

# Sierra Squawker



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

May - 2023

## PUBLIC PROGRAM

Our presenter this month, Tom Hahn, plans to present in-person at the Sonora Library, and his program will be shown live on Zoom, so you can join with us in whichever manner that suits you. Use the Zoom link below to log in from home.

Wednesday, May 17, at 7pm

## Natural History of Western Finches

Presented by Tom Hahn, U.C. Davis

Finches are, in many respects, the archetype of what people think of when they hear the word “bird.” Yet concealed in that “typical bird” form lies amazing variation. Among our numerous western finches – goldfinches, siskins, crossbills, grosbeaks, and so forth – we have: birds that are about as likely to breed in January when the snow lies deep on the ground as they are in July, birds that perfectly match the calls of their mates, birds that pack their songs with precise imitations of the sounds of other species, birds that seldom breed in the same place two years running, birds that we can only tell apart reliably by their flight calls, birds that can breed “in the streaked plumage of youth,” birds who can nest far from their food sources because they possess hefty food-transport pouches, and birds whose mandible tips don’t even line up. This presentation will be a tour of the striking natural history, behavior, morphology, and physiology of our western finches, and highlight ways that field ornithologists and bird watchers can add to our growing knowledge about these fascinating birds.



Tom Hahn is a professor of biology at the University of California, Davis. He has been studying western Cardueline finches since the late 1980s, when he began working on reproductive schedules of red crossbills for his doctoral research. Since then, he and his students have spent many hours in the field studying the reproductive schedules, migratory habits, vocal behavior, habitat associations and other aspects of the natural history of red crossbills, white-winged crossbills, evening grosbeaks, pine siskins, house finches, Cassin’s finches, purple finches, American goldfinches, lesser goldfinches, pine grosbeaks, common redpolls and gray-crowned rosy-finches.

**Tonight's Zoom link:**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89156789500>

## APRIL FIELD TRIP REPORTS

### String of Pearls, April 8

Eight birders enjoyed the spring day, finally, after our long winter. But some of us had to first navigate through the annual Oakdale Rodeo, of which we had been unaware. Maybe we missed the diversion to River Road – but we did enjoy our forced, unexpected immersion among hundreds of Latino cowboys on Peruvian and other gated cavallos de passo; no Gringo cowboys in evidence.

As in recent years, it seems the Phainopepla convention was taking place near the first pond with their competing, squabbling and courting taking center stage. Indeed, sex was in the air – literally! A pair of Turkey Vultures gave us a short and rather languid demonstration just to make sure that we understood the seasonal game plan.



*Red Slider Turtle - Pat Sanders*

The high water flow meant no muddy sand bars for the Wilson's Snipe we saw last year. An invasion of Canada geese may account for the solitary Wood duck and the lack of Common Gallinules on the ponds to the right of the road to the spit. A couple of Pied-billed Grebes and few coots were unusually quietly going about their usual business of foraging - but when the coots start their courting, all hell will break loose!

We also had the fairly unusual delight of watching a Black-crowned Night Heron take off and glide elegantly across the river over the heads of a pair (presumably) of Double-crested Cormorants. A Red Slider Turtle eased off its napping rock and slid into the water at our approach.

Of the 42 species observed, a pleasant surprise was the abundance of Lewis's Woodpeckers. Pat and Harold Sanders told us that this year, Lewis's are also newly common at New Melones.



*Tree Swallow  
Photo: Pat Sanders*

### Indigeny, April 23

I was greeted by 11 eager participants. Unfortunately, 4 of them thought that they were going on a walk with an arborist, apparently a little confusion over the word "Audubon". However, they merrily trooped off for their own adventure while the rest of us enjoyed a beautiful morning searching for birds. While we only heard the Black-headed Grosbeak we did get to see the beautiful Bullock's Oriole. Other highlights included singing House and Bewick's Wrens, a pair of Ring-necked Ducks and a Hutton's Vireo. 33 species were observed. Next month I would expect to see the Black-headed Grosbeak, Bullock's Oriole and some Flycatchers and Warblers. May is always lovely at Indigeny!

