

Central Sierra Audubon Society

Sierra Squawker



www.centralsierraaudubon.org

April - 2024

PUBLIC PROGRAM

This presentation will be via Zoom (link below) and showing in the Sonora library

Wednesday, April 17, at 7pm

Sierra Birds and their Habitat Adaptations

Presented by Rich Cimino

At our last month's presentation (March 20) retired geology professor Jeff Tolhurst showed and discussed the remarkable geologic history of America's west coast that resulted in the Sierra Nevada uplift (basically "subduction and accretion") that then produced the remarkable variety of habitats in our chapter covering Tuolumne and Calaveras Counties.

That variety of habitats of course provided often major challenges in that many are tough and unforgiving; imagine for instance the American Dipper that lives mostly at higher elevations foraging exclusively in often ice-cold fast-running waters. That took some serious adaptations but the Dipper's ultimate advantage is that it has no food competition from any other bird in those conditions. That's the pro and con - the existential challenge versus reduced competition. Fortunately, geologic processes and timescales allow time for species to evolve and adapt.

Rich will address this fascinating topic of which and how bird species adapted to those habitats, each one adapting in genetics and morphology to produce stable species for several million years even while the planet has gone through hot and cold periods requiring a lot of behavioral adaptations, some of which in turn produced genetic adaptations such as our lactose tolerance.

Rich is well known to CSAS, having delivered several previous presentations. He has been birding in California for 55 years, and is a field guide for Yellowbilled Tours, which offers annual birding tours to Nome and Barrow Alaska, and Belize and Guatemala, as well as throughout California, Arizona and New Mexico and sometimes Wisconsin or Texas. Indeed, as I write this, he is leading a small group birding tour in Guatemala.



Zoom url: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89307683859>

APRIL 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://centralsierraudubon.org/field-trips/>



April 10 (Wednesday) - Wards Ferry Road

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

April 16 (Tuesday) - Yolo Bypass/

Join me for a day of adventure in the valley. We will be visiting the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area in the morning. It is about a 2 1/2 hour drive. There will be waterfowl to observe and in the past a good chance of seeing the White-tailed Kite and other raptors. Next we will visit the California Raptor Center less than 20 minutes away. This is run by the U.C. Davis School of Veterinary Medicine. While they take in injured raptors to rehabilitate and release, there are many resident raptors to view that are not releasable. So, if we didn't get a viewing of a White-tailed Kite at the Bypass Area we will see one here along with a Golden Eagle, Peregrine and Prairie Falcon and a Swainson's Hawk to name a few.

Pack a lunch and meet me at the Barrow's parking lot to carpool at 8:00 am. We will make another stop at the Shell Station in Copperopolis by 8:45 am to pick up anyone traveling from Calaveras County. Please RSVP to me for this excursion and let me know if you can drive or would need a ride - call or text #925-822-5215 or email kdegear@gmail.com

Trip leader Kit DeGear

April 20 (Saturday) - String of Pearls, Oakdale

We will start the trip at the Oakdale Recreation Area on the Stanislaus River. On our last visit in April of 2023, it seemed that a 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! Of the 42 species observed, a pleasant surprise was the abundance of Lewis's Woodpeckers - will this year be as good?

