

Central Sierra Audubon Society's
Sierra Squawker



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So, You Want to Lead a Bird Walk???



"Doc" Nancy Muleady-Mecham plus some of her trainees at Big Trees SP, October 25

by Ailene Garrido

Recently retired for the second time, my own goal at this phase of my life is to spend more time doing the things I enjoy the most. I have always been a birdwatcher as long as I can remember. As a small child I have a vivid memory of my father throwing grain to a flock of cardinals in the snow in the south eastern part of the U.S.

The urgent plea from Ken Smith, Field Trip Chairperson, to lead a bird walk or field trip prompted me to respond. He said you did not have to be a skilled birder to participate as it is geared for the amateur. It should be fun, he said, and will make the CSAS a much stronger Audubon chapter while improving our birding skills. **"WE NEED YOU!"** he wrote and I couldn't resist. Retired National Park Ranger Nancy Muleady-Mecham, PhD. and Fulbright Scholar had generously offered to conduct a class on how to lead a bird walk at the Calaveras Big Trees State Park. I signed up and on October 25 arrived at the Park at 9am.

Nancy Muleady-Mecham, PhD, or Doc Nancy as she likes to be called, is a rare and precious gift for those blessed to be in her company. She gave us her background which was so impressive that at first I thought, "Now why did I think I could do this?" Those thoughts vanished however, as she began demonstrating how to look at a bird through your binoculars. This seemed like a simple concept, but in actuality I can remember many times searching for the bird with my binoculars and not finding it. Her simple technique put the bird right into view every time.

Doc Nancy explained the difference between being a "bird watcher" versus a "birder." I had wondered about that. I was glad to hear that she is also a birdwatcher. No **Big Year** for us! She gave an ornithology lesson on bird behavior and how a bird's form helps in hunting and surviving, and even brought specimens of a barn owl's head and wings to demonstrate further.

She explained that bird watching is also hearing the bird. You can recognize a bird by its vocalization, and may never see it. As we walked through the giant sequoias she explained how the edge of a forest and the beginning of a meadow makes an excellent bird habitat.

I have touched on just a few of the points Dr. Nancy Muleady-Mecham covered in the 1+ hour stroll through the sequoias. It was a perfect outing that I am so grateful to have been a part of. She has offered to give another class this spring and I recommend you sign up now.

Ailene Garrido

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

On November 1st I had the opportunity to tour a portion of the Rim Fire with the USFS and YSS. Yosemite Stanislaus Solutions is a collaborative group formed three years ago to assist and advise the Stanislaus National Forest with forest management, especially rehabilitation and habitat improvement. The YSS is made up of representatives from the Forest, including the Forest Supervisor, along with all of the interested stakeholders in industry, recreation, and the environmental community. Because of the overwhelming destruction from the Rim Fire, the focus and mission of YSS has greatly intensified with the need to move quickly to prevent further damage from the effects of erosion and habitat loss.

CSAS has been invited to join YSS and I am happy to announce that Walt Kruse and Linda Millspaugh have volunteered to participate and bring their findings back to our Board of Directors. Their commitment of time and effort to this important cause is indicative of the volunteer spirit that makes the Central Sierra such a great place to call home.

Your local Audubon staff wishes all of you the best in the upcoming holiday season.

David Harden

2013 TRAVELOGUE

Southern African and Madagascar by Steven Umland. Part III



I do not know what it was about the Helmet Vanga; the big blue bill or the crazy, staring white eye, along with the chestnut and black coloring, that caught my fancy. This was the one bird I really wanted to see. So we made a long, and crazy, trip to Masoala NP in order to hunt this baby down. We, of course, thought that we had a direct flight to Maroanetra

where we would transfer to a boat and take the 2 hour ride out to our lodge on the Masoala Peninsula. How naive! We ended up flying north of Masoala to pick up a few passengers who would eventually go back to Tana (the capital). When we were getting ready to leave, airport officials came out and after much shouting, we ascertained that the 18-seater was too heavy! Someone was going to have to leave their luggage in order to lighten the load. We were exempt as we only had carry-ons. Two unlucky passengers had to leave their heaviest piece of luggage. We then left, an hour late, and were met at Maroanetra airport by a young lad in a taxi that looked as if it were held together with spit and baling wire. When we got to the lodge office we were informed that it was too late and we would have to leave in the morning. Grrrrrr!

Early the following gray, overcast, morning found us in a fast boat out of Maroanetra on a lumpy sea hurtling toward our destination with frequent bone jarring thumps from the boat as it smashed down into a trough following a large swell. The ride seemed to end quickly when we pulled up on the beach next to the beautiful Tampolodge. We were the only clients at the lodge. It was situated on the beach adjacent to a river. We moved into our cabin and our guide immediately whisked us away for a birdwalk in the jungle. After 5 species of Vangas, I deliriously returned to the lodge and had a lovely dinner and evening. The following day had us walking along the beach the two km to the park. About halfway there our guide pointed out a bird on a tree. I could not believe it when I glassed my first Helmet Vanga! Woohoo! It was not supposed to be on the beach!

Our guide said that he had never seen one in this locale in the 18 years he has been guiding there.

