



The Kite Call

Ohlone Audubon Society, Inc.

A chapter of the National Audubon Society
Serving Southern & Eastern Alameda County CA
Our Mission: To celebrate and protect birds and their habitats in
Southern and Eastern Alameda County
www.ohloneaudubon.org

Calendar

- Oct 5 FIELD TRIP
Rodeo Lagoon, Hawk Hill
- Oct 6 GENERAL MEETING
(via zoom)
- Oct 18 FIELD TRIP
Big Break
- Oct 26 FIELD TRIP
Hayward Shoreline
- Nov 10 GENERAL MEETING
(via zoom)
- Nov 13 FIELD TRIP
Bort Meadow

Membership Meetings

Where Wildlife, Humans, and Hope Come Together A Closer Look at Raptor Rehabilitation

by

Orange County Bird of Prey Center



Date: Tuesday, October 6, 2026

Time: 7:30 PM Via Zoom (instructions to the left)

This talk will cover some of the common reasons that raptors are brought in for care and what the process of rehabilitation and release looks like. There will also be a review of some of the unique adaptations of common raptors in California.

The Orange County Bird of Prey Center, located in southern California, is dedicated to treating and rehabilitating injured raptors and returning them to the wild. They believe that education is the best long-term solution to prevent and mitigate many of the challenges that raptors face and that raptors play an integral role in the balance of nature.



ZOOM MEETING INSTRUCTIONS:

[https://us06web.zoom.us/
meetings/82091982477/
invitations?
signature=EpuCp6rqjLtJSHT
CPhEGSgKnfPvzdX0nHkKH
wp1BUAQ](https://us06web.zoom.us/j/82091982477?pwd=ZU5lcnZkdX0nHkKHwp1BUAQ)

*Please note that the
November meeting will be
via zoom on the 2nd
Tuesday of the month,
November 10, delayed one
week for Election Day.*



SOUTHERN SIERRA NEVADA CONSERVATION

Southern Sierra Research Station

by

Bob Barnes and Mary Whitfield

Date: Tuesday, November 10, 2026

(PLEASE NOTE THIS IS THE 2ND TUESDAY OF MONTH)

Time: 7:30 PM Via Zoom (instructions to the left)

Bob Barnes, past Audubon California Bird Conservation Programs Director, will lead off with context by discussing the conservation and superlatives of the Southern Sierra Nevada (Kern River watershed), including the convergence of five major bioregions and the resulting

(continued on page 2)

(November 10 program continued)

state and/or national highs in diversity of birds (nesting species), butterflies, mammals, amphibians and plants, plus the conservation successes helping to protect the area's remarkable diversity as best possible.

Mary Whitfield, SSRS Research Director will then discuss the history of SSRS (Southern Sierra Research Station), its Kern River Valley and vicinity research programs (e.g., Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo) and research in Arizona, New Mexico (e.g., Pinyon Jays), and Latin America. She will also discuss SSRS's bird tracking programs via bird banding, MOTUS towers installation in Arizona, throughout California, and throughout New Mexico, and MOTUS tracking tags, and following amazing results, ground nodes resulting in definitive, fascinating information gathered on nesting season territory size, use, and defense. Mary will also discuss SSRS workshop offerings.

To learn more about Bob and Mary, their work, and other activities, click here southernsierraresearch.org



Field Trips

All field trips: please register at
<https://ohloneaudubon.org/upcoming-events/field-trips/>

Rodeo Lagoon & Hawk Hill
Monday, October 5, 8am - 1pm
Leader: Bob Toleno

Join us in the Marin Headlands for fall migration. We'll start the morning at Rodeo Lagoon, birding the willows on the south side, mostly looking for songbird migrants and rarities. We may also check the north side of the lagoon, if we have time. At around 11am, as the day warms up, we'll drive a short distance to Hawk Hill to spend some time scouring the sky for migrating raptors.

