



MAGPIE CALLS

Newsletter of the Santa Ynez Valley Natural History Society
PO Box 794, Los Olivos, CA 93441
805-693-5683 www.syvnature.org syvnhs@syvnature.org

Dedicated to the study, exploration, and appreciation of natural history
in the Santa Ynez Valley region



Western Snowy Plover with a hatchling and egg. Photo by Cristina Sandoval.



Looking west from Coal Oil Point where Snowy Plovers nest. Photo by Cristina Sandoval.

Plovers at the Point: Walking Coal Oil Point Reserve

Field Trip with Dr. Cristina Sandoval
Thursday, September 18, 1:30 to 4:00 p.m.
Coal Oil Point Reserve, UCSB

The Western Snowy Plover (*Anarhynchus nivosus nivosus*) is found along the Pacific coast of North America, Mexico, and in some interior western states. We will meet with Dr. Cristina Sandoval at the Coal Oil Point Reserve Nature Center and tour the reserve, discussing the ongoing conservation and restoration efforts, with an emphasis on Western Snowy Plovers.

The Pacific population of Western Snowy Plovers' preferred habitat is sandy coastal beaches, sandbars, and river mouths. They primarily feed on small invertebrates found around kelp wrack in the intertidal zone and along the edges of salt marshes, salt ponds, and lagoons. Their breeding season typically runs from March to September. The Pacific coast population of the Western Snowy Plover is listed as threatened under the U.S. Endangered Species Act, and their populations had significantly declined before they were listed as threatened. At Coal Oil Point, symbolic fencing, education, and signage are now successfully used to mark nesting areas and guide people away.

Dr. Cristina Sandoval is the Director of the Coal Oil Point Reserve, part of the UCSB Natural Reserve System. She received her Master's degree in Brazil in social spiders and moved to Santa Barbara to do a PhD. At UCSB she studied the evolution and speciation of the Cristina's Walking Stick (*Timema cristinae*) named in Dr. Sandoval's honor, who first found and collected it. She then started as a director of the reserve, where she has been working for 30 years to restore vegetation and fauna in this unique area and support research and education there.

How to Register

Event date: Thursday, September 18, 2025, 1:30 to 4:00 p.m.

Participation is limited to 20.

Advance registration is required for this field trip and will open at 9:00 a.m. on Saturday, August 23 for members and on September 6 for nonmembers at syvnhs@syvnature.org or 805-693-5683.

Members \$15 / Nonmembers \$30 / Children \$5.

Directions and meet-up location will be emailed to registered participants.

See Upcoming Events on page 5

Tracking Tarantulas at Sedgwick Reserve

Field trip with Marion Schlinger and Nikki Evans
Thursday, October 16, 4:00 to 6:00 p.m.

Fall is mating season for tarantulas here in the Santa Ynez Valley, and it is the best time to observe these amazing spiders. Join Marion and Nikki as we unravel the mystery of the tarantulas (*Aphonopelma* spp.) that wander about our roads, yards, and fields. Of the ten species of tarantula in California, at least three are located at Sedgwick Reserve.

During this program, we will walk no more than a mile on level ground as we search for tarantulas. We will examine a tarantula or two up close and search for their burrows out in the fields. We will also address their biology, distribution, defenses, identifying characteristics, and their predators. Those who wish to, may have the chance to handle a tarantula. Perhaps we will even catch a glimpse of a tarantula hawk, a large wasp that preys on tarantulas. In any case, you are sure to come away with an appreciation for these fascinating creatures who make the Santa Ynez Valley their home.

Marion Schlinger is a naturalist/entomologist and loves being out in nature enjoying the plants, birds and critters,

including insects, that she finds either in her garden or on long walks with her labrador, Max. She also had a 'pet' tarantula named Knucklehead in graduate school.

