

# Sierra Squawker



## New President's Address

Every President, on taking over their new role at the top of the pyramid of an all-volunteer organization, probably has two fundamental questions - "*why did I allow this to happen to me?*" and, "*what do I want to do and accomplish?*" So, regarding the first question, when I joined the Board of CSAS about ten years ago it was conditional - "never will I be President I said"! But, as the anonymous "they" so wisely advise "never say never". Over the years, I've enjoyed the friendships, the camaraderie, the activities, the discovery of a new passion, and wanted to do more for birds and for our chapter, so when the time came it seemed like a natural transition to make my contribution.

As for what I want to do and accomplish, well, CSAS is clearly suffering from an aging activist base with few newcomers to the leadership ranks. Given that birding is supposedly one of the fastest-growing hobbies across North America, it appears both odd and unnecessary that CSAS should be "dying on the vine". It suggests that outreach to younger people and to a wider demographic base across the two counties is critical for an active CSAS and for the birds, and so that is my prime focus. My goals are that by the end of two years of my Presidency, CSAS will have at least three very active groups with their own activities, viz. the current Sonora group, a new Calaveras group, and a new student group at Columbia College, whereas today we have only the active Tuolumne/Sonora area group. Very few Calaveras people participate in CSAS currently because it functions mostly in distant Tuolumne County around Sonora where we hold our monthly meetings. If we can make these things as described above happen, then I will be replaced by somebody who actually *wants* to be President!

I'm delighted to tell you that already we have made great progress. In terms of the age issue, our first step is that we, the Board of CSAS, have agreed to hire an intern student at Columbia College whose task will be to set up a college Audubon group (Club in Columbia terms) in conjunction and with support of CSAS. We are in process of working with the College to find a suitable student for whom this internship would enhance his/her career.

In terms of regional demographics, we now have a group of activists in Calaveras County working to bring formal birding activities to life in the county. As you will see on the next page, our first event will be a video presentation by myself at the Murphys library. My thinking is to hold interesting presentations on a monthly basis alternating among different locations such as Murphys/Angels Camp, San Andreas and Arnold so that everybody in the county gets a chance to participate in their locality. Of course, local field trips should be another part of enabling local participants. Later in this newsletter, you will see a sidebar that suggests little things that you can do to bring CSAS into your community.

Barry Boulton

## SONORA UPCOMING 2017 - 18 PUBLIC PROGRAMS

October 18

Barry Boulton  
TBD

November 15

Laura Murphy  
Mother Lode Wildlife Care

December CBCs

Groveland CBC - Dec. 14  
Sonora CBC - Dec. 16  
Calaveras CBC - Dec. 30

January 17

Rich Cimino  
Birds of Belize

## SONORA PUBLIC PROGRAM

Wednesday, September 20 at 7 pm

### "Dragonflies of the Central Sierra"

by

**Tim Manolis, Ph. D**

This talk will be on Dragonflies and Damselflies of a transect through the Central Sierra Nevada, including the foothills. I will present a basic introduction to dragonfly biology and distribution, focused on species that can be found from the foothills, up into the Sierra Nevada, and down onto the east slope (e.g., Mono Lake). A wide variety of interesting species, ranging from desert to boreal forms, may be found along this transect of the central state.



**Sinuous  
Snaketaail**



**Wandering  
Glider -  
Tim Manolis**

Tim Manolis (Ph.D., University of Colorado) is an artist, writer, and field biologist who lives in Sacramento. He is author of *Dragonflies and Damselflies of California*, and illustrator of *Field Guide to the Butterflies of the San Francisco Bay and Sacramento Valley Regions* and the *Field Guide to Spiders of California and the Pacific Coast States*.

Join us at **7 PM, September 20th** in the **Tuolumne County Library on Greenley Road in Sonora** to enjoy this presentation. **The public is always welcome at our monthly programs.** Products and publications on a wide range of birding topics are on display and on sale at each meeting. Refreshments will be provided.

## MURPHYS PUBLIC PROGRAM

Saturday, September 23 at 2 pm

### "Secrets of the Burned Forest"

by

**Barry Boulton**

Forest fires such as the Butte Fire of 2015 and the Rim Fire of 2013 are scary and disturbing because they threaten our way of life, sometimes, even our very existence.

