

Central Sierra Audubon Society

Sierra Squawker



www.centralsierraaudubon.org

March - 2022

PUBLIC ZOOM PRESENTATION

Wednesday, March 16, at 7pm

**Tracking the Elusive Sierra Bighorn Sheep:
Endangered Mountaineer of California's Spine
by Christian John**

Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep are a State and Federally-endangered subspecies of bighorn sheep, endemic to the Sierra Nevada mountains of California. Each spring, Sierra bighorn migrate between the Owens Valley and the High Sierra as seasonal snow melt and vegetation growth progress upward in elevation. Understanding the relationship between snow, plant growth, and bighorn sheep movement will help guide management decisions surrounding bighorn sheep and their conservation, and advance ecological theory linking herbivores to their environment. In this presentation, Christian will introduce bighorn sheep and the techniques he uses to measure animal movement and plant growth, and share results from his ongoing work along the eastern Sierra.



Christian is a PhD candidate at UC Davis, studying landscape-level ecological responses to climate change. He is advised by Dr. Eric Post in the Department of Wildlife, Fish, and Conservation Biology. His path to ecology began in a high school biology lab, where he caught salamanders and identified their diets. Since then, he has worked in Andean cloud forests, the low-Arctic tundra, and desert ecosystems. While much of his work takes place hunched over a computer, his favorite days are the ones spent in the field.

Zoom URL: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86318441779>

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!**

The February 16 presentation by **Eric Tymstra** entitled "**You are What you Eat: Connecting Foraging and Breeding Behavior in Lekking Sage-Grouse**" is on-line at: <https://vimeo.com/678562211>

Note: all prior CSAS Zoom presentation URLs are shown on our website home page at www.centralsierraaudubon.org

MARCH FIELD TRIPS

Wednesday, March 2 - Groveland Community Services District (GCSD)

I hope you will join us to explore this very rich environment. The property encompasses an area of more than 200 acres of oak, alpine and willow habitat with three storage ponds with a rich variety of birds. Our last visit to GCSD in November of 2021 yielded 32 species and it will be interesting to see what's happened in the meantime. We expect - and hope - that the Wood Ducks will be on full display this month!

Meet the group in the GCSD parking lot at 8:00 AM. Bring binoculars and a birding guide if you have one. The walk will last about two-three hours. **Kit DeGear (925)822-5215, or [kdegear@gmail](mailto:kdegear@gmail.com)**

Friday, March 11 - String-of-Pearls, Oakdale

We will start the trip at the Oakdale Recreation Area on the Stanislaus River. On our last visit in March of 2020, we enjoyed an unprecedented assemblage of at least a dozen flitting Phainopeplas followed by Cedar Waxwings and even a freshwater turtle. This year will undoubtedly be much different, but it's always an enjoyable and productive field trip.

Meet 8:30am at Barrow's (previously Perko's) in Sonora to carpool. This will be a 100 mile round trip from Sonora so have enough gas! Bring layered clothing in muted colors, binoculars and scopes and lunch. If you wish to meet at Oakdale, the recreation area is just off River Road in Oakdale. That is, turn right at the traffic lights in Oakdale and then turn left on River Road. The 2nd left, Liberini Ave, takes you to the parking lot where we'll assemble there at 9:30am

Paolo Maffei (209)532-8426

Sunday, March 27 - Indigeny

Our trip to Indigeny on February 27 was rich in bird species and numbers (see the details in the trip report on page 8), and I expect that our March trip will be equally successful, so I look forward to seeing you there this month.

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

Early Notice of an April Field Trip

Sunday, April 3 - Ironstone

We plan to take a trip to Ironstone in Murphys on Sunday the 3rd of April - details will be in the April Squawker.

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Salt Springs Valley Trip Report

On Friday, February 11, we made our annual pilgrimage to Salt Springs Valley following in the wake of our illustrious leader, Paolo Maffei, where we had a thoroughly enjoyable day. As usual, we had hopes, expectations and surprises, all of which add depth to a good day's birding. We had expected to see a Ferruginous Hawk and, sure enough, we did - it seems to have adopted a lichen-encrusted largish oak tree where the road turns sharp right about a mile before the resort itself. It was on that tree as we first approached, flying away as we got near, but on our way back after lunch and walk around the resort, it had returned to the tree. Additionally, I've observed it on that same tree previously.