See the eBird checklist at: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S134782125>

**Kit DeGear, Field Trip Leader**

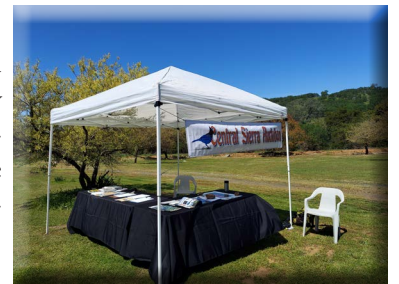


*Our intrepid birders at Indigeny!  
Photo: Cyril Ashe*

### Earth Day at Salt Spring Resort, April 22

The new management at Salt Spring Valley Resort were very enthusiastic to hold an Earth Day event and so they contacted us to participate. So Bruce McClenahan set up a very attractive CSAS table and stand as you see here. Kit DeGear, Paolo Maffei and Darcy Zimmerman joined Bruce to answer birding questions and lead bird observation trips. In the event, the participation was a little low, but with new events there's a learning curve in gaining publicity and public participation, so we look forward to joining again in 2024.

View Kit's eBird checklist online at <https://ebird.org/checklist/S134676885>





## CSAS MEMBERS' APRIL SIGHTINGS

### April 4

This is something unusual that we have never seen before. This year an Acorn Woodpecker has moved into one of our birdhouses. She sleeps in it every night and most likely will build her nest in it. Can't wait to see what happens next. Usually our birdhouses have Nuthatches, Titmouses, and Tree Swallows.

### April 20

No new news on the Acorn Woodpecker except she is still using the box every night. We see her sticking her head out of the hole every morning.

We have a Titmouse in another box and she is sitting on eggs, and a Nuthatch in another house. We have Bluebirds in the boxes in the field.

**Dave McCrea, Sonora**



### April 6

2023 Bullock's Orioles just arrived – first of the year!

**Joy Lopez,  
Lake Don Pedro.**



### April 18

Suzanne Whitley and I were at Salt Springs today and found the Bald Eagles' nest with both parents visible.

We also saw Lewis's Woodpeckers which neither of us had seen before.

**Joan Mazzetti**

**Editor's notes:** given the chaotic weather over the last few months, we can fear that avian mortality might be greater than normal, so that this pair of Baldies were able to return separately to their annual nest is quite an accomplishment.

The spring flashes of color from the orioles and tanagers are always exciting and inspiring - Spring is really here! I remember as a boy in England that the "spring bird" for us was the European Cuckoo; we anxiously listened out for it, and when we heard it, we would count the number of "cuck-koos" it would utter - 70 times and more in one run was not unusual.

This has surely been the year for the Lewis's Woodpeckers so that several of our members have seen them this year for the first time - see my hypothesis on page 6.

## CSAS Elections for 2023-24

On June 3 we will hold our Annual Meeting and Potluck to elect the new Board for the 12 months from June 2023 - June 24. Our Nominating Committee has already established willing officers for the available positions as shown here. If anybody wishes to offer themselves for one of these positions, you can contact our Committee Chair, Gail Witzlsteiner ([witoz@msn.com](mailto:witoz@msn.com)).

Officer candidates are: President: Tom Parrington. VP for Programs: Ralph Retherford.  
Director-at-Large: Gail Witzlsteiner Secretary: Jean Dakota. Treasurer: Linda Millspaugh

This will be a potluck to celebrate another successful year for CSAS at which you can meet our scholarship recipients and socialize with the full Board in Ralph Retherford's beautiful backyard. So, hold the date - June 3 at 4pm - and further details will be in the June Squawker.

## MAY 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/>**



### **May 4 (Thursday) - Wards Ferry Road, Sonora**

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.

**Trip leader: Tom Parrington**

### **May 18 (Thursday) - The Confidence Trail**

Please join us on the Confidence Trail with our presenter this month, Tom Hahn. This used to be an annual bird walk with Tom before covid when we enjoyed his special avian insights; always a privilege to spend time with him.! This is always a particularly great outing with many Spring migrants to hear and see! Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the trailhead at Confidence/South Fork Rd. just north of Middle Camp Rd.

Please note that Tom's busy schedule at UC Davis may mean that he cannot stay in Sonora overnight and join us for the field trip. His attendance will be confirmed well before the 18th, and will be updated if necessary on our website. If Tom is unable to be with us, Kit DeGear will lead the field trip on May 30th. You will also be notified of any changes via email.

