

The California Condor

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



Least tern adult feeding its chick: July on Ormond Beach 2021 - photo by Alex Vaca

Call Notes

by Cynthia Hartley
VAS executive director

Welcome to **Birdathon** month at VAS! Birdathon is Ventura Audubon's major annual fundraiser. Although grants support our basic work of species monitoring and habitat protection, they only provide a part of our funding needs, and grants require significant resources to administer. **Donations provide a critical part of our fundraising needs.**

VAS is sensitive to the cacophony of fundraising requests that show up in everyone's mail and email inboxes, so to keep it simple our October newsletter is essentially a 2-in-1 emailing. Both an overview of how we use funds donated in birdathon, and also the usual news and announcements relevant to our birding audience.

We've made some changes this year to birdathon. It has been many years since anyone donated based on number of bird species seen on field trips, so despite the name we have eliminated the species competition option (for now). We have set up a special PayPal link to accept donations as a Birdathon donation. We are also switching to a new

system for tracking VAS membership anniversaries, so we are separating donations from memberships. We have created a unique PayPal link for new/renewal memberships. All of these links are on our website. In keeping with tradition, we are also sending out a special mailing with a stamped return envelope for anyone wanting to donate or join via check through the mail.

Ventura Audubon is a 501(c) 3 non-profit corporation; so, all contributions are tax deductible. Watch for our mailers to arrive in your mail box the first week of October, or you may go online and donate through our PayPal link.

Save the Date!

VAS Christmas Bird Count coming on Dec 19, 2021
More info in next month's newsletter



What do Birdathon donations support?

Protecting Birds and Their Habitat in Ventura County

Least Bell's Vireo Recovery on the Ventura and Santa Clara rivers



This small river loving bird has been on the federal endangered species list since 1986. We have partnered with local groups to protect this endangered bird for many years through habitat restoration.



This small songbird is especially vulnerable to cowbird brood parasitism because of habitat fragmentation. So in concert with habitat restoration, we worked to reduce cowbird parasitism. Now we are watching to see if restoration of riparian habitat has been sufficient for these birds to make a comeback. Currently, we are supporting ongoing population monitoring of Least Bell's Vireo to track the success of these efforts on our Ventura County rivers.

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

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
- Condor Take Permit
- Opposition to Arctic Refuge Drilling
- Bird Friendly Landscaping Practices
- Scoping document for SCR-1
- Fisherman's Wharf Development

Shorebird Recovery Program (SRP)

Ventura Audubon is committed to helping the western snowy plovers and least terns that nest on Ventura County beaches. Since 2015 we have been conducting a comprehensive recovery program on the non-State and non-Federally owned beaches in Ventura where these endangered/threatened birds nest. These are Ormond and Hollywood beaches. Our program combines closely monitoring nesting populations and chicks, with habitat and nest protection, and public outreach. The information below summarizes this work.



*This is a snowy plover nest on Ormond Beach in 2021. This was one of our last nests of the season
photo credit Cynthia Hartley*

SRP - Science

Our staff of 2 part time biologists and one contract biologist conduct **nest monitoring** of the CA least tern and western snowy plover. We locate nests and track outcome. We work closely with USFWS and CDFW in the course of this work. The data we collect is given to State and Federal ecologists to track how these species are doing against recovery goals. We also monitor for threats to nesting success in real time.

At Ormond we use trail cameras to help us better identify predators and threats and verify nest hatches. Cameras are placed

2021 Nesting Outcome

Ormond Beach

- 43 snowy plover nests
- 27 least tern nests

Hollywood Beach

- 14 snowy plover nests

on nests 24/7 and are motion activated. The video to the left is one of the last nests that hatched in 2021. [more info](#)



We have created phone apps for our Beach Naturalist volunteers to enable them to collect data 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](#)

SRP - Habitat Protection



Disturbance is one of the leading causes of nest failures for both snowy plovers and least terns. On Ormond Beach we maintain fencing around 3 large nesting areas, enclosing a total of 100 acres of high value nesting habitat with 2 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.

[more info](#)

Left - inside nesting habitat

Right - outside habitat



Outreach: Beach Naturalists



Beach Naturalists Armando and Rachel conducting outreach on Hollywood Beach



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.

We provide a free 3 hour training session (currently hosted on Zoom), and a follow-up field training. Thereafter naturalists work shifts on either Hollywood or Ormond Beach. Tideline Surveys - snowy plovers and shorebird migrants. Some of the activities they conduct include:

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

In 2021 we had 50 volunteers attend classes. We provided a total of 24 regular volunteers who served 400 hours of service on Hollywood and Ormond Beaches

Fostering our Local Birding Community

Reed V. Smith Trail at Hederick Ranch



As part of the restoration work with the Santa Clara River Conservancy, we have held joint habitat restoration work days on Hederick Ranch on the Santa Clara River. As part of this effort we have created a trail for birders, in honor of one of our VAS conservation leaders, the "Reed V. Smith Trail". VAS remains committed to maintaining this trail and we will be scheduling clean up days this year to keep it open.

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

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

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.

