

Central Sierra Audubon Society

# Sierra Squawker



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

April - 2023

## PUBLIC PROGRAM

We will meet and socialize in-person at Sonora Library while Jessica will be on Zoom, so you can join with us in whichever manner that suits you. Use the Zoom link below to log in.

Wednesday, April 19, at 7pm

## **Ecological Variation and Reproductive Behavior of Spotted Sandpipers in the Mono Basin**

**Presented by Jessica Schaefer**

How does ecology shape behavior? Particularly for species with broad geographic ranges, distinct ecological conditions can drive differences in behavior or life history between individuals and populations. For example, Spotted Sandpipers breed across North America in a wide variety of freshwater habitats spanning sea level to high elevation. They are well-known for their polyandrous mating system (in which females pair with multiple males simultaneously and males are the primary caretakers of eggs and offspring), yet little is known about their behavior in high elevation habitats such as the Eastern Sierra Nevada. My research explores variation in the mating and parental behavior of Spotted Sandpipers in the Mono Basin and asks how behavioral variation relates to ecological factors such as food abundance, predation risk, and social environment.

Jessica Schaefer is currently a PhD candidate in the Animal Behavior Graduate Group at the University of California, Davis, and she previously received her MS in Zoology from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. Jessica is broadly interested in the evolution of reproductive behavior in creatures from limpets to lizards to birds. She loves to read, write, observe animals in the wild, and dance, and she also serves as Editor-in-Chief of The Ethogram, a blog about animal behavior at: <https://theethogram.com/>



**Tonight's Zoom link:**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84686922169>

## Controversy over the name "Audubon"

You may have read in the media that the National Audubon Society has been embroiled in a painful internal struggle over whether or not to retain the name "Audubon" for our organization. While it is appropriate for organizations including ours to conduct themselves ethically and morally, the analyses and discussions should be serious and objective. In this case of the Audubon Society, I regard the supposed issue as manufactured, not real, as I will explain here.

The background is that John James Audubon was, in addition to being the most famous bird painter of his era, also a slave owner and active promoter of slavery, and therein lies the supposed problem with regard to the name. However, he neither founded the Audubon Society nor even knew of its existence because he was born in 1785 and died in 1851, while the National Audubon Society was formed 54 years after his death in 1905! So, to suggest that the National Audubon Society conducts and/or condones racism **as his legacy**, one must explain and show how that 54 years was bridged to continue his ethics (or lack of). That's a difficult task that the proponents of deleting his name fail to do, and so they resort to speaking in innuendo as you'll see.

In the late 1800s, there was much outrage in East Coast states over the slaughter of millions of waterbirds, particularly Egrets, for use in the millinery trade; that is, hats for high society women. In 1896, two ladies founded the Massachusetts Audubon Society followed by a few other state-level Audubon societies until, in 1901, these local Audubon groups formed a loose national organization which then became the formal National Audubon Society in 1905. As I say, Audubon himself had been dead for 54 years...

Why was the name Audubon used to protect birds? Easy My Dear Watson - he was not only a ground-breaking bird painter but also an adept self-promoter such that his works were famous (and expensive), and the beauty of birds painted by him adorned many high society living rooms and public places. His work was so well-known that those in power could not claim to be unaware of the majesty of birds; Audubon provided a prolific artistic context in which to place the heartless millinery business. That made speaking about, and lobbying against, the cruel plume trade in which hunters killed and skinned the mature birds, leaving orphaned hatchlings to starve or be eaten by crows, much more effective. That publicity machine was and is the sole role and legacy of Audubon himself in the National Audubon Society. Audubon as an artist has been a tremendous asset for the Audubon Society and thus for birds, while the personal values of Audubon the man have been totally irrelevant in its interaction with society. No "John James Audubon (racist) DNA" pervades the Audubon Society.

