Central Sierra Audubon Society

Sierra Squawker

www.centralsierraaudubon.org May - 2021

PUBLIC ZOOM PRESENTATION

Wednesday, May 19, at 6:30pm

"Vocal Dialects in Birds"

What exactly are they, who has them, and why does it matter?

by Tom Hahn, UC Davis

Many bird watchers have heard that birds often display "song dialects," but most people I've spoken with (even many professional behavioral biologists) use the term "dialect" very loosely as a synonym for "song type variant." In fact, dialects represent a very specific form of song variation. In this presentation, I'll describe the different kinds of song variation that exist and make clear what distinguishes dialects from these other types of variation, and show examples of species that do or probably do display dialects, as well as of some that have song variants but apparently lack dialects.

I'll finish by discussing why knowledge of the occurrence and distribution of song dialects in a variety of species of birds is important, with an emphasis on how we all can contribute to our collective body of knowledge on this topic (e.g. by uploading our own recordings of birds from different geographic areas to forums such as eBird and Xeno Canto).

Tom Hahn is on the biology faculty at UC Davis where he studies behavior and physiology of a variety of birds, especially reproduction and migration of crossbills and other nomadic finches, but also vocal behavior of a variety of songbirds such as white-crowned sparrows and Cassin's finches. He is also a regular field trip leader at the annual Mono Lake Bird Chautauqua (coming up on-line in June) where he discusses these fascinating topics.

Zoom log-in information:

https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87615643816

"Avian Malaria in the Hawaiian Amakihi" on YouTube

The April 21 presentation by Gabbie Names in which she discusses the causes and evolutionary adaptation of avian malaria in this beautiful Hawaiian species is now available on YouTube at: **https://youtu.be/ItO6C_9L-m8**

See also George Dondero's related story on the Amakihi and other exotic Hawaiian birds in Hakalau Forest NWR on page 3 of this newsletter.

UPCOMING MAY FIELD TRIPS

Thursday, May 20 - Indigeny Reserve

Please join us to bird through the beautiful grounds at Indigeny. Besides the apple orchards, there are large oaks, some pines, stream-side thickets and a marshy area with reeds that provide some great habitats for birds. As always, bring your binoculars and/or scopes, wear muted colors and you may wish to include a hat, sunscreen and water. We will hope to see the Black-headed Grosbeak, Bullock's Oriole, arriving Warblers and Flycatchers and if we're lucky a Western Tanager!

The walk will last 2-3 hrs. Children are welcome! Meet in the parking lot at 8:00 AM. Rain will cancel the trip. Follow the signs from the intersection of Greenley and Lyons/Bald Mountain Roads in Sonora. After a few miles on Lyons/Bald Mountain Road, turn right onto Apple Hill Drive where there is a large sign that says "Apple Valley Ranches." A quick left turn onto Summers Lane leads you to Indigeny.

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.

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

Suggested Self-guided Field Trip - White Pines Lake

White Pines Lake should provide some good Spring birding. In past years at this time, the Black-headed Grosbeak, Bullock's Oriole, Western Tanager, some Flycatchers and many Warblers should be arriving or present. It is a lovely park. I would suggest some morning birding followed by a picnic lunch at one of the many sites available. It is about an hour for Sonora residents but obviously much closer for our Calaveras contingent. Take a left turn from Hwy 4 (on your way out of the town of Arnold) on Blagen Rd. opposite the El Vaquero restaurant. Make another left on Lyons Park and you have arrived. If you continue on, other picnic areas are available along the lake. At the far end of the lake by the sports field parking lot you can cross a small bridge into the disc golf area. If you bear right (away from the disc golfers) you can take a fairly short walk along some willows by a stream that will take you to a road that loops you back to the sport field parking area. Happy Birding!

