

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

Remembering Two Naturalists Who Inspired Us

We lost two of our region's most esteemed and beloved naturalists when **Fred Emerson** and **Joan Easton Lentz** died within weeks of each other this summer. Over the past four decades, Joan and Fred enriched the lives of thousands of local natural history enthusiasts, students, and professionals through their leadership of field trips, classes, and bird surveys. The books that Joan authored also hold a cherished spot in many home libraries.

The two never taught classes in tandem, but they had much in common. Their local work as volunteers and

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Joan Lentz, left, with her trusty spotting scope while leading a birding trip for the SYVNHS on Figueroa Mountain in May 2009. Photo by John Everts.

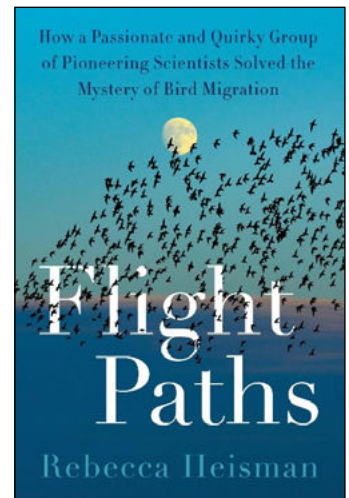
See Upcoming Programs on page 8

Bird Migration Secrets Revealed (Partly): Book promotion

Free Zoom lecture with book author Rebecca Heisman
Thursday, September 21, 2023, 7:00 to 8:30 p.m.

This lecture will be live-streamed via Zoom. Register for the lecture at the following link: Bird Migration Secrets. The lecture will be followed by a question and answer period.

Join the Santa Ynez Valley Natural History Society for the first program of the Fall 2023 season, a free lecture by author Rebecca Heisman based on her book, *Flight Paths: How a Passionate and Quirky Group of Pioneering Scientists Solved the Mystery of Bird Migration*. We've all heard amazing facts about bird migration—the long distances that birds travel, the ways that they navigate, etc. But did you ever



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President's Message from Marion Schlinger

Dear SYVNHS Members and Friends,

BIRDS! BIRDS! BIRDS! This fall we are going to the birds, so to speak, as several programs focus on our feathered friends. First will be a Zoom presentation on September 21st with Rebecca Heisman titled "Bird Migration Secrets Revealed (Partly)", based on her book *Flight Paths*. On November 18th Peter Thompson will lead a birding field trip at UCSB North Campus Open Space (a former golf

course restored to a wetland!). And topping off the bird theme on November 29th will be our own board member, Dennis Beebe, and his daughter Jess, giving a hybrid live/Zoom lecture "Birds of a Different Feather; Ostriches and Their Relatives."

And speaking of migration, the Anna's hummingbirds are 'sucking it up' at my hummer feeders. The best time to count how many you have is just after sunset as the wars cease and peace descends on the feeder, some even sharing a spot,

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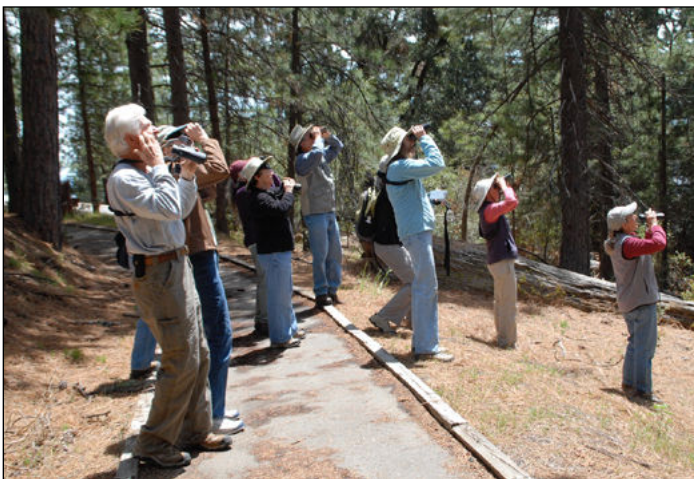
Remembering Two Naturalists, cont.

educators was nurtured at the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History. They both excelled in ornithology and shared their passion for birding with novices and experts alike. Fred and Joan were gifted natural history interpreters who patiently imparted their expertise without condescension to the many beginners who filled their classes. One of Fred's strengths as a teacher was his disarming sense of humor, which he perhaps developed, in part, as a coping device during his long career as an emergency room physician.

