

Central Sierra Audubon Society

Sierra Squawker



www.centralsierraaudubon.org

April - 2019

SONORA PUBLIC MEETING

THE SCIENCE IN NATURE

Presented by Nancy Muleady-Mecham, Ph.D

Look at the science of nature; how does water get to the top of a tree; how do animals stay warm; where did the gold in the mother lode come from; how do deer know when to grow their antlers & how do we see the natural world? These and other processes of the natural world will be explored.

Following in the footsteps of Alexander von Humboldt who first interpreted the natural world through scientific understanding and processes, Nancy will take us deep into the processes of understanding the natural world through the scientific process that has made such incredible steps forward since renaissance times. Doc. Nancy is an Adjunct Professor of biology at Northern Arizona University and Columbia College, Sonora as well as a Visiting Lecturer for the University of Virginia Semester At Sea Program where she taught biology around the world. Doc. Nancy was selected by the United States as a Fulbright Scholar and traveled to the Russian Federation to teach at Gorno-Altai State University in southwest Siberia and to conduct research in remote protected areas.



Nancy is a retired United States National Park Ranger and lives in the Sierra Nevada with her family. When not working on her research on Giant Sequoias she loves to backpack. She has completed solo hikes of the John Muir and High Sierra Trails through the Sierra Nevada, hiked through the Alps on The Haute Route from Chamonix to Zermatt, and is a Pacific Crest Trail section hiker. She is the author of several books.

Wednesday, April 17 at 6:30 pm

At the County Library, Sonora (Greenley Rd)

FIELD TRIP REPORTS

Salt Springs Valley - March 16



Group photo by Walt DeGear

Ten birders met at the first pond. We saw a Wilson's Snipe, a Belted Kingfisher, but fewer ducks than usual. Great close-up viewing of Pied-billed Grebes and spectacular flashing of epaulets by Red-wing Blackbirds. At Salt Springs reservoir, the sought after Rock Wren appeared for Paolo, from under a car at the resort office, but not, as expected, on our walk over the dam, where a couple of mishaps with muddy boots on the return were rewarded by a beautiful garter snake. It posed for all to see the ruby red spots on its sides.



Garter Snake photo by Barry Boulton

Across the lake, four immature Bald Eagles cavorted. According to the resort manager, they're still being fed by two parent pairs, two offspring each. On the loop by the landmark schoolhouse, scanning for no-show Ferruginous Hawks, Kit's sharp ears caused us to look skyward, to a hundred Sandhill Cranes circling on their northward journey. The day produced a Prairie Falcon, Loggerhead Shrike, fly-catching Lewis's Woodpeckers, Phainopepla and a second Rock Wren, for a total of 65 species, not counting the Emus, seen at a distance from the farmhouse.

Paolo Maffei, Trip Leader



*3 of the 4 immature Bald Eagles cavorting across the lake
Photo by Barry Boulton*

Ironstone, Murphys - March 23



Group photo by Walt DeGear

When my alarm went off at 6:45 am, and I could hear the rain pounding down outside, I was more than ready to cancel the trip. However, checking the weather I thought there was a chance that the rain might clear. Good call! Not only did 4 others join me but the birds did, too. We were quickly treated to a Hermit Thrush and several Golden-crowned Sparrows in the parking lot. We changed our direction given the rain, and started up by the Visitor Center which had some rain cover. We were surrounded by half wine barrels filled with an incredible display of daffodils and tulips. Worth the trip in and of themselves. High above in an Oak a Merlin was perched, I suspect checking out the Lesser Goldfinches at the feeder below. Other highlights included 2 more Hermit Thrushes, a Fox Sparrow and 6 pairs of Wood Ducks! A total of 31 species were seen. A great drippy, soggy no-sunshine day!



Wet birding! Photo by Alan Beymer

Kit DeGear

Indigeny - March 24

While the temperature was in the low 30's, the sun was out! Eight of us enjoyed our morning stroll where 41 species were seen. Highlights included an unusual sighting of a Western Meadowlark singing way up high in the top of a large Oak, (a first for me at this location), a nice close up view of a Cooper's Hawk and a Hutton's Vireo. Next month should bring in some of our Spring visitors, Western Kingbird, Bullock's Oriole and the Black-headed Grosbeak to name a few. Join me!

Kit DeGear

APRIL FIELD TRIPS

April 3 (Wednesday) - 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 April 3, 2019. The property encompasses an area of more than 200 acres of oak, pine and willow habitat with three water storage ponds.

The March 6 Bird Walk was cancelled due to rain.