Nikki Evans received her PhD in Natural Resources and Environmental Sciences from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. She is currently Outreach and Communications Specialist at Sedgwick Reserve. She fell in love with tarantulas during her first fall at Sedgwick, seeing dozens of tarantulas wandering the Reserve looking for love. She promptly fell down a rabbit hole learning everything she could about them. Nikki loves birding, botanizing, photographing wildlife, and sharing nature with her two-year-old daughter.

How to Register

Event date: Thursday, October 16, 2025, 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. Participation is limited to 20. Advance registration is required for this field trip and will open at 9:00 a.m. on Saturday, September 20 for members and on October 4 for nonmembers at syvnhs@syvnature.org or 805-693-5683. Members \$15 / Nonmembers \$30 / Children \$5 Directions and meet-up location will be emailed to registered participants.



Fall is migration season for male tarantulas in search of mates. Photo by Nikki Evans.



Tarantulas will calmly walk across your hand. Photo courtesy of Nikki Evans.



Naturalist and entomologist Marion Schlinger, who had a pet tarantula in graduate school. Courtesy photo.



Broad expanses of sandy beach are found in many shoreline areas between Rincon Creek and the Ventura River. Photo by Larry Ballard.

Rincon Creek to the Ventura River: Slip sliding away!

Field trip with Larry Ballard and Sabina Thomas
Saturday, November 1, 9:00 a.m. to Noon

The Santa Ynez Mountains are the western-most range within the Transverse Ranges, and they dominate the skyline for the 60 miles of coast between Point Conception and Rincon Creek. At Rincon, however, there is an abrupt change in the topography which extends 12 miles down the coast. It is this section that will be the focus of our nontechnical field trip to examine a unique landscape, ranging from Rincon Creek to the Ventura River and back.

Naturalist Larry Ballard will lead the first part of the trip, where our driving route will take us along the Pacific Coast Highway and U.S. 101, with several short walking stops along the way. We will test our observational skills as if we were mapping the area for the first time. Some of the geomorphic features we will encounter are stream terraces, sea cliffs, marine terraces, antecedent streams, and depositional deltas. If the visibility is good that day we will have distant views of Gaviota Peak, the Channel Islands, Pine Mountain Ridge, and the Topatopa Mountains.

There will be stops starting at Rincon, then Sea Cliff, the Ventura River, "no-name," and finally La Conchita. At our last stop, geologist Sabina Thomas will discuss the disastrous landslides on Rincon Mountain in 1995 and 2005 as well as the ongoing threats to the community of La Conchita. We hope to have a road log for places that we'll pass by without stopping.

Larry Ballard is a natural history educator with a focus on botany and has been a popular field trip leader for the SYVNHS, California Nature Art Museum, and other organizations for over 25 years.



Gullies and arroyos dissect these terraces in the oil-bearing Pico Formation along the north side of Highway 101 west of Ventura. Photo by Larry Ballard.

Sabina Thomas grew up in Germany and received her PhD in Geology from the Technical University Berlin. She moved to Santa Barbara in 2010. In addition to teaching earth-science at Santa Barbara City College, she leads field trips for the SYVNHS, Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History, and Channel Islands Restoration.

How to Register

Event date: Saturday, November 1, 2025, 9:00 a.m. to Noon
Participation is limited to 20.

Registration opens at 9:00 a.m. on Saturday, October 4 for members and on October 18 for nonmembers at syvnhs@syvnature.org or 805/693-5683.

Field trip location and information will be sent to registrants.

Hike difficulty is rated as easy.

Members \$15 / Nonmembers \$30 / Children \$5

Rocking on Rocks

Introduction to Rocks: Workshop with Dr. Sabina Thomas
Saturday, November 8, 9:30 a.m. to Noon
Santa Barbara City College campus

Have you been curious about rocks? Do you realize that rocks can tell a story? How does one distinguish one rock from another, and what is the difference between rocks and minerals? Sabina Thomas, PhD, and a faculty member at local community colleges, will conduct an Introduction to Rocks class at Santa Barbara City College's earth science labs. You will be learning about the different rock families, conduct some simple but helpful tests to identify rocks and minerals, and find out why geologists think that rocks are interesting—they really DO tell a story! The workshop may include a short walk to the La Playa stadium and Maxwell Overlook to briefly explore the local geology. No hammer, hard hats or hiking boots required.

