

# THE HOOT OWL



May / June 2020  
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San Joaquin Audubon Society  
Affiliated with the National Audubon Society-California

## PROGRAMS

There will be no general membership meetings during our regular summer hiatus (May through August). The next general membership meeting will be Tuesday, September 8, if COVID-19 pandemic conditions allow.

## Annual Chapter Picnic Cancelled, HOWEVER...

Due to the current state of lockdown and shelter-in-place orders in our state, the annual chapter picnic at the Mokelumne River Day Use area has been cancelled. HOWEVER, we will still be holding the annual general membership meeting, via Zoom!

Please join us for a virtual May San Joaquin Audubon general membership meeting by Zoom on Tuesday, May 12th, from 7-9 p.m. During the meeting we will have our annual officer elections. After the elections there will be several bird themed games: a pictiary type game and bird trivia.

To join the meeting please follow the link or enter the meeting ID and password  
<https://zoom.us/j/96263347235?pwd=TzJic0tiYU12RINjRWM0aFVhZWt2dz09>

Meeting ID: 962 6334 7235  
Password: Bird

## FIELD TRIPS

### (Cancelled until further notice)

All: Due to the ongoing pandemic, all upcoming San Joaquin Audubon Society field trips will remain cancelled. We hope to resume as soon as the Governor opens the state to such outings. Meanwhile, we hope you are all able to bird in the county, keeping your safety, and the safety of others in mind. Please share your trips information or pictures on one of our many social media outlets.

## PRESIDENT'S NOTE

Dear San Joaquin Audubon members:

It's been just about a year since I have taken the reins as president of this wonderful chapter. It has been a learning experience, but one that I am grateful to undertake. I am happy to report that our chapter continues to strengthen, and is once again in a position to donate funds to many wonderful organizations here in the county. I want to thank the board members, our field trip leaders, and all of those who have donated monies or their time to help our chapter thrive. Your efforts are appreciated by many. Please be safe and enjoy our feathered friends.

Respectfully,  
Pat Paternostro  
President - San Joaquin Audubon

## URGENT: EMAIL ADDRESSES NEEDED!

*We need your email address for our new paperless newsletter!*

As mentioned in previous issues, the paper copy of the newsletter that you're accustomed to receiving in your mailbox will soon be a thing of the past. The Hoot Owl will soon be available in electronic form only. An electronic newsletter will not only save trees, but will also save dollars, which will allow us to do more to support our core conservation and education efforts. An electronic newsletter will also make it possible to include longer articles and color photographs! So, if you haven't already done so, please provide your email address to our membership chair, Alan England ([wdchkgqsgrl@yahoo.com](mailto:wdchkgqsgrl@yahoo.com)). Alan and our chapter can then assure that you will start receiving our upcoming electronic editions in your email. Thank you!

Kurt Mize - Newsletter Editor

## American Robins now migrate 12 days earlier than in 1994

### New GPS data show birds adjust to shifting snow conditions as climate warms

Every spring, American robins migrate north from all over the U.S. and Mexico, flying up to 250 miles a day to reach their breeding grounds in Canada and Alaska. There, they spend the short summer in a mad rush to find a mate, build a nest, raise a family, and fatten up before the long haul back south.

Now climate change is making seasonal rhythms less predictable, and springtime is arriving earlier in many parts of the Arctic. Are robins changing the timing of their migration to keep pace, and if so, how do they know when to migrate? Although many animals are adjusting the timing of their migration, the factors driving these changes in migratory behavior have remained poorly understood.

A new study, published in *Environmental Research Letters*, concludes that robin migration is kicking off earlier by about five days each decade. The study is also the first to reveal the environmental conditions along the migration route that help the birds keep up with the changing seasons. Lead author Ruth Oliver completed the work while earning her doctorate at Columbia University's Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory.

At Canada's Slave Lake, a pit stop for migrating birds, researchers have been recording spring migration timing for a quarter century. Their visual surveys and netting censuses revealed that robins have been migrating about five days earlier per decade since 1994.

In order to understand what factors are driving the earlier migration, Oliver and Lamont associate research professor Natalie Boelman, a coauthor on the paper, knew they needed to take a look at the flight paths of individual robins.

Their solution was to attach tiny GPS "backpacks" to the birds, after netting them at Slave Lake in mid-migration. "We made these little harnesses out of nylon string," Oliver explained. "It basically goes around their neck, down their chest and through their legs, then back around to the backpack." The unit weighs less than a nickel -- light enough for the robins to fly unhindered. The researchers expect that the thin nylon string eventually degrades, allowing the backpacks to fall off.

The researchers slipped these backpacks onto a total of 55 robins, tracking their movements for the months of April through June. With the precise location from the GPS, the team was able to link the birds' movements with weather data on air temperature, snow depth, wind speed, precipitation, and other conditions that might help or hinder migration.

The results showed that the robins start heading north earlier when winters are warm and dry, and suggest that local environmental conditions along the way help to fine-tune their flight schedules.

"The one factor that seemed the most consistent was snow conditions and when things melt. That's very new," said Oliver. "We've generally felt like birds must be responding to when food is available -- when snow melts and there are insects to get at -- but we've never had data like this before."