We had also hoped to see the Rough-legged Hawk that others have seen recently, but in this we were disappointed - we had a false alert which turned out to be another Ferruginous, but no Rough-legged. But, as compensation, across the open field along Hunt Road we had the good fortune to see a Merlin in the distance - too far away for a good photo, but still a good sighting. It was first seen on a fence post after which it displayed some aerobatics almost like a flycatcher, sallying up, swooping down and then up again. Merlins do forage on insects and so it may well have been in fly-catching mode, or chasing one of the many Western Meadowlarks. Meadowlarks were the very common terrestrial species, while Coots the most common water species.

Actually, the pond near the junction of highway 4 and Rock Creek Road was quite prolific in species if not numeric count; there were Ring-necked and Ruddy Ducks, Gadwall, American Wigeon, Green-winged Teal and Mallard along with Bufflehead and three grebes - Western, Eared (juvenile) and the tank-like Pied-billed (with apologies to said species!) A Kingfisher discreetly showed itself about 200 meters away too, as well as both Egrets and Great Blue Heron.



Eared Grebe (juv)

*Photo by
Darcy Zimmerman
with Nikon D500*

We were pleased to see a Bald Eagle resting on a high voltage pole along with one of the quite numerous Kestrels on a nearby line. We'd hoped to see a Rock Wren which we did at the resort and then in rocks along the back road by the olive orchard - singing on a lichen-encrusted rock. All-in-all, a very good day's birding with 51 species observed.



Rock Wren by Darcy Zimmerman



Ferruginous Hawk by Barry Boulton

SIGHTINGS

Dark morph Red-tailed Hawk

On Jan 30, Ryan Richelson shot this excellent photo of a dark morph Red-tailed Hawk on an oak along Hunt Road near Salt Spring Valley. As we know, Red-tailed Hawks have a very wide range of plumage colors and patterns - perhaps the widest range of all birds - so it may not seem at first glance surprising to see this version.

However, as my close friend John Sutake who lives part time in Berkeley and Arnold tells me, he commonly sees dark morphs along the Pacific coast and the lighter versions up here in the foothills as well as in the Central Valley. He explains that plumage variations have a cause and a significance; they are not arbitrary. In the case of the Red-tailed Hawk, these variations are mostly connected to foraging and camouflage. Dark morphs migrate to and from the Pacific North-West, Oregon and Washington, where they generally forage in and around the dark forests and so their plumage merges into that particular landscape, giving a higher foraging success rate. In contrast, Red-tails that breed in the north-west away from the coast are foraging in desert, scrubland and chaparral which are much lighter habitats where camouflage and foraging success require lighter colors.

Given that, we would expect the darker morphs to keep to the coastline, and the inland populations to stay inland when they migrate down - the Central Valley and the Sierra foothills. Generally they do just that, but individuals are occasionally diverted for unknown reasons, and that seems to be the most likely case for this Red-tail that Ryan observed.



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OSPREYS ARE BACK - EARLY THIS YEAR!

Kathy Mayhew reports that “I started consistently seeing an Osprey in the big Wallace nest last Friday (Feb. 4), and Colleen reports seeing one there two days earlier. Yesterday there were two - one on the nest and the other on a wooden cross-piece 3 feet below - when I drove to Lodi and returned several hours later. This morning I only saw one again, but I suppose the other was out catching breakfast. Is this most likely the same pair that nested there last year, and will their two fledglings likely return to the area as well? No sign of others at any of the empty nest boxes yet. I got so involved in watching the families last year, when three of the four sets of chicks survived to fledge. I think one nest (where I originally spotted 3 tiny heads) may have lost the male meal provider, then had the chicks picked off by predators or died of hunger. The female left soon after I stopped seeing any chicks”.

Editor's note:

I'm delighted that you've already seen the Ospreys on that huge nest; I'd expected that Ospreys generally would begin to return nearer the end of February, but your observations indicate very early returns this year - which I've now observed at other local Osprey breeding locations.

