

Sierra Squawker



www.centralsierraaudubon.org

February - 2023

PUBLIC PROGRAM

In-person at Sonora Library and on Zoom

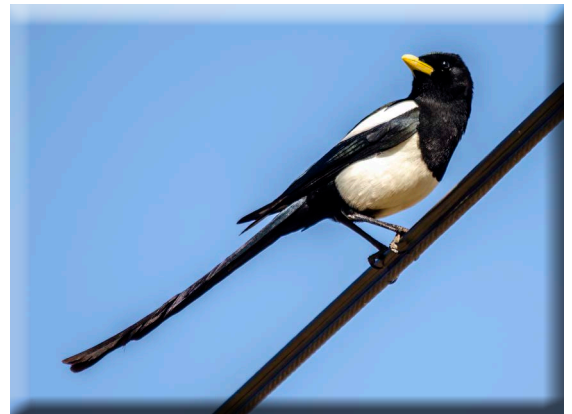
Wednesday, February 15, at 7pm

The Yellow-billed Magpie Population Status and Ecology in the Sacramento Region Presented by Dan Airola

This presentation covers Dan's studies of the Yellow-billed Magpie population that occupies parks and other open-space areas within the urban Sacramento area. Dan documents the previously unstudied ecology of Central Valley magpie populations. He also describes new information that explains the occurrence and abundance of magpies in this area. He solves the mystery of how magpies appear to have maintained stable and healthy populations in this urban area, while populations in more rural areas have been decimated by West Nile virus.

Dan Airola is a Wildlife Biologist and Ornithologist, who has lived in the Central Valley since 1985. Dan conducts research and conservation efforts for birds of concern in northern California, often with a community science component. He began studies of Yellow-billed Magpies during 2020 after discovering that almost no ecological study of the species had occurred in the Central Valley. His other research and conservation program species include the Tricolored Blackbird, Purple Martin, Swainson's Hawk, Osprey, and migratory and wintering songbirds. He is a Board member and Conservation Chair of the Central Valley Bird Club, and Editor of the journal "Central Valley Birds".

His recent book on 30 years of Purple Martin research and management is available at cvbirds.org



Zoom URL will be: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84743130988>

The January 18, 2023 CSAS discussion on building, installing and maintaining nest boxes is now on-line at: https://youtu.be/Z_bhQqeMUzo

All CSAS Zoom presentation URLs are shown on our website at <http://centralsierraaudubon.org/>

2022 CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT REPORTS & PHOTOS

Despite the stormy season, we successfully completed three CBCs thanks to the compilers and enthusiastic volunteers. The general tone was that species and numbers were lower than we're accustomed to, and to what extent that may have been due to the unsettled weather and the long drought is still a question mark.

As **Steven Umland**, Compiler for the **Sonora CBC** says "December 17 was a beautiful, if cold, day for our 37th CBC. The number of birds seen was the fifth lowest amount since our Count started in 1986. 37 people managed to scratch out 7252 individuals of 99 species. We have had 5 Counts with lower numbers - four of them in the past decade! There was plenty of food and water about at the time so that cannot be the reason for the decline. We have been in the grips of a crippling drought for the past few years. Our reservoirs have been hit hard and groundwater keeps getting harder to find. Its impact on nesting has yet to be determined. The numbers of almost all the species we found were way down, some at their lowest.

On the positive side, we added two new species to our endeavors. One each of Greater Scaup and Vesper Sparrow were found! Clark's Grebe was found for the second time and Virginia Rail and Sora keep returning to Teleli golf course. If you wish to view a spreadsheet that shows the count of every species observed in Sonora CBCs from 1986 - 2022, go to: <https://centralsierraaudubon.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Sonora-2022-CBC-results.xlsx>

I want to thank all the people who participated. It is awe inspiring to see how much work everyone contributes. The long hours and tireless searching for our feathered prey is admirable. I would also like to thank the Tuolumne Utilities District and the Jamestown Sanitary District for allowing access to their properties. So, after all the rain in the past two months, maybe we will see more water in our reservoirs next spring and more water for more food for our nesting friends. Save December 16th this year for the 38th Sonora Christmas Bird Count. See you then."

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Bruce McClenahan, Compiler for the new **Angels Camp CBC** reports that "The inaugural Angels Camp CBC was wildly successful with a varied group of veteran All-Stars to first time participants. Like the Calaveras count, we shifted the scheduled date one day to avoid wet and/or windy conditions. Everywhere water could stand, it was standing and everywhere water could run it was running. Twenty-one people covered the seven areas, of the fifteen mile diameter circle under flat gray light. While cloudy, the temps were mild in the mid to high 40's, with a light breeze. Highlights were numerous, not the least of which was the enthusiasm for the first annual count and some new faces to the CBC. We found 88 species and 8,164 birds. Rich Cimino saw a Peregrine Falcon and a Rufous-crowned Sparrow, Karen Orso photographed a Merlin, Darcy Zimmerman got a photo of a Sharp-shinned Hawk, Julie Moss-Lewis got a leucistic Eurasian Collared-dove while Keith and Sandra Maurer had six Ferruginous Hawks and a Prairie Falcon. The biggest surprise for me was the whopping number of Lewis's Woodpeckers - 92." The total for each species are available at: <https://centralsierraaudubon.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Angels-Camp-2022-CBC-results.xlsx> Fun was had by all, and I am already looking forward to next year. We could use a lot more birders to get better coverage in some areas. I hope to see you then, if not sooner.