Met 8:00am 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 9:00am

Trip leader Paolo Maffei

April 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

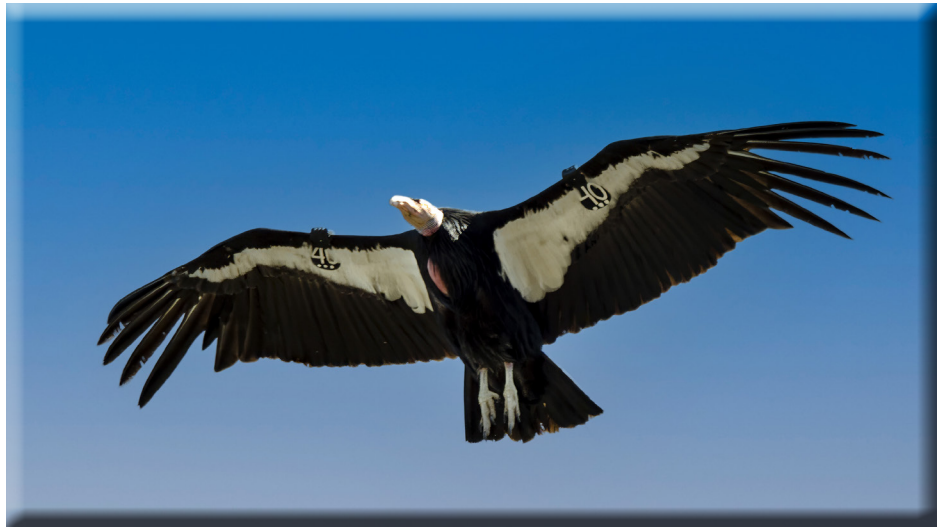
CONSERVATION CORNER

Conservationists Torn Apart

A Look Back at the beginnings of the California Condor Recovery Plan

On April 19, 1987, AC-9 the last remaining wild California Condor (CACO) was removed from the wild and taken to the San Diego Zoo. A bitter twenty-year debate on how to best prevent the CACO from going extinct had come to an end. The hands-on approach (vs. the hands-off approach) won, but were they right? No one knew the answer, it had never been tried.

The hands-off faction's argument went like this: 1) protect habitat and individual birds, 2) CACO couldn't tolerate any human disturbance, 3) CACO would not survive in zoos or would lead a compromised life, 4) CACO raised in captivity would not have the skills to survive in the wild when released. All solid arguments. The hands-on faction argued for intervention: 1) CACO numbers were dwindling rapidly to avoid extinction, 2) capture and radiotelemetry could determine critical habitat, foraging requirements and mortality factors, 3) captive breeding could possibly increase numbers of CACO faster than in the wild.



Condors at Pinnacles by Barry Boulton

With all of the birds now in captivity, there was no turning back, either drive the program to success or the California Condor would go extinct. Every challenge was faced head on; retrieving and incubating eggs to promote double clutching, maximizing the genetic diversity of the remaining population to prevent inbreeding, providing the conditions so CACO would breed in captivity, raising young to not imprint with humans, teaching mature birds to be parents, teaching juvenile birds how to survive in the wild, (including avoiding power poles), providing the best possible release sites (currently there are eight sites), reducing the amount of lead ammunition in the environment to name a few of the challenges.

Today the California Condor population sits at 560 birds with 345 in the wild. Everyone who loves birds should be in awe of the tireless effort, dedication, and determination by the countless number of researchers, veterinarians, and volunteers who brought the California Condor back from the brink of extinction.

Science can be ugly sometimes when trying desperately to get it right, and as you will see below, the Condor Recovery Program was fraught with many setbacks for every gain. But the California Condor population to date is very encouraging. If you get the privilege to see a California Condor in the wild, you should be very thankful for all of the scientists who made it possible.

Contributed by Bruce McClenahan, Conservation Chair

Condor Population 1980-2022



Captive Population

Captive breeding of condors occurs at Los Angeles Zoo, Oregon Zoo, San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance, and World Center Birds of Prey in the U.S. and Chapultepec Zoo in Mexico City.



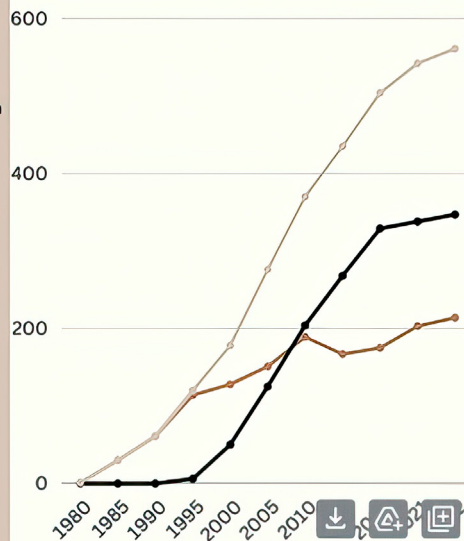
Wild Population

The wild population includes the free-flying birds in Arizona, California (Central, Southern and Northern), Utah, and Baja, California Mexico.



Total Population

The total condor population is the combination of the wild and captive populations.



Learn more:

"Condors: In Canyon Country" by Sophie Osborn

<https://wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Birds/California-Condor>

California Condor Recovery Timeline

1973 – The CACO Recovery Team was formed

1975 – Fewer than 60 CACO in wild. First ever Endangered Species Recovery Plan written, for CACO

1978 - CACO captive Breeding Plan supported by National Audubon & others

1980 (June) – CACO chick died from stress upon removal attempt from a nest for the captive breeding program

1980 (June) - Local Audubon & Sierra Club push to suspend all interventions, to allow CACO to die in dignity.

