

The California Condor



Blue Gray Gnat Catcher by Rachel Ameche

Ventura Audubon Society
September 2024 Volume 66, Number 1
A Chapter of the National Audubon Society
venturaaudubon.org

September Program Date Correction

The September program date for "Ventura Water Pure

update" was incorrect. The program is Tuesday September 10th at 7pm. The location is the same, please see the corrected details below.

Call Notes

by Rachel Ameche
President

We hope your summer was full of rest, sun and beautiful birds. Our 2024/25 season is upon us and with it comes a line up of new speakers and great field trips. We're excited to reconnect with our members and friends and meet new ones. The chapter was on break, but the Shorebird recovery team has been hard at work all summer. Check out the bird blog for updates and to see how this year's season went. Fall migrants will soon be flying in, so don't miss signing up for field trips to get out and see them.



Keep reading for all the upcoming Audubon events and we look forward to seeing you at our program on September 10.

[Membership Webpage](#)

[Join VAS via PayPal](#)

Shorebird Recovery Program Update

by Cynthia Hartley
Shorebird Recovery Program Lead



Nesting Season Summary

This was a challenging year!

Despite having one of the highest numbers of snowy plover nests in the past 20 years, we encountered a significant failure rate. Out of 59 plover nests, 61% failed, resulting in 36 lost nests. Predators were the main cause, impacting 33 nests. The predators, ranked by the number of nests lost, were ravens, skunks, ground squirrels, coyotes, and crows. The remaining nests failed due to abandonment, which is relatively common each year.

The most critical measure of success is the number of fledglings. For least terns, we had none, while for snowy plovers, we counted a total of 20 fledglings—though some of these may have been double-counted in subsequent weeks. The true number was likely between 10 and 15 fledglings. To put this in context, we documented 169 plover eggs laid, of which 62 hatched, resulting in a success rate of 6% to 9%. While we are pleased to have documented as many fledglings as we did, there is significant room for improvement.

This year differed from last in that we did not lose any plover nests to human activity or tidal washouts. However, of the 21 tern nests, all but one failed. Of these, 18 were lost to predators, and one was taken by humans. The remaining nests failed due to abandonment.

A major concern this year was human disturbance. Although we didn't lose any plover nests to human activity, we did lose one tern nest due to human take. We experienced unprecedented levels of human-related issues, including people pushing bicycles through the habitat, walking dogs in the area, vandalizing fences, camping in or near the habitats, leaving large trash piles, scavenging for sea glass near the nests, and stealing trail cameras. These disturbances likely contributed to the increased predation of nests.

Ventura Audubon is a member of the Ormond Beach Scientific Advisory Committee and has been asked to provide input on the restoration design. Stay tuned for upcoming blog posts where we will share our recommendations to address the issues impacting nesting outcomes at Ormond Beach.

For more information and to watch some video highlights of our season check out the VAS Bird Blog

[Visit the Bird Blog
Here](#)

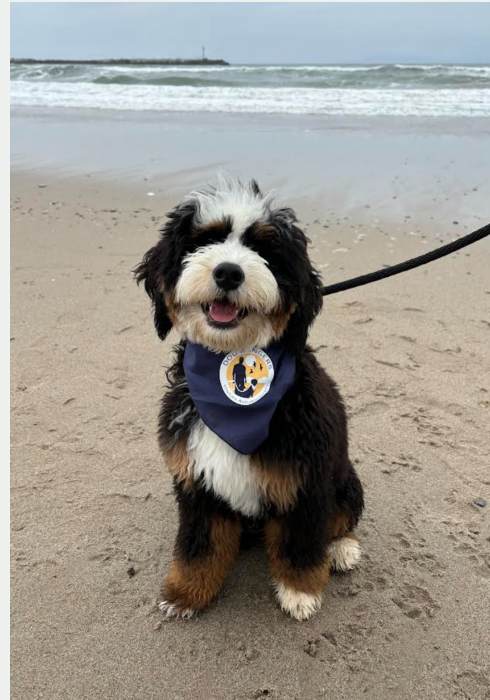


Dog Rangers

We're thrilled to share that the Dog Rangers program has had its best year yet! This initiative is dedicated to educating dog owners on how their pets can help protect shorebirds and wildlife. When Dog Rangers make a pledge, they commit to respecting shorebirds and their habitats, ensuring these birds can feel safe and thrive in their nesting areas. This summer, while our amazing interns conducted tideline surveys at Hollywood Beach every Sunday, they also worked hard to recruit new Dog Rangers and discuss the program's commitment. We're excited to report that, so far this year, we've recruited 62 Dog Rangers, and that number continues to grow!

