

Sierra Squawker



PUBLIC PROGRAM - MARCH 15th at 7pm

“Birds of Alaska”

Presented by David Wimpfheimer

Alaska is a huge state with a wonderful assortment of dramatic landforms and fantastic wildlife not seen anywhere else in the country. Many of our wintering shorebirds, waterfowl and other birds breed there. This program will focus on coastal and interior habitats that are relatively easy to travel to. Birds of Denali, Glacier Bay and Kenai Fjords National Parks including Northern Hawk Owl, Long-tailed Jaeger, Ptarmigan, Tufted and Horned Puffin and mammals such as Grizzly Bear, Moose, Caribou and Wolf will be a main focus of this program. David has had a love affair with Alaska since 1969 when as an impressionable teenager he first visited the state. Its wildlife and landscapes shaped his career as a naturalist. Years later he returned to study birds at the Pribilof Islands and Prudhoe Bay. He has been leading birding and natural history tours in the state for the last twenty years.



Horned Puffin - David Wimpfheimer

David Wimpfheimer is a professional naturalist, guide and biologist who is very passionate about our natural world. He has particular interests in birds and the natural history of the American West. Since earning a degree in Biology from Beloit College, David has surveyed seabirds and shorebirds in Alaska, raptors in Egypt and a variety of birds in Point Reyes, California.



Join us at **7 PM, March 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

April 19, 2017: Steven Umland
How to install & use eBird

May 17, 2017: Tom Hahn
The Birds of the High Sierra

June 14, 2017: Annual Meeting, Potluck and
Election of CSAS Officers

July - August Summer break

A TIME FOR REFLECTION

Because the officers of Central Sierra Audubon are all unpaid and mostly retired, we suffer the same problem as many other non-profits which is in attracting fresh officers who have new energy and ideas - and might even be younger! So existing officers often have an almost ethical dilemma which is "do I take a break knowing that the Chapter cannot survive too many such losses, or do I just hang in?" Are we willing to see CSAS just fade away? That is a particularly critical question this year because we are losing both our President (Tom Parrington) and VP for Programs (David Harden).

I know that I became a CSAS officer simply and solely when an existing officer with serious health problems decided to remain on the Board because no one else came forward, even though it wasn't fair to him. I hadn't thought about it until that June evening at the annual election potluck, but as I watched the election, it seemed to be the only thing to do at that moment and so I offered on the spot. That doesn't make me a hero, but simply that because I'd already come to enjoy the chapter, I thought it was my turn to take some responsibility for making my contribution. In fact, I've enjoyed it thoroughly in large part because our particular Board members provide a very friendly environment in addition to the larger role we each play.

So, this is not in any way to think of this as a guilt trip but, rather, just to give quiet reflection on whether you would be able to give the time and energy to CSAS and our mission for the next two years (although we hold elections every year, most officers stay on for multiples of two years - often, too many multiples!)

The positions to be filled are President, First VP, Second VP, Secretary and Treasurer, and we are also looking for an Education Chair replacement, so your serious consideration of coming forward is critical for our Chapter.

If you are interested in serving, please contact our nominating committee members Linda Millspaugh, Kit DeGear or Barry Boulton (contact info below).

Barry Boulton

HOW THE MIGHTY ARE FALLEN!!!

Last month I reported that I'd seen a flock of Pacific Golden Plovers foraging with Long-billed Curlews and Killdeer west of Modesto. Well, Sal Salerno, President of the Stanislaus Audubon, gently informed me that Pacific Golden Plovers are rare in the Central Valley, and he says that I saw only **Black-bellied Plovers** that do forage in mixed flocks in wintertime, including with Long-billed Curlews as shown in flight here.



Barry Boulton

SIGHTINGS & BEHAVIORS

Jan. 15

This morning I birded the first 2.5 miles of Cherry Lake Road from Hwy 120 east of Groveland. The highlight was a Hooded Merganser swimming and diving upstream from the bridge on the middle fork of the Tuolumne River. I have only seen one here once before, in Dec 2015.

Jeanne Ridgley

Jan. 28 & 31

Sunny, crisp weather after a lot of rain seems to be providing good foraging for the birds. Lots of flying insects, green grass with bugs, and water for the eagles. Watched a Kestrel catch beetles then eat them on the pasture fence post. This year I'm seeing the most Juncos ever. 5 Bald Eagle at Six-bit Ranch - 3 juv., one mature adult and a 3 year adult.