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

April 6 (Sat) - String-of-Pearls at Oakdale

We will start the trip 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. Last year we saw a Sora and four Green Herons, but our "best bird of the day" was a Blue Gray Gnatcatcher. In total, we saw 53 species - pretty good!

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

April 11 (Thursday) - Merced Vernal Pools & Grassland Reserve

This grassland reserve is about all that remains of the original grasslands habitats of the Central Valley as they were in the 1800s. As such, it is a critical habitat for wildlife including birds of course.

We shall be led and guided by the Director of the Reserve, Monique Kostler who will give us an introduction to this fascinating and unique ecosystem and its history. I'm hoping that we'll see one of my favorite little birds - the Horned Lark, but many others besides.

The tour on the reserve will be from 9am to 12 noon which means leaving Perko's in Sonora at 7:30am so, if you're joining us, you'll need to get to Perko's a little earlier.

If you wish to participate, you must let me know beforehand, and you will need to sign two waiver forms that I'll provide to you on your request.

If you're interested, I suggest that you view their website so that you have a good understanding of the place and the activities that UC Merced facilitates there. Their url is: <https://vernalpools.ucmerced.edu/>

Barry Boulton (209)596-0612
or **rbarryboulton@gmail.com**

April 20 (Sat) Wards Ferry Road

We will take a bird walk along Wards Ferry Road and through our ranch and our neighbor's 400 acre ranch known as the Kiriluk ranch which overlooks Turnback Creek. That creek flows into the Tuolumne River. This is a repeat of an outing held over the last five years ago. Bring a bag lunch. Refreshments will be provided at the barn.

The walk starts at 8:00 a.m. by the barn at 15589 Wards Ferry Road which is approximately 5 miles southerly from its intersection with Tuolumne Road, and about 1/4 miles southerly of the intersection with Yosemite Road.

Tom Parrington

April 27 (Sat) - Ironstone Winery, Murphys

The Ironstone Winery in Murphys has a rich habitat comprising many oaks of various ages and sizes, wetlands and pond, open lawns and vines where we will see many species.

We will have the pleasure of being led by **David Yee** of the Central Valley Bird Club. David is a superb field trip leader because he constantly talks through what he's seeing and hearing, and then gives lots of information on the species at hand. In other words, he provides a superb learning experience for those of us who are still on the way.

We are also hoping and expecting to explore new areas of Ironstone as the weather improves and dries out to make those other areas accessible.

We'll meet in the lower parking lot at 8:30am and our walk will last 2 - 3 hours. Rain will cancel the trip. From highway 4 at Murphys take Main Street and turn left at Scott Street until you bear left where Scott Street ends to become 6 Mile Road. From here the formal entrance to Ironstone is just one mile on the right (don't take what looks like an entrance halfway on the right as it's simply a working gate). Just inside the Ironstone entrance, bear left and park on the left side.

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

April 28 (Sunday) - 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 (Field Trip Chair)

SIGHTINGS & OBSERVATIONS

March 1

Saw two migrating Snow Geese headed west at 108/Soulsbyville Road. Then, unusually, 3 Bald Eagles; first at Hess where it landed on top of lone cedar tree, second at Cedar Springs Rd. on ground in the meadow, and the third at Lake-wood Park, Twain Harte, circling around.

John Gleason

Mar.21

Anna's Hummingbird - males and females, trying to get to feeders but being hassled by scrappy Rufous. Rufous Hummingbird - males scrapping over hummingbird feeders. Bullock's Oriole- male First of Season--appeared on Hummingbird feeder.

John Turner

Mar. 21

Greg Robbins shot this handsome Brewer's Blackbird up close and personal at the Willow Springs pond on Thursday. He was gathering nesting material, but dropped it all and came over to us. I think he was hoping that we would feed him, as there was evidence that someone was there before us who left food for the birds and ducks.



There are now two immature Double-crested Cormorants that seem to have taken up residence, along with the pair of Lesser Scaups. We also spotted a Cedar Waxwing, which was a first at this location.

Jean Dakota

Food Envy & Competition



*Photo and story by Pat Sanders,
Bureau of Reclamation*

This adult Bald Eagle had caught a fish at New Melones, but food always attracts company it seems. As you'll see, the Turkey Vulture at top left is looking longingly, although not daring to get too close. What you can't see is that down to the right out of view is a Raven, also coveting that fish! Eventually the eagle gave up and took its catch away to eat.



*Here's the Mother Lode at its magnificent best - beautiful wildflowers, granite rocks and almost-fluorescent lichen.
Great shot by Dave Douglass*

Backyard Birding at Hathaway Pines
by Alan Beymer

After a recent medical adventure in San Andreas, the doctor advised me to take it easy for a month. His advice was backed up by some severe winter weather which made even routine outings difficult.



