

Central Sierra Audubon Society

Sierra Squawker



www.centralsierraaudubon.org

September - 2018

SONORA PUBLIC MEETING

Experience a Family of Ospreys Breeding at New Melones Lake in 2018

Presented by Barry Boulton, CSAS President

The Osprey is one of our most iconic species since its recovery from DDT, and it's easier than most to observe because it nests in the open and tolerates humans – even if it doesn't like us! This Spring, with great support from Bureau of Reclamation staff, I've been video recording a family at the New Melones Visitors Center because I wanted to understand their behavior patterns – such as the relationships between the adults, between adults and young, and between the siblings themselves. So, I will be presenting the breeding story of this family – and like human families, it has meaning and comedy, familial bonds and competition, intrigue and suspense, along with many questions. With over 700 hours of behavior video sequences, I'll condense this all down to an intriguing and fascinating story of this one family.



Family of 6 - photo courtesy of Pat Sanders, USBR



The 4 juveniles waiting for food - photo courtesy of Elissa Wall

Lady Fortune has smiled on this project – there are 4 young in this family, an almost unheard-of number; you can see how crowded the nest is. It gets crazy when one or more flaps its wings to exercise its muscles in preparation for that first flight!

WHEN? Wednesday, September 19 at 6.30pm
WHERE? County Library, Sonora (Greenley Rd)

CALAVERAS PUBLIC MEETING

The Colorful Birds of Texas

Presented by Julie Moss-Lewis & John Lewis

Birds of Texas are intriguing for us Northern California birders because while that State has many species in common with California, yet there are variations (e.g. Rose-breasted Grosbeak and Green Jay), and then others that we just don't see because they are sub-tropical species who spend time in southern Texas.

Join Julie Moss-Lewis and John Lewis as they share their stories, photographs, and travel tips after spending two weeks casually birding and exploring the south Texas border region in April 2018. Highlights include birding hot spots in Carlsbad Caverns and Big Bend National Parks, Gulf Coast warbler migration and "fallout" on South Padre Island, and the tropical birds of Mexico that extend their ranges just across the border to the wetlands of the Lower Rio Grande Valley.



Julie and John say they are neither expert birders nor expert photographers, but they are fun-loving and engaging speakers who researched and planned their Texas trip thoroughly and with an eye to finding the best places to look, eat, and stay...and they managed to take some excellent photos as you will see. They stayed in specialized "bird-friendly" lodging, found the hot spots most likely to reward casual viewers with great birds, and are ready to answer all your questions about logistics and what to expect--including a few quirky non-birding detours that may be worth your while. This presentation is highly recommended if you have ever considered making the journey yourself to see the astonishingly colorful bird species of South Texas.



*All photos by
Julie Moss-Lewis
using her Nikon
Coolpix P900*



WHEN? Thursday, September 20 at 6pm

WHERE? San Andreas Library

SUMMER MONTHS HAPPENINGS

New Melones Lake Bald Eagle Rescue

The air was filled with heavy smoke on the morning of July 29, 2018. A call came out over the radio from the New Melones Lake Visitor Center of a young eagle in distress near the Mark Twain Day Use Area. Visitor Center volunteer Renee Isaacs was informed of the eagles need for assistance by some local kayakers who made the discovery.



Fish hook & line
in Emma's esophagus

Photo courtesy of Elissa Wall

Park rangers Grant Harrison and Pat Sanders (who presented to CSAS earlier this year) took a boat to the reported location to search for the bird. On the first pass, because it turned out to be very well blended in with the surrounding rocks, no bird was observed but on the second pass a young eagle was observed. Grant brought the boat to the shoreline east of the eagle's location so as not to stress it further. As Pat approached the eagle she observed it to have a piece of fish line coming out of the side of its beak and the line was wedged in between two rocks, hence it could not fly, eat or drink due to the tautness of the fish line. She slowly approached the stressed eagle and gently placed a towel on its back, down over the wings and made a little hood over the eyes. She then, with gloves on, used her left hand to break the fishing line from the rocks and then secured the legs and talons. Having secured the bird, she climbed back into the boat and placed the eagle in a very large pet carrier.



Emma gently placed in the pet carrier

Photo courtesy of Elissa Wall

Emma (as she is now named) was taken to the Tri-County Wildlife facility in Jackson by Elissa and Mark Wall where she was received by Pat Benik and administered fluids and antibiotics. The next day the fish hook was removed from Emma's esophagus by a veterinarian, Dr. Smith, in Placerville, after which she has been eating fish and gaining weight.

August 25: Emma was released today and after some initial hesitation, made a successful flight - may she do well, survive and reproduce.



