

Sierra Squawker



www.centralsierraudubon.org

February-2014

PROGRAM - FEBRUARY 19th

Bird Conservation in Coffee Growing Regions presented by John Sterling

John will present Smithsonian research that supports the Bird-Friendly Coffee movement. He will discuss why some coffee farms are better than others for birds, why good coffee farms are critical for conservation, and will illustrate his talk with photos of birds from coffee farms in Latin America, the Philippines and Sumatra.



Bay-headed Tanager - John Sterling

John has been a very active birder since 1971 and a professional wildlife biologist since 1981. He has traveled extensively throughout California learning about local bird distribution and is working on a book on the state's avifauna. He has traveled internationally as a guide and ornithologist for many institutions including projects as a Smithsonian ornithologist to Mexico, Ecuador, Peru, Sumatra, Canada and Russia. John currently has his own company specializing in tours, birding classes, research and environmental consulting. His website is www.sterlingbirds.com

Join us at 7 PM, February 19th at the Tuolumne County Library on Greenley Road in Sonora. The public is always welcome and refreshments will be served after the program. Products and publications on a wide range of birding topics are on display at each meeting.

For information please contact David Harden, 533-1668 or email dharden@sonnet.com

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UPCOMING PROGRAMS

- Mar 19** Pete Devine as Dr. Steller - "Steller's Jay"
- Apr 16** Guy Van Cleave - "Bird Evolution"
- May 21** Jack Laws - "Nature Observation"
- June 18** Annual meeting, elections and potluck

CSAS EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH

CSAS is again partnering with the Tuolumne Group of the Sierra Club as our two organizations continue to offer two \$1000 scholarships each year. We have revamped the application (found on-line on our website) and will together conduct interviews of the finalists. These scholarships are awarded to college students after their sophomore year who are pursuing degrees in natural sciences. Preference is given to graduates from either a Tuolumne or Calaveras County high school or to those who attended Columbia College and will have completed two years of undergraduate work with a minimum of a 2.5 GPA. The deadline for this mail-in application is February 28. See the website for details at www.centralsierraudubon.org/

Our very active Education Coordinator, Pamela Blair, received a delightful thank you from Mrs. DeMars and the Twain Harte 5th Graders, saying "Thank you for taking the time to teach our students about Raptors. They enjoy being able to see real examples of different birds important to our local ecosystems. I appreciate the time you volunteered to inspire our students. We all enjoyed your lesson".

Here Pamela is shown in typical action in the classroom, assisted by a friendly tarantula.



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2013 TRAVELOGUE

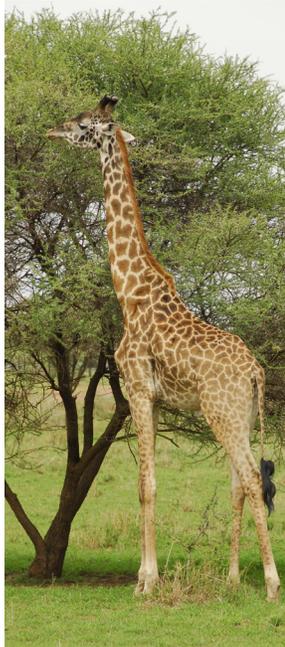
Southern African and Madagascar

by Steven Umland. Part V

Krugers National Park, South Africa was a mythical destination for me. The ultimate high of the isolation evolution of Madagascar was going to be hard to top. Sure, the exotic species that we had observed were hard to beat, but we were back in Africa. It is difficult to describe the wonder of your first encounter with a herd of elephants or zebra. Giraffes feeding off the treetops is a spectacle not to be missed. Indeed, Suzi and I were witness to all these on a previous trip to Kenya in 2005. This time, however, WE HAD OUR OWN CAR!! We were not subject to the restrictions of a paid Safari; we could go where we wanted, stop as long as we like, skip things we have seen a million of (think Impala), and enjoy the trip at our pace.

Krugers needs some explanation before we go on. It is situated in eastern South Africa on the border with Mozambique. At about 300 miles long and 50 to 80 miles wide, it comprises nearly 5 million acres of land. There was one paved road from north to south, and 4 or 5 east-west paved roads. There were many dirt roads that were easily accessible with most cars. Interspersed within its borders are 12 main "Rest Camps" with a smaller number of satellite camps. Tall electrified, fences surround the main camps. Within each camp is a range of accommodations from basic tent camping to multi-family houses. Each camp provides a restaurant and store.

