

PRESS RELEASE

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Birds of California's Channel Islands. Photos by Book Lotus Productions / Terri Wright

New Book is Definitive Guide to Island Biodiversity on the Wing

- *Birds of California's Channel Islands* published by Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History now available in Museum Store
- Primary author is Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History Curator Emeritus Paul W. Collins, M.A., with coauthors Justyn T. Stahl and H. Lee Jones
- Two-volume, 809-page reference is the definitive guide to the biology and history of birds of the Channel Islands, known as California's Galapagos
- Author talk co-presented by SBMNH and Santa Barbara Audubon Society to be held September 29, 7:00 PM at the Museum, registration recommended

SANTA BARBARA, CA—Emblazoned with an Island Scrub-Jay as a charismatic ambassador, a new two-volume tome published by Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History is the definitive guide to 449 species of birds known from California's Channel Islands. *Birds of California's Channel Islands* is essential reading for island conservationists and resource managers in charge of stewarding this

archipelago, a biological hotspot often called “California’s Galapagos.” The reference will also reward birders and all-around naturalists seeking a deeper understanding of the avifauna of this island group.

The book’s primary author is SBMNH Curator Emeritus of Vertebrate Zoology Paul W. Collins, M.A. Across five decades of study, Collins has used the Museum’s Vertebrate Zoology Collections—strong in Channel Islands specimens—as a home base for research that has led him to remote and rugged locations across all eight of the California Channel Islands. Collins studied the evolution of the Island Fox for his master’s degree, and his later work on historic eagle diets helped inform restoration and recovery plans for Island Foxes. He was the lead vertebrate zoologist for an inventory of the natural resources of Channel Islands National Monument prepared for the National Park Service in 1979. In the decades since, he has studied and published extensively on research about Channel Islands wildlife—especially the avifauna—in cooperation with Channel Islands National Park, The Nature Conservancy, the U.S. Navy, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. He and coauthor Jones published *A Checklist of Birds of the California Channel Islands* in 2015 through the Museum.

Coauthors Justyn T. Stahl and H. Lee Jones bring additional expertise to the project. Drawing on his experience as one of the first serious birders on the islands, Jones collaborated with Collins on early drafts. Stahl worked closely with Collins to hone the text and bring the book to completion, attempting to verify eBird and iNaturalist records, and adding his unique perspective on the San Clemente avifauna based on his 15 years of work there.

“The authors have gathered records for virtually every avian species known to occur . . . whether resident, visitor, introduced, recently extinct, or recently arrived,” writes Dennis Power (SBMNH director 1972–1994) in the book’s foreword. Power contrasts the book’s wealth of information with the sparse record that existed when he was a young biologist. The book reveals “how dynamic this region is in terms of its avifauna. Without the detailed data and the authors’ synthesis, you would not realize the extent of the changes that have taken place,” Powers continues. “This book—this tome—is a major achievement in the study of the California Channel Islands.”

Where databases like eBird and iNaturalist only extend back a short time, the book presents a high-resolution picture of bird status and distribution on the islands from prehistory through the Anthropocene. Data-rich overviews in the first volume describe the physical environment of the islands, the marine and terrestrial habitats, avian fossil and archeological records, the history of human influences on birds—from the first Native peoples to today, the history of research on the avifauna of the Channel Islands—from the mid-1800s through 2023, and a results and discussion chapter which summarizes the findings of this intensive study of the Channel Islands avifauna. The second volume contains the species accounts: meticulous records of when and where each species has been observed, island-specific differences in abundance and nesting cycles, and taxonomy. For species of conservation concern, a conservation and restoration section summarizes efforts undertaken to recover island population impacted by human activities on the islands. The information provided in the species accounts is valuable not only to resource managers seeking to know how and when species use the habitats in their care, but to birders who hope to contribute to the growing wealth of island knowledge. “Now the layperson has a source that they can compare with their record of observing a bird on a given island in a given season to see whether their observation is noteworthy,” says Collins.

Together, the two volumes cite 1,949 references of scientific research. In addition, they draw on museum specimens and egg collections spread across 38 institutions throughout North America as well as the British Museum of Natural History in the United Kingdom (each one verified by Collins), historic field records in the spidery writing of nineteenth-century naturalists, and digital-born data from eBird and iNaturalist. This breadth of data allowed the authors to demonstrate the “dramatic changes in the



breeding avifauna on the Channel Islands, from the historic period up to the present conservation and restoration period, changes which are ongoing as we have climate change starting to rear its ugly head," says Collins.

Collins and Stahl will share highlights from their research findings and stories of the field work and museum detective work behind the book at a public talk on September 29 at the Museum. Co-presented by the Museum and Santa Barbara Audubon Society, tickets are \$5 and advance registration is recommended. This event in Santa Barbara will kick off a local book tour, with a few other dates around the region leading up to a lecture and book signing held by the Catalina Conservancy on Santa Catalina Island in late January 2027.

The Museum has published a limited run of just 250 copies, of which more than 30% were sold on pre-order, with the rest now available online through sbnature.org/store and in person at the Museum daily, 10:00 AM–5:00 PM. The book is part of the Museum's publication series of Monographs, and Studies in Biodiversity.

