Central Sierra Audubon Society

Sierra Squawker

www.centralsierraaudubon.org

December - 2024

You all know of the importance of the annual CBCs as we call them. As you also know, a successful count requires "eyes on the ground" - people. And as another "you know", we're always in need of more people.

Since you already knew all of that, I'm tempted to stop right now and just give you the barebones data - the dates and contacts. But, you know, when you have a captive audience, the compulsion to continue is irresistible - and I rarely resist. So, here goes - with just a little bit of heresy!

Come and join a CBC for yourself as well as for the birds - maybe more. Come just to be outside with nature; look at the plants that are in their dormant season; see which ones have or have not changed color and stopped photosynthesizing; see the geometrical patterns in their leaves and stalks; look at a tree and wonder about how they don't get burst pipes when it's freezing, after all, they need water just like us to survive but they don't burst. Just be with nature, look at it, and wonder how. Sure, you'll miss some birds but, as Shakespeare's Hamlet said "There are more things in Heaven and Earth....." So, come, join a CBC for you. Make it a new CBC experience.

Sonora CBC on Saturday, December 14

Contact: Kit DeGear at (925)-822-5215 or kdegear@gmail.com

Angels Camp CBC on Saturday, December 21

Bruce McClenahan at (209)323-0739 or bgmcclenahan@gmail.com

Calaveras CBC on Saturday, December 28

Contacts: Keith and Sandra Maurer at kandsmaurer@goldrush.com

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/

DECEMBER 2024 FIELD TRIPS

December 5 (Thursday) - Salt Springs Valley Raptor Hunt

I am hoping we will track down some of our large raptors on this outing. This will primarily be a birding-by-car-trip. This area is known for Red-tailed Hawks but in the winter there are often Bald and occasionally Golden Eagles, Ferruginous Hawks and sometimes White-tailed Kites. In addition, we should definitely see the American Kestrel and I would hope the Lewis's Woodpecker. The resort we often stop at, on our annual trip to this locale in February, is not open in December therefore bathrooms will probably not be available. We will aim for a shorter day skipping the large reservoir and concentrating on the raptors. We do plan to have our more expansive day in February as usual.

Meet me at the Copperopolis Pond at 9:30 AM where we can organize a carpool with our walkie-talkies. You may wish to bring a sack lunch which we can eat at the Copperopolis town square which does have restrooms at the end of our excursion. Please RSVP for this event so I can alert you to any changes or cancellation.

Trip leader - Kit DeGear - Call/text/email if you have any questions. #925-822-5215 or kdegear@gmail.com

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All other field trips in December are the CBCs listed on the front page

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NOVEMBER VISIT REPORTS

Saturday, November 9 - Knights Ferry

It was a lovely morning to explore Knights Ferry. Eight of us met in the parking lot by the Visitor Center where we were treated to both a male and female Phainopepla, one of the highlights of the day. Another highlight was a very cooperative Rock Wren who gave us many viewing opportunities. 27 species were seen in total. As we walked across the bridge to where the Salmon Festival was taking place, we were able to observe a few salmon spawning down in the river, the final highlight of the day!

View this checklist on-line at **https://ebird.org/checklist/S201969690**

Kit DeGear - Trip Leader

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Thursday, November 14 - Camanche Dam - Mokelumne River Walk/ Lodi Sandhill Cranes/ Cosumnes River Preserve

Nine bird watchers car-pooled to the Camanche Dam, Mokelumne River Day Use Area and Fish Hatchery. The skies were partly cloudy and the temps were in the low 60's. Before we even began the river walk, we saw a Greater Egret, two female Common Mergansers and a Kingfisher right as we exited our cars. The Turkey Vultures were everywhere in the sky but we did not see any vultures eating the salmon carcasses. The river was teaming with three and four foot long salmon. The river was so loaded with salmon that at one viewing spot the air smelled like fish, not rotting fish but just fish. The birding group was privileged to see many different birds including an Osprey. The species count for this location was 23 different birds.

The next stop was Woodbridge Road in Lodi. We saw numerous Sandhill Cranes and hundreds of migratory ducks and geese in the sky. The American Kestrel is common in this location and we saw two Kestrels kiting (hovering like a helicopter) before diving for prey. Due to the rotation of the fields, the cranes were in different areas from past birding trips. The migratory ducks were farther away from the viewing areas. The group did see a Wilson's Snipe and some Black-necked Stilts and Killdeer. Six cranes were spotted close by, but they did not stay long after they noticed that we were watching. The species count for this location was 26.

The group proceeded to the Cosumnes River Preserve. The migratory ducks were easier to see here as well as some shore birds including a Wilson's Snipe, Cinnamon Teal and the Northern Pintail duck. As the temperature was dropping, the trip members did not stay for the Crane "Fly-in" at dark. The species count for this location was 18.

A special thanks to: Kit DeGear, Jan Jorn-Baird, Bill Bowie, and Paolo Mafei, who were our bird identification specialists. A welcome back to Gretchen Olsen, husband Kurt, Sheila Shanahan and Tobie Morgan.

