

Central Sierra Audubon Society

# Sierra Squawker



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

December - 2020

## PUBLIC ZOOM PRESENTATION

**Wednesday, December 16, at 7pm**

### **"Dragonflies - World's Best Flight Machine" by Barry Boulton**

**D**ragonflies have been around for about 330M years - before dinosaurs - and so they've had time to perfect flight to a state of near-perfection such that, in the avian world, only hummingbirds can compare. They're the largest insects that we can easily see performing fascinating behaviors that I'll show and describe. Not only are they among the most aggressive predator of any class both as nymph and adult, but they're also good food for birds too - what goes around comes around perhaps?

**O**ne of my favorite dragonfly sighting locations is the Merced NWR in late September when their activities are reaching a crescendo, so I enjoy them along with the arriving Sandhill Cranes, a delightful combination. You will enjoy seeing these gorgeous insects close-up in their spectacular colors.

**B**arry Boulton is President of CSAS and its Newsletter Editor who specializes in recording behaviors of birds and dragonflies with photo and video techniques.



### **Zoom log-in information:**

#### **COMPUTER:**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88526467875?pwd=YjB0YWE4cTdadjhqVTthhd1E0OEgzUT09>

**PHONE:** (669)900-9128 **Meeting ID:** 885 2646 7875 **Passcode:** 574462

You might like to log on 5 minutes before 7pm just in case you run into problems; it also gives you time to say "hello" to those already logged in so that we can start on time or close to.

#### **Note:**

If any of you wish to enjoy our Zoom presentations but are not sure how to do any part of it, please call or email me and I'll set up a practice session just for you and guide you through the process. It would be my pleasure to do it, so don't hesitate to contact me.

## UPCOMING DECEMBER FIELD TRIPS

### **December 3 - Thursday Afternoon with the Sandhill Cranes**

Our November 12 field trip to the Lodi/Cosumnes area was so successful (see trip report on next page) that we will do it again on December 3, although with some variations. We hope that those of you who missed that trip can join us for this one.

This half day tour will explore the cranes' daytime feeding grounds and conclude with the fly-in. At dusk the cranes converge on the flooded fields to roost for the night. The fly-in here typically numbers into the thousands, with both Greater and Lesser Sandhill Cranes. Numerous other bird species may also be viewed, including but not limited to ducks, geese, Tundra Swans, Great Blue Herons, egrets and shore birds. Participants are encouraged to bring a folding chair to relax in while watching the cranes fly in to roost.

In Sonora, meet at Barrows Café (formerly Perko's) at 12:00 noon and caravan (NOT carpool) to Lodi, a 90 minute drive, stopping briefly at the Shell Gas Station at about 12:30pm in the Copperopolis Town Square to pick up any cars coming from Calaveras County. The next stop will be at Hwy 12 and I-5 in Lodi for bathroom breaks before arriving at Woodbridge Road. There we can view/photograph the Sandhill Cranes and numerous other birds at several spots along this public road. The cranes will be flying in between 4:30 and 5:30 pm. This field trip will conclude at 5:30 pm (dark). Wear layered clothing in the event that the weather is cool. Bring binoculars if you have them, snacks, water, hand-sanitizer, masks and a folding chair if you want to sit down during the fly-in.

Unfortunately, we cannot get together for dinner after, so everyone will be on their own. Due to the COVID restrictions, the only food available will be take out (McDonalds, Burger King, etc.), or participants may want to bring their own food to eat where ever they feel comfortable.

Everyone participating in these group events is requested to take their temperature on the day of the trip, and it must be below 99 degrees to attend.

**Trip leader is Jean Dakota; let her know you are joining us: (209)591-9952 or [jdakota002@comcast.net](mailto:jdakota002@comcast.net)**

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### **December 10, Thursday - Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area Auto Tour**

Less than 2 1/2 hours away (near Sacramento and Davis) in the heart of the Pacific Flyway, Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area is a haven for waterfowl, shorebirds and wading birds, neotropical migratory birds and raptors. I have been to this site a couple of times and have enjoyed viewing a variety of species. In particular a wide array of waterfowl, raptors such as the White-tailed Kite, and the Ring-necked Pheasant.

