

Central Sierra Audubon Society

# Sierra Squawker



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

November - 2024

## PUBLIC PROGRAM

This presentation will be on Zoom **and** viewable in the library, so join us there if you can - refreshments provided.

Wednesday, November 20, at 7:00pm

## "The Wow of Bird Colors"

Presented by David Lukas

In part two of a four-part series of talks on bird biology, naturalist David Lukas will introduce us to the marvelous world of bird colors and patterns. Do you know how many types of colors there are on birds, and how these colors are produced? Did you know that humans and birds see colors in different ways and that birds use colors and patterns in a wide range of ecological and behavioral contexts? This will be a fun and "colorful" talk that leaves you never seeing birds the same way again.

David Lukas is well-known naturalist and author who has studied and written extensively about the natural history and birds of the Sierra Nevada. He has written seven books, including a field guide companion called Sierra Nevada Birds. He has also led thousands of natural history tours, classes, workshops, and presentations. David's most recent project is producing a weekly nature newsletter at [www.lukasguides.com](http://www.lukasguides.com)



### **Zoom url:**

<https://us05web.zoom.us/j/86535914213?pwd=6zX5cqysaTBNJjkjes0scYQkDaoyh7.1>

**Note:** David's excellent presentation at our October meeting entitled "Under the Surface with Bird Bones and Skeletons" is available for viewing at: <https://youtu.be/tCNCMhnJIFE>

**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/>**



## NOVEMBER 2024 FIELD TRIPS

### **November 9 (Saturday)- Knights Ferry**

Meet me at the Visitor Center for a half mile walk out the river trail. This area is usually good for Rock Wren, Canyon Wren and Say's Phoebe. Unfortunately, the covered bridge is closed to foot traffic. We will walk back down to where we started to cross the car road bridge to bird the other side of the river. However, This will be a great opportunity to view the migrating salmon! On this side I'm hoping for some Cedar Waxwings. Our walk will end here just in time for you to enjoy the Salmon Festival which begins at 10:00 am.

**Trip leader - Kit DeGear - Call/text/email if you have any questions. #925-822-5215 or [kdegear@gmail.com](mailto:kdegear@gmail.com)**

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### **November 14 (Thursday) - Camanche River Walk to Fish Hatchery/Lodi Sandhill Cranes**

CASAS will travel to the Camanche Dam and fish hatchery and then to Lodi, CA on Thursday, November 14. We will see numerous birds (and fish!) on the Mokelumne River Day Use area and river walk to the dam/ fish hatchery and then on to Lodi to see the Sandhill cranes.

We will then drive to the Mokelumne River day use area. From there we can take a walk along the Mokelumne River up to the Comanche Dam and Fish Hatchery. The water spilling from the dam should be crowded with migrating salmon. Walking along the river we may see: Black-crowned Night Herons, Great Blue Herons, egrets, osprey, one or two different woodpecker species, Mergansers, vultures, hawks, and maybe eagles looking for lunch in the migrating salmon. The raptors hanging in the trees above and along the river are surprisingly close. The walk at the Mokelumne River/ fish hatchery area will last a total of about two hours and should provide some good photo opportunities. There are picnic tables and portable toilets, and we can eat our lunch at the river. The hatchery offers a self-guided tour, out of doors, with signage explaining the process of migrating salmon, collecting and hatching the fish eggs (roe), and growing and releasing the fingerling salmon.

When we have finished at the Day Use Area, we will drive west to Lodi to see the Sandhill Cranes (about 26 miles) to Woodbridge Road. The Sandhill Cranes will be on both sides of the road, in fields and flooded fields. The time should be around 2:00 2:30 pm and there are a couple of places to park the car to watch the Fly-in starting at 4:30 pm. It will be dark by 5:30. Participants have the option to stay to watch the fly-in at dusk and everyone is free to leave as they need to. From Lodi, the drive back to Sonora is about 90 minutes.

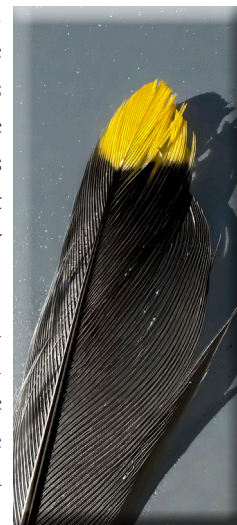
We will meet in Sonora at Barrow's (formerly Perkos) at 8:00 am and carpool/ car caravan to the Camanche Dam, an approximate 70 - 80-minute drive. Driving instructions will be provided for the day's activities. We will stop briefly in Copperopolis to pick up any folks coming from Calaveras. We will also stop at Valley Springs to pick up any additional folks if needed. Bring lunch, snacks and water, hand sanitizer, binoculars and a birding guide if you have one. This time of year, a hat and sunscreen are also recommended.

