

Central Sierra Audubon Society

Sierra Squawker



www.centralsierraaudubon.org

October - 2021

PUBLIC ZOOM PRESENTATION

Wednesday, October 20, at 7pm

"Bird Migration: How, When, and Why"

by Joely DeSimone

Biologist Joely DeSimone will give a presentation about the wonders of bird migration: how birds know when and where to migrate, how they prepare, and what makes the nomadic Pine Siskin so unusual.

Joely is in the final year of her PhD in the University of Montana's Ecology and Evolution program.



*Joely DeSimone
at work*



*Pine Siskin
tagged for
migration*

Zoom log-in information:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87148605906>

Note

The presentation will commence at 7pm sharp, so it's good to log in by 6:55pm to allow time for possible internet issues. When you're there, wait until the host lets you in. Please keep your microphones muted throughout the presentation until Q&A time. **And remember, your camera "sees" your whole room - and so do we!**



The excellent presentation by Caitlyn Rich of CSERC last month entitled "Step into the Boots of a Biologist" is now on-line at:

<https://vimeo.com/606979824>

UPCOMING FIELD TRIPS

Wednesday, October 6 - Groveland Community Services District

I hope you will join me to explore this rich environment. This month I hope we might see some migrating birds like the Black-throated, Yellow and Yellow rumped Warblers. Wood ducks and Ruby-crowned Kinglets should also be present. The property encompasses an area of more than 200 acres of oak, pine and willow habitat with three storage ponds.

Meet the group in the GCSD parking lot at 8:00 AM. Bring binoculars and a birding guide if you have one. This time of year, a hat, sunscreen and water is also recommended. The walk will last about two-three hours. Please take your temperature prior to participating. We require a temp of 99 degrees or below for Covid protection protocol.

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

Sunday, October 24 - Indigeny Reserve

Please join me as we 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. On our Sept. 19th trip we saw 40 species. Highlights included a Lewis's Woodpecker, a Willow Flycatcher, several Warblers including a Common Yellowthroat, a first at this location! As always, bring your binoculars and/or scopes, wear muted colors and you may wish to include a hat, sunscreen and water.

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 kdegear@gmail.com

SIGHTINGS

Stories by Jean Dakota and photos by Greg Robbins in Soulsbyville

September 26

Recently, Western Bluebirds have been visiting our birdbath every day at 4:30 to 5:30pm. There are six or seven of them, and they all travel together. They prefer the smaller bird bath and all get in at once (they barely fit!). This is new for us, and we love seeing them.



We are excited to say that we have four female Northern Shovelers in a nearby pond. We have never seen them here in the four years that we have lived in Tuolumne County. We have not yet seen any male shovelers (but hopefully they will come).



Drying out after the bath!

We are concerned that the pond is overrun

with ducks. People seem to have illegally dumped off a number of domestic ducks (8 white ones and 6 black ones) at this pond. There are always Mallards present, but less than a dozen this fall. Then there are the Canada Geese, I counted 24 today. Add to that the drought and the fact that the HOA for this pond stopped the water supply (the homeowners have to pay for the water) which means that the pond is GREATLY reduced in size. So I am concerned that with too many birds and very low water levels, the animals may contract disease, like botulism. Hopefully it will rain soon!!!

A Brief Look at Pelicans

Story and photos by David Couzens

Perhaps my having watched too many Road Runner cartoons during childhood led to my fascination with large gawky-looking birds. Of course, the tall, beeping roadrunner chased by Wile E. Coyote bears no resemblance to those smaller common sprinters of the Southwest. Surely, nature offers more conventional configurations. Well, maybe not.

Consider the pelican. These long-beaked water birds sport oversized throat pouches used to scoop up gallons of water along with their prey while hunting. The water is expelled and the fish are then gobbled down quickly. Agile flyers, pelicans hunt cooperatively, and flocks of dozens or more are common sights along the California coast. On land, they amble about awkwardly on their rubbery webbed feet.

The brown pelican, one of the smaller species, is impressive enough, with a wingspan of nearly 7 feet and weighing in at nearly 10 pounds. I've spotted this species as far south as the Atlantic shores of Guatemala. Then, there is the Sumo-sized Dalmatian pelican, whose wingspan can exceed 11 feet. The 30 plus pound adult males are among the heaviest flying birds. Equally impressive is their wide range, spanning from Eastern Europe to the Middle East to India to as far as the eastern shores of Siberia.

