

Sierra Squawker



www.centralsierraaudubon.org

January - 2024

PUBLIC PROGRAM

Alex will present from Nevada on Zoom, and we will also show him on-screen in the Sonora library. Use the Zoom link shown below to log-in from home.

Wednesday, January 17, at 7pm

Birds of the Mojave Desert

Presented by Alex Harper

Alex Harper of Las Vegas, Nevada will give you an overview of how birds move through the Mojave Desert throughout the year. You'll learn about what drives bird movement throughout the year, learn about local species, and hear about the challenges facing birds and conservation.

Alex is a biologist and interpretive naturalist based in southern Nevada. He has experience conducting point counts and raptor counts across the western United States, has worked as a biologist in the renewable energy industry, and he is currently the Education and Outreach Coordinator for the local Audubon chapter, Red Rock Audubon (<https://www.redrock-audubon.com/>).

Alex is a professional bird and natural history guide. He is especially drawn to communicating science through storytelling and connecting direct experiences. He loves the desert and wants you to appreciate it even more than you already do.



Tonight's Zoom link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87424995840>

JANUARY 2024 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/>



January 18 (Thursday) - Merced National Wildlife Refuge

Following our November visit to Merced NWR, we're returning again in January because with so many birds and such a rich variety of species, the avian scene is always different and interesting.

We'll meet as usual at 2pm at the first viewpoint in the refuge off Sandy Mush Road (7430 W Sandy Mush Rd, Merced, CA 95341) and then we'll make either one or two circuits and watch the sunset fly-in from the far viewpoint. For those who wish, we'll enjoy dinner at our favorite Thai restaurant in downtown Merced.

Trip leader Kit DeGear (925)-822-5215 or kdegear@gmail.com

January 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. Our late November walk on a sunny day produced 26 species, among which the highlights included a Great Egret flyover, Bald Eagle, Bufflehead and the plaintive call of the Golden-crowned Sparrow.

The walk will last 2-3 hrs. Children are welcome! Meet in the parking lot at 9:00 AM (note later start time). 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

Sonora Christmas Bird Count

Saturday December 16th was the Tuolumne County Christmas Bird Count which started as a beautiful sunny day in the 50s in most areas, perfect weather for birding if only the birds had gotten the message. From most reports both the numbers and species counted were down. Usually abundant sparrows were hard to find in numbers, and raptors sightings were sparse. The drought cannot be blamed as our lakes and reservoirs are full and this fall has had some rain. For Barry Boulton who did Area 1, which is Southerly and Westerly of Jamestown, it was a miserable count - last year he counted 27 species, but this year only 9!

However, there were some highlights for the day. Gerard and Marigold Ardron, Pam Palmer, Dayna Guthrie and Tyson Kahler, who covered Area 6, which encompassed Teleli Golf Course and the Lime Kiln Road area Southerly of Sonora, had a whopping 62 species, including a Ferruginous Hawk and a Cackling Goose. Pamela Blair and David Harden's group scored a Golden and Bald Eagle and 2 Northern Harriers in Area 20 which includes the Stent, Jacksonville and Algerine Roads. Jean Dakota and Sheila Shanahan heard a Peregrine Falcon 2-3 times which was confirmed by Merlin Sound ID in Area 12 which is that part of East Sonora Easterly from the Junction Shopping Center and includes the Lambert Lake area, Standard, and Curtis Creek area.

The good news is that the number of participants who turned out allowed coverage for 18 of the 20 areas of the Circle that was created by Steve Umland who was out of area and so missed this year's count. Thanks to all who took up the challenge and spent the time to support Audubon.

