

The **CALIFORNIA CONDOR**

Ventura Audubon Society **SEPTEMBER 2013** Volume 34 Number 1
A Chapter of the National Audubon www.VenturaAudubon.org



CALL NOTES ..Bruce Schoppe, President

A Summer for the Birds!

The summer of 2013 was, truly, A Summer for the Birds!

A bald eagle pair nested and successfully fledged two chicks at Lake Casitas. This is the first time eagles have nested at Casitas in decades. Park management secured the area beneath their tree (we thank you!) but many campers and visitors got to enjoy watching these majestic birds from nearby picnic and camping areas.

Sandy Hedrick and Jackie Worden discovered the nest of a Least Bell's Vireo pair in the Ventura River bed near Main Street. Known as the Willoughby property, it was acquired by the Ventura Hillside Conservancy over a year ago and has seen the results of intensive reclamation efforts since. LBV's are subject to cowbird predation; so, Jackie quickly made arrangements to manage that problem. The cost was borne by VAS with help from Ventura Hillside Conservancy and Friends of the Santa Clara River. At least two chicks fledged successfully. It is noteworthy because, heretofore, the Santa Clara River was the farthest north LBV's had been found. If they are to successfully repopulate the Ventura River, we shall need to manage the cowbird threat for several years. That will be expensive and we will need to seek donations and grants to cover the cost.

Most astounding of all, however, has been the very large number of Western Snowy Plover and California Least Tern nests at Hollywood Beach. We had over 200 tern nests and at least 16 plover nests in the dunes near the harbor entrance. Debra Barringer, Alexis Frangis and Danielle Glenn have been monitoring the beach for VAS. Seeing the number of birds and nests, Michael Glenn of the USFWS suggested that help was needed especially as we approached the July 4th weekend. Within a couple of days of my emailed plea, 21 people volunteered as docents to help educate beachgoers and ask them to Share the Shore! We used a lot of Share the Shore signs to help identify the very extensive nesting area. The harbor entrance has not been dredged this year; so the beach is larger than usual, which may have a lot to do with the number of nests.

The Harbor District has been very cooperative. By the time this is published, Michael Glenn will have met with Hollywood Beach homeowners to encourage them to love the terns and plovers, too! In September, Michael is planning a series of programs at five elementary schools that border the beaches in Oxnard and Ventura to educate the kids about terns and plovers. And, we hope educate their parents, as well! Among other activities, they will produce some poster art focusing on the terns, some of which will be made into signs for use on the beaches in years to come. Standing on the beach with more than 400 terns flying around and dozens of plovers on the ground was an unforgettable experience we hope can be repeated. Thanks to all who helped make it possible. We are looking forward to another year of great field trips and enjoyable programs. See you there.

SEPTEMBER PROGRAM ..Audrey Vincent

7:30 p.m. Tuesday, September 10th, Poinsettia Pavilion, 3451 Foothill Road, Ventura

"Birds of Columbia" with Santiago Escruceria

This evening's program will focus on birds of the south west area of the country; two mountain areas, one of wetlands, and another of riparian, open country. Santiago's love for nature was born in Colombian jungles. Many of his childhood afternoons were spent eyeballing souvenir snakes he caught in jars during morning adventures. Years later, in California, Santiago would remember this infatuation when stalking seabirds and mammals on a beach. When he incidentally turned his binoculars inland and saw colors floating through the sky, his love for nature was stirred and his interest in birding peaked. Join us for what is sure to be a colorful and most interesting presentation!

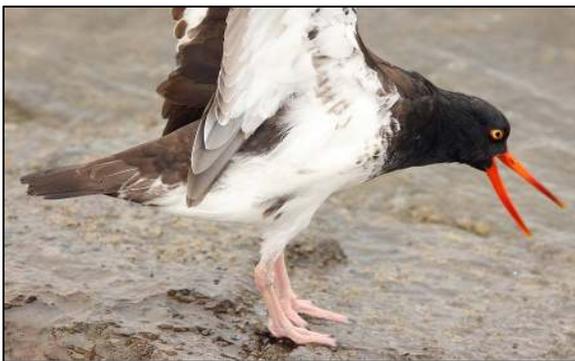
BEYOND BASICS ...Article and Photos by David Pereksta

