CENTRAL SIERRA AUDUBON SOCIETY

SIERRA SQUAWKER

https://centralsierraaudubon.org/

March 2026

The American Art of Bird Carving - Chet Wilcox

Bird carving is a distinctly American, indigenous folk art, rooted in Native American decoy-making and refined by colonists for hunting.

Since then, bird carvings have evolved into a prized and highly collectible, decorative, and realistic art form, featuring species like songbirds, owls, ducks, geese, and shorebirds.

Duck decoys are generally crafted from soft woods like white pine, sugar pine and cedar, while true to life songbirds require hardwoods like Tupelo, Basswood and Jelutong that can perfect feather details.

MARCH PROGRAM

WEDNESDAY MARCH 18TH 7:00

IN PERSON AND VIA ZOOM AT THE TUOLUMNE COUNTY LIBRARY

Click Here for Zoom Link

Chet Wilcox started carving when he was 8 years old after winning a pocket knife in a softball throwing contest. In 1982 he carved his first duck decoy, after his mother gave him a decoy carving book for Christmas.

Now an octogenarian, Chet is a Master Carver. His “hobby” woodshop, built from a converted garage, holds carved species in varying states of completion, awaiting the painting touch of a master. His collection of more than 2,000 bird carvings from hummingbirds to full size hawks are worthy of display in any museum in the country.

MARCH FIELD TRIP - BURLUPI POND - NEAR INDIGENY

Thursday, March 5th, Meet at Indigeny Parking Lot @ 9:00

While Indigeny has long been a repeat-worthy and popular birding site for our club members, I'd like to propose a slight, very nearby variation, to include, or focus on, the pond. I can't confirm an actual name for the pond, but it lies at the eastern end of Burlupi Road where it nears its junction with Apple Hill Drive.

Gadwaall
eBird

I've found it to be a consistently reliable site for its attraction to numerous waterfowl (ducks, herons, etc), raptors, songbirds and more. Frequent species have included Gadwall, Mallard, Merganser, Bufflehead and Wood Ducks, Finches, Warblers, Kinglets, Towhees, Sparrows, Ravens, Blackbirds, Cedar Waxwings, Bluebirds, Red-tail and Red-shouldered Hawks.

Buffelheads - Male and Females
AllAboutBirds

There should be plenty of birds to see, especially with spring breeding season coming on. The pond is quite a beautiful setting.

Sturdy walking shoes, binoculars, scopes, drinking water and snacks may all be useful. Trip length may run between 2-3+ hours, depending on the birds we find.

Trip leader Andrew Maurer - 209 918-6004.

Green Heron
All About Birds

Wood Ducks
AllAboutBirds

REPORTING FROM CALAVERAS BIG TREES STATE PARK

Bruce McClenahan

Wintering Strategies Put To The Test

The next several weeks will test the wintering strategies of birds at Calaveras Big Tree State Park (See the January Squawker), with five feet of snow on the ground.

Birds that cache seeds like the Steller's Jay, White-headed Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpeckers, and Clark's Nutcracker should fair better than birds who do not set up a cache (Pileated Woodpeckers, Downy Woodpeckers, Northern Flickers, and Kinglets. Ground feeders (Towhees, Wrens, Quail and others may need to move to lower elevations.

I have not observed a big snow at Big Trees and I will be curious and hopefull as to what spring will bring to the park.

A Different Big Year - CBTSP

By Alan Beymer

What do you write about Big Trees SP when you cannot get in? You listen to your editor.

Twice this year Bruce has mentioned 2026 as a possible Big Year, both for himself and others. Sure, how about a big year at Calaveras Big Trees? How many birds can there be at the park? Avibase, the World Bird Data Base, says there have been 179 species spotted at Calaveras Big Trees over the years. So between power outages I reviewed my bird sightings and begin a Big Year count.

