemed impossibly pretty and I knew I had to see them. When I succeeded I chose to celebrate the sighting with a drawing, however poorly done. Because that is what you do when you find something so wild and lovely. The only way I knew to protect it was to leave it

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behind and savor the memory. Drawing does that for me and many of you. Whether it's painting or poetry, art closes the loop on an experience. That chance encounter with beauty and the warmth of its memory, was the next why. Hundreds of portraits later, and a mind full of colors—this is one birder's version of photography.

Learning

Improving our skills, recognizing subtle differences and identifying birds that were unfamiliar to me, getting more experience—this was very satisfying and produced a dopamine thrill like nothing else. To finally understand how to recognize that a Western Sandpiper is a juvenile, or identify a Eurasian Wigeon by its call... there's nothing as rewarding as sticking that dismount.

Details

It wasn't until I turned my attention beyond simple identification and learned about the Brown-headed Cowbird's nest parasitism and other such things that the next why showed up. The intellectual pursuit of knowledge and a lifetime of learning... another why. Complicated life cycles, bizarre courtship displays, curious and reliable preferences for specific trees, anatomical features, interspecies relationships, fabulous journeys, physical adaptations, and the curious lack of blue... There are so many mysteries to explore and discover.

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Not a day has gone by in all these decades that I don't see something new in the birds I watch. They are my enthusiastic instructors and I am their grateful student.

Science

Some folks continue this quest for knowledge by pursuing a career in science. A friend of mine, after being introduced to birding, fell completely in love with it. He changed his career path, applied for a second degree in biology, went on to get his PhD in Shorebird sciences. His papers have been published widely and he credits birding with giving him a new and more fulfilling direction. Similarly, millions of people around the globe use eBird knowing that their checklists are enriching our understanding of bird populations. Community science is alive and well. Yet another why.

Challenge

The collector's mentality eventually showed up for me as well. Exciting at first, but eventually becoming slightly stressful. Confronted by a growing awareness of the many wonders in the bird world, and the proliferation of field guides on my shelf, it became necessary to actively search for the birds I had not seen. Ideally, all of them! Chase, collect, tick or twitch... whatever you call it, it was now imperative I find all of the Warblers. Every possible Sparrow in North America, etc. I'm not proud of this urge, nor have I been successful. It's just one more why that has been added to my growing list of motivations. It brings an irregular joy, especially when one can't find the last Warbler. But, when (and if) I do succeed and the goal is accomplished, there will definitely be a party!

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Thrill of victory, agony of defeat. That sort of thing. This kind of birding naturally brings adventure to the activity. World travel, a treasure map, hot pursuit, negotiations to make like tides, trails, and bugs are all woven into this fabric.

Accomplishment

Collecting occasionally leads to competition. Another why. Once you challenge yourself to see as much as you can, you might just end up seeing if you can up your game and improve your eBird ranking (county, state, or world). Birders vie for the top position each year, chasing recent reports when the “needs alerts” show up. It’s quite fun to see your name climb up the list. It can also be a little stressful as birds often slip away before you can add them to your total. The Gray-crowned Rosy Finch did that for me. I missed that county-first record by a couple of hours along with scores of other disappointed birders. No reward. Nice hike though.

Health

That reminds me. Exercise and mental health. Not only do birders have a nearly constant regiment of walking and fresh air, all in the pursuit of birds, but we also protect our mental health. Birding has been proven to help lower blood pressure, increase our sense of well-being, and provide us with stimuli to keep our minds active and engaged. We all benefit from a sense of purpose and birding is definitely purposeful. Many people, myself included, feel that birding puts us in a mindful

state, in touch with whatever spirituality we choose to follow. Being present and in a place, listening to the signals our environment sends us, following nature's clues... sounds like a meaningful experience to me!

Friendship

Birding can be very social. Some folks prefer the solitude of birding alone, but ultimately, their pursuit of birds and their presence in the community makes them visible to other birders. Without even trying, the quiet birders, the shy naturalist makes friends with those around them. We all meet people as we bird and so already have something in common. It's easy to talk to birders and sharing the experience of finding a special bird with another person is wonderful. Our closest friends are birders as well. So yeah, relationships made while birding have an enormous benefit.

Whatever your reason (or reasons) for birding, I hope you find joy in it. Be safe, helpful and kind to people you meet in your travels. Let them see your happiness and share it with them eagerly. The world gets smaller and more frantic every day. Knowing there are still so many wonderful birds to see and mysteries to solve can only help. We will all benefit when more of us find our why. •

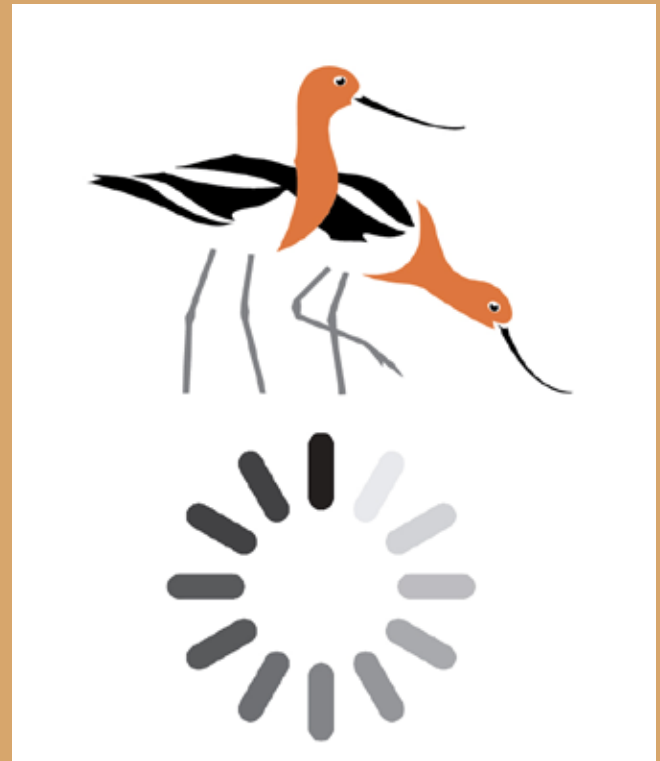
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Director's Desk

Matthew Dodder
Executive Director, SCVAS
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What's in a name? Part 2

Many of you have asked for an update on our organization's quest for a new name. Clearly, this has to be done thoughtfully, but we also want to finalize our name before January 2025 so we can begin the organization's next century on the right foot. To reiterate, the Board of Directors and I have decided to conduct a search. This was based on the membership vote that was sent out last year. We then formed a naming committee (NC) comprised of several board members and staff. The NC has met several times since then and worked through a list of considerations, the first being what our new name should communicate. The NC then created a long list of names that honored those discussions and then narrowed it down even further a few weeks ago. The next step is to present the NC's final name choice to the Board in March. If a consensus is reached during the Board's deliberations, the members will be given an opportunity to vote yay or nay on the proposed name. That's where we are in the process. Stay tuned for more updates soon.



Continued on next page

Birdathon

March 25 – May 5, 2024

New shirt for the new year! Pre-order now.

Support the SCVAS Education Program by joining or sponsoring a team. Start your own team...

scvas.org/birdathon

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The **Spring Birdathon** has now been set for March 25 — May 5. We plan on having an in-person kick-off event on March 20 (details TBD), and an in-person awards night on June 8. We have a major goal this year of raising \$80K in pledges, but will need your support to reach that goal. The Birdathon has been running for 35 years and since its beginning, it has supported our Education Program, allowing us to offer the Wetlands Discovery Program to Title 1 schools at no charge. To reach our goal, we will be posting team dates on our website soon. Look for that information on our website, scvas.org/birdathon.

While you're at it, preorder our new t-shirt which features 17 species of Raptors most commonly seen in Santa Clara County. All Birdathon proceeds, including purchase of this year's shirt, will be used to support our education program. Artwork by Matthew.

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ID SERIES

Sparrows

Matthew Dodder
Executive Director, SCVAS

Finally, the **SCVAS Learn** Icterids class (New World Blackbirds) has been postponed for scheduling reasons but will resurface in the future.

In the meantime, we will offer the 3-session online class; **Sparrows**, March 4, 11, & 18. **Registration is now open.**

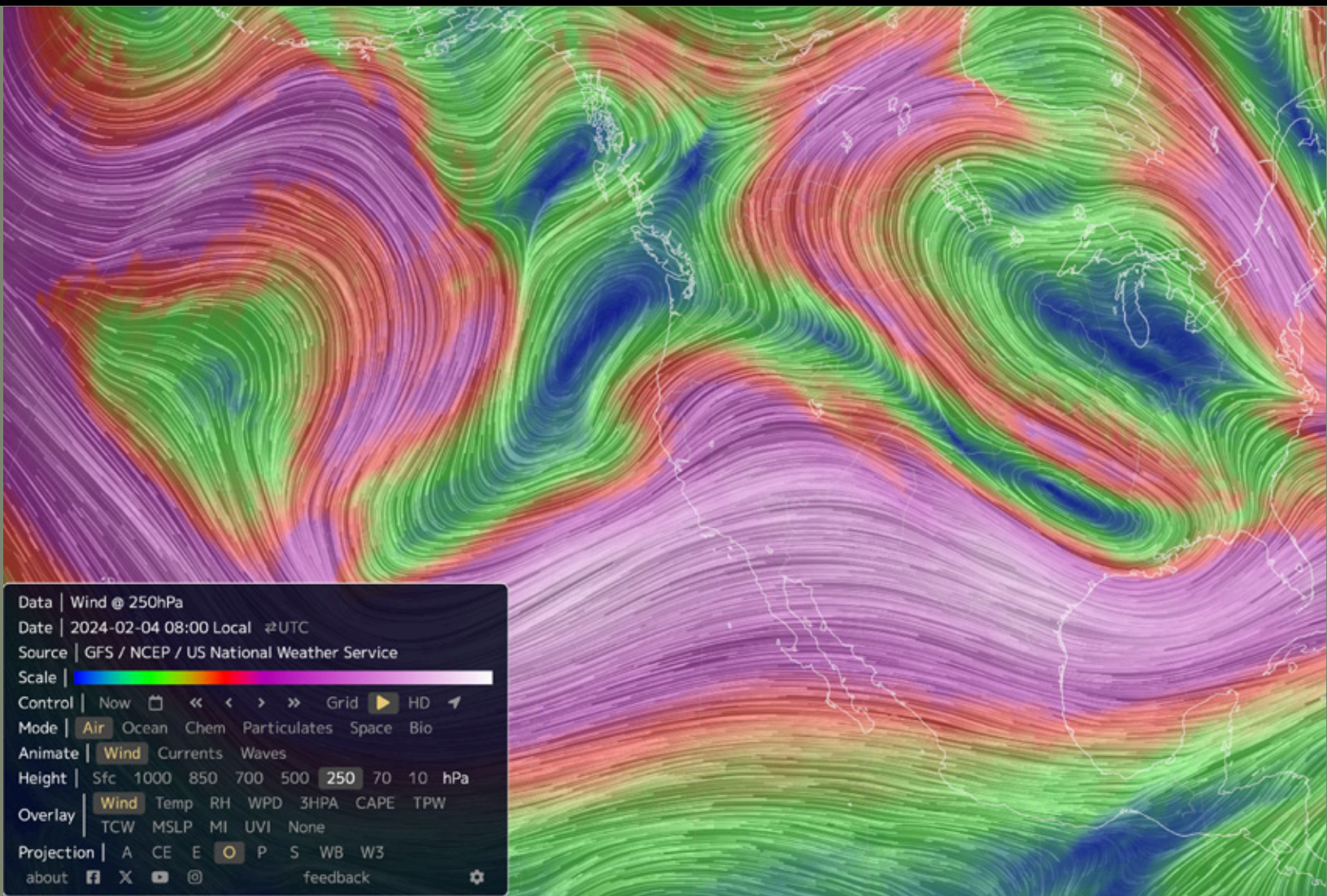
We have a few of the Sparrows t-shirts available as well. Call our office to confirm we have your size. •



Looking good, Barry!

What To Look For

Matthew Dodder
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Look what the rain dragged in...

As we assemble the spring issue of the AVOCET, we are midway through an early February atmospheric river, or “pineapple express”, characterized by heavy rain and warm winds. This is the perfect set-up for two wonderful situations: Cozying indoors and making a big pot of soup, and the high probability of rarities getting thrown off course and ending up

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in our county. But oddly, some of the unexpected birds that have shown up, have seemed to come from places other than where we might expect. For some context, the wind outside my home office window at this moment is from the southeast and gusting up to 57 mph! The windows are shaking, and the driveway is littered with debris from our trees. Thankfully, the soup is quietly bubbling on the stove. By the way, check out this [mesmerizing real-time wind display](#) which should help support some of the claims I'll make later.

We might expect something to drop into our area from places to our southeast, such as our famous Painted Redstart... yet nothing quite as exotic as that sort has show up. Instead, we've had an unseasonable **Hammond's Flycatcher**, not expected in any numbers until April. While examining our county checklist, I see that indeed, history has brought us other Hammond's Flycatcher during late January and early February, and the range map shows that their wintering grounds are indeed to our southeast. Interesting...

At the end of January, a **Williamson's Sapsucker**, showed up at Cuesta Park in Mountain View, originally misidentified as a Northern Flicker. This montane species is year-round in the mid-Sierra Nevada, but a portion of its wintering range is also to our southeast (Sierra Madre Occidental). So in both of these cases, the recent storms have produced some of the rare bird reports we might expect. Unexpected!

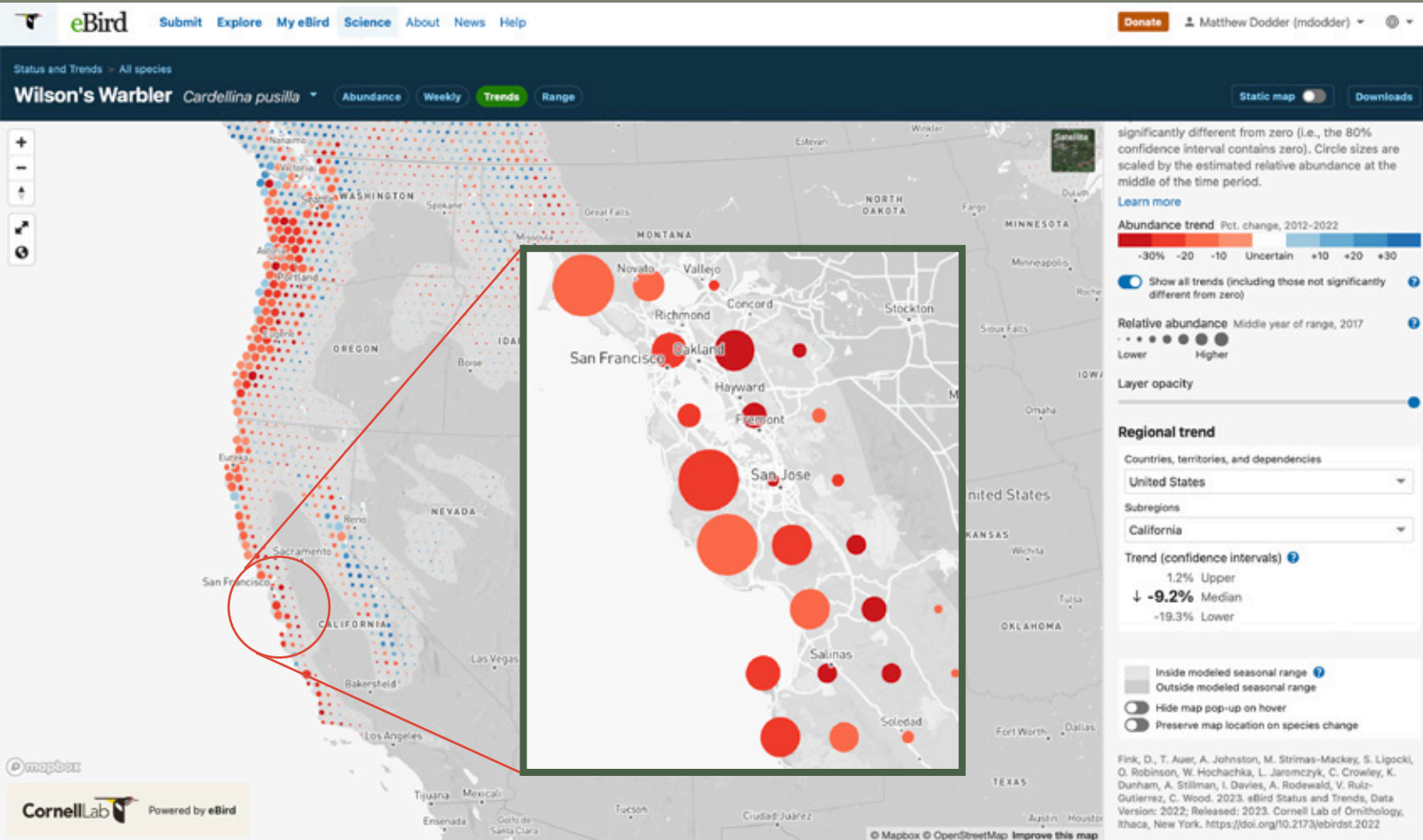
As I watch the bright green wind lines swirl on the website listed above, I notice also that vortex is comprised of two main sources— wind from coastal Canada to our north, and tropical winds from the south. The whole system is moving in a

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counter clockwise direction. This suggests that some unusual birds from the north coast could also be swept up and brought to us as they wrap around the eye of the storm, tossing them up to us from the south... I'm not a meteorologist, nor am I a biologist. I'm a birder and a system like the one we are seeing now causes me to think about possibilities. Realistic or not, I had a dream last night about Black-vented Shearwater at Stevens Creek Reservoir...