Understanding and Identifying Hybrid Oystercatchers



Bird identification is usually straightforward; a bird is either one species or another, which can be determined through an assessment of multiple field marks. However, this can become complicated when a hybrid is involved, especially if the bird is not recognized as such. A notorious hybrid conundrum in southern California is properly identifying a bird that appears to be an American Oystercatcher (*Haemotopus palliatus*) as that species or an American x Black Oystercatcher hybrid. Several hybrid individuals have been frequenting the Ventura Harbor and coastline over the last few years and provide a good study of this issue. These birds have caused confusion as most observers have identified them as American Oystercatchers, but further study of these birds reveals that many characters are intermediate between the two species.

Black and American Oystercatchers frequently hybridize where their ranges overlap in northwestern Baja California, Mexico, a fact ornithologists have known for nearly 100 years. While many birders associate American Oystercatchers with the east coast of the U.S. (photo, right), the species also occurs down both coasts of North America all the way to South America. The northernmost distribution on the Pacific Coast is central Baja California where they overlap in a 200-mile zone with Black Oystercatchers (*Haemotopus bachmani*) at the southern end of that species' distribution. The subspecies of American Oystercatcher (*H. p. frazari*) in this region often shows extra black flecks below the hood and other variable plumage characteristics, which may be a result of past hybridization with Black Oystercatchers. As a result, some authorities question whether these individuals are valid American Oystercatchers or just the result of hybridization in that region. All of California's 43 records of American Oystercatcher involve *frazari*.



This issue was studied by Joseph R. Jehl Jr. who published a monograph on the "Hybridization and Evolution of Oystercatchers on the Pacific Coast of Baja California" in 1985. Within that monograph, Jehl developed a scoring system for assessing the intermediacy of Black and American Oystercatchers which has become known to birders as the "Jehl Scale." This system evaluates 10 plumage character states that are each ranked from 0 to 4 or 0 to 6. By evaluating and scoring these characters independently (if you can see them all in the field, which is difficult) the additive score will determine whether you saw a Black Oystercatcher (total score 0-9), American Oystercatcher (total score 30-38), or a hybrid (total score 10-29). Some of the characters that are readily observed can help these determinations if you cannot

see all 10 characters. For instance, if the uppertail coverts are dark, or there is extensive black down the chest or onto the belly, or if the undertail coverts are heavily mottled, then it is likely that the bird is a hybrid like the birds pictured here and at the top of the page from the Ventura area.

After extensively studying, photographing, and scoring the birds in the harbor, I came up with scores in the range of 25-27 which places them at the high end of the hybrid range and very close to being considered American Oystercatchers. Some birds in this score range have passed through the California Birds Record Committee as Americans so who knows what the final decision on these will be. I recommend downloading the Jehl Scale, grabbing your binoculars and camera, and sitting on the rocks at the harbor trying to decipher these intriguing birds. This should help hone your observation skills, which in turn may improve your ability to identify other birds that can be difficult for birders such as shorebirds, gulls, sparrows, and others.



SEPTEMBER FIELD TRIPS ...Karin Kersteter

Friday, Sept 6, 2013, 8:15 a.m. – 2:30 p.m. Hopper Mountain National Wildlife Refuge. Leader: Dan Tappe (Refuge Manager, U.S. Fish & Wildlife). Join us on **an incredibly special trip!** We will meet the refuge manager in Fillmore and travel for 1 hour into the NWR. We will view a condor chick on its nest and then travel to a different observation point to look for more adult condors. You are encouraged to bring cameras and scopes. There are no facilities, so please bring food, snacks, water and sunscreen. The dirt road to the refuge is rough, so SUVs and high clearance vehicles are recommended. We will meet at 8:15 a.m. at the Vons parking lot on the corner of A St and the 126 (there is a Starbucks on the corner). We will then assign people to cars to limit the number of vehicles. This trip is limited to 20 people, so please RSVP to venturabirding@yahoo.com asap to reserve your spot. When you RSVP, please state if you have an SUV or other similar vehicle and would be willing to carpool and how many people you can accommodate. Please call Karin at (805)901-2203 if you have any questions.

