

Central Sierra Audubon Society

# Sierra Squawker



[www.centralsierraaudubon.org](http://www.centralsierraaudubon.org)

May - 2019

## SONORA PUBLIC MEETING

### **The Birth and Immortality of a Biological Myth: "year-round breeding by crossbills" Presented by Tom Hahn**

The things we “know” about animals are only as robust as the observations on which we base that knowledge. It is not unusual for “myths” about biology to creep into our knowledge base. These myths often begin with low quality or incomplete observations, followed by the drawing of overly presumptuous conclusions based on scant information. These myths can then become entrenched in the scientific literature and be perpetuated through un-careful citation of sources by later authors.

In this talk I'll share with you one example of this from ornithology - the myth of "year round breeding" by crossbills. I'll trace the origin of this myth from sources in the older literature up through its current persistence in the minds and writings of ornithologists. Finally, I'll highlight how field observers such as bird-watchers can help to avoid and eliminate these types of myths borne of insufficient observations.”

Tom Hahn is on the biology faculty at UC Davis where 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 such as white-crowned sparrows and Cassin's finches. He is also a regular field trip leader at the annual Mono Lake Bird Chautauqua (coming up in June) where he discusses these fascinating topics.



**Wednesday, May 15 at 6:30 pm**

**At the County Library, Sonora (Greenley Rd)**

*These monthly events are open and free to the public, and we urge you to bring your friends and neighbors and, perhaps even more important, young people and students whether at school or college.*

# CALAVERAS PUBLIC MEETING

## **Inside Birds: Avian Structure and Function**

**Presented by Nancy Muleady-Mecham, Ph.D**

**J**oin Doc. Nancy for a literal look inside birds. How have they evolved to be the unique class they are today? From skeleton to muscles, digestion and their varied senses, we will explore these wonderful co-inhabitants of planet earth.

**D**oc. 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 teach at Gorno-Altai State University in southwest Siberia and to conduct research in remote protected areas.

**N**ancy 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.

**Thursday, May 23 at 6:00 pm**

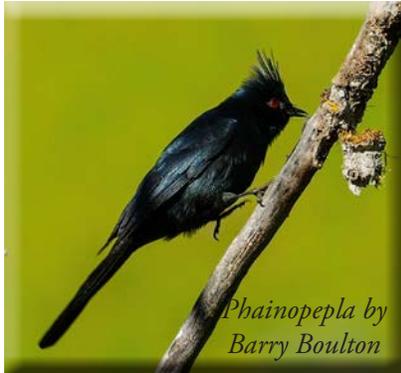
**at Bistro Espresso, Arnold**

## FIELD TRIP REPORTS

### **Knights Ferry - April 6**

Eight birders met at the Oakdale Recreation Area off River Road, where Sal Salerno's prior scouting produced a flash appearance of Yellowthroats. A for us unprecedented assemblage of at least a dozen flitting Phainopeplas was the first highlight of the day, followed by Cedar Waxwings and a freshwater turtle.

Common Gallinules, a Wood Duck family with several youngsters swimming in line, and a Canada Goose sitting on a nest atop a vegetation island rewarded our walk along the third pond.



*Phainopepla by  
Barry Boulton*

We lunched by the Orange Blossom bridge, with a pair of Downies working the tree above our heads. Flooding at Horseshoe Rec. Area blocked our usual hike by the lake, but redirected us to a show of Cliff Swallows, busily nest building on the vertical bank across the creek.

Knights Ferry closed off by an event! Alternate plan: check out Willms Rd for Tricolored blackbirds! Strenuous scoping at the pond's edge - one bird, two, then ten, flying West. Soon we met the flock, at least 150, covering the fences on both sides of the road, truly exciting, but of course minimal compared to flocks which once darkened the sky. The day's total: 62 species.

