Central Sierra Audubon Society

Sierra Squawker

www.centralsierraaudubon.org February - 2018

BIRDS OF THE CHAPARRAL
Presented by Christy Sherr

Celebrate the tenacity and beauty of our often misunderstood mixed and montane chaparral in the Sierra Nevada, the plethora of chaparral-dependent birds and other wildlife, and the important roles that these chaparral-types play in forest succession. Shy birds such as the Wrentit, Green-tailed Towhee, Macgillivray's Warbler and others have evolved and adapted along with chaparral habitats. We will discuss the processes that support these species.

Christy Sherr is a retired State and National Park Ranger currently working as a Field Biologist and Education Coordinator for the John Muir Project (JMP) of the Earth Island Institute since 2015. Prior to joining JMP she worked with the project as a wildlife surveyor on the Black-backed Woodpecker Nest Density Study. Christy served as a State Park Ranger throughout California for 20 years, and was a Ranger Naturalist with the National Park Service for 5 years in Sequoia and King's Canyon National Parks. She is a life-long birder with a degree from Cal Poly – San Luis Obispo in Wildlife Biology.

THERE WILL BE TWO VENUES FOR THIS PRESENTATION:

SONORA - Wednesday, Feb. 21
7pm in the **Tuolumne County Library** on Greenley Road in Sonora.

SAN ANDREAS - Thursday, Feb. 22
6pm at **San Andreas Library** located at: 1299 Gold Hunter Rd, San Andreas.

SIGHTINGS & BEHAVIORS

Jan. 1

I came across this photo op today. I have never seen the **Great Blue Heron** hunt for rodents, always fish. I stopped and took a few pictures as I watched him catch this rodent and swallow it whole while it was still alive. I couldn't help but wonder - couldn't this rodent do some major internal damage to the heron as he was being swallowed? I could see that swollen throat on the Heron and wondered.

Story & Photos - Peggy Sells

Editor's comment:
According to Cornell Lab. of Ornithology, the Great Blue Heron enjoys a wide array of animals including fish, insects, mammals, amphibians, frogs, birds and crustaceans. Moreover, voles are an important component of nestling diet in some places.

Jan. 9

I drove down to River Rock Road on the advice of Ron McDow as a place to possibly see a **Ferruginous Hawk**. I was fortunate to spot one flying near the road within a mile of turning onto River Rock from Green Springs Road. I pulled over, got out to see it land in a nearby Oak for a few minutes then fly off again. I was able to get a few shots of this stunningly handsome bird as it flew by. I just can't get over what a cool looking hawk that was! Two things I did not know about them: they are the largest hawk, and only the Golden Eagle and some kind of vulture has leg feathers all the way down to the feet.

Story & Photos - Dave Douglass

FIELD TRIP REPORT

Jan. 20 - String of Pearls, Oakdale

We broke out of morning fog at Knights Ferry and eight birders enjoyed a beautiful, sunny but cool day, with a total of 53 species. Salvatore Salerno, President of Stanislaus Audubon met us at the preserve off River Road. Sal's birding knowledge is amazing, often anticipating, by local and season, what to look for. Seeking **Green Herons**, we heard a **Sora** at the second pond. Soon, great views of a **Blue Grey Gnatcatcher**, our "best" bird of the day. At Horseshoe pond, a variety of ducks and two more Green Herons brought our day's total to four.

The news on e-Bird was of a **Barrows Goldeneye**, upstream from the Knights Ferry Bridge. Bingo! We sighted a Goldeneye, from a distance, and continued to a promontory for a better view. Five males and nine females, with more appearing from below. Much excitement, and wishing we had a scope. Alas, Paolo's insistence that they were all Barrows was dashed, Kit was proven right. With other birders reporting, all were judged to be **Common Goldeneyes**! **Paolo Maffei**

CSAS group on the String of Pearls field trip.
Photo - Walt DeGear

UPCOMING FIELD TRIPS

Feb. 7 - GCSD

The monthly Bird Walk at the Groveland Community Services property at 18966 Ferretti Road, Groveland, will be led by Jeanne Ridgley on February 7th. The property encompasses an area of more than 200 acres of oak, pine and willow habitat with three water storage ponds.

On the January 3 Bird Walk, 33 species were seen. The highlights were **Sharp-shinned Hawk**, **Hutton's Vireo**, **Brown Creeper** and **Cedar Waxwings**.