Fred and his wife Nancy were early supporters of forming the Santa Ynez Valley Natural History Society. It was fortuitous that Fred agreed to lead the Society's very first field trip, which was a day-long visit to Zaca Lake in the autumn of 2000. On this outing, he set the bar for all future Society field trips with his obvious preparation to interpret



Fred Emerson leading the SYVNHS's very first field trip (in fall 2000), with his binoculars in hand as usual. Photo by John Evarts.



Joan, in pale blue, leading our May 2009 birding trip on Figueroa Mountain. She researched birds in the scattered "sky islands" of mixed evergreen forest found at higher elevations in the Los Padres National Forest. Photo by John Evarts.

the natural history of the Zaca area, including the limnology of our county's deepest lake. Fred would go on to lead or co-lead a number of the Society's trips in the Santa Ynez Valley area, some of which were centered around birding. He would always decline our honorarium for field trips, but instead asked that we try to redirect his payment to fund activities that might help encourage younger people to get involved with nature.

Joan's love of the natural world, and of birds in particular, was infectious. Her enthusiasm in the field, lyrical nature writing, and sense of optimism about restoring biodiversity were deeply inspiring. She was a long-time member of the Society, and we helped celebrate the release of three of her books through lectures, book-signings, and field trips. Her *Introduction to Birds of the Southern California Coast* was the focal point of a memorable lecture and follow-up field trip at Coal Oil Point Natural Reserve. With the publication of *A Naturalist's Guide to the Santa Barbara Region*, Society board member Tim Matthews organized a year-long set of



Fred was pleased to be honored for his leadership of SYVNHS field trips at the Society's 10th anniversary celebration, held at Sedgwick Reserve. Photo by John Evarts.

field trips with Joan that were built around the different habitats she explored in that essential reference book. In 2021, when she was increasingly fatigued by her rare and eventually fatal respiratory disease, she kindly agreed to give a lively online interview, which is archived on our website, about her memoir, *Story of a Santa Barbara Birder*.

Joan Lentz and Fred Emerson made a lasting impact through the generous way they taught natural history and mentored so many in our community. A good way to honor that legacy might be to follow their example. Anyone who is reading this issue of "Magpie Calls" is likely to have friends, colleagues, children and/or grandchildren who have a curiosity about the natural world. Share your enthusiasm and knowledge with them! Joan and Fred would applaud since they understood, all too well, that future generations of educated naturalists will be essential as we move ever deeper into the Anthropocene Epoch.

— John Evarts

Bird Migration Secrets, cont.

wonder how we figured all of this out? While working for the American Ornithological Society, Rebecca Heisman became fascinated with the varied and creative techniques that scientists have used to study bird migration, and this eventually became the basis for her equally fascinating book. In her talk, she'll share some surprising stories from the history of bird migration research and discuss why understanding migration is so crucial for bird conservation.

Rebecca Heisman is a freelance science writer and bird enthusiast who lives in Walla Walla, Washington. She has contributed to the publications of the Audubon Society, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, the American Bird Conservancy, and the American Birding Association. Prior to the pandemic she worked for the American Ornithological Society as a communications specialist. *Flight Paths* is her first book, published by HarperCollins in spring 2023.



Author Rebecca Heisman.
Photo by Kailee Meyer.

President's Message, cont.

and all tanking up for the night. The other night I had 10, all didn't fit, but with some jockeying all seemed satisfied. Then there are the Bullock's and hooded orioles. Adults pretty much left as in past years by mid-August. This year I had to remove my jelly feeder on the 15th as honeybees took it over big-time. I am still seeing about three hooded youngsters that have discovered my grapes that are nicely protected by leaf cover. They should be moving on by mid-September.

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology has a very cool free website that uses weather radar data to predict migrations and track flights in real time. The site is <https://birdcast.info> and is a collaboration of the Cornell Lab, Colorado State University and the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. They also promote 'Go Lights Out' for both residential areas as well as cities where lighted office buildings confuse and attract migrants at night.

On October 22, we are excited to offer a workshop titled 'Why Keep a Nature Journal? Or Things I Learned Today'. This will be held under the oaks at the UCSB Sedgwick Reserve with our journaling board member, Jimmy Farnum.

Trees will also be a focal point for two of our other field trips. November 4 will be Trees of Figueroa Mountain with John Evarts and Margie Popper, and December 17 will be the Trees of UCSB with Larry Ballard. There will probably be a couple of Pop-Up field trips announced at moment's notice, but email notices will be sent out,

together with website postings.

As a cost saving measure, the SYVNHS Board decided to distribute the "Magpie Calls" newsletter only via email, as postage rates continue to go up and up. We hope you understand.

