

Central Sierra Audubon Society

Sierra Squawker



www.centralsierraaudubon.org

May - 2020

PUBLIC PROGRAMS & FIELD TRIPS CANCELED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE

Message from the CSAS President

Greetings! With all that's going on - and not going on! - in these strange and unique times, I hope that you're finding fulfilling ways of keeping the spirit alive and well. I always spend a lot of time at this time of year observing birds courting and breeding but, by happenstance, I've explored some local rural byways in Calaveras County with beautiful views, carpets of flowers - and no traffic so that I can stop to take photos with no problem. Having discussed with my urban friends their restrictions, I realize how fortunate we are up here in the foothills, able to enjoy the outdoors while easily observing social distancing. In fact, just this morning, I was practicing with my new toy, a drone, over Lake Alpine. where the road was closed and only the occasional biker came by. I managed to crash the drone, but it survived and I retrieved it - yet another lesson in "how not to"!

All this in addition to watching Ospreys settle down to incubate in so many places - and the extra gift with this project is to see other birds by chance. An interesting observation occurred when I visited an Osprey nest in a utility tower along a back road near Copperopolis; surprisingly, a pair of Ravens is breeding in a nest in the same tower but directly below the Ospreys! I would expect the Ospreys to chase them out, but perhaps it's a case of "out of sight, out of mind" because I noticed the Ravens approach the nest from below, keeping out of the Ospreys' direct vision!

While video recording nearby Red-winger Blackbirds displaying in a little reed-filled pond, I noticed an owl box over to the side where at least four juvenile Barn Owls were actively milling around in the box waiting for food. I couldn't determine if there were more than four young owls inside - quite likely because the Barn Owl typically has a large brood such that four would be an unusually small number. But, even four seemed to me to be over-crowded in that box!

And on top of all these pleasures, I've been buying fresh delicious fava beans from a little family nursery near Modesto. I stand in my kitchen shelling these freshly-picked beans - a slow, almost meditative job - while I listen to a talking book and enjoy a glass of wine; life is good!

I'm working with a community group in Patterson on the edge of the Diablo Range where San Joaquin agribusiness is proposing to construct a reservoir behind two massive dams, with at least 25% (and ultimately, probably most) paid by the taxpayer. This is institutionalized corruption in action, and yet the local Congressman and Assemblyman are leading the charge to give public money to corporate agriculture so they can plant even more nuts that provide huge profits. The Central Valley, once a magnificent set of ecosystems and habitats, has been subordinated to corporate profits, much to the detriment of birds. This project is taking a lot of my time because we need to halt this corruption - and it's not easy (probably impossible!).

But to be involved in this conservation project is an excellent demonstration that coronavirus offers opportunity as well as problems. I needed assistance on a potential lawsuit as well as the arcane topic of the Public Trust Doctrine that was critical to the Mono Lake campaign, so I reached out to an environmental organization who referred me to two professors at CSU Stanislaus. Each responded favorably and helpfully, the last one at 9pm! I don't think that I would have received those encouraging responses so quickly in "normal times". That is not, of course, to welcome coronavirus, but to recognize that new ways of living and working for whatever time needed, can offer opportunities as well as difficulties.

Barry Boulton



Pebble Mine & Bristol Bay in SE Alaska

Audubon Alaska says on its website: *"Located in southwest Alaska, Bristol Bay is home to the world's greatest concentration of seabirds, dozens of important bird areas, the world's largest salmon runs, and is threatened by one of the world's largest open pit mine proposals. The proposed Pebble Mine would be one of the world's largest open-pit gold mines. The project would dig a 1-mile wide, 1-mile long, and 200m deep mining pit in the heart of spawning salmon and breeding bird habitat. The proposed mine will destroy 3,500 acres of wetlands, lakes, and ponds, and over 80 miles of salmon streams. Audubon Alaska has been fighting for over a decade to help protect the rich resources of Bristol Bay from the threat of this huge mine. Road corridors will slice through grizzly bear habitat between two national parks".*

It's not clear to me exactly how Audubon Alaska has been working to protect Bristol Bay but, in October, Trout Unlimited announced a lawsuit against the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for their decision to arbitrarily withdraw safeguards for the region's fishery, otherwise known as the Proposed Determination. However, on April 17, the judge dismissed the lawsuit, halting TU's efforts to have these protections reinstated through legal means.

That leaves only a very doubtful possibility for protection - a decision by President Trump to deny the project its key federal permit. Trout Unlimited is requesting signatures for a petition to the President - they will print out all responses on May 15th and send them to the White House. I wished that Audubon was doing this but, in their absence, we need as many signatures as possible for this petition. You can view and sign it at:

<http://www.savebristolbay.org/tellpresidenttrump>

Also, if you wish to see the excellent short video of Bristol Bay and the spawning sockeye salmon from which I took the above shot, it's available at: <https://vimeo.com/377863980>

Please sign the petition today!

APRIL SIGHTINGS

Editor's note: I'd really appreciate more feedback in terms of what birds you're seeing every month, whether that is on a specific birding walk or, probably much more frequently, in your backyard and garden. I'm interested in what birds you're seeing, what they're doing, and your opinion as to what they're up to. When you see a bird in action, you're observing a part of their culture, and every bird has its own culture. To me, whether you're observing a lowly sparrow or blackbird, a reviled Starling or a Western Tanager, something interesting is always going on. Are they competing, courting, foraging, weaning off their young, teaching them to fly, and so on? Are they interacting with their own species, or another, and how is that working out?