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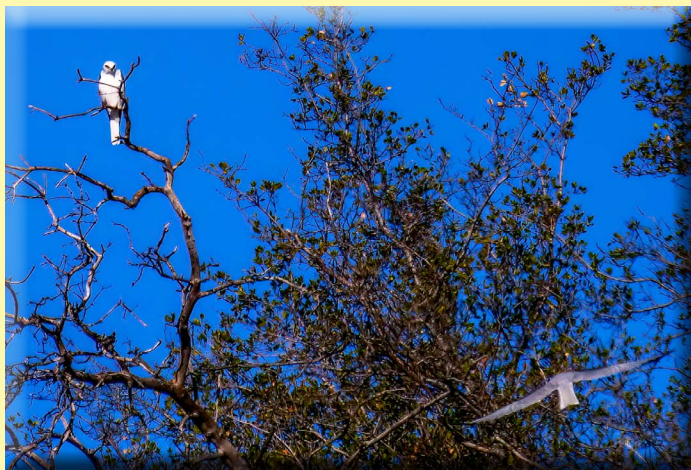
Keith and Sandra Maurer, joint Compilers for the **Calaveras CBC** confirm the relative paucity of birds this year in saying "Despite the clear weather, the birds seemed to be laying low after the heavy rains from the previous days. Rather small numbers overall - 79 species, and around 3500 total birds. Highlights were a Williamson Sapsucker at Avery Middle School, a Merlin out on Fullen Rd, Bald Eagle, three Phainopepla and a White-headed Woodpecker at Big Trees SP. The biggest surprise was the lack of Robins - only 218. This year we plan on holding the count on December 30th, so put it on your calendars."

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Sandhill Cranes in Our Region

A research project on Sandhill Crane distribution, abundance and migration covering the greater Sacramento area down to San Luis was conducted by Gary Ivey (now at Malheur Refuge) et al in the winters of 2007/8 and 2008/9. If you wish to download the paper in pdf form it is available on our website at:

https://centralsierraaudubon.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Distribution_abundance_and_migration_tim.pdf



CBC Photos



Clockwise from top right:

- * *Sharp-shinned Hawk by Darcy Zimmerman at the Angels Camp CBC.*
- * *Lesser Goldfinch flock at the Calaveras CBC by Julie Moss-Lewis.*
- * *Red-breasted Sapsucker bathing in a puddle at the Angels Camp CBC by Darcy Zimmerman.*
- * *Leucistic Eurasian Collared-Dove at the Angels Camp CBC by Julie Moss-Lewis.*
- * *Merlin in New Melones at the Angels Camp CBC by Karen Orso.*
- * *Pair of White-tailed Kites outside Jamestown at the Sonora CBC by Barry Boulton.*

FEBRUARY 2023 FIELD TRIPS

February 11 (Saturday) - Salt Springs Valley

This is one of our favorite field trips in Calaveras County with a variety of habitats including ponds, grasslands, oak woodlands and resort lake. We usually see over 50 species on this trip with one of our old favorites being the Lewis's Woodpecker and, as always, we'll be looking out for Ferruginous Hawks and, if we're lucky, a Rough-legged Hawk.

As usual, our trip leader will be Paolo Maffei. We will meet at 9am opposite the pond about 1/4 mile along Rock Creek Road off highway 4 near Copperopolis. Bring water and lunch which we will enjoy at the resort which also has restrooms available (\$10 per car). Bring radios for convoying if you have them, otherwise we will bring sanitized radios for your use (we have 5 radios). Finish around 2pm - but if you need to depart earlier, we'll get to the resort around 11:30am. Rain will cancel.

February 16 (Thursday) - Merced NWR

This trip substitutes for the one we were due to do on January 18th, but which we canceled due to the uncertain weather conditions. In mid-February, because it will be getting very close to migration time, the refuge normally mows the corn that they plant to supplement the cranes' food source as they prepare for migration. That means they spend more time there during the day than prior months after arriving in September - good for birders! This is a very active time for the cranes as they perform a lot of dancing that strengthens the bonds between mated pairs, while the unmated youngsters practice and prepare themselves to find a mate. You never know what you'll see, but this is generally the best time for crane viewing.