Monthly Speaker Programs



We provide a monthly speaker each month who presents on a topic of interest to our audience. Due to COVID we have been using ZOOM to reach our audience.

We will probably provide a Zoom option from now on, since we find that we can present a greater variety of speakers and more people can attend.

Upcoming topics

DECEMBER 2021 - JOSEPH BRANDT
 Movie night / Q&A
 Movie Title: Condor's Shadow

JANUARY 2022 - GAVIN JONES
 Gavin Jones is a wildfire ecologist working for the USDA. He is going to talk about how wildfire affects forest biodiversity (specifically owls!).

Meet Our Staff



Cynthia Hartley
Sr. Biologist



Kat Whitehouse
Biologist



Alecia Smith
Volunteer Coordinator

Meet our our 2021 Summer Interns



Kat Henry
Audubon in Action
Summer Intern 2021



Mackenzie Kuras
Environment for the Americas
Summer Intern 2021



Alex Vaca
Environment for the Americas
Summer Intern 2021

To make a BIRDATHON donation

[Donate ONLINE](#)

<or>

US Mail

send a check:
Ventura Audubon Society
P.O. Box 24198
Ventura, California 93002

Other ways you can support the Ventura Audubon Society

Select Ventura Audubon as your Amazon Smile charity



This is a very easy way to support your favorite charity.
You don't have to do anything, just designate your charity.
When you shop via smile.amazon.com, Amazon will donate 0.5% of eligible purchases to your charity –

no fees, no extra cost, no hassle.
Use the link above to select VAS as your charity.

Volunteer

Curious about volunteering? Take our volunteer survey to find out how your skills and interests fit with our needs

[SURVEY FORM](#)

THANK YOU!

October VAS Programs



October Field Trips

Ormond Beach

[Google Maps](#)



SATURDAY, OCTOBER 16, 2021
8:30 AM

Ventura Settling Ponds

[Google Maps](#)



SATURDAY, OCTOBER 30, 2021
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.

The settling ponds at the Ventura Harbor is a reliable place to find ducks, grebes, gulls and terns, as well as songbirds and raptors. We should hear Spotted Towhees, Yellow Rumped Warblers and Blue-gray gnatcatchers

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

In order to balance birding with safety, we have implemented a number of **COVID safety procedures** that will limit the number of trips and attendees, and ensure distancing.

COVID-19 safety measures:

- All participants sign up in advance for field trips
- Participants sign and return a COVID release form
- All participants must be vaccinated - This includes our leaders too
- Everyone must wear a mask and social distance during the field trip

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

Protecting and Promoting Southern California Wildlands

Speaker: Sandy DeSimone
Audubon Starr Ranch Sanctuary
Date/Time: October 12, 2021; 7 PM PDT

Presentation Summary: Plants are a passion for Sandy DeSimone who did her doctoral research on coastal sage scrub, an endangered shrubland. She also developed the “Starr Ranch Field Ecology Programs,” an innovative approach that integrates ecological research into education.

People of all ages participate in the programs, taught by biologists, and have hands-on experience in simulated or actual field research. She also directed five years of research on biology and non chemical control of a priority nonnative plant species, artichoke thistle.



Since 1997 and over a series of three experiments, Starr Ranch seasonal staff learned how to use a method that has reduced artichoke thistle cover by 95% in a work site after

one season of non chemical treatment. Land managers from Ventura to San Diego Counties have visited Starr Ranch to hear about land management practices and visit the restoration sites.



Other Programs for Birders



Falling For Migration

Sat Oct 9, 2021 at 2-3pm

Fall migration is upon us! What does that mean? It means birds are passing through our yards and heading to their wintering grounds. Migration is an

amazingly complicated event that birds perform twice a year, at least! We're going to take a look at the history of migration and highlight some of the birds that go that extra mile (literally).

Facebook [invite](#)

Saving Songbirds

Sat Oct 23, 2021 at 2-3pm

The birds need our help! Population declines have hit many of our favorite birds and it's time we talk about how we can help them out. We will take a closer look at Cornell's Seven Simple Actions as well as some other



local organizations and projects that are helping restore lost habitat. We'll talk about turning your yard into a Certified Wildlife Habitat and how native plants can help turn the tide for our feathered friends.

Other Audubon Chapter Programs



Morro Coast Audubon Society
Serving San Luis Obispo County Since 1966

Program: Mono Lake Osprey, the Morro Coast, and Beyond

Speaker: Lisa Fields, Senior Environmental Scientist (Specialist), California Department of Fish and Wildlife

Time and Date: 7 PM; Oct 18, 2021

Website [link](#) for more info



**SANTA BARBARA
AUDUBON SOCIETY**

Program: A Visual Journey through Carrizo Plain National Monument

Speaker: Chuck Graham

Time and Date: 7:30 - 9 PM; Oct 27, 2021

Website [link](#)

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

- California Department of Fish and Wildlife and United States Fish and Wildlife Service, Endangered Species Act Section 6 Grant (S6)
 - National Foundation of Fish and Wildlife (NFWF)
 - National Audubon Society, Audubon in Action Grant
 - The Baltoro Trust
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[Contact Us](#)