

Central Sierra Audubon Society

Sierra Squawker



www.centralsierraaudubon.org

January - 2021

PUBLIC ZOOM PRESENTATION

Wednesday, January 20, at 6:30pm

"The Nature of Yosemite: A Visual Journey"

by Robb Hirsch

Yosemite is like nowhere else on Earth. Within its vast expanses are spectacular granite mountains, glacially carved valleys, thundering waterfalls, delicate meadows, grand trees, and charismatic wildlife. From his years of exploring and studying California's Sierra Nevada, Robb knows that understanding natural processes can thoroughly enhance a visitor's connection to the landscape.



In this presentation featuring his stunning photography, Robb will offer a wide variety of impressions of his (and our) favorite national park, from wildlife to still life, from intimate views to majestic landscapes, and from season to season.

Robb is a naturalist photographer based out of Groveland, California. Biologist by training, naturalist by heart, and photographer by passion, he has an intimate relationship with the natural world. Robb and his wife, Regina, moved to Groveland, California, in 2002, where they still live with their son, Noah, and two dogs. They own coffeehouse and gallery Mountain Sage, also a music venue, plant nursery, and garden.

To view Robb's website and photography: www.RobbHirschPhoto.com

Zoom log-in information:

COMPUTER:

[HTTPS://US02WEB.ZOOM.US/J/87838538446?PWD=MFVSCVLIDVL1QKX1OUN1K0TXRTBVQT09](https://US02WEB.ZOOM.US/J/87838538446?PWD=MFVSCVLIDVL1QKX1OUN1K0TXRTBVQT09)

PHONE: (669)900-9128 Meeting ID: 878 3853 8446 Passcode: 566936

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.

THE CSAS SCHOLARSHIP FUND - A PERSONAL VIEW

By Caitlyn Rich

Three years ago, I received my first scholarship from Central Audubon Society to help with my schooling at UC Santa Cruz. I received another the following year when I used the scholarship for hands-on experiences in the field. This second scholarship allowed me to spend a month in the Galapagos studying and working with the species that roam the islands; it also allowed me to spend 50 days camping and conducting field research all across California. After my field quarter, I began my undergraduate thesis on *Ensatina* salamanders at Ft. Ord Natural Reserve.

I graduated with my degree in Ecology Biology in September 2019. That October, I started my one year term as an Americorps partner with the Tuolumne River Trust. I worked as a Forest Health Specialist, conducting wildlife surveys, restoring meadows, and working on forest health and reforestation throughout the Rim Fire footprint. While working for the Tuolumne River Trust, I also continued

working on my undergraduate thesis, which was recently approved for publication in the Biological Journal of the Linnean Society.

After my Americorp term ended in mid-September, I started working at CSERC as their Environmental Associate. I will be leading the meadow monitoring program for tracking cattle grazing impacts and our wildlife surveys. I have enjoyed being involved in so many different projects at CSERC and am excited to continue learning about the world around me. Thank you for all your support - you have played a big role in helping me get to where I am today. I look forward to the days where we will have volunteer events and face-to-face meetings together. **Happy New Year to you all!**



Working on a fence post at TRT

Scholarship Contributions

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



Caitlyn with clay salamander models for her thesis



Coyote urine sample obtained during one of her field quarter research projects.

IT'S DUCK TIME AGAIN

American Wigeon Kleptoparasitism

Winter has its consolations, and one is that this is the time when ducks of many varieties share their beauty with us - if I may be anthropocentric for a moment in assuming that they wish to share anything with humans! I've been spending time in the San Francisco Bay delta watching and recording some fascinating duck behaviors, and so I thought to share some of this with you.