Sabina Thomas grew up in Germany where she received her PhD in Geology. She left Berlin for the U.S. in 1989 and taught at colleges and universities in Texas and Ohio until she moved to Santa Barbara. She worked as a Backcountry Ranger at the Santa Barbara Botanic Garden and as a Nature Educator. Sabina teaches earth-science courses at Santa Barbara City College and Ventura College

and has led five-day field trips for students as well as adult learners in the Eastern Sierra, White Mountains, and Death Valley. She earned the California Naturalist Certificate and the Climate Stewardship Certificate, and she loves going on field trips.

How to Register

Event date: Saturday,
November 8, 2025,
9:30 a.m. to Noon
Participation is limited
to 20.

Advance registration is required for this workshop and will open Saturday, October 11 at 9:00 a.m. for members and on October 25 for nonmembers at syvnhs@syvnature.org or 805-693-5683.

Members \$15 / Nonmembers \$30 / Children \$5
Directions and meet-up location will be emailed to registered participants.



Sabina Thomas. Courtesy photo.



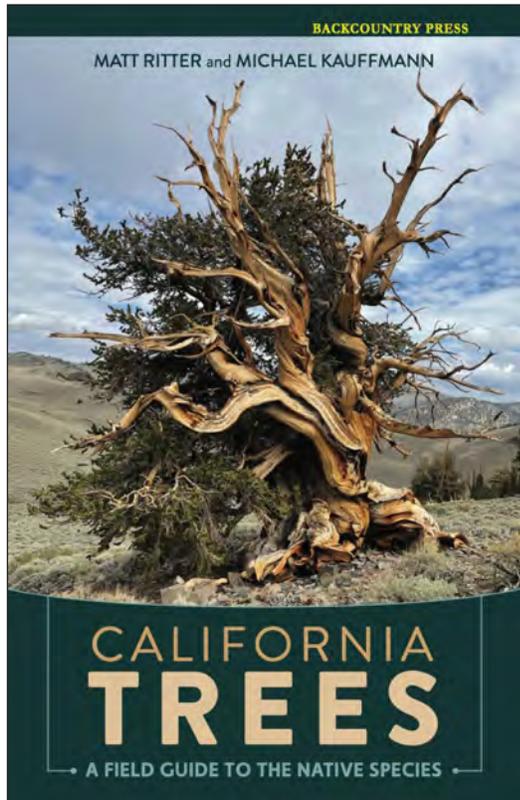
An assortment of rocks collected in California (except where noted).
Upper left: Fractured and healed chert of Monterey Formation (sedimentary); upper right: Mica schist (metamorphic); center: diorite from Utah (igneous, volcanic); lower right: copper ore deposit (hydrothermal - volcanic); lower left: serpentinite (metamorphic, state rock of California).
Photo by Sabina Thomas.



Top: Igneous volcanic tuff;
left: Metamorphic blueschist;
right: Igneous volcanic glass.
Photos by Sabina Thomas.

California's Native Trees

Free live and Zoom presentation and book signing with Dr. Matt Ritter
 Wednesday, December 3, 7:00 to 9:00 p.m.
 Co-sponsored by the Solvang Library



In his latest book, Dr. Ritter takes readers on a journey through the state's diverse landscapes, highlighting the remarkable variety of tree species that call California home. Photo courtesy of the publisher.

Dr. Matt Ritter will speak about his latest book, *California Trees: A Field Guide to the Native Species*, which he co-authored with Michael Kauffmann. The authors believe that "Connecting with trees, identifying them, and learning more about them can be an entry point into nature and an antidote to the stresses of modern-day life."