Anyway, back to reality. This time of year we dress in layers, we bird in the rain, and we power through the storms, all the while awaiting the blessed arrival of spring. There are already signs spring is close at hand though. (Remember, this column is written in early February so these observations will be weeks old by the time you read this.) The **American Avocets** have begun to get an orange blush on their heads and necks. The first reports of **Allen's Hummingbirds** are trickling in, and **Rufous Hummingbirds** will join the party in a month or so, just to complicate identification. **Yellow-rumped Warblers** are starting to change their clothes. I even heard the full song of an **Oak Titmouse** the other day at the Ranch, and **Dark-eyed Juncos** are occasionally practicing their long-form trills. A **Wilson's Warbler** showed up at Ulistac Natural Area a few days ago which makes one wonder— was it overwintering or early arriving? It's odd also that these days the **Tropical Kingbird**, whose arrival was formerly taken as a sign of fall, might now just as easily hail the advent of spring with its departure. Change is the only constant and it is definitely in the air.

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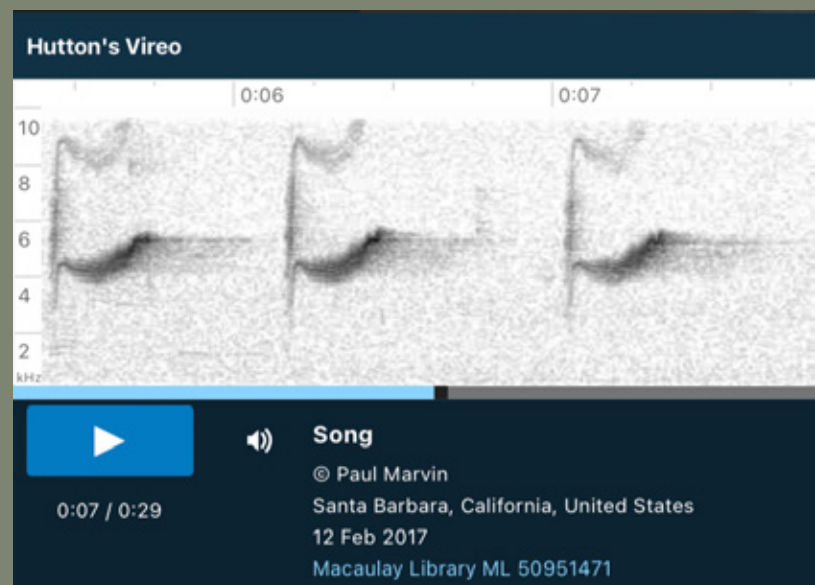


A few birds to watch for soon would be the early migrants. **Wilson's Warbler** is one of the first. It could be found in dense willow thickets and shrubs beginning last week (apparently). Some will pass through and continue north, while the Wilson's Warblers that remain here to breed, come from western Mexico and show a subtle orangey-yellow on the face. Their population is in decline and worth identifying to subspecies "chryseola", whenever possible, to assist with [monitoring](#) their population.

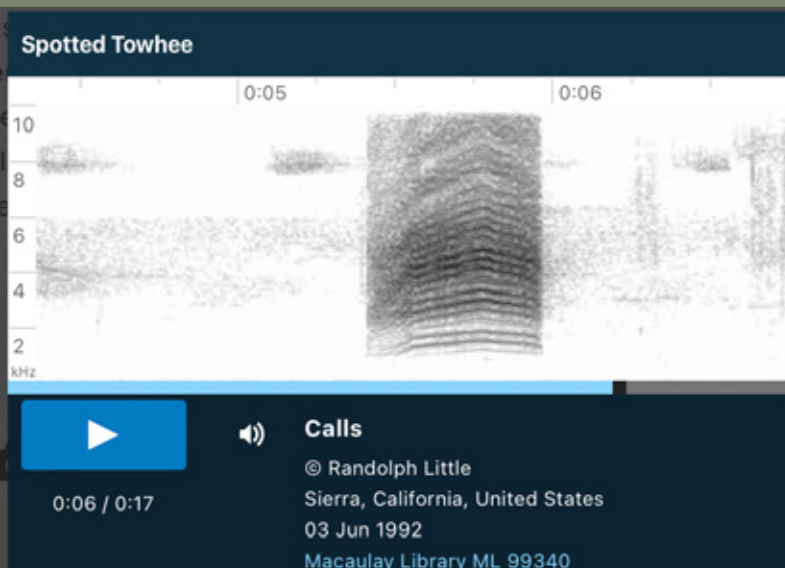
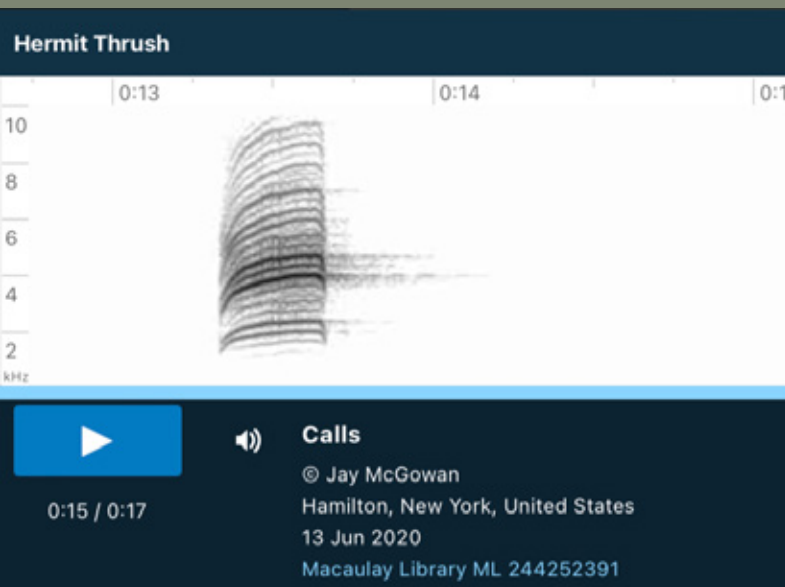
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Speaking of Warblers, the **Yellow-rumped Warbler** will soon begin performing in anticipation of its journey to the breeding grounds. Most of our Yellow-rumps will travel to the Sierra and areas north. A few will remain here to be heard and admired as they nest in the Santa Cruz Mountains. You will have a chance of seeing them in their full spring costume in Sanborn County Park, Montebello OSP, and occasionally in Upper Stevens Creek. These are the same areas you might find **Hermit Warbler** too. It's a good idea to listen to their songs a few times to re-acquaint yourself with the lyrics before you watch the show (you know, so you can sing along).

That said, the annual effort to re-learn songs is a common struggle among birders. It is easy to recognize songs or calls you hear all the time, but when you are presented with a song for one or two months out of the year, the limitations of our audio memory become clear. A crucial moment for me came when I was able to recognize the chip note of a Townsend's Warbler as being different from that of the Yellow-rumped Warbler. The accomplishment came not in knowing what it was, but by recognizing it was different from something else. Small steps like that naturally develop into a keener sense of sound and how they can be learned, one step at a time.



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Problems arise when birders have to distinguish between the smears of calls of **Hermit Thrush**, **Hutton's Vireo**, and **Spotted Towhee**. All quite recognizable but admittedly, also frustratingly similar. The same goes for songs. With practice though, and repeated listening, the **Yellow-rumped**, **Townsend's**, **Hermit**, and **Black-throated Gray Warbler** can be mastered. The habitats of these four birds may also help you determine the species. At least in theory. I highly recommend Earbirding.com's "[How to Visualize Sounds](#)" webpage, as an additional

way to improve your ability of recognizing and differentiating bird sounds.

While I get very excited about the first Allen's Hummingbird and their remarkable fiery colors, I am also thrilled by the first **Western Flycatchers**, **Warbling Vireos**, **Grasshopper Sparrows**, and **House Wrens** and all their distinctive vocalizations. Nothing however, gets me more excited than

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seeing and hearing my first **Hooded Oriole** of spring. The brilliant orange-yellow males arrive and start “veeking” from the palms and my heart jumps. But then there is the **Black-headed Grosbeak**, the **Cliff Swallow**, **Lazuli Bunting** and **Western Tanager**. There is so much to look forward to now. And while you’ve heard me say it before (about every season of the year), now is the best time to go birding. There’s simply no better time to be a birder than spring. We just have to get through these storms and see what the rain dragged in. •

Tech Trends

Matthew Dodder
Executive Director, SCVAS
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Where to look for *whatever* you're looking for.

Late to the party

There was a time, at the height of my chase year, when I regularly arrived at a site, looking for a bird that I had just learned about, only to find other birders leaving the location—the prize bird securely checked off their list before I even arrived. Somehow, they had gotten themselves in position earlier, looked for the bird perhaps hours before I even knew the bird had been discovered... What sorcery had brought them the information so quickly?

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These birders, who I affectionately refer to as first responders, were always on their way to find something new, something good, something I might not even learn about in time... So I stood there dumbly (having not found the bird) wishing I knew exactly how news could travel so fast, and still not reach me??

Newspaper

Fifty years ago, when I was a boy in Boston,

The Boston Globe

rare bird sightings were printed once a week in the Boston Globe. One had to call the newspaper and leave a 30 second message. If it was deemed interesting enough, it would be printed in a short column each week. The names of the birders were never included in the column and details were sparse.

So if a Dovekie was reported in Boston Harbor, or a Gyrfalcon at Logan Airport, birders wouldn't hear about it for as much as a week and so the report was often not actionable. One day, when I was 14, I left my own report of a Gallinule at Arlington's Great Meadows. I was not given a parade.

Bird Box

Later, when I moved to California, rare bird sightings were communicated with another phone machine—the Bird Box. When you called, the voice of Joe Morlan asked how many Loon species had been found in California's coastal waters. If you typed the answer correctly, you were clear to leave your voice recording. Anyone could call and listen to the reports but only those with the correct answer to Joe's question could leave a message. One incredible day in Point Reyes, during the king tide, I left an urgent and breathless report of Yellow Rail at Waldo's Dike. No one could rush there to enjoy the bird with us because the heavy rains had downed several trees on Sir Francis Drake Boulevard making the road impassible. We celebrated alone in a restaurant with no electricity. Northern California Birders' Bird Box - Call (415) 681-7422 to learn about the latest rarity sightings and share your sightings with others.

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Listservs

In the 1990s a number of Listservs popped up around the country reflecting the world's increased use of email. These subscription based email lists generally followed county lines with a few exceptions. SouthBayBirds, or "SBB" covered Santa Clara County like it still does today. Monterey Bay Birds "MBB" by contrast, covered Monterey County and neighboring Santa Cruz. Still others like Central Valley Birds "CVBirds", CalBirds or the colossal TexBirds were much larger and multi county. Whatever areas they served, the Listservs provided ways for people to send messages to the group, who would receive them as individual emails or as a daily/weekly digest. Subscribers could reply to the entire list or to the original poster. This made for some great conversations, informative discussions, specific recommendations about locating a bird. List owners and moderators would redirect discussion threads when necessary. Volunteers like Jim Dehnert, and Chuq Von Rospach before him, have done an excellent job keeping our listserv on the rails. Recent efforts to curtail the spam epidemic however, have caused some issues with messages getting to gmail or yahoo email addresses. There is an ongoing effort to solve this temporary inconvenience. The SBB listserv remains extremely active and is the go-to resource for rare bird reports for many birders in Santa Clara County. You may also wish to subscribe to MBB for the Monterey Bay, or check sialia.com for other listservs in your areas of interest

Digest

When the Listservs began to proliferate, all the phone messages I mentioned earlier were then transcribed by Adam Winer in a digest that was emailed to subscribers every few days. During migration, those messages arrived almost daily. Like all volunteers, Adam was kept busy with these summary reports and I frequently printed them out and carried them with me on the road—I didn't get my first cellphone for several more years, and it didn't even have email or web access until years after that.

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A similar outlet for compiled information is sialia.com which takes all of the nation's listservs and compiles them continuously. One can zero in on a specific list area by clicking on your target list such as [SouthBayBirds digest.sialia.com/?rm=one_list;id=68](http://SouthBayBirds.digest.sialia.com/?rm=one_list;id=68)

THE BIRDING LISTS DIGEST SIALIA.COM
BIRDING IN THE INFORMATION AGE

Welcome to the new, nation-wide Birding Lists Digest.

Please read the [FAQ](#). If you have any questions or comments, please email Dave Ranney at dave@sialia.com.

Region: | Messages for [<< January 27, 2024 >>](#) | Jump to: | [View All Lists](#) | [FAQ](#)

California

Northern California

Received	List	From	Subject
1/27/24 8:19 pm	central_valley_birds	Michael Perrone via groups.io <michaelperrone10...>	[centralvalleybirds] Costa's hummer
1/27/24 4:48 pm	SouthBayBirds	Matthew Dodder <mdodder...>	Re: [southbaybirds] Baltimore/Bullock's Oriole continues in Palo Alto
1/27/24 4:30 pm	SouthBayBirds	Adam Burnett <adamburnett33...>	[southbaybirds] Baltimore/Bullock's Oriole continues in Palo Alto
1/27/24 4:15 pm	northbaybirds	Denise Hamilton <2napabirders...>	[northbaybirds] Progressive graying/leucistic Robin backyard
1/27/24 3:07 pm	northbaybirds	Jim Chiropoulos via groups.io <jnc...>	[northbaybirds] Sharpies are Spectacular! Rodeo
1/27/24 3:04 pm	SouthBayBirds	Chris Johnson <ryanjohnson77...>	Re: [southbaybirds] ID help: Hammond's FC? at Ulistac
1/27/24 2:45 pm	SouthBayBirds	Dominik Mosur <dominikmosur...>	Re: [southbaybirds] ID help: Hammond's FC? at Ulistac
1/27/24 2:16 pm	SouthBayBirds	Chris Johnson <ryanjohnson77...>	Re: [southbaybirds] ID help: Hammond's FC? at Ulistac
1/27/24 1:55 pm	SouthBayBirds	Melissa Johnson <mitzmelissa...>	[southbaybirds] Two Pelagic Cormorants
			[southbaybirds] Eurasian Wigeon at Crittenden Marsh

Sample digest page on sialia.com

ASHLEY
presidents day sale

YOUR CHOICE OF
mattress
hot buys'
just
\$699

shop now

Overload

So, with all that background in mind, we find ourselves in a new and very different information situation today—overload. There is almost too much information, or more accurately, there are too many places to find rare bird information such that a birder has to check more than one source to get all the bird reports. Here's a rundown of some of the ways bird sightings are disseminated and possible ways to avoid being left in the dark...