The other highlight of this trip was the troop of Red-ruffed Lemurs that put on a show for us on a subsequent trip into the Park. This active group moved up and down trees while they were foraging. They would then make these breathtaking leaps between trees to begin anew the dining process. We spent a glorious hour beneath these beautiful beasts before heading back to the lodge and eventually back to Tana.



Next month--Mantadia, Alamazaotra (Perinet), and Indri.

Steven Umland

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS (CBC)

Sonora Area CBC – December 14th

Please sign up early as this helps the compiler, me, to get everything arranged in plenty of time. Call me, **Steven Umland** at (209) 352-6985 or email to stevenum71@gmail.com and sign up! Potluck afterwards will be at 5pm (4.30pm set-up) in the County Ambulance building at 18440 Striker Court, just off of Tuolumne Rd. east of the intersection with Wards Ferry Road.

FEEDER WATCHERS NEEDED FOR SONORA CBC

For those of you who cannot get out in the field on December 14th, you can stay in the comfort and warmth of your own home and tally the birds that come into your yard and/or feeders and send the results to me. If you can do that, contact me and I'll send you flexible guidelines.

Steven Umland

Calaveras County CBC – December 28th

To sign up, please contact me by phone (209)596-0612 or email rbarryboulton@gmail.com. If you've never done it before, or you're a newer birder, I can arrange for you to join an existing group. As last year, there will be no potluck.

Barry Boulton

Wallace-Belotta CBC – December 28

To participate, contact Kasey Foley at (209)473-3904 or kaseyfoley@sbcglobal.net

Roadside Pick-up (rescheduled from Nov. 21)

The next roadside cleanup will be on December 19. We'll car pool from Perko's at 7:30am to start work at 8.00am at the Lake Don Pedro vista parking area on Hwy 120/49. This is an easy one to two mile stroll and we're back at Perko's before 10:00am. Come and join the party!

FIELD TRIPS

Note: All CSAS field trips are open to the public. Children are welcome. As usual, wear muted colors. Wear a hat, use sun protection, bring water and a snack plus sturdy but comfortable shoes. It is fall and the weather is variable, so consider dressing in layers. Bring binoculars, field guides and spotting scopes if you have them. Rain may cancel the trip – see trip details.

CSAS DECEMBER & JANUARY FIELD TRIPS

December 4th & January 1, GCSD

Jeanne Ridgley will lead her regular walks on the GCSD property on Dec 4 and Jan 1.

The property encompasses an area of more than 200 acres of oak, pine and willow habitat with three water storage ponds. 136 species of birds have been seen there since November of 2007. Wintering waterfowl will be returning in the coming weeks, so be ready to greet them.

Meet the group in the GCSD parking lot at 8:00 AM. Bring binoculars and a birding field guide if you have one. Rain will cancel the trip. The walk will last about two-three hours.

If you have any questions, call **Jeanne at 962-7598**.

Jan. 12, 2014. Woodbridge Ecological Reserve, Sandhill Crane Tour

This is a docent led tour from 3:30 to 5:30 ending at the North Unit blind to observe the **Sandhill Cranes** returning to roost. **CSAS has a total of 14 spaces available**, so first-come, first-served! There will be a carpool from Perko's in Sonora at around 1.30pm, and possibly another in Calaveras County – more details after you're registered. Contact:

Ken Smith: (949)922-1455 or kensingz_2@yahoo.com

Stanislaus Audubon Dec/Jan Field Trips

Dec. 7, Eastern Stanislaus County

We'll bird along Cooperstown and other roads in the east county, targeting particularly the many species of raptors that frequent that area in the winter. It will be your best chance of the year to see Bald Eagle, for instance.

Trip leader, Dave Froba 521-7265, froba@comcast.net
We'll finish early afternoon.

Editor's note: call Dave to find out time & place to meet him on location.

Jan 25, Merced National Wildlife Refuge

Trip leader TBA. Contact Dave Froba, 521-7265, froba@comcast.net

In the winter this magnificent refuge attracts waterfowl, shore birds, and others, in the millions.

Mid/late afternoon meeting to enjoy the sunset fly-in of thousands of Sandhill Cranes.

Editor's notes on the Merced NWR trip:

1. Contact Dave to establish meeting time at the NWR.
2. I visited the refuge on Nov 9th & 11th and the Sandhill fly-in against the red sunset was spectacular and noisy. Not only the cranes, but at the far corner overlook point, a pair of Great Horned Owls regaled me as dusk approached and overtook me. Watching their bodies expand to make hooting vocalizations was fascinating. During daylight, other highlights were Long-billed Dowitchers and a Wilson's Snipe and, near that same distant viewpoint, lots of White-faced Ibis – maybe 200, the most that I've ever seen at the refuge.
3. I've placed a video at YouTube showing the Sandhills arriving at sunset with the GHO in attendance. The url: <http://youtu.be/JJg3JC4opKg>

BIRD SIGHTINGS

Groveland Community Services District.

24 Species were seen on the Nov 6 walk. Highlights were Hermit Thrush and Song Sparrow. Then on Nov. 18 I added a Mountain Chickadee to my list, bringing it to 136 species! And, the first Ring-necked Duck of the season showed up.