1980 (June) – USFWS permits withdrawn for captive breeding program. Conservation efforts stopped.

1982 – Photo census of CACO determines only 21 CACO exist in the wild.

1982 (April) – Biologists confirm CACO can lay a second and even third egg (double / triple clutching).

1982 – USFWS reinstate captive breeding permit and allow for egg removal from nests.

1984 (Winter) - Six of the remaining CACO presumed dead, only nine remain in the wild.

1985 – National Audubon sues USFWS to stop captive breeding program

1985 (Summer) – USFWS issues permit to capture three of the nine remaining wild CACO.

1985 (Summer) – Captured CACO (AC-3) determined to have dangerously high levels of lead in blood

1986 - AC-3 dies from lead poisoning

1986 – Audubon loses lawsuit on appeal. USFWS issues permit to bring in all remaining wild CACO

1987 (April) – Last remaining CACO (AC-9 a male) captured and removed from the wild

1987 (April) - CACO population stands at 27, split between Los Angeles and San Diego Zoos.

1988 – Seven Andean Condors released in California to study reintroduction techniques.

1991 – Six Andean Condors recaptured (one died) and returned to native Columbia and Venezuela

1992 (January) – First two CACO raised in captivity released into the wild

1992 (October) – CACO found dead near Pyramid Lake having ingested ethylene glycol.

1992 (December) – Six additional CACO released into the wild. CACO population 63

1996 – The World Center for Birds of Prey, the third captive breeding site raises first chick

1996 (December) – First six CACO released at Vermillion Cliffs, AZ

2002 - First three CACO released in Baja, Mexico

2002 (May) – Twenty-two-year-old AC-9 returned to the wild after producing 16 offspring in captivity.

2004 – The Oregon Zoo, the fourth captive breeding site raises first chick

2004 (April) – AC-9 and his new mate hatch a chick in a cave, in the wild.

2019 (July) - Lead ammunition banned when taking any wildlife with a firearm anywhere in California.

2022 (May) – First two CACO released at Redwood National Park release site

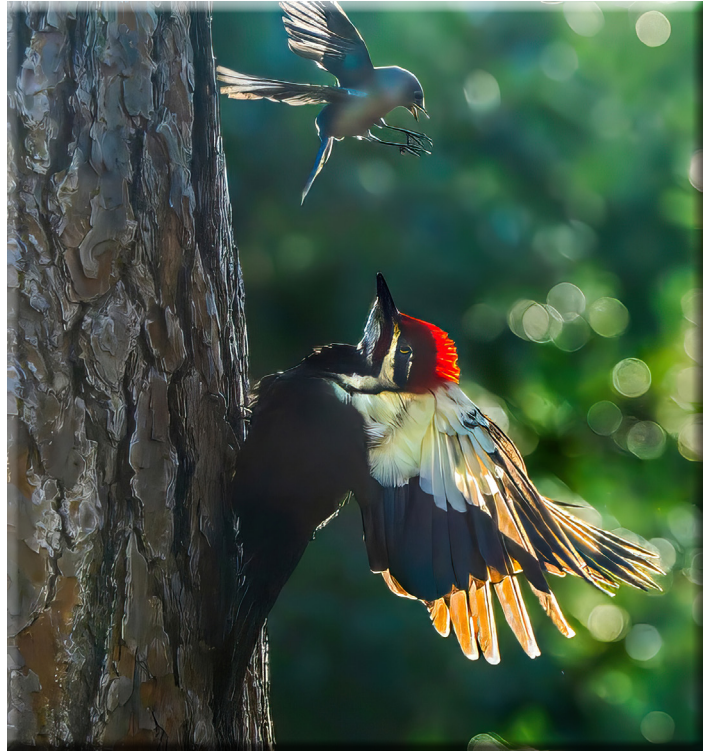
2023 (September) – Appeals court rules the U.S. Forest Service can't ban Arizona wildlife hunters from using lead ammunition. Lead poisoning, the leading cause of Condor fatalities remains.