Saturday, Sept. 7, 8:30 a.m. Ventura Wildlife Ponds at Ventura Harbor. Neil Ziegler (983-7207) Traditional kick-off walk for the Audubon year. Take Harbor Blvd to Spinnaker Dr and enter Ventura Harbor. The water treatment plant is on Angler, a left turn before Spinnaker curves to the right. Park in lot on right hand side of road. Use caution in crossing road at blind curve. Meet in front of gate. We will look for a variety of shore and ocean birds such as teals, grebes, egrets, herons and Buffleheads as well as the elusive Marsh Wren.

Tuesday, Sept 10, 8:30 a.m. Arroyo Verde Park. Adele Fergusson (415-4304). We may see some early fall migrants including White-crowned & Golden-crowned sparrows, hawks, woodpeckers, and hummingbirds. North on Victoria Ave, left on Foothill Rd, right on Day Rd/entrance to the park. Meet at the last parking lot by the restrooms.

Saturday, Sept 14, 9 a.m -4 p.m. Day trip to Santa Cruz Island. Leader Joel (Island Packers). Join us on a much anticipated trip to Santa Cruz Island in the Channel Islands National Park. Our Island Packers boat will leave from Ventura Harbor and land at Prisoner's Harbor. During the voyage, we will look for pelagic species such as Craveri's Murrelet, shearwaters, and terns. Once on land,

we will look for the Island Scrub Jay, Allen's Hummingbirds, Orange-crowned Warblers and Song Sparrows, as well as early migrants. You must purchase your own ticket for the boat trip (\$59 for adults/\$54 for seniors). Please call Island Packers at (805)642-1393 to purchase your ticket well in advance, as the trips often sell out. Remember there are no facilities on the islands, so bring all food and snacks you will need for the day. Pack it in, pack it out policy is in effect. Bring water, sunscreen, and seasickness medication if needed! Enter Ventura Harbor on Spinnaker Dr, turn right at entrance sign Ventura Harbor Village #4. Arrive 45 minutes prior to departure (8:15am). Please see Island Packers website at <http://www.islandpackers.com/DayTripPreperation.html> for more information.

Saturday, Sept. 21, 9 a.m. – noon. Coastal Cleanup Day, Surfer's Knoll (Ventura Harbor). California Coastal Cleanup Day is a statewide volunteer day and a chance for Audubon members to clean up one of our birding sites. Last year, volunteers removed 9000 pounds of trash, 1900 pounds of recyclables and cleaned 40 miles of Ventura beaches and waterways. Pre-registration is not required – just meet in the Surfer's Knoll parking lot and bring your own water, gloves, bucket or re-useable bag.

Saturday, Sept. 28, 8:30 a.m. Beginners' Bird Walk, Santa Clara River Estuary/ Surfers' Knoll. Leader: Allen Bertke (640-9037). We hope to see a variety of shorebirds including Snowy Plovers, grebes, turnstones, Whimbrels, cormorants and sandpipers, as well as many ducks and gulls. Take Harbor Blvd to Spinnaker and enter Ventura Harbor. Follow Spinnaker as it curves around to the right. Surfers' Knoll is on the left. Please bring scopes. We will be walking on sand, so please wear appropriate footwear.

Upcoming weekend trip! Saturday and Sunday, Oct 12-13, Big Morongo and Whitewater Preserve. Leaders: Dee and Betty Zeller (caretaker guides). Our fall weekend birding trip will begin at Big Morongo Canyon Preserve on Saturday. We will look for Scott's and Bullock's Orioles, Verdin, warblers, vireos, thrashers and roadrunners, as well as a variety of sparrows. On Sunday we will visit Whitewater Preserve where we may see a variety of raptors and wildlife, including bighorn sheep! RSVP is required to venturabirding@yahoo.com by Sept 15. Detailed instructions, including lodging info, will be e-mailed to those who RSVP. (continued on Page 6)

SUMMER BIRDING HIGHLIGHTS ...Allen Bertke

It's me again, reporting on some highlights from the summer bird walks. We had a new destination this year, the San Marcos Foothills Preserve in Santa Barbara. A notable sighting there was a Black and White Warbler. We also encountered a bird that was definitely a woodpecker, but none like I had seen before. It had most of the field markings of a Hairy Woodpecker, except for the normal large amount of spotting on the wings, but instead of white in all of the usual places, it was a dirty brown color. I decided to call it an aberrant Hairy, but after looking in the Sibley's field guide I discovered there is indeed a subspecies of the Hairy Woodpecker that fits the description perfectly. That was a first for me. Needless to say, that "Dirty Hairy" made my day!