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

APRIL FIELD TRIP REPORT

Willms Road/Rock River Road - April 22

A beautiful day in the foothills! Seven other birders joined me for our auto caravan tour along Willms Road, up Rock River Road (which gets more rutted and almost impassable each winter), and on to lunch in Red Hills. So glad Tom Harrington could join us before he and Kathy move to Colorado. They will be sorely missed! While we did not see many wading or shore birds, (exceptions being a Great Egret and Killdeer), we did get to view some Horned Larks and Tricolored Blackbirds that were on our target list. Other major highlights included an off-course Snow Goose at Willms pond (a rare sighting), some Lawrence's Goldfinches and the Savannah Sparrow. Birds were mostly quiet at Red Hills but we added a few more species to total 34 for the day. We all enjoyed our lunches with a couple of nearby horses but thankfully no flies!

Kit DeGear, Field Trip Chair

It's interesting to observe birds from different angles so that we can see and appreciate the identification marks, such as the little "horn" on the Horned Lark, the beautiful hind-wing and tail feathers of the Lawrence's Goldfinch, and the exquisite back and tail patterns of the Savannah Sparrow.

From left to right:

- Horned Lark
- Lawrence's Goldfinch
- Savannah Sparrow.

Photos by Lucia Gonzalez

Hakalau Forest NWR (Hawaii)

by George Dondero

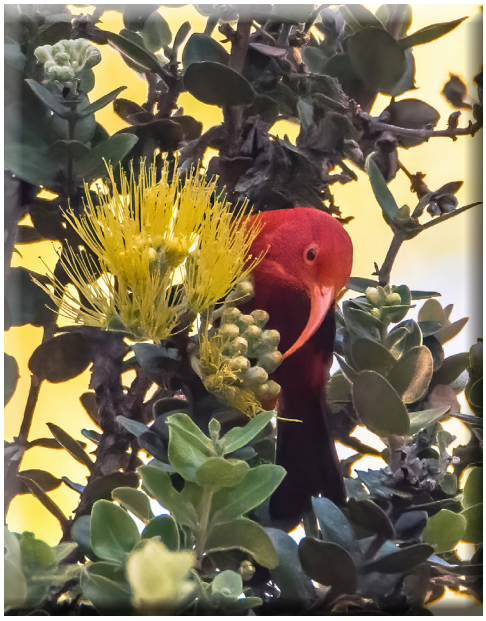
In Gabbie Names' presentation, she identified the several threats to survival of the indigenous bird species on the Hawaiian Islands including disease, loss of habitat and predators. Mosquitoes are the vector that conveys the avian malaria virus. In recent history seventeen species have gone extinct and many others are threatened.

Anyone who has looked for birds in Hawaii has probably noticed that most of the species one sees were introduced from other places. Finding the indigenous species can be very challenging.

One notable effort to conserve the honeycreepers on the big island of Hawaii (where Gabby did her research) is the creation of Hakalau Forest National Wildlife Reserve in 1987. Conservationists raised funds to purchase a tract of land that had previously been held privately as a cattle ranch. It is located on the eastern flank of Mauna Kea between 2,000 and 6,000 feet elevation. At the higher altitude the mosquitoes do not thrive. The area was fenced to keep out the known bird predators including mongoose, rats and mice. Erecting such fencing in an area without roads is an expensive proposition, and most materials had to be brought in by helicopter. Then native species of Koa and 'ohi'a were planted to replicate what had once been a robust forest. Many honeycreepers feed on the blossoms of the trees and insects in their bark.

In order to maintain integrity and longevity of the reserve, there is no public access. One must enter with a commercial guide in small groups on a pre-arranged day. In 2017 I was fortunate to secure a spot with a guide and spend a day at the forest. The following pictures were captured that day. We hope Gabbie's research will lead to helping the survivors flourish.

See **https://www.fws.gov/refuge/Hakalau_Forest/about.html** for more information.