We will meet at Barrow's Cafe in Sonora (formerly Perko's) parking lot at 8:30 am. While we cannot carpool, unless you have friends in your "social bubble", we can caravan to the location. We will make a brief stop at the Shell Station in Copperopolis at 9:00 am to pick up any cars coming from Calaveras County. I will have maps to distribute to facilitate further directions. Wear layered clothing; bring a mask, hand sanitizer, lunch, snacks, water and binoculars/scopes. We will not be able to share scopes or binoculars, just our enthusiasm. We should be back in Sonora by late afternoon before dark.

Everyone participating in these group events is requested to take their temperature on the day of the trip, and it must be below 99 degrees to attend. We appreciate your cooperation in following these guidelines.

**The trip leader is Kit DeGear: please call her to let her know you are joining us: Cell #(925)-822-5215 or Email [kdegear@gmail.com](mailto:kdegear@gmail.com)**

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### **Suggested Self-guided Field Trip**

We are recommending Indigeny Reserve this month as a suitable location for you to get outside by yourself or with your household family. There are a variety of habitats that make this locale a good site to see many birds. A recent visit netted 30 species. Some target birds would include Hermit Thrush, Wrentit and if you are lucky a Brown Creeper! While recent dredging work at Phoenix Lake has impacted some venues one can still get down to the reeds/lake area. A nice easy, mostly level, walk. Indigeny is at 14679 Summers Ln, Sonora, CA 95370.

**If you have any questions please feel free to contact me, Kit DeGear. Cell #925-822-5215. Email [kdegear@gmail.com](mailto:kdegear@gmail.com)**

## November Field Trip Report

On Thursday, November 12, fifteen bird lovers formed an eleven car caravan to travel to see the Sandhill Cranes in Lodi and the ducks and shorebirds at the Cosumnes River Preserve. The sky was overcast and the temperature was 31°F at 7:00 am in Sonoma. As the day progressed, the sun came out and the temperature rose, making for a really pleasant day of bird watching. The auto caravan stopped in Copperopolis and Lodi to pick up more attendees and proceeded to Woodbridge Road to view Sandhill Cranes. There were hundreds of cranes in the fields, in the water, and in the air. After driving the length of the road and viewing cranes, egrets, geese, numerous Northern Shoveler ducks and a Belted King Fisher, the group headed to Staten Island Road. Along Staten Island Road, there were several hundred or more ducks and geese. Cackling Geese were readily identified there, as well as Ross's Geese and Tundra Swans. Parking on the side of the dirt road at Staten Island was limited. The group then proceeded to the Cosumnes River Preserve.



*Northern Pintail at Cosumnes by George Dondero*

The total trip yielded 60 bird species. Some of the bird sightings included a large number of hawks, Greater White-fronted Geese, and a Loggerhead Shrike. Future trips will be held in the reverse, traveling first to the Cosumnes Preserve and then to Woodbridge Road, to take advantage of the sun's afternoon position for better bird viewing and photography. Our chapter bird identification specialists for this walk were Kit DeGear, Tom Parrington, Ralph Retherford, Linda Millsbaugh, Paolo Maffei and Cyril Ashe - plus almost everyone with an iPhone. Many thanks to them and all of the participants for their knowledge and participation in the identification process.

Jean Dakota



*Crane Silhouette  
by  
Joy Lopez*

At the preserve, social distancing was observed as we enjoyed lunch outside, both under the trees and under the covered porch at the Visitor's Center. (The Visitor's Center was closed due to COVID.) For future trips, the Visitor's Center includes a "natural history room" with a life size model of a Sandhill Crane, pamphlets and books on the local flora and fauna, as well as flush toilets. Due to the drought, the water level of the floodplain ponds was low, making the ducks and geese further out, away from the walkways. One of the highlights of the 2 hour walk along waterways and riparian habitat included a closer view of two male/one female Northern Pintail ducks, and two male/one female Cinnamon Teal ducks. The Northern Pintails were literally "art pieces of floating jewelry." And the Cinnamon Teals looked to be an unbelievable electric red color in the sun. Of special note at the Cosumnes Preserve was the presence of Sandhill Cranes further out beyond the ducks.



