

Central Sierra Audubon Society

Sierra Squawker



www.centralsierraaudubon.org

April - 2021

PUBLIC ZOOM PRESENTATION

Wednesday, April 21, at 6:30pm

"Avian malaria in Hawaii: past, present, and future" by Gabbie Names

Since the introduction of avian malaria to Hawaii a mere century ago, the disease has contributed to devastating declines of the native avifauna. In most Hawaiian forest birds, avian malaria causes high mortality. A few species are able to cope with infection, including the Hawaii Amakihi (pictured right), but surprisingly little is known about what allows the birds to survive infection. In this presentation, Gabbie will provide a brief overview of the history of avian malaria in Hawaii and discuss some of the findings from her PhD involving the causes and consequences of avian malaria resilience in Hawaii Amakihi.



Gabbie Names completed her PhD at UC Davis in 2020, studying how avian malaria infection influences the immunity, physiology and behavior of songbirds on Hawaii Island. She recently moved to Paris, France, where she plans to continue her research on avian malaria in wild birds.

Zoom log-in information:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85363260801>



"Favorite Winter Birds of the Central Sierra Nevada Foothills" on YouTube

The March 17 presentation by Rich Cimino featuring some of his favorite birds in our region is now available on YouTube at: <https://youtu.be/cHcnQPd-CDY>

UPCOMING APRIL FIELD TRIPS

Thursday, April 22 - Wilms Road/Rock River Road off Highway 108

While still observing Covid guidelines, this April we will maintain our Auto Tour Field Trip option with walkie talkies. We will meet at the Barrow's (formerly Perko's) parking lot at 8:30 am. We will caravan down Hwy 108 to a left turn on Wilms Rd. which is directly opposite the turn off to Knights Ferry. There will be few opportunities to pull over on Wilms Rd. but there is a pond which will allow for some outside of car viewing. Rock River Rd. is much less traveled. There is a nice pond near the end and we might catch some migrating shorebirds. This time of year we will hope to see Horned Lark, Loggerhead Shrike, Tri-colored Blackbirds and Western Kingbirds. Please observe and have on hand current Covid protocols, sun protection, water, snacks/lunch. If time and interest allow, we will continue on to a drive, with a few stops, through Red Hills (where there are some vault toilets available and the self-guided suggestion this month), easily accessed on our way home. Hope you will come along!

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

Suggested Self-guided Field Trip - Red Hills south of Chinese Camp

If you have not experienced driving through the Red Hills Area of Critical Concern this would be a good month to go. South of Chinese Camp, the Bureau of Land Management oversees acreage with atypical serpentine soils providing habitat to rare plants (e.g. California Verbena) and species: the Red Hills Roach (a minnow), and the Foothill Yellow-legged Frog are some unusual inhabitants. At this time of year the major draw is the beautiful wildflowers! However, if you are extremely lucky, you might get a glimpse of the Greater Roadrunner. As spring unfolds Sixbit Gulch Rd. (off Red Hills Rd. in the center of this area) can provide some great viewings of spring migrants, such as flycatchers, warblers, etc. You can reach this area by turning left from Hwy 108 West from Sonora onto Hwy 49, then turning right onto Sims Rd. and veering right onto Red Hill Rd. Red Hill Rd will take you to J59. Turning right will take you back to Hwy 108 where you can make your return. A very nice drive at the very least!

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

MARCH FIELD TRIP REPORTS

Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area on March 11

I was pleased to have 4 others willing to make the long drive to the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area. While we did not have a particularly high species count, (35 species), we did enjoy seeing each and every one. This was a new venue for most and they were impressed with the size of the refuge, over 16,000 acres. Highlights included Cinnamon Teal, Green-winged Teal, Northern Pintail, Black-necked Stilts and a huge sighting of Long-billed Dowitchers. At lunch we had a lively discussion about a large flock of what most assumed to be Snow/Ross's Geese and either Canada or maybe Greater White-fronted Geese. Cyril Ashe was adamant that they were a huge flock of White-faced Ibis and Sea Gulls. He laughingly concluded with "That's my story and I'm sticking to it!" These discussions are what makes these trips fun. I hope to return in the fall and include in our trip the UC Davis Raptor Center which is currently closed due to Covid.

