



MAGPIE CALLS

Newsletter of the Santa Ynez Valley Natural History Society
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*Dedicated to the study, exploration, and appreciation of natural history
in the Santa Ynez Valley region.*

What's New at SYVNHS...

by Charlie Stauffer, SYVNHS Board President

The past twelve months have been especially busy and fulfilling for the Natural History Society.

In March, the Society celebrated its 15th anniversary at Arroyo Hondo Preserve. Some 90 people turned out for hiking, two field trips and a picnic replete with birthday cake.

Last fall, we chartered two aircraft for a short but memorable flight to Santa Rosa Island where we spent a breezy day exploring Becher's Bay and the Torrey Pine loop trail with our host, island expert Steve Junak.

The trip to Mt. Pinos this past June wrapped up our field trip series to the various habitats of our region as presented in Joan Lentz's *A Naturalist's Guide to the Santa Barbara Region*. This exciting overnight field trip was a first for us; you can read the report in this newsletter.

Upcoming SYVNHS Lectures and Field Trips

- Sep. 26 Dragonflies of Santa Barbara County (lecture & field)
- Oct. 11 Fall Migrants on Figueroa Mountain (field)
- Oct. 29 Hydrology of the Santa Ynez River (lecture)
- Nov. 7 Geology of the Upper Santa Ynez River (field)
- Nov. 12 Surf, Sand, and Stone (Lecture)
- Dec. 5 Winter Birds of the Santa Ynez Valley (field)

Overall, the Society presented over a dozen field trips and lectures during the past year, including a well-received series on birding, another first for us.

As always, comments and questions are very helpful on all topics. We encourage you to utilize our recently updated website for information, communications, and reservations. Thank you for your continued support of the Natural History Society.

Upcoming Lectures and Field Trips

Dragonflies of Santa Barbara County

Free lecture with Hugh Ranson

Saturday, September 26, 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Tipton Meeting House and in the field, UC Sedgwick Reserve

Gates open at 11:30 a.m. for those who would like to picnic prior to the lecture

Join us for an eye-opening lecture about local dragonflies with Hugh Ranson, an authority on this unique life-form in Santa Barbara County. Dragonflies, like birds, are gorgeous, fleeting, and their behaviors endlessly fascinating. They are said to be the world's most efficient predator. There is still relatively little known about their status and distribution in the Santa Barbara region; Ranson has added eight species to the county list, which now stands at 52 species. Dragonflies are surprisingly



An uncommon Roseate Skimmer

Photo by Hugh Ranson

easy to photograph without the need for very expensive equipment, and Ranson's photos will inspire many to give it a try.
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The hour-long lecture will cover the natural history of dragonflies, including photos of some of the more common species and the key features that help identify them. Following the lecture, participants will walk to the Sedgwick pond and spend an hour watching dragonflies and perhaps netting a few for a closer look. Bring binoculars for the field walk. If you bring a camera, a zoom lens is helpful.

Hugh Ranson first became interested in birds at an early age in his native England, and has birded for over 40 years. Three years ago he became interested in dragonflies and was immediately smitten; he has since spent hundreds of hours in the field, helping further our knowledge of the dragonflies of Santa Barbara County. Ranson teaches fifth grade in Goleta, and can always be found on his lunch break at a local pond, watching, netting, and photographing dragonflies.

This event is co-sponsored by UC Sedgwick Reserve, 3566 Brinkerhoff Avenue, Santa Ynez, CA 93460



Fall Migrants on Figueroa Mountain

Birding Field Trip with Tim Matthews

Sunday, October 11, 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon

Advance registration required at synature@west.net or 693-5683.

Participation is limited to 15.

Members free/nonmembers \$20

Do you know the Northern Pygmy-Owl's call? After this trip, you might. Come bird Figueroa Mountain with Tim Matthews for a listen and look at fall migrants, full-time residents, and perhaps some unusual visitors. On the mountain, you never know what might blow

in. Possibilities include Fox Sparrow, Band-tailed Pigeon, Phainopepla, Golden Eagle, hawks and ravens. Most of our birding will be done at a little-visited spot part way up the mountain; there will be an easy walk of about one mile. Bring binoculars.

Tim Matthews, a lifelong naturalist, sportsman, and conservationist will lead this trip. He is a long-time Valley resident with a strong interest in natural history and has led many trips in the past for the Society, USFS, Wildling Museum, and other organizations.



