

Central Sierra Audubon Society

# Sierra Squawker



[www.centralsierraaudubon.org](http://www centralsierraaudubon.org)

April - 2022

## PUBLIC PRESENTATION

Finally we are able to use the Sonoma library and revert to in-person meetings as in days of yore with refreshments! Presentations will also be carried over Zoom simultaneously so that you can choose to be present with us, or enjoy it from the comfort of your home.

Wednesday, April 20, at 7pm

## **Neo-tropical Birds that Forage with Swarming Army Ants by Rich Cimino**

Mixed-species flocks of foraging birds have been documented from terrestrial habitats all over the world that are thought to forage with ants and others for either improved feeding efficiency or better protection from predators. Species that are vulnerable to predation often follow species whose vigilance they can exploit. By doing so, they are able to reduce their own vigilance and forage at higher rates. These exploitive behaviors will be shown and discussed with photos and video clips of birds using swarming Army Ants in Central America.

Rich grew up in Pleasanton, Alameda County, he now lives in Larkspur, Marin County. In a past life he was Conservation Chair for Ohlone Audubon and a stake holder in the Altamont Pass Wind Resource (turbine collisions with Golden Eagle) Area and The Alameda Creek Alliance, Friends of Tesla Park and started the Eastern Alameda County Christmas Bird Count. Currently he is active Marin Audubon Society as a field trip leader, Point Blue Conservation and Golden Gate Raptor Watch. Rich is an active participant in member of the McNear Vaux's Swift Observation team, and several Marin County Christmas Bird Counts and a Board Member of the Friends of Olompali, State Historical Park where he leads a team for the new 2021 Marin County Breeding Bird Atlas.

Rich has been birding in California for 55 years, and is a field guide for Yellowbilled Tours, which offers annual birding tours to Nome and Barrow Alaska, and Belize and Guatemala, as well as throughout California, Arizona and New Mexico and sometimes Wisconsin or Texas.

**Zoom URL:** <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86003499255>

**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. **Remember, your camera "sees" your whole room - and so do we! If you are planning to eat, it's best to turn off your video.**

The February 16 presentation by **Christian John** entitled "Tracking the elusive Sierra Nevada Bighorn Sheep" is on-line at: <https://vimeo.com/689468741>

**Note:** all prior CSAS Zoom presentation URLs are shown on our website home page at [www.centralsierraaudubon.org](http://www.centralsierraaudubon.org)

## APRIL FIELD TRIPS

### **Sunday April 3 - Ironstone Vineyards**

I'm so happy to announce that we shall be returning to this beautiful stomping ground. Spring migration has begun so I expect to see some of our favorites. In particular the Bullock's Oriole, Black-headed Grosbeak and some Warblers. Another bonus is the stunning array of daffodils and tulips in half wine barrels around the upper entrance to the tasting room and Museum/Gift shop. It's a unique display they provide every spring at this time of year. You won't be disappointed!

We will meet in the lower parking lot at 8:30 am. and our walk will last 2-3 hours. Rain will cancel the trip. From highway 4 at Murphys take Main Street and turn left at Scott Street, bear left where Scott Street ends to become 6 Mile Road. From here the formal entrance to Ironstone is just one mile on the right (don't take what looks like an entrance halfway on the right as it's simply a working staff gate.) Just inside the Ironstone main entrance, bear left (not up the incline to the right to the tasting room and Museum) and park on the left side.

**Kit DeGear (925)822-5215, or [kdegear@gmail](mailto:kdegear@gmail.com)**

### **Saturday, April 9 - Red Hills Ecology Walk**

This walk is an experiment for CSAS in that our focus will be not only on birds, but the whole ecology of Red Hills and, as we see birds, where they fit the whole scheme. More particularly, we will discuss micro-habitats and what that means for individual species; adaptations and how they relate to species diversity and population survival; plants and flowers of all kinds including their place in the food web necessary for all other species, along with insects and their roles. At the same time, despite lack of rain, the wildflowers at Red Hills are still quite impressive with many varieties and so well worth visiting just for them.

