



PUBLIC PROGRAM

Tonight's program will be a "show & tell" event in the Sonora library; that is, no Zoom tonight.

Wednesday, February 21, at 7pm

Rescuing & Caring for Wildlife

Presented by Nina Resnick

Founder of Rose Wolf Wildlife Rescue & Rehabilitation Center

Caring for rescued wildlife is both a passion and a commitment combined with love for the animals, and Nina Resnick has those qualities in abundance. She's been caring for wildlife for over 25 years now and, as you can imagine, has a rich fund of fascinating, amusing and tough stories to tell us about a wide variety of wildlife. She'll be sharing many of these stories this evening, and she looks forward to talking with you about your experiences, questions and comments about rescuing, caring for and releasing wildlife.

Here are some recent guests:



Note - if you missed our presentation on January 17 by Alex Harper entitled "Birds of the Mojave" it is now available on YouTube at: <https://youtu.be/CLWNrIeaiCY> I highly recommend it.

FEBRUARY 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/>



February 3 (Saturday) - Salt Spring 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.

We will meet at Barrow's in Sonoma at 8am to carpool to Copperopolis pond about 1/4 mile along Rock Creek Road off highway 4 near Copperopolis. Alternatively, meet at the pond at 9am. Bring water and lunch which we will enjoy at the resort which also has restrooms available (\$10 per car). Bring radios for communicating while convoying if you have them. Finish around 2pm - but if you need to depart earlier, we'll get to the resort around 11:30am. Rain will cancel.

Trip leader Paolo Maffei

February 25 (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 January 28th walk on a beautiful sunny day produced 33 species including a Bald Eagle (see report on p.6).

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 Sonoma. 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

Advance notice - Paolo Maffei will lead his annual Oakdale "String of Pearls" trip on Saturday, March 2.

Merced NWR Field Trip Report - January 18

The weather was not very good but the birds were great. Ten of us met and made the tour of the refuge. We viewed 44 species. The Ross's Geese and Snow Geese were very close to the 1st platform. It made learning how to make an ID between these very similar species much easier and rewarding. We had a lone Cackling Goose, not far off the road, which also allowed for some good ID comparison to our much more common Canada Goose. Everyone one was particularly thrilled with the Vermilion Flycatcher sightings and I would like to include Jean Dakota's remarks as she said it so well: *"Finally, I got to see a bird on my 'list', the Vermilion Fly Catcher, and he/she did not disappoint! First we saw the female flycatcher, and she was lovely. The lighting was good and we could see the yellow orange color of her underside. But that was just the warm-up to her significant other(s). We may have spotted two males in different trees, some distance apart, not sure. But the male bird was amazing. The shade of red was almost electric, and the brilliant red color on the bird's head almost glowed in the overcast light."*

Just as we were leaving a flock of Sandhill Cranes were flying in with their distinctive call. Unfortunately, the darkening sky did not allow for a satisfying view. A Great Horned Owl serenaded our exit.

eBird checklist at: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S159249900>

Kit DeGear



Conserving Biodiversity in a Changing Climate: Understanding the Clark's Nutcracker-Whitebark Pine Mutualism

Whitebark pine and Clark's nutcrackers have a fascinating relationship: the trees provide rich, fatty seeds (with more calories per pound than chocolate), and the birds "plant" the trees' seeds—a single bird may hide up to 98,000 seeds in a year. The food caches help the birds get through the winter, and the leftovers grow into new trees. In fact, whitebark pine trees sprout almost exclusively from nutcracker seed caches. This dependency has led to considerable concern for both species because whitebark pine ecosystems are rapidly disappearing in the western United States. This disappearance, largely due to mountain pine beetles and invasive blister rust, has caused concern for the entire ecosystem.

While whitebark pine restoration efforts are underway, these efforts will not be effective if Clark's nutcracker populations decline or their habitat selection changes to a degree that they are not available to disperse seeds. We have limited information on nutcracker population status and behavior, but evidence suggests that declining whitebark pine communities are leading to reduced local Clark's nutcracker populations.