Overlooking the Golden Gate Bridge, Hawk Hill sits near the southernmost end of the Marin County peninsula. Early October is the peak of raptor migration, and because they prefer not to fly over water, the peninsula acts as a "funnel" to concentrate them over this point. Seventeen different species have been documented migrating over Hawk Hill, including some not usually seen near the coast, like Swainson's, Ferruginous, and Broad-winged Hawks, and even the occasional Prairie Falcon. Bring water, sunscreen, and a scope if you have one. We'll watch the raptors fly out over the Golden Gate. Many of the birds will be distant, but leaders will help teach you how to ID raptors by shape. *(Directions cont'd next column)*

Directions: Take the Richmond Bridge to Hwy 101 south, then exit on Alexander Rd (exit 442). Make a left on Bunker Rd, go through the tunnel, drive 2 miles, then make a left on Field Rd, where you'll immediately see a parking lot. Make sure not to park in the 30-minute limit spaces.

Big Break Regional Shoreline
Sunday, October 18, 9am – noon
Leader: Bill Hoppes

Big Break Regional Shoreline has an excellent mix of habitats. First off, it has one of the East Bay Regional Park District's Visitors Centers, as well as an excellent 3-D model of the SF Bay and Delta. We will first visit the fishing platform, which has excellent views of the "Big Break" and the Carquinez Strait. After that, we will follow trails that edge willow runs, grasslands, and sloughs. Birding is always good here, and we have good chances to see anything from Sandhill Cranes to White-faced Ibis to our own White-tailed Kite. Bring a spotting scope if you have one.

Directions: Take I-880 north to CA-24 east to I-680 north to CA-242 north to CA-4 east to CA-160 toward Sacramento. After half a mile, exit on Main St and make a right, then make a left on Big Break Rd. Look for the shoreline entrance on the right.

Field Trips Continued

**Hayward Regional Shoreline:
Longspurs and Shorebirds
Monday, October 26, 8:30am - 11am
Leader: Bob Toleno**

In mid-autumn, very large grassy fields around the Bay Area can attract migrating grassland birds, like pipits, meadowlarks, and most exciting of all, longspurs. At Hayward Shoreline, the tiny hill known to birders as "Mount Trashmore" is one of the best places to see these birds.

We'll meet at 8:30 and walk out to Hayward Landing first to scope through the shorebirds there. Marbled Godwits and Willets should be numerous, and we may even see something more unusual, like a Surfbird or Ruddy Turnstone. After that, we'll walk the grass of Mount Trashmore, listening and looking for Lapland Longspurs, or maybe even a rarer longspur or a Snow Bunting, if we're extremely lucky.

Directions: Exit I-880 at Winton Ave. and head west all the way to the end. Meet at the paved parking lot inside the gate (not the dirt lot outside the gate). A restroom is available at that lot. Rain cancels.

Tour Announcements

**Extremes of Inyo County Tour
Leaders: Bob Toleno & Juli Chamberlin
May 23 - 28, 2027**

This popular trip is happening for the third year in a row!

On the southeast flank of the Sierra Nevada, Inyo County spans a huge range of habitats and elevations, and offers some of the best inland birding in California. This tour explores those extremes, from moist fir and aspen forests in the Sierra Nevada to the dry bristlecone pine forest of the White Mountains, from the rich lowland riparian areas of the Owens Valley to the natural and artificial oases of the driest desert on the continent, Death Valley.

Breeding birds we'll see on this trip include Gambel's Quail, Black Swift, Black-backed Woodpecker, Brown-crested Flycatcher, Plumbeous Vireo, Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay, Juniper Titmouse, Verdin, Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, Cactus Wren, LeConte's Thrasher, Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch, Black-throated

**Bort Meadow, Anthony Chabot Regional Park
Friday, November 13, 9:00am - noon
Leaders: Kathy Robertson
and Karen Kramer**

The hills of Anthony Chabot Regional Park are home to many resident species, including California Thrasher, five species of woodpeckers, nuthatches, raptors, and many more. Expected winter visitors include Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Yellow-rumped Warbler, White-crowned, Golden-crowned, and Fox Sparrow, with White-throated Sparrow also possible. We'll walk about 1.5 - 2 miles on some hilly trails through riparian areas, oak woodland, and chaparral.

