Central Sierra Audubon Society

Sierra Squawker

www.centralsierraaudubon.org

January - 2019

SONORA PUBLIC MEETING

"Binoculars - Our Indispensable Tool"

Presented by Rich Combs

Quality binoculars have a right to feel misunderstood. Besides being thrown in the sandbox without lens covers, often used as monoculars, judged by their $29.95 poor cousins, or simply forgotten and left at home, they can be an exceptional tool if only they could be understood. Therapist Rich Combs hopes to provide some in depth understanding of these instruments, and optimize their use as an indispensable tool for birders and outdoor enthusiasts alike.

Rich Combs spent over 30 years doing optical design for various laser programs at Lawrence Livermore Lab. He just retired as president of the Tri-Valley Stargazers Astronomy Club, centered in Livermore, and is an active observer and telescope maker. For 15 years he has given astronomy programs at Bald Mountain for the Summit Ranger District, and enjoys hiking locally and around the world, including hiking the length of New Zealand on Te Araroa. He enjoys looking through both ends of binoculars.

Wednesday, January 16 at 6:30 pm

At the County Library, Sonora (Greenley Rd)

CALAVERAS PUBLIC MEETING

Round Table Discussion hosted by Barry Boulton & John Sutake

This month, we'll try a new experiment; rather than having our usual one-way topical presentation, this time we'll gather around over food and drinks to discuss birds. For a change, you can all participate as you wish, although John Sutake and myself will be your guides. That will enable you to talk about some of your birding experiences and observations, discuss your opinions on them, and we can see if others have seen the same or similar. John and I will provide historical and evolutionary contexts so that we can discuss where those aspects fit in with our day-to-day observations. So, bring your observations, questions, hypotheses and thoughts and we'll bounce them around. If you don't want to share but just to listen that's quite OK - there will be no pressure to speak.

The Bistro Espresso has fine food, coffee, beer and wine, so this will be a perfect environment in which to try a new and more interactive approach to birding. Come along at around 5:30pm to order food & drinks for a 6pm start.

Thursday, January 24 at 6:00 pm

At Bistro Espresso, Arnold (Oak Circle Drive)

California to Protect Birds as Trump Administration Abandons them

Sacramento, November 29, 2018 – California legal and wildlife officials today released a legal advisory affirming the state's ability and intent to protect migratory birds from commercial and industrial activity even as the federal government refuses to do so. The move by California Attorney General Xavier Becerra and Director Chuck Bonham of the California Fish and Wildlife Department comes as the Trump Administration has signaled its intention to abandon enforcement of key provisions of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA).

"California is home to hundreds of magnificent bird species, such as the Sandhill Crane and Burrowing Owl, that will benefit from this affirmative statement that they will be protected," said Sarah Rose, executive director of Audubon California. "These birds are an important part of California's natural legacy, just like our beaches, mountains, and deserts."

This action is the culmination of work by Audubon California and our many advocates throughout 2018 to raise the profile of this issue to state policymakers and compel them to take steps to protect our birds. In 2018, Audubon California sponsored legislation to reinforce protections for migratory birds in existing state law. That effort dramatically raised awareness throughout the Capitol about the plight of migratory birds and the threat created by the Trump Administration's actions. Audubon California eventually withdrew this legislation because we felt we could make more progress working with the administration – and that effort resulted in last week's announcement.

The MBTA is one of the nation's oldest environmental laws, and has been the foundation of protections for migratory birds in North America for more than a century. In a legal opinion issued December 2017, however, the Trump administration abruptly reversed decades of government policy and practice—by both Democratic and Republican administrations—on the implementation and enforcement of the MBTA.

"This move by the State of California is an example for other states seeking avenues to protect migratory birds until the federal government again lives up to its historic and legal obligations," said Sarah Greenberger, senior vice president for conservation policy at National Audubon Society.

The Act's prohibition on the killing or "taking" of migratory birds has long been understood to extend to so-called incidental take from industrial activities—meaning unintentional but predictable and avoidable killing. Under the Trump administration's revised interpretation, the MBTA's protections will apply only to activities that purposefully kill birds. Any "incidental" take—no matter how inevitable or devastating the impact on birds—is now immune from enforcement under the law. The Administration intends to change the regulations that guide how the law is enforced to reflect its radical legal opinion, which will make it more permanent and binding.

The California legal advisory specifically notes the state's ability to enforce the so-called "incidental take" that the federal government is seeking to allow. "California's protections for migratory birds, including a prohibition against incidental take, remain clear and unchanged," the advisory reads.