**Trip Leader: Tom Hahn**

### **May 21 (Sunday) - Big Trees State Park with Stanislaus Audubon, 9am - 2pm**

This has been a popular field trip for many years. This visit to the redwoods will be an opportunity to see montane species of warblers, flycatchers, woodpeckers, wrens, and vireos, all beginning their breeding season. More uncommon species such as Pileated Woodpecker, Northern Pygmy-Owl, or Northern Goshawk may be seen. Participants will arrive at the park in their own vehicles; a day use entry fee of \$10 is required. Bring water and lunch, sturdy shoes, and insect repellent.

**Trip Leader Sal Salerno with co-leader Srinivasan Raman**

### **May 28 (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)**

## 2023 Edye Dingman CSAS Scholarship Report

The CSAS Scholarship Committee (Darcy Zimmerman, Monika Riedel, Corinne Grandstaff and Gail Witzlsteiner) met recently to review applications for our 2023 Edye Dingman CSAS Scholarship. The committee recommended, and the Board approved 3 scholarships – A \$2000 award to Natasha Mayo, a \$1500 award to Fonda Thomas and a \$1500 award to Trinity Walter.

Each of the recipients are invited to accept their awards at our Annual Meeting on June 3, 2023. They will have the opportunity to share information about their educational plans with those in attendance.

### **Congratulations to each of the following scholarship recipients:**

**NATASHA MAYO** - a graduate of Sonora High School is attending Humboldt State University as a transfer student from Columbia College. She is pursuing a career in fish biology, environmental science or ecological restoration.

Natasha is focusing on wildlife fisheries biology and then plans to obtain a Master's degree in Natural Resources. She is a Certified California Naturalist and has had 10 straight semesters on the President's/Dean's list for academic excellence.

She spent 2 months studying at Baker Station at the High Sierra Institute through Columbia College.

She has volunteered with the with the CCC and Americorp Watershed Stewards Program, the campus Oceanography club, Cramer Fish Sciences, and with the Calif. Dept. of Fish and Wildlife doing fish and water studies.

**FONDA THOMAS** – will graduate from Columbia College this Spring semester and plans to continue her studies in the Fall at Cal State Stanislaus, majoring in geography and environmental resources.

Fonda is a Certified California Naturalist and a member of the College's President's List.

She has volunteered with Tuolumne River Trust since 2015 and is a Stanislaus National Forest Service River Ranger where she does ecological restoration and preservation of natural habitats. Fonda is a birder and a Senior Park Aide at Columbia State Historic Park where she created a self-guided dendrology booklet that helps visitors identify various shrubs and trees in the Park.

**TRINITY WALTER** – is a resident of Calaveras County and transfer student from Columbia College to either UC Davis or UC Merced. She is interested in environmental engineering or hydrology and hopes to implement systems designed monitor and water, soil and ecosystems.

Trinity works on campus in the science lab, serves as a tutor for other students and was on the President's List.

She has volunteered with the US Army Corps of Engineers doing litter clean up at New Hogan Reservoir in Valley Springs and has run an information booth at CanSat to encourage interest in science and technology.

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Every year we offer scholarships for eligible students of at least junior standing in college who are pursuing an undergraduate or graduate degree in Natural or Environmental Sciences. Preference will be given to alumni of a high school in either Calaveras or Tuolumne County, or those who have attended Columbia College. The scholarship fund for 2023 was \$5,000 total.

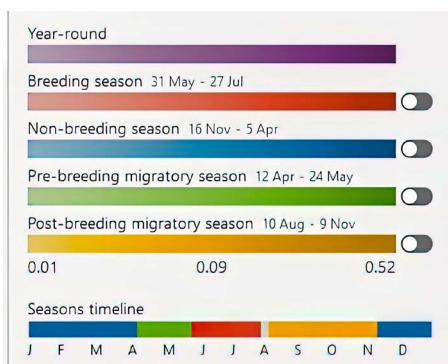
**Report by Scholarship Chair, Gail Witzlsteiner**