Those who wish to eradicate his name from our society say that his racist background taints - even represents - the National Audubon Society and, by implication, all Audubon chapters such as ours. But, they don't tell us how that works, how it is that our chapter or any other, is tainted by a man who died 54 years before our national organization was formed. Am I, our Board, you our members, racist or prejudiced because the name of a man, who died 172 years ago and had no personal connection with any of us, is in our chapter's name? I think not.

The Seattle Audubon Society has decided to drop "Audubon" from its name and here's a partial quote by its President, Andrew Schepers, that illustrates the typical silliness that they promote: *"We are here for the birds, for the people, and for nature, **not to defend a harmful legacy**. We've got too much good work to do to let this continue to **stand in our way**. Our organization has a bold history of over a century of activism and impactful conservation. Our work will require all hands and voices to more fully serve our communities today and into the future. Complacency towards antiracism is not an option if we are to fulfill our mission".*

You can see here the use of innuendo mixed in with good intentions that themselves can and should go on without reference to a man dead for 172 years. This is the sleight of the pen, the deceptive use of words, of those without a real argument. Mr. Schepers doesn't tell us what racist misdeeds he and or Seattle Audubon may have performed in **"defending a harmful legacy"** that they won't do from now on, nor if he or they will take personal responsibility for such misdeeds rather than blaming a long-dead man. It is all so transparently a silly - and sad - fiction, of no use to birds or minorities.

On March 15, the Board of the National Audubon Society announced, after a year-long evaluation, that it will retain Audubon in its name and you can view the announcement here: <https://www.audubon.org/news/national-audubon-society-announces-decision-retain-current-name>

Barry Boulton - President, CSAS

## APRIL 2023 FIELD TRIPS

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

### April 8 (Saturday) - String of Pearls, Oakdale

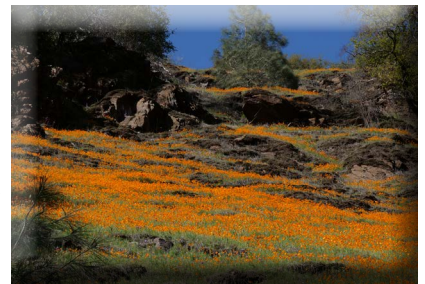
We will start the trip at the Oakdale Recreation Area on the Stanislaus River. On our last visit in March of 2022, we enjoyed a good showing of Wood Ducks and Phainopepla while a Snowy Egret gave us a good look at his “golden slippers” - which made me wonder if those yellow feet help catch fish? Wilson’s Snipes seem to be occurring more frequently, and we watched one bury its long bill in the mud all the way to the hilt. 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. We can expect a very enjoyable and successful trip again this year.

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 at 9:30am

**Trip leader: Paolo Maffei (209)532-8426**

### April 15 (Saturday) - "The Longest Mile" Wildflower Hike **EBMUD Seeking Volunteers**

Are you a native plant enthusiast or do you know of a native plant enthusiast that may be interested in being a Volunteer Guide to assist EBMUD Ranger/Naturalists in conducting the annual Longest Mile Wildflower Hike on April 15th? Volunteer Guides use field guides to locate and identify wildflowers for participants on the hike that are contained in the *Common Wildflowers of the Mokelumne Coast to Crest & China Gulch Trails*, and assist the Ranger/Naturalist(s) in tasks such as directing and signing in participants, issuing parking passes, parking cars, handing out printed materials and other related duties. We also need volunteers the week prior to help with flagging the wildflowers for easy identification on the day of the hike.



Please let me know if you are interested in helping with the event on the 15th and/or marking wildflowers one of the three days prior to the tour either April 11, 12, 13th.

**Lora Sparrowk**, Ranger Naturalist II, EBMUD Mokelumne Watershed Unit

**Contact info: [lora.sparrowk@ebmud.com](mailto:lora.sparrowk@ebmud.com) or (209) 772-8260**

(EBMUD website announcement at: <https://www.ebmud.com/about-us/events/event-details?occurrenceID=4011>)

### April 23 (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.

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.