The background to this idea is that although we have increasing knowledge about extinctions, yet it seems to me that the body politic and society in general is focusing more on social issues and away from the support for environmentalism and conservation that was in vogue and successful in the 1960s through the 1990s. These days, conservation successes are much harder to achieve and, paradoxically, the big push towards combatting climate change doesn't give much optimism for successful habitat and biodiversity improvements. At the same time, there is a move towards a "30x30" concept whereby 30% of California's lands and coastal waters would be conserved by 2030; but you only have to look at the Central Valley which once held an incredible variety of ecosystems and species but is now 90% barren monoculture to question where politics will lead 30x30.

It's my thinking that we nature lovers can well learn more about the interplay of ecosystems and species so that we are able to better educate others, particularly young people, on the ecological dynamics that underpin life on this planet. I'm doing a lot of such studies and just a week ago was able to put some of my thinking into action when I co-led an ecology field trip with students from Belleview Elementary School - see my report on page 4 of this newsletter.

Our co-leader on this event will be **Doug Krajnovich** who has been the Newsletter Editor for the local Sierra Foothills CNPS Chapter for some years, and whose interests and passions encompass birds and plants. Our other co-leader will be **Kit DeGear**, our dynamic Field Trip Chair and ace birder, so you'll be in very good company! If you know "plant people" who may be interested to join us and share their knowledge, please invite them.

We shall meet at 8:30am at the Serpentine Road North trail 1.44 miles south of highway 120 along Sims Rd/Red Hill Rd and the map will be shown on our website at [centralsierraaudubon.org](http://centralsierraaudubon.org) I think we will end at around 11:00am before the heat of the days kicks in. Do bring water and snacks.

**Barry Boulton: [rbarryboulton@gmail.com](mailto:rbarryboulton@gmail.com)**

### **Thursday, April 21 - Wards Ferry Road Walk**

We will take our annual bird walk along Wards Ferry Road and through our ranch and our neighbor's 400 acre ranch known as the Kiriluk ranch which overlooks Turnback Creek. That creek flows into the Tuolumne River. This is a repeat of an outing held over the last five years before covid. Bring a bag lunch. Refreshments will be provided at the barn.

The walk starts at 8:00 a.m. by the barn at 15589 Wards Ferry Road which is approximately 5 miles southerly from its intersection with Tuolumne Road, and about 1/4 miles southerly of the intersection with Yosemite Road.

**Tom Parrington**

## Sunday, April 24 - Indigeny

The spring migrants are arriving so I hope to see the colorful Bullock's Oriole and Black-headed Grosbeak and perhaps the Orange-crowned Warbler.

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.

Kit DeGear (925)-822-5215 or [kdegear@gmail.com](mailto:kdegear@gmail.com)

## Friday, April 29 - Pelican Trail, San Joaquin NWR

I had the pleasure of attending a Stanislaus Audubon Chapter outing on March 26 led by Sal Salerno, Chapter President and Daniel Gilman. What a unique and interesting habitat. As a group we saw over 60 species. A wide variety of waterfowl inhabit the flooded areas, Sora and Marsh Wren regularly calling, overhead raptors, including the Swainson's Hawk and many other birds are able to be observed. I was quite thrilled to get a good look at a Common Yellowthroat and a California Thrasher.

Join me for a great day of exploring this number #2 hot spot for their county. Bring your binoculars, a bird field guide, food, water, sunscreen and a hat. This will be a 2-4 hr. and a 2-4 mile (depending on the number of loops you wish to explore) walk out a level dirt trail.