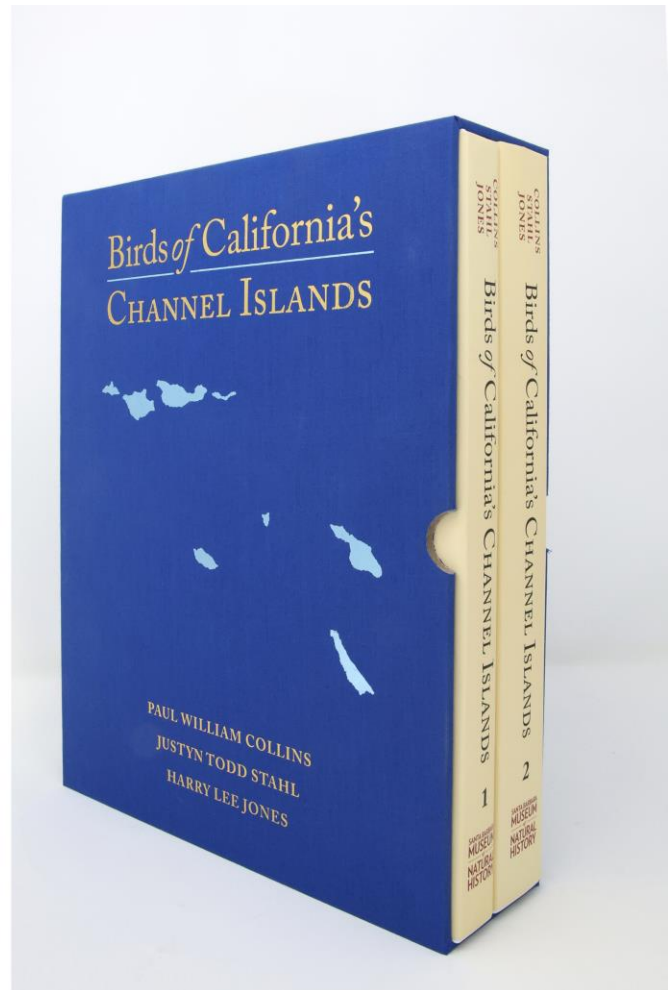
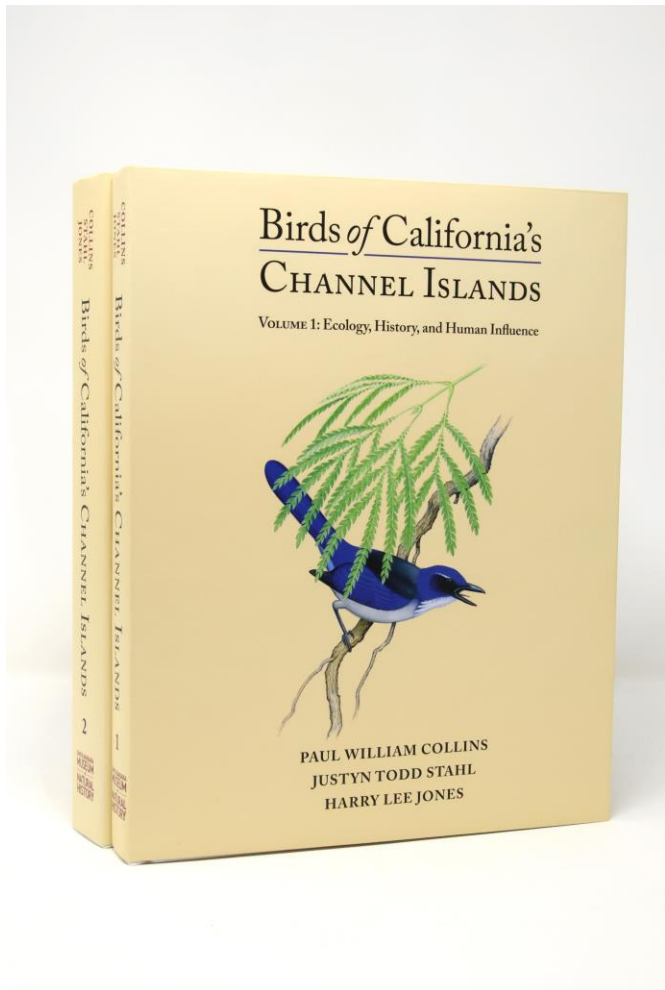
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About the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History

Powered by Science. Inspired by Nature. The Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History connects people to nature for the betterment of both, drawing on collections that preserve the natural and cultural heritage of the Central Coast and beyond. Founded in 1916, the Museum is a private nonprofit supported in part by philanthropy, membership, and visitors. The remarkable philanthropic support the Museum has received over the years has enabled the long-term research efforts highlighted in these volumes. For more information, visit sbnature.org.



Left, Paul Collins in the field at the Two Harbors Bald Eagle nest on Santa Catalina Island. Photo by Seth Newsom. Right, Collins at an historic Bald Eagle nest east of Point Bennett on San Miguel Island. Photo by Eric Hochberg



Birds of California's Channel Islands. *Island Scrub Jay* artwork by Dana Gardner, cover design by Terri Wright/Book Lotus

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Paul W. Collins at Sandy Point on Santa Rosa Island. Photo by John Storrer

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Photo of Justyn T. Stahl on East Anacapa Island © 2025 Nicole Desnoyers