Directions: From eastbound I-580, take the Redwood Rd. exit in Castro Valley, and turn left (north) onto Redwood Rd. (If approaching from westbound I-580, turn right.) Follow Redwood Rd. for approximately 8 miles, and turn left into the lot for the Bort Meadow Staging Area.

Save the Dates!**Christmas Bird Counts**

East Alameda County

Friday, Dec 18, 2026

Hayward– Fremont

Sunday Dec 20, 2026

Crane Ridge-Corral Hollow

Sunday, Jan 3, 2027

Sparrow, Scott's Oriole, and Lucy's Warbler.

Besides just breeding birds, late May is prime time to find migrants, especially vagrants from eastern North America. As nocturnal migrants fly over the deserts, when the sun rises, the artificial and natural oases act as magnets for these hungry birds. Birders from all around California go to Death Valley each spring and fall to experience this phenomenon.

The cost will be \$975 per person for a shared room, \$1,225 for a single. This will be a caravan-style trip, and carpooling will be facilitated. Limit 10 participants. This tour sold out the past two years! Sign up below if you're interested.

<https://ohloneaudubon.org/upcoming-events/field-trips/>

(Another great bird tour next page!)

Southeast Arizona - Monsoon Season in the Sky Islands

Leaders: Bob Toleno & Juli Chamberlin

July 31 - August 8, 2027

In the southeast corner of Arizona, a number of tiny mountain ranges rise up out of the desert, giving the region its nickname: "The Sky Islands." In the summer, when the intermittent monsoon rains fall and create a "second spring," this region becomes a biodiversity hotspot. This tiny area hosts many bird species that can't be seen anywhere else in the US, and should be on every birder's bucket list.

This eight-day tour will explore four of those ranges: Santa Catalina, Santa Rita, Huachuca, and Chiricahua Mountains. Up to 15 species of hummingbird can be seen at this time of year, including Rivoli's, Berylline, Violet-crowned, and Lucifer Hummingbirds, plus Blue-throated Mountain-gem. Other regional specialties we'll search for: Montezuma Quail, Inca Dove, Zone-tailed Hawk, Coppery-tailed Trogon,

Greater Pewee, Thick-billed Kingbird, Mexican Jay, Mexican Chickadee, Bridled Titmouse, Olive Warbler, Rufous-winged Sparrow, Five-striped Sparrow, Chihuahuan Meadowlark, Grace's Warbler, Red-faced Warbler, and Varied Bunting. Some wonderful night birds we might see include Buff-collared Nightjar, Mexican Whip-poor-will, Elf Owl, and Whiskered Screech-Owl.

Exact costs are TBD, but probably about \$2,500-2,700 per person for shared room and about \$500 more for a single. Costs include all lodging, food, and transportation while on the tour (but not including flights to and from Tucson). Maximum tour size of 9; minimum 7. Sign up below if you're interested.

<https://ohloneaudubon.org/upcoming-events/field-trips/>

Bird Observations—Late summer 2026

By Bob Toleno

Autumn is here, and southbound migration is in full swing. Shorebirds like **Marbled Godwits**, **Western Sandpipers**, and **Black-bellied Plovers** are all over the mudflats of SF Bay, some just passing through and some spending the winter here. Songbirds are also on the move, with **Hooded Orioles** and **Lazuli Buntings** on their way out, and **Townsend's Warblers** and **Golden-crowned Sparrows** arriving here from the north. **Northern Yellow Warblers** and **Willow Flycatchers** are passing through on their way further south.