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Santa Clara California, US Map

Overview

Illustrated Checklist

VIEW MY...
 My eBird
 Life List
 Target Species
 Needs Alerts
 Checklists

EXPLORE...
 Hotspot Map
 Bar Charts
 Media
 Top 100
 Rare Bird Alerts
 Printable Checklist

216 Species observed

3085 Complete checklists

10.5K eBirders

556 Hotspots

Sightings Updated ~16 hr(s) ago. Show all details

Last seen **First seen** **High counts**

SPECIES NAME	COUNT	DATE	OBSERVER	LOCATION
1. Mourning Dove	2	30 Jan 2024	Jeff Zolotar	Mountain View--Dale Ave Neighborhood
2. Anna's Hummingbird	3	30 Jan 2024	Jeff Zolotar	Mountain View--Dale Ave Neighborhood
3. Black Phoebe	1	30 Jan 2024	Jeff Zolotar	Mountain View--Dale Ave Neighborhood
4. American Crow	6	30 Jan 2024	Jeff Zolotar	Mountain View--Dale Ave Neighborhood
5. Chestnut-backed Chickadee	3	30 Jan 2024	Jeff Zolotar	Mountain View--Dale Ave Neighborhood
6. Oak Titmouse	1	30 Jan 2024	Jeff Zolotar	Mountain View--Dale Ave Neighborhood
7. Bushtit	6	30 Jan 2024	Jeff Zolotar	Mountain View--Dale Ave Neighborhood
8. Ruby-crowned Kinglet	1	30 Jan 2024	Jeff Zolotar	Mountain View--Dale Ave Neighborhood
9. Brown Creeper	2	30 Jan 2024	Jeff Zolotar	Mountain View--Dale Ave Neighborhood

Top media CURRENT MONTH More top media

If you are not already using eBird, you are missing out on a lot. Not only does it keep your life list, your year list, your county list, and even your ranking sorted out nicely, but it provides you with a wealth of other resources from bar charts to target species alerts. There's also no better way to help you prepare for your next birding trip than exploring all the research tools it provides. Now, with regard to getting information about recent bird sightings, that is best done through the [Explore page](#). You can set up alerts for birds you have not seen (for a given month, year, or ever). If said bird shows up in your target area (county, for example), you will receive a "Needs Alert" via email. You can also view the birds seen most recently on the Explore page. If you are using the eBird Mobile, these options are available on the Explore panel on the lower edge of your phone's screen. This is all great, but you do still have to check your email inbox...

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BirdFinder

BirdFinder.net US-CA-085 About			
US-CA-085			
Wed 2024-01-31 09:34	3 - Red Crossbill (Checklist)	Ray Trent	Bear Creek Redwoods OSP--Pond , Santa Clara, US-CA
Wed 2024-01-31 08:40	1 - Pelagic Cormorant (Checklist)	Rebecca Thorjussen	Shoreline Park--Shoreline Lake area , Santa Clara, US-CA
Tue 2024-01-30 16:45	1 - Hammond's Flycatcher (Checklist) 📷 ✓	Chris Overington	Ulistac Natural Area , Santa Clara, US-CA
Tue 2024-01-30 14:30	1 - Chestnut-sided Warbler (Checklist) ✓	Bob Strobe	Mitchell Park , Santa Clara, US-CA
Tue 2024-01-30 13:39	1 - Chipping Sparrow (Checklist) ✓	Laurie Bechtler	TJ Martin Park , Santa Clara, US-CA
Tue 2024-01-30 13:30	1 - Hammond's Flycatcher (Checklist)	Erica Fleniken	Ulistac Natural Area , Santa Clara, US-CA
Tue 2024-01-30 13:20	1 - Chipping Sparrow (Checklist) ✓	Dave Weber	Ed Levin CP--Sandy Wool-Elm areas , Santa Clara, US-CA
Tue 2024-01-30 13:16	1 - Common Loon (Checklist) 📷 ✓	Garrett Lau	Sunnyvale WPCP--Pond A4 , Santa Clara, US-CA
Tue 2024-01-30 13:16	1 - Red-throated Loon (Checklist) ✓	Garrett Lau	Sunnyvale WPCP--Pond A4 , Santa Clara, US-CA
Tue 2024-01-30 13:16	1 - Common Loon (Checklist) 📷 ✓	Garrett Lau	Sunnyvale WPCP--Pond A4 , Santa Clara, US-CA
Tue 2024-01-30 12:45	1 - Common x Barrow's Goldeneye (hybrid) (Checklist)	Melissa Johnson	Shoreline Park--Shoreline Lake area , Santa Clara, US-CA
Tue 2024-01-30 12:45	2 - Pelagic Cormorant (Checklist) 📷	Melissa Johnson	Shoreline Park--Shoreline Lake area , Santa Clara, US-CA
Tue 2024-01-30 12:04	1 - Hammond's Flycatcher (Checklist) ✓	Richard Jeffers	Ulistac Natural Area , Santa Clara, US-CA
Tue 2024-01-30 12:00	2 - Lesser Yellowlegs (Checklist)	Kim Blythe Higdon	Palo Alto Baylands , Santa Clara, US-CA
Tue 2024-01-30 10:27	1 - Yellow Warbler (Checklist) 📷 ✓	Garrett Lau	Don Edwards NWR--Env. Ed. Ctr. (EEC) and nearby upland areas , Santa Clara, US-CA
Tue 2024-01-30 10:11	1 - Chestnut-sided Warbler (Checklist) ✓	Andrew Bradshaw	Mitchell Park , Santa Clara, US-CA
Tue 2024-01-30 10:02	1 - Barrow's Goldeneye (Checklist)	Marjorie Siegel	Aviso Marina County Park (please use a specific pond hotspot where possible) , Santa Clara, US-CA
Tue 2024-01-30 09:28	1 - Hammond's Flycatcher (Checklist) ✓	Peter LaTourrette	Ulistac Natural Area , Santa Clara, US-CA
Tue 2024-01-30 09:15	1 - Chestnut-sided Warbler (Checklist) 📷 ✓	David Shieh	Magical Bridge Playground , Santa Clara, US-CA
Tue 2024-01-30 08:43	2 - Pelagic Cormorant (Checklist) ✓	Bob Bolles	Charleston Slough/Coast Casey Forebay , Santa Clara, US-CA
Tue 2024-01-30 08:20	2 - Pelagic Cormorant (Checklist) ✓	Ryan Phillips	Shoreline Park--Shoreline Lake area , Santa Clara, US-CA
Tue 2024-01-30 08:07	1 - Green-winged Teal (Eurasian) (Checklist) ✓	Ryan Phillips	Charleston Slough/Coast Casey Forebay , Santa Clara, US-CA
Tue 2024-01-30 08:03	1 - Red-necked Grebe (Checklist) ✓	Richard Jeffers	Lake Cunningham , Santa Clara, US-CA

In the same way that sialia.com captures the posts made on the various listservs, BirdFinder compiles all the rare bird reports from eBird and displays them in one place. You can narrow your query to birds in Santa Clara County by entering our county number (085) which is embedded in the county page's URL on eBird. birdfinder.net/region.php?region=US-CA-085 This remarkable source of information is now the start page on my browser.

Continued on next page

iNaturalist

The screenshot shows the iNaturalist website interface. At the top, there is a search bar and navigation links for 'Explore', 'Community', and 'More'. The main heading is 'Observations' with a search filter set to 'Bird' and a location filter for 'Santa Clara County, CA, USA'. Below this, a summary bar shows statistics for Santa Clara County: 178,487 Observations, 391 Species, 6,198 Identifiers, and 7,128 Observers. The main content area features a grid of bird species cards, each with a photo and observation count:

- Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*): 5,043 observations
- Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*): 4,236 observations
- Western Bluebird (*Sialia mexicana*): 3,300 observations
- Great Egret (*Ardea alba*): 3,341 observations
- Other species shown include a hummingbird (4,234 observations), a Canada goose (3,820 observations), and a small brown bird (3,443 observations).

An inset screenshot shows a map of the region with a red overlay indicating the distribution of observations. A pop-up window on the map shows details for 'Pacific Noddy' with 13,581 observations. The bottom of the page includes navigation links, a 'DONATE' button, and social media icons.

I have to admit, I am not an iNaturalist power-user. But I do enjoy identifying plants and insects with the mobile app and gradually building my non-avian life list. It is an incredible resource for anyone wishing to learn more about the wide variety of life forms around us. Merav Vonshak organizes many bioblitzes through her bioblitz.club website. These events use iNaturalist and take place in many locations throughout the Bay Area, including North Coyote Valley Conservation Area where we run our Oak Savanna Community Science Project. What happens occasionally is this—an iNat user posts an image of a bird that they may or may not recognize. Even more occasionally, reports like this start a frenzy in the birding community. A perfect example was the Zone-tailed Hawk a few years ago at Anderson Reservoir. The user (a general naturalist, but not necessarily a birder) posted a photo of a mystery hawk and it took several days for the local birders to get

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the news of this rarity. This is no one's fault, but it is evidence that iNaturalist is a platform is used by many people and we should look to it for reports that might not appear elsewhere. Visit [iNaturalist.org](https://www.inaturalist.org) and download the mobile app as well and see why so many people love this platform!

Discord

The screenshot shows a Discord chat interface for the 'South Bay Birds - Discord' server. The active channel is '# rarity_chat'. The chat history includes:

- A message from **matthewdodder** (12/12/2022 8:13 AM) with a photo of three birds. The text reads: "Here is a nice size comparison from yesterday. The CUSA has some interesting structural differences as well as the temporal tertial droop. The primaries and tertials are longer than Dunlin, and the head appears smaller and more rounded and the neck seems more slender, making it appear slightly longer. The legs are proportionally longer. The bill is not only more evenly curved, but it comes to a fine point, quite unlike any other birds. My suggestion would be to look at low tide where it was seen last December-January, and if you arrive at the wrong time, check the Harriet Mundy Marsh beside the Lucy Evans Nature Center." Below the photo is the caption: "L to R: WESA, DUNL, LBDO, CUSA".
- A message from **matthewdodder** (12/12/2022 2:59 PM) stating: "I just received a call from a birder in the Adobe Meadow neighborhood of Palo Alto who reports about 15 SCALY-BREASTED MUNIAS in her backyard feeder. For privacy reasons, she did not want to publicize her exact location, but wanted the news to get out since this is not an established area for the species." This is followed by a paragraph: "As far as eBird goes, this is a new location. There are creeks that run through the area where the birds might find suitable habitat. Perhaps the birds were scattered after the stormy weather. The closest public habitat that might also support the birds would be the Palo Alto Flood Control Basin, so so maybe they will show up there as well." and another paragraph: "The closest recent eBird reports are from Pecos Way in Santa Clara from several weeks ago." A date separator for "December 19, 2022" follows.
- A message from **Cedrik von Briel** (12/19/2022 2:44 PM) saying: "Painted Redstart continues ifg!!! Nice refind @Eve Meier !!". It has 2 likes and 2 reactions.

The left sidebar shows the server's channel list, including # welcome-and-rules, # announcements, # resources, # introductions, # arrivals, # photo_contest_entries, # photo_contest_chat, # rare_bird_alert_scl, # general, # q_and_a, # bird_id_help, # rarity_chat (selected), # photos_and_art, # meetups, # events, # casual_chatting, # birbs, # out_of_county_rarities, # out_of_county_general, and # bragging_channel. The right sidebar shows a list of online members, including SCVAS STAFF and SCVAS VOLUNTEER.

Two years ago, a South Bay Birds server was added to the Discord platform by Massimo Bafetti, a young birder from the community. He felt that the existing SBB listserv lacked the energy and casual conversation style young birders wanted. Once announced, many people opened Discord accounts for themselves, myself included, so they could see what this new channel was like. As was intended, the posts are informal, irreverent, and fun. Formatted like a chat group,

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images can be shared on the platform (from either one's phone or desktop), and new posts generate an audible alert so would wouldn't miss any news. What was truly unique about the new platform is that messages could be placed in different topic areas such as rarity chat, photos and art, out-of-county, events, and the new Young Birders Club. An article by the founder, Massimo Bafetti, appeared in the summer issue of the *Avocet* in 2022.

Telegram

The most recent but certainly not the last information source for birders is an app. To use the Telegram platform, you must download the app, create an account, and request to be admitted to the Bay Area Rare Bird Alert. This is not unlike Discord, but differs somewhat in having a more rare bird focus. The alerts users receive can be frequent and contain hyper-specific detail about locations of recent rare birds. A perfect example of when this was put to good use was the appearance of Swallow-tailed Gull at San Gregorio Beach in San Mateo County. Updates came every few minutes that included spectacular photos and GPS coordinates. Had I known about the group or the app, I might have gotten that information in time... sigh.

Finally

If there was ever a case of too much of a good thing, the current information age for birders would be it. If we truly want to stay well informed about what's around, we have to look at multiple information sources. It's bedeviling, but true. Perhaps the future will bring a consolidation of news outlets for birders, but more likely there will be yet another news source we'll have to check. Using eBird plus one other platform (like SBB) to get the word out about local rarities is always a good tactic. While the number of news sources will probably only grow, we can all be thankful that if a Gyrfalcon ever does appear in Santa Clara County, reading the news won't depend on getting the Boston Globe delivered to our door. ●

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It's Spring!

Ann Hepenstal
SCVAS Volunteer



What's in Your Garden?

Supporting Birds With What We Grow

Whether you have a balcony or an acre, the plants you grow at your home can help support birds. But some plants are more valuable than others! This is a good time of year to look around, assess your landscaping and plant containers, and start planning for the October planting season.

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Habitat Value

Birds need food, water, a place to raise young, and shelter. Your landscaping choices can help support these needs. But while birds may happily seek a place to hide from predators in native and nonnative plant species alike, the plant's habitat value is simply not the same.

Empty Grocery Shelves and Junk Food

Often, landscaping choices are dictated by what is familiar... or pretty... or available when you go to the garden center. By choosing native plants for your landscaping, you can add habitat value to your yard and support birds. California native plants offer many beautiful flowers and foliage and are available in our local plant nurseries. Since the birds, insects and plants evolved together, these plants support life and habitat and provide good nutrition.

Some exotic plants look pretty and may attract birds and insects—but may not provide good nutrition. When these plants are in the landscaping, people say things like, “but the hummingbirds like it!” or “but birds eat the berries!” I like eating chips, and they give my body calories—but not the nutrition that my body needs. While birds may eat the berries or other food from exotic plants, these plants don't provide



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the value that native plants do. Or, the exotic plants may look pretty to human eyes, but offer nothing to the insects and birds—the equivalent of empty grocery store shelves.

I like eating chips—but they’re not proper nutrition for me! Incorporate native plants into your landscaping instead of exotic plants, so the birds have the insects, nectar, berries, seeds, etc. that they need to thrive.

Plants I Glare At

As I walk around my neighborhood and see the landscaping at nearby homes, there are several exotic plants that I especially resent as being problematic. Go look at your landscaping and see if you have them. Remove them from your home landscape (talk to the property manager at your apartment or condo complex). This fall, plant a native plant there instead.

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Nandina Domestica (Heavenly Bamboo):

While commonly used in home and commercial landscaping, Nandina is a terrible choice. Not only does it spread, but its leaves and green berries release large amounts of cyanide when consumed. The unripe berries are highly cyanogenic, while the ripe berries (the red ones) release cyanide slowly and as the berries age, they become less and less toxic until they produce little or no detectable cyanide. When birds eat a couple of berries—no problem. When Cedar Waxwings eat the berries—because they descend on bushes, strip the berries off the bushes, and gorge on them—they eat so many berries that they're unable to detoxify them and the cyanide may kill the birds.

<https://ncbg.unc.edu/2022/05/04/nandina-toxic-to-birds>

Buddleia (Butterfly Bush):

Native to China, the Butterfly Bush has pretty purple flowers



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and butterfly enthusiasts often recommend it. It's an invasive plant, spreading very easily by seed, and no North American caterpillar feeds on its leaves (bad both for the butterfly procreation and for birds that need caterpillars for their young). Instead, select from the many, many California native plants that support butterflies—with their nectar, or as host plants for caterpillars. See <https://bit.ly/cnbutterfly> to learn more or use www.calscape.org to find plants.

<https://www.ecosystemgardening.com/butterfly-bush-is-invasive-do-not-plant.html>



Agapanthus

While this plant has pretty purple flowers that look like fireworks, it's an exotic plant native to South Africa that spreads easily. I call it the Gas Station Plant because it's used so commonly in commercial landscaping as well as at homes. Planting this exotic offers no benefit to the birds—select a native plant instead, to provide nectar, seeds, insects as a host plant, berries—some nutrition to support the birds.

