



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*

President's Message

When I began to compose this message, a quick check of the Winter/Spring 2020 issue of *Magpie Calls* reminded me that it had been exactly one year since the Society last hosted an in-person lecture. That occasion was a well-attended presentation in Los Olivos with Dr. Heather Schneider, who gave an outstanding talk titled "Rare Plants of Santa Barbara County: Why Uncommon Plants Matter and What We're Doing to Save Them." As is customary for our evening programs, the Society treated Heather and a guest to dinner at a nearby cafe before her lecture. She was warmly welcomed by the attentive audience and generous with her time during the Q & A period that followed her talk. Afterward, some of the attendees lingered to socialize and enjoy refreshments provided by the Society. It was a nice way to close out an evening enriched by natural history education and a sense of community. Although I don't like to mull over the past, I do hold onto memories of moments such as Heather's lecture whenever I feel a need to imagine the kinds of SYVNHS programs that will again be possible in the not-too-distant future.



Our only outing since the pandemic hit was this Oct. field trip tour of Haskell's beach and the Ellwood bluffs to examine shoreline geology and beach ecology, with leaders Susie Bartz and Larry Ballard. Photo by John Everts.

SYVNHS Winter/Spring 2021 Events Online

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| Feb. 18 | A Conversation with Naturalist Joan Lentz |
| Feb. 25 | Tiger Salamanders in Santa Barbara County |
| Mar. 18 | Annual Members Meeting prior to Mar. 18 lecture |
| Mar. 18 | The Evolution of Stone Tools |
| Apr. 1 | Pisaster Disaster: Sea Star Wasting Disease |
| Apr. 22 | <i>Rooted</i> : Book Preview with the Author |
| May 13 | "V" is for Vulture |

Like every organization, business, school, and household, the pandemic forced the Society to make challenging and sometimes dispiriting changes to our routines and activities. As most of you know, we pulled the plug on our entire 2020 spring schedule, including field trips, lectures, workshops, and a special 20th anniversary celebration. Some of the program ideas from our new Advisory Committee had to wait as we put things on hold. The fall 2020 issue of our newsletter was canceled.

There is good news to share as we move forward. The Board of Directors discovered that we could easily conduct our meetings via Zoom. During the summer, we resumed our series of natural history lectures and moved them to a webinar format with the support of our newest board member Kate McCurdy and her resources as Director of Sedgwick Reserve. Board member Dennis Beebe and his daughter Jessica stepped up to give their engaging lecture on local corvids. We began to reschedule some of the previously canceled talks, such as the timely lecture on chaparral and wildfire by Dr. Matt Kay. With the guidance of another relatively new board member, Jim Patin, we purchased our own Zoom webinar account and set up new email addresses through the Society's website. We found that viewership of our online

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programs was strong, and we now record and post these Zoom webinars on our website. This expanded interest in our lectures has prompted the board to accelerate its efforts to eventually live stream and record its in-person lectures.

Board member Marion Schlinger, who is also our Membership Coordinator, did the research to find and purchase a portable audio-enhancement system that will allow field trip participants to spread out and listen to a trip leader from over 100 feet away through small wireless earphones. This technology, common on guided museum tours, is something we'll use in future outings, even beyond the pandemic. Board member Liz Gaspar has taken on the daunting task of hiring a web designer and overseeing a top-to-bottom renewal of our website after our old platform was no longer being supported. We plan to launch the new website this spring. Our Secretary and board

member Len Fleckenstein continues to provide amazingly detailed and helpful minutes from our online meetings. Our Treasurer Margie Popper keeps track of our income (down this year) and expenses, while producing balance sheets and other annual financial reports, which she has done as a Society volunteer for more than 20 years.

Our board members are looking forward to seeing you when the Society can resume field trips and in-person lectures. But until then, please join us for our ongoing 2021 series of Zoom lectures. The hard-working team on the current board will be further strengthened with the arrival of three new directors: Tina Collins, Jim Farnum, and Sabina Thomas. You can read about these three individuals elsewhere in the newsletter.

Thanks again for your generous support and appreciation of this unique nonprofit organization.