Boelman added that "with this sort of quantitative understanding of what matters to the birds as they are migrating, we can develop predictive models" that forecast the birds' responses as the climate continues to warm. "Because the timing of migration can indirectly influence the reproductive success of an individual, understanding controls over the timing of migratory events is important."

For now, it seems as though the environmental cues are helping the robins to keep pace with the shifting seasons. "The missing piece is, to what extent are they already pushing their behavioral flexibility, or how much more do they have to go?" said Oliver.

Because the study caught the birds in mid-migration, the tracking data doesn't reflect the birds' full migration path. To overcome this limitation, the researchers plan to analyze tissue from the robins' feathers and claws, which they collected while attaching the GPS harnesses, to estimate where each bird spent the previous winter and summer.

*(Continued on Page 3)*

## American Robins migrating earlier *(Continued from Page 2)*

Over the long term, Oliver says, she hopes to use the GPS trackers to sort out other mysteries as well, such as how much of the change in migration timing is due to the behavioral responses found in the study versus natural selection to changing environments, or other factors.

"This type of work will be really cool once we can track individuals throughout the course of their life, and that's on the near-term horizon, in terms of technological capabilities," she said. "I think that will really help us unpack some of the intricacies of these questions."

The new study is part of a broader NASA-funded research and outreach project, called the Arctic-Boreal Vulnerability Experiment, that is tracking how the rapid warming of the far north affects wildlife. Read more about the project on the researchers' blog: <https://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/blogs/fromthefield/2016/04/12/a-migration-mystery/>

Oliver is now a postdoctoral associate at Yale University. Other authors on the study include Peter Mahoney from the University of Washington, Eliezer Gurarie from the University of Washington and the University of Maryland, Nicole Krikun from the Lesser Slave Lack Bird Observatory, Brian Weeks from the University of Michigan, Mark Hebblewhite from the University of Montana, and Glen Liston from Colorado State University.

Citation: Earth Institute at Columbia University. "American robins now migrate 12 days earlier than in 1994: New GPS data show birds adjust to shifting snow conditions as climate warms." ScienceDaily. ScienceDaily, 1 April 2020. <[www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2020/04/200401150819.htm](http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2020/04/200401150819.htm)>.

## BIRD SIGHTINGS

*February 11, 2020 - April 19, 2020*  
*(All sightings pertain to San Joaquin County)*

Submitted by Liz West

Kurt Mize reported that two **Say's Phoebes** were in a north Stockton neighborhood on February 21<sup>st</sup>, possibly a return of the pair that nested there two years ago. On March 19<sup>th</sup>, Kurt saw one of the Say's Phoebes going to the porch of a residence on Davis Rd. at the same location a nest had been previously.

On February 29<sup>th</sup>, David Yee relocated the **Yellow-billed Loon** in San Joaquin County part of Camanche reservoir. David had first seen the bird on the Wallace Bellota Christmas bird count. March 1<sup>st</sup> it was seen by John Luther from Liberty Road. A mini "pelagic" on March 3<sup>rd</sup>, failed to relocate it. The mini pelagic participants, Kurt Mize, Frances Oliver, John Luther, and Jim Gain found a Greater Scaup in San Joaquin County.

Ben Stalheim counted seven **Marbled Godwits** on March 17<sup>th</sup> at Staten Island. On March 19<sup>th</sup> there were six.

On March 19<sup>th</sup>, Ben Stalheim found a **Garganey** in the closed portion of Staten Island.

David Yee picked out a first winter **Lesser Black-backed Gull** at the Koster Rd. quarry pit on March 22<sup>nd</sup>.

On April 5<sup>th</sup>, Mark and Lorna Elness had a **Calliope Hummingbird** visit their feeders in Manteca.

On April 16<sup>th</sup>, Jim Gain had a **Broad-winged Hawk** in southern San Joaquin County, near Ripon, and took many documentary photographs. The bird was observed flying south into Stanislaus County before he lost it. Despite a concerted effort by others later that morning, the bird was not relocated.

On Sunday, April 19<sup>th</sup>, Pat Paternostro found and photographed a **Townsend's Solitaire** at Dentoni Park in Stockton. Despite a search by Pat and several local birders, the bird was not refound.

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Website: [www.sanjoaquinaudubon.org](http://www.sanjoaquinaudubon.org)

Listserve: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/sjbirds/>

## Other California Birding E-mail Listserves

<https://groups.io/g/calbirds>

<https://groups.io/centralvalleybirds>

<https://groups.io/g/StanislausBirds>

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/central-sierra-birds/>

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/sierra-nevadabirds/>

## Membership

### *National Membership*

By joining the National Audubon Society you are also a member of the San Joaquin Chapter. This includes subscriptions to the award-winning *Audubon Magazine* and to the chapter newsletter, *The Hoot Owl*. Both publications are bimonthly. For *national membership*, send check payable to the **National Audubon Society** to the address below.

- National Audubon Membership Rate: \$20

### **San Joaquin Audubon Society**

**Attn: Membership (National)**

**P.O. Box 7755  
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### *Local-Only Membership*

This includes a subscription to the bimonthly chapter newsletter, *The Hoot Owl*. For *local membership*, send check payable to **San Joaquin Audubon Society** to the address below.

- Chapter Newsletter—mailed paper copy \$15
- Chapter Newsletter—electronic copy \$10

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