Central Sierra Audubon Society

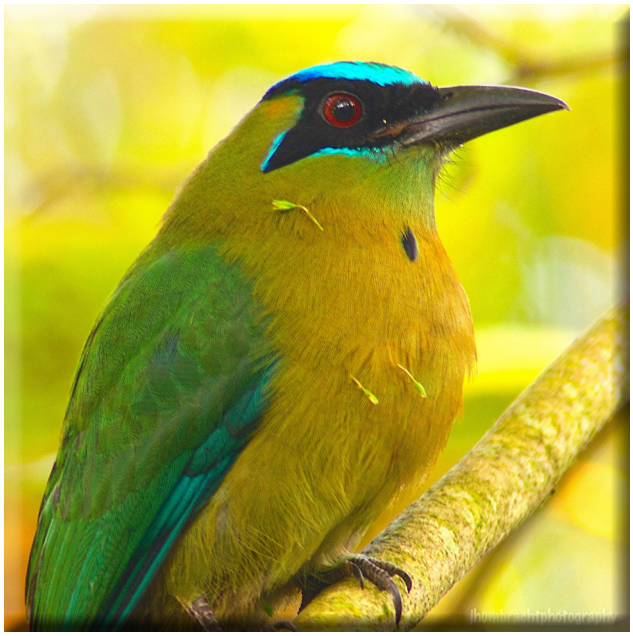
Sierra Squawker

www.centralsierraaudubon.org

January - 2018

BIRDS OF BELIZE
Presented by Rich Cimino

Belize is a tiny English-speaking country on the west side of the Caribbean next door to Guatemala that has become a mecca for bird lovers because it contains nearly 600 species compared to 660 in California in an area that is 18 times smaller! The tropical forests, savannah, numerous cayes (low-lying islands), wetlands, and coastal plains of Belize offer a myriad of habitats for many birds. Nearly half of the country's land and adjacent waters are protected under forest reserves, marine reserves, wildlife sanctuaries, national parks and other protected area designations.



Our guest and presenter, Rich Cimino, a long-time friend of mine, will regale us with photos and stories of the birds that he's seen and photographed on the trips that he has led to Belize.

Rich has birded California for 48 years, has been a member of Ohlone Audubon for 30 years where he was a conservation leader for the chapter, and is a leader and participant in a myriad of bird conservation projects. He is also a field guide to many birding symposia such as the recent Central Valley Bird Club festival in Stockton.

Rich is the owner and tour leader of Yellowbilled Tours that provides birding trips to Alaska, Belize and now France, as well as many IBAs (Important Bird Areas) in the U.S. He has previously presented "Birds of Alaska" to CSAS, and Jeanne Ridgley took a trip with Rich to Nome in Alaska just a couple of years ago, so now he is returning to entertain and educate us once again. His website is at **http://yellowbilledtours.com/**

Join us for this tropical birding adventure!

THERE WILL BE TWO VENUES FOR THIS PRESENTATION:

MURPHYS - Tuesday, Jan. 16
6pm at **Gold Country Roasters** cafe located at 78 Scott Street, Murphys (downtown).

SONORA - Wednesday, Jan. 17
7pm in the **Tuolumne County Library** on Greenley Road in Sonora.

SIGHTINGS & BEHAVIORS

Dec. 1

I like photographing birds (especially raptors) and was lucky enough to be at the right place at the right time 2 days ago out of Jamestown on a couple of **Red-tailed Hawks**. I was shooting one that was in a treetop then it took off and started calling then immediately another showed up and they both dropped their landing gear and started circling around. One even briefly went into a stoop during all this. I've seen this with the Red Tails before but seems like it was always more like February. Is this unusual behavior for late November?

Dave Douglass

Editor's response:

It's an interesting question that you ask - the Red-tailed Hawk is a monogamous species that mates for life so that, just like human couples, pairs must do things that maintain the pair bond or relationship such as aerial maneuvers and calls, and may include sham copulations. These maneuvers with hanging legs are courting, mating and bonding actions, but in November they're not ready to mate seriously because it's too early, so in this case they are specifically reinforcing their bond.

