

The California Condor

Ventura Audubon Society
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A Chapter of the National Audubon Society
venturaaudubon.org



Alistair Skinner

Least Bittern, Alistair Skinner

Our vision for Ventura County is a place where
native birds thrive in healthy habitat, and
humans co-exist respectfully with birds and other wildlife

Call Notes

by Rachel Ameche, VAS President

Fall migration is well underway, and birds are making their way down south. It's my favorite time of year to get out and bird, which is perfect because Birdathon is underway! Our theme this year is **"Backyard birds: where conservation begins"** It doesn't matter whether your "backyard" is a private garden, a shared space, a local hiking trail, or a state park. Take some time this month to visit your favorite outdoor spots and enjoy our local wild birds. Please consider joining in our fundraising efforts. VAS counts on the generous donations of its members to keep our programs running.

Our events this month are a celebration of our "backyard birds." Be sure to join us for our chapter meeting where Benny Jacob-Schwartz, our October guest speaker, will share with us his passion for birds and conservation. He will discuss some of our beloved local species and teach us some new reasons to love and appreciate them.

I hope to see you at the [Patagonia event: Birds, Native Plants, and Local Conservation](#). It's a perfect complement to our bird-a-thon theme as we will have the opportunity to learn more about our local environment and the importance of native flora and fauna. Come say hello at the VAS table and take time to get to know other partners in conservation work from around Ventura County.

Our September speaker, Tevin Schmitt, did a wonderful presentation on conservation efforts surrounding the Santa Clara River Estuary and the future of the Ventura Settling Ponds. For more information on this topic, check out the bird blog [HERE](#) and the Wishtoyo Foundation web site [HERE](#)

Back in August, VAS had the privilege of hosting a table at the Wild and Scenic Film Festival in Ventura. I'd like to send a special thanks to volunteers Max and Nancy for setting up our booth and having many productive conversations with the attendees. Events like this are an important way we get the word out about our chapter and make connections. One of the most important things Beach naturalist volunteers do is educate the public about what VAS does. Whether it's conversations about dogs on the beach, helping keep track of plovers and chicks, or protecting our Coastal Dune habitats, these efforts to engage the community make a big difference for birds.

Thank you for supporting VAS and our mission to protect birds and the places they live. Happy Birding!



Backyard Birds: Where Conservation Begins

This month, we turn our binoculars to our backyards to set our sights on a better future for birds. Our fundraiser this year has a theme for the first time because we hope to raise awareness about how everyone can directly contribute to bird conservation. More than half of all US bird species are on the decline and over 3 billion breeding birds have been lost since 1970. That's a staggering 1 in 4 birds. You can use your backyard to help reduce the loss of wild birds by planting native plants and saving any tree trimming and landscape maintenance for the fall. Many species use our landscape to nest in trees, shrubs and on the ground.

“By simply scheduling truly needed vegetation trimming in the fall and early winter, property managers, tree-trimming businesses, city crews, homeowners and others can help protect and create important nesting bird habitat.” -David Wappler, wildlife biologist, lead VAS's Habitat for Birds

campaign and Ventura Audubon Society member.

During October, our backyards can have even more impact. Please join us for Ventura Audubon's longest running annual fundraiser, Birdathon. Use the included form to pledge a certain amount per species that you spot in your yard and anywhere you bird during the month of October. Join us for a field trip, explore a new birding spot, or go birding with friends to find as many species as you can. At the end of the month, return your envelope with your donation and bird species count. The member who spots the highest number of species will receive a VAS hat, a Shorebird Recovery beer glass and a shout out in our next newsletter. Your generosity allows us to continue our programs including educational, scientific and conservation efforts that are important to local birds, other wildlife, and their habitat. Every donation makes a difference for birds!

Finally, be sure to tune in to our chapter meeting on October 10th at the Poinsettia Pavilion where our friend Benny Jacobs-Schwartz (Birds by BIJS) will do a deep dive into the So-Cal bird species we cherish and enjoy. We will hear about the nesting habits of our backyard birds so we can better understand how to help them during nesting season.

Thank you for your ongoing support of Ventura Audubon Society!

How do you support Birdathon?

You may contribute either online or via mail:

Online contribution

1. Go to our website, www.venturaaudubon.org. During October, this will take you to our Birdathon home page.
2. Click on the "Donate to Birdathon- PayPal" button, this will take you to the our PayPal page. There you can donate with either a credit card or a PayPal account.