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

Feb. 10 - SALT SPRING VALLEY

Kit DeGear will lead the field trip to this usually prolific valley. At the pond where we start our tour, we should see over-wintering waterfowl and even a **Belted Kingfisher** if we're really lucky. Along the initial grasslands, we'll see several passerines such as **Western Meadowlarks, American Pipits, White-crowned** and **Lark Sparrows** plus perhaps a **Loggerhead Shrike**. Further on is a pond that normally contains more ducks and an egret or heron - we'll need to use scopes here.

As we near the reservoir and the day warms up, we'll look for the soaring raptors, particularly the **Ferruginous Hawk** - this is probably the best place in our chapter for this species - and possibly a **Rough-legged Hawk**. We're also likely to see a **Bald Eagle** at the reservoir and perhaps a **Burrowing Owl** or two in the open grasslands. **Prairie** and **Peregrine Falcons** have been spotted in the past - although we can't make any promises!

Meet at 8:00 am at Perko's in Sonora to carpool, or on location at 9:00 am at the pond on Rock Creek Road close to the junction with highway 4 at Copperopolis. If you're coming from Angels Camp, turn right onto Rock Creek Road at the bottom of the long hill where Main Street goes left to old town Copperopolis. If you're coming from Tuolumne County, take O'byrnes Ferry Road to Copperopolis where it becomes Main street. Go over highway 4 and that's Rock Creek Road with the pond right there. Bring lunch which we'll eat at the resort. The trip will last until around 2pm.

Kit DeGear (925)822-5215 or kdegear@gmail.com

Feb. 25 - 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

Feb. 27&28 - MERCED NWR

Merced National Wildlife Refuge is the place to view **Lesser Sandhill Cranes** and **Snow & Ross's Geese** in their thousands. To fully appreciate these magnificent birds, seeing the sunset fly-in and the sunrise fly-out are magic events, so that's why we'll have an overnight trip. Sunset on February 27 will be at 5.54pm, while sunrise on February 28 will be at 6.34am, so an overnight stay is optimal.

We'll meet at 2pm at the first overlook in the refuge on Sandy Mush Road so that we can do one circuit of the autotour before sunset. **Barry Boulton (209)596-0612**

NOMADIC PINE SISKINS ARE BACK!!!

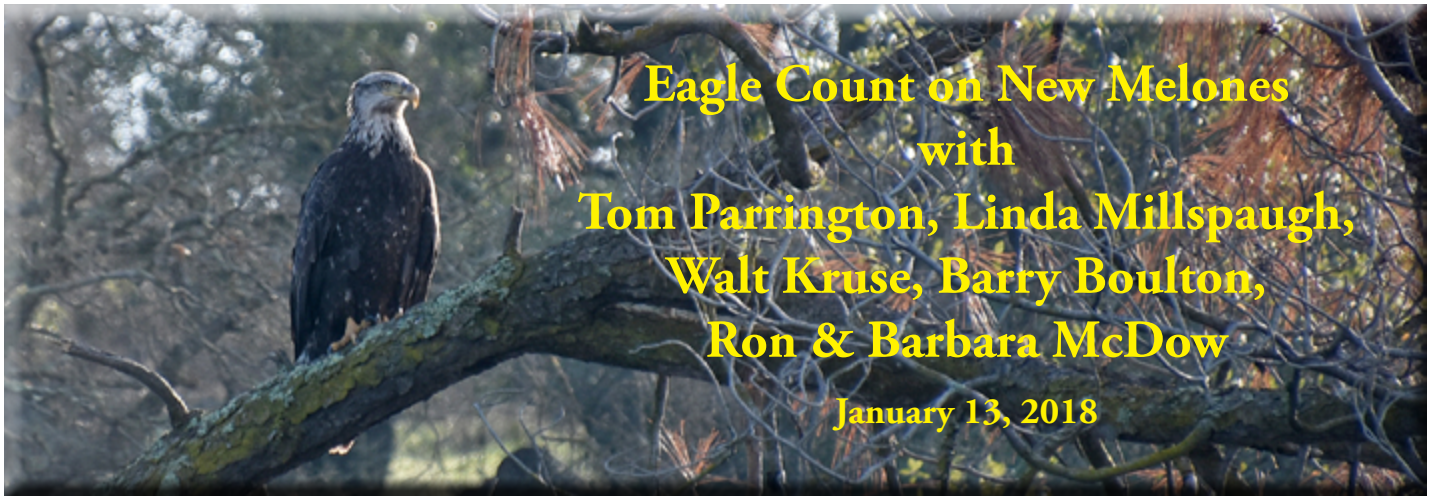
This January, my Arnold yard has been visited by a flock of **Pine Siskins** (Spinus pinus). The 40 birds have been feeding on the ground along with **Purple Finches**, **Juncos** and **Spotted Towhees**. Besides the sunflower seeds provided by me, they may have been consuming recently fallen incense cedar pollen cones.