Join Dr. Ritter for a visually rich and inspiring celebration of the state's iconic native flora. From the towering redwoods of the northern coast to the otherworldly Joshua trees of the desert, he will take you on a journey through the state's diverse landscapes, highlighting the remarkable variety of tree species that call California home. With his striking photography, humor, and botanical insight, Dr. Ritter will share the natural history of California's largest and most storied organisms. A book signing will follow the presentation, giving the in-person audience an opportunity to purchase the book.

Dr. Ritter received an undergraduate degree in microbiology from UC Santa Barbara before he completed his doctoral studies in plant biology from UC San Diego. He



Dr. Matt Ritter, Cal Poly SLO botany professor. Photo courtesy of the author.

has been a professor at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo since 2002, and he has lectured to Society members twice before. In 2011, he introduced his book, *A Californian's Guide to the Trees Among Us*, and in 2018, he covered *California Plants: A Guide to Our Iconic Flora*. Dr. Ritter does not limit himself to nonfiction, he has also produced an award-winning children's book, *Something Wonderful*, about a tropical rainforest fig tree, and a climate change novel, *Rainwalkers*.

How to Attend

Event date: Wednesday, December 3, 2025, 7:00 to 9:00 p.m.

Live lecture location: The courtroom adjacent to Solvang Library at 1745 Mission Drive (CA 246)

A book signing will follow the presentation.

Zoom: Register for the screening at our website, www.syvnature.org.

The presentation recording will be posted online after the event.

Upcoming SYVNHS Events

Sept. 18 Plovers at the Point: Field Trip

Oct. 16 Tracking Tarantulas: Field Trip

Nov. 1 Rincon Creek to the Ventura River: Field Trip

Nov. 8 Rocking on Rocks: Workshop

Dec. 3 California Trees – Native Species: Lecture

Dec. 28 Magnificent Trees of UCSB, Return Visit: Field Trip

Pop-Up events will be posted on the website and emailed to members and friends.



Caution! Tarantula crossing. Photo by Nikki Evans.

Return Visit to the Magnificent Trees of UCSB

Field trip with Larry Ballard

Sunday, December 28, 9:00 to 11:30 a.m.

UCSB campus

The UCSB campus boasts more than 250 tree species from six continents, including several rare or unusual trees not found elsewhere in the Santa Barbara area. Due to popular demand, we are again offering a walking tour to introduce the magnificent trees at UCSB with Larry Ballard. He will be sharing some species not seen on previous trips, and we'll also revisit some favorite specimen trees. We will take a look at the architecture of trees, discuss identification tips, and introduce participants to many of our local urban trees.

Along with more common species, we'll see locally uncommon introductions, such as Firewheel Tree, Giant Fishtail Palm, Coast Banksia, Guadalupe Palm, Banyan Fig, and Mallet Flower. The tour will also visit a national champion Big Tree!

Groundskeepers, the staff of the biology greenhouse, a variety of faculty, and a former UCSB Chancellor have all contributed to the establishment of this dynamic botanical diversity. Our trip is timed for the holiday break at the university, and we'll find the campus to be relatively quiet.

Larry Ballard is a natural history educator with a focus on botany and has been a popular field trip leader for the SYVNHS and other organizations for over 25 years. He has offered past tours of the famous collection of trees at UCSB, as well as educational walks to introduce the trees of Alameda Park in Santa Barbara and the street trees in the valley communities of Los Olivos, Santa Ynez, and Solvang.

How to Register

Event date: Sunday, December 28, 2025, 9:00 a.m. to 11:30 at UCSB

Participation limited to 20.

Registration opens at 9:00 a.m. on Saturday, November 29 for members and on December 13 for nonmembers at syvnhs@syvnature.org or 805/693-5683.

Field trip meet-up location and information will be sent to registrants.

Hike difficulty is rated as easy.

Members \$15 / Nonmembers \$30 / Children \$5



Flower of the aptly named Firewheel Tree (*Stenocarpus sinuatus*) at UCSB. Photo by John Evarts.