Pelican Nature Trail : San Joaquin River National Wildlife Refuge. 2714 Dairy Rd., Vernalis. (From Hwy 132 out of Modesto, turn left onto S. River Rd. then left onto Dairy Rd. then a right turn into the parking lot.) Meet at 7:30 am in the Barrow's parking lot to carpool. We should arrive around 9:00am if you wish to meet us there. Please RSVP for this outing to arrange rides or for any last minute changes.

Kit DeGear, (925) 822-5215 or [kdegear@gmail.com](mailto:kdegear@gmail.com)

## MARCH FIELD TRIP REPORTS

### March 2 - GCSD

There were 5 of us for the walk this month on the Groveland Community Services District property. The weather cooperated beautifully! Highlights of the day included Wood Ducks, a less common sighting of some Lesser Scaups and an observation of a Great Horned Owl in flight. This species had not been seen for a couple of years so it is nice to know it is still about! A total of 41 species were seen. There won't be a walk in April but I look forward to returning May 4 where I hope we will have some spring migrants to observe!

Kit DeGear, Field Trip Chair

### March 11 - String of Pearls in Oakdale

Welcoming two new birders on a productive and beautiful day, we totaled 54 species even though the lack of meaningful rain has to be reducing bird numbers in general. The Oakdale Recreation area ponds yielded a good showing of Wood Ducks and Phainopeplas (though not quite the "Phainopepla Convention" of an astonishing dozen or more Phainopeplas who displayed themselves during our last visit in April of 2019 before covid hit). A Snowy Egret gave us a good look at his "golden slippers" and I wondered - do those yellow feet help catch fish? Wilson's Snipes seem to be occurring more frequently, or are we're getting better at finding them? Watching one bury its long bill in the mud all the way to the hilt was a revelation.

The Horseshoe pond was graced by a swirling flight of a dozen Great Egrets, with one Snowy among them, and then we got a long, look at a male Nuttall's Woodpecker. With plenty of activity, a few of us reached the end of pond. Focusing on a Black Phoebe which had landed unusually high in a tree, two cavorting Bald Eagles, invisible to the naked eye, came into view. Once revealed, we followed them over the horizon, almost expecting them to lock talons in a spiraling mating dive, although that didn't happen.

Paolo Maffei

## March 25 - Red Hills Romp

We always look forward to our trips with the “Dragons”, the students, from the Elementary School in Chinese Camp. Jan Jorn-Baird, Ralph Retherford, Barry Boulton and Lucia Gonzalez provided assistance in this endeavor. Our duty is to provide a brief introduction to Birding. The birds were not particularly cooperative and the weather was unseasonably warm but we did see 11 species. A highlight was a very vocal Bewick's Wren. The children moved through a couple of rotations. A new station was added this year - gold panning! An officer from the County Sheriff's Dept. with his father, “Grandpa Richard” and the law enforcement officer for the Bureau of Land Management for our region manned this popular rotation. How fortunate that the children have teachers, Sheri Betz and Linda Cazares, that put this all together for them. Can't wait for the Red Hills Romp next fall!

Kit DeGear, Field Trip Chair

## March 27 - Indigency Reserve

An overcast day provided nice cover for a lovely walk through the Indigency grounds. Five of us enjoyed observing 35 species. Highlights included Buffleheads, Bewick's Wrens and actual sightings of 2 Wrentits. The extra special species of the day was a Green Heron flyover! Hope you'll have the opportunity to join me next month when the Spring Migrants should be arriving.

Kit DeGear, Field Trip Chair

## Nature Bowl - a Science-based Educational Program for 3rd through 6th Graders

For this program the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (<https://wildlife.ca.gov/Regions/2/Nature-Bowl>) develops the curriculum and works with partners to hold Nature Bowl events. Schools can choose to participate by selecting a team of interested and motivated students. The idea is that through games, problems, puzzles, and exploration, students gain ecological knowledge and conservation literacy. One part of this program is for the students to do field trips where they are required to look for and report on several ecological issues that I think are sophisticated and impressive for these grades. In addition to noting the fairly obvious basics such as carnivores, herbivores, omnivores, flora and fauna, and invertebrates, they must also report on the food web, pollination, adaptation, lifecycle, ecotones and biotic zones - complex topics.

