

# Sierra Squawker

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



February - 2017

**PUBLIC PROGRAM - FEBRUARY 15th at 7pm**

## “Birds of Alcatraz”

**Presented by Tori Seher**

Alcatraz Island, known for its military history and infamous federal prison, is also home to a rich variety of natural resources including regionally significant populations of nesting waterbirds. The island supports the only nesting colonies of Brandt's and Pelagic cormorants in San Francisco Bay, and the largest nesting colony of Western Gulls. There are also nesting Pigeon Guillemots, California Gulls, Black-crowned Night-Herons, Snowy Egrets, Black Oystercatchers, and Great Blue Herons.

This presentation will cover the nine species of waterbirds nesting on Alcatraz, including their ecology and current population status. We'll discuss why these birds are significant to the area, how disturbance to the birds can affect their breeding success, and actions taken to help protect these birds.



Tori Seher has worked for the Golden Gate National Recreation Area since 2011. As the biologist on Alcatraz Island she provides leadership in the protection and management of nesting bird colonies. Prior to working on Alcatraz, Tori was the Wildlife Biologist overseeing the Human-Bear Management Program in Yosemite National Park for eight years. Tori holds a bachelor's degree in Wildlife Conservation Biology from Arizona State University and a master's degree in Geography: Resource Mgmt & Environmental Planning from San Francisco State University.

Join us at **7 PM, February 15th** in the **Tuolumne County Library** **on Greenley Road in Sonora** to enjoy this presentation. 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.

### **UPCOMING 2017 PUBLIC PROGRAMS**

**March 15, 2017:**

**David Wimpfheimer**  
The Birds of Alaska

**April 19, 2017:**

**Steven Umland**  
How to instal & use eBird

**May 17, 2017:**

**Tom Hahn**  
The Birds of the High Sierra

**June xx, 2017:**

**Annual Meeting, Potluck and**  
**Election of CSAS Officers**

## SIGHTINGS & BEHAVIORS

Dec 31, 2016

**D**riving along Beckwith Road west of Modesto in the early pm, I noticed lots of bird activity in one field. On stopping, I saw lots - probably 100s - of Killdeer, plus Long-billed Curlew, plus a flock (maybe 50 - 100) of a medium-sized shore bird that was a new species for me. The dark spot behind the eye, the speckled chest and the bill color identified it as the **Pacific Golden Plover**, most likely a juvenile.

**Barry Boulton**

Jan 2, 2017

**W**e moved to Calaveras County in March of 2016 and our property borders BLM land. Past few weeks we have seen 2 **Bald Eagles** in these dead trees about ¼ to 1/2 mile from our home out our back window - the crows keep chasing them off.

**Deana Corsa**

Jan 6, 2017

**V**isited Staten Island today and saw lots of Sandhill Cranes (Greater), although with so much water around they were all over the place, not concentrated in one area. On going to the popular Woodbridge Road area to watch the Sandhill fly-in (which didn't happen!), I was able for the first time to actually photograph a **"Black" Merlin**. As John Turner told me "*the heavy vertical and contrasting streaking indicate a Pacific (Black) Merlin which people some consider a subspecies. There are considered to be two other sub-species: Taiga (medium gray) and Prairie (light gray)*".



**A**ccording to Birds of the Sierra Nevada (Pandolfino and Beedy), the Taiga sub-species is the most common Merlin here in the Sierra, arriving in early Fall, moving below snow line as the winter storms hit, and then migrating out by end of April. So, this is the time to look out for them!

**A**lso along Woodbridge Road there was a very noisy Belted Kingfisher that constantly returned to perch on the overhead wires and rattle away in their common fashion.

**Barry Boulton**

Jan 17, 2017

I had a great day going down Rock Creek Road and up Coo-  
perstown Rd. I have been chasing the **Mountain Bluebird** without success for 3 years, but today, there they were, everywhere I looked! The sexual dimorphism (differences between sexes) is really quite striking as you see here, male on left).



*Mountain Bluebird pair - Carol Rosalind*

Also spotted a Merlin with a European Starling kill, a Golden Eagle near a picked clean carcass, most likely a horse. And our wintering Say's Phoebe and **Lewis' Woodpecker**. Only 5 sparrows, not species but birds; I saw more Prairie Falcons than Sparrows!

**Carol Rosalind**



*Lewis' Woodpecker - Carol Rosalind*

## UPCOMING FIELD TRIPS

### **Feb. 1 & March 1 - GCSD Wednesday Walk**

**T**he 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 Feb 1 and Mar 1. The property encompasses an area of more than 200 acres of oak, pine and willow habitat with three water storage ponds.