Some great rare birds have also been showing up. A **Prothonotary Warbler** at Ardenwood delighted dozens of birders for over a week, a **Lucy's Warbler** was enjoyed by many at Lake Elizabeth, and a **Summer Tanager** has been catching bees on the UC Berkeley campus. Uncommon shorebirds have also been passing through, like a **Solitary Sandpiper** at Coyote Hills and a **Semipalmated Sandpiper** at Middle Harbor in Oakland. Get out and enjoy fall migrants while they're here! (All photos by Bob Toleno)



Summer Tanager, UC Berkeley, 12 Sept, 2026



Willow Flycatcher, Albany, 12 Sept, 2026



Prothonotary Warbler, Ardenwood, 1 Sept, 2026

President's Corner

Fall is coming and that means bird festivals. These events are great fun, and I always try to go to at least one each year. Here are some good ones in our area between now and the end of the year.

Lodi Sandhill Crane Festival. November 6-8. This is one of my favorite events and I go pretty much every year. If you haven't seen a Sandhill fly-in or lift-off you are missing one of the great wildlife events in North America. This festival has great speakers, numerous tours of local birding hot spots, and a great art show. For more information go to <https://lodisandhillcrane.org/about-the-festival/>

Just after the Lodi festival is the **California Swan Festival in Yuba City on November 13-15.** This is a great opportunity to see the swans and other waterfowl of the Sacramento Valley and refuges. To learn more go to <https://caswanfestival.org>

If your November isn't full enough, there is the **Central Valley Birding Symposium in Stockton, from November 19-22.** I won't make it this year, as I will be in Easter Island. This festival always has a great lineup of speakers, workshops, and field trips. For more information go to <https://cvbirds.org/events/central-valley-birding-symposium-2026/>

So, get your festivals done, because December means Christmas Bird Counts.

As I sit here in Livermore in 90-degree heat, wondering if fall will ever come, I was thinking how birds mark the changing of the seasons. We always talk of fall and spring migration, but can we be more specific and actually make a bird calendar; one not tied to specific days of the year, but to the changing of the seasons? One of the first bird combinations that comes to mind is the switch from winter to summer and visa versa, represented by the arrival and departure of Hermit and Swainson's Thrush. Hermit Thrush is our winter thrush and, when we see Swainson's start to arrive, we know that winter is ending and summer is on the way. It is the same when Hermits start showing up; winter is finally coming. Can we add to that? Fall is my favorite season. What bird's arrival marks the beginning of fall, not tied to any specific date but to a real change in seasons? After some research, I've decided that White-crowned Sparrow is the bird. When these guys start to appear, fall is truly here, regardless of the date on the calendar. Winter comes with Ruby-crowned Kinglets. What about spring? – it has to be Tree Swallows. When you spot them flying above, spring has arrived. Finally, summer, my least favorite season. When you hear the wonderful song of Black-headed Grosbeak, summer and 90-degree days are here.

Bill Hoppes

Here is my bird calendar:

Let's start in winter:	Winter is coming	Hermit Thrush	Winter is here	Ruby-crowned Kinglet
	Summer is coming	Swainsons Thrush	Spring has arrived	Tree Swallow
	Summer is here	Black-headed Grosbeak	Fall has arrived	White-crowned Sparrow

That's my calendar, feel free to design your own. I know right now I am looking for that first White-crowned Sparrow.

The birding calendar



Conservation

Ohlone Signs on to Amicus Curiae Brief on Dublin Measure II Case

The Ohlone Board agreed to submit an *amicus curiae* brief in the Dublin Measure II CEQA court case. This long-standing issue concerns Dublin Measure II, which the city put on the ballot in November 2024, without doing any CEQA review. Measure II narrowly passed and broke Dublin's eastern urban limit line to allow commercial development on the Crosby properties between Dublin and Livermore. Those parcels had been protected by the Dublin Open Space Initiative of 2014. Save Mount Diablo and

Friends of Livermore won the Alameda County Superior Court case last year, setting aside the initiative. The City of Dublin decided to not appeal, but the Crosby family, represented by Livbor-Manning LLC, did decide to appeal. The case is in the briefing stage at the Court of Appeals. It is hoped that a strong showing by environmental groups might make a favorable impression on the justices who will decide on the appeal.

