Central Sierra Audubon Society

Sierra Squawker

www.centralsierraaudubon.org

May - 2017

PUBLIC PROGRAM - MAY 17th at 7pm

"Birds of the High Sierra"

Presented by Tom Hahn

The High Sierra Nevada presents birds with many opportunities. Food is abundant during the summer, and moisture from winter snows persists into the late summer long after many lower elevation areas have become dry and hot. However, weather is unpredictable, snow potentially falling any day of the year, and conditions during the long winter include low temperatures and very limited feeding options. Birds of the High Sierra use a variety of strategies for exploiting the opportunities and coping with the challenges. In this talk we'll survey the range of bird species that frequent the High Sierra and discuss a variety of behavioral and physiological strategies they use to thrive in this environment.

Mountain Chickadee

Examples include food caching by **nutcrackers** and chickadees to smooth out the seasonal variation in food supply, use of torpor by some small birds like hummingbirds and **chickadees** to save energy overnight, fattening for winter survival and to fuel migration, flexible foraging techniques such as switching from catching flying insects to gleaning by dusky flycatchers, use of foods such as spiders and flies that accumulate on the snow surface in spring by juncos and white-crowned sparrows, and exploitation of resource booms such as emergent aquatic insects around alpine lakes by rosy-finches.

Clark's Nutcracker

Tom Hahn is on the biology faculty at UC Davis. He studies behavior and physiology of a variety of birds, especially reproduction and migration of crossbills and other nomadic finches, but also vocal behavior of a variety of songbirds. He and his students worked on mountain white-crowned sparrows at Tioga Pass in the High Sierra for many years.

Join us at **7 PM, April 19th** 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

June 14, 2017:	**Annual Meeting, Potluck and Election of CSAS Officers**
July - August	**Summer break**
September	**Timothy Manolis** **Dragonflies**
October	**Steve Shunk** **Woodpeckers**

CSAS OFFICERS STILL NEEDED!

After June, two of our current Officers will not be continuing on the Board and so we are looking for "new blood". As a new Officer, you would not suddenly become responsible for CSAS! Rather, you would learn the different roles and think about taking over one of them at a future date.

If you are interested in serving, please contact one of our nominating Committee members:

Linda Millspaugh.....(209)586-9557
Kit DeGear.....(925)822-5215
Barry Boulton.....(209)596-0612

The current list of Board nominees is:
* President: Barry Boulton
* VP, Programs: Kit DeGear
* VP, Conservation: Walt Kruse (incumbent)
* Secretary: Jeanne Ridgley (incumbent)
* Treasurer: Linda Millspaugh (incumbent)
* Membership: Pattie Henderson (incumbent)
* Field Trips: Ken Smith (incumbent)
* Publicity: Jan Jorn-Baird (incumbent)
* Newsletter Editor: Barry Boulton (incumbent)

HIGHWAY CLEAN-UP

The next Adopt-a-Highway cleanup will be on Friday, May 19th. Meet at Perko's in Sonora at 7.30am to carpool to the Lake Don Pedro vista point where we start the pick-up. We will return to Perko's by 10am.

Tom Harrington (209)694-8564

AUDUBON CALIFORNIA ADVOCACY DAY JUNE 8, 2017

Audubon California is organizing a day of advocacy (for birds of course) in the State Legislature for which they are looking for volunteers, so please think about joining. It's a fascinating experience because you get at least an initial idea of how realpolitik works as you meet legislators and/or their aides. You need have no fear of feeling tongue-tied or inadequate because you won't be sent into an office by yourself. Office visits are usually done by 2 or 3 people of whom at least one knows the Audubon issues sufficiently well to present our perspective. There are always handout materials provided as well. The role of we, the volunteers, is to add numbers (which implies votes!) which provide weight to Audubon's advocacy.

See Audubon California notice and agenda at:
http://ca.audubon.org/get-involved/agenda-2017-audubon-california-advocacy-day

SIGHTINGS & BEHAVIORS

Apr. 8
A pair of Pileated Woodpeckers is working on cavity and nest in a snag at Greeley Hill. Their communications with each other are quite interesting; just before the work changeover, the incoming bird calls loudly.

Photo - Lester Fuller

Apr. 12
Bluebird vs. Swallow! Just had an amazing sighting of a Western Bluebird protecting his turf. A Violet Green female swallow was trying to get in a bird house. She was chased from a house occupied by tree swallows, so went to the bluebird house. The male was to have nothing of that and attacked the poor little swallow viciously. He grabbed her and had her on the ground and wouldn't let her up. Finally she got free. Maybe she won't try that again.

Charlotte Ginn, Red Hills, Chinese Camp

Apr. 13
Heard the unmistakable call of an Ash-throated Flycatcher, then located it in a blue oak. Also seen this morning, several male and female Hooded Orioles (both mature and first-year) and we are seeing many Bullock's Orioles of both sexes now. Over the past few days we have seen both male and female Rufous Hummingbirds amongst the many Anna's. Last week's Calliope hummer has not been seen since.

John Turner, Elev. 1050 ft., Lake Don Pedro

Apr. 21
Had quite the productive morning on the Confidence Trail. The Nashville Warblers are back in droves. Two MacGillivray's Warblers under the second power line crossing were a thrill. The best birds were the Chestnut-backed Chickadees. It was a beautiful morning.