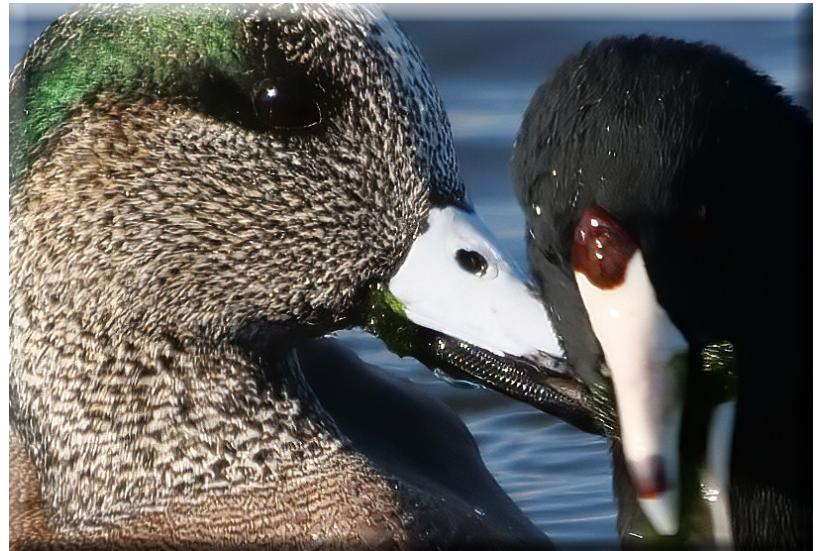
Imagine this scenario if you will: you're an American Wigeon who has just migrated from Alaska or Canada to California to over-winter here. You've found a very attractive habitat loaded with other ducks which tells you that there's food and social protection here - but with one major problem: the water is too deep for you, a dabbling duck, to obtain the plant food you need to survive. And, even though you're nominally a dabbling duck, you're not good at surface filter-feeding (as is the Northern Shoveler) because you're more of a grazer than a dabbler! You eat by grazing on stems and leafy parts of aquatic plants, leafy parts of grasses and clovers, and leafy parts and seeds of various agricultural crops. So, what to do? This is a problem facing twenty or thirty American Wigeons in a freshwater pond in Palo Alto that I recently discovered.

Well, adaptability is the hallmark of any species that has survived several million years through ice ages and other climatic changes, and one useful solution is to take advantage of the work of others - in this case, the work of American Coots who dive down to retrieve green algae that's out of range for the wigeons. In a word, stealing!

There are many coots in this pond, so the wigeons attach themselves loosely to a particular coot and follow it around, fairly closely. When the coot dives, the wigeon watches to see where it surfaces and rushes over to share the meal as it does so! If another coot appears to offer better opportunities, they quickly attach themselves to that one.

Interestingly, the American Coot is an aggressive bird that is given to fighting with its own, even to the death, and so not easily intimidated but, presumably because the wigeon is larger, the coots accept the losses although without backing off. As it happens, the wigeon is also known to steal and feed in this way with diving ducks such as the Redhead and Canvasback, while the coot is also known to similarly steal food too! On one occasion I watched several wigeons swimming hopefully around two foraging American White Pelicans which is common practice for them, but the pelicans weren't bringing up any vegetable matter and so the wigeons drifted away to find better providers.

Although the wigeons tend to individually harass particular coots, the pair stay well-connected, never straying far from each other. Their pair-bonding started before they arrived here to over-winter, but the male still has to keep proving himself. In this pond to date, there appear to be only "committed" pairs so the pairs appear to be quite stable but, if unattached breeders were to arrive, competition would emerge. Since they won't migrate for several months and then commence nesting-building in May or even June, there's plenty of time to test out and, if advantageous, change mates!



The lamellae ("teeth") at the base of the mandible make the wigeon (this is a male) such a strong grazer. *Photo: Barry Boulton*



An American Wigeon pair rush over to see if they can share any of the green algae retrieved by the coot - not much this time! *Photo: Barry Boulton*

UPCOMING JANUARY FIELD TRIP

Thursday, January 21 - Merced NWR

Please join us for a fun day observing all the waterfowl migrating in to this unique spot. We can expect to see Snow/Ross's Geese that had not yet arrived on our October visit. I am hoping the Great Horned Owls may be starting to nest, too. The Sandhill Cranes, many ducks, shorebirds and the Refuge raptors will provide other highlights.

We will meet at 2:00 pm at the parking lot observation platform on Sandy Mush Road. Remember to check your temperature prior to arrival and have masks, hand sanitizers, water and personal birding equipment. We will be unable to share scopes etc. It will be nice to share our observations over walkie talkies and socially distanced encounters outside our cars. This is always a great outing!

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



Northern Harrier photographed by Dave Douglass at the refuge just before Christmas. We usually see one or two cruising at low altitude on the lookout for the next meal.

Suggested Self-guided Field Trip

We are recommending the Dragoon Gulch Trail this month as a birding venue. This is a popular local trail near downtown Sonora. Unfortunately, it can be crowded at times and is a favorite for dog walking as well. The trail starts at the parking area at the top of Wood's Creek Rotary Park located off Stockton St. on Wood's Creek Way. The trail is well marked and begins on pavement and directs you up a residential street. After crossing a bridge you will soon enjoy a more wooded area. There are several loops to choose from, some more strenuous than others. There should be plenty of woodpeckers, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, and Towhees. Keep your eye out for Bushtits, Hermit Thrush and/or Fox Sparrows.

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

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

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/

Your CSAS Officers

Barry Boulton, President & Newsletter Editor	(209)596-0612
Tom Parrington, Conservation	(209)928-3835
Ralph Rutherford, 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
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YSS delegate - Walt Kruse	(707)548-1829
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