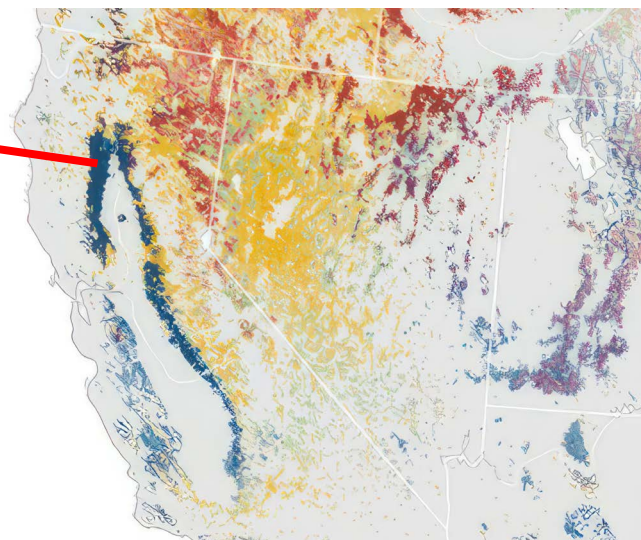
## MYSTERY - Super Abundance of Lewis's Woodpeckers this Winter-Spring

I've been intrigued that the Lewis's Woodpecker has been observed in unusually high numbers, and even in places not seen before, throughout our area. Also that they are often seen as small social groups, not singly as usual. These have occurred at lower elevation places such as New Melones, Valley Springs and Salt Springs Valley near Copperopolis, for which there's a good reason as you'll see. Additionally, my professional birding colleague, whom many of you know, Rich Cimino, tells me that it is also appearing unusually in the coastal area, with Mt. Diablo having its first record of the Lewis's.

To start off, I viewed Cornell's on-line reference "Birds of the World" (<https://birdsoftheworld.org/bow/home>) which shows its distribution throughout the year, but the Cornell map is so stylized and general that it doesn't provide any clues to the answer to this question. However, the more realistic map generated by eBird shown here from actual birders' observations helps us a lot more and, in doing so, testifies to the value of eBird as a scientific tool.



Likely nomadic origin - see discussion below



***eBird recorded actual observations with color key, showing that most wintering populations are located along the Sierra Nevada foothills (the Central Valley is the blank area white) and central N. California.***

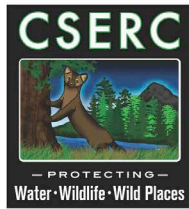
Before commenting on these observations, a paper written around 2000 under the auspices of the California Wildlife Habitat Relationships System, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, California Interagency Wildlife Task Group gives us some interesting clues with reference to these over-wintering California populations.

Here are some germane comments from the paper (emphasis added). *Lewis's Woodpecker: an uncommon, local winter resident occurring in open oak savannas, broken deciduous, and coniferous habitats. Winter food mostly cached acorns, other nuts and seeds, and emerging insects. Caches acorns and other nuts in crevices and holes for use in nonbreeding season. Prefers oaks and acorns in winter. Seasonal Movements: tends to wander in fall. Distance travelled depends on proximity of suitable habitat and acorn and other nut supplies. May form nomadic flocks in late summer and fall; moves into orchards, or moves higher in mountains (Bock 1970). Mountain populations usually move to lower areas for winter.*

We can see that the eBird observations show those major wintering populations (dark blue-green) along the east side of the Central Valley - that is, Sierra foothills - as well as on the west side (of the CV) in central Northern California. Although the observations along the Sierra foothills are denser implying greater numbers than further west, we know from past experience that this is still a fairly uncommon bird, and not often seen by most casual birders.

So, here we have a bird that needs oak savannas to survive the winter which is why it over-winters in our lower elevations. Moreover, it is a species which happens to be nomadic or opportunistic, a description which suggests that when food is scarce, its instinct is not to dig in and tough it out, but to move on to better pastures. My conclusion is that the rather extreme winter we've experienced has prompted small nomadic flocks to look for those better pastures, which raises the next question - from where did they migrate? Looking at these eBird observations suggests that they most likely migrated south from their usual central Northern California over-wintering areas as I've indicated on the above map.

**Barry Boulton**



## Nature Photo Contest Win Cash Prizes!

**Have you taken a great photo of local  
wildlife or landscapes lately?**

**Enter to win up to \$150!**

Submit up to 10 photos you have taken of natural landscapes and/or native wildlife in the Central Valley or Sierra Nevada. Send them to [chelsea@cserc.org](mailto:chelsea@cserc.org) by May 15, 2023 to enter to win **cash** prizes up to \$150! There is also a category for youth 16 and under. Visit our website for full contest rules and details at:

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



Photo by Dave Douglass

### 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
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