—John Evarts, Board President

Spring Programs

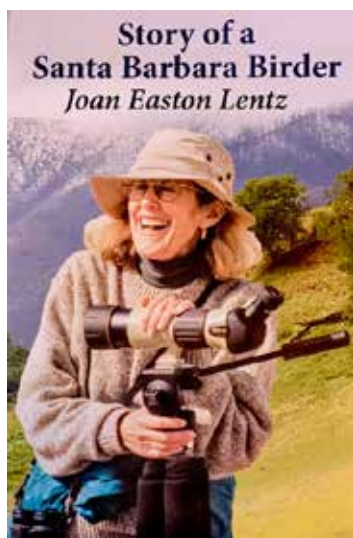
Interview with Joan Lentz, author of *Story of a Santa Barbara Birder*

Free online webinar with Joan Lentz

Thursday, February 18, 7:00 – 8:30 p.m.

This Zoom webinar included a 30-minute recorded interview with Joan, followed by a live Q & A. Please visit our website for the link to the recorded event.

We are excited to announce our first program of 2021, which was a conversation with Joan Easton Lentz about her new book, *Story of a Santa Barbara Birder*. As many of you know, Joan Lentz has long been a leader — and an inspiration — for a generation of birders and naturalists in Santa Barbara County. Whether it was through her years of teaching birding classes, organizing our annual Christmas Bird Count, or authoring invaluable reference books such as *A Naturalist's Guide to the Santa Barbara Region*, she



Right: Naturalist Joan Lentz, featured on the cover of her new book.

has always been generous in sharing her deep knowledge of the bird life and biodiversity in this area of California.

Story of a Santa Barbara Birder is a fascinating personal history that chronicles Joan's life, including her childhood exploring Santa Barbara and its wild backcountry and her later work as a natural history educator, researcher, and writer. Joan's passion for nature and her appreciation of its many gifts are at the heart of this book.

If you would like to read *Story of a Santa Barbara Birder*, it is available from local independent bookstores, such as the Book Loft, Chaucer's, Wildling Museum, and Tecolote Books; it is also sold on Amazon. There was a Q and A following our interview with Joan, and we hope you were able to join us for this special evening.



Joan Lentz (center, in blue) leading an SYVNHS birding trip on Figueroa Mountain in 2009. Photo by John Evarts.

Tiger Salamanders in Santa Barbara County:**What we've learned and future prospects**

Free online lecture with Brad Shaffer

Thursday, February 25, 7:00 – 8:30 p.m.

This Zoom webinar included a live presentation followed by a Q & A. Please visit our website for the link to the recorded event.

The Santa Barbara Distinct Population Segment of the California tiger salamander has been listed as Endangered for nearly 20 years. During that time, we have learned a great deal about its distribution, evolutionary history and distinctiveness, and threats to its continued survival in the wild. In close collaboration with both agency and local resident partners, Dr. Shaffer's lab has conducted both field ecological and genetic analyses of the salamanders over



Tiger Salamander. Photo by Brad Schaffer.

the last five years that indicate the precarious situation that they face. In this talk, he shared the results of that research, and the directions that he feels are likely to be the most productive going forward in our efforts to save, and restore, this unique species that is only found in northern Santa Barbara County.

Brad Shaffer is a Distinguished Professor in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at UCLA. He was an undergraduate zoology major at UCSB and UC Berkeley, received his Ph.D. at the University of Chicago where he worked on Mexican tiger salamanders. A life-long herpetologist, Brad has studied tiger salamanders and their relatives across the US and Mexico for four decades. He is the founding director of the UCLA/La Kretz Center for California Conservation Science, the UCLA Stunt Ranch natural reserve, and the California Conservation Genomics Project, an effort using genomic analysis to revamp conservation efforts in the state.



Right: Conservation biologist Brad Schaffer. Photo courtesy of the speaker.