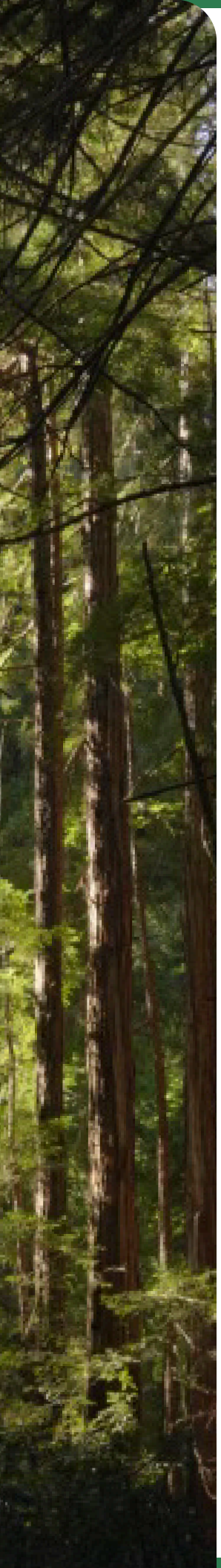
The stormy January 3rd Christmas Bird Count started it for me even though it was a bit disappointing. The usual array of winter birds are absent from Calaveras Big Trees. But I am already harboring fantasies about a Big Year and I have eight.

On January 5 on Old Moran Road I spot a Common Raven and Hairy Woodpecker. On January 13, a Black Phoebe in the meadow puts me at 11. January 15, again in the meadow and a flock of Western Bluebirds and a Purple Finch raise the total to 13. I suspect birding on a solo basis requires verification and I vaguely recall that Ronald Reagan once said, "Trust, but verify." That means either I must have a recognizable photo or verified audio proof from Merlin. And so it goes, bird by bird.

Click to Find us on Facebook

Go Birding and Send in Your Stories

Editors Note: Best of Luck Alan. Don't hesitate to give me or others a call. Strength in numbers.



CONSERVATION CORNER

Pa'ashi (Big Water) National Wildlife Refuge

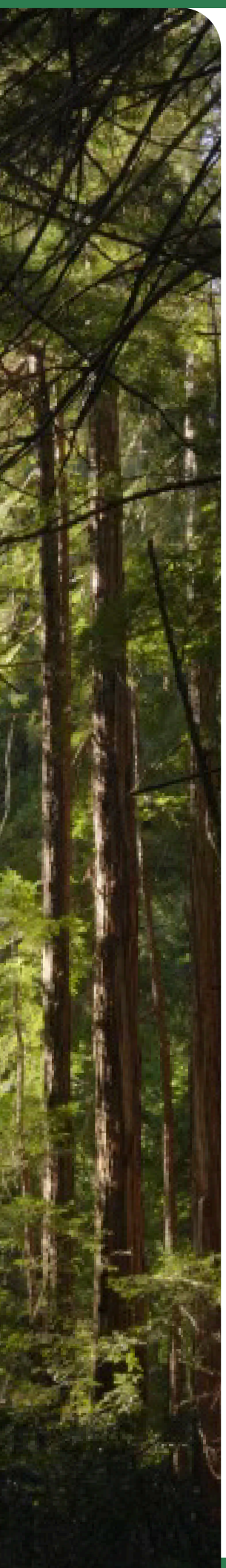
Bruce McClenahan - Conservation Chair

Once the largest freshwater lake west of the Mississippi River, Tulare lake (Pa'ashi) covering 690 square miles in the Central Valley of California was a vast and rich ecosystem vital to the Yokut tribe. (Lake Tahoe is 129 square miles). The Yokuts used Tulare Lake as a year-round source of sustenance and culture, utilizing it's immense resources for elk, trout, clams, ducks, shelter, transportation and cultural creation stories.

In the late 1800's, agriculture started to get a foothold in the central valley and the four rivers feeding the lake (Kings, Kern, Kaweah, and Tule) began to be dammed and diverted. Cotton was the crop du jour, and by the 1930's, Tulare Lake was less than 50 acres. By the late 1940's, agricultural giants like J.G. Boswell and others controlled the valley and Tulare Lake was no more.

Since that time, the historic Tulare Lake has flooded to some extent six times, with the most recent taking place in March 2023, covering 100,000 acres. The economic damage estimated from that flood ranged from $900 million in the short term to billions in the long term.