The Jan 4 Bird Walk was canceled due to rain.

**B**irders who wish to bird at GCSD must be accompanied by an authorized birder and have signed an Agreement and Release from Liability Form.

**M**eet 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.

Jeanne Ridgley (209)962-7598

## February 11 – Salt Springs Valley

**O**n Saturday, February 11, Steven Umland will lead our annual field trip to Salt Springs Valley near Copperopolis. On previous outings to this area we have seen meadowlarks, eagles, falcons, various types of hawks and many other species. We will have lunch in the picnic area at Salt Springs Valley Reservoir and probably walk out onto the dam. Salt Springs Valley Resort has a nice picnic area and restrooms.

**T**here is a \$10 per car charge for day use, so we will try to carpool as much as possible. Meet me at the pond on Rock Creek Rd., just off Highway 4 at Copperopolis at 8:00 a.m. Bring a lunch, water, binoculars, field guides, spotting scopes if available and wear layered clothing to accommodate the weather.

Steven Umland (209)352-6985 or stevenum71@gmail.com

## Merced NWR Overnight Visit – March 1 & 2

**T**his refuge is a spectacular place for watching Sandhill Cranes (about 10,000 currently), Snow & Ross's Geese (estimated 60,000 in total), White-faced Ibis, Tundra Swans, Great Horned Owls, Peregrine Falcons, Northern Harriers, Yellowthroats, American Pippits, Sora and Common Gallinule along with many others. The nice problem is that both sunset and sunrise can be spectacular, which will occur at 6.03pm and 6.42am respectively. At sunset the cranes will fly in against the Hamilton Range while the geese are settling down for the night. At sunrise, the Sandhills will either lift off to forage in the surrounding fields or, if the corn grown specially for the birds is being mowed, there should be thousands of cranes and geese near the autoroute. Of course, with birds there are no guarantees, and the large amount of wetlands available now give them a lot of roosting flexibility.

**W**e will meet at the first overlook platform at the NWR entrance at 2pm – yes, that's well before sunset but there will be many species to see as we traverse the autoroute (and we may circle round twice to ensure maximal sightings).

**I**n case you are not familiar with the NWR, its address is: 7430 W Sandy Mush Rd, Merced, CA 95341.

Barry Boulton - rbarryboulton@gmail.com

## THE MAGIC OF MERLIN

**N**o, I'm not talking about the mythical Welsh wizard in King Arthur's court; I'm talking about an incredible new bird identification app. from Cornell that is appropriately named "Merlin Bird ID". This wizard actually works!

**W**hen you've installed it (free!!!) on your smartphone, either iPhone or Android, you answer 5 questions after which it gives you a short list of possibilities with their photos. Here are the 5 simple questions:

1. Location - local sites available for selection

2. Date/time of observation.

3. Size of bird - select 1 of 7 options.

4. Colors - select up to 3.

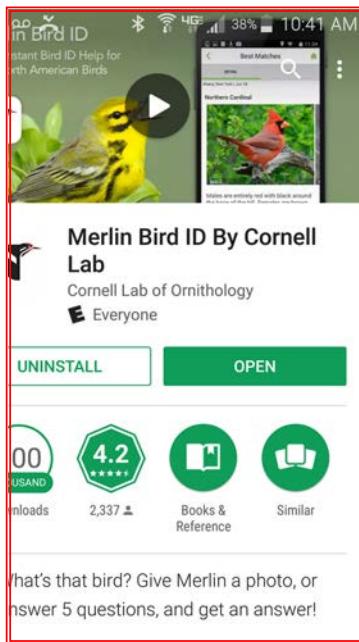
5. What was the bird doing - select 1 of 6 options.

Push "Identify" and it gives you a short set of possibilities.

**I**s it infallible? No, of course not, but still amazingly good. It worked well with the Bufflehead, Yellowthroat and some others I tried, and then I thought to try to confuse it by "describing" a Wood Duck in which choosing the colors isn't easy (what set of 3 colors might you use?) I tried it once and it couldn't offer suggestions. I tried again with a different color blend and it offered 3 or 4 options with photos, including the Wood Duck. Impressive I'd say.

**F**urthermore, Cornell has now added another dramatic feature - photo ID. That is, if you have a reasonable bird photo in your smartphone, the app. will try to identify it for you.

**S**o, here's what you do - go to your smartphone app store and look for Merlin, shown here on Android. You can install the basic Merlin app. and then upgrade to add the Photo ID feature.