In millions of years, wildfires have created the very forests that we love, and which are essential for our society, our lifestyles, and for wildlife.

Regimes of forest creation through fire have caused many birds, mammals and insects to evolve, and to

adapt their lifestyles along with the fire regimes, such as this Black-backed Woodpecker emerging from the cavity after bringing food to its chicks.

Explore the adaptations and lifestyles of wildlife in newly-burned forests in this free presentation by Barry Boulton, President of Central Sierra Audubon Society. Our medium will be a movie by biologist and filmmaker Maya Khosla entitled "*Searching for the Gold Spot*". We will step through the movie, stopping as appropriate to discuss the various topics as they arise.

Join us at **2 PM, September 23rd** in the **Calaveras County Library in downtown Murphys** to enjoy this presentation. **The public is always welcome at our monthly programs.** Refreshments will be provided.



**Black-backed  
Woodpecker -  
Maya Khosla**

## SIGHTINGS & BEHAVIORS

**Aug. 10**

**F**or the last two days we have observed the following combat situations at one of our hummingbird feeders. Anna's Hummers vs. Rufous Hummers as expected, 4 juvenile Hooded Orioles with each other, plus 2 Acorn Woodpeckers. The hummingbirds fearlessly attack them all.

I have two other hummingbird feeders nearby where the activity is calmer. We also had the base of one of these feeders separated and broken open by the acorn woodpeckers. Another had the little yellow plastic flower petals pecked off by the Acorn Woodpeckers. They are evidently after the sugared water as the nearby birdbath has been relatively unused for bathing or drink. Has anyone else had feeders damaged by woodpeckers?

**Ken Smith, Chinese Camp. Elev: 1083'**

Aug. 11

**I** also have had two hummer feeders attacked by Acorn Woodpeckers breaking the yellow plastic flowers to pieces. First time in 15 years at this location. Also have had ants getting into the sugar water, but today I have a 4" praying mantis on one feeder and no ants.

**Tom Harrington, Lambert Lake Rd., 2300' elev**

**I**'ve worked at Los Gatos Birdwatcher collectively for 6+ years. We have a few customers who have Acorn Woodpeckers frequent their hummingbird feeders and some have widened the "ports" holes just to help the Acorn Woodpeckers and Orioles get the nectar. Funny we've also had plenty of reports of the yellow flowers gone missing..one customer says the squirrel takes her flowers. As for the fighting between the species..the males will be the most aggressive naturally and defend their feeder. We have a female Anna's claiming and defending our San Jose feeder. One thing for sure, nature always surprises us and we should never assume the scientific nature of any creature..observing will prove this testimony. Lucky you have the Rufus, So much fun.

**Kirsten Harris, Pine Grove / San Jose**

**Aug. 13**

**T**his morning I birded the first 2.5 miles of Cherry Lake Rd. from 120 east of Groveland. Highlights were Brown Creeper, Canyon Wren and Bullock's Oriole.

**Jeanne Ridgley, Groveland.**

**Aug. 14 - Ken & Eve's Ramble**

**W**e decided to go by Turlock Lake S.R.A. where I was a Ranger 1977 - 83 and bird the campground only to find it closed for public safety due to unpredictable oak tree failures. So we continued on Lake Road towards Waterford to our primary destination, Merced NWR.

**H**awkins Rd/Lake Rd Junction, West of Turlock Lake S.R.A. 11:00am, sunny, light clouds, 76 degrees. I don't know if this pond has a name other than its location. It has been dry due to drought the past several years and I was surprised to see it flooded again. It has been a good birding pond in the past during CBCs. Scopes are often necessary. Parking is good along Lake Rd, but limited on Hawkins Rd. For some, hiking up the grade for the better view of the other adjoining ponds is worth the effort. Eight Western Grebes w/ 4 chicks - chicks were all white, 1/3rd size of the parents and already able to swim and dive. We did not observe any attempts at flight. This indicates to us that this pond when flooded is a viable nesting area for Western Grebes. Also, 250 Canada Geese in groups of 10 - 50 scattered around the pond., 12 Ruddy Ducks, 32 Black Necked Stilts, 42 Long-billed Dowitchers, 2 Killdeers, 1 Great Blue Heron, 4 Great Egrets, 1 Brewer's Blackbird