Mail-in contribution:

- If you received a mailer, just fill out the pledge form and return it with a check in the pre-addressed envelope that has been provided with this letter.
- If you did not receive a mailer, send a check payable to:
Ventura Audubon Society, P.O. Box 24198, Ventura, CA 93002

For all checks, write "Birdathon" in the memo line

Donate for
Birdathon

What do Birdathon donations support?

Ventura Settling Ponds

The Ventura Settling ponds are an important community resource. Ventura Audubon will always advocate for this valuable habitat and recreation area. We continue to maintain our nest boxes at the settling ponds and are making plans to expand that effort with nest monitoring, predator baffles and heat shields. We are also monitoring the [Ventura Water Pure](#) project as the City of Ventura implements waste water treatment improvements that will help to restore the Santa Clara River estuary to a more healthy

system. We have expressed our concerns for the future of the settling ponds to the City of Ventura and to the California Coastal Commission.



Least Bell's Vireo Recovery on the Santa Clara River



This small river loving bird has been on the federal endangered species list since 1986.

It is especially vulnerable to cowbird brood parasitism. So in concert with habitat restoration, we have worked to reduce cowbird parasitism.

Currently, we are supporting ongoing population monitoring of Least Bell's Vireo to track the success of these efforts on Ventura County rivers.



Least Bell's Vireo (top, left) and nestling 2020 (bottom, left) Santa Clara River; photo credit @JaneGriffith Griffith Wildlife

right, at Hedrick Ranch, photo by Alex Vaca



Public Comment

Our conservation committee was created in 2018 to improve our efforts to monitor and comment on local developments and proposals that impact birds. We have spoken at

both the Port Hueneme and Oxnard City Councils on issues that impact nesting snowy plovers and least terns. Below are a list of comment/support letters on issues that we have submitted. Our [website](#) has links to many of these letters.

- Opposition to Reyes Peak Logging
- MS4 Permit Comments to the LARWQB
- City of Port Hueneme General Plan update
- Ventura County Local Coastal Plan
- Ormond Beach Restoration Plan
- Tree Trimming Guidelines
- Construction of a large car storage near Ormond Beach
- Condor Take Permit
- Opposition to Arctic Refuge Drilling
- Bird Friendly Landscaping Practices
- Scoping document for SCR-1
- Fisherman's Wharf Development
- Offshore wind farms
- California Coastal Commission

Shorebird Recovery Program Nest Monitoring



This is a snowy plover nest on Ormond Beach in 2022, taken by Alex Vaca

Our staff of 2 part time biologists conducted nest monitoring of the CA least tern and western snowy plover at Ormond Beach. We locate nests, track outcome, determine reasons for any nest failures and engage the Ormond Beach land owners to improve nesting success for these species

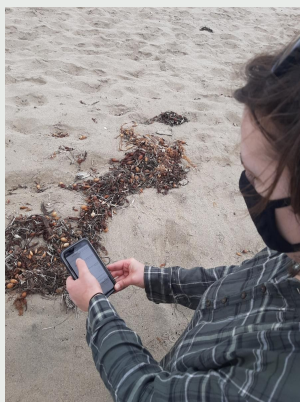
2023 Nesting Outcome

Ormond Beach

- 66 snowy plover nests
- 19 least tern nests

Check out the final report and video [HERE](#)

At Ormond we use **trail cameras** to help us better identify predators and threats and verify nest hatches. Cameras are placed on nests 24/7 and are motion activated.



Volunteers collect data on their phones while they conduct their beach patrols.

This data helps us understand things that might be affecting nesting and fledgling outcomes:

- Dog Log Survey
- Shorebird Disturbance
- Wrack Abundance Survey
- Banded Bird Reports

Beach naturalists also have an opportunity to accompany a biologist to assist with nest monitoring [more info](#)

Snowy Plover and Least Tern Habitat Protection

On Ormond Beach we maintain fencing



around **4 large nesting areas**, enclosing a total of **120 acres** of high value nesting habitat with **3 miles of fence** line.

At Hollywood Beach the habitat we protect is comparatively small (**3-5 acres**), but without fencing nests would not survive on this busy urban beach.

Left - inside nesting habitat
Right - outside habitat

Beach Naturalists Volunteer Program

Beach Naturalists educate and inform beach visitors about the natural history of western snowy plovers and California least terns and how to reduce disturbance to nesting birds and chicks.



Beach Naturalists Fred Dale conducting at Hollywood Beach (above)

We provide a free workshop that includes 3 hours of classroom lecture and 2 hours of field training. Thereafter naturalists work shifts on either Hollywood or Ormond Beach.