They also glean pine trees for pine seeds and insects. They are gregarious throughout the year, even foraging in small groups during breeding season in the high Sierra. Winter flocks wander widely but I suspect that this one is moving downslope ahead of the snow. Look for them associating with crossbills and finches to which they are closely related (same genera).

John Sutake, Arnold, 4,000" elev.

The happy return of the Pine Siskins who skipped me last year - enjoying the feeder with Lesser Goldfinches.

Carol Rosalind, Groveland



Eagle Count on New Melones with Tom Parrington, Linda Millspaugh, Walt Kruse, Barry Boulton, Ron & Barbara McDow

January 13, 2018

Mated pair of Bald Eagles
Photo - Pat Sanders, USBR

A group of CSAS members joined staff from the US Bureau of Reclamation (USBR) to do the annual Eagle Count on New Melones Lake. Pat Sanders of USBR organized us into three boats and so we roamed in different parts of the lake counting every bird in sight.

We saw several **Bald Eagles** showing various ages; the immature in the top photo has "dirty" head plumage so he's not yet fully adult and ready to mate (well, he might be ready, but he won't find a willing mate!). He's probably 4 years old and may find his true love next year.

The mated pair above are showing their magnificent white head adult plumage, while the immature eating the skunk is probably only one, possibly two, years old, so he has a few lonely years ahead.

Immature Bald Eagle eating a skunk
Photo - Pat Sanders, USBR

Dear Eagle Count Participants,

Thank you for assisting with the Annual New Melones Eagle Survey on January 13, 2018. A total of 20 Bald Eagles (13 Adult/7 Immature) were counted during the survey and 5 mature Golden Eagles were also observed. That brings the total count of eagles to 25. Last year there were only 13 total eagles observed, nearly double this year.

Many other bird species were sighted including: Osprey, Doves, Woodpeckers, a variety of Grebes, Double Breasted Cormorants, Common Mergansers, Peregrine Falcon, Red Tailed Hawks, and American Kestrels. Studies show species diversity is a good indicator of the health of an aquatic ecosystem.

I want to thank all the volunteers who participated in the Eagle Survey and I look forward to seeing all of you at future events.

Sincerely,
Patricia Sanders,
Natural Resource Ranger, New Melones Lake.

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WHY BIRDS MATTER: YEAR OF THE BIRD

AUDUBON PARTNERSHIP WITH NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

"It's not just what they do for the environment – it's what they do for our souls. In 2018 we'll explore the wonder of birds, and why we really can't live without them" **- Nat. Geog.**

We mark the beginning of an exciting partnership between National Geographic, Audubon, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, BirdLife International, and dozens of other partners to make 2018 the "Year of the Bird." We want to use this year to bring tens of thousands of new people to the cause of bird conservation! To honor the centennial of the **Migratory Bird Treaty Act**, Year of the Bird will be about celebrating the wonder of our feathered friends, examining how our changing environment is driving dramatic losses among bird species, and highlighting what people can do to reverse this trend.

National Geographic will be creating new bird content throughout 2018 for their various platforms – magazines, books, maps, TV, digital channels, experience events, lodges, and kids programs. There is a dedicated Year of the Bird website at **birdyourworld.org**, and during each month of 2018, a themed call-to-action to inspire people to help birds. Audubon is creating specialized Year of the Bird content at **audubon.org/yearofthebird** to help people learn about the threats birds face today and to inspire them to take action in line with Audubon's priorities – from creating bird-friendly homes to growing native plants for birds to taking part in community science programs like the Christmas Bird Count to using their voice to advocate for birds.

If you, members and friends of Central Sierra Audubon, have the time and energy, please take a look at these conservation opportunities. Even if we can each take one action this year, that action multiplied by thousands of others, can have an impact. If you're not a National Geographic Magazine subscriber, you might consider it for 2018 because these articles are spectacular.

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MIGRATORY BIRD TREATY ACT UNDER THREAT!!!!

