

THE SANDERLING



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Forty-Four Years and Counting: Debi Shearwater's Legacy of Birding and Conservation

by Michael P. Montgomery

When it comes to opportunities for seeing marine birdlife, Monterey Bay is one of the jewels of the eastern Pacific. Much of that is due to the upwelling associated with its deep submarine canyons; the rest, arguably, is due to Debi Shearwater.

In 44 years of chartering boats up and down the California coast, with the majority leaving from Monterey, Shearwater has developed a worldwide reputation for expert-led, conservation-minded seabirding.

Her company, Shearwater Journeys, routinely draws in birders from around the country and the globe, and offers pelagic trips of such quality and frequency—13 full-day outings this September, for example—that they have helped put California seabirding on the map.

This year, Shearwater is retiring. Her final trip out of Monterey will take place on October 20, just as fall migration is winding down.



Shearwater, right of center, leading a pelagic trip in Monterey Bay.

As Shearwater told me during a recent phone interview, retirement doesn't mean she's stopping seabirding. She's just scaling back, with an eye to spending more time birding near her home in Hollister, as well as attending more pelagic trips as a participant rather than organizer.

“The first couple years, I’m not gonna do much,” Shearwater said—except, of course, she was quick to remind me, a 27-day expedition to the Russian Arctic planned for next summer.

Considering how busy Shearwater’s pelagic birding schedule is and has been for much of her career, even next year’s month-long excursion is “scaling back.” In the late 1980s, she was leading 80 California trips a year. Sometimes, she would lead 12 of them back-to-back, each requiring an early morning start and lasting between eight and 12 hours.

The core of this business, Shearwater explained to me, has always been California’s Central Coast, with trips embarking at Santa Cruz, Moss Landing, Half Moon Bay, and, now almost exclusively, Monterey’s Fisherman’s Wharf. But it wasn’t that long ago that she chartered boats as far north as Crescent City and as far south as San Diego, with other ports in between.



*Shearwater on one of her many international pelagic trips to the Arctic.
Photo courtesy of Debi Shearwater.*

When Shearwater first moved to California, in 1976, West Coast pelagic birding had nowhere near that sort of breadth or regularity. “I wanted to go on more trips, and there weren’t any trips,” she told me. What few outings were available were always sold out.

Starting with several trips a season, Shearwater remedied the situation. At first, only her friends were invited, and they would reconvene afterward at Shearwater’s home for conversation and homemade dessert. After a couple of years, she opened the trips up to the public.

“[It was] kind of something that hatched in my living room,” Shearwater said. “But it was just for fun. [...] The boat trips were my hobby then.”

Far more than a hobby, and far more even than the successful business it has become, Shearwater Journeys has taken on a life of its own. That much I could see for myself, when, several days after my interview with Shearwater, I volunteered as a crewmember on one of her “Fall Seabirding Classics.”



*Like this Santa Cruz-based whale watching boat, most of the vessels Shearwater charters are otherwise used for sport-fishing or whale watching.
Photo by Leslie Patten.*

Probably because the 2019 season is Shearwater’s last, I was expecting the boat to be filled with nostalgic returnees and longtime local friends of hers. But during the pre-departure briefing, when Shearwater asked how many participants were from out of the state or country, the vast majority of those on board raised their hands. The same majority raised their hands when Shearwater asked how many had never been on a trip with her before.

As for myself, I had been on a Shearwater voyage seven years ago. I was fourteen years old at the time, an aspiring birder eagerly adding species to my just-begun life-list. This time around, I'd signed on as the boat's "chummer," whose job it was to slice up frozen anchovies—"chum," in fishing parlance—and toss them off the stern in hopes of attracting a following of birds.

In between stints at the cutting board and taffrail, I chatted with the birders around me. A man from Vancouver, Canada, told me this was his first pelagic trip. One of the boat's three leaders, all of whom were expert seabirders tasked with finding, identifying, and calling out species, told me he'd been working with Shearwater for over 20 years. A little later in the day, a woman from Ohio described the springtime profusion of warblers she sees near her home. A woman from Juneau, Alaska, said she and her husband had been wanting to do a trip like this for a long time.

The impression I got, then, was not one of nostalgia, or of a tradition gone stale after 44 years, but one of lively, friendly people intent on trying something new, or, in the case of Shearwater and her crew, of continuing something tried and true.