**M**erced NWR 1:00pm, nice weather. At this time of the year, all the ponds are dry. We were hoping for sightings of passerines, but very few were evident. Driving around the loop, several Turkey Vultures were constantly in evidence. Along the gravel road next to Sandy Mush road, the areas of grasses were green, evidently had been irrigated and being grazed by a herd of Black Angus. The cattle were mostly females, calving, and in most cases the newborn calves were being tended to by their mother, but a few were motionless on the ground, evidently abandoned. Numerous Turkey Vultures were feeding on dark objects on the ground in the fields and we believe they were preying on the weak or stillborn calves and on the placentas. As we approached the last several hundred yards of the loop, a kettle of 50-60 Turkey Vultures lifted out of the trees on the other side of Sandy Mush Road. We have never before observed such a large number of Turkey Vultures in such a concentrated area. We observed a similar activity several years ago near Jordan Valley, Oregon. The predators in that case were Golden Eagles which, the locals claimed, arrive there every year during the calving season.

**A**light phase adult Swainson's Hawk with white face, dark bib, and white belly perched on a utility pole along Sandy Mush Road. When it flew one could see the 'pointed' wings and no dark mark on the leading edge of the wing. Also, a Great Horned Owl at the south end of the Bittern Marsh trail.

**D**awson Pond 6:00 pm: 3 Double-crested Cormorants. Pond is at a high water level which may limit dabblers. We saw no resident Mergansers, Mallards, American Coots or Canada Geese.

**Ken Smith, Chinese Camp.**

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## SURVIVAL OF AN OSPREY RUNT

When the campground host at New Melones Tottletown area told me that an active Osprey nest was just outside the Visitors Center, I scooted over there in minutes to be greeted by a nest with three juveniles. Right there, a one-sided love affair for a few weeks began; one-sided because they were never happy or welcoming when I arrived, while I was enthralled by their behaviors. But they learned to mostly ignore me – more important things were going on, mainly associated with the third juvenile, the runt (*definition: an animal that is smaller than average, especially the smallest in a litter*), who didn't appear likely to survive those 100+ degree temperatures in the open.



The aspect that fascinated me was the relationships in that nest, between siblings and between mother and runt. When I arrived on June 12th, there were three active juveniles in the nest and I noticed that when the mother tore off a chunk of fish and gently offered it to the runt, another, older sibling was quietly watching; no competition, no fighting, but simply observation or awareness. That was interesting because, as I'll detail, this was very clearly a runt and that condition was most likely due to shortage of food as the older siblings commandeered most of it; but at this moment as I observed, the runt received what she needed (it was indeed a female).

So, on June 12th there were three juveniles, reduced to two when I visited on June 23, and down to one – the runt – on June 28. Oddly enough, these two departed juveniles never afterwards roosted in the nest which would have been normal Osprey behavior. However, they were seen on several occasions among nearby trees and so appeared to survive well without the nest and its parental support. Moreover, they would normally have spent time with the father learning to fish for themselves and become independent, but there were no such observations to confirm that behavior.

From them on I observed the mother and runt many times, when the obvious care and concern by the mother was so sweet and compelling even when, or perhaps particularly when, the runt was suffering. I watched the mother in the boiling heat (107+ some days) as she protected her baby from the sun, even nestling her bill and face right beside her panting runt so as to both check her out and to provide assurance that mother was still here, protecting and caring for her. When father arrived with the fish (mostly, Osprey mothers do the brooding while fathers do the fishing), she would tear off small chunks and feed her youngster, all gently and in measured time. The parental patience over this time was astounding and I marveled that both parents would continue with a runt that appeared to me to be on its last legs.

Well, they knew better because finally, on July 22, I arrived to see the runt take a shaky flight off the supporting woodwork having stepped over the edge of the nest. This was certainly not her maiden flight, but probably within a few days of that, and from then on she swiftly acquired confidence and elegance in departing from and returning to the nest. That means she was almost three weeks behind her siblings and, throughout that time, her parents commitment to her was total and successful. As it happens, she, unlike her siblings, did return many nights to roost with her mother in the nest.