2021 Members Meeting of the SYVNHS

Thursday, March 18, at 7:00 p.m. prior to the evening's live lecture

Please join us for our annual Members Meeting on Thursday, March 18, at 7:00 p.m. This very brief meeting will precede the lecture by Dr. Jay Reti on the evolution of stone tools. The meeting and Dr. Reti's lecture will be presented via Zoom's webinar format. Our short meeting agenda includes an announcement about the new and returning board members, and a short financial update by our Treasurer. You'll be able to send questions or comments to us in real time via the Q & A function of the webinar.

The Evolution of Stone Tools based on Lithic Artifact Analysis

Free online lecture with Jay Reti

Thursday March 18, 7:00 – 8:30 p.m.

This Zoom webinar includes a live presentation followed by a Q & A. A Zoom link will be emailed to SYVNHS members and posted online prior to the program. A recording of the presentation will be posted online after the event.

Imagine for a moment what it would take to make it through a day - let alone a meal - without the use of tools. While tools can be crafted from a number of natural objects, their utility depends largely on the skill, creativity and perseverance of the tool crafter. How did early *hominins* learn to make tools, and learn to improve on their function? How do anthropologists and archeologists study the evolution of tool making over a time scale that begins with the dawn of man, nearly 3.0 million years ago?

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UC Santa Barbara's Santa Cruz Island Reserve Director Dr. Jay Reti is an archeologist by training and a college lecturer by passion. Jay will present a lively lecture covering ways that tool making has evolved over millions of years, along with ways to study how *hominins* produced stone (lithic) artifacts. Jay's enthusiasm for anthropology and his ability to connect with his audiences promises that even early *hominids* in the audience will leave the talk enlightened about how the role of tools and advancements in tool making have shaped human evolution.

Dr. Jay Reti is the Director of the Santa Cruz Island Reserve, part of the UCSB Natural Reserve System. Prior to this, Jay was faculty in the Anthropology Department at UC Santa Cruz and still retains an honorary Assistant Professor position there. He earned a PhD from the Evolutionary Archaeology program at Rutgers University. Dr. Reti is an archaeologist and paleoanthropologist with extensive field experience in human evolutionary sites in East Africa,

including Kenya and Tanzania. He lives both on Santa Cruz Island and in Santa Ynez with his partner, Sarah, and 6-year-old daughter, Norah.



Right: Archaeologist and reserve director Jay Reti.
Photo courtesy of the speaker.

Pisaster Disaster: Sea Star Wasting Disease along the Pacific Coast

Free online lecture with Melissa Miner

Thursday, April 1, 7:00 – 8:30 pm

This Zoom webinar includes a live presentation followed by a Q & A. A Zoom link will be emailed to SYVNHS members and posted online prior to the program. A recording of the presentation will be posted online after the event.

First noticed in 2013, a mysterious disease has crippled sea star populations along much of the west coast. The outbreak, dubbed sea star wasting disease, caused many sea star species to die in record-breaking numbers over a short period of time. Among the hardest hit was the keystone species known as the ochre sea star (*Pisaster ochraceus*), which occurs on the Santa Barbara coastline.



Bat stars (*Patiria miniata*) come in a variety of colors.
Photo courtesy of the speaker.

The disease continues to persist at low levels from Baja California to Alaska, and while populations are trending toward recovery in some regions, other areas have shown few signs of rebounding. The outlook for recovery varies by species as well, with species such as the ochre star faring better than others, such as the sunflower star (*Pycnopodia helianthoides*).

Melissa Miner, a research specialist from the University of California Santa Cruz's Long Marine Lab works with the Multi-Agency Rocky Intertidal Network (MARINe) monitoring sea stars and other intertidal organisms along the west coast. Melissa has played a key role in the effort to collect and centralize monitoring data from over 200 coastal ecosystems between Alaska and Mexico and to

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Melissa Miner observes an ochre sea star showing wasting disease.
Photo by Greg Davis/PBS.

track the progression of the disease over time. She and her colleagues from MARINE examine the effects of the disease on various sea star populations, and how the decline in sea stars impacts the greater community as a whole. Because sea stars eat many other organisms, Melissa and MARINE have already noticed changes in the biological communities in which the sea star populations have declined.