Bill Hoppes

Eden Landing Data Center Near Hayward Shoreline

The City of Hayward Mayor and City Council held a public meeting on September 15, 2026, at City Hall. There was discussion of a referral to ban future data center developments in the City. There was also a discussion of an oversight process/ordinance for data centers already approved or operating, including STACK SVY03A.

Several members of the public commented on concerns for the impact data centers have on the environment, due to their high demands for energy and water, as well as the amount of air, land, water,

and noise pollution. Ohlone Audubon Society expressed concerns about the impacts to wildlife, plants, and habitat loss.

There was no vote by the Mayor and City Council. It was agreed that more research on data centers is needed, and a moratorium be put in place in order to slow the process down before more applications are considered. There will be no pause on current data center construction and no ban on future projects at this point.

Marlina R. Selva,

SANDHILL CRANE FESTIVAL TOUR REGISTRATION

Dear Craniacs, Crane Lovers, and Festival attendees,

Don't miss out on our fantastic tour lineup for the main festival this year (November 6–8).

The Sandhill Crane Festival is bigger than ever this year, with brand-new tours, such as, *Behind the Scenes Tour & Crane Fly-in at Staten Island* and *A Walking Meditation for Bird Watchers*. You will also want to register right away for your favorite tours and the *Evening Fly-in* on Friday, Saturday, or Sunday night.

Register here: <https://lodisandhillcrane.org/festival-tours/>



Be sure to check out our website at
www.ohloneaudubon.org

**A Warm Welcome to
new members and
thank you to those
renewing and
donating to us!**



New and Renewing

Michelle Acosta
Susie Claxton
Seth Dietz
Catherine Jurca
Jo Krishnamoorthi
Lois Lutz
Isabelle Reddy
Kathy Robertson
Dick Schneider
Shoba Sivakolundu
Susan Towle

Donations

Diana Brumbaugh
Susie Claxton
Seth Dietz
Sandy Ferreira in
memory of Erica
Herron & Helen
Keating
Catherine Jurca
Lois Lutz
Dick Schneider
Stephanie Woods



National Wildlife Refuge Association Presents Inaugural Lifetime Refuge Friend Award to Conservation Pioneer Florence LaRiviere

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The National Wildlife Refuge Association presented its inaugural Lifetime Refuge Friend Award to Florence LaRiviere, honoring more than six decades of extraordinary leadership to protect the wetlands, wildlife, and open spaces of San Francisco Bay.

At 102 years old, LaRiviere remains a powerful voice for conservation and a living link to the grassroots movement that helped create and expand Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge, now one of the nation's largest urban national wildlife refuges. Her lifelong advocacy helped protect thousands of acres of critical wetlands and wildlife habitat for future generations.

“Florence LaRiviere embodies what it means to be a Refuge Friend,” said Desirée Sorenson-Groves, President & CEO of the National Wildlife Refuge Association. “She saw the value of the Bay’s wetlands when others saw empty land waiting to be developed, and then she did something about it. For more than 60 years, Florence has shown us that persistence, vision, and community action can transform the future of an entire ecosystem. We are honored to present her with the very first Lifetime Refuge Friend Award.”

For the complete story of this most remarkable woman's efforts click here <https://www.refugeassociation.org/press-releases/2026/9/1/national-wildlife-refuge-association-presents-inaugural-lifetime-refuge-friend-award-to-conservation-pioneer-florence-lariviere?>

The “Night Wings” (Bats) of Southern Alameda County

East Bay Regional Park District
David Lee Riensche*, Fendi De Amicis
Abstract

Bats perform substantial ecological services, including insect consumption, pollination, seed dispersal, and nutrient cycling.