So it was that on March 24, I was privileged to join the Bellevue Elementary School's Nature Bowl team with teacher Carmel Portillo and STEM Coordinator Tricia Dunlap, along with 15 students and several parents at the Knights Ferry Recreational Area. Tricia introduced the day's activities and discussed various ecological concepts, and then I was able to take over for my part of the session. We were fortunate to see several Turkey Vultures circling overhead to gain height for the day's scavenging, so were able to engage in Q&A about rising air thermals, the dihedral shape of the TV's wings and why that shape, the black leading edges of the wings and what causes that (melanins), and what benefits that configuration might confer - a very lively discussion ensued.

The students were very alert and engaged with plenty of ideas and suggestions which was very encouraging of course; I was impressed with their active out-of-the-box minds! While there were not a lot of birds to observe, we had plenty of ecological things to discuss - many adaptations such as the Phainopepla's near-dependence on mistletoe. Then, on mistletoe itself - why is it always high up in certain trees; again, plenty of student ideas. We looked at lichen on a tree trunk, discussed its make-up and properties, and sprayed it with water to see how quickly the fungal protective partner became translucent to allow sunlight to hit the green algae thus allowing it to photo-synthesize. Adaptations were actually a big part of our discussions.

Having never worked with students before - something that made me a little nervous - I was thrilled to be able to extend beyond birds and into the fascinating ecological details that actually sustain the world we live in, and that we need to understand in order to protect and conserve. So, I fully appreciate the Nature Bowl program and hope that many more schools participate over time. I hope to do more of these programs because I think that CSAS needs to be more involved at this level, and this is what I wish to practice at our Red Hills ecology trip on April 9th. I'm pleased to say that CSAS handed out 16 copies of John Muir Law's book "Sierra Birds: A Hiker's Guide", one each for the students and teacher Carmel.

Barry Boulton

## BIRDING OR BOTANIZING? (WHY NOT BOTH?)

by Doug Krajnovich

**Editor's intro:** Doug and I have been discussing how to widen the arena of CSAS activities and, as you will have seen earlier, we will co-lead an ecological field trip to Red Hills on April 9, so I asked Doug to submit his thoughts for the Squawker.

*"Objects are concealed from our view not so much because they are out of the course of our visual ray... as because there is no intention of the mind and eye toward them. We do not realize how far and widely, or how near and narrowly, we are to look. The greater part of the phenomena of nature are for this reason concealed to us all our lives. Here, too, as in political economy, the supply answers to the demand. Nature does not cast pearls before swine. There is just as much beauty visible to us in the landscape as we are prepared to appreciate, – not a grain more. The actual objects which one person will see from a particular hilltop are just as different from those which another will see as the persons are different. The scarlet oak must, in a sense, be in your eye when you go forth. We cannot see anything until we are possessed with the idea of it, and then we can hardly see anything else."* Henry David Thoreau, *Journal entry, November 4, 1858*

Before I retired, I considered myself a "nature lover," but my attention was mainly limited to scenic vistas – the gross features of the landscape. I had a postcard mentality. I had neither the time nor inclination to drill down into the component parts – living and non-living – that together create a landscape or an ecological community. Soon after I retired, I made a conscious decision to start paying attention to wildflowers. I was amazed at how many kinds there were, and how beautiful they were. I felt like Alexander von Humboldt sailing up the Orinoco as I "discovered" commonplace species on trails that I had used for years. I was even more amazed that I had paid so little attention to wildflowers before. I had relegated them to splotches of color on postcard landscapes – because "my mind and eye had no intention toward them."