Entrance to the Park and each of the camps is restricted to specific hours. A Leopard and a herd of Water Buffalo held us up on our first afternoon out. On our way back to the camp where the gates would close at 5:30, we were perplexed with the 30 mph speed limit but adhered to it. We were 2 miles away when we rounded a corner where the Park Police were citing a car that had passed us minutes ago. Whew! They closed the gates after we entered the camp. When the gate guard was asked of the consequences of being late, he said that up to 15 minutes usually nothing happens. The violators were given the stern face and passed through. After that, the park rangers were summoned and fines were levied. Being an hour late is about \$100 US. When driving through the Park, you are not allowed out of your car, for obvious, pointy-toothed reasons. There are about 6 or 7 "get out" points around the Park where you can explore some attraction. Most of the longer bridges have areas in their center where you can exit the car. There is NO roaming around the



Park on foot (stiff fines).

When the gates open at 6 AM, there is usually a line of cars waiting to go out searching for game. We never found a "best time" to find animals but usually the middle of the afternoon was the worst. Staking out water holes worked as often as not. We would get the map of the park out and drive. There were sightings boards in the camps but, again, not always reliable. Our best technique for sighting game involved finding parked cars by the side of the road. The quality of the sighting was directly proportional to the number of cars in the group. If you could drive through, you could count on a lion or leopard being in view. Mostly, though, we would pick some roads around the camp we were in and go on a 3 to 4 hour "drive" keeping our eyes peeled for whatever we could see.

Next month: Mammals and Birds and Crocs, Oh My!

Steven Umland

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 winter 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 UPCOMING FIELD TRIPS

February 2nd - Knights Ferry "String of Pearls"

On an all-day field trip to the "String of Pearls", we hope to see lots of waterbirds plus others too. Meet either at Perko's Sonora, at 8am to carpool, or at the Knights Ferry Visitors Center at 8.30am. Some of the walking will be over stony walkways, so boots are recommended. Bring water, food and scopes if available since some of the birds will be rather distant.

Trip leader: Paolo Maffei 532-8426

February 5th, GCSD

Jeanne Ridgley will, as usual, lead the Bird Walk at the Groveland Community Services property at 18966 Ferretti Road, Groveland. 136 species of birds have been seen there since November of 2007, and 27 species were seen on the Jan 1 Bird Walk. Highlights were wintering waterfowl: Wood Ducks, Ring-necked Ducks, Bufflehead and one Ruddy Duck.

Meet the group in the GCSD parking lot at 8:00 AM. Rain will cancel the trip. The walk will last about two-three hours. If you have any questions, call **Jeanne at 962-7598**.

February 22, Salt Springs Valley, Calaveras County

We will take our annual field trip to Salt Springs Valley where we usually see a wide spectrum of birds, although the drought will doubtless have its impact.

Meet at 9am about a quarter of a mile along Rock Creek Road from its junction with highway 4 near Copperopolis. We'll lunch at the resort, so bring food and water etc.

Trip leader: Steven Umland 352-6985

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FIELD TRIP REPORTS & SIGHTINGS

Woodbridge Ecological Reserve, January 12, 2014

Sixteen of us arrived at the South parking lot on Woodbridge Rd near Lodi about 3:00 in the afternoon. We were greeted by a 20+ mph, brisk cold wind out of the North. While waiting for the docents, we observed several Sandhill Cranes, 22 White Pelicans (the docent was excited as White Pelicans had not been reported at the Reserve for a number of years), White-fronted Geese (see photo), Tundra Swans, Pintails, Northern Shovelers and of course American Coots.

We were escorted to the "blind" at the North parking lot, where they shared information about the reserve, maps, coffee, cookies and shelter from the wind. They presented a history of the reserve and of the evolution of the Sandhill Cranes, one of the oldest bird species in the world. We were introduced to their life cycle, physical characteristics, behavior, and how their migration patterns developed. At dusk, some of the Sandhill Cranes returned to roost in the marshy wetlands, thrilling us with their majestic grace and beautiful calls. The docent counted 67 Sandhill Cranes. He speculated that many of the birds may have migrated to the Merced NWR rather than fight the high headwinds to our location.

We also saw American Widgeon, Green-winged Teal, Long-billed Dowitchers, Greater Yellowlegs, Black-necked Stilts, Killdeers, Least Sandpipers, Ring-billed and California Gulls, American Egrets, White-tailed Kites, Red-tailed Hawks, Northern Harriers, and Red-winged Blackbirds. The



Greater White-fronted Geese pass the Refuge in formation

Docents reported a Golden Eagle was present just moments before we arrived. As we say in my house – "This trip is a keeper!"

Ken Smith

January 6 - Pinecrest Birding

I just returned home from a beautiful, unusually dry winter week in Pinecrest where I was interested in seeing what birds might still be there. A group of coyotes serenaded us the first night and then over the next few days I saw the usual wintering birds, all very active, with a few seasonal unusuals* for me. Steller's Jay, Red Breasted Nuthatch, Northern Flicker, White Headed Woodpeckers (several squabbles among them), Hairy Woodpecker, Mountain Chickadee, Common Ravens 30+ (I scanned them carefully looking for a Red Tailed Hawk or Bald Eagle in the mix, no luck), *Mourning Dove, *Spotted Towhee plus a *Mystery flock of 5-6 possible Pine Grosbeaks...I've seen them near my cabin before.