Their low reproductive rates and sensitivity to human disturbance makes bats vulnerable to a variety of threats, including habitat loss and fragmentation through weather disasters, pesticides, toxic wastewater, wind farm development, and the fungal white-nose syndrome. With the help of the “Bat Brigade” wildlife volunteer group, the East Bay Regional Park District (EBRPD) conducted a nine-year study (2017-2025) of bat distribution, abundance, and calls per hour at three locations in southern Alameda County.

A total of 58 bat exit, and acoustic surveys were conducted periodically between April and July at Sunol Wilderness Regional Preserve, Lake Del Valle Regional Park, and Camp Arroyo Regional Recreation Area. The study confirmed the presence of seven genera and ten species of bats, including three California Species of Special Concern: The Pallid Bat (*Antrozous pallidus*), Townsend's Big-Eared Bat (*Corynorhinus townsendii*), and the Western Red Bat (*Lasiurus blossevillei*). Additionally, the acoustic sampling detected the following species in order of abundance: Yuma Myotis (*Myotis yumanensis*), Mexican Free-Tailed Bat (*Tadarida brasiliensis*), and California Myotis (*Myotis californicus*).

Lastly, more than 1000 volunteers contributed over 5000 hours of supervised service annually, and this effort demonstrates the tremendous energy that community scientists can bring to a wildlife conservation program.

See the full article here <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ijnrem.20261101.18>

Surf, White-winged, and Black Scoters

By Bill Hoppes

The Bay is particularly important winter habitat for diving ducks. Historically, nearly half of the Surf Scoters wintering in the lower Pacific Flyway occurred here. Today, however, diving-duck numbers have declined in parts of the Bay, particularly the North and Central Bay. The current San Francisco Bay State of the Birds assessment reports that diving-duck trends are relatively stable overall but differ substantially among regions.

Surf Scoters are by far the most likely of the three to be encountered regularly in the Bay. White-winged Scoters are less numerous, while Black Scoters are distinctly uncommon in most Bay Area locations. That difference in abundance is itself useful when evaluating an unfamiliar bird—but it should never be used to dismiss an unusual-looking individual.

Scoters favor relatively deep, open water and areas where shellfish are abundant. In the Bay, they can form large rafts that seem to disappear and reappear as individual birds dive. Rocky coastlines, marinas, bridges, and sheltered bays can also provide good viewing.

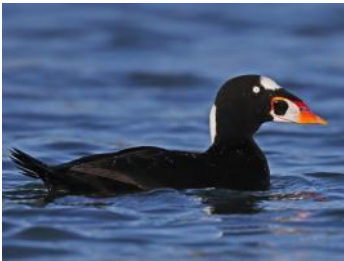
Among productive Bay Area locations are Coyote Point, Richardson Bay, San Leandro Marina, and various shoreline viewpoints overlooking deeper water. Coyote Point is particularly useful because Surf Scoters can sometimes be viewed relatively close to shore.

Richardson Bay deserves special attention. Its extensive protected subtidal waters provide important winter habitat for waterbirds, including Surf Scoters, and the area is particularly valuable during the winter period.

Surf Scoter

Scientific name: *Melanitta perspicillata*

Adult Male For most Bay Area birders, Surf Scoter is the scoter to learn first. It is the most numerous scoter in the region and, fortunately, the adult male is one of the easiest sea ducks to recognize once you know what to look for.



The male Surf Scoter is essentially black, but his head contains three striking areas of white: a large patch on the forehead, another at the rear of the head or nape, and a smaller white area near the bill. His enormous, colorful bill is the real showstopper. It is orange, white, and black and has a distinctly swollen, sloping profile.

Think: black body + white face patches + huge orange bill = Surf Scoter.

The bill is especially important. At a distance, the white patches can blend together or disappear in poor light, but the large, orange, swollen bill often remains apparent. The male's spectacular appearance has earned the species the informal nickname "skunkhead," a reference to the contrasting white markings on its black head.