In February they're beginning to get serious about reproduction and so we could say that the winter games are solely for maintaining the pair bond whereas in Spring they're the real thing.

Dec. 20

Sandi and I drove down Rock River Road and back on Cooperstown Road. We saw **Lewis's Woodpeckers** on both roads. Also two **Prairie Falcons, a Ferruginous Hawk** and several **American Kestrels** on Rock River Road, and a **Burrowing Owl** just barely in Tuolumne County on Rock River Road. Surprisingly, we did not see any **Horned Larks** on either road. The pond at the start of Rock River Road had many **America Wigeons**, a **Green-wing Teal**, several **Bufflehead**s, a few **Mallards**, and about 20 **Canada Geese**.

John Turner

Dec. 22

I have not seen a **Varied Thrush** all Fall, but on this first day of Winter, they are back – a lovely Christmas surprise. Happy to report that the **Downy Woodpecker** that hit a window hard, slept for an hour, finally was able to fly away.

Carol Rosalind

Dec. 22

Yesterday I went to the Merced National Wildlife Refuge and it was awesome - hundreds of **Snow Geese** and other ducks. The highlight was a **White-faced Ibis** on the far side of the loop. Watched it for about 10 minutes maybe 30 feet from the car. Just foraging in the weeds on the waters edge. Unfortunately, no Sandhill cranes, but well worth the trip!

Charlotte Ginn, Red Hills, Chinese Camp

Charlotte's White-faced Ibis

The Ibis is a social bird and there's a population of well over 200 that frequents the refuge and surroundings. For several winters, a solitary Ibis, presumably the one seen by Charlotte, has foraged in that corner of the refuge. Here it was on Dec. 12.

Barry Boulton

Dec. 23

Today I made a brief mid-day visit to the Valley Springs wastewater treatment plant. There were three, possibly four **Barrow's Goldeneyes** present. Two males and one female, plus a female with a pale yellowish bill that looked like a Barrow's structurally.

John Harris, Oakdale

Dec. 26

Now the **Purple Finches** have returned, I am seeing the varieties - this is obviously an orange variety. It is thought to be food sources and not genetic processes that cause the plumage coloration in the finch.

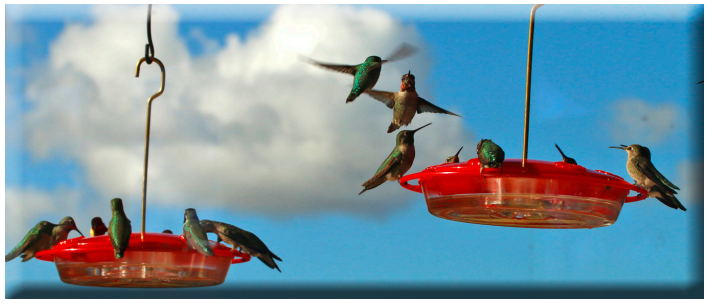
Carol Rosalind

Comment by John Turner

One theory for the unusual coloration seen is a change in diet.. Another theory is as a recovery from the pox's disease. We've seen it here at our home, on House Finches, but it is definitely uncommon. The disease usually starts as an infection in an eye. We've seen enormous swelling on an eye which often means the bird will not survive.

Dec. 26

The hummingbird feeders at John & Sandi Turner's house in La Grange are very busy - including a Nuttall's woodpecker that also appreciates their generosity!



