

Central Sierra Audubon Society

Sierra Squawker



www.centralsierraaudubon.org

October - 2019

SONORA PUBLIC MEETING

Barn Owls: Predator-Prey Relationship

John Schuster, CEO of Wild Wing Company

The barn owl has been around for the last 26 million years and its importance to agriculture in California is just coming to the forefront. It is one of the most skilled hunters of rodents in North America. It does not have to see its prey to make a kill. Its face is a dish shape, similar to a satellite dish, and the ears are asymmetrical so it can locate rodents such as gophers or mice rustling around for food under 16-inch-tall grass, then swoop down and make the kill. One barn owl will eat on the average of 155 gophers per year, or 53 pounds of gophers. If you had a mere 48 Barn Owls in your area, they would consume 7,440 gophers or 1.3 tons of gophers per year. John will discuss Barn Owls, their history and how they are used in contemporary agriculture.



Born into a musical environment, John sang in school, church choirs, played trumpet, baritone horn, trombone, string bass, in concert, marching bands, symphony orchestras, jazz ensembles, and led his high school marching band as a drum major for 2 years. After fighting

forest fires and working on conservation projects with Ecology Corps/CDF in the 1970s, John performed throughout the States as singer, guitarist, and harmonica player with illustrious names such as Bob Dylan.

However, despite his musical accomplishments, he started looking back at his beginnings in forestry. Then, back in 1995 a friend turned him on to cavity nesting birds and he's been actively involved in cavity nesting bird conservation ever since. In 2000, John established Wild Wing Company, after personally witnessing the success that beneficial cavity nesting birds have on impacting pests in our vineyard operations.

John is a lifetime member, 2005 West Coast Director, and board member of the North American Bluebird Society. A contributor to Cornell Lab of Ornithology, and Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y.



Wednesday, October 16 at 6:30 pm
At the County Library, Sonora (Greenley Rd)

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



Thursday, October 24 at 6:00 pm

at Round Table Pizza, Valley Oaks Center, Valley Springs

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.

OCTOBER FIELD TRIPS

October 2 (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 September 4 Bird Walk, birders saw 40 species including Spotted Sandpiper, Lesser Yellowlegs, Belted Kingfisher, Lawrence's Goldfinch and four species of Warblers: Black-throated Gray, Wilson's, Yellow and Orange-crowned.

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

October 5 (Saturday) Salt Springs Valley

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!

Salt Springs Valley is primarily an auto tour, with several very different habitats - water, open rangelands and oak forests plus a stand of eucalyptus that, all-in-all, offer many species.

Meet at 8am at Perko's to carpool from Sonora, or at 8:45am opposite the pond about 1/4 mile along Rock Creek Road off highway 4 near Copperopolis. Bring water, lunch and radios (for convoying) if you have them. Lunch at the resort (\$10 per car). Finish by 2pm - but if you need to depart earlier, we'll get to the resort around 11:30am. Rain will cancel the trip.

October 27 (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.

On Sunday, September 22, five of us enjoyed a pleasant morning marking the end of Summer and the start of Fall. We were fortunate to have Sal Salerno, President of Stanislaus Audubon join us. Highlights included hearing 4 Virginia Rails, and seeing Orange-crowned, Yellow and Yellow-rumped Warblers. A Bewick's Wren's song provided a cheerful backdrop while hunting down the Warblers. Another cool sighting was a good look at a pair of Hairy Woodpeckers. While this species has been seen here before, it is less common at this elevation. A total of 37 species were seen.

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

October 12 (Sat.) Ironstone Winery, Murphys

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.

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

AN APPEAL FOR BINOCULARS

I'm collaborating with a teacher at San Andreas High School who this year initiated a new course of study at the school entitled Forestry & Natural Resources.

Recently I gave a bird presentation to two classes with the idea of introducing them to our topic of interest and expertise as an important component of natural resources. Now, we would like to take them into the actual world of birds - namely, local field trips where binoculars as well as field guides are important assets.

So, the question is this, do you - like me - have binoculars that you no longer need that you'd be willing to donate? I found two old pairs that I'll be only too happy to be put to good use, and I suspect that I'm not alone in that!

If you do have spare binocs, please email or call me and we can arrange the pick-up.