For over 25 years, **Melissa Miner** has played a key role in the collection and synthesis of long-term monitoring data from rocky intertidal communities from Alaska to Mexico as part of MARINE. She began her career at UCSB, monitoring sites along the Santa Barbara mainland and Channel Islands, and has worked her way north. She is a researcher at UC Santa Cruz, but works remotely from Bellingham, WA, with her husband, twin teenage boys, and a fluffy rescue mutt.

Book Preview with the Author: *Rooted: Life at the Crossroads of Science, Nature, and Spirit*

Free online lecture with Lyanda Lynn Haupt
Thursday, April 22, 7:00 – 8:30 p.m.

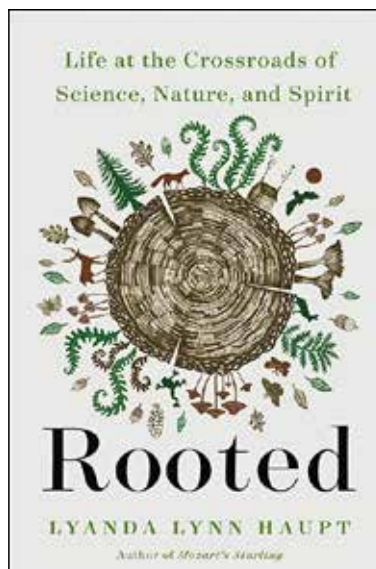
This Zoom webinar includes a live presentation followed by a Q & A. A Zoom link will be emailed to SYVNS members and posted online prior to the program. A recording of the presentation will be posted online after the event.

Members and friends of the Santa Ynez Valley Natural History Society will be afforded a sneak preview of Lyanda Lynn Haupt's latest book. *Rooted* inspires readers to deepen their connection with nature. The following is taken from the publisher's description of the book, to be published May 4, 2021.

In Rooted, cutting-edge science supports a truth that poets, artists, mystics, and earth-based cultures across the world have proclaimed over millennia: life on this planet is radically interconnected. Our bodies, thoughts, minds, and spirits are affected by the whole of nature, and affect this whole in return. In this time of crisis, how can we best live upon our imperiled, beloved earth?

Award-winning writer Lyanda Lynn Haupt's highly personal new book is a brilliant invitation to live with the earth in both simple and profound ways—from walking barefoot in the woods and reimagining our relationship with animals and trees, to examining the very language we use to describe and think about nature. She invokes rootedness as a way of being in concert with the wilderness—and wildness—that sustains humans and all of life.

In 2019 Lyanda treated our audiences with her lecture on her



book, *Mozart's Starling*, a weaving of her knowledge of music, the natural sciences and history.

Lyanda Lynne Haupt is an award-winning author, naturalist, ecophilosopher, and speaker whose writing is at the forefront of the movement to connect people with nature in their everyday lives. She holds a master's degree in environmental ethics and philosophy. Her newest book is *Rooted*. Lyanda's other books include: *Mozart's Starling*; *The Urban Bestiary: Encountering the Everyday Wild*; among others. She lives in Seattle with her husband and daughter.



Lyanda Lynn Haupt at Sedgwick Reserve. Photo by Kate McCurdy.

“V” is for Vulture

Free online lecture with Dennis and Jess Beebe

Thursday, May 13, 7:00 – 8:30 p.m.

This Zoom webinar includes a live presentation followed by a Q & A. A Zoom link will be emailed to SYVNHS members and posted online prior to the program. A recording of the presentation will be posted online after the event.

We see them circling overhead almost every day; sometimes we mistake them for hawks. In our area, these large black, bald-headed birds are usually Turkey Vultures (*Cathartes aura*), a member of nature’s efficient clean-up crew. They are scavengers and they have been patrolling the skies for millennia. A total of 23 species make up the vultures found in the New World (the Americas) and the Old World (Europe, Asia and Africa.). Turkey Vultures are local representatives of the New World vultures, which in North America also include the California Condor and Black Vulture. Although Turkey Vultures are commonly seen, they are little studied and much of their behavior remains unknown. This lecture will address what is known, including their evolution, ecology, and how these birds are treated worldwide, from reverence to revulsion.