In August, we had a fantastic time attending the C.A.R.L. Pooch Parade, an event promoting rescue dogs, where we successfully recruited 11 new Dog Rangers. This experience reinforced our commitment to reaching more dog owners and expanding our community. Looking ahead, we're eager to attend more events like this to further our outreach. We will be conducting monthly outreach at the Ventura Botanical Gardens and the Channel Islands Farmers Market, aiming to connect with new community members and promote the Ventura Audubon chapter. Additionally, we'll be launching Dog Ranger meet-ups to build a stronger community. If you think your pooch would love to help promote harmony with wildlife, come visit us at one of our tabling events or reach out to our volunteer coordinator at volunteer@venturaaudubon.org to arrange a meetup. Join us in making a

difference for our feathered friends!



September 2024 Speaker Program

An update from VenturaWaterPure

Speaker: Linda Sumansky

Date: Tuesday September 10th

Time: 7pm PST

Live at the Poinsettia Pavilion and via Zoom, see link below.

Program Description:

The VenturaWaterPure team will provide project updates, focusing on environmental stewardship of the Santa Clara River Estuary and ongoing partnerships with Heal the

Bay, Ventura Coastkeeper / Wishtoyo Chumash Foundation. They will highlight key initiatives like the estuary monitoring programs to ensure sustainable development of the project. Additionally, VenturaWaterPure will discuss efforts to protect endangered species, advancements in water purification technology, and provide the latest updates on grants, funding, and treatment pond access. This presentation reflects their commitment to balancing infrastructure progress with ecological preservation.



Speaker Bio:

Linda Sumansky is VenturaWaterPure’s Program Director, responsible for overseeing and managing all levels of the program from design, permitting, funding, compliance and construction.

With over 35 years of experience, 19 in the water industry, Linda has a broad engineering background, including water quality, wastewater design, construction, and budgeting for capital projects.

Prior to joining the City in 2021, Linda worked at the City of Santa Barbara, where she served most recently as the principal civil engineer and project manager for three large capital improvement projects to improve water quality and provide a reliable drinking water source. Linda holds a bachelor’s degree in chemical engineering from Bucknell University and a master’s degree in civil engineering from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.



To join the program visit our

[Monthly Speaker webpage](#)

Then click the
"Watch Virtually Via Zoom" button
at the top of the webpage

Getting it Right – Mastering Bird Identification Challenges Royal and Elegant Terns – Article and Photos by David Pereksta

There are some bird species that are challenging for local birders to identify correctly. Often times these involve similar looking species that can be difficult to distinguish. Reviewing our local eBird records has illuminated some of the more common misidentification problems that a number of observers are having, which has become the inspiration for a new column. One bird family that presents a series of challenges are terns. This month I will kick off a new series by providing some helpful tips on correctly identifying two of the larger terns that occur along our coastline; Royal and Elegant Terns.

Is there really a problem identifying these species correctly? You bet there is! In fact, I would say that misidentifying Elegant and Royal Terns is one of the most frequent and egregious identification errors in Ventura County. A large flock on the rocks in the Ventura Harbor has been identified as Elegants by one good birder, then identified by Royals by another good birder on the same day. An organized birding group misidentified a large flock with none of them realizing their mistake as they all accepted the eBird checklist. Distinguishing between these species is not difficult, but birders make assumptions and often do not look closely enough before entering their data in eBird. Common mistakes include reporting one of the species out of season or in numbers that are not expected for a particular season. Identifying these species correctly involves not only knowing their field marks, but also understanding how their seasonality, distribution, and abundance varies.



During the breeding season, both species have black crowns, napes, and crests extending to the top of the bill as shown above. The photo below shows a Royal Tern on the left and three Elegant Terns on the right. This was taken in early November when their crowns are in basic plumage. As this photo shows well, Royal is much bulkier than Elegant; nearly twice as large by weight. Some references suggest that bill color means something but there is a lot of overlap and variation, even within an individual species. Look at the variation in the Elegant Tern bill colors in this photo alone where they range from nearly yellow to dark orange. The bill color on Royal Tern is more uniform while Elegant Terns generally have paler tips. Bill structure is different with Royal having a large and heavy bill while Elegant has a relatively longer and slenderer bill with a slight downcurve to it. In basic plumage, Royal has more extensive white on the forehead extending farther back on the crown (well past the eye) than Elegant does. Elegant has a longer, shaggier crest than Royal. Merlin does not differentiate Elegant from Royal vocalizations so you cannot trust the app to distinguish them by call. The Elegant Tern's loud *keer-rick* call is more grating than that of the Royal Tern.