Unfortunately, I do not do inactive very well. Television never holds my attention very long. So, I read, sketched, washed dishes, took short walks and watched birds. Reading, sketching, kitchen chores and walking are reliable time fillers. But bird watching from indoors took me by surprise and became the highlight of my recuperation.

Our new home has a sunroom on the west side and the view of the backyard is wide angled and clear. At first, armed with binoculars, I would see an occasional bird. Once I set up the telephoto lens on a tripod, the birds became more numerous and frequent. I think they were there all along, but my concentration seems to improve when I get behind the camera.

I have been cleared to resume normal activities, but I think my indoor bird watching will continue to be part of my daily routine.



Narrative & Photos by Alan Beymer
Clockwise from top left: Brown Creeper, Nuttall's Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, American Robin

Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua
June 14-16, 2019 in Lee Vining, CA

The Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua brings birders together to enhance appreciation and understanding of the Mono Basin's diverse and abundant bird life and to educate the public about this area's value to birds and people. The Chautauqua offers over 90 field trips, workshops, and presentations with renowned bird guides, naturalists, and artists. Add live music and delicious food, and you've got yourself a fantastic long weekend in nature with friends!

The Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua is a very popular event. Many field trips will fill to capacity within minutes of registration opening.



We suggest being as prepared as possible with trip choices as well as multiple alternative choices from the program. Register on our secure site for the events you wish to participate in along with your complete contact and payment information. You will be registered for the events of your choice based on availability. Registering online is faster, easier, and quickly confirms your spots.

Mountain Bluebird
in Jeffrey Pine forest
at the 2018 Chautauqua
Photo by Barry Boulton

Please fully prepare yourself to register by reading our registration before registration opens:

<http://www.birdchautauqua.org/register.php>

Registration is on April 15 at 6:30am

Editor's note

I have attended these Chautauquas for several years now and I can affirm that this is an event to attend and remember. The field trip leaders are impassioned and knowledgeable, the birding is superb, and the whole atmosphere just has to be experienced.

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Thoughts on Ostriches and Evolution

by Polo Maffei

[Paolo and his wife Janet took a trip to South America at the end of last year for many pursuits, not least to learn the romantic Argentinian tango!]

On our trip around the Horn, in Montevideo, we hired a taxi driver who took us birding to a zoo. Next to the enclosure of lesser Rheas, was the African Ostrich. Rheas have a greenish neck, but one can see why Darwin referred to them as ostriches in his "Voyage of the Beagle." The common ancestor of these birds, plus the emu, must have predated the separation of continents from Pangaea, over a hundred million years ago, well before "the end of the dinosaurs." These bird/dinosaur ancestors presumably lived some for some 40-50 million years along with the other dinosaurs, those that went extinct. Feathers serve them better for keeping eggs warm, perhaps also for display purposes (although there is little sexual dimorphism) but not for flying.

According to an article in Scientific American, the evolution of birds, in all their diversity, was accomplished relatively rapidly, over forty million years or so, yet these "ostrich" species, once well adapted to a given lifestyle, remain today almost unchanged; they had no reason to. They're not very smart - in an ostrich farm in Israel, we were told they don't even recognize the people who feed them. Brains are very costly, taking, in our case 40% of our caloric expenditure. Crows can recognize human faces. A raven in England greets people using a Yorkshire accent that it's learned!

By contrast, in evolutionary timescale, in Lake Victoria, a whole panoply of fish, occupying every niche, carnivores, herbivores, predators (often horizontally striped) prey species (often vertically striped,) all derived from a common cichlid ancestor, occurred over a mere ten thousand years.

Paolo Maffei

Late Sightings (Mar 29)

Just returned to Arnold and visited the local lakes to observe the changes. At Lakemont Pines there is still a pair of Hooded Mergansers – presumably mated pair – left over from the wintering group of over twenty. The interesting question now is whether they, too, will migrate, or whether they'll reside here semi-permanently. Time will tell. On the same lake were two male Ring-necked Ducks, presumably passing through on their northward migration.

On White Pines Lake were three Common Mergansers, probably waiting for warmer weather before they move upslope to breed. This species breeds every year just beyond the east end of Alpine Lake, and then they bring the chicks down into the lake to feed and grow.

John Sutake

Dave Douglass over at Pine Mountain Lake has been having a fine old time photographing Wild Turkeys showing off sexual attractiveness in their age-old manner as you see here.