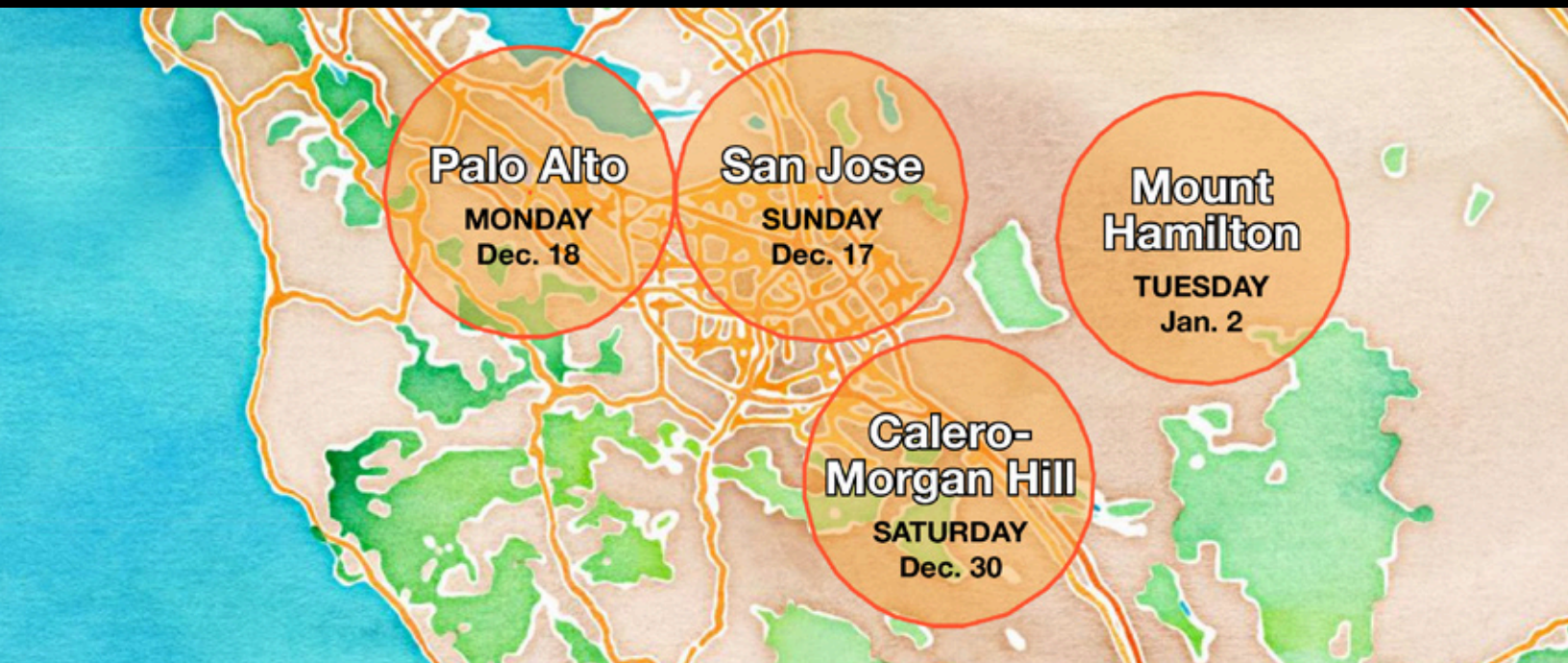
Prepare for the Fall

California native plants like to be planted in the fall, when the soil is still warm and the rains are about to arrive and help them settle into their new home. This spring and summer, you can look around for exotic plants to remove, do research on what native plants will do well in their place (calscape.org or bloomcalifornia.org), and prepare to plant them in October. •

2023-2024 Christmas Bird Count Results

Table of Contents

Barry Langdon-Lassagne
Aggregator



INTRODUCTION

Every December-January SCVAS sponsors several Christmas Bird Counts (CBCs), part of a citizen science project coordinated by the National Audubon Society. Organizations use data collected in this long-running wildlife census to assess the health of bird populations and to help guide conservation action. Read about [how the data is used](#) and about the [histories](#) of our counts. Also see our [Highlights and tables for past Christmas Bird Counts](#). For information outside our area, visit [Audubon Christmas Bird Count](#).

Each CBC has the primary goal of counting all individuals of each species of bird detected in a 15-mile-diameter circle on a single day. In the SCVAS counts, each of our four predefined

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count circles are divided into sectors by the count leader and teams are assigned to count birds in each sector. Counters with less experience are teamed with those more experienced. Even if beginning birders can't identify every bird, they provide important "extra eyes" in finding birds. A countdown dinner is held on the evening of the count, where groups share their results and tell tales of the day.

LATEST RESULTS

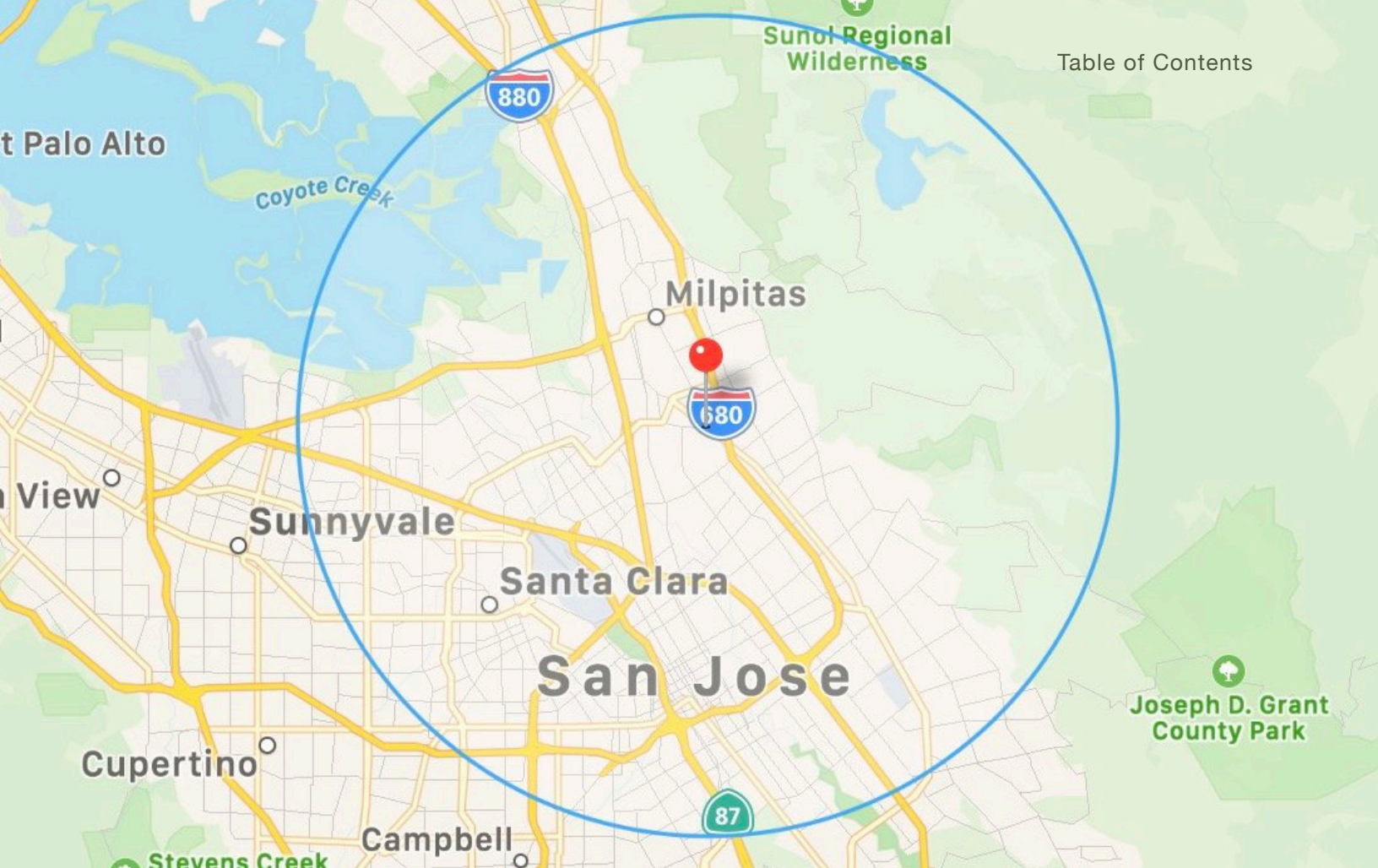
Below are the results from our four Christmas Bird Counts for this winter. Across our four count circles, 362 volunteers were able to tally 196,476 individual birds spanning 196 species.

See this year's table on pages, 47 & 48, — an aggregation of the results from all four Christmas Bird Counts (also see [previous years' results](#))



Nate Klein, East Foothills Sector, San Jose CBC 2023

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Mike Azevedo, Compiler

The San Jose Christmas Bird Count took place on Sunday, December 17th, 2023. Threats of afternoon rain seemed to affect the birds, and many sectors didn't seem so "birdy." One hundred and five participants fanned out across the valley to find birds in tidelands and in the hills and parks around Silicon Valley. Rare birds found in the Alviso sector included some favorites that do get seen relatively frequently such as Blue-winged Teal, Eurasian Wigeon, Barrow's Goldeneye, Black Rail, Glaucous Gull, Red-throated Loon and Swamp Sparrow. Tree Swallows, Violet Green Swallows and Barn Swallows were found, as they have in recent years, but unlike last year, where these fast-flyers were found in several sectors, this year, they were only found around Alviso.

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Young Birders Team, San Jose CBC

Western Tanager was found in both Santa Clara/Sunnyvale Sector and the Guadalupe River area. Lewis's Woodpecker were seen in the old golf course on Tully across



California Gull Yawning, E Foothills Sector, San Jose CBC

from Lake Cunningham for the Evergreen Sector. Ferruginous Hawk was seen at Calaveras Reservoir by the South Reservoir team. Also seen and written up, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker

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and Cackling Goose. Agnews sector birders found a Rusty Blackbird, and Nashville Warbler.

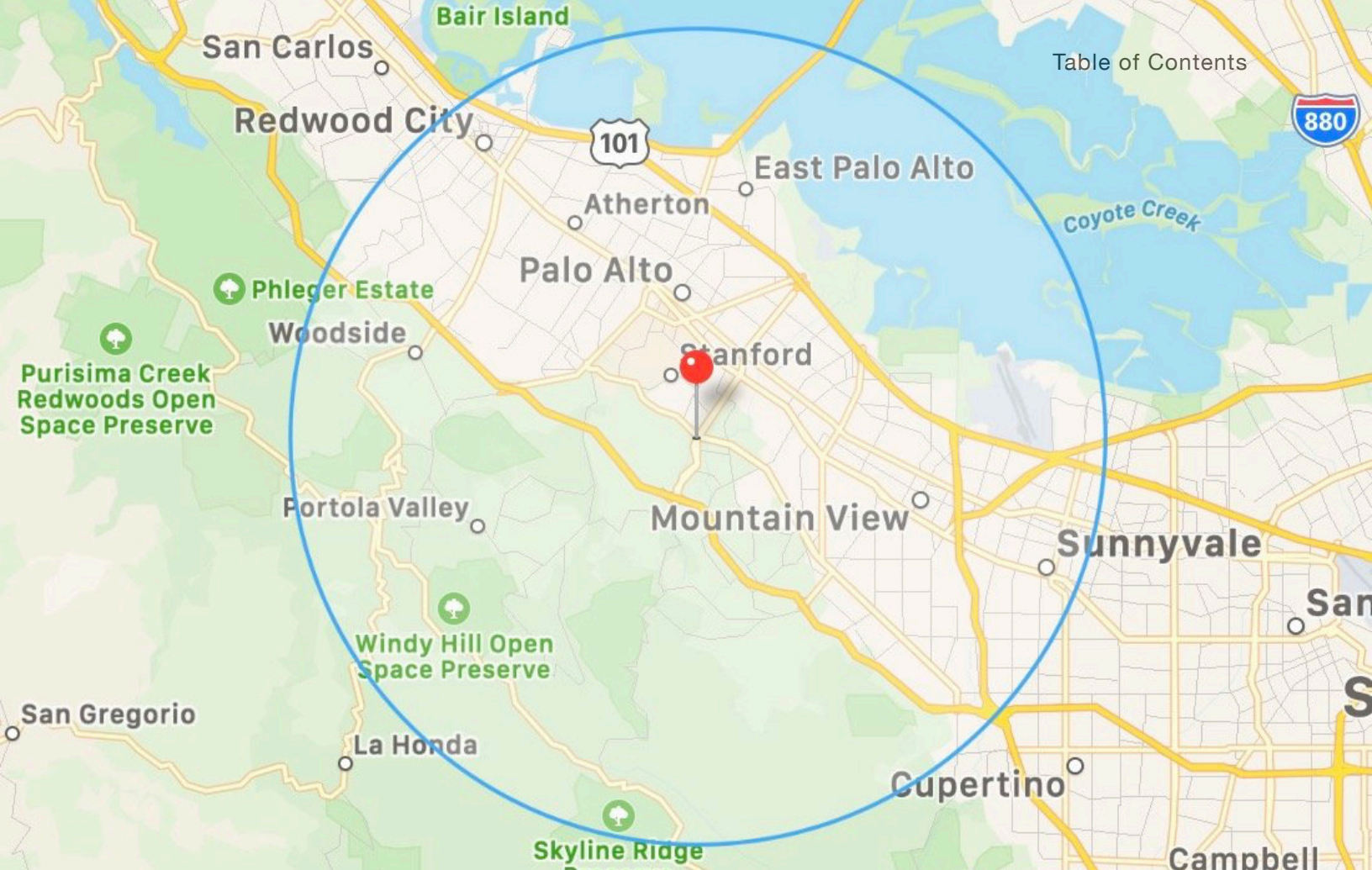
Sanderling and White-throated Swift were missed, as was Short-eared, Northern Pygmy-owl and Hutton's Vireo. Thankfully, Burrowing Owl was not among the missing, a few individuals being found in Calaveras sector at Wool Ranch and East reservoir.

This year, the Young Birders Club participated as a team for the Alviso sector. Alviso generally attracts our best birders and these students and their parents were able to use their solid experience with baylands birding to lend a hand when it was most needed.



Young Birders, San Jose CBC

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Palo Alto

Al Eisner, Compiler

The Palo Alto CBC took place in mostly-wet weather on Monday December 18. The weather created unpleasant conditions, especially for many counting in the Santa Cruz Mountains. While the 147 participants was only a bit below last year's record (160), the effort in party-hours was down about 17% compared to the last two counts, while the total number of birds was more than 25% lower. However, we did manage to find 163 species, only a few less than our recent average.

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Because of the weather, it probably isn't useful to conclude much about numerical trends for individual species (last year's very high count of Band-tailed Pigeons, highest in the nation, was back to more "normal" numbers.) Most of our Owl species stayed undetected, and some species usually found on the count were missed: Greater White-fronted Goose, Wood Duck, Eurasian Wigeon, Ruddy Turnstone, Golden Eagle, Barn Owl, Western Screech-owl, Pileated Woodpecker, Loggerhead Shrike and Swamp Sparrow.



