Central Sierra Audubon Society

Sierra Squawker

www.centralsierraaudubon.org December - **2019**

DECEMBER PROGRAMS

Christmas Bird Counts

SONORA - Saturday, December 14 - Steven Umland,
stevenum71@gmail.com or 209.352.6985

GROVELAND - Monday, December 16 - Steven Umland,
stevenum71@gmail.com or 209.352.6985

CALAVERAS - Saturday, December 28-Keith Maurer,
kandsmaurer@goldrush.com

If you're new to the counts, just contact the compilers shown here and they'll place you with an experienced team so that you can enjoy the day (very important - this is a fun experience). Even if you're not an experienced birder, you're still very valuable because we always need "eyes on the ground" - simply seeing that there's a bird is important; others will do the identification if that's not your strong suite.

CALAVERAS PUBLIC PROGRAM

Round-table Bird Discussion

CANCELED DUE INCLEMENT WEATHER

We will repeat a program from last year whereby we sit around a table in our local coffee shop and talk about our own sightings, impressions and so on of the birds in our backyard, locality or vacation trips; in fact, we share anything about birds, or just enjoy the conversation and camaraderie with like minds. John Sutake, who always has a lot of fascinating topics, thoughts and ideas in his head, will lead the discussion and then it goes wherever it goes!

Time & Location:

Wednesday, December 4 at 6pm

Bistro Espresso, 1225 Oak Circle Drive, Arnold, CA 95223

DECEMBER FIELD TRIPS

December 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 November 6 Bird Walk we saw 36 species including Wilson's Snipe, Red-breasted Sapsucker, Cedar Waxwings and Lincoln's Sparrow

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

December 3 (Tuesday) - Lodi/Cosumnes

Beat the weekend crowds to observe both Greater and Lesser Sandhill Cranes resting, eating and dancing in flooded farm fields. We will meet in Sonora (Perko's at 7:30 am) and carpool to Lodi, a 90 minute drive, on Tuesday, December 3. We will stop briefly in Copperopolis to pick up any folks coming from Calaveras. The next stop will be at Hwy 12 in Lodi for bathroom breaks and coffee before arriving at Woodbridge Road. There we can view/ photograph the Sandhill cranes and numerous other birds at several spots along this public road. After, we will proceed a few miles north to the Cosumnes River Preserve.

The 2,000 acres of wetlands of the Cosumnes River Preserve are jointly managed by private and government agencies. The Preserve hosts a rich variety of up to 90 seasonal bird species including shore birds and migrating ducks. Expect to see Black-bellied Plover, Black-necked Stilt, Greater Yellowlegs, Dunlin, Long-billed Dowitcher, and many other species. We will stay on the asphalt paths and not venture into the restricted and/or muddy areas. There are restrooms and a covered picnic area that should be available for use. Bring lunch, snacks and water. We will be back in Sonora by dinnertime.

Trip leader is Jean Dakota; call her if you want a ride and to let her know you are coming: (209)591-9952.

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NOTE: there will **NOT** be a trip to Indigeny this month, but Kit reports: "On Sunday, November 24th I was joined by 4 birders, and we all had to wend our way through a large group of Wild Turkeys at the entrance. Several were in full feathered display! A timely show so close to Thanksgiving. A total of 37 species were seen. Highlights included Pine Siskin, Cedar Waxwing, a Merlin, 3 Red-breasted Sapsucker and 2 Townsend's Warbler". The next Indigeny outing will be Sunday, January 26th.

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NOVEMBER FIELD TRIP REPORTS

November 14 - Joe Domecq & Old Basso Bridge followed by Merced NWR

Nine of us, including Sal Salerno, the President of the Stanislaus group, met to explore the Joe Domecq Wilderness Area and the Basso Bridge environs. We saw 31 species while tromping around the rocky terrain. We decided to leave a little early (as it was fairly quiet) but not before being treated to a beautiful view of a Ferruginous Hawk.

Sal, took us on a side trip to the bridge in La Grange where he showed us a nice trail that goes along the Tuolumne River. I hope to have a trip there in the spring. Sal says the wildflowers are great, too.

Our next stop was Dawson Lake where we saw 12 species. One of the outstanding highlights of the day was seeing the Vermilion Flycatcher. This is the 3rd winter this out-of-area bird has appeared. Truly stunning. We had two scopes to get excellent views!

Vermilion Flycatcher on oak trunk at Dawson Lake. Photo: Barry Boulton

A nice lunch was had by the Merced River in Snelling. Then off to the Merced NWR.

At Merced, we were thrilled to be greeted by a White-tailed Kite upon our arrival. Always one of my target birds. There was no shortage of birds at the refuge. Everyone enjoyed finding their favorites among the 42 species on display, whether it was Black-necked Stilts, Wilson's Snipe, the elegant Northern Pintail or the sea of white Snow/Ross's Geese. All were pleased. We also enjoyed the inevitable ID discussions, Curlew or Whimbrel, Least or Western Sandpiper, causing us to bring out the guide books and phone apps. Sunset fell as we listened to the enchanting sounds of the Sandhill Cranes flying in. The vermilion sky recalling our earlier flycatcher was awesome!

A long day which ended at the Thai Star restaurant where delicious food was eaten with relish. Can't wait for our return trip in February! **Kit DeGear**

The group at La Grange bridge. Photo Sal Salerno/Walt DeGear

REPLACING WOOD DUCK BOXES AT GCSD

In 2009 Bill Zachman built three Wood Duck nest boxes and arranged for volunteers to install the Wood Duck boxes at the large sewage pond at GCSD. Since that time, birders have observed 3 to 4 Wood Duck families on the pond in the spring and summer of each year.

