

Central Sierra Audubon Society

Sierra Squawker



www.centralsierraaudubon.org

March - 2021

PUBLIC ZOOM PRESENTATION

Wednesday, March 17, at 6:30pm

"Winter Birds of the Sierra Foothills"

by Rich Cimino

Several years ago the American Birding Association attempted to outline what the twenty favorite birds in the Americas might be. So, what are the twenty birds in the Sierra Nevada Foothills that you would choose, and how would you go about selecting them? Would you use diverse habitats, seasonal abundance, song or beauty, colorful plumage or something else? Each of us has different criteria, maybe based on unique yard feeder experience, never-to-be-seen-again yard bird, or maybe on a field trip watching a raptor harassing shorebirds.



Here in Northern California foothills of the Sierra Nevada we have the good fortune to be at the crossroads of several migration paths, as well as having local resident birds that do a simple annual down-slope migration. Rich will give us his selection of favorites he has enjoyed in our region of the Sierra foothills, along with their current range and migration maps.

Rich has birded California for 50 years, has been a member of Ohlone Audubon for 30 years where he was a conservation leader for the chapter, and is a leader and participant in a myriad of bird conservation projects. He is also a field guide to many birding symposia such as the recent Central Valley Bird Club festival in Stockton.

Rich is the owner and tour leader of Yellowbilled Tours that provides birding trips to Alaska, Belize and France, as well as to many IBAs (Important Bird Areas) in the U.S. His website is at <http://yellowbilledtours.com/>

Zoom log-in information:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88594936663?pwd=L3NWZS9MTnlGeGxNeFloenkvbG8zQT09>

Meeting ID: 885 9493 6663 Passcode: 808947



February Golden-crowned Sparrow Presentation available on YouTube

February's presentation by Autumn Iverson featuring migration patterns of the Golden-crowned Sparrow is now available on YouTube at: <https://youtu.be/gWMNJVv40rI>

UPCOMING MARCH FIELD TRIPS

Thursday, March 11 - 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 8:15 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

Suggested Self-guided Field Trip

March would be a lovely time to explore the beautiful grounds at Ironstone Vineyards in Murphys. The surrounding oak woodland, pond and the lush landscaping, including open lawns and vines, provides rich habitats for many birds. Keep at eye out for Wood Ducks at the pond located below the facility and Hermit Thrush above the little creek running along the lower parking lot. There is a bird feeder outside as you near the tasting room that attracts birds as well. After St. Patrick's Day the approach to the tasting room and the museum is lined with half wine barrels filled with a stunning variety of daffodils and tulips. Worth a visit! Ironstone is open Thursday through Sunday from 10:00 am to 4:00 pm.

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

FEBRUARY FIELD TRIP REPORT

Salt Springs Valley on February 27

This was an auto birding trip led by Paolo Maffei, from Copperopolis Pond out to the Reservoir where we had lunch, after which we walked around the resort campground area. We then traveled back to the Salt Springs valley grasslands loop. Given our weather which was sunny and clear with temperatures in the upper 40's to mid 50's but extremely windy at 20+ mph, I think we did pretty well in the species count with a total of 50 species. I was really hoping for a Ferruginous or Bald or Golden Eagles which we see on most trips to this valley. But, as always with birds, you have to enjoy what you get!



At the resort campground by the reservoir, this Black-crowned Night Heron flew up from the creek. It was an immature in typical brown plumage with white flecks on the back, carrying a big greenish bill with large golden/orange eyes.

This beautiful Savannah Sparrow was hanging out with the Western Meadowlarks in the grasslands.

Kit DeGear

Photos by George Dondero



My unexpected winter visitors by Kathy Enea

I live in Blue Lake Springs in Arnold and my property backs up to the forest. After the big storm, I was anxious to see if my little feathered friends had fared well enough to find my feeder again. As usual, the Dark-eyed Juncos, Red-breasted Nuthatches, and Mountain Chickadees showed up. Over the seasons they have developed a bit of dance while sharing my one feeder. The Nuthatches and Chickadees sort through the seeds that they don't want and toss them down to the Juncos who happily rummage for their favorites. The Nuthatches and Chickadees each take their turns, taking one seed (usually the sunflower seed). They then perch on the nearby branches of the nearby pine and cedar trees while they eat the morsel one at a time.