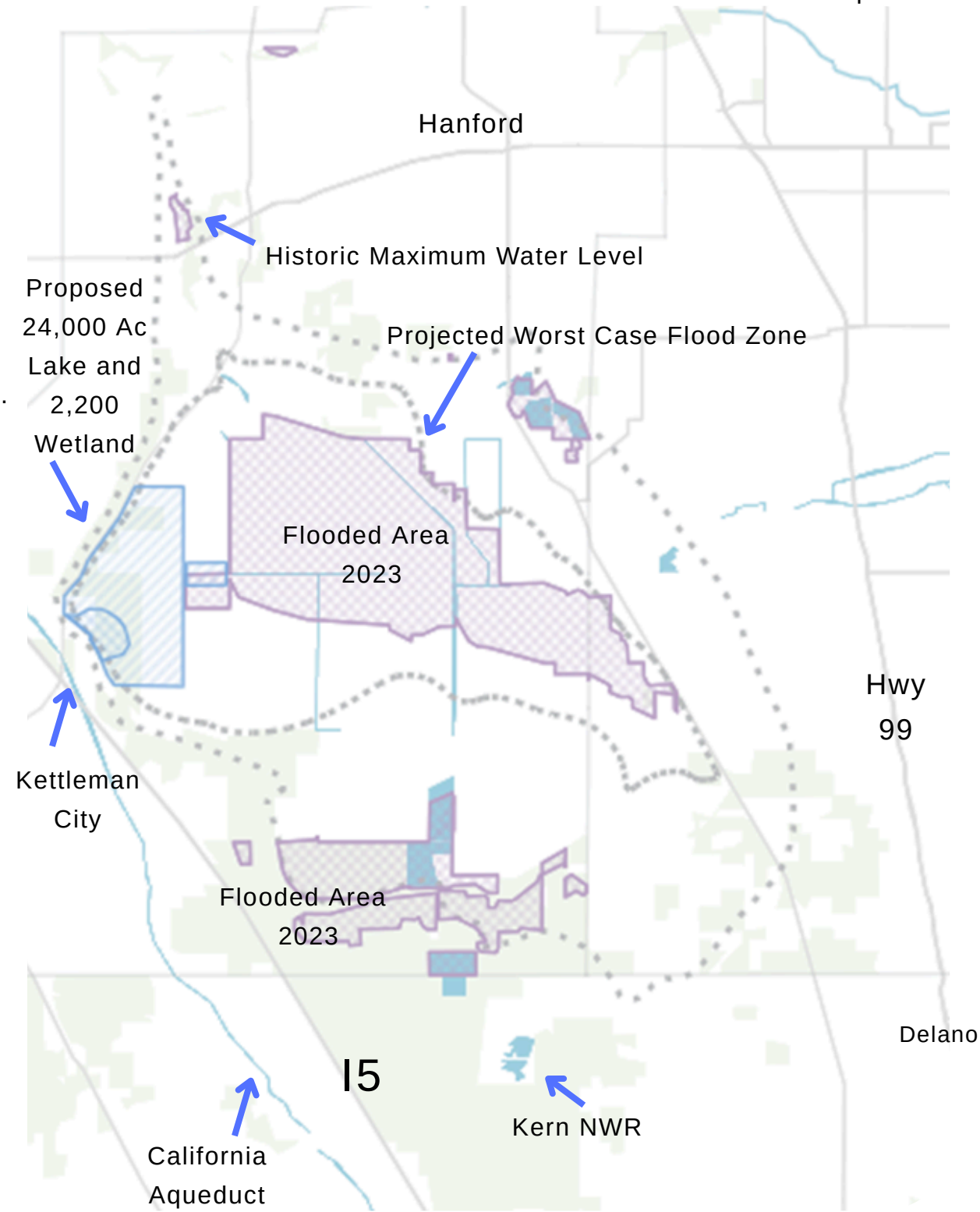
California's wild swings in weather patterns caused by global climate change will undoubtably flood Tulare Lake again, but a plan is underfoot to put water back on the historic lake bottom and prevent further flooding. The goal is to create a smaller, managed 24,000-acre lake that could provide flood protection, water storage, ground water replenishment and wetlands restoration. The cost estimate one-billion dollars.



CONSERVATION CORNER

Pa'ashi National Wildlife Refuge while a figment of my imagination, could become a reality if a coalition of the willing would come together to create the 2,200-acre wildlife refuge (Merced NWR is 10,250 Ac) and 24,000-acre multi-functional lake.

Pa' ashi NWR would be a small reminder of Tulare Lake's historic past.



Los Angeles Times: Sean Greene

SCARLETT UPDATE - FLYING CONSISTENTLY - NO CHEATING

The four foot perch has been removed and Scarlett is flying consistently from the ground to the nine foot perch.

Hopefully the cold, stormy weather will also cool her desire to get out of the cage. When the weather improves she will be evaluated for release. Hopefully next month we will have video at 11.

