

# Sierra Squawker



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

January - 2023

## PUBLIC PROGRAM

**In-person at Sonora Library and on Zoom**

**Wednesday, January 18, at 7pm**

### **The Joys of Bird Boxes at Home A Discussion with CSAS Bird Box Champions**

Many species of birds are cavity nesters, meaning that they choose to build their nests in hollowed out holes/cavities in trees or fence posts. As habitat diminishes and competition for nesting space becomes challenging, programs to support Bluebirds and other cavity nesters such as Ash-throated Flycatchers have developed across the country.

Join us on January 18th at 7:00 pm in the Sonora Library meeting room as we discuss the successes and challenges regarding this nest building behavior and what we are doing to help.



We will share fun photos, information and tales about the more than 40 bird boxes that Audubon members monitor and maintain along the Highways 108 and 49.

Bird boxes and bird box building kits will be available for purchase if you too would like to help the birds by offering cavity nesting space in your own yard.

I hope to make this event available on Zoom.  
The Zoom URL will be:  
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89613702953>

## NOVEMBER 2022 FIELD TRIP REPORT

### **November 29 - Lake Camanche/Mokelumne River Walk/ Lodi Sandhill Cranes**

**O**n Tuesday, November 29, thirteen bird watchers car-pooled to the Lake Camanche Dam, Mokelumne River Day Use Area and Fish Hatchery. The skies were clear and the temps were pleasant. Unlike last year, there was no mystery shore bird (that was later believed to be a juvenile Spotted Sandpiper). We did see a pair of common Mergansers and a Great Blue Heron. The Turkey Vultures were everywhere, sunning and taking dirt baths. They were hanging around for the die-off of the salmon after depositing the salmon eggs.

**T**he fish hatchery was open and the group saw 8 - 10 large (3 foot long) salmon waiting in a holding tank. The self-guided tour of the hatchery included educational signs describing the process of Salmon migration and harvesting of the eggs (roe), then the timing and growth of the fingerlings. Of the dozens of long concrete canal "tanks" under overhead netting, only six were holding fingerlings. The fingerlings were between 8 and 12 inches long and the netting was working well to keep the birds from stealing these juvenile salmon fingerlings.

**T**he bird highlights at the river were several Lewis's Woodpeckers and one Osprey. Two bright red Salmon carcasses were stuck just under the water line along the shore. A total of 30 bird species were seen at this location - see the eBird report for details at: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S123235804>

**T**he next and final stop was at Woodbridge Road in Lodi to see the Sandhill Cranes, egrets and hundreds of cackling geese. Only two swans were spotted in an area crowded by ducks and Coots. Because of the swan's location and the daylight glaring off of the water, the group later decided that these were Mute swans. A Belted Kingfisher, many Red-tailed and Red-shouldered Hawks and American Kestrels were among those species identified at this location.

**A**ccording to the experts at the Sandhill Crane Festival, there are 8,000 cranes at this area along the Pacific Flyway that all migrate from Oregon<sup>\*\*\*</sup>. (The Sandhill Cranes at the Merced NWR number in the 12,000 range and migrate from Alaska.) We saw hundreds of cranes in both the dry and flooded fields. There was a flock of yellow-rump warblers in the trees. As the temperature was dropping, the trip members did not stay for the Crane "Fly-in" at dark. We did see dozens of gulls in a field when driving out of the Woodbridge Ecological area. The final tally for species seen at this location was 38 - see the eBird report for details at: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S123236443>

**S**pecial thanks to: Kit DeGear, Cyril Ashe, Jan Jorn-Baird, Pattie Henderson, Bill Bowie, Tom Parrington and Evan Watson who were our bird identification specialists. Joining us for the first time were Gretchen (friend of Sheila Shanahan), Evan Watson and Frank Barrett.

**Jean Dakota**

<sup>\*\*\*</sup> Editor's note: as Jean says, the over-wintering cranes at Lodi comprise the majority of a population that breeds in Oregon and also in Northern California which are of the **Greater** Sandhill Crane sub-species. The cranes at Merced NWR are of the **Lesser** Sandhill Crane variety and comprise a very small proportion of the population that breeds in Alaska and the Arctic (the North America total population of Lessers is around 700,000).