Pair of Clark's Nutcrackers - Barry Boulton

In order to understand these dependency dynamics, Dr. Taza Schaming is studying Clark's nutcracker space use in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem and Washington's Cascades through satellite-tracking and documenting occupancy with passive acoustic recording units. Tromping through snow, then mud and swarms of mosquitoes, Taza has been trapping, surveying, radio-tracking, and satellite-tracking nutcrackers since 2009, to study movement, habitat selection, and social behavior. Her ultimate goal is to determine which management actions will increase the persistence of nutcrackers throughout their range. This problem is more urgent than it first seems: these high altitude pines are essential to protect because they play a critical role in the ecosystem, including helping to retain snow (and thus drinking water) on the upper slopes of the western mountains, and providing high-energy nuts on which many animal species, including the grizzly bear, depend.

Nutcrackers also play an important role in forest regeneration and conifer seed dispersal for not only whitebark pine, but for at least ten conifer species in western North America. A decline in nutcracker populations would affect not only whitebark pine regeneration, but long-distance dispersal of these conifer species. Taza's results advance our understanding of the magnitude of the impact of the decline of whitebark pine on Clark's Nutcrackers' behavior and populations. This data will aid in the design of biologically informed management interventions which will help maintain a healthy ecosystem by ensuring persistence of nutcrackers throughout their range.

Project website with more information: <http://www.thenutcrackerecosystemproject.com/research.html>

Interestingly, the US Fish & Wildlife Service has just decided to investigate whether the Pinyon Jay warrants protection under the Endangered Species Act. Pinyon Jay numbers have declined over the last half-century as persistent drought, more severe wildfires and other effects of climate change have intensified, leaving the birds with less food and fewer nesting options as more trees die or are removed. Consequently, there is concern that without the Pinyon Jay—a social bird that essentially plants the next generation of trees by stashing away the seeds—it's possible that the piñon forests of New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada and other Western states could face another reproductive hurdle.

More info at: <https://apnews.com/article/endangered-species-pinyon-jay-climate-change-1f21143ad13e06db73b1b1cc643a0f9a>



Pinyon Jay - BB

Perhaps the two greatest essays on conservation were written by one man – Aldo Leopold. Published in "A Sand County Almanac" in 1949, one year after his death, "Thinking Like a Mountain" and "The Land Ethic" were way ahead of their time. Leopold stressed the need to develop a conservation ethic and take personal responsibility to observe all of the connections in the natural world around you, and do all you can to preserve them for future generations. I would urge you to read the essay below and reflect on it. I hope you enjoy it as much as I do, especially when I first read it 45 years ago.

Bruce McClenahan

"Thinking Like a Mountain" by Aldo Leopold

A deep chesty bawl echoes from rimrock to rimrock, rolls down the mountain, and fades into the far blackness of the night. It is an outburst of wild defiant sorrow, and of contempt for all the adversities of the world. Every living thing (and perhaps many a dead one as well) pays heed to that call. To the deer it is a reminder of the way of all flesh, to the pine a forecast of midnight scuffles and of blood upon the snow, to the coyote a promise of gleanings to come, to the cowman a threat of red ink at the bank, to the hunter a challenge of fang against bullet. Yet behind these obvious and immediate hopes and fears there lies a deeper meaning, known only to the mountain itself. Only the mountain has lived long enough to listen objectively to the howl of a wolf.

Those unable to decipher the hidden meaning know nevertheless that it is there, for it is felt in all wolf country, and distinguishes that country from all other land. It tingles in the spine of all who hear wolves by night, or who scan their tracks by day. Even without sight or sound of wolf, it is implicit in a hundred small events: the midnight whinny of a pack horse, the rattle of rolling rocks, the bound of a fleeing deer, the way shadows lie under the spruces. Only the ineducable tyro can fail to sense the presence or absence of wolves, or the fact that mountains have a secret opinion about them.