Female and immature Surf Scoters



Female Surf Scoters are much harder. They are dark or sooty brown, with a dark bill and two pale facial patches. One patch is generally near the base of the bill and another is farther back on the cheek or behind the eye.

This creates a useful distinction from female White-winged Scoters, but the differences can be subtle. A female Surf Scoter should look **dark overall, with a relatively large head and bill and two distinct pale facial areas**.

Don't expect every female to display a textbook pattern. Lighting, distance, molt, age, and the angle of the bird can dramatically alter its appearance.

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White-winged Scoter

Scientific name: *Melanitta deglandi*

The White-winged Scoter is the largest of the three North American scoters and, in some ways, the easiest to identify—if you can see the wing.



Adult male

The male is velvety or silky black with three especially useful features:

- a large white wing patch;
- a small, comma-shaped white mark around and behind the eye;
- an orange-tipped bill with black at its base.

The wing patch is the key. When the bird is sitting on the water, the white wing patch may be almost completely hidden. When it stretches its wings or flies, however, the white becomes unmistakable.

This creates one of the great scoter identification traps: **a White-winged Scoter swimming among Surf Scoters may look almost entirely black.** Consequently, don't identify every black scoter as a Surf Scoter simply because you cannot see a white wing patch. The White-winged Scoter is noticeably larger and heavier than Surf and Black Scoters. Its head and bill also appear substantial.

Female and immature birds



Females and young White-winged Scoters are dark brown rather than black. They have pale facial markings and can look remarkably similar to female Surf Scoters. The best clue is again the **white wing patch**.

If a brown scoter suddenly raises its wings and reveals a broad white panel, you have a White-winged Scoter. When the bird remains motionless, however, identification can become much more difficult. In these circumstances, compare overall size, head shape, bill structure, and facial pattern rather than relying on a single field mark.

Black Scoter

Scientific name: *Melanitta americana*



Black Scoter is the least frequently encountered of the three in the San Francisco Bay Area and, therefore, can be an exciting find.

The adult male is almost entirely black, with one major exception: a bright orange knob at the base of the bill. Unlike the Surf Scoter, the Black Scoter does not have the dramatic white facial markings. Unlike the White-winged Scoter, it does not have a conspicuous white wing patch. That leaves you with a very simple-looking black duck. But the bill tells the story.

Adult male

Look for: all-black body + rounded head + orange bill knob.

The bill itself is relatively broad, and the profile is different from the Surf Scoter's enormous, sloping bill. The Black Scoter's bill does not slope upward toward the forehead as strongly as the Surf Scoter's does. The Black Scoter also tends to look somewhat smaller and more compact than a White-winged Scoter.

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Female and immature birds

These are considerably more difficult. Females and young birds are brown, with a paler cheek and darker cap. They can overlap considerably in appearance with female Surf and White-winged Scoters.

This is where the combination of characteristics becomes important:

- Surf Scoter female: two pale facial patches, relatively large sloping bill.
- White-winged Scoter female: brown overall, pale face, but look for the white wing patch.
- Black Scoter female: brown with pale cheek, relatively rounded head, and no white wing patch.

The Black Scoter also tends to sit relatively buoyantly, sometimes with the tail noticeably cocked upward.



How to Identify a Scoter in the Bay

When you encounter a distant flock of dark ducks, resist the temptation to immediately name the species.

Use this sequence.

1. Is it actually a scoter?

Scoters are chunky, heavy-bodied diving ducks. They sit relatively low in the water, have short tails, and often form tight groups. Don't confuse them with Greater Scaup, which are common in the Bay and can also form enormous rafts.

2. Look at size

If one bird seems noticeably larger than the others, investigate it. Largest: White-winged Scoter; Intermediate: Surf Scoter; Smallest: Black Scoter. Size differences are easier when species are sitting together.