Photos - John Turner

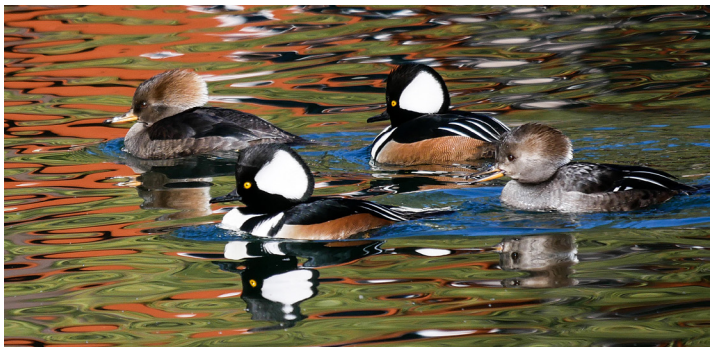
Dec. 26

Early this afternoon, driving east on 108, I saw about a dozen **American White Pelicans** fly overhead. I was driving and my husband looked back and saw about a dozen more on a pond. We think this was around the Kistler ranch ponds.

Ellen Reintjesee

Dec. 28

This has been an interesting month in the Arnold area. At Lakemont we have a fairly stable 26 or so **Hooded Mergansers** although occasionally some will spend a little time at Meadowmont pond. This is the highest count in several years.



Hooded Mergansers at Lakemont
Lucia Gonzalez

Just days ago a pair of **Wood Ducks** arrived on the lake. They probably are local breeders that know the area because they are much less shy than migrating Wood Ducks who are legally hunted and have learned to fear humans.

Interestingly, in early December one late afternoon the Hooded Mergansers were performing their courting routine with the males particularly active. This behavior is quite elegant with much head-bowing between males. On many other occasions they foraged as a group whereby one dives and then they all dive - except that one generally stays on top of the water, presumably as a lookout for danger.

The late November **Varied Thrush** passing through my garden reminded me of their recent eruptions and other migrations. Here at 4,000 ft. we see both large-scale and local migrants such as **American Robins** that move downslope for the winter. Another winter visitor for me are **Pacific Wrens** that move downslope to avoid heavy snow as they're ground feeders.

John Sutake, Arnold, 4,000 ft.

Dec. 28

Today there were 8 **Hooded Mergansers** on the first pond along Camp Nine road just off Parrotts Ferry Road. All in all, we seem to be having a high-count year of this species. But no kokanee salmon sighted in the upper Stanislaus and so probably not a good Bald Eagle year. **Barry Boulton**

Dec. 29

Pine Siskins arrived today, only stopped for water. I put out another Finch Feeder in case they return. They made 2017 with only a few days to spare! **Carol Rosalind**

UPCOMING FIELD TRIPS

Jan. 3 - 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 January 3. The property encompasses an area of more than 200 acres of oak, pine and willow habitat with three water storage ponds.

On the December 6 Bird Walk, 27 species were seen. The highlight was a flock of 22 **Cedar Waxwings. Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Lincoln's Sparrow** and **Bushtits** were also seen.

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, jeanneridgley1@sbcglobal.net

Jan. 20 - "STRING OF PEARLS" (Oakdale)

This time we will do the trip starting at the Oakdale Recreation Area on the Stanislaus River. This is often a good location to see the generally elusive Green Heron. Further on we might see Virginia Rail and Common Yellowthroat along with Song Sparrows. We may hear the rattle or, if we're really lucky, see a Belted Kingfisher, while Spotted Sandpipers and Killdeer may also be present. Last year at the covered bridge we saw an unusual sight - a large flock of American Goldfinches.

Meet 8:30am at Perko's in Sonora to carpool. This will be a 100 mile round trip from Sonora so have enough gas! Bring layered clothing in muted colors, binoculars and scopes and lunch. If you wish to meet at Oakdale, the recreation area is just off River Road in Oakdale. That is, turn right at the traffic lights in Oakdale and then turn left on River Road. The 2nd left, Liberini Ave, takes you to the parking lot where we'll assemble at 9:30am.

Paolo Maffei (209)532-8426

Jan. 28 - 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.

There were 5 of us for the Nov. 26th Indigeny Bird Walk. All in all a fairly quiet day. I wonder if the birds were hunkered down for the impending storm? Highlight was the **Sharp-shinned Hawk** just hanging out above our heads in an Oak by the parking lot. 25 species were seen.

