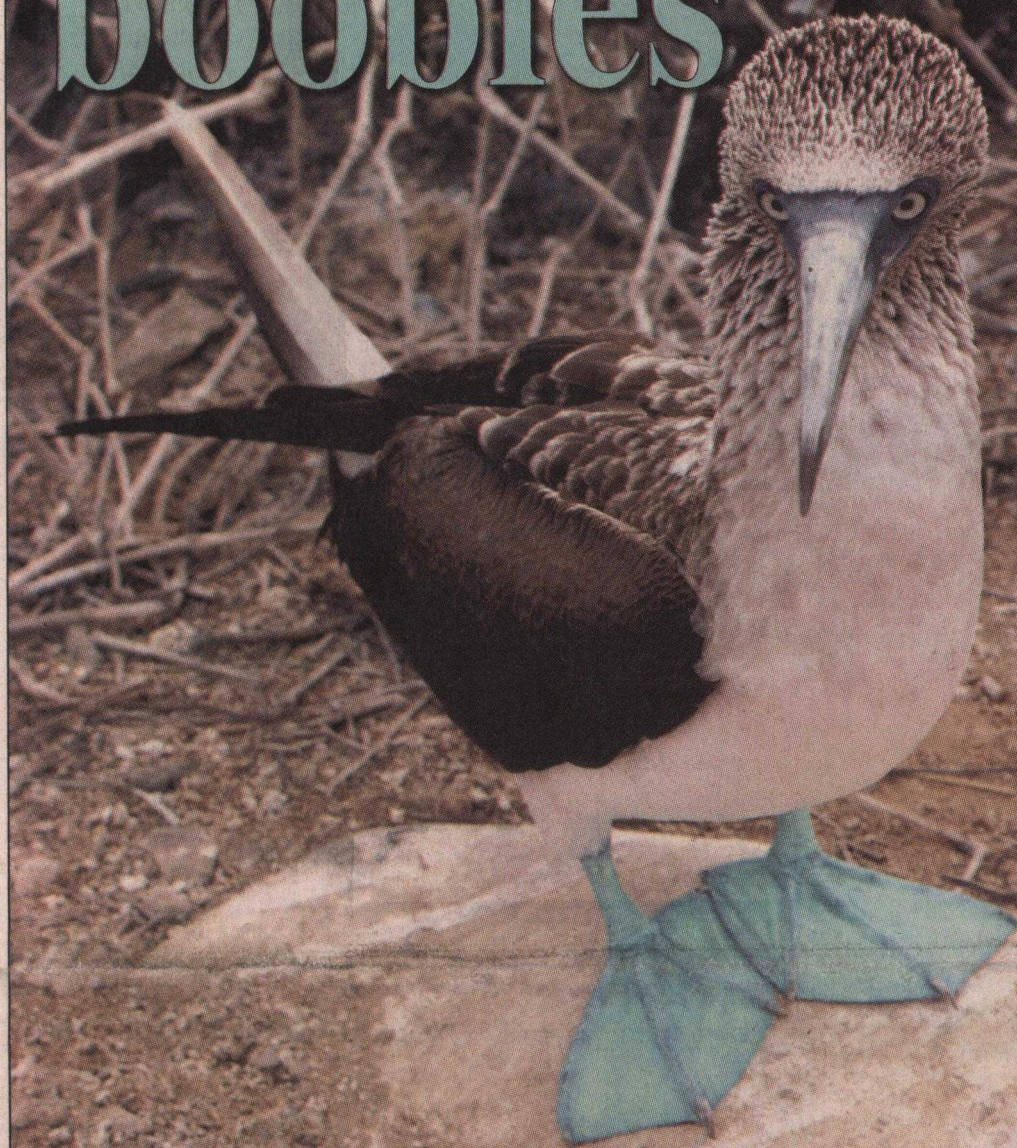


Invasion of the boobies

Rare-to-see
blue-footed
birds visit
county



The blue-footed booby, native to the Galapagos, Ecuador, has been spotted at least twice in Santa Cruz County this week. The birds are rarely seen north of the Salton Sea, but have recently been viewed along the Southern California coast and as far north as Marin County.
SYBIL SASSOON/ROBERT HARDING /AP

Birds

By JASON HOPPIN

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✓ **LIVE OAK** — On a rocky shelf next to Sunny Cove, UC Santa Cruz student Abe Borker and some friends looked over the water Tuesday, scanning for an impossibility.

Yet there it was: the blue-footed booby, a subtropical seabird famed from the Galapagos Islands to the Sea of Cortez for its long, pointed beak, clumsy waddle and pastel-colored webbed feet, a combination that makes the bird look like it walked off a Pixar movie set.

"I was really excited," said Borker, who is working toward a doctorate in ecology and evolutionary behavior. "I'd seen one in Mexico earlier this year, but I never thought I'd see one in Santa Cruz."