Northern Pygmy-Owl

Photo: Jackson Trappett

GO GREEN!

Are you willing to receive *Magpie Calls* by email only? If so, please let us know by contacting us at synature@west.net, and we will add your name to our "email only" list. Help the Society reduce paper usage and save on postage. A downloadable copy of the newsletter is also available on our website, www.synature.org/newsletters/.

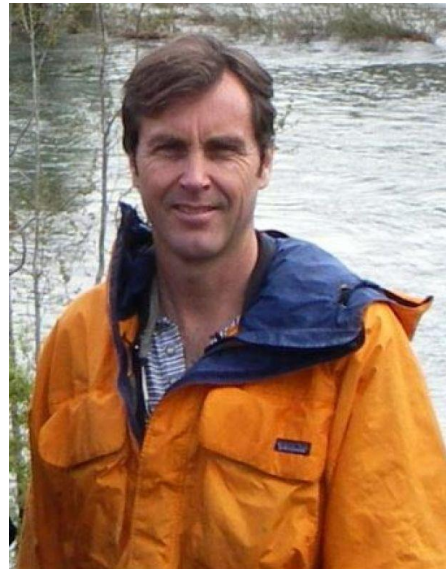
Hydrology of the Santa Ynez River: Past, Present and Future

Free lecture with Tim Robinson
Thursday, October 29, 7:00 p.m.
Legion Wing, Veterans Memorial Hall
1745 Mission Dr, Solvang, CA 93463

A Mediterranean climate is characterized as having an extended dry season and a short wet season, a combination that is often associated with a boom–bust river runoff regime. Santa Barbara County, specifically the Santa Ynez River, provides an excellent example of that drought–flood regime and the commonly observed inter– and intra–annual discharge variability of rivers in this type of climate. The Santa Ynez River is vital to sustaining life for terrestrial and aquatic wildlife species and to humans who rely on it for their water supply. In his lecture, Dr. Robinson will give an overview of watershed functionality and stream hydrology in context of historic trends, El Niño conditions and global warming.

Tim Robinson holds a Ph.D. from the Bren School of Environmental Science & Management at UCSB as well as two master’s degrees in Geography—one from UCSB

and a second from the University of Costa Rica. His specific expertise is in water quality, watershed analysis, fisheries biology, and Geographic Information Systems. He is the Senior Resources Scientist and Fisheries Division Manager for Cachuma Operation and Maintenance Board (COMB), where his focus has been on watershed and fisheries management specifically for the endangered southern steelhead within the Santa Ynez River watershed.



Geology Exploration of the Upper Santa Ynez River

Field Trip with Susie Bartz
Saturday, November 7, 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.
Advance registration required at synature@west.net or 693–5683.
Participation is limited to 20.
Members free/nonmembers \$20

The Santa Ynez River is a braided meander belt that finds its way along the north side of the Santa Ynez Mountains, flowing west to the ocean at Lompoc. We’ll be exploring the river near the harsh convergence of the Little Pine and Santa Ynez faults. There, the river cuts a sinuous route through rock layers whose steep folds reflect intense tectonic compression. Within the faulted area, springs and mineralization of fault–gouged rocks enrich both their color and their composition. Both rocks and flora promise startling color as well as fascinating history in both geologic and human time.

We will begin with an orientation at the Live Oak Picnic Area on Paradise Road. Here we’ll explore river dynamics, the Gibraltar Dam impoundment, exposures of rare algal limestones, and other marine fossils. Then we’ll drive another mile to the Redrock trailhead and walk along the river, crossing the Little Pine fault at two places as we approach the old quicksilver mines.

Plan on walking about 3 miles round trip on mostly level terrain. Hiking poles are highly recommended, since any scrambling around the river rocks will make them useful. Bring water, lunch, good solid shoes or boots, broad brimmed hat, and sun protection.

Susie Bartz worked at the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History to publish the maps of legendary geologist Tom Dibblee. She currently assists community organizations to help bring an awareness of earth sciences to children, teachers, and the general public.

Surf, Sand, and Stone: How Waves, Earthquakes, and Other Forces Shape the Southern California Coast

Free lecture with Keith Heyer Meldahl
Thursday, November 12, 7:00 p.m.
Legion Wing, Veterans Memorial Hall
1745 Mission Dr, Solvang, CA 93463

Join us for a free evening lecture and book signing with Keith Heyer Meldahl, author of *Surf, Sand, and Stone*, and the 2011 *Rough-Hewn Land: A Geologic Journey from California to the Rocky Mountains*.