We will meet at the main overlook just a little way inside the entrance at 7430 W Sandy Mush Rd, Merced, CA 95341 at 2:00pm. We will have plenty of time to do one leisurely auto-route circuit, and then a second one to end up at the far overlook point for sunset with the cranes fly-in. For those who wish to socialize afterwards, we will enjoy dinner at our favorite Thai restaurant in Merced.

Trip leader: Kit DeGear

February 26 (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.

On our January 22nd visit, a young mother and her 4 year old son were among the attendees - what a delight to see his keen interest in birds. He asked a lot of good questions, a future birder I am sure! We were able to sneak up through the reeds by the lake on some ducks, a pair of Killdeer and 2 flying Great Blue Herons. Another highlight included many sightings of a Ruby-crowned Kinglet flashing his ruby crown - a special treat as this is not often observed.. You can see our checklist at: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S126752672>

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. As always, bring your binoculars and/or scopes, wear muted colors and you may wish to include a hat, sunscreen and water. **Kit DeGear (925)-822-5215 or kdegear@gmail.com**



Note: our website contains maps for each field trip and will also indicate cancellations due to weather or other reason. So, if in doubt, check it out!

<https://centralsierraaudubon.org/field-trips/>

Our CSAS group on Jan. 22nd. From left to right: Barbara McDow, Darcy Zimmerman (sitting), Bill Bowie (standing), Jan Jorn-Baird, Ron McDow and Cyril Ashe

Avian Camaraderie

During a period in which we've been experiencing devastating storms with much personal inconvenience and perhaps worse, it's interesting to contemplate how wildlife - and birds in particular - cope with situations in which food and shelter are threatened. These are times when bird feeders are particularly appropriate for avian health. We know that under some circumstances, particularly in the case of hummingbird territoriality, aggressive antics can and do occur. But, outside of that avian particularity, how does it look? One of our members who has a very active birding backyard along with a passion for bird photography has observed and recorded what he calls avian camaraderie among several species. If you have any observations of bird interactions under these weather conditions, I'd be pleased to receive them for inclusion in next month's Squawker.

Comments and photos by Dave Douglass from Pine Mountain Lake, Tuolumne County observed on January 11, 2023.

All this cold, rainy, inclement weather has been causing a lot of seeming camaraderie in the backyard. I think the cold weather causes birds to eat fat to help stay warm. Our suet block is doing a "land office" business lately. I actually prefer not to have any man made objects in my shots but this is some stuff that I thought was worthy of documenting. Photos clockwise from top left: a male and female Northern Flicker, male Dark-eyed Junco/male Nuttall's/female Downy/Northern Flicker, male Nuttall's/female Flicker, female Downy/Northern Flicker, and lastly, further up the tree Woody was pounding on the tree trunk and got an audience of a male Nuttall's. I did not observe any harsh words. Everybody just got along...

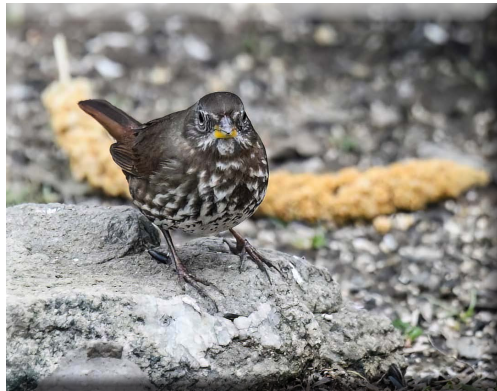


The Fox Sparrow

By coincidence, two of our members observed Fox Sparrows this month, and since I'm not familiar with this bird, I took a keen interest in the excellent photos they obtained. Actually, I was quite fascinated when I zoomed in on this shot by Greg Robbins in Soulsbyville, and many questions came to mind. For instance, what is the purpose of that eye ring which is quite common to a lot of small birds - is it a signaling device? I don't think so but, rather, I fancy it reflects more light into the eye, not for better sight per se, but to be more sensitive to movement which is critical for small birds that are prey to others such as the Cooper's and Sharp-shinned Hawks.



And then I wondered about those subtle colors and shades in the plumage - why those particular patterns? Actually I ask that question every time I look at the details of a bird, animal, flower, tree and so on; did that pattern make a better survival arrangement and how? The little bit of white under the bill surely wasn't critical for survival - or was it? Since Fox Sparrow males and females are identical, it can't be female choice as with the Peacock.



So, is it just genetic drift or something more specific? I think that in so many cases of coloration and patterns in living structures, it will always be impossible to answer some of these questions (I suspect that my eye ring hypothesis is provable/falsifiable scientifically), but it's fun to contemplate!

Here (left) we have a chirpy little Fox Sparrow that was in need of care and then released and photographed by Darcy Zimmerman in her backyard in Vallecito.

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.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

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

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