Boobies are invading the coast of California with dozens of sightings recorded, especially in Southern California, something that hasn't been seen since 1971. They have been

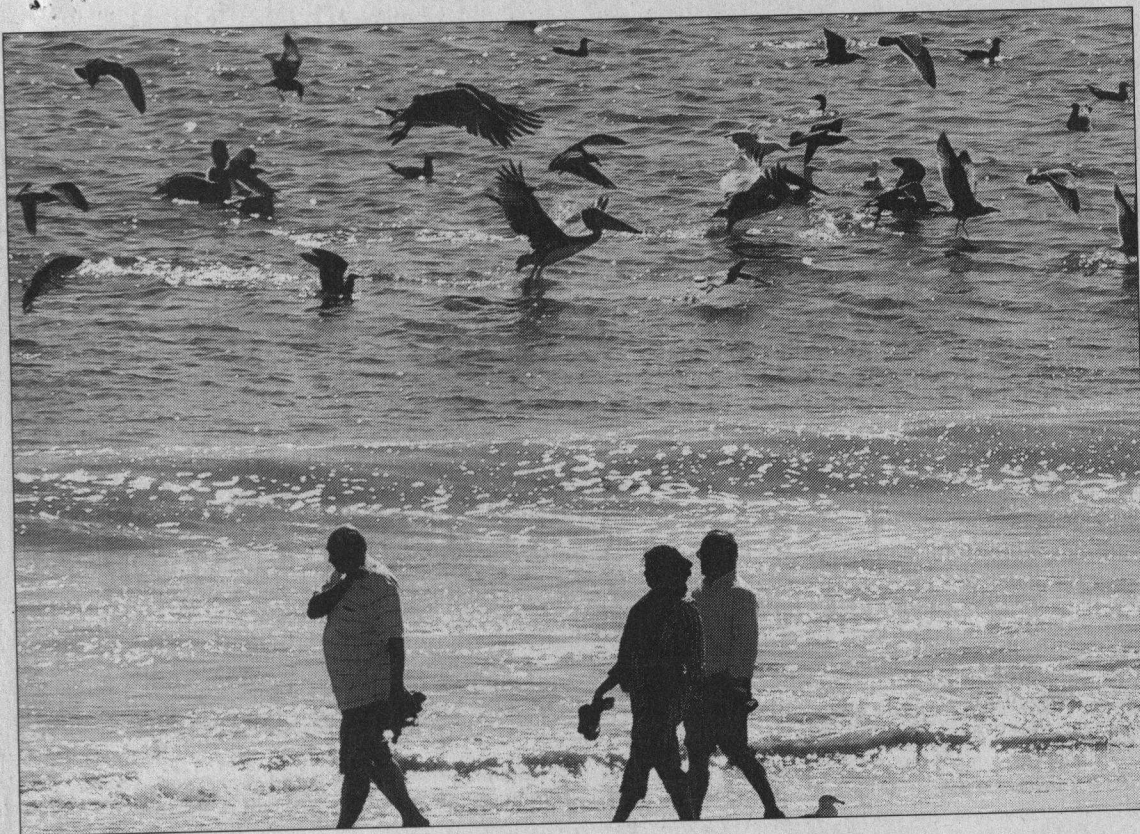


A blue-footed booby soaks in a pool at the International Bird Rescue Center in San Pedro on Tuesday

WALLY SKALI/LOS ANGELES TIMES

SEE BOOBIES ON A4

9.19.13



Pelicans, gulls and other birds feed on anchovies as beachcombers make their way along Main Beach on Tuesday in Santa Cruz. A few sightings of blue-footed boobies in the area have caused quite a stir in the bird-watching community.

SHMUEL
THALER/
SENTINEL

BOOBIES

Continued from A1

spotted as far north at Point Reyes, according to bird trackers, and there have been several local sightings as well.

Most seem to be juveniles, which have yet to develop the telltale blue feet. They tend to dwell in flocks of brown pelicans — another migratory seabird — and the first local sightings began on Sunday.

"Huge excitement for birders," said Brian Sullivan, a locally based director of eBird.org, a project of the New York-based Cornell Lab of Ornithology. "Right now there's lots of birders out there to see and document this invasion."

Sullivan spotted one near Point Pinos. They have since been seen in Capitola, Live

Oak and Pescadero, and people like Monterey birding expert Don Roberson are keeping a sharp lookout for more.

Roberson said he narrowly missed a Sunday sighting. He also rushed out to a lunchtime report of three flying over the Monterey Wharf on Wednesday, to no avail. He aches to see one.

"There's a lot of excitement. It's been 42 years since there's been one in Monterey County. I don't have another 42 years," Roberson said, author of "Birder's California" and an authority on the history of local birding.

After hearing about the booby invasion, Alex Rinkert and a friend ventured to Seacliff State Beach, hoping to find one among an ongoing feeding frenzy of birds.

"On Tuesday, we saw one fly up the coast pass-

TO REPORT A BOOBY

■ Seen a booby? Take notes and include your observations at eBird.org.

ing the cement ship at Seacliff, and then later in the day we found two roosting with many brown pelicans, Brandt's cormorants, and Heermann's gulls at Black-Point on the Live Oak coast," Rinkert said. "We were ecstatic at this point!"

Why the invasions occur has not been pinpointed. There have been reports of abundant anchovies in Monterey Bay, which has contributed to a phenomenal number of whales locally.

But Sullivan said it's more likely the boobies are being

pushed up here by a collapse of their food supply in Mexico. Roberson posited that it could be a combination of food scarcity following robust breeding seasons, which may explain why this invasion, as in 1971, features juvenile birds.

Bernie Tershy, a professor with UCSC's Coastal Conservation Action Lab, believes that's a strong possibility as well. He wrote his dissertation on boobies, and notes that while other kind of boobies will hatch one chick, the blue-footed variety can hatch up to four.

"The blue-footed booby are really set up to take advantage of good years," Tershy said. "Their population can increase dramatically during good years."

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