In answer to your question, yes although they migrate and over-winter in different locations, they are faithful to their nest and so (unless one died) they will be the ones you saw last year. Regarding the youngsters, they normally stay in their winter quarters for one more year and so last year's young won't come back until Spring of 2023 earliest.

The question about whether the youngsters will return to the Wallace area is interesting - conventional wisdom is that juvenile males return to their natal area so if you happen to see a marauding male over that nest, it might be one of the 2020 brood either from that nest or one in the region. When I say marauding, I mean one that's obviously looking for a nest site. The male owner of the nest usually returns early so as to secure his familiar nest, and he'll be shortly followed by his mate. The juvenile males are generally a little later because they don't yet know that by being late their chances of taking over an existing nest site are very low. However, you may see a solo male juvenile harassing the owners who are already in the nest - he may well be quite persistent, flying around and attacking several times in the hope that he might dislodge the resident male and thus take over nest and female.

Well, you might ask, how does the larger female respond to such a situation - does she protect her mate? It all depends on where they are in their breeding cycle. When the female returns, she's not yet ready physically to breed because her ovary is still shrunk which is what happens to birds' sexual organs after the breeding season. The male has to court her to stimulate her hormone flow to, in turn, stimulate her ovary growth so that she can produce eggs. The male also has to provide food from time to time to prove that he's still a good provider for the family that's soon coming, and he has to start bringing in sticks to rebuild the nest. In a sense then, the male is on trial during the first, say, three weeks, which means that the female isn't necessarily committed to him; she has options and may be willing to take a new and stronger mate. It is reckoned that Ospreys are more faithful to the nest than to their mate, and so exchanges are possible in those first three weeks or so. However, at some point, she is committed to him and will support him against other males.

I should add that female juveniles are thought less likely to return to their natal region, and the reason is that if they did so and mated with their kin, their genetic diversity and robustness would be diminished and survival rates would go down. Of course, they don't know that and have never made conscious choices based on it, but populations that spread out to avoid kin in-breeding and thus maintained genetic robustness became the predominant population because of that behavior.



*The huge Wallace nest with female Osprey just visible.
2020 photo by Barry Boulton*

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MORE SIGHTINGS

Jan. 29

This leucistic Red-tailed Hawk has been spotted by quite a few people near Angels Camp. I was lucky enough not to just find it but to have my camera on it when it took off! It was pretty far away, so these are very cropped pictures.

Story & photos by Darcy Zimmerman



Editor's note:

Leucistic plumage is often mistakenly said to be albino – mainly because the word albino is more common in human health and is thus in our general vocabulary. Both albinism and leucism are genetic disorders associated with lack of a pigment known as melanin that produces black coloration in plumage, skin and eyes. In the case of albinism, there is no melanin in the body and so the feathers are mostly white although they can have yellow or red coloration that is caused by carotenoid pigments that will still be present if the particular birds uses them for plumage colors. In the case of leucism, melanin is reduced but not completely absent as in albinos and, additionally, other pigments such as carotenoids are also reduced, so the bird is likely to be unusually pale or piebald with white patches across its body.

Now, this bird is very white for being leucistic, so how do we know that it is leucistic and not albino? The most definitive reason is that its eyes are dark, whereas in an albino bird, they would be red. We normally don't see the redness of the blood in the eyes because the vessels are opaque due to the normal melanin; without melanin, they are translucent and appear red. Also, there is some black plumage coloration that tells us that some melanin is present, along with the diagnostic red tail. Therefore, this is a leucistic bird.

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Feb. 20

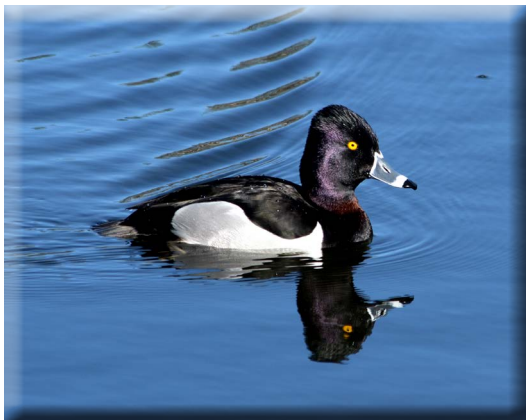


Photo by Greg Robbins

This ring-necked duck did not seem timid when we saw him yesterday at the Willow Springs pond (about 3,000 ft in elevation). He was one of two males who came very close to us on shore. In the past, these ducks have kept far away from people on the shore.