3. Find the males

Adult males are much easier. Look for: Huge orange bill and white face → Surf; White wing patch and white eye mark → White-winged; Plain black with orange bill knob → Black

4. Wait for movement

This is especially important with White-winged Scoters. A bird sitting on the water may hide its most important field mark. Wait for it to flap, stretch, preen, or fly. A flock taking flight can suddenly reveal several White-winged Scoters that were nearly invisible moments earlier.

5. Study the bill

For close birds, bill shape may be more useful than plumage. Surf Scoter has the most extravagant bill: large, swollen, and strongly sloping. White-winged Scoter has a heavy bill with an orange tip. Black Scoter has a more compact-looking bill with a rounded orange knob in the male.

6. Watch the flock

Scoters are social, and mixed flocks are common. If you identify one Surf Scoter, don't stop. Search the rest of the flock. You may find White-winged Scoters mixed among them—and occasionally a Black Scoter. This is one reason scoter identification is an excellent exercise in careful scanning rather than simply checking off the first recognizable bird.

Where to find these guys

The best time to look for scoters around San Francisco Bay is generally late fall through winter and into early spring, when northern breeders are occupying their coastal wintering grounds.

Bring a spotting scope if possible. Binoculars are sufficient for close birds, but a scope can transform a distant raft of black dots into an extraordinarily interesting collection of individual ducks.

Coyote Point is a particularly useful location because Surf Scoters may occur relatively close to shore. Richardson Bay is another excellent place to learn the birds while also seeing the broader community of wintering waterfowl.

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Watch a flock for ten or fifteen minutes. Notice how often individuals dive. Watch birds preen and stretch. Study their size relationships. Eventually, the differences that initially seemed impossibly subtle begin to become obvious.

Feature	Surf	White-winged	Black
Overall size	Medium large	Largest	Smaller
Male Body	Black	Silky black	Black
Male Face	White patches	White comma behind eye	Plain black
Male Bill	Large, orange, multicolored	Heavy, orange-tipped	Orange knob
White Wing Patch	No	Yes	No
Female	Brown, two pale face patches	Brown, pale face	Brown, pale cheek
Best Clue	Huge colorful bill and white head patches	White wing patch	Orange bill knob
Bay Area Abundance	Commonest	Less common	Uncommon
Typical Winter Habitat	Bay, coast, open water	Bay and coast	Coastal water

The Most Important Lesson

The three scoters become much easier when you stop trying to memorize isolated field marks. Think of them as three combinations:

Surf Scoter = spectacular face and spectacular bill.

White-winged Scoter = big bird with white in the wing.

Black Scoter = plain black male with an orange bill knob.

For females and immature birds, slow down. Use size, head shape, bill shape, facial pattern, and—above all—the white wing patch of the White-winged Scoter.

Finally, remember that San Francisco Bay is not merely a convenient place to practice identifying these birds. It is an important part of their winter ecology. Scoters connect the Bay to northern breeding lakes, Pacific coastal ecosystems, shellfish beds, eelgrass, and even Pacific herring spawning areas. Their presence—and changes in their abundance—can tell us something about the health of the estuary itself.

For birders, few experiences are more satisfying than looking at a distant flock that once appeared to contain nothing but black ducks and gradually realizing it contains three different species, each with its own distinctive story.

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Can you help us out? We are still in need of help with a Treasurer and Programs. We've broken up the jobs so no one has to do it all.

We would greatly appreciate your help!

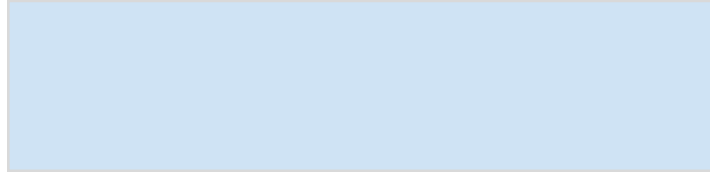
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