It might not have been as intimate as those first trips in the 1970s, but I doubt the fundamentals have changed: the expectant morning hush; the excitement and shuffling of position when the first black-footed albatross or sooty shearwater is called out; the sated, sleepy lull of the afternoon return; and, of course, the abundant wildlife: pods of Risso's and Pacific white-sided dolphins, scattered groups of rhinoceros auklets, a single tufted puffin, a pair of blue whales.



Shearwaters, like these pink-footed and sooty shearwaters (left and right, respectively), were some of the first birds that Debi Shearwater, née Millichap, read about when she was new to birding. In 1980, she legally changed her last name. Photos by Leslie Patten.

Shearwater's enthusiasm for all this was striking. She spoke as passionately about witnessing the comeback of whales as she did about contributing three decades' worth of observations to a forthcoming paper on ashy storm-petrels. Ever the conservationist, yet always a businesswoman, she was as proud to have sold out her entire 2019 program as she was to have once let a graduate student ride for free to collect data for her master's thesis.

Though it might surprise birders only familiar with her from Shearwater Journeys, Shearwater applies this same energy and dedication on land as she does at sea.

In 2017, for example, as a volunteer county coordinator for the statewide survey of tricolored blackbirds, Shearwater added over 13,000 never-before-counted birds to the California total, discovering five previously

unknown breeding colonies in remote locations in San Benito and Monterey Counties.

In 2015, she was a lead plaintiff in a successful court case against permits for collecting bald and golden eagles as “incidental take” by utility companies. The case, because of the prominent role Shearwater’s testimony played in it, is known as “The Shearwater Decision.”

In recognition of these and other achievements, the American Birding Association honored Shearwater in 2018 with its Ludlow Griscom Award for Outstanding Contributions to Regional Ornithology. The 2011 film *The Big Year* paid her a less formal yet higher-profile tribute when Anjelica Huston played a pelagic trip leader named Annie Auklet, clearly modeled on Shearwater herself.



Photo courtesy of Debi Shearwater.

“I think it is fair to say [that Shearwater] is iconic in the California birdwatching community,” Christy Wyckoff, Director of Conservation Science at the Santa Lucia Conservancy and a collaborator of Shearwater’s on the 2017 blackbird survey, wrote to me in an email.

“It would be an amazing exercise to count the number of birders, researchers, and regulators that she has engaged with, and then trace those strings to the awareness and conservation efforts that resulted,” Wyckoff wrote.

After retirement, Shearwater plans to continue her conservation work. With Shearwater Journeys hopefully still operating under new leadership, she told me she is considering getting involved with ranchers and organizations like the Ag Land Trust. Already, she knows of a ranch property she would like to survey, where she suspects grasshopper sparrows have nested.

“I don’t really think of myself so much as retiring as [...] retreating to the golden hills of San Benito County,” Shearwater told me. “I might be busier than ever,” she added.

Shearwater loves San Benito County, she said, for a variety of reasons. For one thing, there isn’t much traffic. For another, it is fairly easy to find new, never-birded locations. And, perhaps most importantly, the wildlife is still relatively abundant.

Shearwater is convinced, for example, that San Benito County has the highest population density of golden eagles in the world, even though no one has officially counted them. One individual, a male whom Shearwater calls Iolair–Gaelic for “eagle”—has nested within viewing or short driving distance from her house for the past seven years.

What impressed me about Shearwater’s attitude toward San Benito County was its continuity with her career in pelagic birding. Just as she has done for 44 years offshore of Monterey Bay, Shearwater approaches this inland landscape with deep commitment, intimate regional knowledge, and an uncurbed sense of curiosity.

Perhaps the best illustration of these attributes is Shearwater's work, alluded to above, with tricolored blackbirds. Her involvement with the species, state-listed as threatened and all but endemic to California, dates back to 1997, when she began volunteering for the California Department of Fish and Wildlife to monitor them; but it is in 2015 that the story of Shearwater's most singular tricolor contribution begins.

In the spring of that year, Shearwater identified a large colony of tricolors nesting in a wheat field in San Benito County's Panoche Valley.



Shearwater, left, recording data on tricolored blackbirds that have been banded by (from left to right) UC Davis graduate student Emilie Graves and biological consultant Sherryl Clendenen. Photo taken by Don Desjardin in Panoche Valley, May 2017.

Suspecting that the field was due to be harvested in the next two days, she sent an emergency email to several people in the tricolor research community; Dr. Robert Meese, a UC Davis professor and the lead coordinator of the species' statewide survey, responded. As a result of the events that followed, Meese told me in a phone interview last year, the colony was saved from possible destruction, with the wheat harvest being delayed until the tricolor nestlings had fledged, left their nests, and gotten safely out of the way of the combines.