My initiation into the botanical world was relatively painless. Since I was trained as a chemist, I will use a chemical metaphor: botanizing, for me, was an exothermic reaction with no activation energy. As soon as I set my mind to it, it was full speed ahead. After all, plants just sit there. If you are patient, you will find them. When you encounter a new plant, you can photograph it, listen to it, talk to it for as long as you like. Even if you can't identify it to species, or even to family, you can try to memorize its "field marks" so that you will recognize your new friend when you meet it again. You can assign it a pet name until you learn its official name.

Birding was a different story. For most beginners, birding has a large activation energy. I found myself charging up the hill, full of determination, only to slide down in defeat. On field trips, people were identifying birds that looked to me like blobs or specks, even through binoculars (assuming that I could even get bins on the bird). When I did get bins on the bird – boom, it was gone. I tried and quit several times before I finally made it over the hump. I can state from personal experience that birding, despite its high activation energy, is an exothermic reaction. Once you get over the hump, you receive more energy than you put in. Before you know it, you are ready to tackle the LBJ's... the won't-sit-still warblers... perhaps even the gulls.

When I started birding as well as botanizing, I found it difficult to do both simultaneously. My brain wanted me to focus on one or the other. With continued practice, I have reached the point where I can devote useful bandwidth to both activities. I botanize with my eyes, and let my ears and peripheral vision alert me to the presence of birds. I let the birds "interrupt" my botanizing, then go back to searching for flowers. I discovered that bins are a handy tool for the botanist as well as the birder. I can spot, and sometimes identify, plants that are on a distant hill or cliff face – or on the wrong side of a barbed wire fence! Now I never go anywhere without camera and bins.

The ecological awareness that Barry Boulton is advocating goes far beyond wildflowers and birds. Nature has many layers. The classification scheme of Margulis and Schwartz arranges life into Five Kingdoms: Bacteria (with 14 phyla); Protocists (30 phyla); Animals (37 phyla); Fungi (3 phyla); and Plants (12 phyla). Wildflowers are a subset of one phylum of the Plant Kingdom. Birds comprise one class of one phylum of the Animal Kingdom. The immensity and diversity of life is intimidating, but it is also an invitation. Darwin's central discovery of common ancestry has survived intact, but his Tree of Life has morphed into an interconnected, interdependent Web of Life. If we aspire to become "naturalists," we must work to sharpen and extend our sense perception, and in the process, increase our understanding and respect for all living things.

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I'm delighted to tell you that Caitlyn Rich has agreed to be our **Biology Consultant** and will also be contributing an article to the Squawker most months contingent on her calendar. You may remember that Caitlyn was our scholarship recipient in 2018 & 2019, and has worked at CSERC for the last year or so; she is now departing our area to undertake a Burrowing Owl project in Colorado about which we will be learning in the near future. The significance of this is that if you have biology questions - not solely on avian topics - you can submit them to Caitlyn and her response will be included in the Squawker. Please submit to me at [rbarryboulton@gmail.com](mailto:rbarryboulton@gmail.com) so that I can track and forward to Caitlyn.

### Barred Owl versus Spotted Owl

by Caitlyn Rich

Over the last century, Barred Owls have gradually expanded their range from the eastern United States westward. They first crossed over the continent through British Columbia forests and are now making their way down the west coast to the forests of California. In their wake, Barred Owls have devastated already struggling Spotted Owl populations.

Spotted Owls have been facing population declines for many years due to the loss of old-growth habitat due to aggressive logging practices. Barred Owls displace Spotted Owls from their territory due to their aggression and larger size. These Owls are in a battle, one simply wants to survive, and the other wants to conquer the land. Spotted Owls already have a disadvantage due to size, but how may climate change tip the scale further?

Our region is predicted to experience warmer winters and hotter, drier summers. In dry, hot summers, small mammal populations can decline, leaving the Spotted Owl with more limited food resources. Spotted Owl diets are dominated by small mammals (mostly flying squirrels and woodrats), they will also eat smaller birds and insects. Whereas Barred Owls may be able to sup-



Barred Owl



California Spotted Owl

plement their diet due to their wide variety of food sources such as small mammals, doves, grouse, crayfish, and frogs.