The natural history and birding communities are mourning the recent loss of two outstanding birders/naturalists – Fred Emerson and Joan Easton Lentz. Fred was an early member and supporter of our SYVNHS from the beginning in 2000. He was an inspiring teacher, and led many birding field trips for us as well as several other groups. Joan was an enthusiastic naturalist and led a series of field trips for the SYVNHS. We are fortunate to have a webinar recording on our website from February 2021 of an interview with Joan titled "A Conversation with Naturalist Joan Lentz" about her book, *Story of a Santa Barbara Birder*. They will be sorely missed and we extend our deepest sympathies to their families.

And finally, a big thank you goes to all our members for your continued support with membership renewals, donations, and participation in our programs. As we continue in our 23rd year, thank you for helping to make the SYVNHS an important part of the Santa Ynez Valley as we continue to foster an appreciation of the natural history of the Valley and surrounding areas for both our members and the general public.

Your President,
Marion Schlinger

Why Keep a Nature Journal?

Or, 'Things I Learned Today'

Workshop with Jim Farnum

Sunday, October 22, 9:00 to 11:00 a.m.

USCB Sedgwick Reserve in Santa Ynez

Participation is limited to 20.

Registration opens at 9 a.m. on September 22 for members

and on September 30 for nonmembers at

syvnhs@syvnature.org or 805/ 693-5683.

Members \$10 / Nonmembers \$25 / Children \$5

Directions to Sedgwick Reserve will be emailed to registrants.

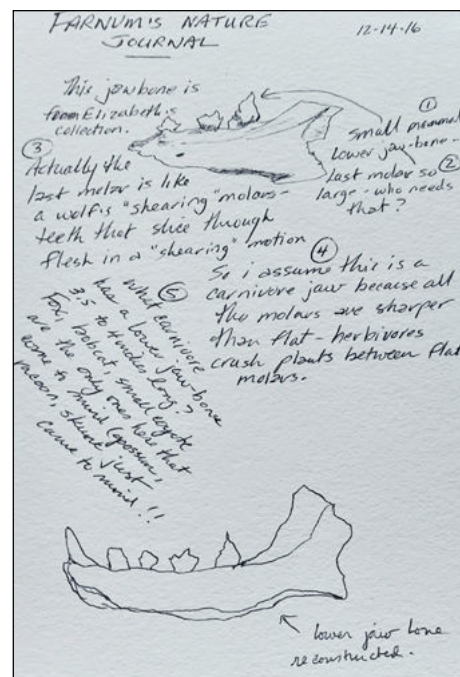
Whether you are new to keeping a journal or are a seasoned recorder of the fauna and flora around you, this workshop is designed to help us hone our observational skills while in the field. A Nature Journal lets us record our experiences of time and place, teaches us new things and is really fun! Contrary to popular belief, proficiency in drawing is not a prerequisite to keeping a journal, but your experience will be enhanced as you learn to draw what you see.

The workshop is being offered to new and experienced journalists ages 12 and older and we will be seated on picnic tables under the shade of an oak canopy at the beautiful Sedgwick Reserve. Please bring a journal, if you have one, a pencil, pen or other writing/drawing



Right: Notes and jawbone sketches from Jim Farnum's nature journal.

Below: Quail drawing from the nature journal of Jim Farnum.



Trees of Figueroa Mountain: A Hike Down Fir Canyon

Field trip with John Evarts and Margie Popper

Saturday, November 4, 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Participation is limited to 20. Good physical condition and good balance are essential for this trip.

Registration opens at 9:00 a.m. on October 5 for members

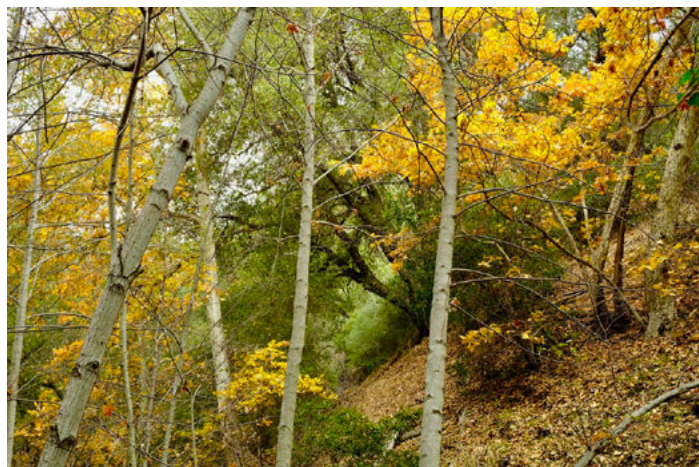
and on October 15 for nonmembers at syvnhs@syvnature.org or 805/ 693-5683.