ACTION ALERT

Pebble Mine Action Alert

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has released a draft report detailing potential impacts of developing a large copper-and-gold mine in Bristol Bay near the headwaters of a major Alaska fishery. The corps plans to take comments through March, April and May on its analysis of various development alternatives for the proposed Pebble Mine, including a no-development option. The Pebble Limited Partnership has proposed an open-pit mine and related infrastructure including a power plant and water treatment plants and tailings storage sites.

About half the world's sockeye salmon is produced in Bristol Bay, and that is bad enough, but you and I as birders have another serious concern because that is exactly where the 20,000 – 30,000 Lesser Sandhill Cranes that over-winter at Merced and Pixley (Kern) NWRs and Cosumnes go to breed. The mine would undoubtedly do major damage to those critical breeding grounds and so we must make our voices heard.

I have already made my input and request to the Corps to deny this application, and you can do the same at:

<https://www.tu.org/action-center?vsrc=%2fcampaigns%2f63765%2frespond>

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Please join my colleagues and me at this event on April 7th. at the State Theater in Modesto. We want to ensure the public understands that all of the Pacific Flyway birds plus a host of resident ones will need continued water supplies on our refuges if they are to survive - and that is likely to become an even more contentious issue with climate change and an increasing human population.

You will get a sense of the history of our wetlands, and then see many of the birds in action - and I can tell you that when you see the Sandhill Cranes dancing larger-than-life on that massive cinema screen, you will be absolutely thrilled!

Barry Boulton

The History of California's Central Valley Wetlands
and the Migratory Birds that Depend on them

1850s **1990s**
California Wetlands
95% converted / reclaimed

Sunday, April 7th
Doors open at 1:30pm;
Presentation starts at 2pm.

Presenters
Philip Garone, Chair of History at California State University, Stanislaus
Sal Salerno, President of Stanislaus Audubon Society
Barry Boulton, President of Central Sierra Audubon Society

Tickets \$10 (Admission charge waived for Stanislaus State students with a current ID at the door).

The State Theatre - 1307 J Street, Modesto, CA - (209) 527-4967

CSAS ELECTIONS

As I mentioned in the last edition of Squawker, CSAS officer elections will formally take place at our annual meeting, currently planned for June 19th, but date still subject to change. As you probably know, non-profits rarely - if ever - enjoy contested elections; on the contrary, it's usually the same old faces, and so it is again this year - almost!

Our current officer slate is:

President: Barry Boulton

VP Programs: Ralph Retherford

Treasurer: Linda Millspaugh

Membership: OPEN

Education: Gail Witzlsteiner

Past President: Tom Parrington

Secretary: Jean Dakota

Field Trips: Kit DeGear

Publicity: Jan Jorn-Baird

Newsletter Editor: Barry Boulton

As you will see, we have one open position this year - Membership Chair. Pattie Henderson has performed this task for 4 years and although it's not an onerous task, it's time for her to explore other avenues - so please consider taking over that role, or think of someone for whom this might be a fulfilling role.

However, in 2020 there will be some major changes that means CSAS will be looking for "new blood". Specifically, Linda Millspaugh will step down which means we will be looking for a new Treasurer - not an easy role to fill. Moreover, I will have served 3 years as President and will also step down. Similarly, Tom Parrington will have served 3 years as Past President and may well feel the need to step down from being on the Board.

So, 2020 is just around the corner and is likely to be a tough year for CSAS in terms of survival. I don't mean to say that you should feel obliged to take an active role - although you might if that could in some way be fulfilling for you (my role as both Editor and President have been real gifts to me). What might be equally productive is if you can think of ways to reach out to other community members that you know and offer them the temptation of birding with CSAS! I'd be very happy to meet with your community groups or individuals to discuss what's possible. In saying that I'll emphasize an important point - I think that participating in any activity must be fulfilling for the participant. In other words, I'm not interested in just filling a CSAS role, but filling it so that the actor is appreciated and fulfilled; a win-win scenario.

The Nominating Committee members whom you should contact are:

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

Paolo Maffei: (209)532-8426, or,

Barry Boulton: (209)596-0612 or rbarryboulton@gmail.com

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 Millspaugh, Treasurer	(209)586-9557
Kit DeGear, Field Trips	(925)822-5215
Pattie Henderson, Membership	(209)586-2169
Jan Jorn-Baird, Publicity	(209)532-1106
Gail Witzlsteiner, Education	(209)586-4025
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
Barry Boulton, Website Manager	(209)596-0612
Walt Kruse, YSS delegate	(707)548-1829
Chris Laddish, Calaveras County Contact	(209)728-3871
Steven Umland, Sightings/eBird	(209)352-6985