My own conviction on this score dates from the day I saw a wolf die. We were eating lunch on a high rimrock, at the foot of which a turbulent river elbowed its way. We saw what we thought was a doe fording the torrent, her breast awash in white water. When she climbed the bank toward us and shook out her tail, we realized our error: it was a wolf. A half-dozen others, evidently grown pups, sprang from the willows and all joined in a welcoming melee of wagging tails and playful maulings. What was literally a pile of wolves writhed and tumbled in the center of an open flat at the foot of our rimrock. In those days we had never heard of passing up a chance to kill a wolf. In a second, we were pumping lead into the pack, but with more excitement than accuracy: how to aim a steep downhill shot is always confusing. When our rifles were empty, the old wolf was down, and a pup was dragging a leg into impassable slide-rocks.

We reached the old wolf in time to watch a fierce green fire dying in her eyes. I realized then, and have known ever since, that there was something new to me in those eyes, something known only to her and to the mountain. I was young then, and full of trigger-itch; I thought that because fewer wolves meant more deer, that no wolves would mean hunters' paradise. But after seeing the green fire die, I sensed that neither the wolf nor the mountain agreed with such a view.



Since then, I have lived to see state after state extirpate its wolves. I have watched the face of many a newly wolf-less mountain, and seen the south-facing slopes wrinkle with a maze of new deer trails. I have seen every edible bush and seedling browsed, first to anemic desuetude, and then to death. I have seen every edible tree defoliated to the height of a saddle horn. Such a mountain looks as if someone had given God a new pruning shears, and forbidden Him all other exercise. In the end the starved bones of the hoped-for deer herd, dead of its own too-much, bleach with the bones of the dead sage, or molder under the high-lined junipers.

I now suspect that just as a deer herd lives in mortal fear of its wolves, so does a mountain live in mortal fear of its deer. And perhaps with better cause, for while a buck pulled down by wolves can be replaced in two or three years, a range pulled down by too many deer may fail of replacement in as many decades.

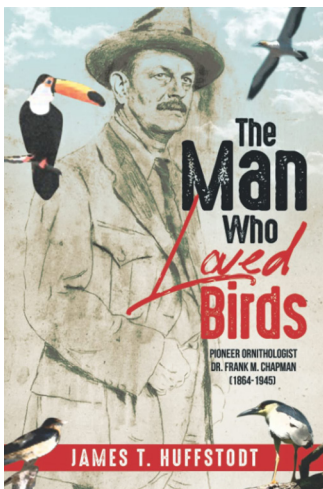
So also, with cows. The cowman who cleans his range of wolves does not realize that he is taking over the wolf's job of trimming the herd to fit the range. He has not learned to think like a mountain. Hence, we have dustbowls, and rivers washing the future into the sea.

We all strive for safety, prosperity, comfort, long life, and dullness. The deer strives with his supple legs, the cowman with trap and poison, the statesman with pen, the most of us with machines, votes, and dollars, but it all comes to the same thing: peace in our time. A measure of success in this is all well enough, and perhaps is a requisite to objective thinking, but too much safety seems to yield only danger in the long run. Perhaps this is behind Thoreau's dictum: In wildness is the salvation of the world. Perhaps this is the hidden meaning in the howl of the wolf, long known among mountains, but seldom perceived among men.