Woody gets into Trouble

by Dave Douglass

I recently heard Woody's LOUD call out back and stepped out onto the porch to see what I could get; I was just in time to see Woody fly from the suet block tree to a nearby tree that has a bird box that is currently occupied by a pair of Western Bluebirds. Woody worked his way down to the bird box and firmly pecked on it, like an insistent door knock, causing one of the bluebirds to very energetically start strafing Woody, who was within a couple of feet from the box. It caused him to do some defensive moves and to raise his red crest in alarm.

All of this was backlit by the last moments of the sun setting behind him making for some dramatically lit, unusual positions which I was happy to get and share here. I'm assuming that it wasn't a social call from Woody and that he utilized the box for some girlfriend getting reason, or perhaps a territorial ownership announcement. Whatever his reason was, the bluebird had to explain to him that he had erred.



Dave Douglass lives at Pine Mountain Lake where he has a backyard alive with birds that he captures with his camera and long zoom lens. One of his frequent visitors is this beautiful Pileated Woodpecker, affectionately known as Woody.



Calaveras County Sightings Update

Last month I told you that the male Osprey at the Iron Horse campground in New Melones was sitting rather disconsolately on his badly-depleted nest which will need a lot of rebuilding to get it up to standard, but instead of getting on with the job, he was apparently waiting for his mate. Well she's arrived, and what a difference she's made - what a surprise! They were copulating as I arrived, the nest is now impressive, and he looks alive - indeed he was doing a lot of preening after copulating!



The pair (female on nest) with the very substantial nest on March 11.



Sad little nest with solo male on Feb. 28

I also mentioned the breeding pair of Bald Eagles overlooking the Stanislaus River just past the road bridge at the bottom. This pair has a checkered history, sort of much ado about nothing so I wait with scepticism to see if they're successful this year. They (presumably the same pair) have had a nest there for about four years and may have produced one offspring in that time, but mostly unsuccessful; last year they were on and off the nest, but nothing came of it. This year they appear to be serious and as of March 14, are still incubating eggs. I spent most of that day watching them (in the world of media they would call it a "slow news day") with the female on the nest until getting close to mid-day when the male arrived to take over the nest. She disappeared



The male takes over the incubation role for a while

towards the lake presumably to find her first meal of the day, but surely not a quick take-out because three hours later she still hadn't reappeared. The male still sat in the nest with more patience than I, so I left him to it...

You know, when I look at that nest tree, I'm struck with how vulnerable it seems - having heard the winds howling outside my house last night, the deck chairs rearranged, and experiencing the very gusty wind in the canyon yesterday, I can't imagine raising a family in that tree! Now, it is a live tree and not a snag, but that angle of repose...



View from the bridge of the very open nest. Both birds (female here) sit very low in the nest with just the tops of their white heads visible as you see here.

It reminds me that in my years with CSAS, I've seen several Osprey snags fall over, giving each pair the big job the next year of finding a suitable nest tree when they migrate here to breed. Perhaps the best-known Osprey nest loss was the very popular one along Parrotts Ferry Road on the Tuolumne side of the bridge; its snag collapsed in the winter of 2010. Indeed, this Bald Eagle pair that I'm currently watching are probably the ones who nested in a snag further up Camp 9 Road, produced a family of three and then lost the snag to a storm over the winter about five years back. Unlike us, they don't have FEMA at hand so they just have to find a new home base by themselves.

Barry Boulton

Running CSAS - ELECTIONS!

CSAS Board Elections - Are You Ready?

Like every other NGO, we have a Board of Officers dedicated to running CSAS, so every year we elect the officers for the next year. Mostly we tend to be continuing members, but occasionally somebody decides to join the Board – and, of course, we welcome them with open arms since new ideas and energy are refreshing and inspiring. So I'd like to talk a little here about why you might think about joining us as an officer. In doing so, I'll follow my experience that it is a personal opportunity as well as a responsibility to join the Board of probably almost any volunteer organization - but right now I'm talking about our need for new members on the CSAS Board.

I think that there are two good reasons why people don't offer to take on the role of officers in an organization that they basically support – I mean, most of the community are not bird enthusiasts so I wouldn't expect them to join our Board, but birders whether serious or casual are likely candidates in principal. The first reason is the logical one that we live in a very active society – everybody has, in a sense, too much to do, particularly the younger family people who work full-time and have children to care for (we have no young activists, and all our officers are currently retired). I can well understand that, although I would suggest that being a community activist and involving one's children might be good training for them as future voting citizens because they'll begin to see how community works.