Black Oystercatcher, Palo Alto CBC, Colin Umson

One new species was found for the count: a Chestnut-sided Warbler at Mitchell Park in Palo Alto. A Caspian Tern at salt pond SF2 by the Dumbarton Bridge was a second count record, while the Curlew Sandpiper, back for its third winter at the Palo Alto Baylands, is still a quite amazing record. Another third-time species was Black Rail (the previous two were in the 1980's). Several Pelagic Cormorants have turned up in the count area this winter; one near Redwood Creek was a fourth-time count record. Black Oystercatcher has settled in near

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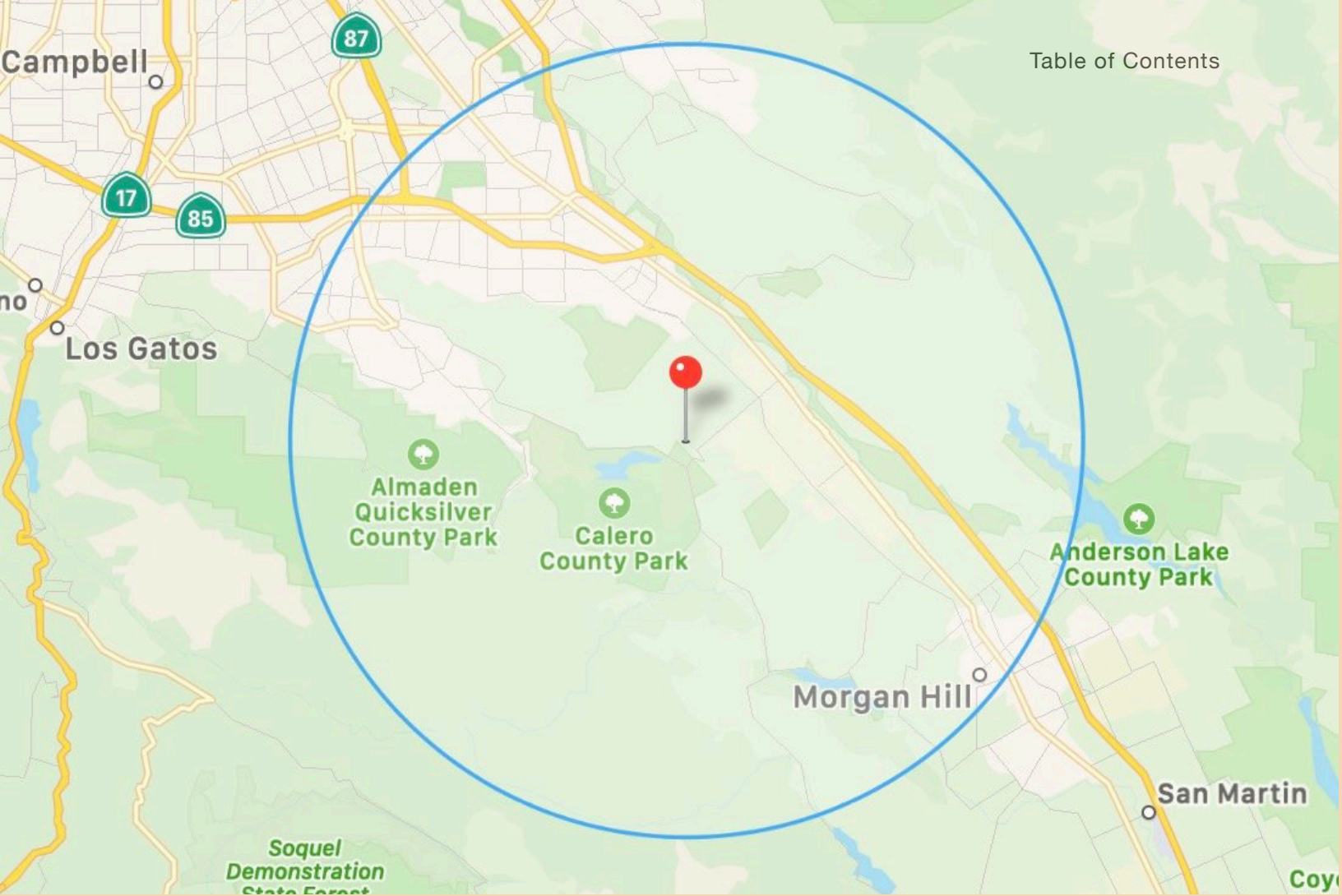
the Dumbarton Bridge, with a total of 5 found by two parties. Other good finds included a Red-throated Loon in the Bay (I'm not sure in which county), 2 Ospreys near the Dumbarton Bridge, 4 Snowy Plovers in San Mateo County, both Tree and Violet-green Swallows in Bayside Santa Clara County, a pair of Bald Eagles in Santa Clara Co, a Great-tailed Grackle near Byrne Preserve in Los Altos Hills, and a Palm Warbler along downstream San Francisquito Creek (seen in both counties).

Thanks are due to our intrepid counters, to our sector coordinators, and to Ann Hepenstal for organizing the count and for setting up our first fully-in-person countdown/dinner since the pre-pandemic era.



Chestnut-sided Warbler, Palo Alto CBC, Howard Friedman

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Calero-Morgan Hill

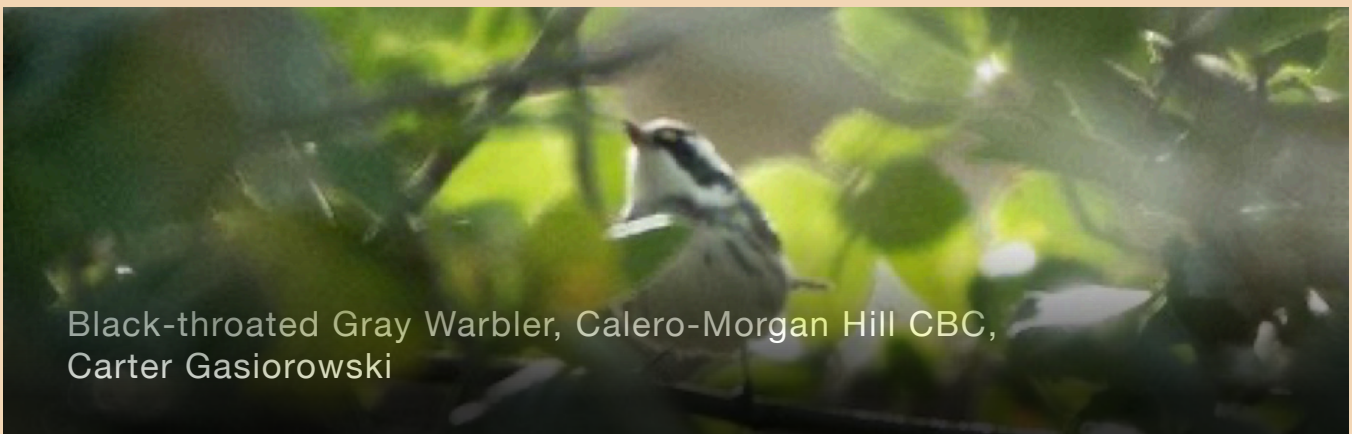
Rick Herder, Compiler

At dawn the Calero-Morgan Hill count on Sat., Dec. 30 didn't look promising. There were rain showers during the early hours, the sun never fully came out, and the temperature hovered in the 50s. Nevertheless, a very good turnout of 94 observers probably helped the count total of 143 species, the highest in several years. Several participants had outstanding days. Carter Gasiorowski found a Summer Tanager, a new bird for the count, and also found a Black-throated Gray Warbler. He, and several other counters, also found an Orange-crowned Warbler.

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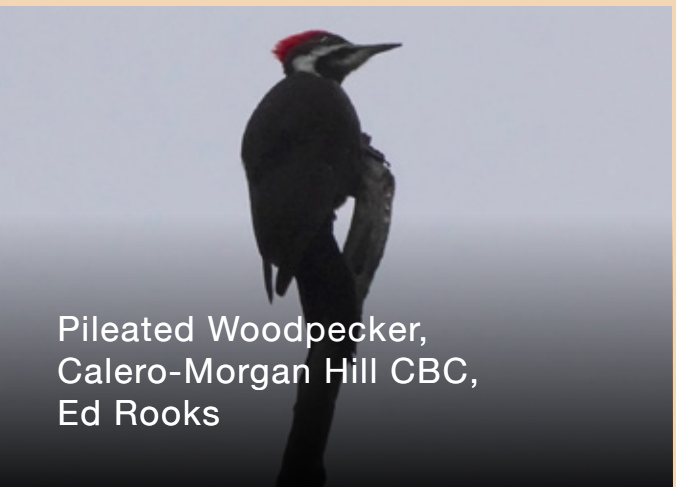


Other reported count rarities were Greater White-fronted Goose, Cackling Goose, Vaux's Swift over Coyote Valley, Lewis's and Pileated Woodpeckers, Violet-green Swallow, and Blue-gray Gnatcatcher along Calero Creek. The Pileated Woodpeckers were reported in a new area for the count, in the hills above Almaden Valley. They've shown up on several recent counts and may be expanding their range east. It's tough to be certain about eagle numbers, especially in areas like Coyote Valley where they are seen in both the Diablo and Sierra Azul range foothills as well as over the valley, but Bald Eagle sightings have been growing in the last five years. Golden Eagle counts have been steady.





Blue-gray Gnatcatcher,
Calero-Morgan Hill CBC,
Bill Bousman

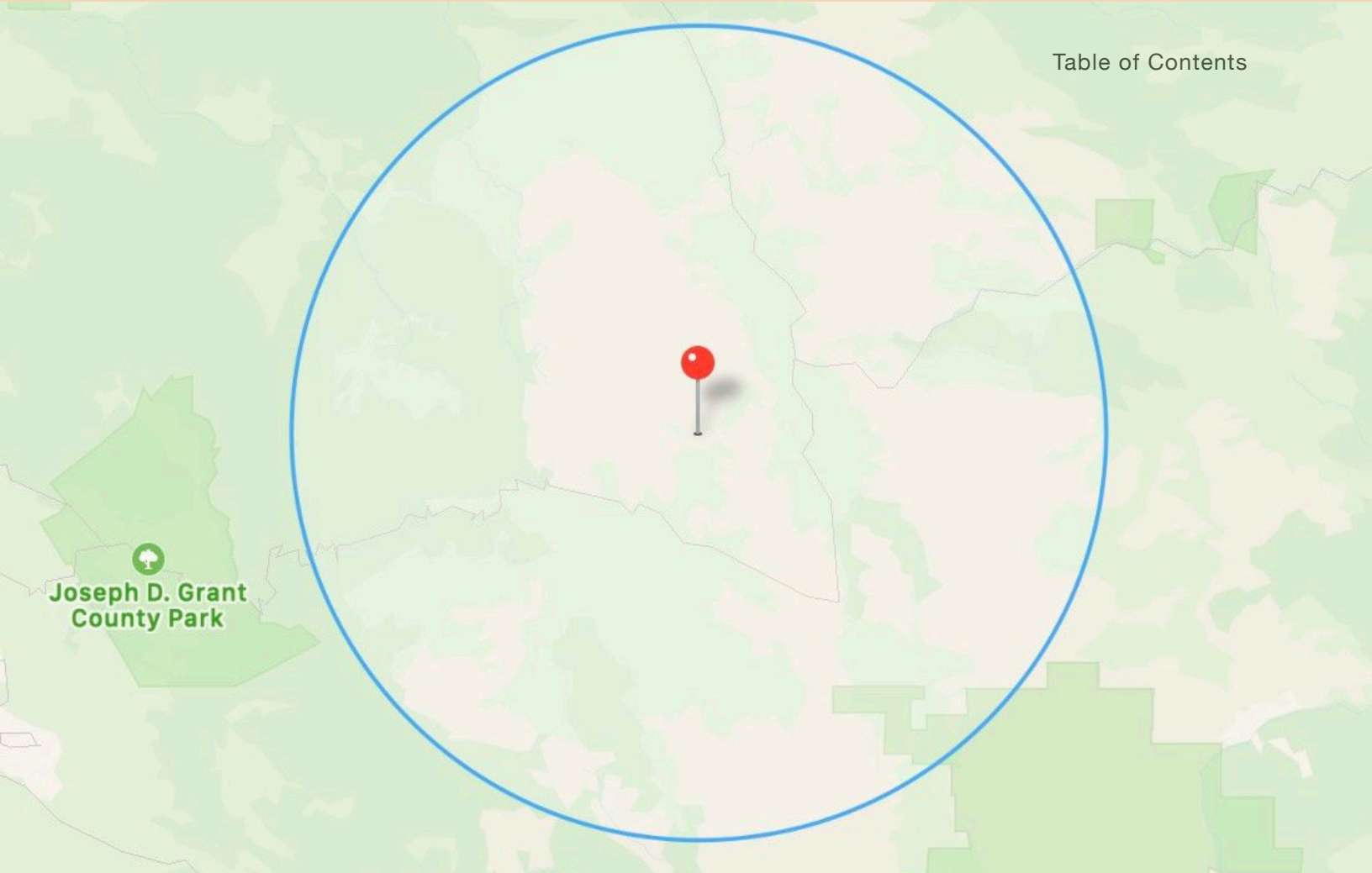


Pileated Woodpecker,
Calero-Morgan Hill CBC,
Ed Rooks

The relatively high species total for this latest count is especially notable since very few shorebirds or ducks were reported this year—one Greater Yellowlegs and one American Wigeon for example. A single Loggerhead Shrike was discouraging, reports of this bird have been dropping. But the berry crop was abundant this year and so were birds such as American Robin and Cedar Waxwing. We also had high counts of Red-breasted Nuthatch, Common Yellowthroat, Townsend's and Hermit Warblers. We did have a few misses of expected birds. Janna Pauser quickly found count week Chipping Sparrows that were missed on count day.



Loma Prieta Team, "tough assignment",
Calero-Morgan Hill CBC, Andrew Melnick



Mount Hamilton

Bob Hirt, Compiler

We had our count on Tuesday, January 2, 2024 and we welcomed good weather throughout most of the day. The smaller ponds were open and the water birds were spread out. We had very little weather-related access problems since the roads were open and dry.



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Unfortunately, we were not able to get access to one of the key ranches and consequently our numbers this year are much lower and perhaps not comparable. We had a below average species count coming in at 89 species, with only 3,493 individual birds for the day. Some of this due to fewer areas counted and some due to the continued impact of the devastation from the SCU Lightning Complex fires of 2020.

As to individual species we had very low count of Lawrence's Goldfinches with only 9 tallied. One other target was Lewis's Woodpecker and we came in at only 7. Bell's Sparrow came in at 4. Golden Eagles at 9 and Bald at 5 were about normal. We did find 11 Varied Thrushes. Our brave owlers found 8 Screech, 7 Great-horned and a Pygmy-owl.



Bell's Sparrow, Mount Hamilton
CBC 2024, Pete Dunten



House Wren, Mount Hamilton
CBC 2024, Pete Dunten

Continued on next page

Thanks to our leaders again: Elinor Gates (and her team: Howard Higley, Howard Friedman, Carolyn Straub and Steve McHenry) Mike Rogers (Mike Mammoser), Mike Azevedo (Bill Walker), and especially, Pete Dunten who solo hiked the grueling Mule trail and stayed into the late day rain, to Kirsten Holmquist and her team (Rich Page and Dale Stahlecker) for the long hike on one of the large ranches, and to Leighton Nakata and Petra Kinsman for counting the birds on the San Antonio Valley Ecological Reserve. I received help again from Dave Stocks and his rugged truck. Our deepest thanks to Elinor Gates for hosting a marvelous compilation feast again this year and for helping count the birds at the top and stocking her house feeders.