**N**ow, here's what I'd like to emphasize: Merlin is possible **only because** of the thousands and thousands of bird sightings listed on eBird by many observers over time. That database provides the most likely birds in a particular location at a particular time of year so that the sophisticated Merlin software can offer realistic ID options. So.....

**PLEASE CONSIDER JOINING & USING eBIRD**

Barry Boulton

## Sharing our Passion and our Observations

We birders obviously love watching birds and, as is our human nature, we like to share them because we want to share our excitement with others and give them the opportunity to go see the same thing. Well, CSAS has a website which performs exactly that sharing, known as the "CSAS listserv". As Steven Umland says for example "*I love the personal touch that the listserv affords. When people post, I know them (mostly) and appreciate their knowledge and insights of our area. I especially love hearing about Jeanne's trips to GCSD and Cherry Lake Road. I love it when Kit DeGear posts her excitement over seeing her Golden Eagle. People who visit from out of the area often announce rarities on the listserv such as Red-necked Phalaropes and European Wigeon on the Rock River Road pond. This gets people excited to go over and check it out. I feel we should encourage its use more along with using eBird*". Jeanne Ridgley, another regular listserv user says "*you can ask questions and exchange information on birds and birding knowledge*".

If our local birding gurus say that, how can we ignore them? So, you can sign up and then list your observations very easily by doing the following:

Just send an email to [http://groups.yahoo.com/group/CSAS\\_Birds](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/CSAS_Birds) and request to join **CSAS\_Birds Listserve**. You will receive a return invitation via email and all you need to do is click on the line to join. It is that easy. If you have any questions, please contact csasbirds@gmail.com (that's another of our gurus, John Turner, in disguise!). Then, you can go on-line and list all of those sightings that excited you! When you sign up, new postings will automatically go to your email.

## New Melones Eagle Count - Report

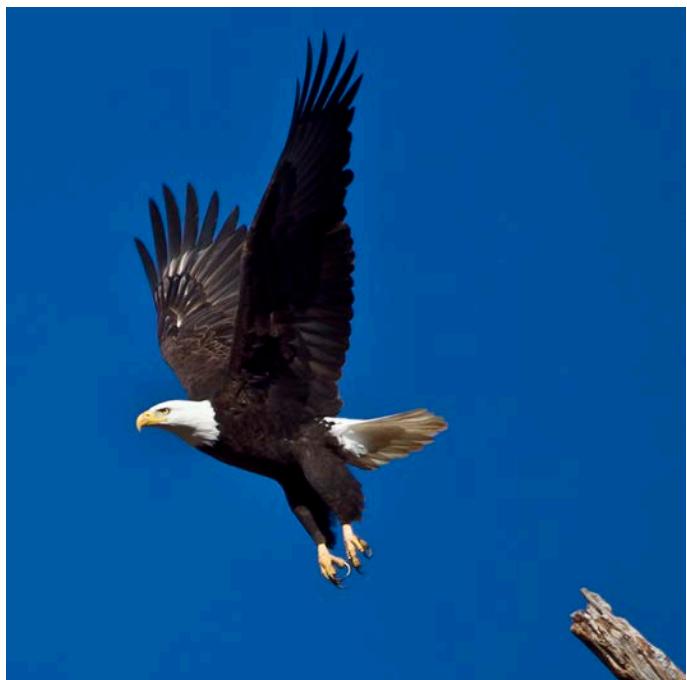
On January 14th, Ron & Barbara McDow and Barry Boulton from CSAS participated in the annual Eagle Count at New Melones Reservoir.

Here's the report by Patricia Sanders of USBR who organized the event. *"Thank you for helping with our annual eagle count on January 14, 2017. We finally had a nice sunny but cold day to complete the survey.*

*A total of 11 Bald Eagles (10 adult and 1 immature) and 2 Golden Eagles were counted during the survey. Many other bird species were sighted including: Osprey, Great Blue Herons, Ducks, Grebes, Cormorants, Kingfishers, Red-tailed hawks and an abundance of American Kestrels. Studies show species diversity is a good indicator of the health of the aquatic ecosystem. There was even an otter observed, coyote and deer.*

*I want to thank all the volunteers who participated in the Eagle Survey".*

**Patricia Sanders, US Bureau of Reclamation**



*Mature Bald Eagle - Patricia Sanders*

## **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 Starbucks conference room at Tuolumne Road just off Mono Way/108.

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

### **YOUR AUDUBON BOARD**

Tom Parrington, President	(209)928-3835
Walt Kruse, VP Conservation	(707)548-1829
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Pattie Henderson, Membership	(209)586-2169
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Barry Boulton, Newsletter Editor	(209)596-0612

### **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
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