SYVNHS field trip participants gathered beneath a massive Moreton Bay Fig (*Ficus macrophylla*) at UCSB in 2023. Photo by John Evarts.



Botanist and tree enthusiast Larry Ballard admires a Screw Pine (*Pandanus sp.*) on the UCSB campus. Photo by John Evarts.

Santa Ynez Valley Natural History Society 25th Anniversary Celebration

The 25th Anniversary Celebration at Sedgwick Reserve was held on June 21, 2025. Enjoy these photos and captions of the many individuals who have been involved from the beginning of the organization and along the way. Photos are by John Everts except where noted by Carey McKinnon.



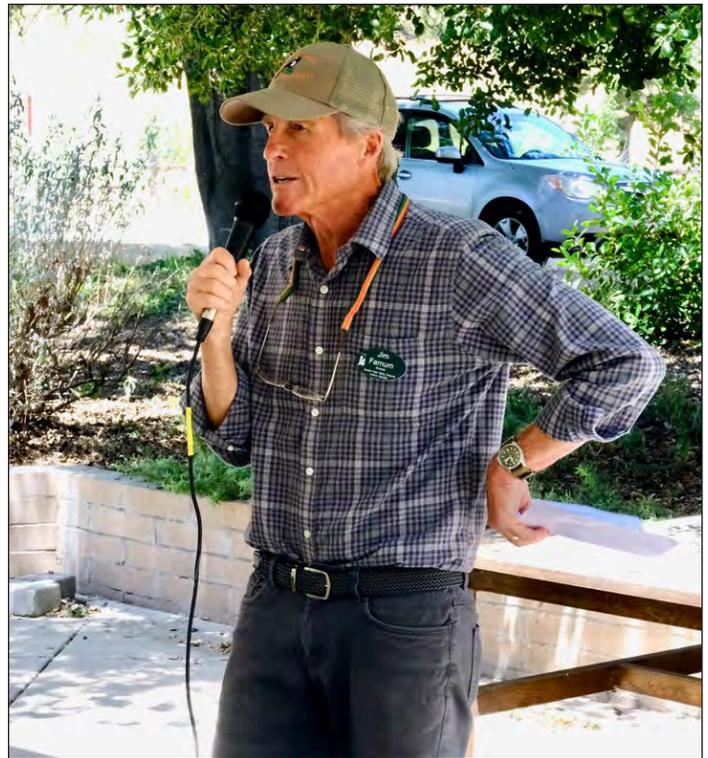
The current SYVNHS Board of Directors gathered after the event for a group photo. From left to right: John Everts, Tina Collins (Vice President), Sabina Thomas, Jim Patin, Dennis Beebe (Secretary), Jim Farnum, Marion Schlinger (President), Margie Popper (Treasurer, but not a board member), Page Hiller-Adams, Nikki Evans. Photo by Carey McKinnon.



Participants in the "Oak Tree Natural History" interpretive hike, one of many hikes and walks offered as part of the day's events.



Founding member and current board member Dennis Beebe helped with pre-event signage and added his usual good-natured enthusiasm to the event.



Board member Jim Farnum served as MC, and he frequently had the audience in stitches with his deadpan humor and dry wit.



Total attendance was over 100. Many people stayed after the hikes for the awards ceremony and lunch under the pavilion, which is located next to the Studio where the Society's founding meeting was held.



SYVNHS Treasurer Margie Popper (right) presents gift certificates to honorees for their years of leading field trips (from left to right): Larry Ballard, Liz Gaspar, Tim Matthews, and Susie Bartz. Not present for this photo was the 5th honoree, Carey McKinnon.



Board member Jim Farnum (right) and others watch the retrospective slide show of SYVNHS field trips, which is now available to view on our website.



Board members Marion Schlinger (President) and Jim Patin (our tech guru) served up slices of the anniversary cake.



The delicious anniversary cake was decorated with an outstanding reproduction of the Society's logo, which was created by artist Patricia Hedrick.