Some of the activities they conduct include:

- Outreach and Education
- Tabling at events
- Report and Document Ordinance Violations
- Fence and Sign Maintenance
- Recruiting Dog Rangers

Our volunteers served over 1,000 hours on Hollywood and Ormond Beaches



Placing sandbags around a snowy plover nest on Ormond Beach to prevent flooding from King tides, June 2022 (above)

Dog Rangers

Dog Rangers reframes the public conversation around the disturbance of shorebirds and seabirds by dogs, letting beachgoers know how their dog can help birds. The pledge directly asks dogs to make following promises, in support of

birds:

- I will never chase birds or wildlife.
- I will wear my leash at the beach to help birds feel safe.
- I will give birds about 100 feet of space to relax and refuel.
- I won't climb the dunes or walk-through established nesting areas.

Dogs have been taking the pledge to protect birds and we already have a growing team of 50 rangers.



Why take the Dog Rangers pledge?

Unleashed dogs:

- Frighten birds (birds see them as predators)
- Interrupt eating and resting
- Lead to nest abandonment
- Damage sensitive nesting habitat



Birding field trips



This is by far our most popular activity. Fostering a love of birds and understanding of their needs is critical to protecting them and inspiring the next generation of birders. We provide trip leaders at local birding hotspots. Currently we hold field trips twice monthly. We provide enough trip leaders that we can break into small intimate groups.

Some of the local hot spots we visit include:

- Arroyo Verde Park
- Camino Real Park
- Santa Clara River Estuary
- Ormond Beach
- Settling Ponds
- Ventura River Estuary
- Carpenteria Salt Marsh

October VAS Field Trips



Ormond Beach



**SATURDAY, OCTOBER 14th
8:30 AM**

Join us at this excellent coastal location, where we will look for a variety of birds, such as Willets, Whimbrels, Long Billed Curlew, Black Bellied Plovers and other migrating shorebirds. We will also look for Peregrine Falcon, Loggerhead Shrikes and Blue-Gray Gnatcatchers. Dress in layers, as the morning may be chilly.

Sycamore Canyon



Photo by Chuck Engel

**SATURDAY, OCTOBER 21st
8:30 AM**

In Point Mugu State Park. Large canyon with coastal sage scrub, eucalyptus and sycamore groves. We will be looking for Thrashers, Towhees, and migrant Flycatchers, Warblers, and Woodpeckers. We will mainly be in the camp areas, and on the easier fire road trails. Restrooms in State Park.

Visit our field trips [webpage](#) to sign up for a field trip or for more details

Beginners are welcome on all field trips. Light drizzle does not necessarily cancel trips, but heavier rain will. For all trips, please wear appropriate clothing (layers are suggested), comfortable shoes, and bring snacks, water, hats, sunscreen, binoculars and field guides.

Questions or need help? Email fieldtrips@venturaaudubon.org

October Speaker Program

BRINGING BIRDS TO YOUR GARDEN

California Native Plants For The Win



Presented by:
BIRDS by BIJS



SAVING BIRDS, ONE BACKYARD AT A TIME

Speaker: Benny Isaac Jacobs-Schwartz

Date/Time: October 10th, 2023; 7 PM PDT

Location: Poinsettia Pavilion 3451 Foothill Rd, Ventura, CA 93003

Presentation Summary: Did you know California is home to over 5,000 species of native plants and 700 species of birds have been observed here? However, much of the state's native flora is now in peril, with many species listed as endangered and on the verge of extinction.

Learn the history of these changes and how you can help bring back the birds through grassroots efforts at the home or garden. This presentation will teach you how to plan and maintain a California native plant garden to attract and care for birds visiting your local landscape. Additionally, participants will be introduced to many of the local birds that visit our yards and open spaces.



Speaker Bio: Benny Isaac Jacobs-Schwartz owns and operates a bird-guiding business and lifestyle brand called BIRDS by BIJS (pronounced Bee-jus). With a background in biology, ecology, and outdoor education, Benny has worked professionally for over 10 years as a naturalist guide, expedition trip leader, and international bird guide. Through his business, Benny offers professionally guided birding outings in Southern California and offers small-group birding tours to his favorite tropical locales like Costa Rica, Ecuador, and Colombia.

Benny is a passionate educator and photographer, specializing in birds! Benny is active on social media where he creates fun, educational videos and posts to inspire others about the natural world with the goal of getting folks to put down their phone and pick up their Binos.