"I"wi

Amakihi

Elepaio

Apapane

Farewell to Tom Harrington

Sad to say, our long-time friend, colleague and general factotum for CSAS, Tom Harrington, is leaving Tuolumne County and CSAS. Tom and Kathy are moving to Littleton in Colorado to be closer to Kathy's daughter. Tom performed the roles of President and Programs VP over the period in which I became familiar with CSAS, and it was his welcoming personality that persuaded me to join CSAS, for which I am very grateful to him. Tom's welcoming smile and sense of humor will be sorely missed by our community.

For some years now, Tom has been our Bird box Coordinator which involves arranging with our Chapter bird box builders how many of each box to build, and then arranging to participate in events such as the CNPS annual plant sale where we sell most of our boxes. Along with bird boxes, he has been responsible for our book sales and for arranging our regular highway clean-up program along highway 120. Not content with that, he is also our backup representative on the Tuolumne-Stanislaus Integrated Regional Water Management Authority!

Tom will be missed for many reasons, but we wish he and Kathy the very best as they settle down to a new life in Colorado. The Denver Audubon Chapter seems to be large and very active, so I've no doubt that he will fit in there pretty quickly!

Barry Boulton

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Trailside Sounds in Big Trees SP

by Alan Beymer

The day was supposed to be merely a re-introduction to the North Grove Trail at Calaveras Big Trees. For a variety of pedestrian reasons my wife and I had not hiked here since early March. The snow had melted, the dogwoods were not yet blooming, so we weren't expecting much. After 10 years living near the park, I should know better.

The forest was ringing with wildlife sounds that morning. The sounds were all around us and pinpointing the source was nearly impossible. Could this be an IMAX production? First the chickarees warned us about their territory, then the Pacific Wrens followed suit, and an occasional White-headed Woodpecker voiced its pee-kik-kik as it flew off—"territory be damned, let's just move this show elsewhere."

The climax was a Pileated Woodpecker drumming. Usually, I hear the sound but do not see the bird. This time the woodpecker was in a pine next to the trail albeit in an elevated perch. As we neared, it was busy attacking a ponderosa. Debris flew. The bird was always just out of sight. If not for the flying bark I would have continued walking. Then briefly the woodpecker rounded the trunk and into our view. There must have been some good food in this particular pine because the normally skittish woodpecker ignored us and methodically kept on removing bark from the tree.

Just another exquisite day on the North Grove Trail!

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SIGHTINGS

I was out in the driveway while ago and happened to hear a VERY close-by Pileated Woodpecker call and I about broke my neck sprinting into the house to grab my hog-leg hoping that it would stick around long enough for me to get it in my cross-hairs. Well, I got lucky because it flew from the neighbor's oak tree into ours. I managed to get a keeper of this quite handsome and very rare (for me) sighting. It's a male, by the way. They have that red mustache. Here's hoping that he'll put our oak on his regular circuit!

When I went down to our lake to check on the active Bald Eagle nest and had another stroke of luck in getting a shot of mama(?) coming in and then feeding the kids (weird how it had nothing in it's talons when landing but somehow came up with some food to feed them). That last shot shows clearly that there are indeed three chicks. The last few times I've gone down there I've only been seeing two. Here's hoping that all three make it into stunning fledgling birds… to shoot - photograph that is!

Dave Douglass

CSERC Photo Contest

CSERC is sponsoring two photo contests, one for adults and another for photographers under 18. You can submit up to 10 full-quality jpgs that you've taken of native wildlife in the Central Valley and Sierra Nevada. Send them to caitlyn@cserc.org by May 20, 2021.

Read the details on the CSERC website at https://www.cserc.org/news/nature-photo-contest-now-open-for-entries/

SIGHTINGS (continued)

We watch all our avian citizens return each year with excitement, and try not to play favorites, but... when the orioles tumble and clatter in, we proclaim it a holiday. This year we had a mob of Yellow-rumped Warblers take over our bird bath, pushing and shoving, chasing each other around like they had been studying hummingbird behavior. It seems most moved on and left one or two pair behind to entertain us over our morning coffee birdwatching. We have both Valley and the larger shyer Mountain Quail here in Tuolumne Canyon, and hear their calls when we don't actually see them.

