

THE HOOT OWL



January / February 2010
Issue 1, Volume 48

San Joaquin Audubon Society

Affiliated with the National Audubon Society-California

Meetings

The meeting location is at Central United Methodist Church, 3700 Pacific Avenue (across from UOP) in Stockton, and begins at 7:30 p.m. Plenty of parking and refreshments. Everyone is welcome.

There will be no general membership meeting in January, 2010.

The Tuesday, February 9 program was undetermined at time of publication.

Please check <http://www.sanjoaquinaudubon.org/> for updates.

Yellow-billed Magpie named Audubon California's 2009 Bird of the Year

A bird well known to bird enthusiasts, but perhaps not to most Californians, today was named the 2009 Audubon California Bird of the Year after it received nearly 26 percent of votes cast during an online poll this fall. The Yellow-billed Magpie lives only in California's Central Valley and coastal ranges, and may be enjoying a comeback after experiencing major declines due to habitat loss, West Nile Virus and pesticide use.

"This is a terrific bird to feature as Audubon California's first Bird of the Year," said Graham Chisholm, executive director of Audubon California. "First of all, it's a dynamic bird that people enjoy watching. Moreover, as Californians, it's our bird, and it could really benefit from us knowing more about it and taking care of it."

The Yellow-billed Magpie is one of California's most striking birds, popular among birders and compelling among conservationists. Aside from its yellow bill, the bird is easily recognizable from its white, black and iridescent body and wings.

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Field Trips

SATURDAY, January 2—Wallace-Bellota Christmas Bird Count

You can fulfill one of your New Year's resolutions (more birding, more exercise, seeing nature, hanging out with friends, doing CBC's) by participating in the Wallace Bellota Christmas Bird Count. It's a beautiful area with rolling hills, grasslands, riparian areas, marsh areas and farmland. Beginners, experienced birders and everyone in between is welcome. Don't let this opportunity slip by. It's a great way to start your new year off right! Just contact Kasey Foley kaseyfoley@sbcglobal.net or (209) 473-3904 for more information.

SATURDAY, January 16—Stockton Rural Cemetery

Join leader Jim Rowoth (956-2648 or rowoth@sbcglobal.net) at 8:00 a.m. at the north end of Cemetery Lane for a leisurely stroll through the park-like grounds of this beautiful and historic local landmark.

SUNDAY, January 24—Stillman Magee County Park

Join leader Jim Rowoth (956-2648 or rowoth@sbcglobal.net) as he conducts his monthly bird census at this little park on the banks of the Mokelumne River near Clements.

SATURDAY, February 20—Grasslands National Wildlife Refuge

Join leader Dave Wagner for this trip to an outstanding winter birding area that should produce a wide variety of waterfowl, shorebirds, and raptors. We will start out at the gun club where Record outdoor writer Pete Ottesen belongs. For directions, meeting time and carpooling call Dave at 209-943-6997.

SUNDAY, February 14—Stillman Magee County Park

Join leader Jim Rowoth (956-2648 or rowoth@sbcglobal.net) as he conducts his monthly bird census at this little park on the banks of the Mokelumne River near Clements.

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT RESULTS

Well, what started out as a cold, gray winter day ended up with blue skies and pleasant temps. Our preliminary species count is 142; biggest misses--Western Sandpiper, Rough-legged Hawk, Varied Thrush, Burrowing Owl, Hutton's Vireo, Prairie Falcon, Brown Creeper, Swainson's Hawk, Pine Siskin, Ferruginous Hawk, White-faced Ibis, and Eurasian Wigeon. Highlights were Winter Wren, Short-eared Owl, Western Grebe, Redhead, Peregrine Falcon, Chipping Sparrow, Townsend's Warbler, Hooded Merganser, Mountain Bluebird, American Avocet, Rock Wren, American White Pelican, Thayer's Gull, and Black Rail. New to the count were Mute Swan (ugh!) and Violet-green Swallow. Thanks to the many counters who came out to spend the day in the field for our 42nd annual count.

Jim Rowoth
Compiler-Stockton CBC

USING NATIVE PLANTS TO ATTRACT BIRDS TO YOUR GARDEN

There are many advantages to the use of native plants in our gardens. In many cases, California native plants already play a part in the life of our native birds. Native plants can provide food as well as cover, a place to escape from predators. With water, cover and food, your garden will become a productive bird habitat. Another advantage of many natives is that they seldom need to be watered once established. Their cycles are adapted to the climate we live in. This is the "Mediterranean" type climate with late-fall/winter/spring rains and a dry period in summer and early fall. There are many exceptions including those plants native to wet coastal and found along rivers and streams.

Many common and uncommon birds will be attracted to fruit-bearing trees and shrubs. In addition to feeding on the fruit various small birds feed on the insects that frequent the plants. Avoid garden use of pesticides because of direct or indirect absorption by birds. Most native plants do not need fertilizer application. It is best to plant during the fall or winter rather than summer so that the plants can become established before the start of our hot and dry summers.

The following is a list of trees and shrubs which do best in dry locations. They do need water in dry weather until they become established. This may mean watering during their first three years.

Shrubs include Toyon which is also called Christmas Berry because of the red berries formed in the fall. Coffeeberry is a shrub with grey foliage. Both Oregon Grape and Blue Elderberry have blue berries, but the Elderberry fruit are preferred by many birds. The Oregon Grape has shiny green leaves which look something like holly. Western Redbud has beautiful flowers and often colorful fall foilage. Others include the Sages with fragrant foliage, Woolly Bluecurls and California Wild Lilac. Coyote Brush is an excellent source of cover to plant near your feeders. California Fuchsia does not get large but provides pretty tubular flowers which attract hummers.