Thanks,

Barry Boulton

(209)596-0612

rbarryboulton@gmail.com

PS

I might add that this is part of our desire for CSAS to work with local schools and colleges whereby we can provide an opportunity for students to see a different world that will enlarge their vision of future careers in which they may help in the conservation of birds in particular, and wildlife in general.

SIGHTINGS

Editor's Note: I'm always hoping and looking for your bird sightings. Right now we're seeing the end of the southward migration, but very soon we'll be seeing in-migration from the north so that ducks in particular will become very abundant. Please let me know what you see, and email photos if possible.

Sept. 23

I noticed a big bird landed on the ground in our backyard pecking on the ground and when I looked at it thru the telephoto I saw, to my delight, that it was a male Northern Flicker (the only ones with a red mustache). They are way high on my list of local birds I like getting in my crosshairs... especially any flying shots that would show off their magnificent wing and tail feathers. Alas, this guy was not in the flying mode; he was real busy snacking on ants. That's right, ants - they almost exclusively eat ants for their preferred diet! Seems weird to me for a "woodpecker" type bird to prefer pecking ants of all things. Anyway, I now know that they are distinctly easier to get up on while they're noshing on ants than at any other time. They're usually very spooky when I show up. He was still gobbling when I walked away after 10 minutes or so.

Dave Douglass, Pine Mountain Lake



*Foraging Northern Flicker
by Dave Douglass*

Editor's note: what Dave says about being "distinctly easier to get up on..." explains why they lay more eggs (up to 13!) than any other NA woodpecker; their predation rate is the highest among woodpeckers.

Sept. 24

This afternoon we were hearing Quail calls nearby and eventually they showed up and hung around a while. They're a little hard to count but it was at least a couple of dozen (the largest covey we've seen) but here's the thing; every one of them were males! Is there a time of the year when all the guys hang out together like buck deer do?

David Douglass

Editor's note: Since the sex ratio is biased towards more males than females, some of last year's males found no partner this spring and so would have formed an all-male covey for the sum-

mer; now is the time they would be looking to rejoin the larger family for fall & winter communal grouping - and Dave just happened to see them before they did so

Sept. 24

The other day we had a visitor in our yard - and stayed only a short time. My field guide tells me it's a Black-throated Grey Warbler (female). I had never seen one before, and grabbed the camera before she left. I don't know how common they are in this area, but it does seem to signal the fall migration is on.



Black-throated Gray Warbler by George Dondero

On the very same day, a Warbling Vireo also showed up in our yard!



Warbling Vireo by George Dondero

George Dondero, Murphys

September was a great month for birding in Arnold. I had eight species of warbler in my backyard this month, local breeders being Calaveras (Nashville), Hermit, Yellow-rumped, Black-throated Gray and MacGillivray's plus migrants on their way through - Wilson's, Townsend's, and Yellow Warblers.

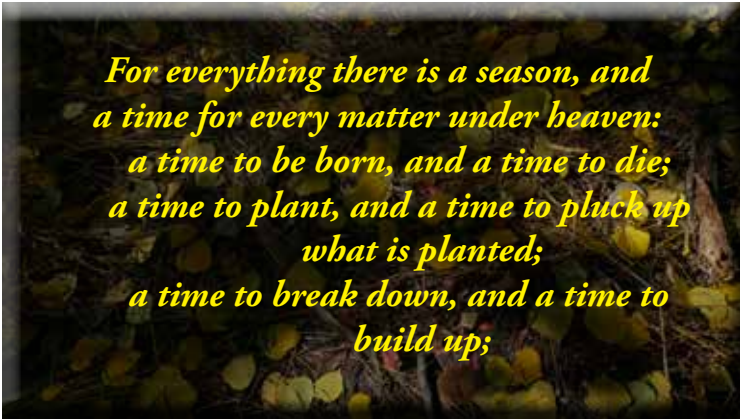
The Yellow Warblers are usually seen at White Pines Lake during the summer, but were attracted to my bird bath while making their way through an otherwise dry coniferous forest at the start of their migration south. Two Western Tan-

agers - one female and one immature male – were yet to leave for Central America, whereas the mature males have already departed. The Black-throated Gray Warbler’s appearance was surprising and pleasing because it’s not common up here, preferring oak woodlands.