Photos by Ron Lopez

The "Jalopy Birds" as we call the Canadian Geese in the lake below are still having territorial disputes or traffic jams, and share air time with Bald Eagles, Ospreys (who are attentively on their nests in the area) Redtails, etc. And Ravens and Scrub Jays to bother all of them, for what seems to be personal enjoyment.....

We have enough House Finches for a much larger house, nests tucked behind speakers in the eaves and Italian Cypress Condos. Out of our moving cloud of LBJs we have ID'd White-crowned and Rufous-crowned Sparrows but the "unroyal" set remain LBJs, and don't appear slighted. What a wonderful time of year!

Joy Lopez

A Plea for Biodiversity

As you probably know, under an order by Governor Newsom signed last October, California is committed to protecting 30% of its land and waters by 2030. The order's prime directive appears to be a very powerful statement for biodiversity: *"To combat the biodiversity and climate crises, the California Natural Resources Agency, in consultation with the California Department of Food and Agriculture, the California Environmental Protection Agency and other state agencies, is directed to establish the California Biodiversity Collaborative to bring together other governmental partners, California Native American tribes, experts, business and community leaders and other stakeholders from across California to **protect** and **restore** the State's biodiversity".*

The State has set up an organization under the California Natural Resources Agency to drive this program and you can see their website at https://www.californianature.ca.gov/ The website allows you to participate in two ways; first and easiest is a Public Input Questionnaire where you give your comments to 8 basic questions which gives you a lot of latitude in your answers. You can give more extensive answers if you choose to submit it in their "CA Nature Data Input Form" available on the same website. These inputs will cease on May 14th.

Since this will inevitably be a political process much more than scientific, it's important to have as many voices as possible indicating that protection for birds is important - as, indeed, it is for biodiversity and wildlife in general. I participated in a Zoom meeting today as part of this process on the San Joaquin Valley and the participation activity was very high, but birds were not mentioned too often. Given that the meager wetlands of the valley (95% destroyed for agriculture) are critical to migratory and over-wintering birds, that rather surprised me; in fact, I'd say that points to minimal Audubon participation. Please visit the website and respond to the questionnaire because this is an unusual opportunity to work on the sustainability of bird species in the Central Valley.

Barry Boulton

PLANTS AND BIRDS

There's a fascinating program on YouTube that was recently presented for the Santa Clara Valley CNPS by Doug Tallamy, Professor of Agriculture and Natural Resources at the University of Delaware entitled "Nature's Best Hope", which is all about re-establishing habitats and ecosystems suited to birds. He shows how this can be accomplished even on handkerchief-size lots in urban settings.

I didn't know just how important are caterpillars to most insect-eating birds; in fact, by far the most important part of their diet, primarily because they are soft and almost completely edible in contrast to beetles and other insects that have tough chitinous exoskeletons. So, for avian survival, plants and trees (oaks being particularly important) that nurture caterpillars are top priority - except in the case of the Monarch Butterfly whose caterpillars are poisonous to birds (but, of course, we should strongly support the Monarch's survival anyway). Although invasive plants usually don't support native invertebrates, the question in this context is not simply about native versus invasive, but between native plants and trees that support food for birds - keystone species as he calls them - and those that don't.

Nature's Best Hope video is at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=esNIhiWWr84

Santa Clara Valley CNPS has an excellent YouTube channel with many such presentations at: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCpqpu65F9GNXdqBoN4hIptQ

The State CNPS has a website that specifies native plants for any location in the State at: https://calscape.org/

Doug Tallamy's website is at: https://www.udel.edu/canr/departments/entomology-and-wildlife-ecology/faculty-staff/

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/

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Your CSAS Committee Chairs

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