California law contains a number of provisions prohibiting the "take" of migratory birds," the advisory reads, and then includes an extensive listing of California law that allows officials to protect migratory birds in the absence of federal involvement.

The federal abandonment of incidental take enforcement is alarming not only because the Act has been used to prosecute violations, but also to compel industries to proactively take steps to minimize the impacts of their operations on birds. The Administration's new legal interpretation opens the door for industries like mining and oil drilling to kill migratory birds without attempt to avoid or mitigate such impacts.

California in September joined seven other states in a lawsuit challenging the Administration's decision not to enforce key elements of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. In May of this year, Audubon led a coalition of environmental groups to file a similar suit challenging the Administration's move.

FIELD TRIP REPORTS

Lodi Sandhill Crane Trip, Dec. 4

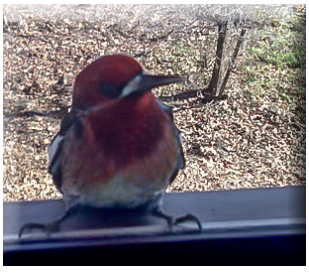
On Tuesday, December 4, twelve bird lovers left Tuolumne County to see the Sandhill Cranes in Lodi and then the ducks and shorebirds at the Cosumnes River Preserve. The sky was overcast with temps in the high 40s at the beginning of the trip. After stopping for coffee where a Northern Mockingbird was spotted in the Starbucks parking lot, the group gathered at the side of Woodbridge Road to view Sandhill cranes.

While on Woodbridge Road, the group chanced to meet David Yee, nature photographer, who will be leading a CSAS field trip in April at the Ironstone Winery in Murphys.

After driving the length of the road and viewing cranes, egrets, geese, numerous ducks and a Belted King Fisher, the group headed to the Cosumnes River Preserve. At the preserve lunch was had under the covered porch at the Visitor's Center. (The Visitor's Center includes a "natural history room" with a life size model of a Sandhill Crane, pamphlets and books on the local flora and fauna). One of the highlights of the 2 hour walk along waterways and riparian habitat included an up close and personal view of an unidentified hawk just 20 feet above the group. After consultation with several members and Sibleys' bird guide, the bird was identified as a juvenile Red-tailed Hawk. The total trip yielded 53 bird species.

Some of the bird sightings included several Northern Harriers, Greater White fronted Geese, a Lincoln's Sparrow, and a Ruby-crowned Kinglet. No woodpeckers were spotted in the woodlands at Cosumnes. Our chapter bird identification specialists for this walk were Kit DeGear, Tom Harrington, and Tom Parrington. Many thanks to them for their knowledge and participation in the identification process. **Jean Dakota**

CSAS Birders on location. Photo: Sherrie Wendt



Our very own Ralph Retherford arrived at work to hear tap-tap-tap in his office; it turned out to be this confused Red-breasted Sapsucker presumably attacking its own reflection. Somewhat surprising in December?

UPCOMING FIELD TRIPS

Wednesday, Jan. 2 - GCSD

The first Wednesday of the month Bird Walk at Groveland Community Services property at 18966 Ferretti Road, Groveland will be led by Jeanne Ridgley on January 2, 2019. The property encompasses an area of more than 200 acres of oak, pine and willow habitat with three water storage ponds.

The species count on the rainy December Bird Walk was 24, including a Red-breasted Sapsucker and a flock of 15 Cedar Waxwings.

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. **Jeanne Ridgley (209)962-7598**

SIGHTINGS & OBSERVATIONS

December 17 - 24

Up here in the Arnold area at 4,000 ft., bird activity is on the slow side, but still some nice views. At White Pines lake just behind Arnold a Bald Eagle sat at the top of a tree surveying its domain, although no action on this occasion. Sometime last year one such, perhaps this bird, successfully attacked and reduced the local American Coot population. The Bald Eagle, like the Osprey, is an occasional visitor at White Pines and you need luck to make an observation.

At Lakemont we now have 7 Ring-necked (I want to say Ring-billed) Ducks and 12 Hooded Mergansers - fewer than last year at this time. I observed a female Merganser chasing off a male who was perhaps being a little too fresh....

John Sutake, Arnold

SONORA AND GROVELAND CBCs

We had back to back CBCs this year and the weather was perfect for two days in the field. The birds did not cooperate as we would have expected, but we managed two excellent Counts.