At Surfer's Knoll, we had the usual suspects, with the addition of three Black Skimmers, who gave us quite a show, making several passes and showing off their skimming capabilities. We also saw several Elegant Terns, Least Terns and Forster's Terns, leading to some of my Tern jokes. One of my favorites describes Tern researchers herding the Terns into a cage and then blowing marijuana smoke into the cage to calm them down. Their goal? To leave no Tern unstoned.

Abbott and Costello could have converted the story of two Tern researchers into a version of their famous "Who's On First" routine. It would go something like this: Two Tern researchers are in the field, catching Terns to be banded and studied. The first one says to the other "I've got my Tern, now it's your turn." The second one says "I don't need your Tern, I'll get my own." "That's what I said, take your turn and get a Tern." "But if I take your Tern and get another Tern, then I'll have two Terns and you won't have any." "Quit turning this around and go get a Tern." "Ok. So what you are saying is that I should take my turn to get a Tern, turn around and turn them in for banding, then return the Terns and we each take a turn to get a Tern and turn them in again?" "Yes, one good Tern deserves another". "What? I don't even know what I just said! Keep your stupid Tern. I'm turning in."

If you didn't follow that, don't feel bad. I think I'm confused myself. I'm not sure what Tern belongs to who. Wait a minute – Who's on First!

My monthly Beginner's Bird Walks start this September at Surfer's Knoll. See the Field Trips page for date and directions. Hope to see you there.

VAS OFFICERS AND CHAIRS

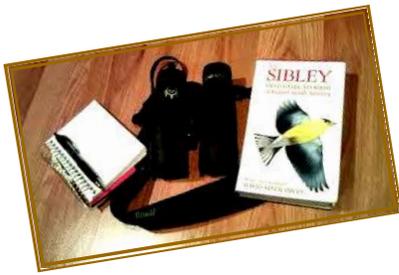
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Program Committee:	Laura Gulovsen	642-6544
	Margaret Wilson	647-7962
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SEPTEMBER BOARD MEETING

The next Board of Directors meeting will be held at the home of Joyce & Bruce Schoppe, 4875 Mascagni St., Ventura, at 7:15 p.m. Call 805-658-2396 for more information. Any VAS member is welcome.

THE VENTURA AUDUBON SOCIETY holds its regular meeting on the second Tuesday of the month at the Poinsettia Pavilion, 3451 Foothill Rd. in Ventura at 7:30 p.m., September through April. The May meeting is a barbecue. Call the President for information. Board Meetings are held on the first Tuesday of the month. A Membership Form is available on our web site.

THE CALIFORNIA CONDOR is published nine times per year (September-May). Members are encouraged to submit articles, announcements, letters and drawings, preferably in WORD format, or in the form of an e-mail message. *The deadline is noon on the 1st of the month preceding the next issue.* E-mail to: deepress2@gmail.com. Call Editor Dee Press at 484-8415 for more information.