FOS Tree Swallows showed up this morning. Now the tussle begins between the Swallows and Bluebirds for the nesting boxes - will have to buy more from the sale. **[Bird box sale on April 8 - see note on p.4. Ed]**

Charlotte Ginn, Red Hills, Chinese Camp

ELECTION NOMINATING COMMITTEE

If you are interested in joining the Board of Officers of CSAS, or want to understand a little more about the different roles and responsibilities, here are the Nominating Committee members and you can call any one of us to discuss.

Linda Millspaugh.....(209)586-9557

Kit DeGear.....(925)822-5215

Barry Boulton.....(209)596-0612

Feb. 1

Ron and Barbara McDow joined me today for the 1st Wednesday Bird Walk at GCSO. The highlight was a flock of about 50 Cedar Waxwings flying over with many landing in a tree which gave us good views in scopes.

Jeanne Ridgley

Feb. 4

In our blue-oak savannah habitat near Lake Don Pedro we seldom see a Downy Woodpecker, and this morning's sighting of a female was only the third time in 22 years!

John Turner, La Grange, Tuolumne Co.

Feb. 9

Took advantage of the lull between storms and went down to the chocolate-colored Phoenix Lake. Nice warm weather even though the sky is threatening. A Lesser Scaup was the highlight along with the 23 Common Mergansers, ALL female. I also find it interesting that there are no American Wigeon on the lake. They are well represented elsewhere in the county – but just not on Phoenix Lake.

Steven Umland

Feb. 9

Great late morning, early afternoon, observations made here at home before the storm. 29 species! Highlights were the Cedar Waxwings, Red-breasted Sapsucker and a Merlin.

Kit DeGear, Near Phoenix Lake, elevation 2400', Sonora.

Feb 9

The sighting in my yard was a male Great-tailed Grackle who "hung out" in my interior live oaks and incense cedar trees for about 15 minutes. Of course, I was without a camera, but he stayed close enough to make note of his size (14 to 16 inches) and the yellow around his eyes. Also, he was somewhat reclusive and stayed within the dense branches of the trees. From the range defined in my Audubon download, the bird appears to be quite north of its range; are there other, local sightings?

Barbara Lashbrook, Murphys

Editor's note: unfortunately, although this species is still unusual here, it is constantly expanding its range from Mexico and Central America. In 1900, Grackles rarely entered Texas, but now reside year-round in Southern California and other south-west states, so we can expect to see it more often here. In fact, Dan Airola observed 4 grackles in his yard outside Angels Camp this January, and John Sutake has seen them previously in the Angels Camp fairgrounds.

Feb. 11

This morning Carol Rosalind and I birded at the Groveland Community Services District on Ferretti Rd. We saw 26 species. We heard a Mountain Quail which is species # 146 since I started birding here in 2007.

Jeanne Ridgley

Feb. 13

In the afternoon we took our daughter, visiting from Oregon, on a birding adventure down Cooperstown Rd. We thought enough time had passed for the rain run-off to have cleared the road but, not all "puddles" are the same! We went through one with water splashing up over the hood of our Honda CRV with AWD! We discovered shortly later, much to our dismay, we had lost our front license plate! If you should be out that way and see it, please let me know! Highlights of the trip were a Golden Eagle being harassed by some Common Ravens and a Red-tail hawk, many Lewis Woodpeckers, several Mountain Bluebirds and a Ferruginous Hawk.

Kit DeGear, Sonora

Feb. 15

John and Sandi Turner and I took a trip down Cooperstown Rd and came back up Rock River Rd on Tuesday. Highlights were Ferruginous Hawks, Merlin, and Eagles galore. Mountain Bluebirds made a fabulous showing along with Lewis's Woodpeckers. Great weather all day and a mostly passable road. Kit DeGear's license plate was not found!

Steven Umland

Feb. 27 - Arnold Winter Wrap-up

This winter has been a record-breaker for Mergansers in the Arnold area. In addition to the two dozen Hooded Mergansers that we usually see, up to 30 Common Mergansers spent January and February up here shuttling back and forth between Lakemont, Meadowmont and White Pines Lakes. A few seem to have pair-bonded, but most not. I saw one male struggling for five minutes before successfully swallowing a 12" fish. The question is from whence they came - perhaps they are locals who came downslope to avoid frozen lakes and streams, but, alternately, they could be migrants from further north.