Kit DeGear, Field Trip Chair



*Green-winged Teal
and
Cinnamon Teal by
Barry Boulton*



How does CSAS Survive - by Barry Boulton, President

This is an annual (existential) question for our Board because, as for every other 501(c)3 organization, CSAS must hold annual elections to give our membership choice of who runs the chapter for the ensuing year. The answer is essentially two-fold; for us to continue obviously requires a membership that uses and appreciates our programs and then - the crucial element - a small group of members prepared to devote time and energy to running the chapter. That is, the Board of Officers. Currently we have about 400 members of whom roughly 50% receive the Squawker by email (we haven't printed and mailed hard copies for several years now except to members who request it because they don't use computers and email). From that base, we may have anywhere from 30 - 60 attendees at our monthly Zoom or (previously and hopefully again soon) public meetings. We currently have 8 Officers plus 3 other committee chairpersons; a total of 11 people running the chapter.

Of course, another similarity with many - or perhaps most non-profits - is that our elections are never competitive and, indeed, simply filling all of the roles isn't easy because recruits are hard to come by! Consequently, most Officers stay on the Board for several years, and several perform more than one role. That's not to suggest that we do these things in a sacrificial manner; no, we enjoy what we do, and we enjoy the sense of accomplishment in that our chapter is strong and vibrant in its activities. But, just as in the natural world, there is a succession process, and so as we officers become older, we need younger recruits to nurture for leadership in their turn. I know that as I turn 80 in early April and have been President for several years now, I would like this coming year to be my last one in that role. I still have a lot of energy, but a younger replacement would undoubtedly see further into the future (and have a bigger stake!) than I, and move the chapter into more productive arenas and activities; that is the nature of generational succession. For my part, lifelong learning is critical, and my current roles as President, Newsletter Editor and Website Manager have all been great in that sense for which I'm very thankful - and my learning is nowhere finished yet I hope! My experience running the CSAS website has allowed me to take over the management of another conservation website that needed help and thus allows me to be involved in protecting the California deserts, a set of ecosystems that thrill me on each and every visit! Just FYI, that website is at <http://www.desertreport.org/> I still want to spend time writing about birds and nature in ways that resonate in my mind, as well as moving into professional bird video documentaries. Obviously, my time is limited...

Consider the possibilities...

Linda Millspaugh is both Treasurer and Membership Chair. While Treasurer is a professional job that most of couldn't handle too well (or not at all in my case!), a computer-competent senior could see the Membership role as an enjoyable social function within the group - and may be able to use the connection to motivate grandkids to join us to enjoy outdoor field trips and the learning and joy that happens when you're observing nature. What a gift for the grandkids!

Kit DeGear is our Field Trip Chair and Education Chair; a mature or retired teacher could provide real opportunities to young minds and support older students who are interested in the environment. We own about 10 preserved and stuffed birds (that typically died in auto collisions) that allows students to actually touch and feel a real bird. They are very popular with teachers and students - but we need an enthusiastic chairperson to make that a dynamic program as and when C-19 allows.

Tom Harrington has managed our book sales, bird box sales and road clean-up program for more years than I can remember! Once more, a socially-oriented senior would find any one of these roles fun and rewarding - you don't have to do them all.

A student or recent graduate might find that taking over management of our website would enhance their career prospects by allowing them to work out how to improve what we already have in place, link it to various social media, and thus learn more about the growing and diverse world of multimedia. This would truly be a win-win situation for both student and CSAS.

What am I suggesting? Well, a couple of things... Many of you seniors have experienced a year with little or no social contact but, as you're all vaccinated and relatively safe, joining us in the sort of ways that I've shown above can add zest and enjoyment in your lives in addition to the sense of accomplishment. Alternatively, you may know of people that would be ripe for these sorts of opportunities - for example, probably very few of you would wish to invest in learning how to manage a website, but you may know of a student or the parents of a student for whom this would be a real opportunity as I described above. If so, please contact one of our Nominating Committee members as follows:

Tom Parrington (209)928-3835 or eattep@sbcglobal.net

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

Barbara McDow (650)391-5277 or barron14700@sbcglobal.net

[Ironstone Vineyard on Saturday, March 27](#)

I decided to follow my own advice for this month's self-guided suggestion and check out Ironstone. It did not disappoint! Jan John-Baird joined me for an absolutely wonderful morning. Did we see the Hermit Thrush above the creek in the lower parking lot? Yes. Did we see the Wood Duck? Yes, a pair at the lower pond and another pair at the upper pond. We both, also, thoroughly enjoyed the exquisite floral display of daffodils and tulips. While walking back to the car our final highlight of the day presented itself above our heads in the parking lot. I spied a couple of Bushtits and then realized they were leaving and re-entering their nest. There was a lot of quivering going on in there. Not sure if there were young or just still nest building. 31 species were observed. We followed up with lunch in Murphys. A fine day!