San Antonio Valley Ecological Reserve, Mount Hamilton CBC 2024,
Leighton Nakata

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2023-2024 SANTA CLARA COUNTY CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS

Species	San Jose	Palo Alto	Mount	Calero	Species	San Jose	Palo Alto	Mount	Calero
	12/17/23	12/18/23	Hamilton	Morgan-Hill		12/17/23	12/18/23	1/2/24	Morgan-Hill
Greater White-fronted Goose	2	-	-	4	Long-billed Dowitcher	53	230	-	-
Cackling Goose	11	2	-	7	<i>dowitcher sp.</i>	275	1,648	-	-
Canada Goose	761	561	-	1,086	Wilson's Snipe	97	10	2	5
Wood Duck	3	-	1	29	Spotted Sandpiper	11	8	-	6
Blue-winged Teal	3	-	-	-	Lesser Yellowlegs	-	1	-	-
Cinnamon Teal	61	22	-	-	Willet	39	5,546	-	-
Northern Shoveler	15,264	6,163	-	4	Greater Yellowlegs	55	85	2	1
Gadwall	384	187	-	77	Curlew Sandpiper	-	1	-	-
Eurasian Wigeon	4	-	-	-	Dunlin	219	911	-	-
American Wigeon	1,892	1,841	29	1	Least Sandpiper	1,745	438	-	-
Mallard	1,642	1,182	64	724	Western Sandpiper	804	6,748	-	-
Northern Pintail	298	564	-	-	<i>peep sp.</i>	476	1,419	-	-
Green-winged Teal	3,105	1,213	-	1	Bonaparte's Gull	4	250	-	-
Canvasback	908	2,266	-	3	Short-billed Gull	46	133	-	-
Redhead	428	407	-	-	Ring-billed Gull	389	413	-	97
Ring-necked Duck	94	85	88	215	Western Gull	75	6	-	467
Greater Scaup	422	124	-	-	Herring Gull	2,106	148	-	954
Lesser Scaup	2,502	416	-	6	Glaucous Gull	1	-	-	-
<i>Greater/Lesser Scaup</i>	830	220	-	-	California Gull	6,080	1,080	-	1,546
Surf Scoter	2	22	-	-	Glaucous-winged Gull	247	26	-	10
Bufflehead	620	297	32	142	Iceland Gull	170	2	-	8
Common Goldeneye	156	37	-	9	<i>Western x Glaucous-winged Gull (hybrid)</i>	2	1	-	-
Barrow's Goldeneye	1	2	-	-	<i>Herring x Glaucous-winged Gull (hybrid)</i>	2	1	-	-
Hooded Merganser	18	31	-	29	<i>gull sp.</i>	990	1,050	-	10,919
Common Merganser	1	3	-	77	Caspian Tern	-	1	-	-
Red-breasted Merganser	48	1	-	-	Forster's Tern	197	117	-	-
Ruddy Duck	2,945	3,958	1	91	Red-throated Loon	1	1	-	-
<i>Blue-winged Teal x No. Shoveler (hybrid)</i>	-	1	-	-	Common Loon	-	CW	-	-
<i>duck sp.</i>	-	2,115	-	-	Pelagic Cormorant	-	1	-	-
California Quail	241	361	261	415	Double-crested Cormorant	204	143	-	190
Wild Turkey	6	142	18	203	American White Pelican	122	183	-	1
Pied-billed Grebe	134	69	5	64	Brown Pelican	-	358	-	-
Horned Grebe	14	1	-	-	Black-crowned Night Heron	126	161	1	18
Eared Grebe	485	22	-	11	Snowy Egret	87	97	-	18
Western Grebe	136	8	-	54	Green Heron	14	2	-	7
Clark's Grebe	36	11	-	6	Great Egret	80	49	3	32
<i>aechmophorus sp.</i>	44	18	-	15	Great Blue Heron	39	15	2	25
Rock Pigeon	1,071	491	5	1,199	Turkey Vulture	109	99	2	301
Band-tailed Pigeon	84	278	9	714	Osprey	-	2	-	1
Eurasian Collared-Dove	102	14	12	156	White-tailed Kite	17	14	-	15
Mourning Dove	427	391	36	342	Golden Eagle	11	-	9	13
Vaux's Swift	-	-	-	1	Northern Harrier	21	12	-	4
White-throated Swift	-	16	-	4	Sharp-shinned Hawk	5	2	-	5
Anna's Hummingbird	433	395	11	338	Cooper's Hawk	13	16	3	15
Ridgway's Rail	-	8	-	-	<i>accipiter sp.</i>	-	1	-	2
Virginia Rail	28	7	-	-	Bald Eagle	5	2	5	13
Sora	70	13	1	1	Red-shouldered Hawk	18	47	1	44
Common Gallinule	10	3	-	3	Red-tailed Hawk	128	79	38	121
American Coot	7,811	3,665	30	318	Ferruginous Hawk	1	-	1	2
Black Rail	2	1	-	-	Barn Owl	1	-	-	3
Black-necked Stilt	476	265	-	3	Western Screech-Owl	6	-	8	1
American Avocet	993	1,273	-	-	Great Horned Owl	6	3	7	9
Black Oystercatcher	-	5	-	-	Northern Pygmy-Owl	-	-	1	-
Black-bellied Plover	312	393	-	-	Burrowing Owl	3	3	-	-
Killdeer	324	62	10	35	Belted Kingfisher	11	6	4	11
Semipalmated Plover	3	72	-	-	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	1	-	-	-
Snowy Plover	28	4	-	-	Red-breasted Sapsucker	11	3	6	6
Whimbrel	8	10	-	-	Lewis's Woodpecker	5	-	7	4
Long-billed Curlew	61	404	-	-	Acorn Woodpecker	165	251	195	648
Marbled Godwit	41	6,152	-	-	Downy Woodpecker	11	4	2	23
Short-billed Dowitcher	37	8	-	-	Nuttall's Woodpecker	57	88	16	82

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Species	San Jose	Palo Alto	Mount	Calero
	12/17/23	12/18/23	Hamilton	Morgan-Hill
Hairy Woodpecker	8	43	28	26
Pileated Woodpecker	-	CW	-	1
Northern Flicker	81	104	26	152
<i>Northern Flicker (Red-shafted)</i>	-	-	32	-
<i>Northern Flicker (intergrade)</i>	1	-	-	-
American Kestrel	52	13	6	46
Merlin	5	8	2	4
Peregrine Falcon	11	2	-	3
Prairie Falcon	1	-	-	1
<i>falcon sp.</i>	-	1	-	-
Black Phoebe	240	210	17	188
Say's Phoebe	39	12	1	40
Hutton's Vireo	-	30	-	10
Loggerhead Shrike	1	-	-	1
Steller's Jay	44	161	36	175
California Scrub-Jay	198	191	186	538
Yellow-billed Magpie	72	-	12	89
American Crow	980	1,902	5	715
Common Raven	131	153	59	367
Chestnut-backed Chickadee	123	529	3	241
Oak Titmouse	103	307	130	372
Horned Lark	2	-	-	33
Tree Swallow	107	3	-	-
Violet-green Swallow	40	42	-	8
Barn Swallow	2	-	-	-
<i>swallow sp.</i>	342	39	-	-
Bushtit	500	554	38	730
Wrentit	9	102	18	60
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	153	208	54	259
Golden-crowned Kinglet	2	9	3	1
White-breasted Nuthatch	71	105	73	157
Pygmy Nuthatch	-	40	-	-
Red-breasted Nuthatch	33	5	-	27
Brown Creeper	4	31	4	11
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	-	-	-	1
Rock Wren	1	-	-	3
House Wren	2	1	5	-
Pacific Wren	-	1	-	-
Marsh Wren	88	25	-	-
Bewick's Wren	72	139	13	152
European Starling	1,705	669	193	2,792
California Thrasher	4	27	8	52
Northern Mockingbird	46	21	-	68
Western Bluebird	182	206	166	325
Varied Thrush	3	71	11	30
Hermit Thrush	71	114	23	58
American Robin	483	3,238	56	946
Cedar Waxwing	402	749	-	471
Phainopepla	-	-	1	1
Scaly-breasted Munia	-	-	-	19
House Sparrow	131	38	-	29
American Pipit	187	150	-	139
House Finch	969	1,006	61	517
Purple Finch	1	17	5	44
Pine Siskin	111	178	38	104
Lesser Goldfinch	214	464	48	486
Lawrence's Goldfinch	-	-	9	-
American Goldfinch	5	45	-	274
Chipping Sparrow	1	-	-	-
Lark Sparrow	9	-	11	15
Fox Sparrow	5	19	1	5
<i>Fox Sparrow (Sooty)</i>	-	-	9	-
<i>Fox Sparrow (Slate-colored)</i>	-	1	-	-

Species	San Jose	Palo Alto	Mount	Calero
	12/17/23	12/18/23	Hamilton	Morgan-Hill
Dark-eyed Junco (Oregon)	283	1,033	336	450
<i>Dark-eyed Junco (Slate-colored)</i>	-	1	-	-
White-crowned Sparrow	1,521	965	216	1,325
Golden-crowned Sparrow	476	749	208	559
<i>zonotrichia sp.</i>	-	-	-	56
White-throated Sparrow	12	5	-	8
Bell's Sparrow	-	-	4	-
Savannah Sparrow	173	121	16	55
Song Sparrow	266	182	2	93
Lincoln's Sparrow	32	34	3	48
Swamp Sparrow	2	-	-	-
California Towhee	214	260	37	316
Rufous-crowned Sparrow	3	-	-	7
Spotted Towhee	31	165	46	135
<i>sparrow sp.</i>	1	43	24	-
Western Meadowlark	354	280	88	613
Red-winged Blackbird	519	120	39	1,061
Tricolored Blackbird	20	-	3	189
Brown-headed Cowbird	133	38	-	14
Rusty Blackbird	1	-	-	-
Brewer's Blackbird	786	220	94	741
Great-tailed Grackle	136	1	-	21
<i>blackbird sp.</i>	2,070	255	52	261
Orange-crowned Warbler	3	13	-	3
Nashville Warbler	1	-	-	-
Common Yellowthroat	49	31	1	17
Chestnut-sided Warbler	-	1	-	-
Palm Warbler	-	1	-	-
Yellow-rumped Warbler	1,047	724	-	778
<i>Yellow-rumped Warbler (Myrtle)</i>	15	114	-	15
<i>Yellow-rumped Warbler (Audubon's)</i>	22	245	4	13
Black-throated Gray Warbler	-	-	-	1
Townsend's Warbler	33	109	1	68
Hermit Warbler	-	-	-	3
Summer Tanager	-	-	-	1
Western Tanager	2	2	-	-
<i>passerine sp.</i>	5	-	-	-
Total Species	169	163	89	143
Total Individual Birds	77,440	75,892	3,493	39,651

Key:

- bird names in italic* = subspecies, hybrids and indeterminate species
sp. = species, as in "swallow *sp.*"
CW = Count Week—seen during the week of the CBC but not on the actual day

San Jose: compiled and organized by Mike Azevedo

Palo Alto: compiled by Al Eisner; organized by Ann Hepenstal

Mount Hamilton: compiled and organized by Bob Hirt

Calero-Morgan Hill: compiled and organized by Rick Herder

Data reconciliation and aggregation by Barry Langdon-Lassagne.

Special thanks to Eric Goodill who created new taxonomic sorting tools and Curt Bianchi for creating tools to streamline the use of eBird for CBC tallies.

Taxonomic order and common names follow the eBird/Clements Checklist v2023 (October 2023).

More Information

Read about [how the data are used](#) and about the [histories](#) of our counts. Also see our [Highlights and tables for past Christmas Bird Counts](#). •

If you're new to the Christmas Bird Count, the writeups from previous years can help you understand what the experience is like! Check out the writeups from previous years including pictures and tables of all birds observed. Here are all the recent writeups:

- [2022-23 CBC Writeups](#)
- [2021-22 CBC Writeups](#)
- [2020-21 CBC Writeups](#)
- [2019-20 CBC Writeups](#)
- [2018-19 CBC Writeups](#)

Ecosystem Engineers

Michael Hawk
SCVAS Board Secretary

Building for Birds and Biodiversity

What do ground squirrels, beavers, and woodpeckers have in common? These seemingly unrelated creatures share a vital role in shaping the environments that support our local bird populations. In the intricate tapestry of nature, they are hard at work as “ecosystem engineers”, sculptors of habitats that provide homes and resources for various species.

Ecosystem engineers are organisms that significantly modify or create habitats, influencing the distribution and abundance of other species in the process. Their actions have far-reaching consequences, fostering biodiversity and creating unique niches for various plants and animals.



Hairy Woodpecker, Tom Grey

And Santa Clara county is home to a number of ecosystem engineers that we can witness and support.

Woodpeckers: Master Crafters of Arboreal Homes

It's probably not a stretch to suggest that most of you

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reading this are fans of woodpeckers. They're charismatic and colorful denizens of most of our wooded habitats.

Santa Clara county's woodpeckers range from the diminutive Downy Woodpecker, weighing in at just 1 ounce, to the powerful Pileated Woodpecker, which can weigh as much as 10 ounces.

Each of our woodpeckers have special adaptations allowing them to drill for insects, and in most cases, even excavate their own homes. Yes, even that tiny Downy Woodpecker will excavate a nest hole!

Birds that nest in holes are collectively called cavity nesters, and of course, many non-woodpecker species are cavity nesters, too. Oak Titmouse, Chestnut-backed Chickadees, Western Bluebirds, House Wrens, Violet-green Swallows, Tree Swallows, and even American Kestrel all nest in cavities (along with several other species).

You don't need to be an ornithologist to observe, for example, a Chestnut-backed Chickadee and recognize that they lack the tools to dig their own nest cavities. They must rely on pre-existing cavities. Yes, on occasion a tree may have a cavity as a result of a fallen branch and some rot. But very often these cavities are the creation of a woodpecker.

Of course, every species of woodpecker will have different strategies and preferences when it comes to hole excavation. Some woodpeckers will excavate multiple holes each season, perhaps as a territorial display, or to demonstrate fitness to a potential mate. Other species may create a fresh cavity each year, while others will re-use existing cavities. And the Lewis's

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Woodpecker is an exceptional case as woodpeckers go - they rarely excavate a hole of their own.

But the hard work of woodpeckers is also enjoyed by many other animals. Bats and other small mammals may use the holes for nesting or roosting. Tree frogs, salamanders, and snakes will use these holes for shelter, moisture, or thermoregulation. And a huge diversity of arthropods partake in these cavities for a variety of needs. Even fungi may find a home in the unique micro-habitat of a cavity.

Woodpeckers play a critical role in engineering these microhabitats that support biodiversity. But of course, we need mature - and even decaying trees for the woodpeckers to use in the first place.

Unfortunately, many parks departments and homeowners entirely remove trees when they age and potentially become hazards. Yes, this makes sense from a safety perspective. Stephen Shunk, author of the Peterson Reference Guide to Woodpeckers of North America, suggests, when possible, to leave as much of a mature tree trunk standing as possible. This provides natural habitat that the woodpeckers - and all of the species that they support - can continue to use for years to come.

Moreover, Shunk goes on to say “Woodpecker conservation is paramount to healthy forest and woodland habitats.” So if you love our forests and woodlands, support the woodpecker.

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The California Ground Squirrel: Burrowing Architects

Moving from the skies to the ground, the California ground squirrel emerges as another unsung hero in the realm of ecosystem engineering. These industrious rodents dig intricate burrow systems that not only serve as their homes but also play a crucial role in supporting threatened species like the burrowing owl.

Burrowing Owls, facing habitat loss and declining suitable nesting sites, have found an unexpected ally in ground squirrels. These owls, often adopting abandoned ground squirrel burrows, create a harmonious partnership that highlights the interconnectedness of species within an ecosystem.

Again, the impact of the California ground squirrel extends beyond birds. Rodents, snakes, insects, and even foxes may use ground squirrel burrows.



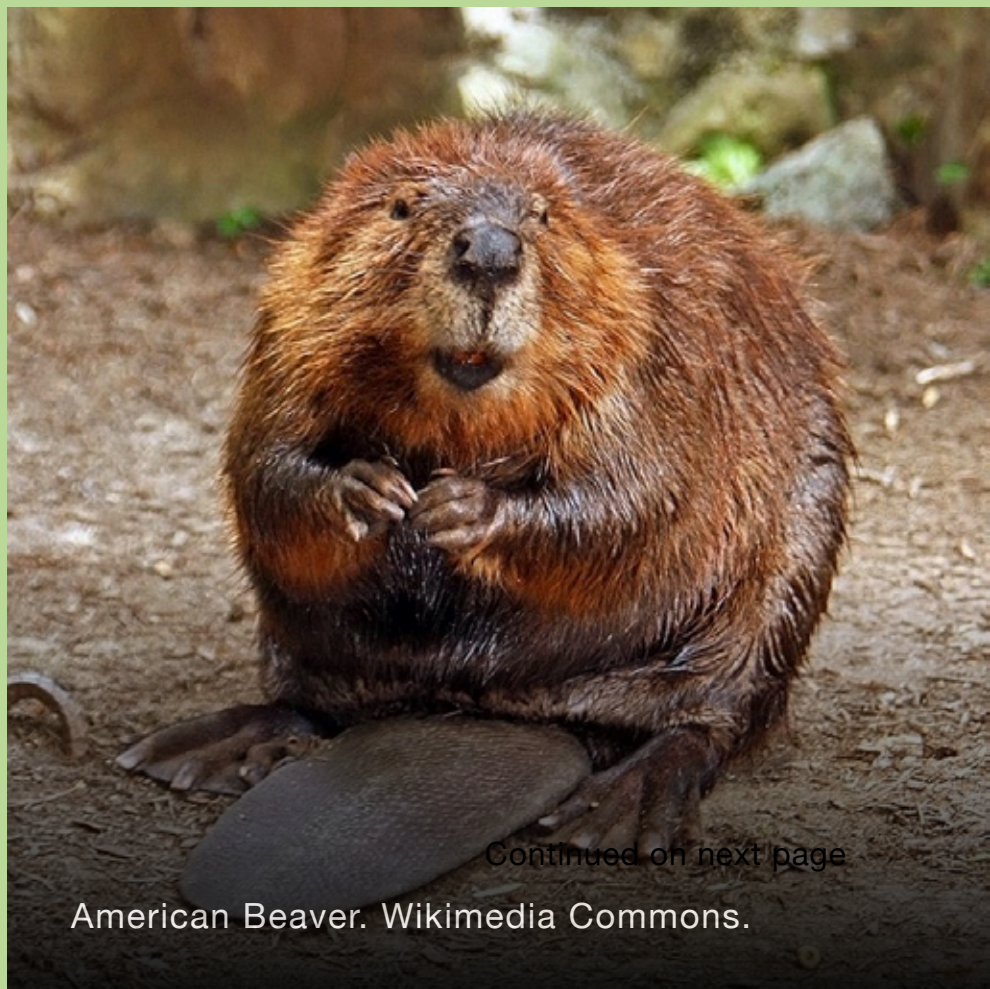
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Beavers: Architects of Aquatic Biodiversity

Nature ensures every niche is filled, and as a result, we also have aquatic engineers, and none fulfill this role better than beavers. In fact, beavers are often highlighted as one of the best examples of an ecosystem engineer.