ACTION REQUESTED

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA), our most important bird protection law is under attack. Legislation in Congress (HR 4239), and a new interpretation of the law by the administration, would end the ability to hold industries accountable for bird deaths.

These proposals would prevent enforcement of "incidental" bird deaths, removing incentives for companies to adopt practices that protect birds from threats such as oil waste pits, and eliminating penalties for companies that kill substantial numbers of birds, including from large oil spills.

Urge our member of Congress, Tom McClintock, and the Department of the Interior to uphold the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. You can email Tom McClintock via this portal:

https://mcclintock.house.gov/contact/email-me

FIREHAWKS: AVIAN PYROMANIACS MAY HAVE USED FIRE BEFORE HUMANS

The use and control of fire has long been assumed to be a skill unique to humans. However, according to a fascinating paper recently published in the Journal of Ethnobiology, it's possible that birds of prey beat us to it. Moreover, it's a phenomenon that's long been recognised in sacred Aboriginal ceremonies. But the idea that "firehawks" (a generic term for three widespread Australian raptors, the Black Kite, Whistling Kite and Brown Falcon) might intentionally spread bushfires, with the intention of flushing out prey, has for decades been treated with skepticism in scientific circles. This carefully written paper may finally change that.

It documents both Indigenous ecological knowledge and many first-hand observations by non-Indigenous people, including firefighters, of these avian pyromaniacs. As fires burn themselves out, the hawks pick up burning or smoking material – presumably at some risk to themselves – and carry it up to a kilometer before dropping it in unburned areas with the aim of creating fresh fronts on which to forage (as well as fresh headaches for firefighters).

See the full (fascinating) story at:
https://meanjin.com.au/blog/firehawks-avian-pyromaniacs-may-have-used-fire-before-humans/

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GROVELAND & SONORA 2017 CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS

Groveland—Four new species were seen on Count day. These were Mountain Quail, Hutton's Vireo, Rough-legged Hawk, and Prairie Falcon. These were great finds. Showing up in their highest numbers were Wild Turkey, Red-shouldered Hawk, and Western Screech-Owl. On the flip side, waterfowl took a big hit this year. Six species (plus the Coots) were at their lowest numbers. A mere 25 Mallards is inexplicable. A paltry 12 Western Bluebirds and 51 Robins were the poorest showing since the onset of the Count. I am sure that everyone will be saddened to hear that the ubiquitous European Starling came in with only 65 individuals.

When I compare this Count to the Sonora CBC I am struck by the disparity in species found and numbers seen. The differences can be explained when you check the participants. Groveland sported 11 people while Sonora fielded 42 observers!

Sonora—While the Groveland Count experienced very low numbers in waterfowl this year, Canada Geese and Bufflehead in Sonora saw their highest. 786 Geese and 50 Buffs graced our lenses this past December 17. 101 Turkey Vultures were the most we have seen. The ups and downs of this species every year make it difficult to make any predictions for the future.

Robins took a big hit this year. Numbers were way down from the very high of 16710 way back 1987! This is only the 4th time in 32 Counts where there were less than 1000 seen. The 156 seen this time was just about half of the previous low of 321 in 1995.

Steven Umland, Organizer & Compiler

CALAVERAS 2017 CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

We observed 96 species, which is an increase from last year's 78. We had 48 participants this year which was an increase from 36 in 2016. We had a large number of waterfowl including Wood Duck, American Widgeon, Ring-necked Duck, Lesser Scaup, Bufflehead, Goldeneye, Hooded and Common Merganser, Ruddy Ducks and American Coots. Five Bald Eagles and 2 Merlins were spotted as well as Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks. A Northern Harrier was also observed. Smaller birds included a large number of Bushtits, Brown Creepers, a Rock Wren and a Pacific Wren. A large number of Ruby-crowned Kinglets were observed. The count also included both a Townsend's and an Orange-crowned Warbler.

In the early morning hours, 2 Pygmy Owls and 1 Northern Saw-Whet Owl were heard vocalizing, along with 2 Great-Horned Owls vocalizing in the afternoon. Both the Hutton's and Cassin's Vireos were observed along with a Slate-colored Junco and Lincoln's Sparrow.

The weather was partly cloudy and fairly warm for this time of year and so a good day for birding!

Keith & Sandra Maurer
Organizers & Compilers

Bald Eagle along Camp 9 Road.
Photo - Rory Erbeck

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

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