For more information and a Zoom link visit our programs page [HERE](#)

The passage of Tropical Storm Hilary left an unprecedented number of storm-petrels and other seabirds on inland lakes across southern California. While Ventura County was on the western edge of the storm's passage, two **Wedge-rumped Storm-Petrels** and a **Black Storm-Petrel** were found at Lake Sherwood on 21 Aug (SC) and 3 **Least Storm-Petrels** were at Lake Piru on 21 Aug (DM). The day of the storm was less eventful but an **Arctic Tern** flew down the beach at Point Mugu on 20 Aug (DP). Searching offshore after the storm turned up a **Wedge-tailed Shearwater** off Ventura on 22 Aug (RT). After the storm, but perhaps not related to it was the arrival of a **Wood Stork** at the Saticoy Spreading Ponds 25-31 Aug (AA & RM). Wood Stork occurrences in the state have dropped over the last decade or more and this was the first Wood Stork in Ventura County since 1971! Other birds of note at the Saticoy Spreading Ponds included a **Cackling Goose** 7-28 Aug (LLG t al.) and a **Cattle Egret** 26-31 Aug (m. obs.).

A **Wood Duck** was in Revolon Slough on 31 Aug (SC). A **Black Tern** was in the Santa Barbara Channel off Ventura on 22 Aug (JB) and another was at the Santa Clara River Estuary on 22 Aug (MB). **Neotropic Cormorants** included one at the Santa Clara River Estuary 18-25 Jul (SC), one in the Arroyo Simi 14-15 Aug (SC), and one (continuing?) at Lake Sherwood on 20 Jul (MH).

Shorebird migration was in full swing during July and August and a number of uncommon species were discovered locally. Two **Pacific Golden-Plovers** were on the sod along Casper Road 13-14 Aug (MB). A **Red Knot** was at Surfers Knoll on 16 Jul (TT), two were at the Santa Clara River Estuary on 29 Jul (KS), and one was at Mugu Lagoon on 6 Aug (DP). **Stilt Sandpipers** included one at the Santa Clara River Estuary on 13 Aug (BF & LO), one on the Oxnard Plain 19-23 Aug (LS & DP), and as many as two at Ormond Beach 28-29 Aug (SC, TT). **Baird's Sandpipers** were reported more frequently than normal this year throughout coastal California and locally there were as many as three at the Santa Clara River Estuary 18 Jul-29 Aug (m. obs.). It is unknown how many individuals passed through the estuary over that timeframe. Other **Baird's Sandpipers** included as many as five at the Saticoy Spreading Ponds 18-29 Aug (RM, m. obs.), one on the Casper Road sod fields on 13 Aug (MB), and two at Arnold Road on 12 Aug (AR & RR). Two **Pectoral Sandpipers** were on the Oxnard Plain on 23-25 Aug (DP) and one or more were at the Saticoy Spreading Ponds 20-28 Aug (RM, m. obs.). **Semipalmated Sandpipers** included as many as two at the Santa Clara River Estuary 3-11 Aug (LLG & SC); one on the Oxnard Plain on 9 Aug (LS), one on 19 Aug (LS), and two on 25 Aug (DP); one at Ormond Beach on 25 Aug (SK); and one at the Saticoy Spreading Ponds on 28 Aug (RM & MR). **Solitary Sandpipers** included one in Ventura on 11 Aug (EC), as many as two on the Oxnard Plain 13-20 Aug (LS & DP), and as many as two at the Saticoy Spreading Ponds 25-27 Aug (RM & AA).

A **White-winged Dove** was at the Conejo Community Park on 14 Aug (RS). A **Yellow-billed Cuckoo** was on the Oxnard Plain on 7 Jul (DP). **Vermilion Flycatchers** away from their breeding area at Point Mugu included one at the Saticoy Spreading Ponds on 26 Jul (DP & SP) and one at Two Rivers Park in Filmore on 26 Jul (TT). **Chestnut-backed Chickadees** were found again along Rincon Creek after an absence of more than a year with at least two there 29-30 Aug (SS). Four **Purple Martins** were at Lake Casitas on 21 Aug (JM & TM). A **Bendire's Thrasher** was on the Oxnard Plain on 19 Aug (DP). A **Summer Tanager** was at Matilija Lake on 19 Jul (DS). Rare in the county during the fall but almost unheard of during the summer, two male **Scarlet Tanagers** were found locally in July including one at Rancho Simi Park on 1 Jul (MP) and another at Lake Casitas 6-15 Jul (CS). A **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** was at Lake Casitas on 8 Jul (LLG).