Jean Dakota - Trip Leader

Mokelumne Day Use Area/Fish Hatchery, Nov 14, 2024
View this checklist at **https://ebird.org/checklist/S202515497**

Cosumnes River Preserve, Nov 14, 2024
View this checklist at **https://ebird.org/checklist/S202516129**

Woodbridge Rd. (W of I-5), Nov 14, 2024

View this checklist at **https://ebird.org/checklist/S202515852**

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Sunday, November 24 - Indigeny

Three of us took advantage of the break in the weekend storm to enjoy a crisp, sun-filled morning among the fall foliage. Penny, new to our birding adventures, joined Darcy and I for my monthly Sunday walk. It seemed like we were running into Ruby-crowned Kinglets at every turn. Were they following us? Down by the lake we could hear the "bouncing ball" call of at least 3 Wrentits. Highlight of the day was a pair of Downy Woodpeckers. 26 species were observed. There will be no walk in December owing to our Christmas Bird Counts. Join me in January but note the time change to 9:00 AM.

View this checklist on-line at **https://ebird.org/checklist/S203548009**

Kit DeGear - Trip Leader

Big Trees State Park Observations

Story and photos by Alan Beymer

BIRDS OF WINTER

Do not be fooled by the quiet. In winter, Calaveras Big Trees does not display the exuberance of spring, but life goes on and bird life thrives.

For starters the Black Phoebe is your best friend. This mid-sized bird occupies the North Grove Meadow at Calaveras Big Trees rain or shine, snow or no. It is consistently present on the western edge of the meadow, and its ability to snatch edible bugs out of the air is a maneuver that keeps viewers entertained.

Common Ravens might be your second-best friend, but beware, the Ravens' territory is huge. They can be in the meadow one moment and in the Mother of the Forest the next. The only guarantee is that they understand the importance of patrolling the Visitor Center and nearby campgrounds to help dispose of unattended food. They see you as a portable snack shack.

Pacific Wrens are one of the smallest of the park birds. But if you hear a quiet tick, tick, tick, be still and listen, it might be a Pacific Wren in winter, often close to the ground. Pay attention. In February and March their mating and territorial songs will fill the North Grove. The Wrens will claim territory and announce their availability at the top of their lungs from perches on high.

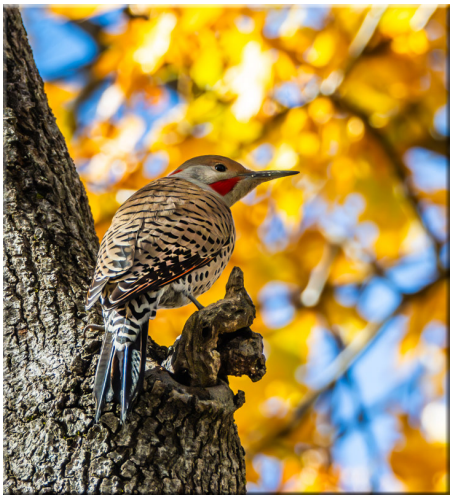
Juncos are the original snow bird. Long before migrating humans claimed the name, Juncos moved en masse from Canada to the Northern United States supposedly to avoid frigid winters. However, in 1924 groundbreaking research by William Rowan at the University of Alberta indicated these birds moved south because of changing light rather than cold temperature.

And the other birds of winter? There are more than four of course, and my list is incomplete: Steller's Jay, Mountain Chickadee, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Brown Creeper, Northern Flicker, White-headed Woodpecker, Pileated Woodpecker, and White-crowned Sparrow to name a few.

Animals as Observers

Friend or foe, prey or poison - animals always need to know the answers to those questions because survival is at stake. I'm always intrigued and amused by cows that we've dumbed down, and yet they appear to be smart and intelligent observers when I approach them with those big eyes apparently seeing into infinity; clearly their genetic survival instincts are still going strong - although to no avail.

Well, our local bird photographer par excellence, Dave Douglass, made a collection from his thousands of photos that show various animals observing him. I'm only too well aware of those observational abilities because here in a Death Valley campground the ravens are legion - and they watch every movement that I make waiting for a tasty morsel (which they don't get from me of course, but careless campers keep them sleek and plump).



CONSERVATION CORNER

Bird Conservation Outlook

Following the November election, the CSAS Board believes future progress fighting for birds and conservation gains will be hard fought battles; with positive outcomes few and far between. In fact, major rollbacks on many decades of environmental progress will most likely be the new norm. Fortunately, we live in California where we may be buffered somewhat from the devastating reversals of the cornerstones of environmental policy. What will happen to the Endangered Species Act, the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, public land policy and many others is all unknown. We will continue to keep you posted.

Bruce McClenahan, Conservation Chair

Membership Drive Raffle

The winner of the Membership Drive Raffle was Jeane Ridgley. The prize, "A Wing and a Prayer" The Race to Save our Vanishing Birds by Anders & Beverly Gyllenhaal is a must read for bird enthusiasts and conservationists alike. The need to advocate for birds is greater than ever.

New CSAS Website

Look for our new Website at CentralSierraAudubon.org . Designed by Level One in Sonora, the redesigned site has more photos (featuring some of our great photographers), a gallery page, new videos, Christmas Bird Count results from 2023 and more. Like our old site, our Monthly Zoom Programs and Squawker archives are just a click away. Take a look and explore our new content.

Find us on our new Facebook page at Central Sierra Audubon

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 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/

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 - Bruce McClenahan	(209)323-0739
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	