Seasonality varies and is important to knowing which species is most likely to be present in numbers at a given time. Both species are coastal including occurring over offshore waters. Royal is more numerous in the winter and occurs in much lower numbers in the summer. They are often seen mixed in with gull flocks on beaches and in estuaries and in the winter, it is not uncommon to see flocks of dozens; with occasional larger flocks of 50-100 birds. Elegant Terns breed south of our area from the northern Sea of Cortez in Mexico to the Los Angeles Harbor. Their post-breeding dispersal brings them north along the Pacific Coast from spring-fall and they arrive in Ventura County in late March with numbers peaking through the summer before they head back south in November. Elegant Tern is extremely rare in the winter locally and is generally absent from Dec-Mar. In contrast to Royal Terns, Elegant Tern flocks can be very large when they are in season, sometimes in excess of 100s if not 1000s of individuals. They will also gather in large numbers on the breakwaters in the Ventura Harbor, where they are frequently misidentified as Royals when seen at a distance.

I hope these tips help clarify the identification of Royal and Elegant Terns. As fall is upon us, the abundance of these species will be shifting so it is a good time to go out in the field to observe them and put this information to the test. If you find this valuable, I can address other identification challenges in coming months. I already have ideas for other difficult species groups (including other terns), but let me know if there are ones you would like me to tackle.

Beginners are always welcome on field trips!

Please do not be shy if you are learning bird ID or are just curious.

We love having and encouraging beginner birders!

- We request that all participants sign up no less than 24 hours in advance for field trips - *this allows us advance time to ensure we have enough trip leaders*
- This also enables us notify participants of any changes

Sign up early to participate in a field trip and to get notifications if a field trip is changed or cancelled!

1. Visit our [Field Trip webpage](#)
2. Scroll to the bottom of the field trip descriptions, and fill out; your name, email address and select the trip you want to attend
3. You will be sent an email by our Field Trip Coordinator

Questions or need help? Email fieldtrips@venturaaudubon.org

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

September Field Trips

Ventura Settling Ponds

Saturday September 7th
Meeting Time: 8:30am

An easy walk along dirt paths around the shore of the settling ponds, one of the top birding locations in Ventura County. We'll be looking for Ducks, Grebes and Herons. Gulls and Pelicans are likely, and Hawks and Harriers possible. No restrooms or drinking water, nearest public restrooms are at Surfer's Knoll parking lot.

For directions please sign up here: [Field Trip webpage](#)



Santa River Preserve

Saturday, September 21st
Meeting Time: 8:30am

The recently opened Santa Clara River Preserve spans almost two miles of this amazing waterway and encompasses nearly 1,000 acres of upland habitat and riverbed. One of the few locations on the Santa Clara River that are accessible to the public. A wide variety of birds can be found here at different times including Bell's Vireo, White Faced Ibis, and Lesser Nighthawks.



We need your support for Burrowing Owls



Habitat loss from development and insufficient protection under the California Endangered Species Act have caused owl populations to plummet by 60% over the last four decades. The owl is considered as “extirpated” from Ventura County and other coastal counties.

At its August 2024 meeting, the Commission determined “that there is sufficient information to indicate that the petitioned action may be warranted, and the petition should be accepted and considered”. This action now requires the CDFW to produce within a specified time a “peer-reviewed report based upon the best scientific information available that advises the Commission on whether the petitioned action is warranted”. The time frame for the report is 12 months which may be extended to 18 months.

There's hope on the horizon for western burrowing owls. The California Fish and Game Commission will meet on October 10th to decide whether to list the owls as threatened or endangered. The [petition](#), filed by the Center For Biological Diversity, seeks threatened or endangered status for burrowing owls in southwestern California (which includes Ventura Co.), central-western California and the San Francisco Bay Area, and threatened status for burrowing owls in the Central Valley and southern desert range.

In March, the Center for Biological Diversity petitioned the California Fish & Game Commission to protect five imperiled populations of the western burrowing owl under the California Endangered Species Act. Additional petitioners included Defenders of Wildlife, Burrowing Owl Preservation Society, Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society, Urban Bird Foundation, Central Valley Bird Club and San Bernadino Valley Audubon Society.

Depending upon how broadly the Commission ultimately defines “populations” of burrowing owls, listing might help remnant populations in Ventura County. For more information, see: <https://fgc.ca.gov/cesa#wbo>.

Ventura Audubon Society has written in support of the petition and urged expeditious determination regarding listing. We encourage you to express your support by sending comments to the Fish and Game Commission at FGC@fgc.ca.gov. Comments should be received no later than September 26.

Wild Birds Unlimited Ventura Events



Falling for Migration - September 15th 2pm PST on ZOOM

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).

Click this [link](#) to sign up

Saving the Songbirds- September 29th 2pm PST on ZOOM

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.

Click this [link](#) to sign up

Thank you to our supporters!

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

- The Holdfast Collective
- The Nature Conservancy, National Coastal Wetlands Conservation (NCWC) grant
- 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
- 1% for the planet
- Ventura Coast Brewing Company
- Topa Topa Brewing Company

Support Ventura Audubon Society

Ventura Audubon Society is a registered tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organization.

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