

BIRD EXPLORER

Climate change and mega-rare bird sightings

BY PETER J. THIEMANN

Birds that we never saw in the American West are now showing up. Some species are expanding their breeding range up north due to favorable conditions with a warming climate. Examples are several Hummingbird species and the Northern Mockingbird. Other birds are becoming seasonal nonbreeding visitors like the Elegant Terns on the coast, first seen in Oregon during the El Niño of 1983.

This year is another El Niño year, and conditions in the Pacific Ocean have changed for sea life. Most visible are sea mammals and birds, with large numbers of whales seen in Monterey Bay and off the coast of San Francisco. Ocean birds, like many species of Shearwaters (mostly of the genus *Puffinus*), are seen in record numbers. With all the warm water down south, birds and mammals are following colder water up north for food. It is a banner year for whale watchers and birders interested in the spectacle. I took two whale-watching trips out to the Farallon Islands, 27 miles off the coast of San Francisco, in September. I was not disappointed with the many whale sightings of several species.

But it is the large ocean birds seen on the Farallones that I want to discuss.

First is the single male Northern Gannet, which has now been seen for three years on the islands and even in San Francisco Bay. Normally this large ocean

bird is found in the Atlantic Ocean. So how did it come to the San Francisco area? Although its course is not fully understood (the Northern Gannet is *not* an escaped bird), the expert consensus is that it must have come through

Photos, clockwise from left: Northern Gannet, adult Blue-footed Booby, Northern Gannet and juvenile Brown Booby, adult Brown Boobies.



the Northwest Passage of the Arctic Ocean due to open sea ice. This bird species cannot migrate long distances over land because it needs open water to dive for ocean fish. We now hear eyewitness reports of Gannet sightings from northern Alaska. The implications are profound. We are already seeing other species like the Polar Bear in peril.

In addition to the Gannet, we have now seen Boobies all the way up to British Columbia, Canada. On my second trip to the Farallones, I photographed 12 Brown Boobies and one Blue-footed Booby, mega-rare birds this far north. The Blue-footed Booby nests on the Galapagos Islands far to the south near Ecuador, and the Brown Boobies range from the Sea of Cortez to Mexico. Now birders are chasing mega-rare birds like the Gannet and Boobies on the Pacific Coast of the American West, a sign of the changing climate with cause for concern for all.

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Photos courtesy of Peter J. Thiemann, Flickr photo stream.



Anise Swallowtail butterfly a joy to see

BY LINDA KAPPEN

The Anise Swallowtail (*Papilio zelicaon*) is of the butterfly family Papilionidae. With wings open it can reach up to three and one-half inches across. The abdomen is black and the background color is yellow with black borders on the forewings. Hind wings have scalloped wing margins with blue spots, a shortened tail, and red-orange eye spots with a black dot center.

Males will perch on hilltops patrolling for females. Females lay eggs singly on host plants that are

mainly of the parsley family, using natives or garden varieties. Citrus has also been reported as a host plant. Young caterpillars will eat leaves, while older caterpillars will eat the flowers of the host plant. The pupae overwinter.

Nectar is the main food source of the adult butterfly. Males also visit nectar, but frequently puddle. Nectar sources are many and include lupines, fireweed, mustards, yarrow, thistles, penstemons, azalea, manzanita and many others.

Habitat for the Anise Swallowtail

can be mountains, alpine meadows, forest clearings, grasslands, or waterways. The butterfly can be seen in flight from late March through July, although this past summer they were seen a little longer with reports of caterpillars into the early fall suggesting a longer flight period. This was a good year for Swallowtail species in southern Oregon, the last notable one I know of being in 2011.

This butterfly is a joy to see, making appearances at unexpected times. I have seen the Anise Swallowtail from grassy areas by the ocean to high mountains.

During a botany course through Siskiyou Field Institute, I hiked to the top of Big Red Mountain on the Siskiyou Crest. While at the top resting and eating

lunch, I was graced with the company of an Anise Swallowtail who rested on a backdrop of colorful lichen-covered rocks. He stayed around warming in the sun while I enjoyed his presence. This image can be found on the “Butterflies and Moths of the Pacific Northwest” Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1529362950616437/>). I have also seen them on top of Mount Isabelle in Applegate hill-topping with other butterflies.

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Linda earned a naturalist certification from Siskiyou Field Institute, and hosts two-day butterfly courses. Photos: Linda Kappen, butterfly; Gerry Queener, caterpillar.



Spotted Owl survey results

For those of you who have been waiting for the results of the analysis on the status and trends of the Northern Spotted Owl, you may not have to wait much longer.

The findings of this study are scheduled to be available online around December 2 at <http://www.aoucospubs.org/loi/cond> in the form of a joint US Geological Survey (USGS) and Oregon State University press release. Lead author Dr. Katie Dugger is a research biologist at the USGS Oregon Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit at Oregon State University. A collaborative team of 37 researchers across multiple organizations authored this paper.

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