Sibley says "*they are somewhat nomadic in winter*" which would support that latter supposition. Today, at the end of February, the totals here are still stable for both species, so they're not yet quite ready to migrate to their breeding places. Females with young can be seen in June at Lake Alpine; of course, the males will have finished their job by then and won't stay around for the weaning process!

There have been fewer Ring-necked Ducks this year in this area, only 6 – 10 whereas our peak year brought 40 – 50.

A few days ago on White Pines Lake I saw two Great Blue Herons together which is very unusual and so my assumption is that they were male and female possibly "thinking" about, or preparing to, mate; unfortunately, they didn't tell me!

John Sutake, Arnold, 4,000 ft.

FIELD TRIP REPORT

Salt Springs Valley Reservoir Feb. 11

The day started out drizzly, overcast, and without the trip leader! He got his times mixed up and was scouting the route. That did not get in the way of the independent and knowledgeable group. They enthusiastically scoped the pond and were about to move on when I showed up.

Pickings were slim along here due to the disagreeable weather but we managed to put together sightings on 29 species. At the ranch with the pond behind it, we scared up 2 Golden Eagles and a couple of Bald Eagles. And, of course, the numerous House Sparrows, Eurasian Collared-Doves, and Starlings kept everyone giddy with excitement!

When we got to Salt Springs Reservoir the weather had improved to where there was no drizzle. Intermittent blue sky was to be had as we glassed over the choppy water and were able to find numerous Ruddy Duck, American Wigeon, Canada Goose, American Coot and Eared Grebe. We had good views of Western and Clark's Grebe, fly-bys of 3 Golden Eagles and a yappy Red-shouldered Hawk.

After a long loop around the lake, we got onto Salt Springs Valley Rd on the west side of the lake. That is when the raptors started pouring in. We stopped to gaze at a Buteo on a fence line about ¼ mile away. After looking at it for many minutes, it flew off to confirm that it was a Ferruginous Hawk. No less than 4 Northern Harriers made an appearance! Outstanding! That spot kicked out several Red-tails, a Kestrel, 2 Bald Eagles and a **Prairie Falcon**. We ended the day there and said our goodbyes. Kit and Walter DeGear were taking me back to my car when a Belted Kingfisher flew across the road for our first of the day. We ended the day with 45 species of birds and 3 Coyotes.



Prairie Falcon - Barry Boulton

Steven Umland

UPCOMING FIELD TRIPS

March 1 & April 5 - GCS D Wednesday Walks

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 March 1 and April 5.

On the Feb 1 Bird Walk 26 species were seen including Bufflehead, White-breasted Nuthatch, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, and Red-winged Blackbirds. The recent rain has filled the smaller ponds which have been dry for several years.

Meet the group in the GCS D 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

April 1: East Sonora Bird Walk

I will lead a walk along Fitch Ranch Road off of Yosemite Road. This area is through pastures, oaks, past a pond and seasonal stream where the usual foothill birds can be seen such as Acorn Woodpeckers, Red-tailed Hawks and Sparrows. Last year we saw 31 species including Phainopepla, Western Tanager, Bullock's Oriole, Western Bluebird and many others, not forgetting a kettle of White Pelicans! This will be a walking tour on a gravel road of about 2 miles.

Those interested can meet to carpool at Perko's at 8:30am or go directly to the start at 16901 Yosemite Road by 9:00am where there will be a limited area for parking. Carpools are encouraged. Bring lunch, water, binoculars, field guides, scopes if available. Rain cancels.

Tom Parrington 928-3835 or eattep@sbcglobal.net

APRIL 7 - 9: TRICOLORED BLACKBIRD SURVEY

As you know, the Tricolored Blackbird is having a tough time surviving because of loss of breeding habitats. In order to take local conservation measures, we need to know where they are breeding and so during these three days we will visit all known sites in our two counties to count them.

We could use a few extra observers - and you don't have to commit to 3 days - although you can! Participating for one day will give you a good insight into their activities and, of course, we'll see many other species too. If you are interested in participating in this important conservation effort, please call our coordinator **Ken Smith (949)922-1455**, or myself **(209)596-0612**.

