



SONORA PUBLIC MEETING

The Colorful Birds of Texas

Presented by Julie Moss-Lewis & John Lewis

Birds of Texas are intriguing for us Northern California birders because while that State has many species in common with California, yet there are variations (e.g. Rose-breasted Grosbeak and Green Jay), and then others that we just don't see because they are sub-tropical species who spend time in southern Texas.

Join Julie Moss-Lewis and John Lewis as they share their stories, photographs, and travel tips after spending two weeks casually birding and exploring the south Texas border region in April 2018. Highlights include birding hot spots in Carlsbad Caverns and Big Bend National Parks, Gulf Coast warbler migration and "fallout" on South Padre Island, and the tropical birds of Mexico that extend their ranges just across the border to the wetlands of the Lower Rio Grande Valley.



Julie and John say they are neither expert birders nor expert photographers, but they are fun-loving and engaging speakers who researched and planned their Texas trip thoroughly and with an eye to finding the best places to look, eat, and stay...and they managed to take some excellent photos as you will see. They stayed in specialized

"bird-friendly" lodging, found the hot spots most likely to reward casual viewers with great birds, and are ready to answer all your questions about logistics and what to expect--including a few quirky non-birding detours that may be worth your while. This presentation is highly recommended if you have ever considered making the journey yourself to see the astonishingly colorful bird species of South Texas.



Wednesday, September 18 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

Woodpeckers and other Cavity Nesters of the Sierra Nevada

**Presented by Barry Boulton,
President, Central Sierra Audubon**

Woodpeckers are among our most visible and vocal bird companions, and have always amazed with their ability to dig cavities in trees without scrambling their brains. And, of course, they love to drum on resonant human structures, and even dig cavities or store acorns in our house walls! But not all woodpeckers are strong cavity excavators so, in this regard, species vary just as they vary in their diets and breeding behaviors – and even in the way that they land on a tree to feed their young. Yes indeed, the behavioral adaptations are quite fascinating as you will see in this video program.



Lewis's Woodpecker

Woodpeckers are generally well-recognized as “key-stone” species because they excavate nesting cavities that are used in subsequent years by other species who have evolved to nest in tree cavities but don't have the woodpeckers' specialized excavation equipment.

That is, many other species such as bluebirds and chickadees could no longer breed if woodpeckers suddenly disappeared. We'll take a look at how these other species take advantage of the opportunities afforded by the woodpeckers' hard work.



Red-breasted Sapsucker

*A White-breasted Nuthatch
gleans food from tree bark
as it typically runs down the
bark, the only bird capable of
that downward movement.*

Photo by Dave Douglass



**Friday, September 20 at 6:00 pm
at Murphys Diggins Clubhouse, 340 Tom Bell Rd., Murphys**

The entrance gate and clubhouse will open at 5:30pm

Note: this program will be repeated in Valley Springs on Thursday, October 24

SEPTEMBER FIELD TRIPS

September 4 (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 Jeanne Ridgley. The property encompasses an area of more than 200 acres of oak, pine and willow habitat with three water storage ponds.

On the August 7 Bird Walk, birders saw 28 species including a Pacific-slope Flycatcher.

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

September 22 (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

September 28 (Saturday) 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'll meet in the lower parking lot at 8:30am and our walk will last 2 - 3 hours. Rain will cancel the trip. Just inside the Ironstone entrance, bear left and park on the left side.

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

FIELD TRIP EARLY NOTICE

On Saturday, October 5, Paolo Maffei will lead a field trip to Salt Springs Valley near Copperopolis. This is usually a spectacular trip with lots of species variety, so make sure to note this in your calendar! Details in the October Squawker.

Lodi Sandhill Crane Festival

November 1 - 3, 2019

This excellent festival combines workshops, presentations and field trips. General Admission is Free! There is no charge for most of the events at Hutchins Street Square, including the Art Show, workshops and presentations, and Exhibit Hall.

Nature Tours - costs vary per tour. For information, cost, and times, please see the tour schedule at:

<https://cranefestival.com/overview.php>

Registration opens around September 1

Central Valley Birding Symposium 2019

November 21-24, 2019

The Central Valley Bird Club will be hosting the 23rd annual Central Valley Birding Symposium, at the Stockton Hilton Hotel in Stockton.

This is a high quality festival with presentations and workshops by nationally-known speakers plus superb field trips - highly recommended.

View the festival program at:

<http://www.cvbirds.org/events/symposium/>

Registration begins September 6, 2019

Spotted Owl Released back into the Wild

On Sunday, August 18, a small group of us were privileged and delighted to watch Laura Murphy, founder of Mother Lode Wildlife Care, release a Spotted Owl into the forest.

She was seen in February by someone walking their dog, lying on the roadside and being pecked at by a Raven. Despite the mountain road being closed because of snow, the owl was safely taken to Laura who had it checked up. She had no physical damage, and no damage to internal organs, so most probably was suffering from lack of food during the harsh winter.