Book Reviews

by Bruce McClenahan

With cold wet winter days ahead, a couple of books for you to savor. One is about a pioneer of ornithology, whose dedication and passion for birds changed birdwatching and the study of birds with innovative museum designs and new camera technology. The other provides hope for saving declining bird populations. It is filled with cutting edge technologies, (antennas on the International Space Station, hydrophones and phone apps) being used by scientists and devoted individuals to save threatened and endangered species. I think you will enjoy and appreciate both. A partial synopsis from Amazon follows:

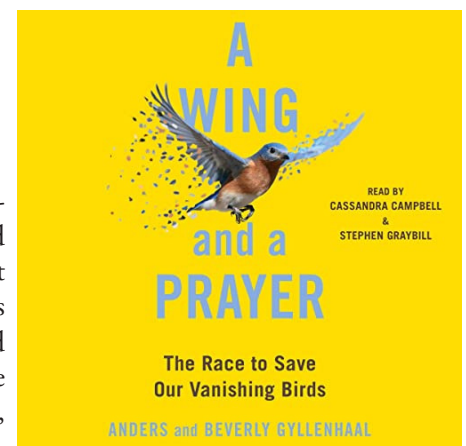


THE MAN WHO LOVED BIRDS: Pioneer Ornithologist Dr. Frank M. Chapman (1864-1945)

"Chapman was a great ornithologist... He loved birds. He loved them as Audubon loved them. He also loved them as St. Francis loved them." Guy Emerson, Audubon Society, 1949. Dr. Frank M. Chapman of the American Museum of Natural History in New York City was the father of the Christmas Bird Count but was also the most popular bird writer of his era, an influential editor, South American explorer, museum innovator, pioneer bio-geographer, educator, early bird photographer, spell-binding speaker, author of 17 books and several hundred popular and scientific articles, and owner-editor of Bird-Lore (1899-1934): the first popular magazine for birdwatchers and forerunner of today's Audubon. Some have called him the father of the modern American birdwatching (birding) movement.

A WING AND A PRAYER: THE RACE TO SAVE OUR VANISHING BIRDS

A captivating drama from the frontlines of the race to save birds set against the devastating loss of one third of the avian population. Three years ago, headlines delivered shocking news: nearly three billion birds in North America have vanished over the past 50 years. No species has been spared, from the most delicate jeweled hummingbirds to scrappy black crows, from a rainbow of warblers to common birds such as owls and sparrows. In a desperate race against time, scientists, conservationists, birders, wildlife officers, and philanthropists are scrambling to halt the collapse of species with bold, experimental, and sometimes risky rescue missions.



Who Wins at the Bird Feeder—the Lone Wolf or the Social Butterfly?

As this Cornell article says: "When hordes of chickadees, finches, and woodpeckers descend on a backyard bird feeder, squabbles are bound to erupt: Sometimes getting a choice morsel means muscling your way into position." I'm sure that you who have feeders have observed this. The article goes into some very interesting facts on this topic:

https://www.allaboutbirds.org/news/who-wins-at-the-bird-feeder-the-lone-wolf-or-the-social-butterfly/?utm_campaign=bird%20academy%20general&utm_medium=email&hsmi=289851562&hsenc=p2ANqtz-JrYaxEJzSr-VC-C6du6OFbTNAU379y1BaZvIHem2HsQFWuYz2Ys7KZ0ZOtUSbU-KFwyAFFcGMgb3314j4vD4pqgh-Lg&utm_content=289683670&utm_source=hs_email

Specifically for Backyard Birders

Backyard birders have a tremendous advantage over those of us who must go to other areas because you can see your birds every day; you know who comes, under what circumstances, how they behave, and how they interact with other birds. You actually accumulate a history of your birds - and, in many cases, one bird or one family. You can truly understand how that family lives and survives. If you have feeders, you can see who comes, how they behave, the species dominance, and so on. In truth, you are highly privileged to be a participant in the lives of particular birds. Imagine how it is for Dave Douglass at Pine Mountain Lake for whom "Woody" shown here is a regular in his backyard, almost a friend - who among us can claim to have a Pileated Woodpecker as a "friend"? Such is the blessing of having a backyard - I have to visit Big Trees SP and hope!