**Trip leader is Jean Dakota** and let her know you are coming: (209)591-9952; [jdakota002@comcast.net](mailto:jdakota002@comcast.net) Once you confirm that you will attend, you will be sent the driving instructions and meet-up times at Copperopolis and Valley Springs.

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## November 24 (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. On our October 27 visit, we had a nice county representation as well as birds - there were two of us from Tuolumne County, two from Calaveras and one from Alpine. We saw a total of 31 bird species. It was a beautiful fall morning and we all enjoyed the autumn colors as well as our feathered friends. We, also, enjoyed speculating about who the yellow tipped feather that Jan found belonged to - Cedar Waxwings? Yellow-rumped Warbler? Highlights included a Downy Woodpecker, a pair of Bewick's Wrens and a great little flock of, yep, Cedar Waxwings!



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)

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## October Visit Report

### Thursday, October 24 - Merced NWR

The six of us were definitely outnumbered by the mosquitoes. A little bug spray did help. Bird numbers were down as expected for this time of year. We still got to see many of our favorites, Sandhill Cranes which were often quite close to the road, White-faced Ibis, Black-necked Stilts, Long-billed Dowitchers and the Loggerhead Shrike. No Vermillion Flycatcher or Wilson's Snipe this trip. A unique highlight was observing all 3 egrets together, Great Egret, Snowy Egret and the Western Cattle Egret which made making comparisons a treat. We saw a total of 32 species. Looking forward to returning in January!

View this checklist online at <https://ebird.org/checklist/S200338237>

**Kit DeGear - Trip Leader**

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## News Release from the California Department of Fish & Wildlife

### Western Burrowing Owl Listing in California

The California Fish and Game Commission (Commission) acted on a variety of issues affecting California's natural resources at its Oct. 9-10 meeting in Sacramento. The public was also able to participate via webinar and by phone.

The Commission unanimously approved naming the Western Burrowing Owl (*Athene cucularia hypugaea*) as a candidate for potential listing as a protected species under the California Endangered Species Act. Threats facing burrowing owls in California are direct mortality and permanent habitat loss caused by urbanization and reduction or elimination of their primary burrow excavators — ground squirrels — from grazing and agricultural lands. The Department will undertake a one-year review of the species' status before the Commission is expected to make a final decision on listing. As a candidate for potential listing, the species is temporarily afforded the same protections as a state-listed endangered or threatened species.

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# Big Trees State Park Observations

Story and photos by Alan Beymer

## ANTICIPATING THE DIPPER

Striving for a glimpse of the American Dipper might just be the ultimate shell game. At the end of the day the Dipper wins more than you do but look on the bright side, you had hours of fun. Nevertheless, there's the Dipper, bobbing on the surface of the Stanislaus River behaving like a small duck, then with a modest splash, it disappears and you ask yourself, "where is that bird?"

Dippers dive underwater regularly with their aquatic maneuvers. According to David Lukas, Dipper dives can last up to 15 seconds. They do this by having, "...low metabolic rates, added oxygen-carrying capacity in their blood cells, and twice as many feathers as similar-sized songbirds."

Initially you might embrace John Muir's perspective. In 1894 Muir wrote: "If disturbed while dipping about in the margin shallows, he either sets off with a rapid whirl to some other feeding ground up or down the stream, or alights on some half-submerged rock or snag...and immediately begins to nod and curtsy ...."



Oh, cool, you think, this will be endlessly entertaining. And it is. But then it vanishes, much to your dismay and delight. The best viewing spot at the Big Trees Stanislaus River requires crossing the Smith Parkway Bridge, parking on the Tuolumne County side of the river, and taking the stairs down to the river's edge. Once there, several spots offer comfortable views of the Dipper territory.





## [Interesting Night Call in Murphys](#)

### **Editor's introduction:**

Sometimes, particularly at nighttime, you hear a call that's so different from anything in your experience that you just can't recognize it. You're sure that it's a bird, but even the Merlin app. doesn't recognize it - so what next? That was the situation for Jan Olson in Murphys for a few dark nights around the last new moon (Oct. 12) when she recorded this call:

<https://centralsierraaudubon.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Night-bird-call-in-Murphys.wav>

Jan sent it to me, but neither I nor Merlin had any ideas on its owner, so I sent it to one of our local enthusiasts, John Harris of Stanislaus Audubon, who thought it was an owl but sent it on to one of his contacts for confirmation. This was John's response:

