

Central Sierra Audubon Society

Sierra Squawker



www.centralsierraaudubon.org

SEPTEMBER - 2016

PUBLIC PROGRAM - SEPTEMBER 21 at 7pm

"WHAT IS BIRD RESEARCH IN YOSEMITE TELLING US?"

Presented by
SARAH STOCK

Sarah will share highlights from Yosemite's bird research projects. Learn how Great Gray Owls and Spotted Owls responded to the Rim Fire. Hear about the nation's oldest songbirds and Black-headed Grosbeak migration. Lastly, hear the inspirational story of how Peregrine Falcons recovered from the brink of extinction in Yosemite.

Sarah Stock is the Terrestrial Wildlife Biologist at Yosemite National Park where she has overseen the Park's program for land-animal biodiversity since 2006. She studies wildlife ranging from songbird population dynamics to the ecology of bats. She earned her Master's degree at the University of Idaho where she focused on the migration ecology of forest owls. Before moving to Yosemite Valley with her family, she studied birds in locations ranging from Alaska to the South Pacific islands. Sarah has authored many technical reports and peer-reviewed publications on wildlife ecology and management.



UPCOMING 2016 PUBLIC PROGRAMS

October 19, 2016: Nancy Muleady-Mecham, "Inside Birds: Avian Structure and Function"

November 17, 2016: Clancy McConnell. Twice our scholarship recipient - graduating in June. TBD

December 17, 2016: Sonora CBC
December 14, 2016: Groveland CBC
January 1, 2017: Calaveras CBC

January 18, 2017: Program TBD

FALL MIGRATION IS HAPPENING!

Even though we're still sweltering in late August summer heat, the migratory birds know that it's time to begin preparations for the autumn journey to warmer climes; indeed, many have already started. I recently observed a flock of around 50 Swainson's Hawks congregated in a recently-mowed alfalfa field adjacent to the San Joaquin River near Modesto. This hawk is quite unusual in being a gregarious species; we tend to think of hawks as being territorial and loners, but for the Swainson's, that's not the case. Even in the breeding season when the adult pair defends the territory around their nest, they often forage in groups with other Swainson's for rodents and other small mammals in agricultural areas and grasslands – particularly mowed or flooded alfalfa fields these days. Then, in late August and early September, large flocks of immatures and post-breeding adults congregate to prepare for migration by feasting and fattening, mostly on grasshoppers, before migrating down as far as Argentina in large flocks during daylight. The flock that I saw in mid-August was probably early formation of one such migrating flock. Incidentally, in the same field were around 200 White-faced Ibis plus several Great Blue Herons and Great Egrets.



Swainson's Hawk foraging
Photo - Barry Boulton

Meanwhile, along the coastline, other migrants are arriving. John Sutake and I watched a flock of Semipalmated Plovers feeding voraciously in the Albany mudflats earlier this week in a mixed group along with Western Sandpipers. Also in the same area John has very recently seen Godwits, Whimbrels, Long-billed Curlews, Red-necked Phalaropes and Black Turnstones, so the Pacific Flyway migration is now well under way.

Down at the Merced NWR, re-flooding is under way and Sandhill Cranes (Lesser) are expected to return from south-eastern Alaska around the middle of September, so I'll organize a field trip later in the autumn to enable us to observe their activities.



Semipalmated Plovers foraging with Western Sandpipers
Photo - Barry Boulton

The message is – keep your eyes peeled for the migrating species as they come through. As you see them, please list them on CSAS Birds so that I can mention them in the October newsletter.

Barry Boulton

.....

SIGHTINGS & BEHAVIORS

Thursday, Aug. 4th at 3:00 pm

Jan and Rick Baird (neighbors and fellow Audubon Members) stopped by the lake on their way home and spotted an American Avocet down by the shore along Lori Lane. Jan kindly came by and let me know. I went down after our visit and it was still there! I posted to eBird. The sighting came up as rare. Just thought I would pass on the observation. Here's the full count: 1 American Avocet, 31 Canada Goose, 2 Acorn Woodpecker, 2 Mallard, 2 Brewer's Blackbird, 1 Lesser Goldfinch, 1 Turkey Vulture, and I could hear a White-breasted Nuthatch nearby. The goose that looks like a hybrid Emperor Goose/Canada Goose was also present. I have seen this goose off and on since the beginning of June.

Kit DeGear, Phoenix Lake reservoir, Elevation 2400'

August 5

On my way home last night, I stopped at Phoenix Lake to take a photo of the spectacular sky. As I was pulling into a parking spot, I saw an American Avocet foraging next to the shore.

Steven Umland

August 16

We saw our first Bufflehead of the fall at Pinecrest lake on Tuesday morning around 10 AM. It was a female flying at the far end of the lake.

Ellen Reintjes, Pinecrest

August 22

This morning at about 8, I was sitting in my gazebo when I heard a Belted Kingfisher rattle its way overhead. It was only the second time in 20 years that this species showed up as a yard bird. It made its presence known for several minutes. About 10 minutes after the Kingfisher stopped vocalizing, I heard a thrashing in the leaves nearby; expecting one of the numerous towhees that are present, I was so pleased to see a California Thrasher just 15" away.