Kit DeGear, Field Trip Chair

[Indigeny Reserve on Sunday, March 28](#)

A lovely morning walk through the grounds at Indigeny with the McDow's and Bill Bowie. We had a very birdy day. 49 species were seen by the group! That is a record for my outings at Indigeny. Highlights included 5 species of Woodpeckers, including the Red-breasted Sapsucker, 3 species of Hawks, Bald Eagle and an Osprey, Lark Sparrow and some first-of-season sightings of the Hutton's Vireo and Orange-crowned Warbler. Looking forward to April and more spring migrants!

Kit DeGear

[SALMONELLA AMONG SONGBIRDS](#)

A widespread outbreak of salmonellosis among songbirds, especially Pine Siskins and goldfinches, has claimed the lives of untold numbers of the birds in the last few months. To slow the spread of the disease, which is caused by salmonella bacteria, some state wildlife agencies and wildlife rehabilitation groups have encouraged people to take down their bird feeders and baths.

Birds in the Pacific Northwest and in southwestern Canada were hit hard earlier this winter, according to Dan Gear, a wildlife disease ecologist at the U.S. Geological Survey National Wildlife Health Center. In February, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife said it had been "inundated with calls from residents who are finding sick or dead finches at bird feeders. Most reports have come from locations on California's Central Coast, the San Francisco Bay Area, and Sierra Nevada communities." The agency's statement identified salmonellosis as the cause and encouraged residents to remove feeders and baths. "Salmonellosis occurs periodically in Pine Siskins in some winters throughout their range," said Krysta Rogers, an avian disease specialist with the California DFW. "When large numbers of Pine Siskins congregate, the disease can spread rapidly, causing high mortality. Most birds die within 24 hours of infection."

Dan Gear of the USGS National Wildlife Health Center says salmonellosis infections in feeder birds are common in winter and early spring as the birds congregate to feed. "The number of cases during winter months in songbirds and in pigeons and doves that frequent garden bird feeders probably is significantly underreported," so it is impossible to say how widespread the problem is right now. "The wildlife health community ends up looking at the really big obvious events, like in the Northwest this winter, but we don't have the capacity to track down all the others."

Meanwhile, clean your feeders and baths to kill any potential bacteria. Gear and other experts recommend cleaning with a 10% household bleach solution (9 parts water:1 part bleach) and removing any spilled and potentially contaminated feed from under the feeder. Clean the feeders, bird baths, and any items contaminated with bird droppings in an outdoor space or in another area of your home that is not used for food preparation or bathing.

Salmonellosis can also affect people, pets, and livestock, making it even more important to remove potentially contaminated seed. Gordon says dogs have become sick after finding and eating lethargic or dead birds. If you find dead birds in your yard, Gordon says you shouldn't touch them with your hands. Use gloves and either bury them or double bag them and place them in the trash. Some state wildlife agencies have online forms for reporting dead birds or other wildlife.

Copied from Birdwatching, March 2021 at:

<https://www.birdwatchingdaily.com/news/birdwatching/disease-outbreak-sparks-calls-to-take-down-bird-feeders/>

SCREECH OWL PAIR

Last month, Peggy Sells provided photos of the Screech Owl couple that have set up their breeding residence in her front yard. As you can imagine, Peggy spends time watching them with her camera remote in hand so as to not disturb them - which is how she obtained this incredible shot of a curious Acorn Woodpecker inspecting the owl! Although the owl is unconcerned about the woodpecker, the very slightly open eyes indicates total awareness of the other bird.



SHARP-SHINNED HAWK

George Dondero shot these two superb shots of a Sharp-shinned Hawk or "Sharpie" in the enthusiast's jargon. As George said "This bird just showed up in my front yard. He's been here three different days, which has resulted in a lot fewer visits to out feeders by the sparrows, finches, and other small birds. This was the first time I could get a clear shot without branches in the way".

The "Sharpie" is quite similar to the Cooper's Hawk, but quite a bit smaller, and both have a black cap on the head and similar



plumage. In any case, they are not easy to distinguish from each other, so here are two helpful descriptions taken off the internet:

Since Cooper's Hawks have larger heads, their eyes are smaller in relation to their heads and it is closer to the beak than to the back of the head. Sharp-shinned Hawks on the other hand have small heads and their eye is in the center of their head. Sharpies also tend to have a white superciliary stripe or streak over their eyes.

A Sharp-shinned Hawk will appear to be the same color from the back to the top of the head, while a Cooper's Hawk will have a paler nape with a contrasting darker cap on the head and darker plumage lower on the back. A sharp-shinned hawk may appear to have no neck at all or just a very short neck.

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 6:30pm. Monthly details shown in this newsletter and on our website at

www.centralsierraudubon.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.centralsierraudubon.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, Director at Large	(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
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