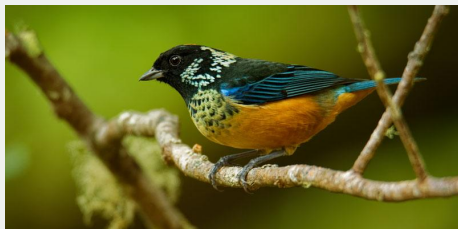
A pelagic trip out of Ventura on 5 Aug had an **American Oystercatcher** on Anacapa Island; 7 **Craveri's Murrelets** south of Anacapa island; two **South Polar Skuas**, 2 **Craveri's Murrelets**, a **Black-footed Albatross**, 7 **Townsend's Storm-Petrels**, 17 **Cook's Petrels**, and a **Brown Booby** in Ventura County waters over the Santa Cruz Basin; and 6 **Craveri's Murrelets** near the Pilgrim Bank (DP, JB, et al.).

Thank you to those who reported sightings during this period. If you have any questions about local birds or have a good one to report (please no messages about nuisance birds) e-mail David Pereksta at <pereksta@pacbell.net>

Good Birding,
David Pereksta

Observers: Allison Alvarado, Mike Baker, Joel Barrett, Marc Better, Sammy Cowell, Eric

VAS Trip to Costa Rica March 20 - 29 2024



Birding Southern Costa Rica with Ventura Audubon

Set out on a journey across the Pacific coastal region of Costa Rica to discover the abundant species of neotropical birds and other wildlife

inhabiting this small but biodiverse country. Marvel at the variety of ecosystems, from lowland tropical forests and wetlands to temperate forests and páramos, and identify hundreds of bird species along the way. Visit national parks and wildlife reserves, botanical gardens, and world-renowned research stations to learn about the natural history of Costa Rica and the latest conservation initiatives to protect its precious ecosystems as you observe magnificent species like crocodiles and endemic avifauna.

Highlights:

- Cruise along the Tárcoles River and watch for water birds and shorebirds.
- Venture on a guided tour through Los Cusingos Bird Sanctuary, once home to famed ornithologist Alexander Skutch.
- Observe some of the 400+ bird species during your stay at Las Cruces Biological Station, a leading research outpost with onsite accommodations.
- Ascend the Cordillera de Talamanca to experience its famous diversity of endemic wildlife.
- Seek out the elusive Resplendant Quetzal in Savegre's private reserve

Click the link below for more information

[Costa Rica 2024](#)

Project Phoenix

Calling all birders! Check out Project Phoenix, a joint partnership between the [UCLA La Kretz Center for California Conservation Science](#) and the [Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County](#).

For thousands of years, wildfire has shaped California's diverse ecosystems. From redwood forests to desert grasslands, fire forged the lands we love.

But fire is not what it used to be in California. Wildfires are larger and happen more frequently. And more fire means more smoke.

Birds are highly sensitive to air pollution, but we know very little about how wildfire smoke impacts birds. Join Project Phoenix and help us solve the mystery.

Project Phoenix is a statewide community science monitoring project to study the effects of smoke on birds in neighborhoods across California. By observing birds in your neighborhood for just 10 minutes a week, you can help us learn more about bird responses to smoke. Together, we can safeguard birds through ever-smokier summers.

Project Phoenix is open to all birders and bird enthusiasts - regardless of previous birding experience. To support beginner birders, we provide resources on [species identification](#), including [free courses](#) from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Project Phoenix volunteers are helping us [monitor birds](#) by conducting weekly, ten-minute surveys of birds at a location of their choosing, beginning now through the end of October.

Click [HERE](#) for more information or to sign-up

Other ways you can support the Ventura Audubon Society

Do you work for a company that uses Benevity?

If you volunteer for Ventura Audubon your volunteer hours go even further with matching funds

Check with your employer



Thank you to our supporters!

Financial contributions to our chapter allow us to continue our work protecting birds and their habitat.

Businesses, Organizations and Agencies

- The Nature Conservancy
- National Foundation of Fish and Wildlife (NFWF)
- National Audubon Society, Audubon in Action Grant
- California Coastal Commission Whale Tail Grant
- The Port of Hueneme
- The City of Port Hueneme
- Patagonia
- 1% for the planet
- Ventura Coast Brewing Company
- Topa Topa Brewing Company



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