Members \$10 / Nonmembers \$25 / Children \$5

Few places in our region embrace a greater diversity of native trees than the Figueroa Mountain area. Rising over 4000 feet above the valley floor, this 4534-foot-high mountain harbors a variety of microclimates and soil types that support a rich selection of trees, including six conifers and five species of tree oaks. Naturalists Margie Popper and John Evarts will lead this hike into Figueroa's cool, deep Fir Canyon, which supports large specimens and some of the highest tree diversity in Santa Barbara County. Participants will learn easy ways to identify the canyon's oaks, pines, and streamside broad-leaved trees. We'll see 14 of the more than 20 plus tree species that grow on the mountain.

The trip will start at the parking area below the entrance to Midland School Trails with a short introduction and to allow for voluntary carpooling. Then we will drive approximately 30 minutes to the parking area for the historic Davey Brown Trail, including a stop to see one of the

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By November, one can expect fall color in Fir Canyon, like this image from 2022 along the Davey Brown Trail. Photo by John Evarts.



Fir Canyon contains especially large specimens of big-cone Douglas fir and canyon oak. Photo by John Evarts.



Margie Popper and John Evarts in the John Muir Wilderness. Photo by Stephen Ingram.

species on our list. This 3.5-mile roundtrip “upside down” hike entails a steep descent into the canyon. The trail is narrow in places with sections that have steep drop-offs and there are four modest creek crossings. We plan a midday lunch stop at a spot where we can see at least 12 native tree species before we climb over 600 feet back up to the trailhead and parking area. By early November, we can expect some fall color in the canyon.

Sturdy hiking shoes, trekking poles, and long pants (to

protect against poison oak) are strongly recommended. Bring plenty of water, a lunch, and trail snacks. This trip is not suitable for novice hikers.

John Evarts and **Margie Popper** have retired from running their company, Cachuma Press, which published *Oaks of California*, *Conifers of California*, and other natural history, travel and gardening books. They helped launch the SYVNHS in 2000 and have been active in the Society since it was founded.

Birding in a Rare Restored Wetland

Field trip with Peter Thompson

UCSB North Campus Open Space

Saturday, November 18, 9:00 to 11:00 a.m.

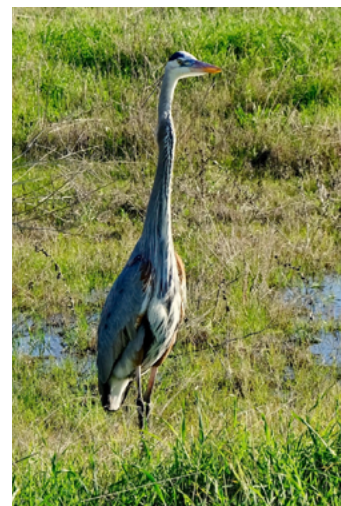
Participation is limited to 20. Advance registration is required and opens at 9:00 a.m. on October 18 for members and on October 28 for nonmembers at syvnhs@syvnature.org or 805/693-5683.

Members \$10 / Nonmembers \$25 / Children \$5

Experienced Santa Barbara birder Peter Thompson will take us on a wetland birding exploration through the one-time Ocean Meadows golf course, now restored as a true California wetland with easy access. You can stay dry in this ecological gem, but the local wildlife and birds have ready access to mud, sand, marsh, deeper water, and even dry upland areas. This is a bird-rich area. Over 297 bird species have been sighted within the 136 acres of UC Santa Barbara's North Campus Open Space (NCOS) and we are likely to see migrants as well as year-round residents in the varied habitats. Birding at NCOS combines local beauty and lively birding in a vanishingly rare, but here rejuvenated, native wetland.

Peter Thompson describes himself as “a life-long nature enthusiast” who grew up hunting and fishing in the Midwest.

He has been Santa Barbara Audubon Society's Field Trips Chair and a frequent trip leader for five years. He is ardent about the need to preserve local natural habitats, and enjoys sharing the joy of birding.



Above: Great blue heron at NCOS. Photo by John Evarts.

Top, left: Burrowing owl. Photo by Petr Kratochvil (CC0 1.0).

Bottom, left: Snowy egret. Photo by Andrea Westmoreland (CC BY-SA 2.0).

Birds of a Different Feather: Ostriches and Other Ratites

Free Lecture with Dennis and Jess Beebe

Wednesday, November 29, 7:00 to 8:30 p.m.