However, I want to address my second reason (it reflects my own experience) which is that most people probably don't think too much about the logistics of running an organization in which they're members. It's not that they don't care, but that they don't know how thin the people resource base for any volunteer organization is. I know that I didn't, so I enjoyed CSAS activities, gave a couple of presentations and then went home – but let me you a little story that opened my eyes.

I attended an annual CSAS potluck/elections event one day many years ago where I had no thought of taking on any active role in running CSAS. As a paid-up member I enjoyed the group which had a Board of officers running it smoothly - and they didn't need me as I assumed, so I could sit back and enjoy. But then, at election time, one man already on the Board reluctantly said he'd continue on the Board for another year due to lack of applicants for his position. But, it was sadly obvious that he was in the not-so-early stages of dementia. Truthfully, it shocked me; how could we let this happen? He needed support, not more work, not more responsibility. I felt compelled to speak to the then-President and said that I'd be willing to replace him right now because I enjoyed participating in the chapter's activities to which this man had made enormous contributions; now it was my turn to take on some of the burdens and leave him in peace.

Burdens? Yes, being an officer takes time and energy, but I regard the personal opportunities to be so much more valuable than any time that I could save by not being an officer. As you may know, I was President for 7 years, am still Newsletter Editor after 10 years, and have been running the website for about 5 years; all of these activities have opened doors to so many good and interesting people and activities, and have taught me so much. I obviously highly recommend doing a stint on our Board and I look forward to working and cooperating with you on behalf of the community and of birds themselves if it is your choice to volunteer with us.

We have a Nominating Committee that is looking for applicants for the Board, and will put them forward for election at our annual elections meeting on June 29th. Details of that event will be in the June Squawker. If you are interested, or know someone who might be, or are interested in the nomination process, please contact any of the following committee members: Gail Witzlsteiner, Chair, at (209)586-4025, Ralph Retherford (209)770-6124, or Paolo Maffei (209)532-8426.

Barry Boulton rbarryboulton@gmail.com

Opportunity Knocks - Squawker Newsletter Editor Opening

You might well ask, perhaps a little skeptically, "is this really an opportunity - or a job that just needs to be filled?" The answer is simple - yes and yes! The newsletter is our primary way to communicate with our members to let them know what we're offering so they can select which they wish to enjoy - so we need to publish one every month (except July and August when we have no organized activities).

That's the clear "need" portion, so what about the opportunity? Perhaps the best way to speak to that question is to talk about why I took over as Editor in 2013 (yes, this is my 10th year!), and what it meant to me. I have a philosophy about taking on roles for non-profits which is, simply put, that I'll only take on roles that will fulfill me in some way rather than as a duty or obligation to the organization. That is, any role that I take must be a win-win situation for me and the organization. It's the only way to keep the passion and the creativity alive, so I advocate that to all volunteers - including any of you interested in this role.

When the opportunity to take over this role occurred in 2013, I didn't have to think deeply about it; I like writing, would like to do more - and needed an audience - so I signed up (no competition of course - writing seems largely to be a skill of the past!) The nice thing about being an editor is that you don't have to do everything because other members contribute too; that gives the editor a lot of flexibility in deciding when and what to write - or not. If you're a writer, then write you must, but as a volunteer editor, you're in control. And, the delightful aspect for the editor of the Squawker is that apart from covering the chapter's formal events and so on, the scope was undefined and unlimited - a dream come true. I conceptualized it as being more visual, more photo-oriented, not just because I do a lot of photography, but I wanted to affirm and encourage other photographers, as well as making it a more interesting and attractive publication. I also wanted it to have a wider and richer variety of articles and topics than most volunteer-driven Audubon chapter newsletters publish.

Anyway, this is not meant to be about me, but I wanted to give you some insight into the opportunity this opening presents, and why you might want to consider taking it on. So if you're interested, please let me know, probably best by emailing me at rbarryboulton@gmail.com to start with and we can go from there. Perhaps I should add that there's no rush because I'm not laying down my pen so to speak, but preparing the way.

Barry Boulton

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/

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
Bruce McClenahan, Conservation	(209)323-0739

CSAS Committee Chairs

Bird Box Trail - Gail Witzlsteiner	(209)586-4025
Bird Box Sales - OPEN	
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