I contacted my friend Dave Quady, who is an owl enthusiast (to say the least). He has studied owls for many years and co-authored a book on birds of Northern California with Jon Dunn and Kimball Garrett, and here is what Dave said:

John, I'm pretty sure that it's a Western Screech-Owl (probably male) giving an 'aggravation' call. I've heard this at least a dozen times in the past: a series of short trills separated by a few seconds of silence. In all (I believe ...) of my past experiences the owl FINALLY uttered a long trill, as on this file at about the 15 second mark. In all my past experiences, the utterances have been on about the same pitch, as here. I still recall wondering what it was the first time I heard it, not sure at all what the bird was until it uttered a long trill. More than once, the owl also, eventually, rendered a couple of prototypical male 'bouncing ball' songs.



*Western Screech-Owl from Cornell*

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## [Leave the Leaves! Leaves are Habitat, not Trash](#)

One of the most valuable things you can do to support pollinators and other invertebrates is to provide them with the shelter they need to survive the winter. Thankfully, that's pretty easy; all you need to do is do less yard work.

Leaves, brush piles, fallen logs, plant stems, and flower heads might not be growing anymore, but they aren't trash — they are natural homes for wildlife! A layer of leaves is vital insulation from the cold for the many animals that hide within (or in the soil beneath), like quite a few butterflies. Others, like many native bees, nest within stems, flower heads, or pieces of wood. Throwing out all of your leaves and other plant material isn't just taking away options for shelter; there's a good chance you're tossing out many animals that have already settled in!

That's why this year and every year, we are making the case for leaving the leaves. That's not to say you can't do any tidying up. We have tips for thoughtful autumn cleanup that still leaves space for nature. You'll also meet just a few of the many animals you'll be saving.

Read on at: <https://xerces.org/blog/leave-the-leaves>



*Photo courtesy of Xerces*

**Note from your editor** – as you may know, the Xerces Society is the premier organization devoted to invertebrate conservation which is of great interest to us because insects comprise a major part of many bird diets, especially for their fast-growing young. I thought this article well worth passing on.

# CONSERVATION CORNER

## Birdcast – Radar Ornithology

Imagine a conservation tool so powerful it could mitigate hazards to migrating birds and prevent bird deaths days in advance. Such a tool exists in the form of Birdcast, a website that uses radar data and migration science to provide tools for birdwatchers to monitor and predict bird migrations.

Birds showing up on radar is nothing new, since the mid 1940's when radar first came into use, mysterious clouds appearing on radar had to be identified due to their possible military implications. In short order, the clouds were determined to be flocks of migrating birds, both day and night. The clouds were not a threat, so the data went unused for decades.

While many years in the making, in 2018 Birdcast began to reach its full potential. With the use of twenty years of Doppler Radar data, large data storage centers and the advent of Artificial Intelligence (machine learning) bird migration forecasts came into being. The Birdcast Migration Dashboard (see below) provides summaries of radar-based measurements of nocturnal bird migration, including estimates of the total number of birds migrating, their directions, speeds, and altitudes.

While not bird specific, (that's where your eBird data comes in) the forecasts can help you know when the best time might be to catch your favorite migrating bird. More importantly, the forecasts can be used to determine when city lights might be turned down or when is the best time to spray pesticides or turn off windmills. Bird migrations are not uniform streams, but rather peaks and valleys and knowing this could let city managers notify property owners of big office buildings to turn down the lights.

**Check out the Birdcast Migration Dashboard for your county:**

<https://birdcast.info/migration-tools/migration-dashboard/>

**Learn More:**

<https://www.allaboutbirds.org/news/bright-lights-and-big-data-radar-ornithology-and-the-rise-of-birdcast/>

**Bruce McClenahan, Conservation Chair**

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

**Board Meetings:** Please call Gail Witzlsteiner (209)586-4025

### 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

Gail Witzlsteiner, President	(209)586-4025
Tom Parrington, Past-President	(209)928-3835
Ralph Retherford, VP Programs	(209)770-6124
Jean Dakota, Secretary	(209)591-9952
Siobhan Hill, Treasurer	(209) 743-2863
Kit DeGear, Field Trips	(925)822-5215
Jan Jorn-Baird, Publicity	(209)532-1106
Bruce McClenahan, VP Conservation	(209)323-0739

### CSAS Committee Chairs

Education & Scholarship - OPEN	
Website - Barry Boulton	(209)596-0612
Newsletter Editor - Barry Boulton	(209)596-0612
Membership - Bruce McClenahan	(209)323-0739
YSS delegate - Walt Kruse	(707)548-1829
Bird Box Trail - Gail Witzlsteiner	(209)586-4025
Bird Box Sales - OPEN	