

Central Sierra Audubon Society

# Sierra Squawker



[www.centralsierraaudubon.org](http://www.centralsierraaudubon.org)

JANUARY - 2016

## PUBLIC PROGRAM - JANUARY 20

### “SIERRA MAMMALS”

### Their diversity, ecosystem roles, and conservation

Presented by John Harris

A transect across the Central Sierra Nevada could cross the ranges of more species of mammals than could be found in most states. What accounts for this diversity, and what species are unique to the Sierra? John will talk about these questions as well as the important roles of mammals in natural ecosystems and some of the conservation challenges faced by our diverse mammal fauna.

John Harris is Professor Emeritus of Biology at Mills College in Oakland, California, where he taught courses in ecology, evolution, natural history and vertebrate zoology from 1986-2013. John began his interest in mammals while working as an undergraduate assistant in a study of chipmunks in 1975. As a graduate student at UC Davis he studied kangaroo mice and other small mammals on Mono Lake's dunes. His research included studies of desert rodents at Mono Lake, Willow Flycatchers at the Nature Conservancy's Kern River Preserve, San Joaquin antelope squirrels and Mojave ground squirrels. John is the author of *Mammals of the Mono Lake-Tioga Pass Region* as well as a number of scientific publications. He lives near Oakdale and is active in Stanislaus Audubon Society and the Central Valley Bird Club.



American Badger      *Photo: John Harris*

The public is always welcome at our monthly programs and refreshments are served after the program. Products and publications on a wide range of birding topics are on display and on sale at each meeting.

For further information, please call **David Harden** at (209)533-1668 or email [dharden@sonnet.com](mailto:dharden@sonnet.com)

## UPCOMING 2016 PUBLIC PROGRAMS

**Feb 17, 2016:**      **Richard Anderson** “Birds of the Midway Islands”      **Apr 20, 2016:**      **Pete Devine** as Galen Clark

**Mar 16, 2016:**      **Tonya Nilsson** “South Georgia Island”      **May 18, 2016:**      **Tom Hahn** “The White-crowned Sparrow”

## CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS REPORTS

### Groveland CBC - December 16

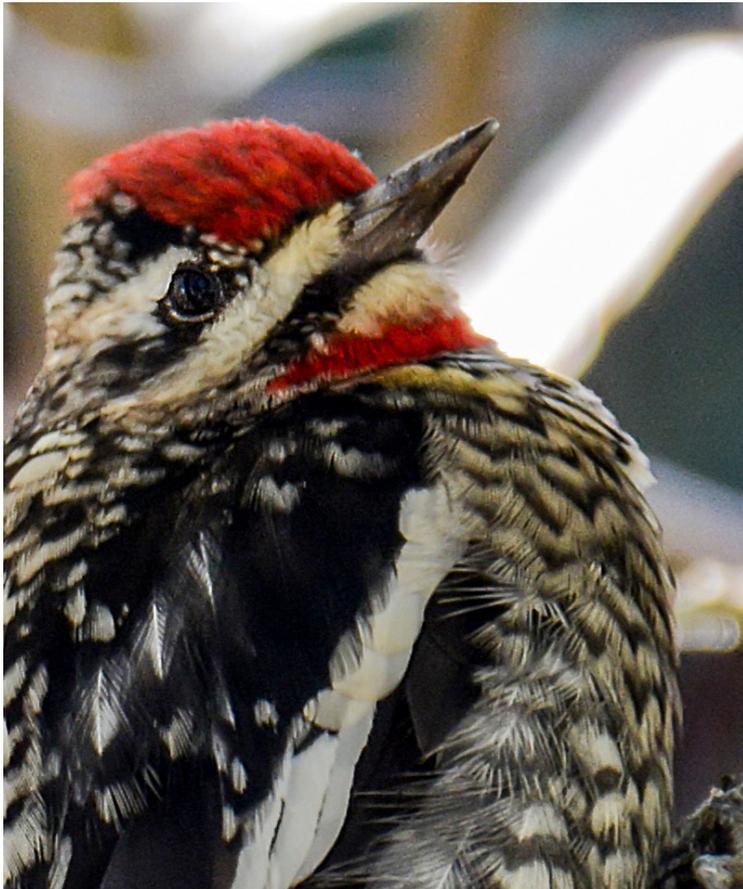
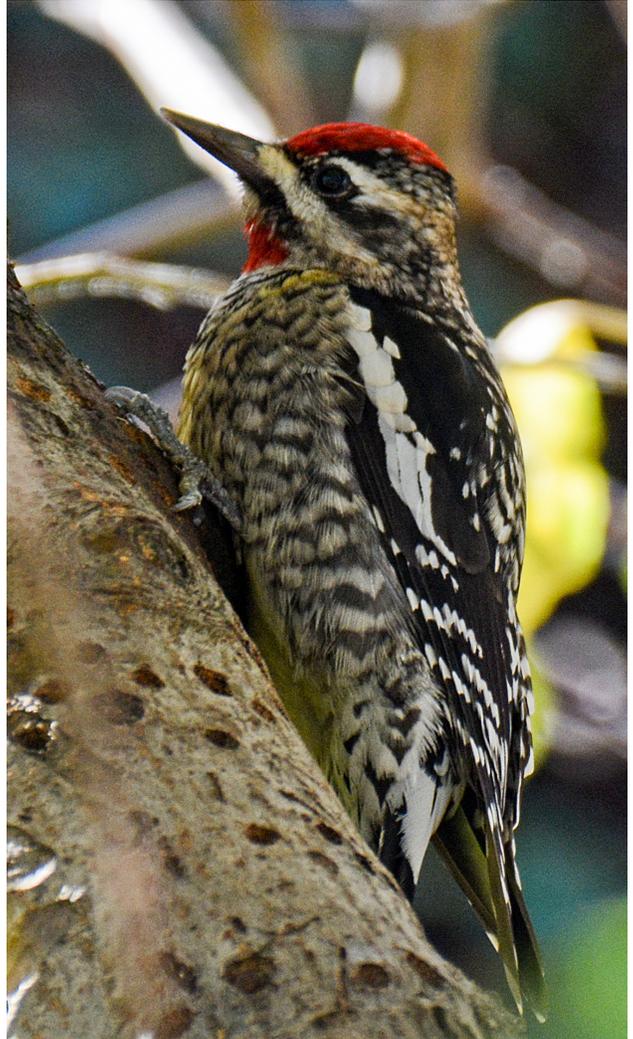
#### **A Personal View by Barry Boulton**