Pinecrest Lake has been lowered to extreme, leaving the dam with 20' or so for PG&E repairs, but on the remaining water I saw 10-12 Common Mergansers with a few darker, smaller diving ducks among them that were out of my binocular range for positive ID.

Jackie Bobrosky

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Eagle Survey on New Melones, January 11th

Several CSAS members participated in the annual Eagle Survey. No Golden Eagles were sighted, but although the Kokanee Salmon have not been around in the numbers we saw last year, we counted in total 42 Bald Eagles compared with last year's record (since 1996) of 51. We also saw Ospreys (only 1 or 2), Great Blue Herons, Western and Eared Grebes, Common Mergansers and Double-crested Cormorants plus one or two Hawks and Kestrels.

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CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS

Calaveras CBC - December 28th

There's little doubt that the recent drought years are taking a toll on our avian populations, although we don't know if breeding numbers are down, or whether the birds spend winter somewhere else. At all events, counts in each area were lower than in previous years, and across all areas in our count circle, we saw only 4,783 birds for a total of 74 species.

Sonora CBC - December 14th

December 14th was a beautiful day for the 43 participants in the 29th Sonora Christmas Bird Count. Beneath the crystal clear, shooting-star-filled skies of 3 AM, I started the Count looking for owls. After 3 hours of cruising the back roads south of Highway 108 I heard 2

Great-horned Owls and a record 10 (for our Count) Western Screech Owls. Other highs for the last 10 years included Wild Turkey (143), Turkey Vulture (95), Bald Eagle (5), Eurasian Collared-Dove (24), Hermit Thrush (61), and Phainopepla (33).

No new species were added. Birds that were seen in very low numbers (far below average) included American Green-winged Teal (1), Common Merganser (6), Golden-crowned Kinglet (7), California Towhee (155), Savannah Sparrow (4), Pine Siskin (2!), and American Goldfinch (8).

Looking through the data for the past 10 years show no alarming trends. The numbers seen were just below average (due to the hard freeze just before the Count?) and the number of species seen was about the average.

Steven Umland

CONSERVATION

News - The Rubber Duck Surfaces again! Emigrant Wilderness at Risk from McClintock.

Our Congressman has again attacked protections given to wilderness areas in H.R. 3606 introduced in the House late last year titled Emigrant Wilderness Historical Use Preservation Act of 2013 which should be called the “*Packers and Cattlemans Protection Act*”. It would preclude any further restriction on activities such as horse packing and cattle grazing than was allowed in 1975 when the area received wilderness protection. This bill would restrict the Forest Service from acting to protect the Emigrant even if in the ensuing years trails have gotten worse from too many hooves, meadows and streams damaged or destroyed by overgrazing, and even though endangered species such as the Yellow Legged Frog and Yosemite Toad are closer to extinction.

Tom Parrington, Conservation Chair

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DONATIONS

For a non-profit, CSAS is unusually reticent about asking for money, but it is needed for our activities, particularly the educational, scholarship, monthly public programs and conservation work, so you might think about contributing at your leisure. The CSAS Board would like to thank Bob and Jean Hackamack, longtime activists, for their recent contribution to CSAS.

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ADOPT-a-HIGHWAY

Our next highway 49/140 clean-up day will be Feb. 21. Meet at Perko’s Sonora at 7.30am to carpool to our location. This is always a nice social time, so please join us for an hour or so of pleasant company and community service.

Tom Harrington 694-8564

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MYSTERY BIRD

Each Squawker will carry a bird photo for you to identify and perhaps gain a little insight into that species’ lifestyle. The answer will be published on the CSAS Facebook page and in the following month’s Squawker. This mystery bird has at least two significant attributes that you may like to note. If you wish, you can email me with your comments, or comment on the photo in Facebook.



Photo: John Turner

Last month’s mystery bird was a **Hooded Merganser**.

Barry Boulton

Central Sierra Audubon Society - CSAS

Chapter of the National Audubon Society
P.O. Box 3047
Sonora, CA 95370

www.centralsierraaudubon.org

General Meetings: Third Wednesday at 7pm (except July and August), in the Tuolumne Public Library on Greenley Road, Sonora.

Board Meetings: First Wednesday at 6pm (Sept. through May) in the Jamestown Community Hall.

Membership of National Audubon & CSAS

If you are not already a member, we would be honored to have you join us. You can join as a full member of National Audubon Society which includes dues for CSAS membership or, 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.centralsierraaudubon.org

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