In his latest book, *Surf, Sand, and Stone*, Keith Heyer Meldahl tells the scientific story of the Southern California coast: its mountains, islands, beaches, bluffs, surfing waves, earthquakes, and related phenomena. It

takes readers from San Diego to Santa Barbara, revealing the evidence for how the coast's features came to be and how they are continually changing. Over geologic time, as Meldahl will reveal in his lecture, beaches come and go, coastal bluffs retreat, and the sea rises and falls. Nothing about Southern California's coast is stable. Meldahl will give the audience an idea of how the coast will be altered in the future and how we can best prepare for it.

Keith Meldahl is Professor of Geology and Oceanography at Mira Costa College and the author of two previous books, *Hard Road West* (University of Chicago Press, 2007) and *Rough-Hewn Land* (University of California Press, 2011). In his spare time, he plays guitar in a classic rock band, and enjoys hiking and exploring throughout California and the western U.S.



El Molino Point, Santa Barbara County
Photo by John Evarts

Winter Birds of the Santa Ynez Valley

Field Trip with Guy Tingos at UC Sedgwick Reserve
Saturday, December 5, 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.
Advance registration required at synature@west.net
or 693-5683.
Participation is limited to 15.
Members free/nonmembers \$20

Join naturalist and birder Guy Tingos on an exploration of UC Sedgwick Reserve's bird life. December is an excellent time to view the diversity of bird species that winter here. An easy hike on some roads and trails will take us to an assortment of habitats including a fresh water pond, grassland, and oak savannah. Binoculars are a must.

Guy Tingos has been birding in Santa Barbara County for 35 years and has led field trips for the Audubon Society, the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History, and SYVNHS.



White-Breasted Nuthatch

Photo by Lynn Watson

Field Trip Report: Mt. Pinos High, June 2015

Field trip led by Joan Lentz, Tim Matthews, Larry Ballard and Susie Bartz

Reported by Laura Baldwin

Photos by John Evarts

In June, about 24 Society members enjoyed a stunning 24 hours atop the region's highest mountain (8847 ft.) with some of our area's best teachers and naturalists. We found tectonic plates crashing together downslope; ancient alpine mat-plants hunkered down for the centuries, their tiny flowers attended by tiny butterflies; and a good variety of montane birds foraging, parenting, and vocalizing.



Iris Meadow



Larry Ballard, Joan Lentz and Brad Schram

Some participants arrived at Mt. Pinos Campground on Friday afternoon, under a sky filled with towering storm clouds. Thunder rumbled, rain showers fell, Joan Lentz and Tim Matthews welcomed it all. We followed Pygmy Nuthatches to their nest holes in old stumps and watched them feed their young. White-headed Woodpeckers drilled into pine trunks. Cassin's Finches bathed in a rare rain puddle. Fifteen bird species were seen before dark.

We were wonderfully fortunate to have Joan Lentz, author of *A Naturalist's Guide to the Santa Barbara Region*, co-lead this trip. Her book is a peerless resource, highly recommended for its readability and thorough coverage of a vast subject. This trip culminated a series of SYVNHS field trips to local habitats described in *A Naturalist's Guide*. Lentz graced the evening campfire with stories of a lifetime's adventures in these mountains with mentors and colleagues, beginning with her grandfather Robert E. Easton and father Robert Olney Easton. After dinner she led us on a starlit walk among tall pines, searching for owls.

Next morning we gathered at Iris Meadow, at the end of the paved road. A walk around the meadow yielded 18 bird species. Birds gathered fruit from Wax Currant bushes, hawked insects above the massed Irises, and fed their young in cavity nests high in Jeffrey Pine trees.



Native flower of *Iris missourienses*

Susie Bartz unveiled a panoramic geologic map of the region and its faults. There are four: the Garlock, Big Pine, San Gabriel and San Andreas faults all come together near the northern base of Mt. Pinos where the San Andreas makes the Big Bend, indicating tectonic plates shifting, grinding, breaking and uplifting Mt. Pinos, Mt. Frazier and Mt. San Emigdio.