**W**e enjoyed near-perfect weather for this event and I was fortunate to be counting the Moccasin Creek & power plant area with Ron and Barbara McDow and John Sutake where we saw a total of 48 species - pretty good for a winter's day! At Moccasin Creek several **Rock Wrens** were busily foraging, but one in particular was quite upset at our presence and very noisily protested in typical feisty manner.

**T**he highlight was to be able to leisurely watch a rare **Red-naped Sapsucker** busily foraging and excavating sap wells on a pear tree right by the power plant itself. It wasn't at all concerned about our presence (although, of course, we didn't crowd it) to the extent that it was still busily working when we left.

**I**t's plumage caused some discussion because - as you see in the photo - there was no red nape which, of course, you would expect to see in a bird of this name! Additionally, the normal sheer black bib was absent as you can see in the expanded photo.

**D**ue to lack of the red nape we considered the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, but that's an extremely rare (in the West) East Coast bird so we discounted it. Then we considered a hybrid because sapsuckers commonly inter-breed. However, the problem



then would be which one? Well, the Red-breasted appears unlikely because its head and upper body are almost completely red and we would expect a lot of that to carry over into a hybrid.

**S**o, we came to the conclusion that this really was a Red-naped Sapsucker with some variations in its plumage which, according to Cornell, is not unusual.

**I**t was outside its normal range of the Rocky Mountains and Great Basin, but is occasionally spotted in the West, so we were the lucky ones on this day!

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## A (SHORT) TALE OF TWO COUNTS

by Steven Umland, CBC Organizer

It was the best of times, it was not quite the worst of times...

Wednesday, December 16, was a beautiful day for the restart of the **Groveland CBC**. The day began around 25o in some spots and soared to about 45o and it was clear and calm all day. From Moccasin on Smith Peak Lookout Rd. and Pine Mtn Lake and surroundings to Lake McClure and Coulterville, 17 birders scoured the 177 square miles looking, listening and counting every bird (well, not the chickens and tame ducks and geese!). Preliminary results show about 4000 birds of eighty species being counted.

The birds of the day turned out to be a Greater Roadrunner found by John and Sandi Turner along with the Red-naped Sapsucker. Fair numbers of waterfowl were seen on the local water impoundments.

On the other hand, the **Sonora CBC** dawned (oh wait, I don't think the sun EVER came out) cold and rainy. I got up at 2:30 to go owling but the driving rain kept me indoors until 5 AM when I just had to brave the weather. No owls were seen or heard. Grrrrrr. It stayed cold and rainy for most of the day. Preliminary scans of the data appear to show low numbers and species of birds. I do not have all the data yet so things may change a lot. I will not guess at the total individuals seen but we might have upward of 90 species to report. Returning to the Count were a Snow Goose on Phoenix Lake and what may be the same one seen out past the Diestels on Bald Mtn. Rd. Both were in the company of Canada Geese. A Red-naped Sapsucker also made an appearance after a one year hiatus. On the upper parts of the Count Area, things were very quiet bird wise. The areas lower down kicked out more birds.

All in all, people had a good time. I will have more to report in next month's Squawker. I would like to thank all of you who endured the elements to make this 31st Sonora CBC a great success!

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### RECENT BIRD SIGHTINGS

November 30

We spent a wintry few days in Pinecrest over Thanksgiving. The weather delivered 4-6" of fluffy snow and temperatures down to the low teens at night. The Lake remained relatively high and hosted some waterfowl. At the far end of the lake there were consistently 1-2 dozen **Common Mergansers**. Through the scope, I also picked up three **Common Goldeneyes**, appearing to be two males and a female. There were a few groups of **Buffleheads** scattered

around the lake and some fished nearer to the beach area.

