

UC Santa Barbara

Newsletters

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NCOS News - December 2022

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UC SANTA BARBARA North Campus Open Space Restoration Project

NCOS NEWS

December 2022



NCOS aerial photo taken on 12/05/22.

UPDATES

More Rain at NCOS!

Our most recent rainstorm on December 2-4 deposited a total of 1.63 inches of rain on NCOS and raised the water level in the slough 1.2 feet. The salinity at Venoco Bridge has decreased from approximately 10 ppt pre-storm to 3.5 ppt. A total of 3.30 inches of rain throughout this fall has increased water levels in NCOS by 2.3 feet. We are still more than 3 inches of rainfall away from a breach event.



View from Dilling's Link during the rainstorm on 12/04/22.



The new wetland channel at the NCOS outdoor classroom area is functioning as planned.



Weed season is upon us! If you are interesting in becoming a weed warrior with the Cheadle Center please let us know and we can provide training (email ncos@cber.ucsb.edu).



Whittier Pond during rainstorm on 12/04/2022.



View of the slough from Whittier Bridge during rainstorm on 12/04/2022.

Making Nature Less Predictable

The Cheadle Center works to reduce "biotic homogenization" or the "McDonald-ization" of the natural world. [This story on native and european honeybees](#) provides an interesting window on the importance of this goal for people and nature.



World's smallest known bee, *Perdita minima*, on a flower. Photo by Krystle Hickman.

Upcoming Changes to NCOS Newsletter

The first NCOS Newsletter was released in April of 2017 and since then has provided a monthly update to all those interested in the NCOS project. As we move into a new phase of the project, the NCOS Newsletter will be changing slightly to incorporate updates and information from other restoration projects that Cheadle Center staff manage. This new version will be released on a bimonthly schedule and the changes will take effect in January 2023. We look forward to sharing interesting facts and photos from our other projects with you all!

FEATURE STORY

NCOS - A Birder's Perspective



Cinnamon teal floating slowly in one of the Mesa vernal pools.

Lynn Scarlett, avid birder and former Deputy Secretary of the Department of the Interior, comments on the values and functions of NCOS for declining bird species. [This feature story is continued on page 14.](#)

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

"Second Saturdays" at NCOS

Cancelled Due to Rain

Please RSVP to ncos@ccber.ucsb.edu

Help us restore and create NCOS with plants and more! Meet at 6969 Whittier Drive at 9am. Bring water,

sunscreen, and wear a hat, clothes and shoes that are suitable for outdoor work



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CCBER Greenhouse Associates

Come help transplant seedlings of native plants with the CCBER team from 9:00 - 12:00. To join, please send an email to ncos@ccber.ucsb.edu.



Nature Guide Tour

This month: December 17, 9:30 -11

Come take a walk around NCOS and learn about native plants and animals with a trained Nature Guide.

COMMUNITY FORUM & PHOTOS

We are interested in any observations of wildlife activity on NCOS, as well as plants and landscapes. Please send your observations, with or without photos, to ncos@ccber.ucsb.edu. Thank you!



Female and male Hooded Mergansers in Whittier Pond. These beautiful ducks find their prey underwater by sight and can actually change the refractive properties of their eyes to improve their vision below the surface. Photo by Daniel Forseth.



Canada geese under the rainbow. Photo by Daniel Forseth.



First documented sighting of a California Ebony Tarantula at NCOS. These hunter spiders do not spin a web to catch prey, instead lying in wait in a burrow and leaping out when small animals come near. This individual had a leg span of approximately 3 inches. Photo by Chris Berry.



American Bittern at Whittier Pond. These well-camouflaged herons hunt along shorelines and the fringes of vegetated areas in wetlands of many sizes and kinds. Photo by Jeremiah Bender.



Northern harriers fly low over the ground and rely heavily on their sense of hearing to capture prey. Seen near the NCOS ROOST. Photo by Jeremiah Bender.



Cooper's Hawk near Phelps Bridge. Photo by Jeremiah Bender.

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For more information on the
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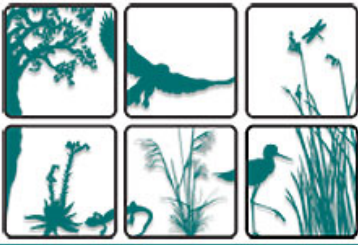
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NCOS - A BIRDER'S PERSPECTIVE

Lynn Scarlett, avid birder and former Deputy Secretary of the Department of the Interior, comments on the values and functions of NCOS for declining bird species.

I recall the area of what is now the North Campus Open Space (NCOS) when it was a golf course. I would bird around the edges—at Devereux, or Coal Oil Point, or remnant wetlands. What a difference vision, commitment, and a half dozen years of restoration make. An elusive American bittern now lurks in reeds at Whittier Pond. Red-shouldered hawks screech overhead. In winter, glorious cinnamon teal glide along the string of ponds. This golf course conversion is pioneering what other golf courses in over a dozen states are trying—restoring lands and waters so that nature and its creatures may thrive.



Cinnamon teal in the Mesa vernal pool.

The urgency is acute. A 2019 report calculated a loss of 3 billion North American breeding birds (1 in 4 birds) from 1970 to the present. Building from that report, a [2022 State of the Bird Report](#) generated by the North American Bird Conservation Initiative, comprising nearly three dozen organizations, examines overall trends in bird populations and identifies 70 “tipping point” species that have lost half or more of their populations in 50 years and “are on a trajectory to lose another half in the next 50 years,” or they have very small populations and face high threats.



Green Heron at Phelps Creek.

Habitat conservation and restoration, especially of grasslands, forestlands, arid lands and shores, is essential to reverse these trends. Though the picture for wetlands, in large part as a result of the North American Wetlands Conservation Act and Farm Bill conservation provisions, is somewhat more encouraging, more wetland protection and restoration is needed. The effects of climate change make careful water management critical. NCOS is both a catalyst for others elsewhere to replicate this restoration story and an essential part of the evolving bird conservation story.

Of “tipping point” birds, some are regulars at NCOS; others occasionally show up. That list includes Allen’s and rufous hummingbirds, Heermann’s gulls, and semipalmated sandpipers, among others that call NCOS home for parts of the year. NCOS provides habitat interconnected with other protected areas like Devereux and Ellwood Mesa, bringing conservation beyond isolated, fragmented “islands” of protection.



Rufous/Allen's Hummingbird seen near the NCOS ROOST.

Restoration details matter. Efforts at NCOS to sustain shallow slopes on the estuary edge for shorebirds have paid off in providing continuous habitat at a wide range of water elevations. Fencing next to trails supports ground-using birds and animals by providing some security from people and dogs. Creation of winter sheltering features supports a variety of avian and non-avian species.



Juvenile Snowy Plover and parent forage along the slough shore.

But protecting and restoring lands is not enough. Sustaining bird populations (and natural habitats) requires complex wetlands management and restoration of native plants. It also requires “people engagement”, staying on trails, watching but not invading bird and animal “space.” Each of us, as guardians of NCOS conservation, may contribute to helping these bird trends reverse course.

Article by Lynn Scarlet. Photos by Jeremiah Bender.

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