NOTES FROM THE FIELD

...David Pereksta

Over-summering waterfowl of species that normally only winter here were reported from a variety of locations. There are usually a few **Brant** that linger through the summer, which this year included as many as 13-17 in Mugu Lagoon from 8 May-19 Jul, dropping to 3 by 26 Jul (DP); 2 at the Ventura River estuary 17-20 Jun with a single bird continuing through at least 30 Jul (KR); and 1 at the Santa Clara River estuary 2 Jul (ASh) increasing to 4 on 5 Jul (JM) with as many as two continuing through 11 Aug. Individual **American Wigeons** were at Lake Casitas on 4 Jun (JG) and Rancho Simi Park on 14 Jun (DP), four **Blue-winged Teal** were in Ormond Beach on 25 Apr (DP) and as many as three were at the Ventura wastewater ponds 22 Jun-19 Jul (CO & DP), and a **Green-winged Teal** was near Point Mugu on 19 Jul (DP). A **Wood Duck** near Point Mugu on 6 Aug may have been an early fall migrant (DP). The status of **Common Mergansers** has changed over the last several decades with breeding now occurring locally in the region since the mid-1990s. This year, reports included several at Lake Casitas on 22 Apr (KK), a pair in Sespe Gorge on 20 Apr (DP et al.), a continuing female in Wheeler Gorge on 24 Apr, four or more along the Sespe River 30-2 May Apr (JB), five along the Santa Clara River on 30 May (JB), a pair with 8 chicks in Piru Creek on 8 Jun (DP), and two in the Ventura Harbor on 3 Aug (OJ).

Local wetlands hosted a variety of uncommon to rare waterbirds and waders. As many as four **Least Bitterns** continued at Matilija Lake through 29 Jun and at least one continued at Lake Sherwood through 5 Jun before three were detected there on 22 Jul (MH). An **American Bittern** was at McGrath State beach on 16 Apr (AF) and another was at Lake Casitas on 22 Apr (KK). **Cattle Egrets** have all but disappeared from Ventura County and their local status is confounded by frequent misidentifications, so a report from the Ventura Harbor on 3 Aug was notable (OJ). **Yellow-crowned Night-Herons** bred at Point Mugu again this year and as many as seven were seen throughout the spring and summer. Two **American White Pelicans** continued at the Santa Clara River estuary through 29 Apr. Offshore, a **Brown Booby** was southeast of Anacapa Island on 21 Jul (JB). **Virginia Rail** reports from the Ventura River estuary on 24 Apr and 24-27 Jun (KR), Matilija Lake on 25 Apr (DP), and Lake Sherwood on 28 Apr (MH), indicated possible breeding at those locations. Rare in summer, individual **Common Gallinules** were reported from Revolon Slough on 28 May and the Santa Clara River estuary on 6 Jul (JB).

Raptor reports were scarce, but the nesting pair of **Bald Eagles** at Lake Casitas continued to tend to two young eaglets through the summer and all were reported by many observers through at least 17 Jul. Also of note were two **Swainson's Hawks** migrating north over Ventura on 5 May (RM) and a **Crested Caracara** at the southern end of Arnold Road 11-15 Jun (AS).

Since May we have seen both northbound and southbound shorebird migration through the county. The hybrid **American x Black Oystercatcher** continued at the Ventura Harbor through 8 Aug and another was on San Nicolas Island on 21 May (DP). While **Black Oystercatchers** used to be uncommon and unpredictable on the mainland, they now appear to be here year-round so I will no longer highlight reports in this column unless there is an exceptional number or breeding involved. Southbound **Solitary Sandpipers** were at the Camarillo Airport on 26 Jul (PG) and Port Hueneme on 4 Aug (DP & ST). **Semipalmated Sandpipers** included two at Point Mugu on 3 Aug (DP) and one in Port Hueneme on 5 Aug (LS). **Red Knots** were reported from several locations including three at Mugu Lagoon on 7 May and one there on 26 Jul (DP), two near Point Mugu on 22 May (DP), and as many as two feeding with a large group of shorebirds near the Ventura Harbor 31 Jul-6 Aug (DDJ). Six **Dunlin** were very unseasonal at Point Mugu on 25 Jun (DP) and may have been individuals of the Asian subspecies.