Jean Dakota

Editor's note:

This is an excellent illustration of why this duck is named "ring-necked" when most birders think that it would be better named as "ring-billed". That brown ring at the base of the neck isn't easy to see normally, only the camera stopping the movement makes it clear. But, when it was originally named, photography wasn't in play - instead, birds were shot and then physically examined when the neck plumage would be obvious. The general consensus in the birding world is that it will be renamed "ring-billed" in the near future.

Birding on Dave Douglass's deck at Pine Mountain Lake, Tuolumne County



Lemming eye-view of an approaching Rough-legged Hawk
Photos by Dave Douglass from his deck

Dave shot these on Feb. 4th and he says: " I am inspired to share some more shots of the sequence I got of that Rough-legged Hawk taking off the other morning, and coming right at me, which is rare to get (it's usually Hawk hyns that I am offered)".

Editor's note:

I think that "hyns" means hindquarters or backside!

Dave also keeps out of mischief by indulging in Photoshop art touches with his photos, so here's a little Pine Mountain Art.



The BUSINESS of CENTRAL SIERRA AUDUBON

We Need a Membership Chairperson

Sometimes in the world of volunteerism, we have to address survival of the organization - and that I would like to gently do here. It tends to be intimidating to contemplate taking on a volunteer job because we don't know what it entails - and we always fear that it will be overwhelming and that we'll get sucked into more tasks. The easy response is to say "thanks but no thanks" however we express that. My experience with CSAS is not like that at all and I'd like to explain why so that you can objectively consider joining CSAS in an activist role. I'll explain why I joined the Board and then why I took on other roles over time.

Please read

I joined after a couple of years in which I'd enjoyed programs and field trips, and had even given a slide show presentation on my Africa trip in 2006. Then, in about 2008, I attended the annual meeting at which the slate of Board members for the next year was to be elected. One of the older Board members was obviously ill (early stages of dementia from which he eventually openly suffered) but agreed to continue on the Board because there was no other willing applicant to replace him. It really hit me that here was a man who had given a lot to the chapter but who couldn't quietly retire because no-one was willing to give him that break. I actually found it so painful that I offered to replace him on the Board of Officers - and so there I was, an Officer and quite clueless about what I was about! In fact, birding wasn't much of my life at that time!

I found that CSAS is one of those groups where people don't make demands of you but, rather, you contribute in ways that you feel comfortable doing - and that enabled me to settle in very comfortably. So I was on the Board doing odds and ends and participating in the direction that CSAS was taking, but obviously in a laid-back role before taking on the role of Program VP - that is, finding people to make monthly presentations. With the help of fellow-Officers I found myself talking to people who were expert in some aspect of birding and, occasionally, other realms of ecology, which that was fascinating for me because I like to be around people who know more than I.

In 2013, our newsletter editor had to resign and so another job to fill. Well, I always liked writing so this seemed like a heaven-made opportunity, and so I offered to take it on. I remember that when I emailed our then President, John Turner, he responded with something like "Great - I have a smile from ear to ear". I've thoroughly enjoyed it in every way by working with contributors, learning new software, making editor's decisions, inspiring students to contribute, and so on. I would say that it has been a growth activity for me - and when you're getting older (I'll be 81 in about 4 weeks time), continual learning and use of skills keeps one out of mischief - and boredom!

Then, in 2016, our then-President's term came to an end so now time for a new President. Although I hadn't thought about or planned to be President, I thought that if no-one else wished to do it, I'd find it a new and learning experience as it has been. The most important part of being President is that we have a Board of Officers who are supportive, and perform their own tasks magnificently. I will single out one person particularly - Tom Parrington, my predecessor as President because the reality is that I'm not a detail-oriented person, whereas Tom keeps us on track. I tend to think of Tom and I as co-Presidents.

In addition to being Newsletter Editor and President, I'm also the webmaster - that was a new and interesting learning experience that I thoroughly enjoy since learning new skills is so important to me. In fact, I enjoy it so much that I took on the role of webmaster for the Sierra Club's Desert Committee - (<https://desertreport.org/>).