Photo by Kit DeGear

When Laura took her out of the box and held her as you see here, she seemed docile and sleepy but then, as Laura lifted her up, she flew very strongly and confidently into the trees and looked down at us; she seemed to know exactly where she was going!

Surprise, surprise...

USFWS finds Tricolored Blackbird does **NOT** warrant ESA protections

Wed, 14 Aug 2019

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service completed an in-depth review of Tricolored blackbird and determined that the species does not warrant listing under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The Tricolored blackbird is found throughout much of California and parts of Oregon, Washington and Nevada.

After an extensive review of the best available science, the Service determined the Tricolored Blackbird does not warrant listing due to on-going conservation efforts, partnerships, and public and private land management activities that are helping to ensure the long-term conservation of this species. The Service will continue its work with partners to help the species remain resilient.

A copy of these findings is on public view today at the Federal Register, and can be accessed on-line at:

<https://s3.amazonaws.com/public-inspection.federalregister.gov/2019-17536.pdf>

Meanwhile...

California's Tricolored Blackbird Is Running out of Room

By Ben Goldfarb, March 31, 2019

Every spring for millennia, California has hosted one of America's grandest wild spectacles: the gathering of the Tricolored Blackbird. *Agelaius tricolor* breeds in colonies that historically numbered in the hundreds of thousands. On the wing, wrote one observer in 1853, they "darken the sky for some distance by their masses." A tricolor super-colony gathered in a cattail marsh is a deafening riot of screaming males and nest-weaving females, a cacophonous congregation that protects itself from predators with sheer abundance. Although they are most closely related to the Red-winged Blackbird, the tricolor's truest soulmate is another gregarious species whose flocks once blotted out the sun: the Passenger Pigeon.

The similarities between Tricolored Blackbirds and Passenger Pigeons do not, unfortunately, end with their behavior. California's Central Valley is today the world's most productive farmland, but it was once puddled by 4 million acres of wetlands—and teeming with tricolors. In the 1930s, biologist Johnson Neff conducted surveys for the federal government and found colonies so dense that one small willow could support a dozen nests. Neff estimated the total population at more than 1.5 million birds—including one colony near Sacramento that supported nearly a half-million blackbirds in 1932. The majesty didn't last. "By 1935," Neff wrote, "(gold) dredgers had so changed the terrain that only 2,000 to 3,000 birds returned to this place."

Neff's account was a typical one. A century of ditching, diking, and draining sucked dry more than 90 percent of the Central Valley's wetlands, with severe consequences for tricolors. Today just 175,000 or so of these blackbirds remain—fewer than once amassed in a single colony.

Tricolors still form the largest colonies of any living North American songbird, but their freefall has only gotten steeper. As recently as 2006, one grouping numbered nearly 140,000. Just a decade later, in 2017, the largest colony was down to 17,500 blackbirds.

While the destruction of California's wetlands was the original sin, Tricolored Blackbirds today face a daunting array of threats. With their natural habitat depleted, the birds have attempted to eke out a living in agricultural fields, with limited success. Their foraging grounds have been converted to almond orchards, their insect prey dosed with pesticides, their nests literally plowed under. They are imperiled, in a sense, by modernity itself, by the pressure inherent to squeezing the world's fifth-largest economy into a single state. They are a species that gathers in great numbers, struggling to survive on a landscape with little room for wildlife.

"The decline has been rapid, it has been dramatic, and it is ongoing," says University of California–Davis biologist Bob Meese. "You have to wonder, what does the future hold?"

Hmmm...

Narrative & Photos by Maggie Sanchez of Columbia College

Species: Male California Gull (*Larus californicus*)

On my recent trip out to Big Sur, I snapped this shot when I noticed this male prepping for take-off. I was lucky enough to get a shot mid “blast off” showing the Gull’s full wing expansion. We so easily look past species such as the Gull because of their aggravating behavior. But that then leads to not noticing such things as the red band on the lower bill or white spot located on the tip of the wings. I most definitely looked past those physical expressions before taking this photo.



Species: Northern Harriers (*Cyrus cyaneus*)

My first birding visit to the Merced National Wildlife Refuge was quite an exciting and surprising experience. I got to observe this pair of Northern Harriers and a multitude of species like the Red-winged Blackbird and Killdeer, plus a close encounter with a coyote.



I was very satisfied by the amount of activity in the relatively small area I covered and am excited to return in late fall to (hopefully) witness the Sandhill Crane migrations.

Species: Cooper’s Hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*)

Having never seen a Cooper’s close up, I was freakishly excited when, not just this one flew in low between the trees, but another followed right behind! My father and I were roaming the Lyons Reservoir trails when both hawks gave up their positions with multiple different conversations either between themselves or at us. Once they both perched in this large cedar tree they continued to sit there and stare down at us for probably five minutes... we obviously interrupted something. It was quite a successful and exhilarating outing.



Species: Hydaspe Fritillary (*Speyeria hydaspe*)

On a quick trip up the mountain near Herring Creek, these extravagantly orange butterflies floated all around the forest floor. The abundant numbers of this species was surprising to me but I probably have not paid as much attention to this specific butterflies population in the past. I was also not expecting the high interaction between individuals; they seemed to be competing over the best flowers and ideal sunning locations.