When Meese later visited the colony, as well as four others Shearwater had found in eastern San Benito County, he was shocked at how many birds they contained. One of the colonies, officially counted in 2017, was 7,500 birds strong—nowhere near the hundreds of thousands recorded in the past, but still far from trivial for a bird whose population more than halved between 2008 and 2017.

As Shearwater recounted Meese's visit, "He kept saying, 'Do you know what this is? [...] You know you can't find this anywhere else in California.' And I said, 'I don't know that. All I know is what I find in San Benito County.'"

Shearwater might make her discovery sound modest, but as Meese emphasized, what Shearwater finds in San Benito County doesn't necessarily correlate with what the average birder finds in San Benito County. So few people go birding there, or even know *where* to go birding there, that much of the county—mountainous, privately owned, and accessed on winding rural roads—gets overlooked. Shearwater calls it the "Lost County."

Since triannual tricolored blackbird surveying began in 1994, Meese told me, the county coordinator for San Benito County had always been someone who knew little of its geography and wildlife—someone, as Meese put it, from "outside." When Shearwater volunteered for the position in 2017, two years after the near-incident in the wheat field, all of that changed.

Not only did Shearwater have experience exploring the county's remoter regions, she took it upon herself, weeks and months in advance, according to Meese, to scout out colony locations, including one in far southeastern Monterey County. The result was the inclusion of 13,150 "new" tricolors in the official statewide census.



*Shearwater releasing the first-ever banded tricolored blackbird at Panoche Creek, in San Benito County.
Photo courtesy of Debi Shearwater.*

Meese calls this "the Debi Shearwater Effect." Previous surveys, he said, were likely underestimates, and were missing the key element needed to be representative: on-the-ground, local knowledge of where to look. By providing that element, Shearwater filled in a critical gap in scientists' understanding.

A similar thing, I think, can be said of Shearwater's involvement elsewhere. Before she began recording, in the 1980s, the thousands of ashy storm-petrels she saw rafting in Monterey Bay, no one had any data on them. Before she encountered bald eagles nesting in San Benito County in 2004, no one had documented them nesting there.

Inevitably, outcomes like these beg the question: if Shearwater hadn't been paying attention, how long would these behaviors and birds have gone unobserved? Or, as Meese put it in context of the blackbirds, "[H]ow many other counties don't have experts? How many other Debi Shearwaters do you need in order to thoroughly survey the state [for tricolored blackbirds]?"

"[T]he answer," he went on to say, "is none. [...] San Benito was the last county with poor coverage."

Of course, that doesn't mean there aren't other places with poor coverage, other gaps in our knowledge of certain bird populations—unsurveyed grasshopper sparrows nesting on ranchland, for instance, or uncounted golden eagles in San Benito County.

Retiring from Shearwater Journeys, but never from birding, Debi Shearwater will remain perfectly placed to help fill in those gaps for years to come.

♦♦♦♦

*Michael P. Montgomery is a fourth-year student at UC Davis majoring in Marine and Coastal Science.
This is his seventh Sanderling as editor for Monterey Audubon.*

MONTEREY AUDUBON'S FALL CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Monthly Lecture Series

On the second Tuesday of each month, Monterey Audubon hosts lectures on a variety of bird- and conservation-related topics. Each talk begins at **7:30 p.m.** at the Pacific Grove Museum of Natural History, with doors open to the public at 7 for refreshments and socializing. The Society's monthly board meetings are held from 6-7 beforehand. Please visit Monterey Audubon's website (www.montereyaudubon.org/calendar-of-events/) and Facebook (www.facebook.com/monterey.audubon/) for updates and possible program changes.

Tues., October 8 — Whales of Guerrero, with Katherina Audley

Barra de Potosí in southwestern Mexico is a little-known jewel, and it's at an environmental tipping point. Humpback whales breed there every winter, and resident dolphins delight visitors. But before Katherina Audley arrived, fishing was almost the only local industry. For the past six years, she has been working to change that through cooperative research, ecotourism, and community-driven conservation.



Gray whales off the California coast. Photo by Blake Matheson.

Audley's organization, the Whales of Guerrero, has been conducting collaborative whale and dolphin research in Barra de Potosí since 2013.