On a recent visit to Oceanside, California, my wife and I had a chance to see some brown pelicans up close. What has happened on the lengthy Oceanside Pier is that a few local pelicans have become essentially domesticated. Rather than seek out their meals in the wild, they hang out at the pier expecting hand-outs from the many fisherman, who willingly do so.



Dalmatian Pelican



Jane Couzens and Brown Pelican at Oceanside Pier

There's a local woman there who refers to herself as the "pelican whisperer" who has encouraged a few of these magnificent birds (whom she has named) to now be "on the dole." As much as we enjoyed getting up close to them (and capturing some of the best "wildlife" images) and engaging in impossible-to-win staring contests, it raises concerns about their habituation. On the one hand, there is an educational worth in people being able to view these critters and, unlike a zoo, there are no cages. On the other hand, what will become of their offspring? As they swell the welfare rolls, will they lose the ability to hunt? Humans interacting with wildlife usually has consequences, and most of these do not bode well for the wildlife. So, whether the world needs pelican whisperers or not remains an open question.

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Local Conservation Work

Tip O'Neill, 47th Speaker of the US House of Representatives, used the commonly-quoted phrase (he didn't originate it) that "all politics is local". Although that may be an over-statement, it does embody the environmental ethic because conservation-at-home is the starting point for most environmentalists. Our past President, Tom Parrington, carefully monitors what and how the Tuolumne Board of Supervisors is doing that might damage bird populations and sustainability in Tuolumne County. For Tom, oak woodlands are extremely sensitive and critical to habitat health, and here's a case in point where a proposed modifications to a project would be damaging to bird populations precisely because of oak woodlands losses, and must not be allowed to stand as proposed.

It would actually be very constructive if you were to write your own letters along these lines to the Planning Commission.

Chairman and Members
Tuolumne County Planning Commission
Tuolumne County
2 South Green St.
Sonora, CA 95370

Re: Valley Vista Subdivision - Modification of Conditions of Approval

Dear Chairman and Members:

I am writing on behalf of the Central Sierra Audubon Society (CSAS) regarding the proposed Modification of Conditions for the above development. In the Notice of the proposed Modifications sent to interested stakeholders dated August 20, 2021, there was no mention of the significant change proposed for protection of oak woodlands, namely the elimination of the mitigation condition that a conservation easement be established on an approximately 78 acre property identified as the Mt Knight property (APN 22-100-37). Instead, reference only was made to the Modified Project and CEQA Addendum documents available at the Community Development Offices and on the County website which lists the elimination of Mitigation Measure 6.

This proposed project acknowledges that over half of the 45.14 acres of oak woodlands on the Site are likely to be destroyed. Even replanting of some oaks on the Site cannot replicate the intricate connection of species that exist in existing oak woods from birds to the underground fungi networks connecting existing plants and trees. The proposed conservation of the remaining oak woodland on the Site will be only fragments of the existing woodland.

The off-site mitigation requirement is eliminated with no realistic alternative except the provision that the developer may contribute to the Tuolumne County Oak Woodland Conservation Fund. To my knowledge, there has never been a single acre of oak woodland "saved" by the Fund since its inception 13 years ago. On behalf of CSAS, I urge your Planning Commission to require a minimum of 25 acres of oak woodland be protected by a binding conservation easement on the Mt Knight parcel or another oak woodland site.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments.

Sincerely,

Tom Parrington, Conservation Chair

cc: Quincy Yaley, Community Development Director

Calling all Providers of Bird Feeders

It's almost time for FeederWatch! This annual bird-counting program from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Birds Canada runs from November through April. We give you tools to keep track of the birds that visit your chosen count area (most people count at home), and you will contribute to a growing database on the dynamics of bird populations across North America.

Guess what: you can FeederWatch without feeders! If you have plantings, water, or other features that bring birds to your yard even without feeders, you can still participate. In fact, counts without feeders are just as important as counts with feeders.

A good reason to sign up now: For anyone who signs up in September (\$18 in the U.S. or a donation of any amount in Canada), we will also provide you with a discount code for 20% off the Growing Wild: Gardening for Birds and Nature online course from the Cornell Lab's Bird Academy. This offer ends September 30.

"This was my first year FeederWatching and I was amazed at how therapeutic it was! Sitting quietly and watching my feeders fills my heart with lots of joy." –Cindy Newell, Virginia

We hope to hear about your birds when the 35th season of Project FeederWatch begins on November 13!