Emma recovered and released,
now on her way to freedom
and a new life, hopefully with
more Emmas to come!

Photo courtesy of Pat Sanders

Leucistic Steller's Jay at Twain Harte

You're probably more familiar with the term "albino" than "leucistic" because that's what you will have seen on TV. with National Geographic etc., but you'll be aware that all or mostly white birds are very unusual and anomalous, and so it's a privilege to have the chance of observing one. We were fortunate that Don Escallier looked up Audubon to tell us of this very unusual bird in his backyard along with many normal Steller's Jays. He talked to Tom Harrington by which means I was fortunate to visit Don one day at his house in Twain Harte to photograph this fascinating bird. So, what's going on with this bird and why do we call it "leucistic" - and why is it white?

To answer those questions, we have to look at bird plumage coloration to understand. The normal Steller's Jay shown here below is blend of blue and black. The black that becomes white is easy - it is pro-



Photos by Barry Boulton, courtesy of Don Escallier

duced by a pigment called melanin that birds produce internally and that is embedded in the bird's feathers. Melanin absorbs all light so that none is reflected and those feathers appear black. But, when a bird cannot produce melanin, as in leucistic and albino birds, the feathers reflect all light which means they are white.

The blue to white change is more complicated because blue is not caused by pigmentation. Instead, it is caused by the physical structure of the feathers in which the barbs are spaced exactly to reflect only blue light. The remainder of the visible light spectrum is absorbed by the melanin in the feathers but, in the leucistic and albino birds, there is no melanin in the feathers to absorb light so although the feathers still reflect blue light, now the rest of the spectrum cannot be absorbed and it, too, is reflected. Hence the blue becomes white in this case.

Now, albino versus leucistic. Both are caused by lack of melanin production but the processes are different with the most obvious expression showing in the eyes. In the albino, no melanin is incorporated in the iris and retina with the result that light reflects off blood vessels in the eye to produce a pink eye. Similarly, the bill and legs in an albino will be light or pinkish due to lack of melanin. As you see, this bird has black eyes, bill and legs and so it is leucistic.

Perhaps I may complete this by mentioning an important aspect of plumage coloration. As I've explained, black is produced by melanin and blue by the feather structure - but what about red, brown, yellow and green colors? Well, they are mostly (things are always more complicated than you'd like!) produced by pigments based on diet - just as with our human skin. That end of the spectrum is usually formed by carotenoids in the diet. However, green isn't so simple - it's generally a combination of dietary yellow combined with structural blue.

You might ask - what does the future hold for these white birds? The first answer is that we don't know as much as we'd like because such birds are few and far between so data on them is minimal at best. But we can make some comments - first, albino birds seem to be intrinsically weak and are unlikely to survive their first year. That will be a combination of a weak system plus being very obvious to predators. Feathers without melanin are generally less robust than normal, so even leucistic birds are vulnerable to weak feathers compromising their flying (and evading predators) capabilities. Leucistic birds are more robust than albinos and can survive; a white Red-tailed Hawk (almost certainly leucistic) was resident in Hathaway Pines for several years. We don't know too much about their reproduction; that is, are they able to find mates and so produce offspring, or are they rejected? Perhaps they're mostly infertile? I'm hoping that observations on Don's Steller's Jay next Spring will provide some clues.

Barry Boulton

UPCOMING FIELD TRIPS

Wednesday, Sept. 5 - GCSD

The first Wednesday of the month Bird Walk at Groveland Community Services property at 18966 Ferretti Road, Groveland will be led by Carol Rosalind on September 5th. The property encompasses an area of more than 200 acres of oak, pine and willow habitat with three water storage ponds.

On August 11 we saw 35 species including Red-shouldered Hawk and Song Sparrow. Three species of swallows were also seen: Barn, Northern Rough-winged and Violet-green.

Access for birders here is limited. Birders must be accompanied by an authorized birder.

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 about two-three hours.

Carol Rosalind

Sunday, Sept. 16 - 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
(Editor's note: This field trip is organized and led by Ralph Baker of the Stanislaus Audubon Society. Ralph knows this refuge intimately having visited it monthly for several years. This is an excellent opportunity to view new habitats with an expert birder. It will be repeated on October 21 if this date is inconvenient for you).