Since Barred Owls have a diverse prey base diet compared to the Spotted Owl, they are also more adaptable to various habitats. Spotted Owls are sensitive to disturbances to their habitat; they will either leave due to a disturbance, die, or will be unable to successfully reproduce due to a lack of resources. They require unlogged, expansive old-growth conifer forests, so when a large high-severity fire comes through, a forest is clearcut, or there is a massive tree die-off due to beetles or drought a Spotted Owl may really struggle to survive and/or reproduce. However, Barred Owls are found in oak woodlands, mixed forests, swamps, and coniferous forests. So as climate shifts habitats, the Barred Owl is already prepared to adapt to new habitats, but the Spotted Owl may not.

## CSAS ANNUAL MEETING & ELECTIONS

Our annual meeting will take place in June, date TBD. Under our Chapter bylaws, only 5 Board members are elected by you the membership, while the remainder are appointed by the elected Board at its discretion except for Past-President who is obviously an incumbent - Tom Parrington once again for our good fortune.

The current slate of nominees is as follows:

- President - Barry Boulton
- VP Programs - Ralph Retherford
- Treasurer - Linda Millsbaugh
- Secretary - Jean Dakota
- Director-at-Large - Gail Witzlsteiner

If any CSAS member wishes to run for the Board, you are quite welcome to do that and so, if you or somebody you wish to nominate are willing, please let me know. Similarly, if you wish to be considered for, or to train for, a specific position on our Board, please let me know.

The meeting will take place in Ralph Retherford's garden in Sonora and will be a potluck, and more details will be in the June Squawker. Even if you're not interested in taking an active position in CSAS, please consider joining us for an enjoyable social event oriented around birds - but not exclusively birds since we're a very varied and eclectic lot!

**Barry Boulton**

**Male Osprey** bringing a stick to his nest at the Iron-horse campground in New Melones on March 15th in preparation for egg-laying and breeding.

Note the dihedral wing shape which is similar to that of the Turkey Vulture but unlike other raptors. Why do you think it's that shape? I'd be interested in your ideas that you can send to: [rbarryboulton@gmail.com](mailto:rbarryboulton@gmail.com)

*Photo by Darcy Zimmerman*



### **Central Sierra Audubon Society - CSAS**

(Chapter of the National Audubon Society)  
P.O. Box 3047, Sonora, CA 95370

**Public Meetings:** As of this month, April 2022, we will hold monthly in-person meetings in the Sonora Library as we did before covid, and simultaneously share them on Zoom so that you have flexibility in attendance. Monthly details shown in the Squawker and on our website at [www.centralsierraaudubon.org](http://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 available on the CSAS website at: [www.centralsierraaudubon.org/join-us/](http://www.centralsierraaudubon.org/join-us/)

### **CSAS Officers**

Barry Boulton, President	(209)596-0612
Tom Parrington, Conservation	(209)928-3835
Ralph Retherford, VP Programs	(209)770-6124
Jean Dakota, Secretary	(209)591-9952
Linda Millsbaugh, Treasurer	(209)586-9557
Kit DeGear, Field Trips	(925)822-5215
Gail Witzlsteiner, Director at Large	(209)586-4025
Jan Jorn-Baird, Publicity	(209)532-1106

### **CSAS Committee Chairs**

Bird Box Trail - Gail Witzlsteiner	(209)586-4025
Book/Bird Box Sales - Jean Dakota	(209)591-9952
Scholarship - Gail Witzlsteiner	(209)586-4025
Website - Barry Boulton	(209)596-0612
Newsletter Editor - Barry Boulton	(209)596-0612
Education - Kit DeGear	(925)822-5215
YSS delegate - Walt Kruse	(707)548-1829