There was also a **Great Blue Heron** fishing from the rocks. While scanning the rocks near the heron, I picked up about half a dozen **Western Bluebirds** flitting about.

One gull present; with a full ring on its bill, not extending to the tip, and its medium size, I took it to be a **Ring-billed Gull**.

Other regulars included **Ravens, Mountain Chickadees, White-headed Woodpeckers, and Red-breasted Nuthatches**.

Ellen Reintjes, Pinecrest

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### BIRD BEHAVIORS

November 28

Along Rock River-Willms Roads towards sunset, we observed **American Crows** forming a **kettle** south of the Clay Pits. They were arriving in pairs or small groups, all heading towards the kettle from as far away as the Willms Ranch and Willms Rd & Hwy 108.

Earlier in the day, we were observing a **Sharp-shinned Hawk** shrouding its prey on the ground next to the red barn W end T-Bar J when suddenly it lifted off and flew in a direct line to a tree next to us and attacked or was attacked by a **Merlin**. There was much screeching as the birds clashed. The Sharpie moved on into the tree and out of sight while the Merlin flew to the top of another tree near where the attack occurred and remained there in full view, in the top for a good 5-8 minutes. This clash all happened within 50' to 150' from our position. The clash was all over in a couple of seconds. What a show!

Ken Smith

December 9

In downtown Berkeley today I heard a commotion overhead where a flock of **Crows**, accompanied by a lone (unidentified) gull was noisily mobbing a female **Cooper's Hawk**, presumably one of our local resident pair. The Cooper's very adroitly headed for a coastal redwood where her aerobatic skills enabled her to go through the tree and out the other side to easily avoid the less capable mob. At this point the crows and gull flew their separate ways, and I'm left to ponder the question of why the gull joined in the mobbing as there was no issue of territoriality or food for it.

John Sutake, Berkeley & Arnold

December 15, 2015

Phoenix Lake Reservoir was at 45 deg, clear, calm with some ice on this side of the lake. Suddenly, two **Bald**

Eagles rocketed out from their perch on the west side of the lake. One landed on the west side of the island while the other disappeared behind and to the east of it. When I got over there the eagle was 'swimming' back to the island from about 30' out. When it got to the island it showed the Coot it had caught. Both birds then flew off to the west.

Steven Umland

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**CSAS FIELD TRIPS**

**GCSD Wednesday Walks - Jan 6th & Feb 3rd**

The first Wednesday of the month Bird Walk at the Groveland Community Services property at 18966 Ferretti Road, Groveland will be led by Jeanne Ridgley on Jan 6 and Feb 3. The property encompasses an area of more than 200 acres of oak, pine and willow habitat with three ponds.

Winter ducks that were seen on our Dec 2 Walk: American Wigeon, Green-winged Teal, Ring-necked Duck and Bufflehead. Three sparrow species were seen: Lincoln's, White-crowned and Golden-Crowned Sparrows.

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 two-three hours. If you have any questions, call Jeanne at 962-7598.

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*Commonly we stride through the out-of-doors too quickly to see more than the most obvious and prominent of things. For observing nature, the best pace is a snail's pace.*

**Edwin Way Teale (1899 - 1980)**  
**American Naturalist & Writer**

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**SNOW GOOSE FESTIVAL**  
**CHICO, CALIFORNIA**

**January 27 (Wednesday) – January 31 (Sunday)**

Birders and nature enthusiasts of all ages are invited to attend the 17th Annual Snow Goose Festival, one of the premier birding events in California. This action-packed 5-day event celebrates the millions of waterfowl migrating along the Pacific Flyway that call the Northern Sacramento Valley their home during the winter months. It also gives our local community an opportunity to rediscover the abundant treasures the North State has to offer all year round, from wholesome foods and delectable wines to inspirational artists and gifted musicians. And with the wide variety of engaging youth activities, there truly is something for everyone at the Snow Goose Festival!

Renowned outdoor and nature photographer, George Lepp, joins the Festival this year as our Keynote Speaker at the "Gathering of Wings" Banquet & Silent Auction on Saturday evening. George will share some of his greatest bird photography success stories, and some very funny failures, as he employs creative tactics and techniques to get the winning shot in locations around the world.

Don't miss this special event!

- Over 70 guided field trips & workshops
- Junior Naturalist Activities
- Snow Goose Festival Wildlife Art Exhibit & Reception
- Banquet & Silent Auction
- Keynote Speaker, George D. Lepp, photographer
- Exhibits & Vendors Galore!

**Check it out at: <http://www.snowgoosefestival.org/>**

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**Central Sierra Audubon Society - CSAS**

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

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

**Board Meetings:** Third Wednesday at 3pm (Sept. - May) at the Blood Bank Conference Room behind Rite Aid on Greenley Road, Sonora.

**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.centralsierraudubon.org/join-us/](http://www.centralsierraudubon.org/join-us/)

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[rbarryboulton@gmail.com](mailto:rbarryboulton@gmail.com)

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