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



## CSAS MEMBERS' MARCH SIGHTINGS

### Avian Ramblings at Lake Don Pedro by Joy Lopez

Caught this Scrub Jay tearing at the oriole nest early this morning. We have 3 nests in the maple outside our bedroom window and though we save nests we find on the ground or in the course of cutting brush, we don't take any that might be used again or used for spare parts. As I restrained myself from adding the nests to the collection, I rather resented the jay shredding it!

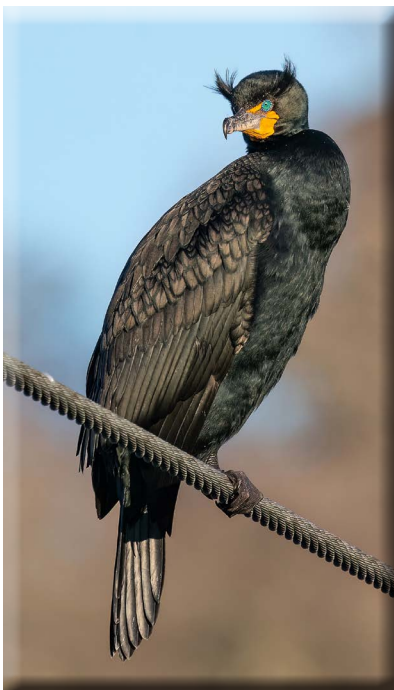
Right now when many of you have deep snow, here at 1100' next to a body of water (Lake Don Pedro) the birds got the memo that it's Spring! Spotted Towhees are the nemesis of a formal garden, gleefully kicking up carefully placed wood chips or gravel and bouncing in and out of low shrubs. It pays to be beautiful if you are going to make big messes. Juncos are flitting in little flocks, California Towhees are slipping by more surreptitiously. The Robins that feed on canyon Toyon berries have come and gone here, but we saw a busy flock working a lawn only 2 miles away.

The Poorwills are back! We always enjoy seeing them on our long dirt roads but they startle the bejesus out of you, flashing up from just in front of the car. Canada Geese are jalopying up and down the lake again, letting us know something has disrupted them, honking and rattling. Ron got to watch 3 Bald Eagles all tumbling midair over the water. He caught 2 with the iPhone - not very clear but very delightful!

We have had a few Bluebirds, and today a couple House Finches, while the Wren ( Bewicks? ) that nests in the solar array and so gets moved twice a day, is back. And twice this week a Peregrine Falcon shot by, which is unusual. Well, they may around, but we don't see them. California Quail are calling a bit as are flickers and ravens. Oh, almost forgot the surprising numbers of Hermit Thrushes we've had around us the last week or two! Migratory we think because of the number of them.



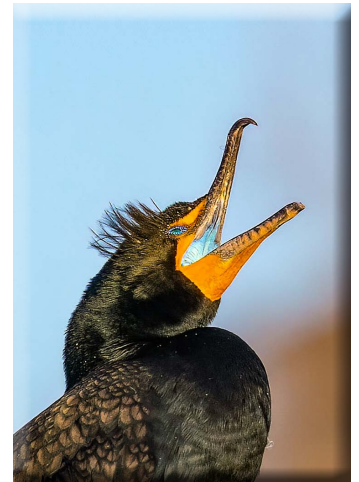
### The Double-crested Cormorant by Michele Dodge



The Double Crested Cormorant is one of the less appreciated birds along the American River Parkway - I've heard many people say they are ugly. But, if you look closely, these guys are actually stunning, especially now, when the males are in breeding plumage! They are the most widespread of the Cormorant species, found all over the US, parts of Canada, and into Mexico and even the Bahamas - in some areas, they migrate, while we see them year around here in Sacramento. They can thrive on both salt and fresh waterways.