Kit DeGear & Tom Parrington

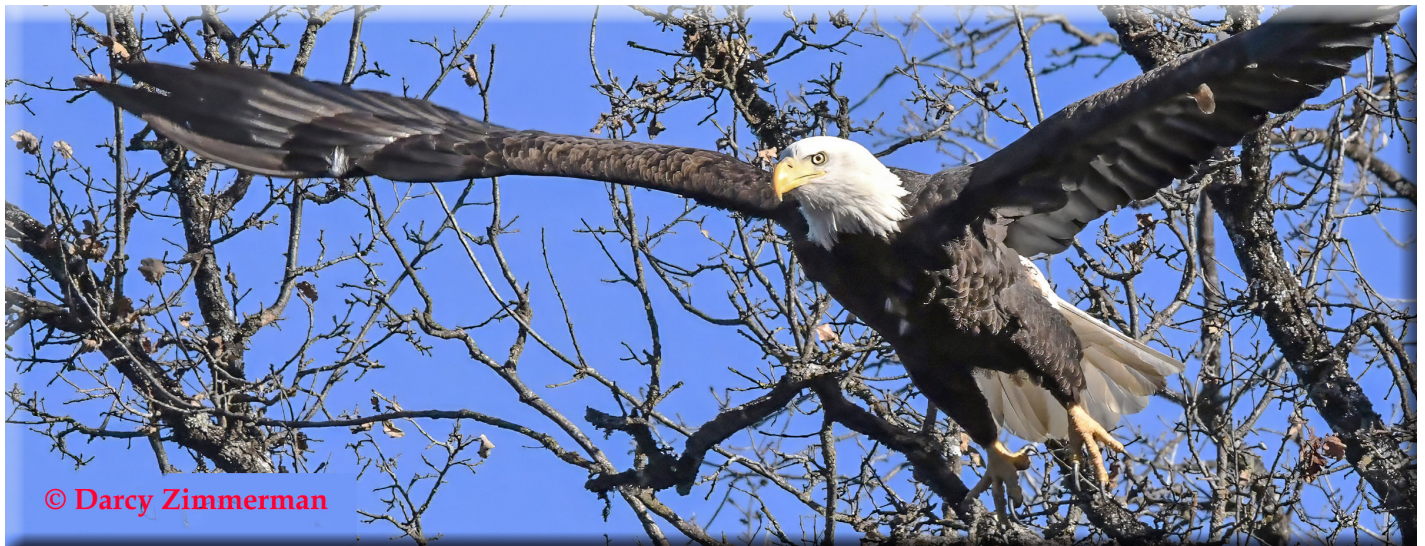
CONSERVATION CORNER

Celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Endangered Species Act

by Bruce McClenahan, Conservation Chair

Break out the champagne and raise your glass to toast the Endangered Species Act (ESA)! Passed with bipartisan support (House 355 to 4 / Senate 92 to 0), and signed into law by President Nixon on December 28, 1973, this bedrock piece of environmental legislation is the cornerstone of the conservation movement. The ESA's success is due in large part to two factors, one the designation of critical habitat for listed species and a two, a unique feature of the act that does not require a cost / benefit analysis before going into action. It is hard to put a price on extinction.

There have been 1,780 species listed under the protection of the ESA, about 120 of which are birds. Although the ESA has its flaws (species allowed to get too close to the brink of extinction, and a lack of funding for recovery plans and their implementation), the Bald Eagle, Peregrine Falcon and the Osprey have all rebounded from their numbers when initially listed under the Act.



© Darcy Zimmerman



Peregrine Falcon by Barry Boulton

While it is difficult to determine the extent to which the banning of the pesticide DDT in 1972 had on the recovery of Bald Eagle populations, clearly the ESA paved the way to recovery. Critical habitat designations (seventy-five new National Wildlife Refuges were created in just seven years after the signing of the ESA), rudimentary captive breeding programs, relocation efforts, and increased law enforcement all had big positive impacts. Four-hundred and seventeen (417) breeding pairs in 1973 has become an estimated 316,000 Bald Eagles today. Likewise the Peregrine Falcon population in the United States has grown from a low of 324 breeding pairs in 1975 to an estimated 40,000 Peregrine Falcons today. The Bald Eagle was delisted in 2007, and the Peregrine Falcon in 1999.