Emma Greig

Project FeederWatch

Join now at:

https://feederwatch.org/join-or-renew/?utm_campaign=FeederWatch&utm_medium=email&_hsenc=p2ANqtz-_G7E-HQq8DxuX3TIG6O5qRvprCRB5RioPei1Ufo-O4118Et-J8CmVK8-aiC7WuvIEavyJtr_HI6Jb9fZc2M6i2qfX2rtA&_hsmt=161658636&utm_content=161658636&utm_source=hs_email&hsCtaTracking=1315493a-d465-4ad4-87a2-1544fb-51d3a3%7C7a41a8d7-79fb-418b-b16d-cbfaa06ab556

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Biden administration prepares to auction public lands for oil & gas development

We had hoped for better, but.... Fossil fuel extraction on public lands accounts for nearly a quarter of all U.S. greenhouse gas emissions. These climate-altering emissions are wreaking havoc on our natural world, resulting in massive wildfires, extreme drought, and catastrophic flooding events. The Colorado Plateau and Utah's redrock wilderness are expected to suffer some of the worst impacts over the coming decades.

Despite this scientific reality, the Biden administration is considering selling a new slate of oil and gas leases across the West, including in Utah. In Utah, the BLM is proposing to sell six parcels covering more than 6,600 acres of public lands for oil and gas development. Development on these parcels would threaten wildlife, water resources, and recreation while exacerbating the climate crisis. Four of the parcels are located adjacent to the Green River in the Uinta Basin, while another is located adjacent to the San Rafael Reef Wilderness, just north of the entrance to Goblin Valley State Park.

The BLM is not required to sell these—or any parcels—for development. In January, President Biden issued an executive order pausing all new oil and gas leasing on public lands to allow the Interior Department to review its broken leasing program. And while a federal court in Louisiana set aside that order and instructed the Interior Department to restart a leasing process, the court explained that the outcome of that process remained entirely subject to the BLM's broad discretion as the land management agency—that is, the BLM retains broad legal discretion not to lease these lands in order to protect public health and the environment, including our climate.



San Rafael Reef

You can quickly and easily add your voice in requesting the BLM to NOT lease these lands at: <https://p2a.co/sLdND4d>

Profiles of CSAS Officers

If I can encourage our CSAS Officers to shed some of their reticence to seeking the limelight, we will introduce you to the Board members over the next few months - just in time for you to realize that you, too, could serve on the Board!

Jean Dakota - Secretary

Jean hails from Indiana, and fell in love with California in 1973 while on a co-op work session that was part of the University of Cincinnati's architecture program. She moved to San Francisco after graduation. Fast forward 40 years, and Jean retired as a project manager from the Federal Government (GSA). The last project she worked on for GSA was the Calexico Land Port of Entry, where she hired a licensed biologist to relocate the burrowing owls on the construction site.

The burrowing owls are protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act so they had to be professionally relocated within a small window of time. If the birds were still on site at the beginning of mating season, all construction would have stopped. The owls were out of their burrows during the day (they are diurnal) and fun to watch. Those big yellow horizontally positioned eyes and long legs make these birds easy to distinguish from other owls.

Jean and her husband moved to Soulsbyville after retirement in 2017 and shortly after, Jean joined CSAS. Jean enjoys her position as secretary and meeting with other bird lovers. Jean hosts a tour to visit the Sandhill Cranes in Lodi each December, and a May bird walk along the old West Side Rail Trail in Tuolumne. There are always a couple of expert birders on the bird walks to assist with identifying the birds. So, being a host does not require being an expert in avian identification.

For the past two springs Jean has assisted Ralph Retherford on the bird box trail. This is a unique opportunity to see the nesting habits of Green Tree swallows, Ash-throated Flycatchers and Western Bluebirds. The bird boxes were inspected weekly. The Tree Swallows used feathers in their nests, the flycatchers used fur in their nests, and the Bluebirds used twigs. Nests with baby birds were not disturbed until after they fledged. The record of the numbers of baby birds successfully raised in the bird boxes is then reported to the North American Bluebird Society.

For Jean, two of the highlights of birding in the Central Valley are the Ibis and Sandhill cranes. And, highlights of birding in the foothills include the Pileated Woodpecker.



Jean and friend

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, 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 - Jean Dakota	(209)591-9952
Scholarship - open	
Website - Barry Boulton	(209)596-0612
YSS delegate - Walt Kruse	(707)548-1829