



Blown from southern waters, the Brown Booby drew birders with his appearance at Natural Bridges State Beach and the wharf. The bird has not been sighted recently.

Chasing *the* Brown Booby

Birds

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Birders flock
to glimpse
the rare or
unusual

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Everyone knows what birds of a feather do. For millions of years, our feathered fellows have had a distinct evolutionary advantage over us: their wings allow them to flock from one end of the globe to the other, chasing sex, food and real estate.

The Monterey Bay Area is the permanent home of scores of wild birds, and a tourist hub for scores of others, who pass through our area to refuel and make connecting flights elsewhere. And the area is also home to scores of a subspecies of *Homo sapiens* called "birders": People who come here to spy on, count, tick off checklists and photograph these winged creatures. Creatures they find fascinating enough to spend some serious money for binoculars, spotting scopes and digital cameras in order to see them even better.

Once in a while, a migrating bird from a distant homeland gets blown off course by a storm, or gets separated from its cohorts, and ends up stranded for a time in our coastal paradise. Such a visitor — a "rare bird" — can cause quite a stir among the birding world. When this happens, you can watch birders themselves engaging in flocking behavior, imitating the creatures they have come to adore, admire, or whatever it is that bird lov-



Last spring, a lonely Crested Caracara feasted on carrion in the Davenport area for a couple of months.

ers feel for birds.

Between Christmas and New Year's, one can witness this flocking phenomenon as hundreds of birdophiles around the country gather in their local areas for the annual

The search is on

The Brown Booby may be gone, but birders are chasing sightings of the Horned Puffin and the Tufted Puffin along the shoreline.



Ruby-crowned Kinglets were among the birds who gorged themselves on insects attracted to rotting brussels sprouts near Davenport.

More information

Check out the Santa Cruz Bird Club, which offers birding walks for beginners to advanced, meetings, boat trips, bird counts and recent sightings. It's also the gateway to the Monterey Bay Birds List [MBBL]. The server presents lists of sightings by birders in the area.

To join, memberships run June-May. Dues are \$20 individual, \$25 family, \$5 youth, \$400 life.

Find the bird club at <http://www.SantaCruzBirdClub.org>.

Photos by Larry Selman

View more of his photos at <http://www.MostlyBirds.com>.



Even the Virginia Rail came to munch on insects near Davenport this spring.



The Hooded Warbler was among the birds attracted to a horde of insects near fields in Davenport.

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Christmas Bird Count. Species are meticulously counted, and regions compete to have the highest number of species in their area for the season.

Just as birds have over countless eons perfected complex communication networks that allow them to know exactly where the ripe blueberries are at any given moment, their passionate worshippers have followed suit. Internet postings and toll-free telephone numbers allow birders to spend even more serious money on last-minute plane tickets, in order to catch a rare bird in or out of its native habitat.

Within the last year, birders from around the country have converged upon Santa Cruz County for a glimpse of numerous lost souls, stranded here away from their fellows.

Last spring, a lonely Crested Cara Cara feasted on carrion in the Davenport area for a couple of months. This bird, which usually cleans up roadkill in Mexico or South Texas, was responsible for the purchase of many tanks of gasoline by San Francisco Bay Area birders, many of whom drove here daily until the big bird gave them the privilege of an eyeful.

This spring, a few dozer loads of rotting brussels sprouts up at Cascade Ranch, north of Davenport, created a big stir in both the bird and birders' worlds, as millions of tiny insects in the compost pile brought an unusual number of diners to the feast. Hooded Warblers, Yellow-rumped Warblers, Common Yellow-Throats, Townsend's Warblers, Fox Sparrows, Swamp Sparrows, White-Throated Sparrows, Hermit Thrushes, Ruby-Crowned Kinglets, Tri-Colored Blackbirds, and even a Virginia Rail were among the less-com-



The Fox Sparrow is larger than other sparrows.

L. Selman/MostlyBirds.com

mon birds that were so busy gorging themselves on protein, that a birder could walk to within a foot of them.

Photographers had birds foraging right under their tripods.

A Brown Booby made daily appearances from Natural Bridges State Beach to the Santa Cruz Municipal Wharf recently. Blown here from southern waters, this handsome fisherman summoned flocks of local and non-local birders, binoculars and cameras in tow, who were hot on the trail for a good peep.

The most recent feather chase has been for the Horned Puffin and the Tufted Puffin, sighted along the shoreline.

And just as in the bird world, one can witness a highly competitive, territorial spirit for the first of a prized tidbit, birders vie to be the first to sight and post a local rarity on the Internet. Web sites for nature photographers boast up-to-the-minute postings of close-up digital masterpieces, rendering it no small feat to be the first to upload an image of a hot, new visitor.

The local Web site with probably the most frequent number of hits from birders in this area is the Monterey Bay Birds [MBB] List Server, which presents lists of birders. One can join the MBB List through the Santa Cruz Bird Club [www.SantaCruzBirdClub.

org]. Birding walks for beginners to advanced are listed, as are meetings, bird counts and recent sightings.

You, too, can get in on the action and find out what bird watching is all about. Start by going down to the wharf or beach area, and strike up a conversation with anyone you see carrying binoculars or a camera with a really long lens.

Marti and Larry Selman own the Glass Gallery, also known as L.H. Selman Limited. They are both birders, and Larry Selman takes photographs of birds. You can view his work the Web at www.mostlybirds.com. Contact Marti Selman through svreeken@santacruzsentinel.com.