This male is in full breeding plumage, so his double crests are clearly visible. The other really fun thing about this bird is you can see his mouth is also in full color - look at the inside, it is SKY BLUE - this is part of his breeding appeal, his eyes and eye liner become brighter and bluer, his mouth turns blue, his crests become larger, and his feathers become glossier. If you look closely, it appears his eyes are "jewel encrusted" with turquoise. He really is a handsome guy now!

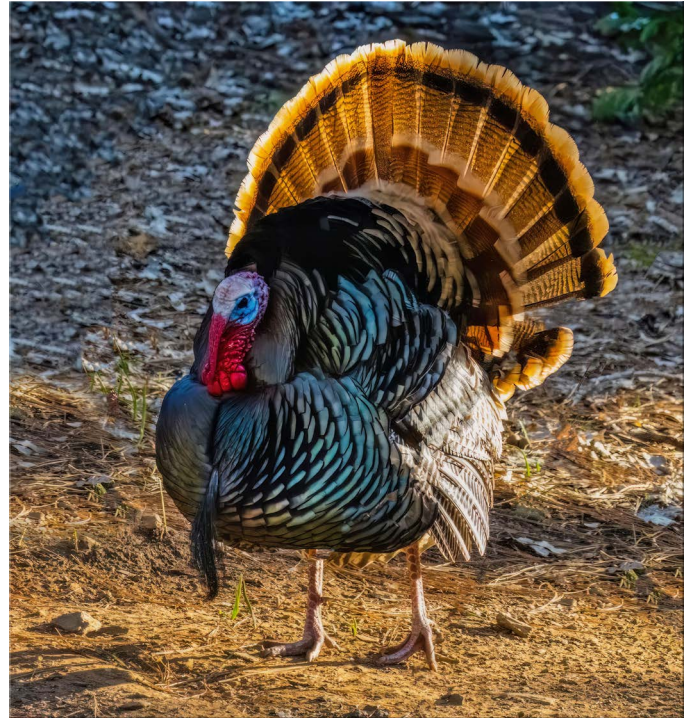
Isn't Nature amazing!?!?





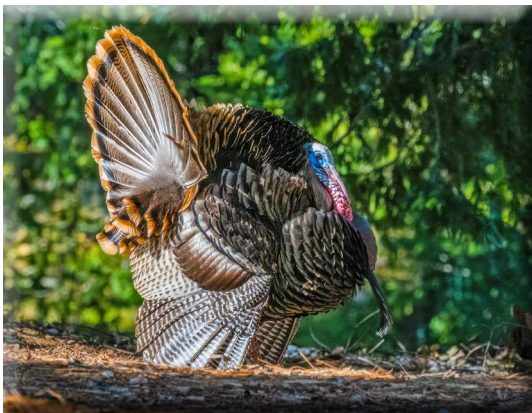
## BACKYARD BIRDING WITH DAVE DOUGLASS

There I was, sitting there watching the ball game yesterday evening when a flock of turkey came into view thru the window and it was right at the last moments of the sunset dappling the backyard with golden light. When this tom worked his way into a spotlight causing his tail fan to glow, I was compelled to jump up, grab the camera and see what I could capture. They continue to be the best show in the backyard and I'm trying to "get while the gettin's good." Side note: I just learned from a friend that they have 5 to 6 thousand feathers!



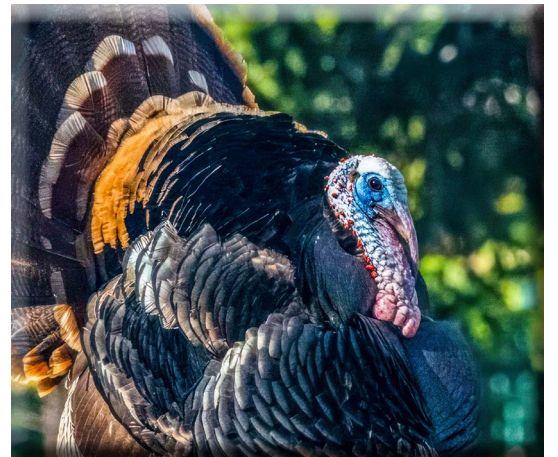
I've seen countless tom turkeys strutting, cruising, and trying to get the attention of the ladies but I've never seen any actual... consummation until this morning. I happened to glance out back and thought, "What in the world?!". I figured out what I was seeing and grabbed the hog-leg (camera