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

GROVELAND & SONORA 2017 CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS

These are preliminary notes on these two Counts. A more in-depth review will be available in next month's Squawker. On Thursday, December 14, 11 people covered the 177 square miles of the Groveland CBC. The morning started with an Owling trip that netted Western Screech- and Great Horned Owls. The Geminid meteor shower was in full force and gave an outstanding display. Over 100 shooting stars kept the darkness exciting. On this clear, beautiful day, we found 2074 birds of 80 species. The data represent a new low in numbers for the Count. The number of species is about middle of the road. New to this count circle were Mountain Quail, Prairie Falcon, and Hutton's Vireo.

Over 40 people took to the field on Saturday, December 16, to cover the 32 Sonora CBC. It was another beautiful day, unlike last year. We managed to eke out 7184 birds of 92 species. A quick scan of the numbers shows no new species. The overall numbers shows a low to middling result while many of the species had their lowest. This is the first time we have had less than 1000 Brewer's Blackbirds. A measly 400 is incredible.

Steven Umland, Organizer & Compiler

CALAVERAS BIRD COUNT - DEC. 30

As this will occur too late for this January edition of the Squawker, we'll provide an update in the next edition.

COUNTING SANDHILL CRANES AT MERCED NWR

On December 12th I had the privilege and pleasure of joining the Fresno Audubon Society to count Sandhill Cranes at sunrise at the refuge. Fresno Audubon Board member Jane Manning coordinates these occasional counts with Fish & Wildlife Service that has oversight of the refuge. Arriving at the refuge at 6am through patchy fog and an air temperature of 28^{0}F required warm clothing and gloves, but still air made it easier. However, when the cranes began calling in the fog and then lifting off to forage in the fields, cold fingers were forgotten! They had our full attention…

With five counting stations surrounding the roosting areas we probably counted most overnighters and so our count of just over 6,000 birds was fairly accurate. Interestingly, this is a location that at high count times has seen 15,000 – 20,000 birds on-site so 6,000 is quite low. The reason seems to be not reduced migrating populations but, rather, with last year's wet winter, more places to roost safely. Indeed, a week before the count I was at the refuge at sunset and almost no birds landed; many flew in and then kept going somewhere else and the rangers tell me this is a common story this year; sometimes they land here and sometimes not.

What I learned during our post-count wrap-up session was interesting and disturbing; the refuge gets water in the Fall from Lake McClure controlled by Merced Irrigation District as part of its mitigation directive for the dams on the river but, after that directive runs out in November, the refuge must pump water from underground aquifers to maintain acceptable conditions for the Cranes. Already, because of increased agricultural pumping, the refuge now drills much deeper (down to 500 ft.) and so the question in my mind is this – for how long is this sustainable? Is this truly a long-term refuge for the Cranes? Nobody knows and apparently no-one is thinking about it, but it seems to me that it will become an issue at some point which may well threaten the over-wintering home for this population of Cranes.

The time spent watching the Cranes lift-off was exhilarating but, in addition, this refuge in winter is so rich in bird species that you can't just leave but, rather, must spend more time there – which I did! There were so many species to be seen such as the Great-horned Owl, Peregrine Falcon, Cinnamon and Northern Teal, White Pelicans, White-faced Ibis, Wilson's Snipes and many others, but the one that was special to me because I've never seen it before was an elusive Virginia Rail quietly foraging amongst the reeds near the observation platform. All-in-all, a day to remember…..

Wilson's Snipe foraging in the reeds, wishing me to just go so that she can continue feeding - which I did

Barry Boulton

PS

I am tentatively planning an overnight trip to the refuge on Feb. 27 & 28 to view the sunset fly-in and sunrise fly-out so keep those dates free if you're interested.

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/

Your CSAS Officers

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Kit DeGear, VP Programs	(925)822-5215
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