As you can imagine, I felt bonded to them, in particular mother and runt but, of course, that's a purely human emotional construction; in reality, no relationship at all, just enjoyment on my part and (presumably) satisfaction on the mother's part.

Interestingly enough, in Tottletown itself, another Osprey nest that was easy to observe adjacent to the Lupine Day Use Area contained just two juveniles, and when I last observed them on July 25, neither had fledged or left the nest, so well over a month behind the first two at the Visitors Center.

Incidentally, young Ospreys are easily distinguished from the parents by two characteristics: (1) the eyes tend to be red rather than the adult yellow as you see in this photo, and, (2) the feather tips are all light, almost white, so the plumage has a mottled or speckled appearance (easier to identify than the eye color depending on angle of view and light conditions).

Footnote on the Runt: as of August 24, she is still resident here, using the nest for much of the day, calling incessantly. I suspect that she's still neither fully competent or confident and so is calling out for parental help, but they've probably departed on their southward migration. So, the two questions now are whether she will survive and, if so, will she stay over winter at New Melones or risk what would certainly be a tough migration for her. Such is the life of a runt.....

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## UPCOMING FIELD TRIPS

### Sept. 6 - GCSD

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 Sept 6. The property encompasses an area of more than 200 acres of oak, pine and willow habitat with three water storage ponds.

**Birders who wish to bird at GCSD must be accompanied by an authorized birder and have signed an Agreement and Release from Liability Form. To do this, contact Jeanne Ridgley.**

Meet the group in the GCSD parking lot at 7:30 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**

### Sept. 24 - Indigeny Reserve

Please join me for what I am hoping will become a regular monthly walk on the 4th Sunday of the month, through the beautiful grounds at Indigeny. Besides the apple orchards, there are large oaks, some pines, streamside thickets and a grape vineyard that provide some great habitats for birds. As always, bring your binoculars and/or scopes, wear muted colors and include a hat, sunscreen and water.

The walk will last 2-3 hrs. Children are welcome! Meet in the parking lot at 8:00 AM. Rain will cancel the trip. (Follow the signs from the intersection of Greenley and Lyons/Bald Mountain Roads in Sonora. After a few miles on Lyons/Bald Mountain Road, turn right onto Apple Hill Drive where there is a large sign that says "Apple Valley Ranches." A quick left turn onto Summers Lane leads you to Indigeny.)

**Kit DeGear (925) 822-5215 or [kdegear@gmail.com](mailto:kdegear@gmail.com)**

### Field Trip with Stanislaus Audubon Society

#### Sept. 17 & Oct. 15 San Joaquin River NWR.

This refuge near Modesto offers diverse habitats, including mixed species transitional areas, riparian forest, oak woodlands, grassland, and seasonal wetlands. Meet at the Stanislaus County Library parking lot (1500 I Street, Modesto) at 7:00 a.m. We will return to Modesto mid-afternoon.

**Trip leader: Ralph Baker, [SASFieldTrips@yahoo.com](mailto:SASFieldTrips@yahoo.com)**

**Editor's note:** getting to Modesto at 7am is a bit of a stretch, but good birding usually means early mornings, and Ralph knows this place intimately having been trip leader on a monthly basis for quite a long time. You will not be disappointed for losing some beauty sleep!

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## CSAS IN CALAVERAS COUNTY:

### WHAT YOU CAN DO

Before offering suggestions, there's a philosophical question here - why would we wish to insert CSAS into any community? For me, the reason is that in the contemporary world of intense competition, sharpened by "always on" technology, and intensified by retreat into virtual reality, we offer an insight into a beautiful natural reality exemplified by **Darwin** when he said *"There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved"*, and by **Henry David Thoreau** who said that *"In wildness is the preservation of the world"*.

When I see birds going about their daily business, and when I contemplate their particular adaptations, those sentiments throb in my very being. To see the mother Osprey caring so tenderly for her weak offspring is to see the richness and infinite continuity of life; this is what we can and must bring to and offer our communities.