Spring and summer is an excellent time to look for uncommon gull, terns, skuas, and alcids along the coast and offshore. The only **Sabine's Gull** report of the season was a lone bird in the Santa Barbara Channel on 16 Apr (JB). Rare in migration, a **Black Tern** was at the Ventura wastewater ponds 5-7 Aug (PJ). **Common Tern** reports included singles offshore Ventura on 24 Apr (DP) and 28 Jul (JB), as well as onshore birds at Mugu Lagoon on 8 May and 26 Jul (DP). Mainland summer reports of **Royal Terns** included one at the Ventura Harbor on 17 Jul (JM), two at Point Mugu 19-26 Jul (DP), one at McGrath State Beach on 27 Jul (JB), and one at Ormond Beach on 4 Aug (ST & DP). **Black Skimmers** were seen throughout the spring and summer in Mugu Lagoon with a high of 28 reported during 7 May-3 Aug (DP). Away from Mugu there were as many as three at the Santa Clara River estuary 6 May-8 Jul (JB & FD) and one at the Ventura River estuary on 24 Jul (LE). **South Polar Skuas** were reported from several boat trips south of Anacapa Island including two on 3 Jul (DP), one on 21 Jul (JB), and one on 9 Aug (JB, JM et al.). Two **Pigeon Guillemots** at Point Mugu on 7 Jul were unusually close to the mainland (DP).

(continued on Page 6)

NOTES... (continued from Page 5)

Single **White-winged Doves** were reported from Oak Park on 11 May (DC) and Newbury Park on 9 Aug (RA). **Calliope Hummingbirds** were in Ventura on 8 May (DP), on Mutau Flat Road on 17 May (JB), and on Mount Pinos on 8 Jun (DP). Two wintering **Lewis's Woodpeckers** continued east of Lake Casitas through 25 Apr.

Passerine reports of note included a variety of uncommon local breeders and a few rare migrants. **Gray Flycatchers** were reported from their usual breeding haunts in Quatal Canyon on 24 Apr (JB) and 11 May (DP & MP), and Mutau Flats on 17 May (JB); however, a report from Mount Pinos on 30 Jun (DM) was higher in elevation than is usual locally. Migrant **Hammond's Flycatchers** continued into mid-April with two at Sisar Canyon on 18 Apr (ST). **Dusky Flycatcher** reports included one along Cerro Noreste Road on 25 Apr (GH), a migrant in Wheeler Gorge on 10 May (DP), two on Frazier Mountain on 11 May (DP & MP), a pair at the Mount Pinos Campground on 2 Jun (TE & MS), and 9 on Mount Pinos on 22 Jun (ST). A **Vermilion Flycatcher** was at Ojai Meadows on 23 Apr (JG). For the second consecutive year, a pair of **Townsend's Solitaires** was reported from the Mount Pinos Campground 2-30 Jun (TE & MS). Six **American Dippers**, including several recently fledged young, were along Matilija Creek on 23 Jun (JB). A **Summer Tanager** was found dead in a yard in Casitas Springs on 17 May (fide AS). A **White-throated Sparrow** was in Camarillo Grove Park 14-23 Apr (RS) and a wintering individual continued in Thousand Oaks through 18 Apr. A **Tricolored Blackbird** was at the end of Arnold Road 22-26 Apr (JB), another was at the Ojai Meadows 23-25 Apr (JG), and another was in the Lockwood Valley on 11 May (DP & MP). **Yellow-headed Blackbirds** were reported widely when they were moving north in the spring including as many as eight at Arnold Road 22-26 Apr (WF), one at Ojai Meadows 23 Apr (JG), 1 near Point Mugu on 25 Apr and 11 there on 10 May (DP), and 12 at the Santa Clara River estuary on 26 Apr (MSa) increasing to 25 there on 6 May (JB). **Scott's Orioles** reports only came from Quatal Canyon with three there on 24 Apr (JB) and on 11 May (DP & MP). A **Baltimore Oriole** was on San Nicolas Island 8-9 May (DP). **Red Crossbills** continued to be reported in the local mountains with 50 on Frazier Mountain on 8 May (KK & CR) and one there on 30 June, 2 in Quatal Canyon on 25 Apr (DP), and 12 on Mount Pinos on 8 Jun (DP). Four were unexpected on San Nicolas Island on 8 May (DP) and were likely the more uncommon "type 3" variant.

Thank you to those who reported sightings during the last month. If you have any questions about local birds or have a good one to report (please no nuisance bird calls), email or call David Pereksta at pereksta@pacbell.net or 659-5740.