Steven Umland

August 22

First of season (FOS) female Western Tanager, Yellow Warbler, and a young male Common Yellowthroat. The Yellowthroat likes the horsetails and reeds around the water feature – and he's a new species for here; YEAH! Also, FOS Western Bluebirds in the bird bath.

Currently it looks like Groveland will be losing 80% of the trees, both conifers and cedars, and some oaks too. It is a picture of devastation. I wonder about what will happen to the birds of the area. I don't know what you call an oak environment without conifers at 3000 feet, and no wet lands. I do not know what birds this environment will support, perhaps with the more open areas, more rodents and that will bring more hawks. Will the Steller's leave? I am sure that will happen and for me, they are my year-round companions. The Steller's nest here, and leave the juveniles for me to raise. Currently, I have about 8 dead pine trees, but I am preparing myself to lose them all, and I have about 25 mature big pines and cedars. My tree guy says I may save the few that are in my gardens, but I have lost two that received consistent water.

Carol Rosalind, Groveland



Common Yellowthroat
Photo - Carol Rosalind

August 23

Ken & Eve's Ramble - we stopped at the Rock River Pond near the 18801 gate on our way home from Modesto and were surprised to see these birds actively feeding. I suspect the lowered water level helps to concentrate the fish/amphibian populations - like fishing in a bucket? 27 White Pelicans, 17 Mallards female/juvenile, 6 Pied-billed Grebes, 2 Great Blue Herons, 1 Great Egret, 2 Killdeer, 2 blackbird sp., 4 possible American Coot/Common Moorhen juveniles at the reeds on SW side of the pond. They appeared to be brownish & grey depending how they turned in the sunlight.

Ken & Eve Smith, Chinese Camp

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS - JUST AROUND THE CORNER!

Save one or more dates for our local CBCs - **December 14 for Groveland**, **December 17 for Sonora** and **January 1, 2017, for Calaveras County**.

The annual Christmas Bird Count was started in 1900. Frank Chapman, then an officer of a young club called The Audubon Society, decided to stage a protest to the annual "Side Hunt" where teams would compete to see who could kill the most animals. 27 people participated in the first "Christmas Bird Census". They counted birds in 25 different areas from Toronto, Canada to Pacific Grove, CA. Most of the counts were centered in the Northeast. Those 27 people saw a whopping 90 species of birds! The Count has grown so that last year, 2505 counts tallied 58,878,071 individuals! AMAZING! During the 2012-13 count, Yanayacu, on the eastern slope of the Andes, counted 529 species. It was the most of any count, ever.

Next month I will talk about how the data is used.

Steven Umland

September 7 & October 5 - GCS D Walk

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 the June 6 Bird Walk 35 species were seen or heard. Highlights included two Great Horned Owls being chased from tree to tree by Western Scrub-Jays, and four families of Wood Ducks.

Meet the group in the GCS D parking lot at 800AM.

Jeanne at 962-7598

CITIZEN SCIENCE - eBird

I am going to try to get more of you to use eBird in the upcoming months. eBird is an invaluable and easy to use, tool. With little time invested you can add to a database that stores information from all over the world. I use it whenever I am out in the field (whichever state or country). I use it when I am out working in the yard. To give an example of how powerful it is, in May of 2015, 9.5 MILLION bird observations were added to the database. Over a quarter BILLION observations have been recorded to date. That is an incredible amount of data for researchers to use. People even add historical checklists. I am currently entering data from the mid-70s when I was taking an Ornithology class and had to take impeccable notes.

With eBird, you can do a multitude of tasks, from planning trips to keeping lists of the birds you see—anywhere. There are two main ways to use eBird—you can enter your data into your computer when you return from your outing or from the field with the use of a smartphone.

Next month we will start with basic use of the program. For those adventuresome souls, download the app from the Apple or Android app store and start using it.

Steven Umland

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/

YOUR AUDUBON BOARD

Tom Parrington, President	(209)928-3835
Walt Kruse, VP Conservation	(707)548-1829
David Harden, VP Programs	(209)533-1668
Jeanne Ridgley, Secretary	(209)962-7598
Linda Millsbaugh, Treasurer	(209)586-9557
Ken Smith, Field Trips	(949)922-1455
Pattie Henderson, Membership	(209)586-2169
Pamela Blair, Education	(209)533-1668
Jan Jorn-Baird, Publicity	(209)532-1106
Barry Boulton, Newsletter Editor	(209)596-0612

rbarryboulton@gmail.com

YOUR AUDUBON COMMITTEES

Ron & Barbara McDow, Bird Box Trail	(650)391-5277
Tom Harrington, Book Sales	(209)694-8564
Anthea Neilson, Hospitality	(209)533-0360
Pamela Blair, Scholarship	(209)533-1668