Stacey Hall, St. Mark's in-the-Valley Episcopal Church

2901 Nojoqui Ave, Los Olivos

This lecture will be both live and presented via Zoom. An email will be sent with the advanced registration link for those wishing to attend via Zoom and will also be available on our website www.syvnature.org. The lecture will be followed by a question-and-answer period.

The Santa Ynez Valley Natural History Society welcomes the return of the father-daughter team of **Dennis and Jess Beebe** to present another informative and entertaining lecture from the bird world. This time they will stay on the ground (mostly) as they present a new lecture on ratites. The ratites are a world of contradictions and exceptions. The oldest group of living birds, most are flightless, yet all evolved from flying ancestors. Today their range is worldwide, mostly confined to the southern hemisphere. Although the ostrich and other ratites are the largest birds in the world, the majority of the species are comparatively diminutive and incapable of flight.

In past lectures, Dennis and Jess have brought us insights into the corvids of the Santa Ynez Valley and vultures worldwide. Recordings of these lectures are available on the Society's website (syvnature.org).



Ostrich. Public domain photo.

Dennis retired after completing two careers; as an Air Force officer, and as an aerospace management consultant. He works part time for the University of California Sedgwick Reserve, where he also serves a volunteer docent. He is a volunteer docent with the non-profit NatureTrack and serves on the board of directors of the Santa Ynez Valley Natural History Society.

Jess Beebe is an accomplished artist, self-taught computer expert, and birder extraordinaire. She volunteers with her father in the service of NatureTrack, Sedgwick Reserve, and other community organizations in the Santa Ynez Valley. She also frequently gets recruited by her father to assist him in developing PowerPoint lectures, then handling the computer-related challenges that frequently crop up during the actual presentations.



Top: Cassowary. Bottom: Kiwi. Public domain photos.



Jess and Dennis Beebe. Photo by Jess Beebe.

The Magnificent Trees of UCSB

Field trip with Larry Ballard

Sunday, December 17, 9:00 to 11:30 a.m.

UCSB campus

Participation is limited to 20

Advance registration is required for this field trip and will open at 9:00 a.m. on Friday, November 17 for members and on November 27 for nonmembers at syvnhs@syvnature.org or 805/693-5683.

Members \$10 / Nonmembers \$25 / Children \$5

Directions and meet-up location will be emailed to registered participants.

The UCSB campus boasts more than 250 tree species from six continents, including several rare or unusual trees not found elsewhere in the Santa Barbara area. In this walking tour with Larry Ballard, we will take a look at the architecture of trees, discuss identification tips, and introduce participants to many of our local urban trees. Along with more common species we'll see such locally uncommon introductions as firewheel tree, giant fishtail palm, coast Banksia, Guadalupe palm, banyan fig, and mallet flower. The tour will also visit a national champion Big Tree!

Groundskeepers, the staff of the biology greenhouse, a variety of faculty, and a former UCSB Chancellor have all

contributed to the establishment of this dynamic botanical diversity. Our trip is timed for the holiday break at the university, and we'll find the campus to be relatively quiet.

Larry Ballard is a natural history educator with a focus on botany and has been a popular field trip leader for the SYVNHS and other organizations for over 25 years. He has offered past tours of the famous collection of trees at UCSB, as well as educational walks to introduce the trees of Alameda Park in Santa Barbara and the street trees in the valley communities of Los Olivos, Santa Ynez, and Solvang.



Ribbon gum. Photo by Larry Ballard.



Above: Larry Ballard in the field. Photo by John Evarts.

Right: A tree species that will remain a mystery until the trip! Photo by Larry Ballard.





Beautiful copses of white alder are scattered along the Davey Brown Trail.
Photo by John Evarts.

Upcoming SYVNHS Lectures, Field Trips, and Workshops

- Sept. 21 Bird Migration Secrets (Zoom lecture)
 - Oct. 22 Why Keep a Nature Journal? (Workshop)
 - Nov. 4 Trees of Figueroa Mountain (Field trip)
 - Nov. 18 Birding in a Rare Restored Wetland (Field trip)
 - Nov. 29 Birds of a Different Feather (Lecture)
 - Dec. 17 The Magnificent Trees of UCSB (Field trip)
- Pop-Ups Short-notice events may be posted on the website and emailed to our members and friends.

Left: Four native tree oaks grow along the Davey Brown Trail in Fir Canyon, and canyon oak (seen here, center left) is the most abundant.
Photo by John Evarts.

Inset: Fir Canyon is a great place to look for banana slugs.
Photo by John Evarts.