With local fisheries once on the verge of collapse, Whales of Guerrero has supported the formation of ecotourism co-ops to provide a new way for local people to make a living. It has also trained 75 boat owners from across the region in whale-safe boating. The organization's environmental education programs have reached more than 3,500 students in 25 schools.

In Audley's lecture, she will talk about the 16 species of marine mammals identified so far near Barra de Potosí, and about how a village of fishermen became a community of committed whale protectors. Audley will also share lessons and tips on how to empower and inspire communities to become marine conservationists.

Tues., November 12 — Birds and Beasts of Tanzania, with Rita Carratello and Don Roberson (rescheduled from August)

The Usambara Mountains of northeastern Tanzania are not usually on most people's tourist route. The roads are bumpy, and the infrastructure poor. But because of its isolation, the region is home to unique flora and fauna, including endemic birds and endangered species.

With the help of an experienced local guide, Don Roberson and Rita Carratello visited the Usambara Mountains in June of 2018. That same trip, they also made a return visit to two of their favorite safari parks, Tarangire National Park and



*Seeing lions like these is always a bonus on any trip to Africa.
Photo by Blake Matheson.*

Ngorongoro Conservation Area, to search for East Africa's iconic mammals. In their talk, they will discuss what they saw, and why a visit to this unique part of the world can be especially rewarding for any birder or nature lover willing to make the trek.

Tues., December 10 – The Salton Sea: A Looming Crisis, with Andrea Jones

The Salton Sea, a saline inland lake covering 350 square miles in southern California, is a critically endangered Important Bird Area that hosts two-thirds of California's bird species.



The Salton Sea. Photo by Kevin Dooley, accessed on Flickr (<https://flic.kr/p/VaDdby>).

For years, runoff from the Imperial Valley fed the Sea. Since 2003, under an agreement to minimize California's use of water from the Colorado River, water formerly used for agriculture has been steadily diverted to water-strapped urban areas like San Diego. At the same time, irrigation techniques have become more efficient, reducing the amount of water lost as runoff. As a consequence of these developments, the Salton Sea is drying up.

By 2033, with 40 percent of its supply predicted to be cut off, the Salton Sea's water level will likely drop by 20 feet, exposing miles of dry, dusty lake bottom, much of it contaminated with chemicals from pesticides and fertilizers. These chemicals can then be picked up by strong winds, and, in a region already prone to bad air quality, cause serious health problems in communities as far away as Mexicali. For the Salton Sea's wildlife, too, the future looks grim. Salinity is predicted to triple in the next 14 years, eliminating the Salton Sea's fishery and most of the invertebrates that provide food for its many bird species.



In addition to its usual fall migrants, the Salton Sea also attracts occasional mega-rarities, like California's first-ever Ross's gull, in 2006. This Ross's gull, California's second, was photographed by Blake Matheson in Half Moon Bay in 2017.

To learn more about the threats facing the Salton Sea, as well as about efforts that have and are currently being taken to conserve it, come hear Andrea Jones' talk. Director of Bird Conservation for Audubon California, Jones will highlight why the Salton Sea is critically important to over 400 species of birds, describe which of those species are most threatened, and explain how Audubon is engaging in new solutions that will benefit both birds and people.

For the past 12 years, Jones has led conservation programs and worked with the network of Audubon chapters across the state to implement conservation projects at Important Bird Areas. She oversees Audubon's efforts in high-priority bird species, and serves as a spokeswoman for bird conservation across California.

(lecture series, continued)

Prior to Audubon California, Jones worked at Massachusetts Audubon, where she served as Director of the Coastal Waterbird Program. She holds a master's degree in Wildlife Conservation and Ornithology and a bachelor's degree in Wildlife Biology and Management, both from the University of Massachusetts Amherst, and is a past board member of the Morro Coast Audubon Society. Jones currently resides in the East Bay.

Weekend Field Trips

Monterey Audubon's field trips visit some of Central California's most notable birding hotspots. Most trips take place on Saturday mornings. While all birders are welcome, spaces are limited, and a number are always held for dues-paying chapter members. Hope to see you in the field!

Sat., September 28 – Moonglow Dairy

Moonglow Dairy is the crown jewel of restricted-access Monterey County birding destinations. A working dairy adjacent to Elkhorn Slough, the sprawling property, much of it now under conservation easement, has hosted a mind-boggling diversity of species over the years.