Essentially the small population of Greater represents a population that probably became isolated from the main population sometime during the ice ages as ice advanced and retreated. Because they breed at lower latitudes they have a longer breeding season and are larger in size and weight as a consequence - hence the name.



*Our intrepid birders - photo by Kit DeGear*



## SIGHTINGS & OBSERVATIONS

This set of observations and photos is by Karen Orso from Calaveras County.

**Dec 4** This morning a Great Grey Owl ventured out of its usual stomping grounds (Middle Fork Mokelumne Canyon) and spent time hunting just outside my door.



For the past two winters I have had a resident Townsend's Solitaire living near my house. He particularly likes the bird bath, usually just sitting on its edge. I've never seen him drink or bathe. I'd be curious to know if this is a common bird in the Sierra Foothills. Between 1995 and 2020 I never saw one on my property.

**Dec 16** This morning I watched a Northern Flicker work furiously to dig an acorn out of the frozen soil. He carried it a short distance and then went to work on it - eating the acorn meat and/or bugs? Not sure. Eventually he was run off by a couple of tree squirrels.

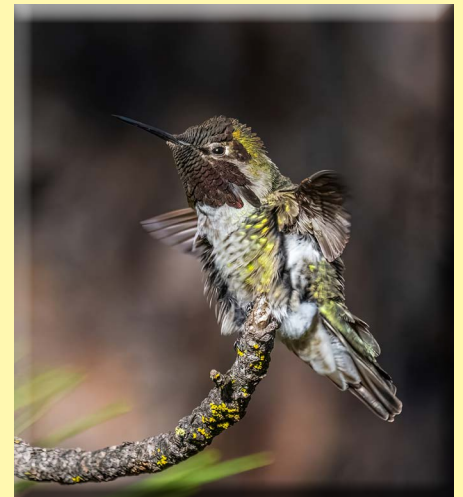




This set of observations and photos is by Dave Douglass from Pine Mountain Lake, Tuolumne County.

**Dec 21** I confess to being very keen on the wing and tail feathers of the Northern Flicker. They are very shy, and unpredictable birds and therefore hard to capture. Yesterday morning while I was quietly sitting out back waiting to see what I could see, a female flicker flew in nearby, then a male came in too, and there was quite an exchange between the two of them. They (or one of them) were making calls that I don't usually hear them making and having some brief bodily contact. I could not tell if what I was seeing was flirting or fighting. Because I was already in place and nearby, they didn't notice me and I started up trying to get some "action" shots. Even though they both were not in these shots, I got one of them cavorting, and showing off his great feathers.

Also a fun photo session with the male Anna's Hummingbird...



## JANUARY FIELD TRIPS

### January 19 (Thursday) - Merced NWR

We'll be making our annual mid-winter expedition to this fabulous refuge that always surprises and delights. In January of 2021 we saw 51 species when the highlights included both Virginia Rail and Sora out in the OPEN, as well as Long-billed Curlew, White-tailed Kites, an albino Black Phoebe and an almost mature male Vermillion Flycatcher, plus three Great Horned Owls. In January of 2022, despite being fog-bound, we still saw many species including the ever-favorite Sandhill Cranes. Just three months ago in October we had a glorious sunny day with several White-faced Ibis along with Sandhill Cranes, loads of ducks including the so-elegant Northern Pintail plus a host of others. Now, eBird reports 10,000 Snow Geese and there will also be some Ross's Geese mixed in so, with some luck and good timing, we should see the skies seething with motion as they make their eruptive murmurations.

We will meet at the main overlook just inside the entrance off Sandy Mush Road (7430 W Sandy Mush Rd, Merced, CA 95341) at 2:30pm. This will give us plenty of time to do one auto-route circuit, and then a second one to end up at the far overlook point for sunset. For those who wish to socialize afterwards, we will enjoy dinner at our favorite Thai restaurant in Merced.

**Trip leader: Kit DeGear**

### January 22 (Sunday) - Indigeny

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. I am hoping we will see the Red-breasted Sapsucker, Pine Siskins and be able to sneak up on some cool ducks through the reeds! 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.

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

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

(Chapter of the National Audubon Society)

P.O. Box 3047, Sonora, CA 95370

**Public Presentations:** As of this month, April 2022, we will hold monthly in-person presentations 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.centralsierraudubon.org](http://www.centralsierraudubon.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.centralsierraudubon.org/join-us/](http://www.centralsierraudubon.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
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