Click the logo above to donate and learn more about Mother Lode Wildlife Care

LONG GULCH RANCH - GROVELAND - BY CORINNE SERA

This past December, Motherlode Land Trust partnered with Tuolumne Resource Conservation District to place bat and Western Bluebird (Sialia mexicana) boxes on the Long Gulch Ranch. Long Gulch is located about six miles outside of Groveland along Ferretti Road and Clinton Road. In 2014, Motherlode Land Trust purchased 576 acres of the ranch and an additional 300 acres is now in escrow. Long Gulch Ranch was originally purchased to protect habitat for the Great Grey Owl (State of California endangered Raptor) and is now open to the public for recreational use. More information about Long Gulch and Motherlode Land Trust can be found at: https://www.motherlodelandtrust.org/

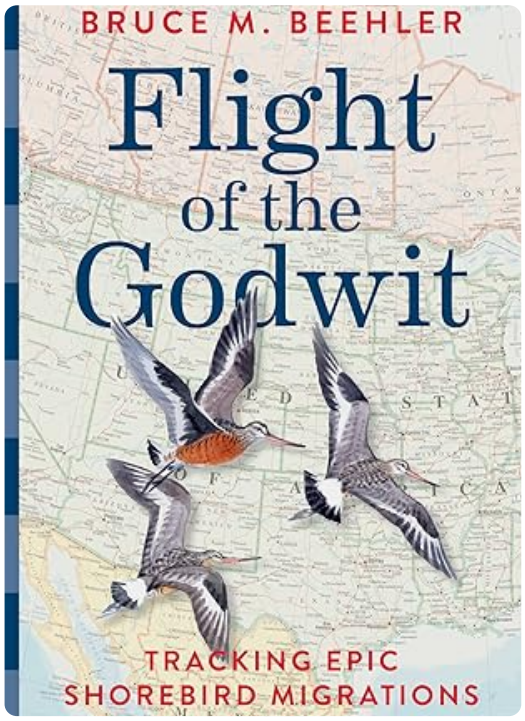
The Tuolumne Resource Conservation District provided funding for the boxes in partnership with California Wildlife Conservation Board and the California Association of Resource Conservation Districts. TRCD also is awarding wildlife structures to landowners who wish to support critical bird and bat species of foothill ecosystems and have suitable habitat on their property.

More information about the funding can be found at: https://www.tcrcd.org/projects/wildlifestructures/

Great Gray Owl
As with most all owl photos - Site not disclosed
Dave Douglass

Book of the Month - Flight of the Godwit - Bruce Beehler, PhD

“An immersive travelogue that belongs on every birder's bookshelf, with 30 gorgeous black-and-white illustrations and a birdwatching species checklist



Flying more than 8,000 miles from Alaska to eastern Australia without stopping to eat or rest, the Bar-tailed Godwit holds the record for the longest nonstop migration of any land bird in the world. Flight of the Godwit invites readers on ornithologist Bruce M. Beehler's awe-inspiring journey in search of North America's largest and farthest-flying shorebirds. Driving 35,000 miles between 2019 to 2023, Beehler sought birds he dubs the "Magnificent Seven": **Hudsonian Godwit, Bar-tailed Godwit, Marbled Godwit, Whimbrel, Long-billed Curlew, Bristle-thighed Curlew, and the Upland Sandpiper.**

Beehler interweaves colorful fieldwork stories and rich details on local culture with the natural history and biology of shorebirds—including evolution, the physics of migration, orientation, homing, foraging, diet, nesting, parental care, wintering, staging, elusive "super-migrators," and the importance of conservation efforts.

Central Sierra Audubon Society - CSAS
Chapter of the National Audubon Society
P.O. Box 3047, Sonora, CA 95370

Public Presentations: We conduct our monthly in-person programs in the Tuolumne County Library, 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 email Gail Witzlsteiner

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Membership of Central Sierra Audubon

If you are not already a member, we would be honored to have you join us. At only $15.00 per year (July 1 - June 30), a CSAS Membership is a steal. Your annual dues and participation are vital to the sustainability of Central Sierra Audubon. As a local member of CSAS you will receive the monthly Squawker newsletter and have access to all other CSAS activities. Please join up if you haven’t already done so. An application form for local membership is available on the CSAS website:
www.centralsierraaudubon.org