Well, you have an opportunity to integrate your asset into the world of "citizen science" through the Cornell Labs and Audubon's Great Backyard Bird County (GBBC). In this program, as with the Christmas Bird Counts, you provide a snapshot at a particular moment in time that will be added to others' sightings in your locality. In this way, we understand what birds are doing, the trends, that are used to define conservation programs for at-risk birds. You are important because there are simply not enough professional birders to provide adequate data; without amateurs the data is not available, so your observations and input are scientifically critical.



How do you participate?

- Step 1: Decide where you will watch birds - somewhere in your backyard.
- Step 2: Watch birds for 15 minutes or more, at least once over the four days, February 16–19, 2024.
- Step 3: Identify all the birds you see or hear within your planned time/location.
- Step 4: Upload your results (so that they become part of the scientific database).

How do you upload your data?

If you are a beginning bird admirer and new to bird identification, try using the Merlin Bird ID app to tell us what birds you are seeing or hearing at: <https://merlin.allaboutbirds.org/>

If you have participated in the count before and want to record numbers of birds, try the eBird Mobile app (<https://www.birdcount.org/ebird-mobile-app/>) or enter your bird list on the eBird website (desktop/laptop) <https://www.birdcount.org/ebird-on-computer/>

Register to participate in the GBBC at:

<https://dl.allaboutbirds.org/2024gbbcwebinar?emci=1d9c4990-7bbc-ee11-b660-002248223197&emdi=3403006e-8abc-ee11-b660-002248223197&ceid=321020>

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Indigeny Field Trip Report - January 28

What a beautiful day - I had purposely moved the start time to 9:00 to avoid a chilly start as we had in November. The 12 of us were soon stripping off our outer layers to accommodate the rising temperatures! 33 species were observed. Highlights included a view of a Bald Eagle across the lake, a Lincoln's Sparrow, a Red-shouldered Hawk and 3 Red-tailed Hawks. Two of the Red-tails were spiraling down in an incredible courtship display. Join me February 25th, back at our regular 8:00 am start time. Who knows what we will see!

eBird checklist at: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S160065729>

Kit DeGear



The Group - photo by Matt Brennan

Annual Eagle Count on New Melones Reservoir, January 11

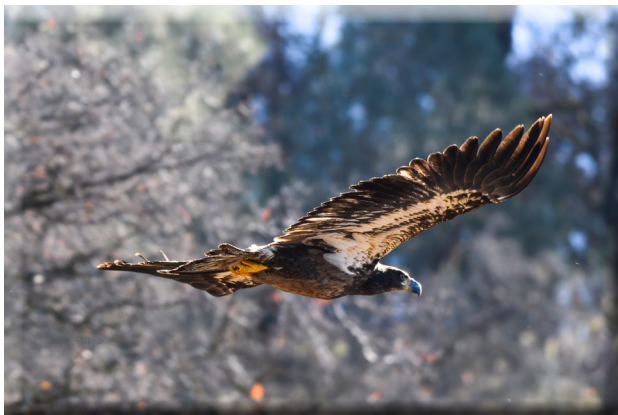
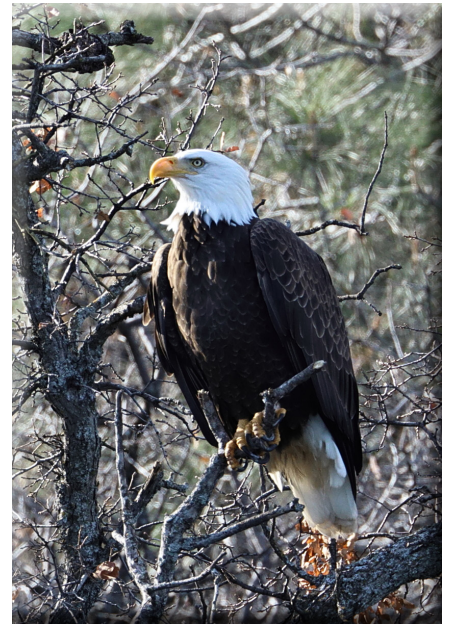
Every year Pat Sanders, Ranger at New Melones, organizes the annual Eagle Count in January, and then the Osprey Count in June, and several CSAS activists always participate in the count. So it was that on a cool but bright day a couple of weeks ago we assembled - only to have one boat out-of-action! Pat quickly changed plans and off we went - having already seen two Bald Eagles. It started and continued in the same manner with frequent eagle and other raptor viewings. That first morning we saw 18 Bald Eagles alone, several being immatures, and in total over two days the count was 38 - twice that of 2023. Out of the 38, 10 were immatures and it was interesting to note the variation in plumage colors and patterns. As you know, in their first five years, Baldies don't look exactly elegant and handsome - not a recipe for finding a mate, so those first years are characterized by celibacy!