What Good Are Birds?

by Salvatore Salerno, President, Stanislaus Audubon Society

Roger Tory Peterson, esteemed ornithologist and pioneer of field guides, was once asked by an interviewer, “What good are birds?” Peterson wrote later that he had been so taken aback by the question that he blurted, “They’re alive, aren’t they?” That answer was likely too subtle for the interviewer. Peterson added, “My interviewer expected me to go into the usual palaver about their beneficial habits,” better framed as the question, “What is the value of birds—to humans?” The argument of a moral imperative, or the appeal of pure aesthetics—these won’t satisfy those who wish to know what utility and economic value there may be in protecting and preserving wild birds. When trying to reply to such queries, we should remember a commandment of persuasion— know thy audience!

Even that is tricky, as your audience varies widely in its experience of birds. For most urban dwellers, birds are viewed peripherally, as features in nature’s background, like sunlight and trees. Ranchers, farmers, and other rural inhabitants, however, are more in tune with the rhythmic patterns of the lives of birds, since their activities are more directly connected with the earth. For either group, it may be important to begin just with a reminder that birds provide many functions and services to any ecosystem. From there, you can create your own path of persuasion.

One of the most obvious “goods” of birds is for providing game meat for food. There are few hunters who still need game exclusively for subsistence, but the value of sport hunting is still part of our culture. Also, the revenue obtained from Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamps has helped to purchase or provide easements for vital waterfowl habitat. More than 300 wildlife refuges in the U.S. have grown from such revenue, including the San Joaquin National Wildlife Refuge Complex in Stanislaus and Merced Counties.

Another benefit can be defined as regulating the environment. Turkey vultures and other avian scavengers remove carcasses and waste, reducing the spread of parasites and diseases into the soil, grasses, and water, thereby protecting livestock. In addition, there are numerous bird species that are chiefly insectivorous, and



Photo Lucia Gonzalez

their voracious appetites are a strong control on populations of insects. In fact, such birds have been observed to reduce insect pest damage in various crops such as broccoli, corn, and grapes—and likely others, as well. Most biologists attest that without birds, we would be overrun by insects, which are more numerous in species and numbers than all vertebrates on earth combined.

Farmers and ranchers alert to their land know what benefits hawks and owls can provide, as predators that are efficient at keeping down rodent populations. As one minute example, a single Barn Owl, in its lifespan, may eat more than 11,000 mice that would have destroyed thirteen tons of crops. Multiply that by millions of wild birds. In field experiments, it has been seen that even the presence of an avian predator creates a “landscape of fear” that can significantly reduce seed consumption, and thereby the reproduction levels, of small rodents.

Birds are also effective dispersers of the seeds of native plants. I have written previously of the benefits of California Scrub-Jays in reforesting oak trees by their autumn plantings of acorns. Clark’s Nutcrackers perform the same function by dispersing the seeds of whitebark pine trees. One study has estimated the cost of doing so by humans would range from \$11-14 billion across the range of such forests in the U.S. When was the last time that you, or anyone, for that matter, ever thanked a corvid for providing a service?



Photo Barry Boulton

It may be lesser known that birds also pollinate many native plants. This research is limited so far, but some scientists believe that birds can pollinate 3-5% of more than 1,500 species of crops or medicinal plants, most of which cannot self-pollinate. As is usually the case, more research would provide more proof of such a benefit to plant ecosystems.

Birds also provide great incidental and direct benefits to the burgeoning field of ecotourism. Millions of birdwatchers attend bird festivals and field trips sponsored by private companies such as WINGS, or nonprofits such as Audubon chapters, every season of the year. Millions of dollars are spent on travel fees and birding equipment. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimate that \$36 billion yearly is spent by birders into the coffers of communities through food, lodging, and transportation.

Because of their beauty and mystery, birds provide more symbolic, yet still tangible, cultural benefits. Throughout the millennia of human existence, birds have been inspirational for art, religion, and literature through poetry, myth and folklore.

There are many paths for answering the question, “What good are birds?” But Peterson’s startled reply to the interviewer is good enough for me, as it should be for you. After all, we are among the more than 45 million birdwatchers in America for whom wild birds need little justification for being alive. We know that birds flourished in their breathtaking diversity long before humans arrived. We believe that they have intrinsic rights to live, to make more lives, and to die on nature’s own terms. Birds are the most beautiful creatures on earth. We should live in deep gratitude, to be able to enjoy our fellow travelers on this brief, luminous journey.

Editor's note: Sal is not only the President of Stanislaus Audubon, but is also a poet and a writer on avian topics. You can read his many bird articles on the Stanislaus Audubon website at: <https://www.stanislausbirds.org/history/sal-s-articles> He often joins us on CSAS field trips.



Photo Barry Boulton - Clark's Nutcracker about to eat and then expell/plant Jeffrey Pine seeds

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/

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