*Northern Shoveler at Cosumnes by George Dondero*



*Cranes landing at sunset by Joy Lopez*

## The Dilemma – Birds & Non-native Plant Species

How should regard a plant that is regarded as invasive when local birds seem to love it? Do we rip it out because it's non-native to our area; do we quietly keep it for the birds' sake, or, do we encourage friends to plant it because birds congregate on it to eat the fruit? The question arises because Jeanne and Larry Bodiford discovered a plant named Pokeweed several years ago in their backyard that can be a prolific source of berries that birds seem to love and thrive on. In Jeanne's words, here's the story.

Over the years, the (pokeweed) plants showed up in different spots of our backyard, mostly shadier areas. Last year and this year, the bushes grew very large and very close to our back deck. Most species we have at this time of year seem to like the berries (and it is just laden w/purple berries hanging so heavy most stalks have bent over pretty far). Last October, near the end of the month, I was fortunate enough to hear Bluebirds and the wheeze of Cedar Waxwings late one afternoon when Larry was out on errands. For the better part of an hour, I watched 3-4 Bluebirds and about half-dozen Waxwings just devour berries. I watched from our back sliding door area so as to not frighten them, about 8-15 feet away.

This year, for the past few days, we have had two Northern Flickers a few times a day (first time and closest ever seen except for the few that we had in our care when we did songbird rescue and care) and they stay longer than others and pack away up to 20 or so berries! Bluebirds also come 2-3 times a day (that we are aware of) as well as Yellow-rumped Warblers, Spotted Towhees, California Towhees, both White and Yellow-crowned Sparrows, Titmice (1 berry at a time) and Blackbirds occasionally.

These bushes turn brownish and dry out and look awful once the berries are gone and we pull them. Larry puts it in the trailer for the slash yard after pulling it up each year and we don't see any evidence of it for many months. However, obviously the birds have "planted" enough around so that they are indeed increased every year but seem to do no harm to established plants (many native) and no way would we try to prevent them growing as the bird life they draw is more than any of the other berries we have around including wild grape! So, with internet and all the social media out there sharing opinions on non-native species, I was not sure how to speak about it - perhaps "mystery berry" or? Have no idea if this is related to or is the same as poke salad as my Mom used to call something she ate as a little girl in Texas.



*Pokemon*  
(internet sourced)

### Editor's notes.

Regarding "poke salad", apparently it is what Jeanne's mother was talking about – I found this on the internet: *Young, boiled pokeweed leaves & shoots are considered a special treat in the South and a canned version is occasionally available in grocery stores.* However, if you're tempted, you'd better find a good recipe because pokeweed can be horrendously poisonous to humans!

Going back to the non-native plant dilemma, I discussed it with my biologist friend and CSAS activist, John Sutake. As he says, the opinions range from the severe "get rid of them all" to the nonchalant "let it be", but there are rational ways to assess how to proceed. For example, is the plant aggressively invasive such as to overwhelm native plants and habitats such as ornamental hyacinth which is clogging up Central Valley creeks, or pampas grass and so on. Those species are truly invasive and eradication needs to be an on-going process.

So where does pokeweed sit? Here's what UC says about it: *"American pokeweed (Phytolacca americana) is a robust, non-woody shrub that is weedy throughout much of California. Native to the eastern United States from Maine to Wisconsin, south to Texas, Mexico and Florida, pokeweed now occurs throughout much of North America. It is sometimes cultivated as an ornamental or garden vegetable, however more often it's considered an undesirable weed. Pokeweed is found in riparian areas, oak woodlands, forest edges, fence rows, forest openings, pastures, under power lines, disturbed areas, vineyards, orchards, cultivated fields, parks, and ornamental landscapes"*. However, while it seems to be a wide-ranging species, nowhere is it said that it overwhelms local plant species, and Jeanne's observations suggests that, indeed, it does not do that. So, my tentative conclusion is that, given its value to birds, it may be a valuable and worthwhile plant in your garden. Incidentally, in John's garden, his most bird-friendly berries are blue elderberry and dogwood.

If any gardener among you would like to comment for the next Squawker, please email me:

Barry Boulton [rbarryboulton@gmail.com](mailto:rbarryboulton@gmail.com)

## The Artistry of Birds

Birds have appeared in artistic form over human history, at least as far back as those in the Lascaux Caves in the Dordogne region of France some 20,000 years ago. They have also featured as gods from the time of ancient Egypt, where the sacred ibis was venerated as a symbol of the god Thoth. In India, the peacock is perceived as Mother Earth among Dravidian peoples while the Persian emperors displayed their godlike authority by sitting in a Peacock Throne.