In Groveland 13 people tallied 4914 birds of 83 species. We generally see lower numbers of birds on this Count due to, of course, the fewer people we have out in the field on Count day. Of the 83 species, we found Count high numbers for the following: Canada Goose-217; Common Goldeneye-5; Common Turkey-79; Double-crested Cormorant-12; Great Blue Heron-13; Black Phoebe-28; Hermit Thrush-32; Red-winged Blackbird-250; and Lawrence's Goldfinch-54.

Low numbers for this Count showed up with Common Goldeneye-5 and Spotted Towhee-11.

On the following day, 39 people pounded the pavement for the Sonora count and turned up 91 species with a total tally of 9549. The species that turned up with the lowest counts since we began were Flicker-57; Steller's Jay-15; California Scrub-Jay-218, California Towhee-94, Spotted Towhee-194, Red-winged Blackbird-20.

The bird that tallied the highest number was the Raven, a whopping 131 birds counted.

Now, the question that turns up the most here is "Why?", "Why do we see these extremes?" To me, habitat change is crucial. As we grind up, pave, burn, and warm up certain areas, that affects birds that either nest or overwinter in those areas. Tree nesters take a big hit when their trees are cut down. Ground nesters are adversely affected when their precious ground is turned into parking lots or orchards. When you combine this with the same outcomes in their wintering area, an overwhelming stress is put on our feathered friends.

On the other hand, certain species of birds experience population boosts with their dependence on interactions with humans. Buildings are great places for a variety of birds to nest on. Power lines are great perching spots.

The final numbers for local Counts are still being assessed. It is hard to make overall conjectures about bird numbers based on local numbers. For example, the Sonora CBC had the lowest number of Red-winged Blackbirds while the Groveland CBC experienced their highest. That being said, we are experiencing a decline in the total number of birds seen on our Counts.

The highest number of birds ever seen on the Sonora Count was our 2nd, in 1987. We found over 27,000 birds that day! Of course, 16,000 were Robins. During the early 90s, we had Counts of well over 10,000 birds. From 1998 to 2008, each Count was above 15,000 birds! Total numbers have declined steadily since 2012. They bottomed out in 2016 with a dismal 6000 tallied.

To kick off the new millennium, the Count in 2000 had 123 species! Awesome! Since 2009 we have only gotten above 100 species three times (and that, just barely). Here's hoping to big increases in the coming years.

Next year, the Sonora Count will be held on Saturday, December 14th. The Groveland Count will be on Tuesday, December 17th.

Steven Umland, Sonora/Groveland CBC Coordinator

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December 23

I took a drive along Cooperstown Rd. and Rock River yesterday. The bird viewing is fantastic!

Peggy Sells

Editor's note - here are three spectacular shots by Peggy, but you can see more at:
https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.1936708499715590&type=1&l=a075071f82

A male **Northern Harrier**. The male is much less commonly seen than the female, and to get a shot this close is quite amazing. See that it has a lot of gray coloration while the female has more brown - it's why the male is often referred to as the "gray ghost".

A **Ferruginous Hawk** - largest of the buteos. Winter is time to see this majestic bird so, remember, not all hawks are Red-tails!

This little **Burrowing Owl** has an excellent location for both camouflage and protection - and it take sharp eyes to see it against this background!

Look at Peggy's Facebook page for more gorgeous shots on this same trip.

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An Open Letter to Congressman Tom McClintock

I recently wrote to Rep. McClntock about climate change to which I received the following standard response. We cannot let these politicians get away with this sort of nonsense and so I encourage you to write to him so that he knows that constituents see through the lies. As frustrating as it is right now, we must not be silent, so please communicate with him - often. He knows that in the November election he received only 55% of the votes which means a 5% swing can overturn him. I could have written a whole treatise from his reply (and was tempted!) but the important thing is not the length, but its very existence. You can email him by going to his website at: http://mcclintock.house.gov Let him know that these responses are ignorant and unacceptable.

McClintock to Boulton, December 6, 2018

Thank you for contacting me regarding global climate change.
I firmly believe that the United States should not hamstring its economy in an attempt to combat global warming.
The Earth's climate is constantly changing and has been since the planet formed over four billion years ago. We know that during the Medieval warm period, from the 10th through the 13th centuries, wine grapes were grown in northern Britain, and Iceland and Greenland supported a thriving agricultural economy. We also know that during the Little Ice Age that followed, the Thames River froze solid every winter and advancing ice sheets destroyed many towns in Europe.
Simply adding more regulations based on suspect science will not change natural climate patterns. Such regulations will, however, devastate our economy and make America less competitive with nations like China and India, who refuse to strangle their economies. For these reasons, I will not support them.