The also count included 2 Peregrine Falcons, 2 Merlins and several Red-tailed Hawks and Kestrels - a sort of raptor-fest. But we saw many others too, including the usual Western Grebes, a few Great Blue Herons, a Kingfisher a Rock Wren or two and so on, but less Common Mergansers than I've seen before - perhaps because of the water level at the reservoir was very high.

Barry Boulton



*Bald Eagle - Imm. and Adult,
and Belted Kingfisher
by
Ranger Pat Sanders,
Bureau of Reclamation*



Middle left - Coots always minimize flying time, so here they're escaping by simply skipping across the water in their usual way, barely becoming airborne for just a few seconds.

Middle right - a Red-tailed Hawk unusually hovering for a moment.

Lower left - an immature Bald Eagle in flight silhouetted against the sunlight.

Photos by Elissa Wall

Get to Know the Bushtit

Editor's note: I subscribe to Tucson Audubon's eblast and enjoyed this article on one of my favorite little birds in the latest edition, and thought that you would enjoy it. The writer is Matt Griffiths, Communications Coordinator for Tucson Audubon and I thank him for permission to reprint it here. View their website at: <https://tucsonaudubon.org/>

Time and again it's been found, even the tiniest of birds can have big stories. North America's smallest songbird, the Bushtit, is no exception. This little grayish-brown fluff of activity is a super-social, big nest builder that lives in most of the West and highlands of Mexico and Central America. It's the only New World representative of the family of long-tailed tits (Aegithalidae), and it can be found in the oak/pine habitat of Southeast Arizona. Despite being tiny, the birds are usually easy to find if present because they live in flocks of up to 40 birds. Bushtits are cooperative breeders and a flock can have simultaneous active nests in their territory, each attended to by the pair and a number of other individuals. Although these nest helpers, or supernumeraries, can be male or female, juvenile or adult, the majority are adult males—a rare occurrence in cooperatively nesting birds—with no mate or a failed nest. The development of this social system could have arisen from the behavior of a flock huddling together to keep warm on cold nights. Indeed, nest helpers are rare on the warmer coast of California, while an average of 37% of nests in the Chiricahua Mountains have supernumeraries. For a tiny bird, the Bushtit builds a big nest, and for good reason. The pair constructs an elaborate and tall, gourd-shaped nest with a side-facing hooded entrance—large enough to fit the pair, all the helpers, and the nestlings every night!



Photo by Barry Boulton

While the Bushtit could be considered a drab bird, even its physical appearance has a couple of twists. Females can be distinguished by their light irises, and for many years, the Bushtit was separated into two distinct species because some birds have black masks. It's now known that having these “black ears” is a polymorphic trait more common in southern populations and absent in the north. When walking the woods of Southeast Arizona, listen for the quiet but consistent high-pitched whistle-squeaks of the Bushtit.

Sources: Birdsoftheworld.org, Allaboutbirds.org, eBird.org, and personal observations.

Matt Griffiths, Communications Coordinator mgriffiths@tucsonaudubon.org

See more bird profiles by Matt at: <https://tucsonaudubon.org/meet-your-birds/>

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 Tom Parrington (209)928-3835

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/

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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

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