In recent years, the return of beavers to the South Bay in Santa Clara County marks a significant ecological shift. These industrious rodents, renowned for their dam-building expertise, are engineers of a different kind, reshaping aquatic landscapes and rejuvenating habitats that benefit not only themselves but an array of bird species.

Beaver dams, by creating slow-moving and shallow waters, have a direct impact on the local environment. These altered water conditions serve as ideal foraging and breeding grounds for various waterfowl and wading birds. Additionally, the changes in creek flows induced by beaver activity lead to enhanced riparian habitats, fostering increased insect abundance. This, in turn, attracts insectivorous birds, creating a ripple effect of biodiversity that reverberates throughout the ecosystem.



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Other Local Ecosystem Engineers

In biology, there are few rules that remain unbroken, and there are few definitions that are absolute. Most organisms are contributing to some aspect of our habitats. While woodpeckers, ground squirrels, and beavers are extreme examples of the ecosystem engineering concept, there are many other animals that contribute on a smaller scale.

Consider the industrious work of ants, whose burrowing and mound-building activities aerate soil and create microhabitats for smaller organisms. Additionally, the intricate web of



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spider silk contributes to plant pollination and provides essential foraging grounds for birds seeking insects. Some hummingbird species even use spider silk as a material to build their nests.

The Bigger Picture of Biodiversity

In my personal journey as a naturalist and birder, I'm continually amazed at the intricacy of the relationships that exist between all living things. If we want to support and enjoy the wonder of birds, we need to support biodiversity at all levels.

The concept of ecosystem engineering is not just a fascinating ecological phenomenon but a critical aspect of preserving and nurturing our local bird populations. By understanding and appreciating the roles played by woodpeckers, ground squirrels, beavers, and other ecosystem engineers, we gain insights into these intricate relationships that sustain biodiversity.

As stewards of our environment, it is our responsibility to recognize and support these ecosystem engineers. Through habitat preservation, responsible land management, and education, we can ensure that these unsung heroes continue to shape and mold habitats that provide a thriving home for the diverse array of bird species that grace our local landscapes. In doing so, we contribute to the resilience and vitality of our shared natural heritage. •

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Conservation Corner

Shani Kleinhaus
Environmental Advocate



Prioritizing birds and nature

Every year, City Councils in Santa Clara County go through a process in which they consider their priorities. Selected priorities then move through further refining and budgeting processes. Some cities select wide scope goals or identify priorities at a strategic plan level. Other cities select very specific topics. Some work through a combination of both.

Frequently, the main themes that cities grapple with center around housing, transportation, the economy, and climate change. Our goal is to introduce nature and biodiversity into the prioritization process. To achieve it, our advocates engage

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in various cities' prioritization processes, asking council members to include regulations, policies or programs that protect parks and open space and improve habitat for birds and pollinators, protect and enhance the urban forests to include native trees, protect waterways from encroachment, require bird safe design to reduce collisions with glass and other hazardous structures, and minimize light pollution. We find that council members often want to help. They care about nature and they know that their constituents care as well.

But our work is not done when cities prioritize our issues. Advocacy requires perseverance, and it takes time and effort which tend to limit our reach. When cities prioritize our requested topics, we continue to advocate and educate, providing staff with information and support. Because this takes much of our advocates' time, we often partner with other organizations to leverage and expand our reach.

In this story, we would like to highlight our ongoing work in Palo Alto, and as you read it—please consider helping us make a difference in your community—we can use the help!

Last year, Mayor Lydia Kou championed augmenting Palo Alto's long-term "Sustainability and Climate Change" priority to include the Natural Environment. The resulting priority, "Climate Change & Natural Environment — Protection and Adaptation", was carried forward in 2024, with Mayor Greer Stone highlighting the importance of crafting ordinances that will protect birds, including Bird Safe Design and the Dark Sky. For several months, we have been working with City staff, and provided them with information and resources on bird safety

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as well as our [Model Ordinance for Dark Sky](#) regulations. Palo Alto's Planning Commission is expected to review a draft ordinance in March or April, and adoption by the City Council is expected later this year—stay tuned!

Palo Alto is also looking to strengthen its Riparian Corridor protections. Riparian corridors are critical resources for wildlife, providing vital habitat and connectivity for fish, birds, plants and other wildlife. Disturbances caused by the siting of buildings and other structures, lighting, impervious surfaces, outdoor activity areas, ornamental landscaped areas, and native vegetation removal near the top of a creek bank degrade water quality and cause bank instability, erosion, downstream sedimentation, and flooding. These effects, in addition to being destructive to wildlife habitat and being visually displeasing, can lead to costly building repairs and destruction of property, loss of property value, and danger to human life.

Palo Alto's guiding planning document, the "Comprehensive Plan 2030" was adopted in 2017. This plan recognized the critical importance of creeks and their corridors, and includes GOAL N-3: Conservation of both natural and channelized creeks and riparian areas as open space amenities, natural habitat areas and elements of community design. This goal is developed into several policies and programs that focus on the need to update Palo Alto's existing Stream Corridor Protection Ordinance and implement additional protections for the City's waterways and riparian corridors. Unfortunately, the city has not updated its Stream Corridor Protection ordinance and as a result, projects continued to be proposed or built with meager setbacks from creeks.

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Last year, we successfully advocated with the City of Palo Alto to modify plans for a home in a meadow adjacent to Los Trancos Creek. City council, led by Council member Pat Burt and Mayor Lydia Kou, required design modifications that provided a wider setback from the creek, plantings of native plants, measures to protect birds from collision with glass and measures to minimize light pollution. In their Motion, Burt and Kou included a request that staff start work on Stream Corridor Protections (Unfortunately, council members Tanaka and Lythcoff-Haims opposed the motion).

Palo Alto is now working to develop an ordinance that would implement its Comprehensive Plan programs, including:

- An update of the Stream Corridor Protection Ordinance to explore 150 feet as the desired stream setback along natural creeks in open space and rural areas west of Foothill Expressway. This 150-foot setback would prohibit the siting of buildings and other structures, impervious surfaces, outdoor activity areas and ornamental landscaped areas within 150 feet of the top of a creek bank. Allow passive or intermittent outdoor activities and pedestrian, equestrian and bicycle pathways along natural creeks where there are adequate setbacks to protect the natural riparian environment. Within the setback area, provide a border of native riparian vegetation at least 30 feet along the creek bank.

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- The update to the Stream Protection Ordinance should establish:
 - Design recommendations for development or redevelopment of sites within the setback, consistent with basic creek habitat objectives and significant net improvements in the condition of the creek.
 - Conditions under which single-family property and existing development are exempt from the 150-foot setback.
 - Appropriate setbacks and creek conservation measures for undeveloped parcels.

We expect this ordinance to be adopted this year, and are sure to alert you when your help and support is needed.



Burrowing Owl family at nest

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Good News!

Rejoice burrowing owls, golden eagles, mountain lions, badgers, tule elk and checkerspot butterflies and those who love them!

With our birds, rare plants and wildlife we are celebrating the acquisition of the 3,654-acre Richmond Ranch for habitat conservation and trail connections! Located along San Felipe Road in southeast San Jose, Richmond Ranch connects the Evergreen area with the Anderson Lake area. An active cattle ranch for almost 100 years, this property includes sprawling foothills, grassy meadows and forested canyons. Of special importance are serpentine grasslands rich in rare plants and insects, including the endangered Bay Checkerspot butterfly.

Parts of Richmond Ranch have been developed in the past, and the remaining ranch lands were often eyed for sprawling developments. Now, the land is protected, and this acquisition will allow the Habitat Agency to protect and enhance the land for plant and animal species. It will allow the county to expand the Bay Area Ridge Trail with connections between the East Foothills, Coyote Valley, and the Santa Cruz Mountains. This is truly a huge deal for our region and our progress towards protecting 30% of the state's land and water by 2030. •

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Sky Island

Sky islands beckon,
Surging rocks to ten thousand feet.
In a sea of sand and mesquite.
Hot dry winds blow,
A siren call to retreat,
To the cool refreshing canyons
Of Huachuca Sky Island.

The journey is treacherous,
Filled with peril,
For such a tiny migrating bird.
Determination propels it,
Compels it, forces it,
To risk all, never aware,
Of the risk at all.

Tiny specks, wings fully unfurled,
Seeking reprieve, millennia old,
Trusting instinct for a map,
Searching for the precise spot,
Never knowing why,
Never caring how.

Seen by multitudes continent wide.
Uniting their spirits,
Both the observed and observer,
Connected by secret strands, undetected by either.

Neither feathery flights nor fickle winds
Can subdue the
Generational call of time,
Before man, before clocks,
Before meaningless borders
To be laughed at and ignored.

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“PROCREATE, PROCREATE” is the universal call,
Answered by the Sky Island,
“WELCOME HOME, WELCOME HOME”.
Sister aviators and brother Sky Island,
Welcome one another,
Sharing the same abode.

Flashes of azure, crimson and gold,
Ignite the Sky Island’s ribbons of
Life giving streams,
Of forests of Arizona Cottonwood,
Sliver Oak and thorny Mesquite.

White-winged or black throat,
Dusky-capped or white-eared,
Violet-crowned or sulfur bellied,
All are joyously welcome here.

The only master that they must obey,
The imperceptible, miniscule adaptations,
Of Natural Selection
Driven by forces unknowable to them,
Driving them forward,
Millennia after millennia,
To the beckoning, magnificent, ever present, ever welcoming,
The place of home.
Huachuca Sky Island.

Craige Edgerton

May 2021

Huachuca Sky Island
Arizona

Field Notes (August – October 2023)

Pete Dunten
eBird Reviewer



Gray-crowned Rosy-finch, Garrett Lau

Several unseasonal records point to an unusually mild winter, allowing more birds to delay migration, stay for the winter, or perhaps arrive early. Examples collected here include Black-chinned Hummingbird, Caspian Tern, Swainson's Hawk, Cassin's Kingbird, Western Kingbird and House Wren. A **Black-chinned Hummingbird** was recorded on video in Palo Alto on 28 Dec (DvR). Stragglers are rarely encountered in the first week of October, after most have departed for Central America. This is only the third December record in eBird for California. A **Caspian Tern** at Alviso pond A12 on 12 Jan was our second January record (PDu). A **Swainson's Hawk** over Ogier ponds on 12 Jan was our third January record (SCR). One **Cassin's Kingbird** was in Coyote Valley along Laguna

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Ave on 25 Nov (JMa) and three were in Gilroy on 10 Jan (CM). The nine Cassin's Kingbirds found on the Los Banos CBC on 28 Dec was a record high count. A **Western Kingbird** at Guadalupe Oak Grove Park on 3 Dec was the first to stay into December (SCh). And the five **House Wrens** on the Mt Hamilton CBC on 2 Jan, three at elevations above 3000 feet, were a record high count.

Returning to the beginning of the eBird/Clements taxonomy, a male **Long-tailed Duck** was found on a closed refuge pond at Don Edwards NWR on 17 Nov (CaT). A **Red-necked Grebe** was a nice find on 6 Jan at Lake Cunningham (SCR). It has remained through the end of January. Red-necked Grebe is missed 5 years of every 9. A survey of the Alviso ponds on 27 Jan finished with an astounding count of 156 **Snowy Plovers** (MMR, RJ). Some of the plovers that breed locally move to the coast during winter, such as a female banded at the Ravenswood complex of Don Edwards NWR in June, 2022 that was subsequently resighted at Tunitas Creek Beach on 24 Dec (PDu). **Red Knots** were on Alviso pond A9 in December,



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with one on 11 Dec (MJM) and eight on 14 Dec (CaT). A **Curlew Sandpiper** returned to Palo Alto Baylands for the third consecutive year on 4 Dec (VP). The sandpiper returned on the same date in 2023. The 4 Dec sighting became part of the California Big Year record set by Van Pierszalowski; it was the only Curlew Sandpiper found in the state in 2023.

Red-throated Loons were found in respectable numbers, six or so, beginning with one on Alviso pond A10 on 14 Dec (CaT) and the adjacent pond A11 on 17 Dec during the San Jose CBC (MMR). Another was found the next day, 18 Dec, at Palo Alto Baylands during the Palo Alto CBC (MMR). One to two continued to be seen there through 10 Jan (m. ob.). Another Red-throated Loon was found on pond A8 between 14 Jan and 18 Jan (MDo, m. ob.). Two were reported from a closed refuge pond on 27 Jan (MMR, MJM, RJ). Finally, one on pond A4 on 30 Jan may have moved from the adjacent pond A8 (GL). **Common Loons** were outnumbered by Red-throated Loons, with reports from three locations of likely two loons. One was at Palo Alto Baylands between 19 Dec and 28 Dec (RJ, m. ob.); one was found on pond A4 between 9 – 13 Jan (DN, m. ob.) and again from 20 – 30 Jan (CCn, m. ob.); in the interim period, a Common Loon was seen on pond A8 between 14 – 17 Jan (MMR, m. ob.).

Pelagic Cormorants took exception to their ‘pelagic’ appellation and have wintered in the south bay. Intermittent sightings began with two on closed refuge ponds on 14 Nov (CaT), followed by one at Shoreline Lake on 19 Dec (GL, SW), moving to nearby pond A1 the same day (RJ). One was on A1 again on 1 Jan (MMR, RJ). Sightings at Shoreline Lake

Continued on next page

resumed on 3 Jan (MJM) and have continued through the end of January (m. ob.). The count at Shoreline increased to two cormorants beginning on 27 Jan (SPv). On 30 Jan one cormorant was seen presenting nesting material to another on the island at Shoreline Lake, a sign the breeding season is starting (RPh). Additional sightings, bringing the number in the area to at least three, were of one on pond A4 between 14 Jan and 23 Jan (MMR, m. ob.) and one on a closed refuge pond on 27 Jan (MMR, RJ, MJM).

The **California Condor** excursions that began in August continued into November, with three above Bell Station in the south county on 4 Nov (SPv et al.) and one over Gilroy on 6 Nov (AP). Two **Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers** have been spotted this winter; one was discovered on the San Jose CBC on 17 Dec at Santa Clara University (VHb et al.) and seen nearby again on 3 Jan (GL, SW) and a second was at Casa de Fruta on 27 Dec and again on 21 Jan (PDu). The Tropical Kingbird first noted along San Francisquito Creek near Geng Rd at the end of October was last seen there on 18 Nov (AT). A second turned up at the Sunnyvale WPCP on 15 Nov (GL) and has stayed through the end of January (m. ob.). Two **Mountain Bluebirds** were photographed at Monte Bello OSP on 11 Nov (LTe). The highlight of the period was a first county record of **Gray-crowned Rosy-finch** photographed on Black Mountain in Monte Bello OSP on 8 Nov (SAb). The Rosy-finch was identifiable to subspecies as Hepburn's Rosy-finch, named for the prolific collector, James Hepburn. Hepburn's Rosy-finch breeds in the Pacific NW and Alaska and is migratory. It was seen once again on 11 Nov (PDu) before departing.