If you're a garden-watcher, you're in a favorable situation because you will glean special insights as you watch the same birds over a period of time, so you see how those behaviors work out. Each of you will have special insights that inspire both theories and questions, and I would very much like to engage in that debate with you. We're all learning as we go and so this allows us to engage in "citizen science" in an enjoyable and relaxed manner. By the way, photos are nice but not necessary because your stories and descriptions are more important.

April 14

A Red-shouldered Hawk this morning at Willow Springs in Soulsbyville. There is a nest near by, but not sure that this fellow is part of the activity there. What amazes me is that



Photo by Greg Robbins

the bark on the tree looks very much like the color and pattern on the bird's wings. He/she was almost/ partially camouflaged when looking through the binoculars. Also of note on this bird-walk today, I watched a Raven move his tail to change/adjust course as he was gliding not far above my head. I did not realize that their tails were mobile and functioning on several levels. I just thought that the tails worked for "flaps down" on landing. I was impressed at the level of control that the bird's tail afforded his flight. Pretty cool!!!

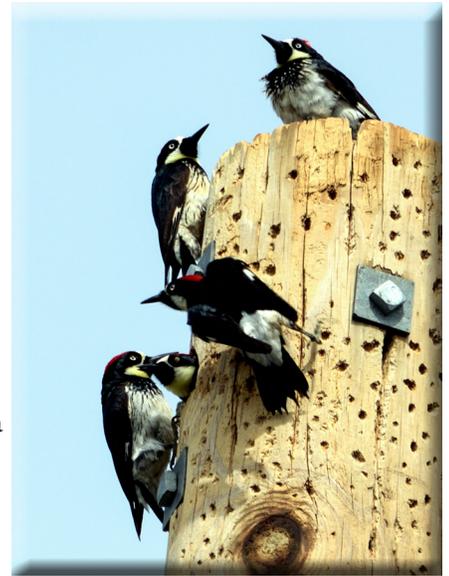
Jean Dakota, Soulsbyville

April 20

Acorn Woodpecker community shot by **Greg Robbins**.

The extended family works together to prepare a store of acorns and to feed the young.

Jean Dakota



April 29

In the last 2 days we have had a Black-headed Grosbeak, a Western Tanager and a pair of Western Bluebirds here visiting our pond and waterfall, just above Forest Meadows at 3690 elevation.

Haven't seen the bluebirds for almost 10 years. Also the resident and ever growing population of Steller's Jays, and one very determined Robin trying to defeat his reflection in the windows downstairs (we have taped up pieces of newspaper to try to discourage him).

Jane Escola

April 29

I'm attaching a photo I took this morning of a Black-headed Grosbeak taking a bath in our backyard. It seems that we have a pair in the vicinity of our house. They will be fun to watch as the season progresses.



Alan Beymer

BOOK REVIEWS

"Of Birds, Birders, and Birding"

by Sal Salerno, President of Stanislaus Audubon

Sal Salerno, whom many of you know from trips that he has led in our area or from his presentations at our programs, has published a compilation of his essays and articles from The Valley Habitat. He is an instructive and entertaining writer, our Central Valley's answer to Roger Tory Peterson. His articles range on topics of interest to birders throughout California, not limited to just the birds and birders of the Central Valley.

Sal also has a great sense of humor describing one hilarious incident of birders from around the State in search of a rare Yellow-billed Loon that had been spotted at the San Luis Reservoir. The search turned into an entrapment in mud without finding "the bird". To protect their names, he only referred to the three as Larry, Curly & Moe. There are also several chapters on Andrew Jackson Grayson, referred to as the Audubon of the West, describing his unique talents but tragic life.

If the reader has not followed the Valley Habitat (Stanislaus Audubon monthly newsletter) since 2008, I highly recommend his paperback which he sells for \$20. To purchase, please contact Sal via email at bees2@sbcglobal.net

Tom Parrington

"What It's Like to be a Bird"

by David Allen Sibley

David Sibley has broken new ground with his latest book "What It's Like to be a Bird", sub-titled "From flying to nesting, eating and singing – what birds are doing and why".

I'll simply quote from his preface to give you his book plan:

"The creation of this book has followed a meandering path over the last fifteen years. My original idea was to produce a bird guide for kids. Then I began to think of it as a bird guide to beginners of any age. The concept of a "simplified" guide never clicked for me - instead, I wanted to make it a broader introduction to birds. My plan to make this volume more than an identification guide led to the idea of adding short essays about some of the more interesting and amazing things birds do. I try to give readers a deeper appreciation of the birds they are identifying. The more I worked on these essays, the more I learned, and eventually those essays became the whole book".

I wholeheartedly recommend this book.

Barry Boulton

CSAS Board Elections

Yes, it's that time of year again when we invite you to join our Board to help keep CSAS vibrant and alive! The current crisis will end and we will return to normal field trips and public meetings, so we invite you to consider participating with us. Elections will take place at our annual meeting in June – date TBD. The role that we really need to fill this year is that of Membership Chair – but that doesn't mean you recruit members! It's actually a matter of managing our database of members in conjunction with National Audubon, so it's an on-line and email role that takes just a few hours per month at home.

If you're willing to consider taking on that role, please contact one of our nominating committee members who are: myself at (209)596-0612 or rbarryboulton@gmail.com, Ralph Retherford at (209)770-6124, or Kit DeGear at (925)822-5215.

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 Millsbaugh, 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
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