Missing birds include the Golden-crowned Kinglet which are normally here year-round; maybe they moved upslope temporarily. Similarly, the Chestnut-backed Chickadees never returned to this elevation since the drought, although still seen at Big Trees SP. Climate change perhaps in both cases?

John Sutake, Arnold

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Indeed, 'tis the Season for Bird Boxes

That may seem paradoxical - bird boxes in Fall when birds need them for breeding in Spring; isn't that strange? Well, yes in a way, but not really; it's true that the birds need them in springtime, but it's best that they have been installed and weathered by the winter. Then, instead of treating them as new and suspicious with their fresh aromas, the boxes are simply part of the existing landscape, and so the birds can use them without fear.

Consequently, you might like to join us at our:

ANNUAL BIRD HOUSE SALE

Saturday, Oct.19 at Rocca Park, Jamestown

Join us for our annual bird house sale held in conjunction with the California Native Plant Society.

You can join us at the event and ask our gurus about bird boxes, feeders and baths that will enable you to attract more birds into your gardens and yards - opportunity knocks!

The sale will take place from 9am - 12noon and if you are able to join us at the CSAS booth, please call Tom Harrington to let him know at (209)694-8564.

Here's a pair of Ash-throated Flycatchers using a nesting box, busily feeding their young with insects and butterflies. This pair (shot in Murphys) was amazingly vocal, yakking back and forth with great gusto.



In addition to this species, there are many more that use nest boxes, for example, Kestrel, Wrens, Chickadees, Nuthatches, Downy & Nuttall's Woodpeckers, Swallows and Bluebirds - so you have a range of possibilities in your nest box!

The poster child for nest boxes is the Western Bluebird, and nest boxes have become a very significant part of their sustainability as a species given the extensive habitat losses that threaten them and many other birds.



We, CSAS, have over 50 bluebird boxes installed on two different routes in Tuolumne County. For the last four years they've been maintained and observed, with hatchlings counted, by Ron & Barbara McDow. Part of the maintenance work involves cleaning out and sanitizing the boxes once a year to main a healthy environment for the birds.

Now, Ron & Barbara are relinquishing their role as guardians of the bluebird boxes, and will be replaced by David & Gail Witzlsteiner (Gail is, of course, on the Board of CSAS).

This leads to another opportunity for you to get outside! Here's how:

Wednesday October 10th, Morning

Ron & Barbara will lead a walk along our bird box trail on highway 49 where they will talk about their experiences with the boxes and the birds, and you'll be able to ask questions about these activities.

At the same time, they will be handing off the route and role to David & Gail, so this will be an interesting walk.

If you're interested in joining us, please call Ron for details at (650)391-5277

Black Skimmers in the Palo Alto Baylands

Black Skimmers are not only very unusual in California, but they appear to be such an improbable bird with mandibles of different lengths that make you wonder how they manage to catch anything with that distorted bill? They manage very well as a matter of fact... It turns out that their name actually means something - they skim along the water's surface with the lower, longer mandible ploughing the water, and when it hits something (hopefully a fish and not garbage), it snaps shut.

When they're skimming the surface, there's a very effective interplay between the wings and surface of the water (rather like the Brown Pelican and other seabirds) that gives lift to the bird such that it skims relatively long distances with only nuanced wing movements. For me, it really is "poetry in motion". When the young hatch, their mandibles are of equal length so their parents feed them, but within 3 - 4 months, they also have an elongated lower mandible and skim-feed for themselves, although the plumage is very obviously juvenile as shown here.

*Skimmers foraging
by Barry Boulton*



Adult Black Skimmers by Lucia Gonzalez

**Observations made on Sept. 22, 2019
by Barry Boulton**



Juvenile Black Skimmer by Lucia Gonzalez

Central Sierra Audubon Society - CSAS

(Chapter of the National Audubon Society)
P.O. Box 3047, Sonoma, CA 95370

General Meetings: Third Wednesday at 6:30pm (except July, August, and December), in the Tuolumne Public Library on Greenley Road, Sonoma.

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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OPEN , Membership	(209)586-2169
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Gail Witzlsteiner, Education	(209)586-4025
Barry Boulton, Newsletter Editor	(209)596-0612

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Chris Laddish, Scholarship	(209)728-3871
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