Jeanne Ridgley

Lake Don Pedro, Oct. 26th

On Saturday a Sharp-shinned Hawk has returned again this fall. For the past several years we have had a Sharpie stay around our property and catch some unwary birds around our feeder. Last year we had a pair and so far this year one has appeared. It will most likely stay through spring. Elevation 1075 feet, blue oak savanna.

John Turner

Bald Eagles on the Stanislaus River, Nov. 14th

This afternoon John Turner and I visited the Middle Fork of the Stanislaus, driving down Camp Nine Road off Parrott's Ferry Road in Calaveras County. At exactly 5.4 miles in from the Parrotts Ferry road junction there is a pull-off area from which you can see down into the river canyon leading west towards New Melones. We noticed that the water was sluggish at that point and not surprising then that we observed 7 Bald Eagles checking out the Kokanee Salmon; one was adult, one late juvenile with the head turning white, and the remainder juveniles. There were no eagles further down the canyon, probably because there were few salmon that far up the canyon; in fact, at the noisy power plant bridge we saw only one solitary salmon! On the way back we were delighted to see a total of 16 Bald Eagles at that same overlook point, and as the salmon numbers (hopefully) increase, we should see more with many deeper in the canyon. You may remember reading that at last year's Christmas Bird Count, over 60 Bald Eagles were counted.

Barry Boulton

CONSERVATION

They're at it again – “death by a thousand cuts”

The current General Plan recognizes some of the unique habitat of Tuolumne County and includes these provisions:

“Require new development which is subject to review under the California Environmental Quality act to achieve ‘no net loss’ of habitat values for Valley Oak Woodland, Serpentine Soils, Old Growth Coniferous Forest, Big Trees Forest, Old Growth Oak, Aspen Grove, Native Perennial Grasslands, Native Grasslands, and Cliff.....”

The Board of Supervisors has been seeking to reduce that protection and so as part of the General Plan update, has set up an “Ad Hoc” committee to recommend weaker language. As you might expect, the committee is composed primarily of mining and development interests with only one environmental voice, that of yours truly. We need more sensible voices at the Ad Hoc meetings that are held at 1pm on the 1st and 3rd Mondays of each month in the Board of Supervisors room on the 4th floor – next meeting is Dec. 2nd. Please join me there.

Tom Parrington

Field Trip Pinnacles Nat. Park ~ Mar. 26 - 28

I will lead daily birding excursions during this mid-week field to Pinnacles NP. Accommodations are either further north on Highway 25 in Hollister, or camping at the park’s Pinnacles Campground just inside the east entrance off Highway 25. For camping information, visit the website www.nps.gov/pinn/planyourvisit/camp.htm. Reservations can be made up to six months in advance, and get booked very quickly, so I advise booking ASAP. For more information on the trip call me at (209)852-2348.

John Turner

EDUCATION COMMITTEE REPORT

Our education program got off to a frenetic start this fall with 15 classroom presentations within 21 days in Tuolumne and Calaveras Counties! Teachers requested info for their 2nd through 5th grade students about bats, spiders (think Halloween!), bees, and birds of prey, and more programs are already scheduled. I have so loved my time back in the classroom with our area’s excellent teachers!

Last week five of us board members accompanied Chinese Camp’s 3rd – 6th grade class 3rd semiannual bird walk in the Red Hills. Over the last 3 years, we have maintained a list of each species seen so we can compare each spring’s and fall’s birds to watch for trends. As to be expected, many of the bird species are found only in one of the two seasons.

Our scholarship committee will be meeting near the beginning of the year to begin the process of organizing and advertising our two \$1000 scholarships we offer each spring to 2 third-year college students majoring in one of the natural sciences, giving preference to those who live or lived in Tuolumne County and Calaveras County. Funding comes from our bird house and book sales, so think Christmas gifts!

Pamela Blair

Editor’s Corner

John Turner and I sometimes make bird presentations to groups who make that request, as we recently gave to a 55+ apartment complex in Jamestown. It won’t surprise you to know that we really enjoy sharing our love of birds and their behaviors with whomever wants to listen and learn, so if you know of any community groups who would like us to do that, please ask them to contact either John or me.

Barry Boulton

Central Sierra Audubon Society - CSAS

Chapter of the National Audubon Society
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www.centralsierraudubon.org

LOGISTICS

General Meetings: Third Wednesday at 7 p.m.
(except July and August). Tuolumne Public Library.

Board Meetings: First Wednesday at 6 p.m.
(Sept. through May). Jamestown Community Hall.

Membership of Audubon & CSAS

If you are not already a member, we would be honored to have you join us. You can join either as a full member of the National Audubon Society which includes dues for CSAS membership but, alternately, you may join as a local member of CSAS in which case you will receive the monthly Squawker newsletter and be privy to all other CSAS activities.

An application form is on the front page of the CSAS website at: www.centralsierraudubon.org

YOUR AUDUBON BOARD

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Barry Boulton, Newsletter	596-0612

rbarryboulton@gmail.com

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