Barry Boulton

APRIL 8: BIRD BOX SALE

On Saturday April 8, CSAS will join the California Native Plant Society in San Andreas for our semi-annual sale of bird boxes, bat boxes, books and other birding articles. CSAS Members will be on hand to offer advice on the siting of bird boxes, on bird feeders and suitable foods, so if you have any questions related to birding, come and ask the experts!

The Ash-throated Flycatchers shown here feeding youngsters in a birdbox in a Murphys garden were yakking at each other non-stop - and you could enjoy a similar scene with a bird box in your garden!

Location: Calaveras County Water District (CCWD) at 120 Toma Court in San Andreas. From Hwy 49 at the north end of San Andreas, turn south onto Pool Station Road, left on George Reed Court to Toma Court.

Time: 10:00am - 1:00pm, and if anybody wishes to come and assist for all or part of that time, call:

Tom Harrington (209)694-8564.



BIG TREES STATE PARK

Right now, access at Big Trees State Park is pretty limited. The North Grove trail is a mess and somewhat hazardous so most of it is closed. And the road to the Stanislaus River and South Grove does not open until about the start of fishing season. So it's pretty quiet - good for the birds!



I was pleased to shoot these two favorites, **Northern Flicker** and **Western Bluebird**, at the North Grove meadow



Photos and narrative - Alan Beymer

GREAT BLUE HERONS NOW BREEDING!

Now is the time to visit a heronry where the Great Blue Herons are displaying, courting, rebuilding nests, copulating and preparing to lay eggs - if they haven't already.

This heronry at Ironstone Vineyard in Murphys (viewable with binoculars from the Black Bart parking lot) is vibrating with springtime energy; at least seven nests have pairs bringing in twigs to repair them after the winter storms.



(Part of) active heronry in Murphys - Barry Boulton

MARCH 17: HIGHWAY CLEAN-UP

The next Adopt-a-Highway cleanup will be on Friday, March 17th. Meet at Perko's at 7:30am to carpool to the Lake Don Pedro vista parking lot, or meet at the vista point at 8.00am. We will return to Perko's by 10am.

Tom Harrington (209)694-8564

GREAT HORNED OWL EYE

A "friendly" GHO allowed me to take video as she began her evening hunting process. I was fascinated to watch her 3rd eyelid, also known as the **nictitating** eyelid, as it slowly traveled across the eyeball, cleaning and moisturizing the surface. The membrane (the left 20% of the open eye shown here) moves horizontally, and has what looks like a substantial vertical black edge to maintain stability. Shown here, the eyelid is moving from right to left back to its rest position. The membrane contains glands that provide the liquid for cleaning and moisturizing.

The membrane is translucent so she can pull it across as desired to protect the front of the eyeball, which might happen when she strikes her prey, or when she is traveling through trees and branches in hot pursuit of intended prey.



Although I can't show it here, I noticed in the video that her pupil size was slightly but constantly changing. A muscle enables her to do that at will to allow more or less light into the eye to improve visual acuity. So, going from light to dark or vice versa, she can change the pupil size to be neither blinded or unable to see because of insufficient light, unlike the human eye with its significant time lag.

Barry Boulton

RUFOUS & ANNA'S STAND-OFF!



Photo - Tim Olson

One can count on the Rufous to be a scrapper and bossy. Classic fan tail attitude type of guy..usually works, but you can see in the Anna's eyes, she is not impressed, "*sorry we don't DO rufous here buddy.. weren't you headed north?*" This one seems early, I mean the frogs in the pond have just started only a week ago.

Dave Olson, Murphys

VIDEO PRESENTATIONS

As some of you know, I spend a lot of time doing both video and photographic recording of bird behaviors that I present to various groups. If you are part of a group that would appreciate such a presentation, please contact me.

Also, if you have an active nest in your yard that I could discreetly shoot, I would appreciate the opportunity.

Barry Boulton (209)596-0612

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/

Your CSAS Officers

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 Millspaugh, Treasurer	(209)586-9557
Ken Smith, Field Trips	(949)922-1455
Pattie Henderson, Membership	(209)586-2169
Jan Jorn-Baird, Publicity	(209)532-1106
Barry Boulton, Newsletter Editor	(209)596-0612

Your CSAS 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
John Turner, Website	(209)852-2348
Steven Umland, Sonora/Groveland CBCs	(209)352-6985