I mention this feeding habit because it recently had to change as I got a wonderful flock of Cassin's Finch that has stayed around for several days. I had not seen this bird before, so I was careful to find the identifying features. While I knew it was a finch, I wasn't sure what kind. This is what I found:

- * Note the dark streaks on white under-tail coverts (check)
- * Male has sharply defined red cap (check) (To me it looked a bit like a bright red raspberry sitting atop its head)
- * Pale eye ring (check)
- * The red on the breast is more of a "wash" of red on the male (check)

Unfortunately, a male and a non-male (female or juvenile) hit my window at the same time. This did give me an opportunity to study further their markings before I laid them to rest in the nearby woods.

Now for the feeding behavior: As the finches became comfortable with the feeder they would show up in a flock and commandeer the perches. They were perfectly happy to sit, share, and feed. I noticed that the Nuthatches and Chickadees were having a hard time getting to feed. They didn't like the buffet approach the finches had created. These little ones have been feeding earlier now, perhaps to avoid the crowd.

My lunch time has always been the birds' lunch time. My husband (who is not a birder) even wonders how they know that this is the time to come by. We always enjoy our lunch on the deck watching our birds and he has learned to know them all, from the Nuthatches, Chickadees, Juncos, White-headed woodpeckers, Yellow-Rumped Warblers, and the occasional Ruby-crowned kinglets. In the summer that "pretty yellow bird" now has its own name: Western Tanager. Slowly he is being won over.

It will be interesting to note when the finches decide it is time to move on. I am sure that when they do my regulars will be just fine with their old routines.

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SIGHTING

This beautiful Double-crested Cormorant was seen at Willow Springs Pond on March 3, and photographed by my husband, **Greg Robbins**. In the last week, up to six have been seen at one time at the pond.

Jean Dakota

Editor's note: this bird is moving towards its courting plumage which you have to observe carefully because it's not too obvious. The orange lores and bill will intensify in color but the fascinating feature is that each eye will develop a ring of blue dots around its outer edge. Also, true to its name, it will develop two crests at the top of the head for a short time during the courting/breeding season; they stick out sideways rather like a bad hair-do! As with all birds, these plumage changes require extra energy - food - to produce the necessary hormone flows, and so the size and intensity of these ornaments indicates to a potential mate the relevant ability of the bird as a food-provider; an important factor when both parents feed the young (as is the case for this species).



OSPREYS AND "DOGFIGHT" OVER NEW MELONES

Well, Ospreys are truly back in our area and getting down to work! Today (March 6) I spent time in the Glory Hole area of New Melones to update myself on two nests that I spent time observing last year. In each nest, both male and female were present, and both were tested by a marauding male youngster wanting to take over an existing nest which would automatically provide him with a mate (females are faithful to the nest, not necessarily to their previous mate).

At one nest, the male performed a "pseudo-copulation" - that is, the intent at this early stage is not to actually inseminate the female but to excite her internal hormone flows that will, in turn, stimulate growth of some eggs in her ovary. After this attempt, the female took off, flew around and returned to land on an adjacent branch whereupon the male once again performed a pseudo-copulation as you see here.



Female returns



Male stimulates her

But, that wasn't all that happened! A Bald Eagle cruised by overhead, whether with malicious intent was very doubtful, but willing to take no chances, the female Osprey took off to deal with any threat. However, much to my surprise, she was beaten to the fight by a Red-tailed Hawk who immediately took on the eagle without assistance as you can see in this series of photos that I managed to shoot.



The Red-tailed Hawk engages the Eagle who turns to face her to protect himself



The outmaneuvered Eagle quickly leaves the scene to avoid any harm to himself

SCREECH OWL PAIR



I've been hearing a couple of Screech Owls calling to each other over the last week. Always at night, but last night they started calling in the early evening and so I followed their calls to two tree cavities right in our front yard. A little patience and they peaked their heads out. Pretty fun to have happen in my front yard!

Peggy Sells



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.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 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
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