**Paolo Maffei**

### **Wards Ferry Road Trek - April 20**

On Saturday's walk along Wards Ferry Road from our barn to Richard's Ranch Road and back, we had 8 attend including an Audubon member from upper Michigan who was visiting family in Soulsbyville; his son not a birder attended as well. There was some cloud cover but great weather. Birds seen included: Kestrel, Anna's Hummingbird, Lark Sparrows, White-crowned Sparrows, Golden-crowned Sparrows, Western Bluebirds, Red-winged Blackbird, House Finches, Acorn Woodpeckers, White-tailed Kite, Red-tailed Hawks, Bullock's Oriole, Oak Titmouse, Ravens, Wild Turkey, and a Peacock.

**Tom Parrington**

### **Ironstone, Murphys - April 27**

Eleven lucky individuals showed up to take part on a particularly exceptional bird outing. We were all quite pleased to see and hear a great variety of birds that David Yee, our trip leader, could point out to us.

We learned from David that April 27th is known as the "Best Birding Day" in the U.S. to see the most species on a given day. That's because it is at a time of year where you still have some wintering birds present in addition to the influx of the spring arrivals. Well, that certainly held true for Ironstone. Where on past visits we saw around 31 species, this day we saw or heard 59!

Highlights (besides our expert and knowledgeable leader, David Yee) included seeing a Western Tanager, Bullock's Oriole, Lark and Chipping Sparrows, a Hutton's Vireo and a Bushtit and Killdeer nest. We were also treated to much yipping and howling from some nearby coyotes in an unusual occurrence during the daytime. A morning well spent!

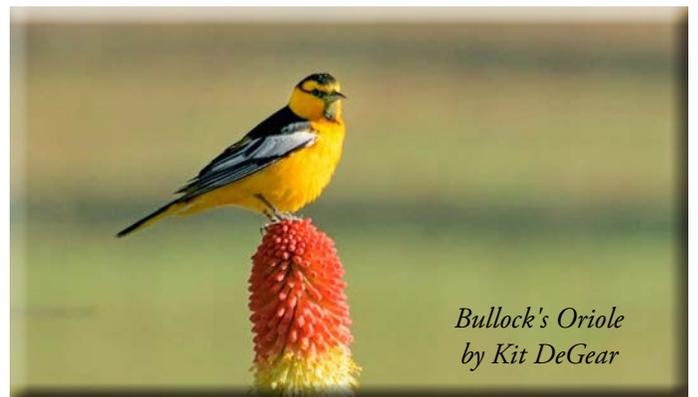


*Ironstone Group courtesy of a passer-by*

**Kit DeGear**

### **Indigeny - April 28**

The six of us who arrived for the outing were immediately rewarded with incredible views of the Bullock's Oriole. Unique this day was their presence feeding on a row of tall blooming flowers along the edge of the parking lot. Other highlights included, Ash-throated Flycatchers, Black-headed Grosbeaks, Orange-crowned Warblers, Lark Sparrows and a Bald Eagle flyover. Next month I hope to see these birds again in addition to some other Warblers, Flycatchers and Vireos and perhaps the Western Tanager, too!



*Bullock's Oriole  
by Kit DeGear*

**Kit DeGear**

## MAY FIELD TRIPS

### **May - 1 (Wednesday) - GCSD**

The first Wednesday of the month Bird Walk at the Groveland Community Services property at 18966 Ferretti Road, Groveland, will be led by Barbara Connelly on May 1. The property encompasses an area of more than 200 acres of oak, pine and willow habitat with three water storage ponds.

On the April 3 Bird Walk, six birders saw a Cinnamon Teal, Band-tailed Pigeons and first of the season Western Kingbird, Tree Swallows, Northern-Roughwinged Swallow and Black-headed Grosbeak.

**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.

**Barbara Connelly (209)962-4980**

### **May - 7 (Tuesday) - West Side Rail Trail**

Come join Jean Dakota on Tuesday, May 7, for a West Side Rail Trail walk along this old railroad trail for great views of the Tuolumne River below, and hawks and falcons above. This time of year we are certain to hear the distinctive sound of the Wrenit and perhaps see some Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, too. Last year this walk yielded 28 species (heard and seen) and lots of wildflowers. In August we spotted a Pigmy Owl along this trail.