Through Monterey Audubon and active local birders, limited access for field observation has been granted thanks to the generosity of the property owners. Late September is a prime time to visit, falling on the "shoulder season" between peak shorebird, songbird, and waterbird migrations. We will rendezvous at **8 a.m.** at the Steamin' Cup coffee shop along Highway One in Moss Landing. **RSVP** to trip leader Blake Matheson at gypaetusbarbatus1@gmail.com. Attendance is strictly limited to 12 participants.



Red-necked phalaropes can be abundant at Elkhorn Slough during summer and fall.

Sat., October 5 – Pajaro Dunes

The Pajaro Dunes Resort in Watsonville attracts a wide variety of species and often provides excellent close views. On this trip, we will begin by exploring the Shorebird Pond area for wintering waterfowl and passerines. Then we'll bird the "Last Mile" of Pajaro Dunes South for shorebirds, raptors, gulls, and other wintering birds. The convergence of Watsonville Slough and the Pajaro River is almost always a rich birding spot.

Meet at 9 a.m. just beyond the Chevron station on Lee Road in Watsonville. If you are coming from the south, take the Riverside exit on Highway One and go left over the freeway. Then turn right at the Chevron and park just beyond there. Rain cancels. **Leader:** Nanci Adams. **Reservations appreciated:** nanciconchita@aol.com or (831) 728-5803. All are welcome; the walking is easy. Sorry, no pets.

(field trips, continued)

Sat., October 12 – San Lorenzo County Park

Join Amanda in King City to check out this fun, varied county park, which offers birders everything from grassy lawns and big stands of eucalyptus to a narrow riparian corridor with access to the Salinas River. Lots of cool habitats make for lots of cool birds. We're hoping to see white-breasted nuthatches, phainopeplas, awesome raptors and woodpeckers, maybe a western or summer tanager, and, of course, some lovely fall warblers.

For folks driving from the north, we will meet at **7 a.m. at the Laureles Grade Park and Ride** to carpool to King City. The walk officially begins **at 8 a.m.** at San Lorenzo Park, beginning at the parking area in front of the bathrooms.



A western scrub-jay, a common resident of Hatton Canyon's pine and oak woodland. Photo by docentjoyce on Flickr (<https://flic.kr/p/72Kr9o>).

Birders of all levels are welcome! The walk is less than half a mile total, and is primarily on maintained trails. King City can get hot, so bring water, a hat, and sunscreen. Bring binoculars if you have them. Amanda will carry a spotting scope. We'll return to our cars at noon. **Please RSVP** to Amanda Preece at apreece24@gmail.com or (208) 520-8794.

Sat., October 19 – Hatton Canyon

This seldom-used State Park property, which was saved from being a freeway corridor, is now a preserved green belt with many species of birds. We should see a variety of woodpeckers, as well as our wintering warblers and sparrows.

Meet at 8:30 a.m. at the trailhead behind the Barnyard Shopping Center. **Leader:** Carole Rose. **RSVP appreciated:** clrose413@gmail.com.

Sat., November 2 – Del Monte Beach: Dead or Alive!

On this trip, which is not for the faint of heart, Amanda will lead a group looking for live shorebirds and seabirds, but will also teach informal anatomy and physiology lessons as beach carcasses allow. Del Monte Beach is a good spot to find dead birds, which offer practice identifying field marks and observing fine details that usually aren't visible through binoculars. **Meet at 9 a.m.** at the parking lot across from the Naval Postgraduate School entrance at Cunningham Road. We'll walk out to the beach, then head west to Fisherman's Wharf, then walk back to the parking lot. We'll be walking in sand, so wear appropriate shoes. Bring binoculars if you have them. Amanda will have a spotting scope. Wear layers and bring a snack. The walk will end at noon. **Please RSVP** to Amanda Preece at apreece24@gmail.com or (208) 520-8794.

Sun., November 3 – Laguna Grande Park

Experience the end of fall migration at Monterey and Seaside's Laguna Grande Regional Park. We will circle the lake on paved trails to search the willow patches, blackberry bushes, lake, and creekside for interesting species that have either dropped in to rest on their migration southward or stopped to overwinter. It's a good time of year to study sparrows and waterbirds. There's also plenty of resident birds to observe. At this week last year, there was an eastern wood-pewee and a scarlet tanager here. **Meet at 8:30 a.m.** at the Virgin Ave parking lot, accessed from Del Monte Blvd. between English Ave and the In-N-Out Burger. We will walk about 1.5 miles, all on flat surfaces, and be out about two hours. Bring your binoculars, cameras, and scopes. **Leader:** Don Roberson, creagrus@montereybay.com.