Sunday, September 23 – Indigeny Reserve

Please join me as we bird through the beautiful grounds at Indigeny. Besides the apple orchards, there are large oaks, some pines, stream-side thickets and a marshy area with reeds that provide some great habitats for birds. As always, bring your binoculars and/or scopes, wear muted colors and you may wish to 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

Saturday, Sept.29th - Westside Rail Trail Walk

Beat the Heat!! Come join Jean Dakota for a walk along this old railroad trail for great views of the Tuolumne River below, and hawks and falcons above. A total of 22 bird species were spotted and heard on this walk last May. Meet in the parking lot at 7:00 a.m. The walk will last from 2-3 hours and cover 2-3 miles. It is an old railroad grade and so fairly level. Muted clothing, hat, sunscreen and water are advised. Please note that there are NO public restrooms nearby.

From Sonora take Tuolumne Rd. intersection at Mono Way just before the Junction Shopping Center, out all the way toward the city of Tuolumne. Go through straight through the light (at the intersection of Tuolumne Rd. N. and Cherry Valley Blvd. N.) turn left on Carter St. and go 0.3 mile; turn right on Buchanan Road. Continue for 0.5 mile and you will see the parking lot on the left just past the intersection of Buchanan and Miramonte Roads. The trailhead and kiosk 1 is down the stairs.

Jean Dakota, (415) 454-8313 (has answering machine) or (209) 591-9952 (after 6:30am on Sept 29).

Central Valley 2019 Bird Symposium

The Central Valley Bird Club will be hosting the 22nd annual Central Valley Birding Symposium Nov. 15-18, 2018, at the Stockton Hilton Hotel in Stockton. The Great Central Valley, in the heart of California and the Pacific Flyway, is uniquely situated for excellent birding. Please join us as the CVBS again celebrates the best of birding in the Central Valley! Come meet the board and staff members! Reconnect with old friends and meet new ones

The CVBS kicks off with a scrumptious hors d'oeuvres buffet & no host bar on Thursday night, followed by one of our favorite keynotes, outstanding photographer, birder, and presenter, **Ed Harper**, with his program on "**Northern Delights**".

Friday night's keynote program "**Bird Migration: The More We Learn, The Less We Know**" will be presented by **Ed Pandolfino**.

Saturday night's keynote program, "**The Trade Off**" will be presented by **John Kricher**. In this lively and thought-provoking presentation, he will contrast the lives, ecology, and natural history of long-distance migrant passerine birds with bird species that are permanent residents of lowland tropical forests.

To look over the schedule of events (including field trips): <http://www.cvbirds.org/events/symposium/>

SIGHTINGS & OBSERVATIONS

Dave Douglass of Pine Mountain Lake has been a prolific, every-day bird photographer this summer, and here are just a few of his shots.



FIELD TRIPS - THOUGHTS & REQUEST

Audubon chapters are defined principally by the field trips and monthly programs that their members can enjoy. CSAS has always had excellent programs for as long as I can remember. Of course, we'd always like to see more members attending our meetings but we understand that the pressure of work and school makes it difficult for younger members to attend mid-week meetings.

In contrast, field trips are more flexible and we normally hold those at weekends, but we tend to be limited by lack of leaders which is very often because individual birders don't feel up to the task of leading and, in particular, being responsible for identifying the birds. So here's an idea - if you know a place that's good (and safe) for birding, why don't you contact us and we'll find competent birders to come along at the agreed date/time so that all you have to do is to lead the walk and our birders will do the identifications.

As an example, a group of lady birders from Arnold requested a knowledgeable birder to lead them at a particular location and so we found available CSAS experienced birders and a date was agreed. In this way, we can have more members enjoying and learning about the birds.

If you are interested, please call:

- Tuolumne County: Kit DeGear (925)822-5215
- Calaveras County: Chris Laddish (209)728-3871

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Bird Presentations

As many of you know, I frequently do presentations on bird behaviors using video techniques to community groups so, if you know of any group that is looking for speakers, please ask them to call me at (209)596-0612.

Barry Boulton

Central Sierra Audubon Society - CSAS

(Chapter of the National Audubon Society)

P.O. Box 3047, Sonora, CA 95370

General Meetings: Third Wednesday at 6:30pm (except July, August, and December), in the Tuolumne Public Library on Greenley Road, Sonora.

Board Meetings: Please call Barry Boulton (209)596-0612.

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

Barry Boulton, President	(209)596-0612
Tom Parrington, Past President	(209)928-3835
Ralph Retherford, VP Programs	(209)770-6124
Jean Dakota, Secretary	(209)591-9952
Linda Millsbaugh, Treasurer	(209)586-9557
Kit DeGear, Field Trips	(925)822-5215
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/Bird Box Sales	(209)694-8564
Augusta Parrington, Scholarship	(209)928-3835
OPEN, Website Manager	
Walt Kruse, YSS delegate	(707)548-1829
Chris Laddish, Calaveras County Contact	(209)728-3871
Steven Umland, Sightings/eBird	(209)352-6985