It occurred to me that it might be nice to include artistic pieces by some of our members, and this month I'll include two by Dave Douglass from Pine Mountain Lake who is a prolific bird and animal photographer, often in his own backyard. He uses Corel's Painter program for most of the "painting" and then finishes the work in Adobe Photoshop.



*Hawk and Northern Flicker*  
by Dave Douglass



I've also been thinking more about birds from an artistic perspective, not least because I've become rather jaded at shooting even more bird photos - as if I didn't already have plenty! Consequently, I've been opening my eyes to the sheer beauty of all things in nature, whether birds, insects, plants, flowers, oak galls, lichens and so on. That also includes the intricate complexity of feathers in avian plumages. However, the feathers don't even need to be on a bird but, like the one shown here that I recently shot at Arrowhead Marsh in Oakland, which is suspended on vegetation with the wind moving it around and the light playing on and forming near-circles on the inside of the feather. I regard the nuances here as being artistic in a real sense, with the tension between solid vegetation and ephemeral shadow patterns on the feather.

**Barry Boulton**

**If any of you have created art around birds that you'd like to be shown in the Squawker, please email me [rbarryboulton@gmail.com](mailto:rbarryboulton@gmail.com)**

## 2020 Christmas Bird Counts (CBC)

### **CALAVERAS CBC - Saturday, January 2, 2021**

The Calaveras CBC will be run again this season by Keith & Sandra Maurer as they have done in the last few years. This event will also follow standard social distancing guidelines and there will not be a meeting at the end of day. Count data can be supplied via USPS or email.  
**Contact Keith & Sandra at [kandsmaurer@goldrush.com](mailto:kandsmaurer@goldrush.com)**

### **SONORA CBC - Saturday, December 19, 2020**

Just to let you all know; the Sonora CBC is just around the corner so get those binoculars out and get ready. The Count will take place on December 19th. It is usually an all-day affair where groups of people go out into a 177 square mile circle and count every bird they see or hear. The circle is broken up into 20 areas. Each active area has an experienced area leader and a team of dedicated people to work on tallying the birds.

In the past, we would all gather at the end of the day to share our experiences but, with COVID this year, we will forego the traditional compilation dinner (Sorry, Tom P.—no cheesecake). People are already champing at the bit to participate. If you want to help out, please get in touch with me, **Steven Umland, at 209.352.6985** or [stevenum71@gmail.com](mailto:stevenum71@gmail.com) and I will set you up!

## SCHOLARSHIP FUND

During the COVID-19 Pandemic students are still in need of our support. Last year we awarded the scholarship to Brittany Kleinschnitz who just reported that during the summer she had an internship where she was searching for Sierra Nevada Yellow Legged Frogs. They were successful in their search and spotted the first Sierra Nevada Yellow Legged Frog north of the Plumas National Forest in 15 years. Our scholarship, thanks to you, helped her pursue her passion.

Many of you have generously contributed to our scholarship fund through the years for which we and our scholarship recipients sincerely thank you. The applicant needs to be either from Calaveras or Tuolumne Counties and be qualified for upper division or in graduate school and be pursuing majors in environmental disciplines.

We sincerely appreciate any contribution you may be able to offer so we can maintain our scholarship at \$3,000 as we did in 2019. CSAS is a 501 (c)3 organization and contributions are tax- deductible.

Your generous contributions should be sent to: Central Sierra Audubon Society, PO Box 3047, Sonora, CA 95370

With great appreciation we thank you,  
Chris Ladd, Scholarship Chair and Barry Boulton, President

### **Central Sierra Audubon Society - CSAS**

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

**Public Meetings:** Under the current C-19 regime, these are now on-line events using Zoom technology on the third Wednesday of each month at 7:00pm. Monthly details shown in this newsletter and on our website at

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

**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 you may join solely 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 for local membership 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 & Newsletter Editor	(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 & Education	(925)822-5215
Gail Witzlsteiner, Membership	(209)586-4025
Jan Jorn-Baird, Publicity	(209)532-1106

### **Your CSAS Committee Chairs**

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