Good birding,
David Pereksta

Observers: Richard Armerding, Joel Barrett, Dan Cooper, Frank DeMartino, Don DesJardin, Linda Easter, Tom Edell, Alexis Frangis, Walter Fuller, Peter Gaede, Jesse Grantham, Mary Hansen, Greg Homel, Oscar Johnson, Penny Johnson, Karl Krause, Dan Maxwell, Robert McMorrin, Jim Moore, Chet Ogan, Matthew Page, David Pereksta, Kay Regester, Craig Rudolph, Matt Sadowski, Larry Sansone, Adam Searcy, Alison Sheehey, Maggie Smith, Russel Stone, and Steve Tucker

FIELD TRIPS (continued from Page 3)

Beginners are welcome on all field trips. Light drizzle does not necessarily cancel trips, but heavier rain will. If in doubt, please call the trip leader.

Just a few reminders about birding etiquette: Stay behind the leader, move quietly, ask questions, and listen to what people are pointing out. When socializing, stay behind the group. Questions/suggestions about an organized trip? E-mail Karin Kersteter at venturabirding@yahoo.com.

Mark Your Calendar Field Trips:

Tuesday, Oct 1 – Canada Larga
Saturday, Oct 5 – Hedrick Ranch, Santa Paula
Saturday-Sunday Oct 12-13 Big Morongo Weekend
Saturday, Oct 26 – Beginners' Bird Walk – Ojai Meadow
Saturday, Nov 2 – Arroyo Hondo, Santa Barbara



A Little Review, or Perhaps You're New...

Get Started Birding

Reprinted from

<http://getintobirds.audubon.org/get-started-birding>

You might be surprised to discover how many bird names you already know, but whether it's five or 50, you can take your knowledge to the next level with the tips on this page and a birder's most important tools: [binoculars](#), a [field guide](#), a notebook, and practice!

Become a note taker: When you see a bird you don't recognize, try to jot down a few notes or sketch the bird before it flies away. If you don't take notes, you may find you've forgotten important details when you are looking at your field guide later. Taking photographs also gives you something to look at later, of course, but writing notes or sketching a bird by hand will force you to pay attention to details of the bird's appearance and behavior while you are watching it.

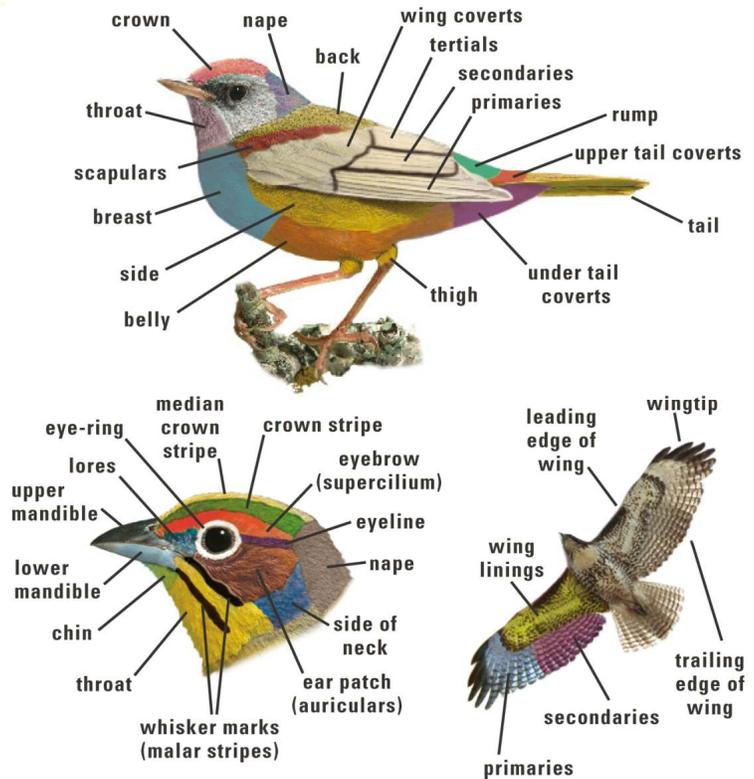
Learn some bird anatomy: Birds come in an amazing variety of colors, shapes, and sizes, but they generally all share the same basic body parts, which are identified on the diagram on this page. Try to familiarize yourself with the names of these body parts and feather groups because field guides use them to describe each bird and make distinctions between similar species. Knowing basic bird anatomy will also help you take better notes and draw better sketches.