Steven Umland

Apr. 20

BARN OWL UPDATE

I was very surprised to see how much they had grown in a week's time. Of the nine counted last week, only seven remain and one will surely not make it to next week as the older ones are very aggressive for food. We seem to have a large number of voles for the adults to get as there are paths the voles make in the grass by traveling over the same way repeatedly. They slightly resemble a pocket gopher, but can run very fast compared to the slow prodding crawl of a gopher. One can sex the chicks fairly accurately now because of the coloration; the lighter ones are male and the slightly shaded would be the females.

In this photo the oldest one would be about 37 days old (my first picture of nine eggs and one newly-hatch chick was on

March 13). The eggs usually hatch sequentially about every other or third day. As there are now seven remaining chicks, their ages would be approximately 37, 35, 33, 31, 29, 27, and 25 days old, give or take a few days. They will fledge around 52 to 57 days old.

John Turner, Elev. 1050 ft., Lake Don Pedro

UPCOMING FIELD TRIPS

May 3 & June 7 - GCSD Wednesday 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 May 3 and June 7.

On April 5, 35 species were seen. First of the season species were Western Kingbird, Black-headed Grosbeak and Bullock's Oriole.

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.

Jeanne Ridgley (209)962-7598

May 18 - Confidence Trail, Sonora

Our High Sierra Birds presenter, Tom Hahn, will lead a birding walk with David Harden & Pamela Blair along this favorite and prolific trail.

Meet at 8:00am at the trailhead on Confidence/South Fork Road just north of Middle Camp Road

David or Pamela (209)533-1668

May 21 – Indigeny Reserve

Come join me for a Sunday morning bird walk through the beautiful grounds at Indigeny. Past trips have included sightings of Bullock's Oriole, American Goldfinch, Wrentit and some of our Spring Warblers and Flycatchers. As always, bring your binoculars and/or scopes, wear muted colors and include a hat, sunscreen and water. You may also want to bring a snack to enjoy at the picnic area at the end of our walk which will last 2-3 hrs. Children are welcome! Meet in the parking lot at 8:00 AM. (Follow 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

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FIELD TRIP REPORTS

April 1 - Fitch Ranch and Yosemite Road Trek

Tom Parrington led walk with thirteen birders that took us 2.7 miles through rolling hills, pastures and oak and pine areas. We saw over 28 species including Phainopepla, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Violet-green Swallows, Tree Swallows, Say's Phoebe, Black Phoebe, Red-tail Hawks, Red-shoulder Hawks, a Cooper Hawk, Turkey Vultures and California Quail.

Tom Parrington

Apr. 22 – Tricolored Blackbird Field Trip

Four birders joined me for this field trip to observe activities at local nesting sites of this threatened species. All of the known Tricolored Blackbird nesting sites were active. I believe they were all in the nest building stage as we observed birds carrying nesting materials. We observed the mass feeding unique to this species and their dense colony nesting activity in the Himalayan Blackberries or the Cat-tail reeds compared to the scattered nesting of the Red-Winged (bicolored) Blackbirds in the adjoining grassy fields.

The highlight of the day at the Tullock Rd/Hwy 108 East Pond site was an American Coot chick that swam out of the reeds displaying its bright orange-red head and orange collar.

Ken Smith

THE DANCING GREBES

For a long time I've wished to observe, video and photograph the dancing Western and Clark's Grebes as they rush across the water in their courting and selection process searching for the perfect or, at least, best available mate. When I learned of a boat owner who organizes such trips on Clear Lake in Northern California, arrangements were quickly made depending on bird activity and weather forecasts. So it was that on April 14th at 7am we found ourselves heading across Clear Lake towards the grebe activity.

There were several hundred Grebes in total, of which around 75% were Western and 25% Clark's and you can see the basic difference between them above - the Westerns on the left have darker body plumage and their eyes are within the boundary of black feathers, while the Clark's reverse both of those characteristics.

In the rushing photo here, there are two males in front and one female. They are, of course, competing for her affection and so although they start as three rushing birds, she drops out early to let them fight it out. She may or may not decide to bond or at least check out one in more detail, but what the selection criteria are remains known only to grebes.

The big question is just how these fairly heavy birds can do it (at 2 - 3 lbs., the largest creature that can stay up on the water's surface); what are the physics that allow it? Well, they have several adaptations that combine to accomplish the task of staying aloft for up to 8 seconds and 20 meters. They have lobed feet with flattened bones that they slap onto the water surface with 14 - 20 foot steps per second. Slapping the surface (which is why their running sound carries so far over the water) generates 30% - 55% of the required lift or support; the remaining amount comes from pushing down through the water. The final problem to be overcome is the drag on the foot as it comes up out of the water; those flattened lobes leave the water with a curious sideways motion that is actually slicing through the water with minimal resistance.

Unfortunately for the Grebes, Clear Lake is a major boating place and the best that they do is to place **advisory buoys** with a max. 5mph **exactly where the grebes are courting and later nesting**. It's an absurd situation where just one crazy boater can damage most of one year's nests.

Story - Barry Boulton **Photos - Lucia Gonzalez**

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