The following shrubs do best in more moist locations and need some summer water during the dry season. Honeysuckle and Twinberry, California Wild Rose, Creek Dogwood, Snowberry, Thimbleberry and California Wild Grape.

Some of the best native trees are the oaks such as Valley Oak and Interior Live Oak. They must have adequate room and care and they do eventually get big. But it will be fifty to one hundred years before they get very large. The California Buckeye is another good native, if you have room. Many of the other native trees have problems which you may not want to deal with.

All of these native plants are available at native plant nurseries. Some can be obtained at other nurseries or by special order. Native Plant Society groups often have sales which are another source of these plants. For more information contact your local California Native Plant Society (or your Education Chair). Much of the information for this article was provided by the Sierra Foothill Chapter of CNPS.

SHRUBS:

- Toyon (*Heteromeles arbutifolia*) Also called Christmas Berry as it has red berries in the Fall.
- Coffeeberry (*Rhamnus californica*) Grey-green foliage, don't try to make coffee from the fruit!
- Laurel Sumac (*Rhus laurina*) A harmless relative of poison oak.
- Manzanita (*Arctostaphylos* spp.) Does poorly in heavy clay soils.
- Oregon Grape (*Berberis* spp.) Yellow flowers.
- Blue Elderberry (*Sambucus mexicana*) Large shrub, do not eat the foliage.
- Sages (*Salvia apiana*, *S. clevelandii*, *S. mellifera*) Crushed leaves smell of sage!
- Woolly Bluecurls (*Trichostema lanatum*) Blue flowers
- Western Redbud (*Cercis occidentalis*) Nice flowers and seed fruit.
- Coyote Bush (*Baccharis pilularis*)
- California Wild Lilac (*Ceanothus* spp.) Many do poorly in clay soil.
- California Fuchsia (*Epilobium canum*) (*Zaucchneria*:old name) Hummingbirds visit the flowers.
- California Huckleberry (*Vaccinium ovatum*)

TREES:

- Oaks (*Quercus lobata* and other natives) Support the acorn woodpeckers!
- Buckeye (*Aesculus californica*) decorative fruit
- Pines (*Pinus radiata* and other natives)
- Fan Palm (*Washingtonia filifera*) Nesting places for owls & orioles.

Yellow-Billed Magpie Named Bird of the Year *(continued from Page 1)*

"I couldn't be more pleased to see the Yellow-billed Magpie get this recognition," said Holly Ernest, who directs the Wildlife Population Health and Ecological Genetics Unit at the Veterinary Genetics Laboratory at UC Davis. "This is a wonderful bird that faces a number of challenges to its survival."

According to research by Ernest and others, the Yellow-billed Magpie declined at a slow but steady rate from 1995 to 2003, when the total number of magpies was estimated at 180,000 birds. Then the onslaught of West Nile Virus made the decline even steeper. Breeding Bird Survey and Audubon Christmas Bird Count data showed the decline as somewhere between 22 percent and 42 percent through 2006.

"Lots of anecdotal evidence suggests a rebound in birds" says Gary Langham, director of bird conservation for Audubon California. "People are reporting them in their yards after a few years absence and you can see it for yourself as you drive through the valley. The magpies are back."

While the Yellow-billed Magpie wins the designation of 2009 Bird of the Year, Chisholm emphasized that the Audubon Society's work on behalf of other California birds, nominated or not, will continue apace.

Birding 101

Jim Rowoth will again offer his beginning birding workshop, Birding 101, at Delta College this spring. The class consists of five Saturday morning sessions, each of which is followed by a field trip to a local birding hotspot (e.g., Stockton Rural Cemetery, local sewage pond, etc.).

We will examine the various birds found locally and some not so locally in this workshop. We will look at what makes a bird a bird and the great variety of different types found in nature, as well as their endlessly fascinating habits and lifestyles. We will also discuss the growing sport of bird-watching and bird-watching equipment.

Participants will work on improving their abilities to find and to identify birds in both in class settings and in the field. Registration details can be found at <http://www.adultedreg.com/delta/index.cfm>; follow the link "For the Birds".

BIRD SIGHTINGS

Mid-October - December 18, 2009

(All sightings pertain to San Joaquin County)

Submitted by Liz West

On October 24th, Joanne Katanic, Lynette Buckman and I found an American Dipper at the Mokelumne River fish hatchery. On November 11th Pat and Dave Croft found a second dipper at the hatchery. Both dippers are immature. Both dippers were last reported November 26th, at least one is still being seen as of December 12th.

Diane and Steve Rose saw a Sage Thrasher at the northwest corner of the Lodi Sewage ponds on November 5th. It was perched on a pile of tractor tires. It was not re found the next day.

November 8th Bruce Webb found an adult Harlan's Hawk with a mostly white tail on Thornton Rd. just north of Peltier Rd. Multiple other people have seen it.

Scott Terrill saw a late Barn Swallow at the Stockton Sewage ponds November 11th.

While looking for the dipper at the Mokelumne River fish hatchery Diane and Steve Rose had a Townsend's Solitaire in the cottonwoods across the river from the dipper on November 12th.

Lauren Harter and David Vander Plum found a Grasshopper Sparrow during a Central Valley Bird symposium field trip November 21st. The whole group was able to see it before it flew off.

On Thanksgiving morning a Slate-colored Junco returned to Cheri Pillsbury's backyard. She thinks it might be one of the two from last winter.

On November 27th Matthew Dodder found a late Hammond's Flycatcher in the trees between ponds nine and ten at White Slough.

San Joaquin Audubon Society
P.O. Box 7755
Stockton, CA 95267

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New website: www.sanjoaquinaudubon.org

Calif. Bird Alerts

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