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A **Rusty Blackbird** was another nice find on 17 Dec during the San Jose CBC (AnH). The blackbird was only the 4th county record. It enjoyed visiting Great America and San Tomas Aquino Creek through 20 Dec (m. ob.). A surprise find on the Palo Alto CBC, a **Chestnut-sided Warbler** at Mitchell Park enjoyed the Magical Bridge Playground on 18



Rusty Blackbird, Howard Friedman

Dec (HF, DAg). Chestnut-sided Warbler is more commonly encountered as a fall migrant but has been found occasionally in the winter. The warbler was seen again on 23 Jan (MMR) and has remained through the end of January. The **Palm Warbler** wintering along San Francisquito Creek below Geng Rd. was last reported on 14 Jan (m. ob.). A second was seen along Laguna Ave. in Coyote Valley on 4 Jan (HF) and a third was at Lake Cunningham Park from 7 – 10 Jan (HF, m. ob.).

Continued on next page

The count of four **Summer Tanagers** between November and January was above average. One was heard along the Guadalupe Creek Trail on 4 Nov at a location favored by a Summer Tanager for five of the last six winters (JPa). A second was along Calabazas Creek between Tasman Dr. and Highway 101 on 18 Nov (MIB) and 21 Nov (GL). A third graced the Calero-Morgan Hill CBC on 30 Dec at Chris Hotts Park (CG). It was seen again on 13 Jan (CG). The fourth was spotted at Mitchell Park in Palo Alto on 25 Jan (KnC). A **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** was caught on a feeder camera in the Willow Glen neighborhood of San Jose on 27 Jan (SHg, ALu). A puzzling **Indigo/Lazuli Bunting** photographed on 3 Nov (SPv, TY) along the Guadalupe River trail above Montague Expressway showed traits of both species and may have been a hybrid (PP). Another streaky, cinnamon brown bunting could be called as an **Indigo Bunting** (MMR). It was along Stevens Creek between La Avenida and Crittenden Lane on 1 Dec. •

Observers: Sabra Abraham (SAb), Dwight Agan (DAg), Melanie Barnett (MIB), Ken Chen (KnC), Susan Chen (SCh), Connor Christensen (CCn), Matthew Dodder (MDo), Pete Dunten (PDu), Howard Friedman (HF), Carter Gasiorowski (CG), Vinayak Hebbagil (VHb), Shannon Hegg (SHg), Ann Hep (AnH), Richard Jeffers (RJ), Garrett Lau (GL), Alice Liu (ALu), Mike Mammoser (MJM), Juliana Manoliu (JMa), Carlos Mendoza (CM), David Nickerson (DN), Janna Pauser (JPa), Sergey Pavlov (SPv), Andy Pedler (AP), Ryan Phillips (RPh), Van Pierszalowski (VP), Peter Pyle (PP), Mike Rogers (MMR), Steve Rottenborn (SCR), Devon Ryan (DvR), Annette Teng (AT), Linda Terrill (LTe), Cameron Tescher (CaT), Susan Weinstein (SW), Tristan Yoo (TY)

Book Review

Robin Chen and Diane McCoy
SCVAS Volunteers



Books for Young Readers

An Introduction to Birding

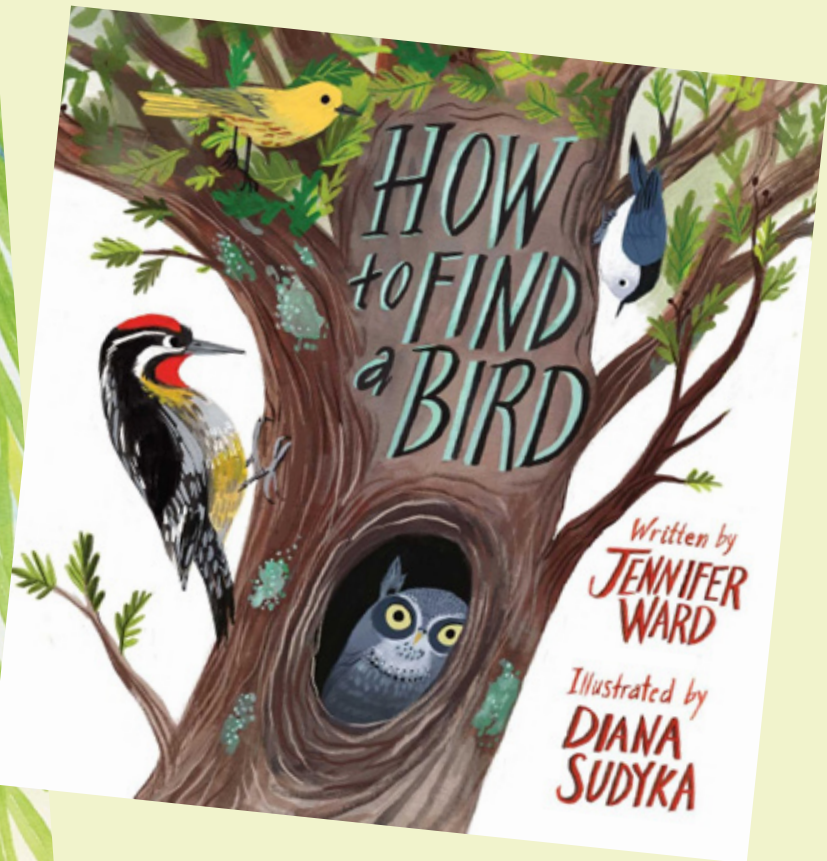
“Look!” your child says, pointing at a gray and yellow bird high up in a tree. “What bird is that?” If you have ever had an exchange like this with a child in your life, and it left you scratching your head, we hope that this article helps you and your child explore your curiosity about birds through books! This article will highlight captivating books for young beginning birders.

Continued on next page

Christie Matheson

BIRD WATCH

What might you find
when you go outside?



Bird Watch

By Christie Matheson

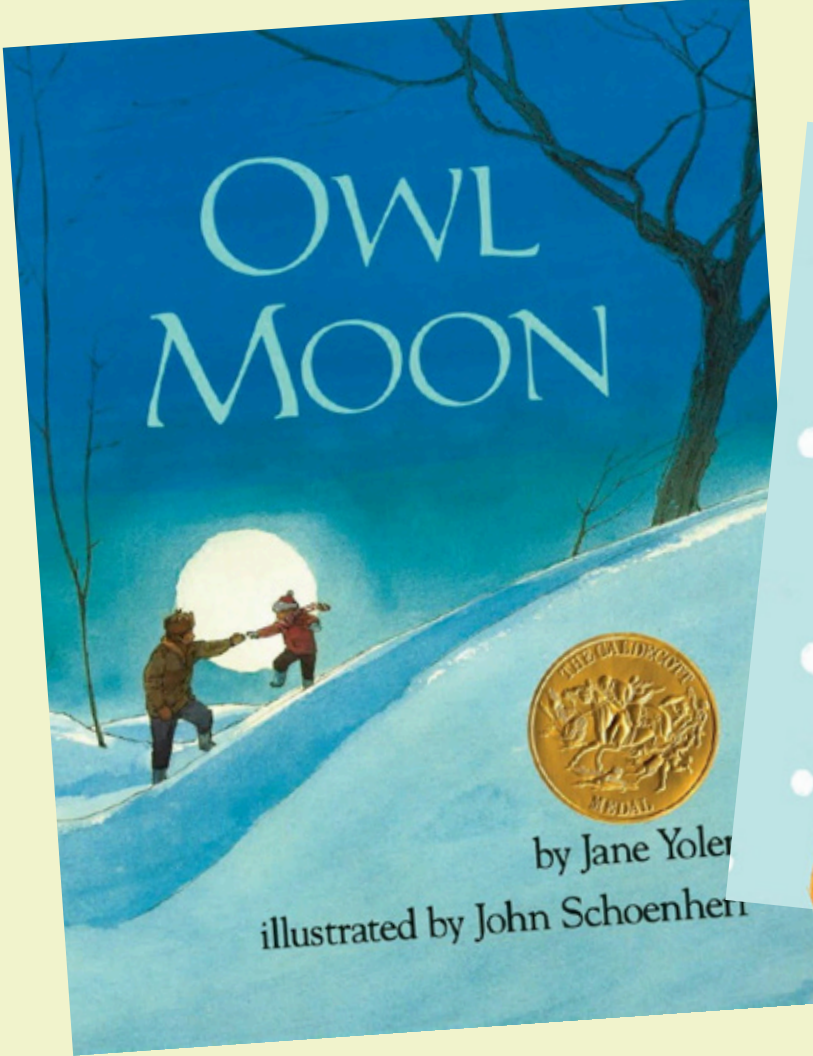
Brimming with beautiful watercolor illustrations, this **book** encourages children to look closely to find the hidden birds on each page. Local San Franciscan author Christie Matheson features a variety of birds that are native to California. Toddlers can also practice counting, and sharp-eyed readers might even be able to spot the native butterfly species! Ages 2-8

How to Find a Bird

By Jennifer Ward

Illustrated by Diana Sudyka

Trees, ponds, oceans, and sky - birds are everywhere! This **book** is colorful with detailed illustrations that will pique your child's curiosity about how they can find birds by looking at their surroundings; in their backyards, neighborhoods, parks, baylands, and foothills. Ages 4-8



Owl Moon

By Jane Yolen

Illustrated by
John Schoenherr

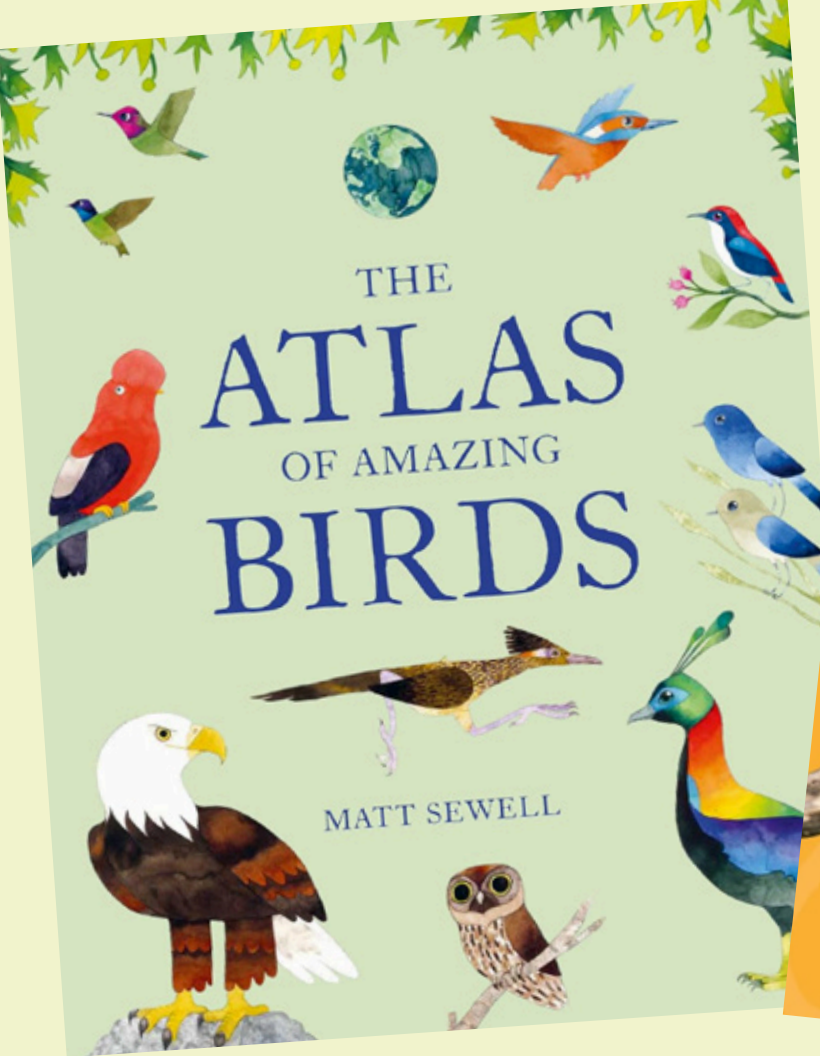
This Caldecott Medal winning **book** takes you on a wintry late night birding adventure to go owling. The prose features beautiful similes and other descriptions of winter imagery. Perfect for Superb-Owl weekend! You can even find a version narrated by the author herself on Audible. Ages 2-8

Bird Count

By Susan Edwards Richmond

Illustrated by
Stephanie Fizer Coleman

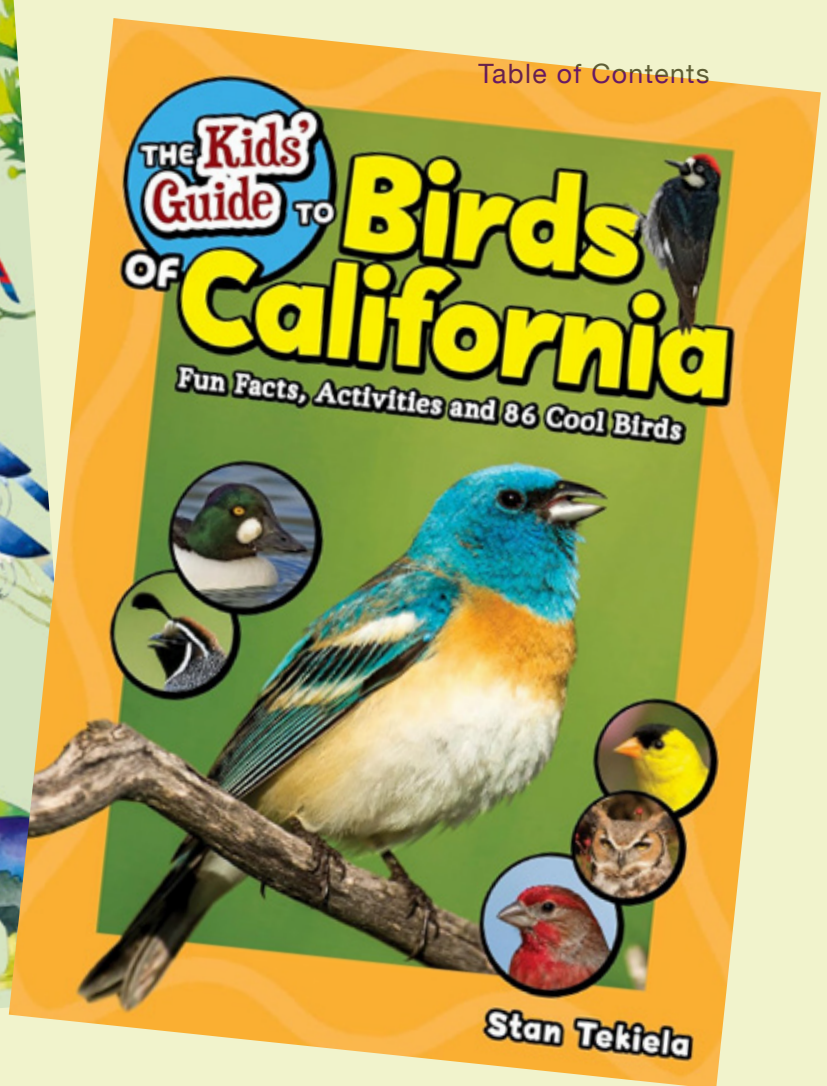
Kids of all ages love counting and keeping checklists. This **book** is perfect for kids who love tallying. They can keep count alongside young Ava as she takes on the role of tallier on the Christmas Bird Count. At the same time, they can learn more about how citizen scientists contribute to research and data for the protection of animals and habitats. Ages 4-9



The Atlas of Amazing Birds

By Matt Sewell

Did you know that the white bellbird is the loudest bird in the world? Or that the kakapo is a parrot that is both nocturnal and flightless? Learn all sorts of interesting trivia in this **book** that covers species from around the world. Ages 5-10



The Kids' Guide to Birds of California

By Stan Tekiela

This beginner **field guide** is perfect for elementary school aged birders. The birds are organized by color instead of family, making it fun and friendly to novice birders. The large photos, helpful diagrams, and easy to read descriptions will have your birder independently identifying local birds in no time! Ages 5-12

Continued on next page

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