Dennis and Jess Beebe, father and daughter, return to the Zoom “stage” of the Santa Ynez Valley Natural History

Society. Their popular corvid lecture, “Birds in Black... and Blue,” was presented to Society audiences in 2020. Dennis is an amateur naturalist, a member of the Board of Directors of the SYVNHS, and a volunteer docent with the non-profit NatureTrack and the Sedgwick Reserve. Jess also volunteers for NatureTrack, and her passion for birding has led her to birding sites throughout the Western U.S. and many foreign countries.



Turkey vulture photo by Mike Baird, Morro Bay, USA, CC BY 2.0 .

Please Welcome Our Three New Board Members

Tina Collins

My lifelong appreciation for and respect of nature began when I was a child camping with my family. Although my profession was focused on the nature of humans (I’m a Registered Nurse), camping, hiking and communication with nature continued in my free time while raising my three children. A favorite family activity was our annual participation in the Golden Trout Natural History Workshop. As members on the Board of that organization, my husband and I helped run a backpacking camp in the eastern high Sierra for over 15 years.

My nursing career focused on Education. I was part of an Education Department that worked as a team to plan, organize, and implement education and training for nurses, as well as programs for the community such as CPR and Birth Education. After the children fledged, I became active with the Sedgwick Reserve, and I have been a volunteer docent there for 15 years. I have also been a NatureTrack volunteer for a couple of years and love the idea of supporting an early connection with nature for children. I became a California Certified Naturalist in 2019. I look forward to a chance to further support the society’s goals, and especially anticipate getting groups together outside again.

Jim Farnum

I grew up spending all my summers at a family place in the Sierras, first camping on our land and then building a cabin in the late 60’s. My interest in natural sciences began very early and was supported by my family and their interest in natural sciences. I studied Forestry at UC Berkeley in the School of Forestry, my major being wildlife management (still called Game Management at the time). My primary professor was A. Starker Leopold, son of Aldo and a major force in wildlife management in his own right. While life took me in other directions, my interest in wildlife and nature has continued unabated to this day. My current interests are mammals, birding, and fish and fisheries (and fly fishing!) I would be honored to serve on the board of the SYVNHS.

Sabina Thomas

I grew up in Germany and received my PhD in Geology from the TU Berlin. I left Berlin for the U.S. in 1989 and taught at colleges and universities in Texas and Ohio until moving to Santa Barbara in 2010. I am Nature Education Manager at the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History and also teach earth-science courses at Santa Barbara City College. I took several courses in botany and also earned the California Naturalist Certificate in 2019. I love going on field trips.

Connecting with Nature During the Pandemic

These short contributions from a few of our board members and our Treasurer reflect how you can take a nature-lover indoors, but you can't make them stay there.

I have found small ways of keeping in touch with the natural world throughout the past year. Just a few steps from my door is a patch of grass and some native trees. Something is always going on if you pay attention: the Scrub Jays disappear in the winter; a quiet group of wild turkeys foraging on the grass early one morning; the unique call of a Phainopepla or the noisy pairing of the American Crows in the sycamores. Within minutes of the start of a rare rainfall, the nearby "dry" creek rushes with water, only to stop just as immediately when the rain ends. On early mornings, the bunnies and quail search for food together on our abandoned back lawn. — Dennis Beebe

For me, this pandemic has actually engendered new opportunities to deepen my connection to the natural world. As I found myself more home-bound, I also slowed down and increased my appreciation of the little wonders that I too often take for granted: soothing birdsong at dawn, a chance sighting of coyotes in the backyard, star-filled night skies, an unexpected patch of wildflowers. When some favorite trails became uncomfortably crowded, I found fresh incentive to seek out new places and discover the rewards of less-traveled routes. Yes, I miss social hikes, but when walking alone or with one other person, I enjoy the quiet and become more receptive to the surrounding landscape. An unexpected silver lining to the pandemic was when Yosemite National Park cut its visitation quota in half. We took advantage of that crowd reduction to explore areas around Tuolumne Meadows that would otherwise be packed with mid-summer tourists. In late August we climbed Yosemite's magnificent Lembert Dome, and for 45 minutes we enjoyed its glacier-scoured summit by ourselves — a moment that would have been unthinkable had it not been for pandemic-driven limits on park access.