So what can you do to aid this penetration and understanding? Well, much as I'd like to change the world overnight, it's not what really happens; we will proceed incrementally. In the first place presentations at various venues will enable the community to see birds-in-action - that is, if they come to the presentation!!! So, the first action you can take is to invite your family and friends to our Calaveras meetings and come with them of course - and don't forget to post on Facebook.

Taking that one stage further, we really need to involve children and teenagers, so if you can get your internet-savvy kids or grandkids to post the meetings on Facebook, invite their friends and come to the presentations with them, that would be a major step. And, if you're a teacher, make sure that your students know of the opportunity - and invite them to bring their parents along too.

The point is that you don't have to invest too much time in this to make it work - teamwork and numbers will make it happen. I can ensure fascinating video presentations, but your help is needed to get people coming along.

If you have sufficient bird photos to make a full 60 minutes presentation, or a short version, I will be delighted to assist you in creating the slide show and in presenting it if you've never done that before and perhaps feel rather shy - I was very nervous when I started giving bird slide shows and video presentations, so I have plenty of empathy! Just let me know.

## BOOK REVIEWS

By Barry Boulton

### **“The Invention of Nature: Alexander von Humboldt's New World” by Andrea Wulf**

In these times of anti-science, it is instructive to know that in 1869, on the 100th anniversary of his birth, Alexander von Humboldt's centennial was celebrated with parties in America, Europe, Africa and Australia. He was the most famous scientist of his time and known as the “Shakespeare of science” in Russia where festivities in his honor were held, but the greatest of the festivities were in his birth city of Berlin where 80,000 people assembled. President Ulysses Grant joined the festivities in Pittsburgh along with 10,000 other celebrants, and crowds gathered in celebration across the country. Now, despite the Humboldt Current, Humboldt County and countless other namesakes, who knows of him?

Humboldt understood Muir's dictum that all things are connected two hundred years before Muir when he described the earth as “*a natural whole animated and moved by inward forces*” and then “*no single fact can be considered in isolation*”; he foresaw plate tectonics two hundred years before Alfred Wegner, and he so clearly saw that human destruction of ecosystems extended beyond the proximate impacts, thus presaging notions of human-induced climate change. In other words, he was a prescient genius!

When we read about the lives of those great naturalists Darwin, Humboldt and Alfred Russell Wallace, it is difficult to comprehend the intellectual curiosity and drive that made them risk life, limb and health in search of data, samples and in creating new ideas. This book is a remarkable read, always interesting and intellectually stimulating, often exciting – and very difficult to lay down; no wonder it was one of the New York Times “10 Best Books” in 2015.

### **“Inside Animal Minds” by National Geographic**

This is a typical National Geographic one-off magazine now available in bookstores and supermarkets that explores “*what they think, feel and know*”. It discusses much current thinking about cognition, awareness, memory and other loaded concepts with many examples and questions in a very readable form. We humans (at least, in our European traditions) are very jealous of our supposed superiority over all other living things and this book gently challenges that view without being dogmatic in turn. Well worth its \$13.99 cost to stimulate your bird watching cogitations.

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## BIRD BOX SALE COMING UP

**Saturday, October 21st** we will join the Sierra Foothills Chapter of the California Native Plant Society at our favorite location in Rocca Park, Jamestown. Here we will be offering bird boxes for sale along with books and other birding items.

Now is the time to buy and install bird boxes so that by the early spring when birds are selecting nesting places, the boxes are already aged and fitting into their environments. New, shiny boxes are scary for the birds so the winter aging is a critical step in having your box inhabited.

If you are able to join us in attending the booth and thus enjoying an enjoyable social day, please call our organizer:

**Tom Harrington at (209)694-8564**

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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, August, and December), 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 CSAS Officers**

Barry Boulton, President	(209)596-0612
Tom Parrington, Past President	(209)928-3835
Walt Kruse, VP Conservation	(707)548-1829
Kit DeGear, VP Programs	(925)822-5215
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
Pamela Blair, Scholarship	(209)533-1668
John Turner, Website	(209)852-2348
Steven Umland, Sightings/eBird	(209)352-6985