and long lens!) and hastily started shooting right thru the living room window thinking that I didn't have any time to waste capturing the moment. I do not know how long this guy was in this pose before I saw it, but he continued to just stand there for a while with no sign of struggle from his lady friend then she eventually moved into a more... receptive position which Tom promptly took advantage of, and then finally jumping off, while the girl friend flitted around kind of erratically before leaving the scene.



This one (left) is dragging its wing feathers which is how they make that dry, rattling sound that I've been hearing, and so I've been trying to figure out just how they produce it. As here, they drag and vibrate them, so it's a physical feather sound, not a vocalization.

This (right) is an example of how they can change the color of their wattles (it's a blood supply thing).



*Photos and stories by Dave Douglass who lives at Pine Mountain Lake*



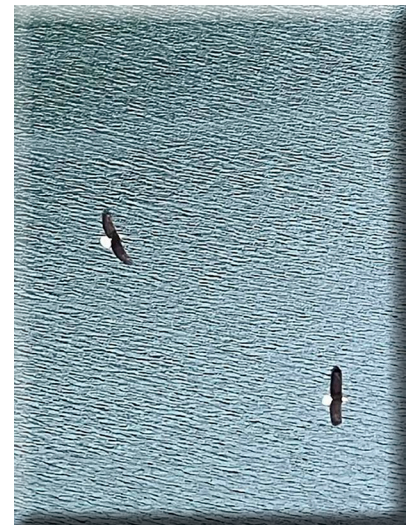
## REQUEST FOR NEWSLETTER SUBMISSIONS

I always enjoy the stories and photos that I receive from you, whether or not you are a formal CSAS member, and look forward to presenting them in The Squawker. They encourage others of us to look for the same birds, and to contemplate their actions and behaviors (my particular fascination). So, I want to encourage you to provide your stories and photos to me. I'm particularly interested in the story; what was that bird doing, where was it, perhaps your idea on why it did what it did, what other birds were around and may have affected its behavior - and so on. We all love stories from childhood onwards, and every observation carries a story as the sightings here by Joy Lopez and Michele Dodge illustrate so well.

Speaking of photos, you may sometimes have to capture them in situations where the quality may be questionable, or, quite commonly these days, you only have your cellphone at hand when the unexpected behavior suddenly occurs, so you may not think the photo is publishable. But don't let that stop you - I, too, have plenty of less-than-perfect photographs as does every photographer! In every issue of The Squawker, almost every photo I use is cropped and modified in Photoshop to suit the style of this publication. The Editor's role is to optimize the written and visual effects while your role is to supply the raw material - yet another example of symbiosis!

For example, in Joy Lopez's story she mentioned that her husband Ron shot these two Bald Eagles on his cellphone and they were *"not very clear, but very delightful!"* Exactly so - if Ron had shot a "perfect" close-up of one bird, that's all that I'd see, but here I can put my vision and imagination together. With the lake down there, I can see in my "mind's eye" the majesty of those three eagles floating and soaring above the wind-caressed wavelets with an elegance that leaves me breathless. I can wonder what the three were doing - fishing at the same time by happenchance or something more? Perhaps one is an unmated male trying to steal the female from her mate, or the not-seen one may be a juvenile hoping to steal a fish from an adult - and so on.

In contrast, Michele's "perfect" shots of the Cormorant allow her to illustrate the intricate plumage and body effects that come into play when sex is in the air. That is, there is scope for different styles and qualities in the photos illustrating our stories. So, if you submit stories and photos, I'll do the rest!



**You can send me photos and stories at: [rbarryboulton@gmail.com](mailto:rbarryboulton@gmail.com)**

### **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](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