— John Evarts



John Evarts and Margie Popper on Lembert Dome, Yosemite.
Photo by John Evarts.

During the pandemic, I have had a personal relationship with nature through a turf removal and landscaping project in our front yard. After lawn removal, and following nature's example, I enriched the newly-exposed soil with compost and other organic matter, along with worm castings – and living worms too. With socially distanced visits to nurseries, my wife and I purchased water-wise plants that are either native or climate-appropriate, while considering which beneficial insects or birds might be attracted to the plants. The project, which is finally coming to fruition in early 2021, has been a true hands-on way to connect with nature at the most local level, while remaining homebound. I have also done some long-neglected pruning of several manzanitas (McMinn, Sunset, and St. Helena) which are now showing their appreciation with lovely flowers.

— Len Fleckenstein

Right: Len Fleckenstein and
Arctostaphylos densiflora
'Howard McMinn'.



When I get outside, I have to fight the impulse to *move*. No matter where I'm walking, doing it at a swift pace is a compulsion. Now I have a "pandemic pace" in my backyard, early in the morning. I balance my binoculars, journal, pen, ipad, cushions, and full coffee cup just long enough to make it to my chair.

When I stop moving, the pace around me picks up. Hey! That house wren made the same route last week. Wow. . . There's a voice from a junco I haven't heard. How can a leaf twirl so fast on a line of web? The sun's *really* moving north. Omg Townsend's *right there*. And my breathing gets calmer, and my coffee gets colder, and now I just sit at a swift pace.

— Liz Gaspar

I guiltily admit that riding out the coronavirus pandemic at the secluded, semi-shut-down, Sedgwick Reserve has not been terrible. Over the past year I have taken in several rescue animals, called them my pandemic pod and headed out into the wilds of

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Right: Kate McCurdy and Juniper
at Sedgwick Reserve.



Connecting with Nature During the Pandemic, cont.

the Eastern Santa Ynez Valley. When the pandemic subsides I look forward to sharing new hiking routes, hotspots of wildlife diversity and things I have learned from wild piglet Smokey, wild-when-she-feels-like-it pack mule Juniper, and never-wants-to-be-wild-again streetdog Loieue with the membership of the SY Natural History Society.

— Kate McCurdy

I have come to appreciate nature and animal life more by participating in virtual nature presentations put on by the SYV Natural History Society and other local organizations during this pandemic year. The NatureTrack Film Festival this year was truly amazing with topics presented from around the world. Getting outside and working around the house has been enjoyable. I am always amazed with the valley and what it has to offer as to plant life and animals – except for, maybe, gophers and ground squirrels – a never ending battle!

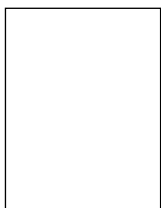
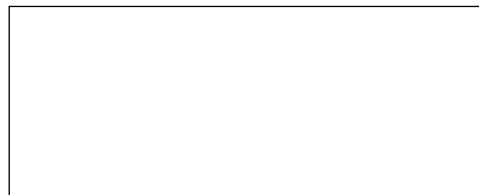
— Jim Patin

“Go take a hike!” That has been the best way for me to stay connected with nature during the pandemic. Out on the trail, I can take a deep breath, smell the wildflowers, try to identify birds, and for a time, transport myself away from all the hurt the pandemic continues to deliver. An emphasis on staying close to home has returned rewards by encouraging trips to familiar locations here in the Santa Ynez Valley and elsewhere in California. A visit to the Carrizo Plain in late April 2020 comes to mind: the eastern slopes of the Caliente Range covered with flowering thistle sage, hillside daisy, and gold fields; a sky without contrails; and air so clear we could see all the way to the snow-capped southern Sierra Nevada.

— Margie Popper

During this pandemic I have been doing daily long power walks on local back roads and trails and taking the time to observe the changes in plant life and birds in the various areas. It has been fun and interesting and kept me on my toes with bird and plant identifications.

— Marion Schlinger



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