Susie Bartz explains the local geology



The hike to the summit of Pinos is short in distance – two miles – but rich geologically and biologically. Larry Ballard explained the rare alpine fell-field and the flora that has evolved adaptations to cope with the brutal conditions – a short growing season, thin soil, extreme temperatures, and prolonged summer drought. Because Mt. Pinos sits at the confluence of the Transverse Ranges, the Coast Ranges, the Central Valley and the Mojave Desert, the unique flora reflects influences from each. Many plants are low, slow-growing, hairy or waxy or both. They form mats; they live for decades or possibly centuries and flower briefly. Highlights included Spurry Buckwheat, Wright's Buckwheat, Dwarf Lupine, Whitney Milk-vetch, Pine Gilia, Granite Gilia, and a tiny Blazing Star. Tim Matthews opened our eyes to the many pollinators and rare butterflies on these plants, including Duskywings, Blues and Hairstreaks. Joan Lentz pointed out Green Towhee, Red Crossbill, Clark's Nutcracker and 17 other bird species making the most of the brief alpine summer.

At the summit an exhibit explains something of the sacred significance of this mountain to the native Chumash people. The mountain was considered to be the center of their world; it felt that way for those on this trip too, thanks to the experts who generously revealed its riches for us.

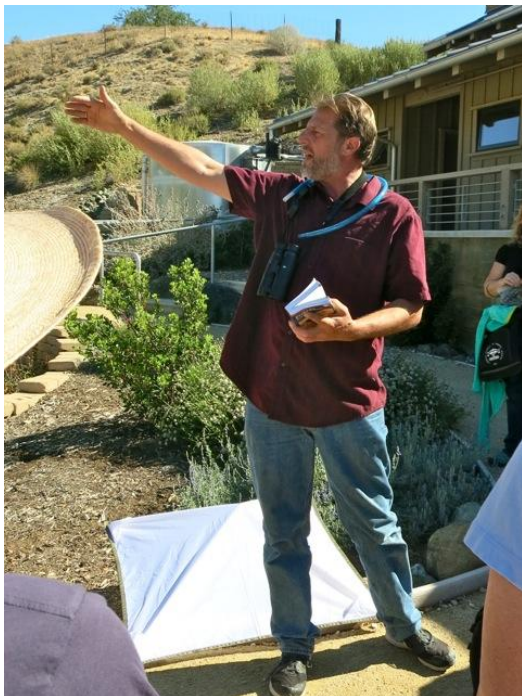


It was a really good trip!

Past SYVNHS Programs:



(Clockwise from upper left) Gathering under the trees for the picnic at Arroyo Hondo Preserve for the 15th anniversary celebration of the Santa Ynez Valley Natural History Society; Ken Hickman (with Margie Popper assisting) setting up remote-sensing cameras at Sedgwick Reserve in preparation for his all-day workshop on camera trapping; Fred Emerson's birding class near the pond at Sedgwick; and two shots of R.J. Adams leading a field trip to capture, ID, and release various spiders. (Photos by John Evarts)



Marc's Stumper

As we move into autumn, you might notice wild fruit on the native shrubs. There are wild cherries and honeysuckle and soon you will notice the bright red *Christmas Berry* shrubs - aka *Toyon* or *California Holly*, the namesake of Hollywood. The cooked red fruit were a Chumash staple, though some people still regard them as poisonous. I understand why foliage and seeds might be toxic - to protect the plant. But plants use extra resources to grow succulent fruit and berries. Surely the point is to attract critters (like us!) to eat them and spread the seeds. That's the stumper. Are there really *any* poisonous fruit and berries? What's the advantage for the plants?

About last issue's stumper: Go swimming or paddling at any local beach and you will notice the strong north to south (or west to east) current. This creates the "littoral conveyor belt" that transports sand down the coast. Any rocky point or jetty disturbs this "river of sand" so that sand accumulates on the upstream north side. All our surfing points are right-breaking waves because every potential left-breaking point has filled in to become a sandy beach. The ocean currents in the southern hemisphere are reversed, so surfers visit Chile to ride "left point after left point"! I suppose the ultimate reason for this is the *Coriolis Effect* of the Earth's spin. (Thanks Charlie!)

Here are three native shrubs that have fruit now or will before too long. From left to right, here are: Holly-leaved Cherry (*Prunus ilicifolia*), California Honeysuckle (*Lonicera hispidula*), and Toyon (*Heteromeles arbutifolia*). Surely the point of such bright red berries is to attract animals and birds to eat them and pass on the seeds. So what about poisonous berries? (Photos by Marc Kummel)



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