Dear Congressman McClintock,
Thanks for your response to my communication to I would like to comment, particularly on your expression "suspect science" which is, as you well know, a loaded and prejudicial expression that actually says nothing.

Our modern world depends on science; indeed, our mutual communication today on this issue through the internet depends on scientific understanding. We trust the scientific process because it works – when did you last fly to Washington and felt fear that the plane may fall out of the sky because Boeing used "suspect science" to design their planes? You didn't of course because you trust the process. Similarly, when you turn on a light switch, drive in a car or when you vote to authorize the funding of new military aircraft and munitions, you trust the underlying scientific process because you know that it works.

I'm sure that you, just like the American public, appreciate weather forecasts and therefore forecasting as a science because you know and trust that it provides useful and necessary information. You know, of course, that weather and climate projections aren't as certain as the law of motion expounded by Isaac Newton, but you also know that we understand scientifically why that is the case, so we are not facing a mystery here. That is why climate change projections show ranges rather than precise scenarios; we know through constant observations, measurements and the scientific process (which involves peer to peer robust discussions and arguments) where the climate is headed, and the most probable impacts on the environment.

Of course, you're not the first influential person to be confused by uncertainty - even Einstein couldn't easily accept Heisenberg's discovery of the uncertainty principle in quantum mechanics. Einstein was proved wrong.....

As you say, climate change is a constant over Earth's history, but you miss two essentials; first, that humankind was not a cause of your examples and, second, that human populations were hurt by those changes. In the 1300s the world population was circa 370 million while it is now 7.5 billion (20 times greater) with much greater consumption, emissions and desires per person. It means more human catastrophes because so many live in vulnerable areas such as the coasts of Bangladesh, Florida and even the San Francisco bay delta and Central Valley. Your response seems to imply that we will always adapt and so nothing to worry about, we need to do nothing. If that concept of ignoring problems is the golden rule, then we shouldn't worry about diseases and epidemics or even wars because they, too, have occurred on and off while humans survived and multiplied. Of course, these arguments are ghastly and foolish and you would strongly oppose them - but then, the same goes for climate change denial.

So please Congressman, no more "suspect science" until you have the integrity and dignity to say which parts are suspect and why, and then we can hold a rational discussion. Suspect beliefs are certainly not part of the scientific process, and should not be part of the democratic process.

Sincerely,
Barry Boulton
President, Central Sierra Audubon Society (Tuolumne & Calaveras Counties)

GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT 2019

For those of you who can't join one of our Christmas Birds Counts, whether because you're doing something else, you're unwell, or you don't want to be out all day birdwatching, this event in February might just be your "cup of tea". It can be as short as you like, but all birds observed and uploaded still add to the database to extend our knowledge of bird populations - a very important set of data.

The Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) is a free, fun, and easy event that engages bird watchers of all ages in counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of bird populations. Participants are asked to count birds for as little as 15 minutes (or as long as they wish) on one or more days of the four-day event and report their sightings on-line at **birdcount.org**. Anyone can take part in the Great Backyard Bird Count, from beginning bird watchers to experts, and you can participate from your backyard, or anywhere in the world.

Each checklist submitted during the GBBC helps researchers at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society learn more about how birds are doing, and how to protect them and the environment we share. Last year, more than 160,000 participants submitted their bird observations on-line, creating the largest instantaneous snapshot of global bird populations ever recorded.

The 21st annual GBBC will be held Friday, February 16, through Monday, February 19, 2018. Please visit the official website at **birdcount.org** for more information and be sure to check out the latest educational and promotional resources.

This count is so much fun because anyone can take part—we all learn and watch birds together—whether you are an expert, novice, or feeder watcher. "I like to invite new birders to join me and share the experience. Get involved, invite your friends, and see how your favorite spot stacks up" Says Gary Langham, Audubon's Chief Scientist.

Bird populations are always shifting and changing. For example, 2014 GBBC data highlighted a large irruption of Snowy Owls across the northeastern, mid-Atlantic, and Great Lakes areas of the United States. The data also showed the effects that warm weather patterns have had on bird movement around the country. For more on the results of the latest GBBC, take a look at the GBBC Summary, and be sure to check out some of the images in the 2017 GBBC Photo Contest Gallery.

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

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Pattie Henderson, Membership	(209)586-2169
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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
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