I'm really making the point that being an active participant can be an enjoyable learning experience that enhances our lives which is how I experience it. If it becomes a chore - let it go! My philosophy about volunteering is that after checking things out, I only do those things that enhance and fulfill my life, not those that stress me. I suspect that many editors with deadlines feel stress from time to time - but not me. If I don't get exactly what I want, I can substitute by and for myself. But, I must say, that I always get timely support from my colleagues so they make it easy for me - CSAS is teamwork in fact.

OK so we need a **Membership Chairperson** - what does that entail? Well, we have national Audubon members and the national organization informs us who has joined and whose membership hasn't renewed and when we need to remind them (many automatically renew without our prompting, but some do need that). So, the Chairperson needs to track and action as necessary. Then, we have smaller number of local members who need to be tracked and prompted to renew as appropriate. This all needs to be collated on a spreadsheet and so Excel skills are necessary. You don't need to attend meetings or to be an Officer to perform this role, so once you've been trained by the existing chairperson, it's pretty straightforward. If you're willing to contemplate doing this, please give me a call at (209)596-0612. I will **NOT** try to coerce you!

Barry Boulton

CSAS OFFICER STORIES

This autobiography is part of our series "Profiles of CSAS Officers" in which you will get to know your Officers on a personal level - this time it is:

Tom Parrington, Past President and currently Conservation Chair

I came late to birding not joining National Audubon until my retirement in 2010, and then joining the local Central Sierra Audubon Society (CSAS) after moving to a small ranch outside of Sonora on Wards Ferry Road. I was born and raised in the San Gabriel Valley close to Pasadena where my wife and I moved after my graduation from Boalt Hall at Berkeley in 1964, now known as Berkeley Law. I practiced law for over 45 years first with my father in Alhambra, who retired to Sonora in 1970. In 1968 I joined a small Los Angeles firm which focused on land use planning and redevelopment law working with cities. For over 30 years I was with a law partner in Alhambra where I continued representing cities doing redevelopment work. I also worked with private clients on real estate and estate planning matters.

One of my clients introduced me to Alaska Audubon on whose Board she served and to its then director fighting to preserve the unique Alaska habitat. She also participated in the Los Angeles Audubon Society which was developing the Debs Center to serve the community in the hill area of East Los Angeles. My wife Augusta and I joined CSAS in about 2011 and have both been active since, with Augusta serving as Scholarship Chair for several years. We are still novice birders but learning and enjoying the varied activities of CSAS. I have been a member of the Sierra Club since 1964, both nationally and first with the Pasadena Chapter, and now with the Tuolumne section of the Mother Lode Chapter, participating in a lot of its hikes.

FIELD TRIP REPORT - INDIGENY FEBRUARY 27

It was a gorgeous day Sunday, Feb. 27 at Indigency, and we saw a total of 41 species. I was subbing as tour leader for Kit DeGear and was joined by Bill Bowie, Ralph Baker, Dale Swanberg and Cyril Ash. I benefited from the good birders in our group. Among the species we saw were a Prairie Falcon, Red-Breasted Sapsucker, Bewick's Wren, Song Sparrow, Lincoln Sparrow, Lark Sparrow, Hutton's Vireo, Northern Flicker, Ruby-Crowned Kinglet and California Quail. There was a flyover by a Great Blue Heron and a fluttering of more than 40 Band-tailed Pigeons. We made it to the northern edge of Phoenix Lake to observe the results of the Tuolumne Utility District dredging during the summer of 2020. Cyril saw Common GoldenEye, Common Merganser and a Double-Crested Cormorant at the lake, but they had flushed by the time the rest of the party arrived. It was a beautiful day that turned quite warm, good birding and good company.

Jan Jorn-Baird

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 available on the CSAS website at: www.centralsierraaudubon.org/join-us/

CSAS Officers

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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	(925)822-5215
Gail Witzlsteiner, Director at Large	(209)586-4025
Jan Jorn-Baird, Publicity	(209)532-1106

CSAS Committee Chairs

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Book/Bird Box Sales - Jean Dakota	(209)591-9952
Scholarship - Gail Witzlsteiner	(209)586-4025
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