(field trips, continued)

Sat., November 16 – Frog Pond Wetland Preserve

Located just off Highway 218 in Del Rey Oaks, Frog Pond can be especially productive for birds if there are rains that have filled it. Expect to see an interesting fall migrant or two, plus an array of resident and wintering species. Birds are more often heard than seen at the pond, as the foliage is quite thick. Plan on training your ears. Since parking is limited and trails are narrow, this trip is limited to eight participants. **RSVP** to leader Rita Carratello, merops22@gmail.com, for meeting time and place.

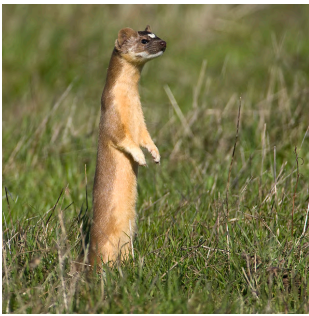
Sat.-Sun., November 16-17 – Cranes and Waterbirds of the Northern San Joaquin Valley

Monterey Audubon will lead an overnight trip searching for sandhill cranes, waterfowl, and other interesting birds in the marshes and grasslands north of Los Banos. We'll carpool early on Saturday for a two-hour journey to **San Luis National Wildlife Refuge**, where we'll hopefully find about a dozen species of ducks and other waterbirds.



Sandhill cranes, with individuals from both the lesser and greater subspecies, in California's Central Valley. Photo by Becky Matsubara, accessed via Flickr (<https://flic.kr/p/CTwUaA>).

If time permits, we will also stop at the nearby O'Neil Forebay at the San Luis Reservoir for more waterfowl and potential raptor species such as burrowing owl, prairie falcon, and bald eagle. We will then enjoy dinner at a local restaurant and stay overnight in Los Banos.



Long-tailed weasels are year-round residents of the Merced National Wildlife Refuge. Photograph by Matt Knoth, accessed via Flickr (<https://flic.kr/p/7hCCjK>).

Bright and early Sunday morning, we'll explore the **Merced National Wildlife Refuge** and other interesting spots such as the **North Grassland Wildlife Area** and **Great Valley Grassland State Park**, both near Gustine. There are sure to be mammals for us to see as well. We will plan to be back in Monterey by early Sunday evening. The trip is limited to eight participants. **RSVP** is required. Once your spot is reserved, you'll receive detailed trip information. **Contact Shawn Wagoner** at swagoner@csumb.edu.

For those who may be interested, trip logistics are as follows. Transportation will be provided from a Monterey meeting location, although personal vehicles are fine as well. There is a suggested **donation** of \$25 per person. We will stay in a moderately priced hotel in Los Banos, and each participant will be responsible for reserving and covering the costs of his or her room. **Please wait** until you are confirmed before booking your hotel. Participants will also be responsible for their own food; restaurant and grocery options are available in Los Banos.

This is mostly a driving tour with numerous stops. Much of the birding will be done in or near the vehicles, with short, optional walks planned as a group. Rain may cancel at least a portion of this tour, as will partial road closures or otherwise unfavorable conditions. **Bring plenty** of water and snacks, warm layers of clothing, sunscreen, sunglasses, hat, binoculars, spotting scope, and camera. Since this is an overnight trip, be sure to pack accordingly.

(field trips, continued)

Fri., December 27 –The 120th Annual Monterey Peninsula Christmas Bird Count

Join Monterey Audubon for the centuries-old tradition of the Christmas Bird Count! From Fort Ord to Garrapata State Park and from Monterey Bay to Laureles Grade, our Christmas Bird Count is surely one of the most scenic in the United States. This annual effort helps build on the nation's longest-running citizen-science data set. We divide our count circle into roughly 15 districts, each led by experienced local birders. All participants of all experience levels are welcome. Contact **Rita Carratello** at merops22@gmail.com for a territory assignment.



White-crowned sparrows are a special winter favorite on the Monterey Peninsula.

How to Know Birds

by Gary Snyder

The place you're in

The time of year

How they move and where in the meadows, brush, forest,
rocks, reeds, are they hanging out
alone or in a group or little groups?

Size, speed, sorts of flight

Quirks. Tail flicks, wingshakes, bobbing –
Can you see what they're eating?

Calls and songs?

Finally, if you get a chance, can you see their colors,
details of plumage – lines, dots, bars

That will tell you the details you need to come up with a name
but

You already know this bird.

•••••

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