Meet in the parking lot at 9:00 a.m. The walk will last from 2-4 hours and cover 2-4 miles. It is an old railroad grade and so fairly level. Muted clothing, hat, sunscreen and water are advised. Ticks are big this year in Tuolumne County, so be prepared with bug repellent. Please note that there are NO public restrooms nearby.

From Sonora take Tuolumne Rd. out all the way to the city of Tuolumne until Tuolumne Road ends at Carter St.. **(Do Not Turn** at the traffic lights at the intersection of Tuolumne Rd. N. and Cherry Valley Blvd. N.) At the end of Tuolumne Road, turn left on Carter St. and go 0.3 mile; turn right on Buchanan Road. Continue for 0.5 mile and you will see the parking lot on the left just past the intersection of Buchanan and Miramonte Roads. The trailhead and kiosk 1 is down the stairs.

**Jean Dakota, (415) 454-8313**

### **May 16 (Thursday) - Confidence Trail**

Please join Tom Hahn, our May presenter (previous evening - see front page of this newsletter) who will once again lead us on this annual bird walk. This is always a particularly great outing with many Spring migrants to hear and see! Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the trailhead at Confidence/South Fork Rd. just north of Middle Camp Rd.

**Trip leader: David Harden (209) 533-1668**

### **May 18 (Saturday) Big Trees State Park with Stanislaus Audubon - Sal Salerno leading**

This visit to the old redwood groves provides an opportunity to see warblers, flycatchers, vireos, and flycatchers. More uncommon species such as Pileated Woodpecker, Northern Pygmy-Owl, or Northern Goshawk may be seen. Meet at the Visitors Center at 8:30am.

### **May 25 (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.

Our April field trip was spectacularly successful with 59 species observed and we hope to repeat that again!

We'll meet in the lower parking lot at 8:00am 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**

### **May 26 (Sunday) - Indigency Reserve**

Please join me as we bird through the beautiful grounds at Indigency. 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 Indigency.

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

## CALAVERAS BIRD REPORT

April was an amazing month this year with the continued presence of migrant winter ducks, Buffleheads, Hooded & Common Mergansers and Ring-necked Ducks, overlapping with the arrival of neotropical migrants - Calaveras (Nashville), Hermit & Wilson's Warblers, Western Tanagers and Black-headed Grosbeaks. Perhaps the heavy winter snow can account for some delay in the departure of the ducks, particularly the Common Merganser, because their high elevation lakes are still frozen. Of course, the fascinating question is how did they know to delay their departures?

Meanwhile, the Band-tailed Pigeons have been eating the emergent vegetation, shoots and catkins, of the black oaks. Also in my backyard a resplendent male Pileated Woodpecker was enjoying a damp earth bath; at first I thought he may be "anting" but, closer inspection after he departed revealed no ants. Perhaps he was treating skin parasites similar to dust-bathing, or maybe it just felt good on the hottest day of the year.

A Brown Creeper repeated a behavior that I've observed previously - it slowly backed into my bird bath before completely immersing itself in the water. I don't know if this was the same Creeper that I've seen in previous years, or a younger one with the same habit. It is impossible to know but, with a probable low annual survival rate that's common for small birds, it was likely to be a younger generation bird and, if so, raises another question - is backing into water a Brown Creeper cultural adaptation and habit?

Over at Ironstone Winery recently I was thrilled to watch a pair of Red-tailed Hawks performing an aerial courting display, flying slowly close to each other with legs dangling downwards. This behavior in late-April is surprising, but perhaps another indication of changing weather modifying behavior patterns, or perhaps this was a migrant pair that had just arrived here to breed; as always, yet another unanswerable question!

**John Sutake, Arnold, 4,000 ft.**

## RARE BIRD REPORT

We live in Tuolumne overlooking the river canyon. Yesterday we were watching our hanging feeder with the usual visitors, House Finch, Lesser Goldfinch, Junco, Black-headed Grosbeak, Oak Titmouse, etc. We then saw a never-before-seen-by-us bird: a **Rose-breasted Grosbeak**. Absolutely no question of the identification, and he (and probably she) came back later as well. Sibley and Kaufman books both say they are "rare" in this area.

**Bill Green**

### **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/](http://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