Every October, volunteers cleaned and added pine shavings to the boxes to prepare them for the next nesting season. In October, 2018, Dave Douglass and Jeanne Ridgley cleaned the boxes and observed that after ten years, they need to be replaced. The Central Sierra Audubon Board approved a request to donate three boxes to be installed in the fall of 2019.

Ron McDow, Tom Parrington, and Tom Harrington each built a box for this project and they were delivered in October. GCSD staff assisted by taking the poles down so installation could take place. On November 21, Dave Douglass, Joe Hopkins and Jeanne Ridgley installed the new Wood Duck boxes on the poles. GCSD staff will raise the poles so they are ready for the 2020 nesting season.

Joe and Jeanne at work; photos by Dave Douglass

NOVEMBER SIGHTINGS

Nov. 28

As the season changes, so too do the birds in Arnold; gone are the summer breeders to be replaced by winter migrants including the Townsend's Warbler, Hermit Thrush and Fox Sparrow. Also returned is the resident Golden-crowned Kinglet as is the Ruby-crowned Kinglet. The Creeper, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Junco and Spotted Towhee take turns at the bird bath, and just this morning one Nuthatch was looking for a food caching site under my deck.

At Lakemont pond, the incoming Hooded Mergansers varied this last week from two to 12 and I expect more to arrive. Also present were numbers of Yellow-rumped (Audubon's) Warblers and one Eared Grebe.

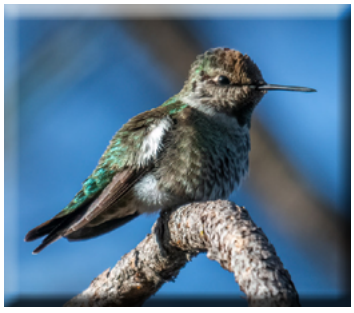
Buffleheads are making their annual winter pilgrimage back to Hunter Dam Reservoir in Hathaway Pines where five pairs were in attendance today, along with two female Common Goldeneyes and twenty Canada Geese.

John Sutake, Arnold

Nov. 26

I don't see the "Butter-butt" here very much, and when I do, I don't usually get its trademark yellow rump in the shot. Score!

The Golden-crowned Sparrows are back and scratching around for seeds as usual.



The little Anna's has its feathers puffed up to reduce heat loss from that tiny body. Staying here over winter must be pretty tough!

Happy Thanksgiving!

Dave Douglass,
Pine Mountain Lake

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Narrative & Photos by Maggie Sanchez of Columbia College

Downy Woodpecker *(Picoides pubescens) with video footage*

Over the past couple of months, I have been observing this male Downey Woodpecker and his behaviors throughout his nest building progress. Earlier on in his work, a juvenile Downy male attempted to take over construction but was soon kicked out. The adult male in this video has been back and forth, sometimes not returning for a week or more. But it seems to me that he returns to keep up the nest, doing a little here or there so he can be prepared to present it to a possible partner. The upkeep appears to be quite important, as he constantly carves out more wood and makes sure to spit it all out.

Click on button to see video

Editor's note: Downy Woodpeckers of both sexes excavate roosting cavities in the fall to carry them through the winter. Oddly enough, although the Downy is likely monogamous, yet they roost separately before they reunite in the Spring. It raises the question of how they remember and recognize each other? More research needed!

Red-breasted Nuthatch (Sitta canadensis)

On a trip down to the Highway 1 coast, this individual (along with a few buddies) frolicked in the trees of a Carmel neighborhood. Nuthatches' always seem to give quite a show whenever I've observed them and are definitely one of my favorites to shoot or simply watch.

CSAS Participation in the Eleventh Annual Stanislaus River Salmon Festival at the Knights Ferry Recreation Area

There's something very special about seeing youngsters enthusiastic about birds and wildlife - even these virtual ones that these lively children are pleased to wear. CSAS is passionate about being involved with children and students because they represent the future of birds and, in any case, they deserve to be able to enjoy the natural world for themselves.

On November 9th, Gale Witzlsteiner, our Education Chair, and friend Bridgette Vandrise Hobbs ran a CSAS table at this event just as they did last year. Gail says that they had a great time with the kids, making a total of 180 turkey vulture hats and stick puppets with them when the youngsters were able to help in construction.

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HIGHWAY CLEAN-UP DECEMBER 11

Join us for another CSAS social activity - the next Adopt-a-Highway cleanup will be on Wednesday, December 11th. Meet at Perko's in Sonora at 7am to carpool to the Lake Don Pedro vista point where we start the pick-up. Or, meet us at the vista point at 7:30am. We will return to Perko's by 10am. Rain will cancel. Help would be appreciated, and you can call:

Tom Harrington (209)694-8564

REMEMBERING AL & PEGGY BERGERON

The recent death of Peggy Bergeron, a friend of many Sonora Audubon birders, brings to mind her husband, now seventeen years deceased. Al Bergeron was a pillar of our organization, often referred to as "Mr. Audubon." His engineering career made him meticulous in all he did, and before retiring and moving to Sonora, he had been active in the Bay Area, among other environmental projects, in creating the Tule Elk reserve near Bolinas in Marin County. Both Peggy and Al will continue to be fondly remembered.

Paolo Maffei

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, Conservation	(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
OPEN, 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 Committee Chairs

Gail Witzlsteiner, Bird Box Trail	(209)586-4025
Tom Harrington, Book/Bird Box Sales	(209)694-8564
Chris Laddish, Scholarship	(209)728-3871
Barry Boulton, Website	(209)596-0612
Walt Kruse, YSS delegate	(707)548-1829
Chris Laddish, Calaveras County Contact	(209)728-3871