Judge size and shape: Size and shape are important clues about a bird's identity, but they can also be hard to determine, especially when looking at a bird from a distance through binoculars. Try to get a sense of the bird's size in comparison to more common or familiar birds (especially if they are nearby) - larger than a robin but smaller than a crow, for example. Shapes are also important to note, especially the shapes of beaks, wings, and tails, which often tell you a lot about a bird.

Study behavior: Take a moment to notice how the bird is acting. Is it alone or in a group? Is it stalking, standing still, or flitting actively? How does it fly? What is it eating? Some birds are easily recognized by their actions alone.

Be aware of variations: Many birds look very different in male and female plumage, adult and immature plumage, and summer and winter plumage, so if you see something different, first check to see if it is a different plumage of a familiar species. Beyond that, birds can also show unusual plumage variations including albinism, which can make them partly or entirely white. And on top of that, birds drop their feathers and regrow them at certain times of year, temporarily changing how long their tails look, for example.

Listen, listen, listen: Listening for the songs and calls of birds can help you find birds and also identify them, even before you see them. And some birds that look similar to each other have very different voices, so paying attention to how they sound can help you separate the confusing species. As you become familiar with the common songs and calls, you'll start to be able to pick out things that sound different. Many different CDs and mobile apps (including [Audubon's mobile apps](#)) include recordings that can help you learn songs and calls too.



Parts of a bird. Adapted from the Kaufman Field Guide to Birds of North America (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, Boston, 2000). Used with permission.

VENTURA AUDUBON SOCIETY

P.O. Box 24198
Ventura, CA 93002

NEW LEGISLATION SEEKS TO PROTECT CALIFORNIA'S WILDLIFE FROM THREAT OF LEAD AMMUNITION

(Reprinted from <http://ca.audubon.org/new-legislation-seeks-protect-california-s-people-and-wildlife-threat-lead-ammunition>)

In an effort to protect both wildlife and people from the dangers of lead poisoning, Audubon California has joined with the Humane Society of the United States and Defenders of Wildlife to co-sponsor legislation that would require the use of nonlead ammunition for all hunting in California. Assembly Bill 711, introduced in March, already has the backing of several key members of the State Legislature, as well as a growing number of hunters and conservation, animal protection, and public health organizations.

This is going to be an uphill battle, and we'll need your help to see it through. [Sign up for action alerts from Audubon California, and we'll send you periodic emails letting you know how you can help.](#)



Scientists agree that lead ammunition still threatens the California Condor, Golden Eagle and other protected species. Similarly, one in five free-flying condors has ingested such significant levels of lead from these sources that they are at risk of dying from lead poisoning. In fact, the leading cause of death for adult California Condors is not old age - it's lead poisoning.

In 2007, Audubon California was part of a coalition that succeeded in requiring the use of nonlead ammunition throughout the condor range. While this law has been successful in decreasing overall blood lead levels and cases of toxicosis in wildlife, it isn't enough. Just last year, a study published by the National Academy of Sciences concluded that unless lead ammunition is removed from the environment entirely, the California Condor won't survive on its own. It only takes a tiny amount of lead to poison animals, causing immense suffering before killing them.

Additional research has also concluded that lead from ammunition poses a significant threat to people, as well. Because lead shatters upon impact, meat from animals shot by hunters using lead ammunition often contains tiny fragments of lead that are ingested by humans and other animals.

In late March, thirty leading scientists who have firsthand knowledge of both the wildlife and public health impacts of lead from ammunition [signed a letter](#) agreeing that the threat from this source means that it is time to eliminate this source of lead from our environment.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 1991 began to require the use of non-lead ammunition like steel and copper for hunting ducks and geese across the United States and the National Park Service in 2009 announced the goal of eliminating the use of lead ammunition.

Nonlead ammunition is already widely available in California, and many thousands of hunters here are already using it. Assembly Bill 711 proposes to phase in the non-lead requirement over a two-year period after allowing the Fish and Game Commission six months to develop a plan for that phase-in that mitigates the impact on ammunition manufacturers, retailers and hunters.