A 2016 report by the American Bird Conservancy (<https://centralsier-raudubon.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/ESA-Report-2016-FINAL-2.pdf>) estimates that the population trends for 70% of the birds listed as threatened or endangered on the ESA are now increasing in population, stable or delisted. Despite that success, the act's determined opponents are many, and numerous legislative attempts (136 in just the past five years) have been made to gut and or eliminate the ESA. Those efforts are ongoing.

Winter Happenings

Often this time of year can seem sort of dead, but if, in addition to our usual birds, we observe other forms of life that may be bursting with energy during winter, we are in for some very pleasant surprises!

Lucia and I today (Christmas Eve) visited the Stanislaus River at the end of Camp 9 Road near Vallecito, and what a rich variety of life we saw! The first surprise on enjoying lunch on rocks above the Stanislaus was to see an occasional dragonfly/damselfly flitting around - this at the end of December! They were too fast to identify as dragonfly or damselfly, but when I caught up with one, it turned out to be a new-to-me damselfly, namely a California Spreadwing - that seems like a strange name, and the reason is that unlike most damselflies, when perched on a rock or twig, it leaves its wings open almost like a dragonfly. But it still has the typical damselfly widely separated eyes.



Going just off the trail we found an Indian grinding rock (left) covered with almost fluorescent mosses plus a water-filled reflective pool. I could just imagine the Indian women grinding acorns while others of them, or the men, were fishing for salmon nearby in the Stanislaus!

Perhaps the nicest surprise was to see a colony of several thousands of over-wintering Convergent Lady-beetles covering rocks, wood and twigs in one small area. Because it was just after midday with sunlight, they were just a little active but, come the cold night, they'll be cuddling up for warmth.

Intriguing were the tiny droplets of dew on just one small area of spider's webbing (below).



Buckeye lunch for a squirrel



As I get older, I find that my hikes and wanderings get shorter and shorter as I observe the abundance of living creatures whether they are birds, insects or plants, then going on to research them when I return home. For instance, those individual wind-blown lady-beetles that migrate up here from the Central Valley and join their fellows; each one comes alone whereupon they all find each other at one place to overwinter together, an amazing accomplishment, apparently based on pheromones (scents) that guide these new creatures to the same place their ancestors over-wintered before them!

Barry Boulton

Angels Camp Christmas Bird Count

The second annual Christmas Bird Count for Angels Camp (CAAC) was another smashing success. Under near perfect weather, 20 birders covered the 15-mile diameter circle with record numbers, 99 species and 8,216 birds. The days highlight was a Red-necked Grebe (RNGR) found and photo documented by Al DeMartini at New Melones. Another surprise was the low number of Lewis's Woodpeckers (LEWO) only three verses 92 last year; although the literature suggests they are somewhat nomadic in wintertime. I can only count maybe 12 species (including owls) that we could have reasonably expected to encounter that we did not find. In other words, we cleaned-up.



Red-necked Grebe by John Harris

My many thanks to a great team, I will look forward to seeing everyone again next year. I will endeavor to do some recruiting to help make next year's count (Saturday December 21st) an even greater success.

Bruce McClenahan, CAAC Coordinator

Hooded Mergansers are back in Arnold!



Five Hooded Mergansers were on Lakemont Pond on December 24. This one shyly scooted over to the other side and became mixed with ripples and reflections to provide a photographic treat. We might see 20 or so this winter.

Central Sierra Audubon Society - CSAS

(Chapter of the National Audubon Society)

P.O. Box 3047, Sonora, CA 95370

Public Presentations: We now conduct our 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

Tom Parrington, President	(209)928-3835
Barry Boulton, Past-President	(209)596-0612
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
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 - OPEN	
YSS delegate - Walt Kruse	(707)548-1829
Conservation - Bruce McClenahan	(209)323-0739