

THE HOOT OWL



March / April 2014
Issue 2, Volume 52

San Joaquin Audubon Society
Affiliated with the National Audubon Society-California

PROGRAMS

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.

TUESDAY, March 11

Keith Hansen

"A Carbon-Free Year of Birding"

Many of us travel to distant and not-so-distant locations to get that "life" bird, just like they did in the movie "The Big Year." Wildlife artist Keith Hansen will share his experience and insights on how it's possible to be an avid birder without adversely impacting the planet, but still have a good time.

Keith's talent as an artist came naturally from his mother who shared her love of art with all of her children. Travel and exploration of Mexico, Central America, the Andes, Galapagos and more helped Keith develop his knowledge and love of birds and wildlife everywhere. Keith has volunteered at the Point Reyes Bird Observatory both at the Palomarin Field Station and on the Farallon Islands. His art work has appeared in many books, scientific journals, magazines, newsletters and logos. Keith's most recent endeavor is illustrating a book entitled "Birds of the Sierra Nevada: Their Natural History, Status, and Distribution," authored by Ted Beedy and Ed Pandolfino.

TUESDAY, April 8

David Lukas

"Bird Feathers and Bird Bones"

David Lukas, writer and naturalist, will cover bird bones, feathers, and muscles and how they work together to help a bird fly and live in its environment. Expect to learn about the inner and outer workings of birds.

David is a California naturalist and the author of six books. David grew up in Oregon but has been living in the Sierra Nevada and leading bird programs in California for nearly 20 years.

FIELD TRIPS

SATURDAY, March 1—*Introductory Birding Field Trip*

Join leader Susan Schneider at the north end of Laurel Ave. in Lodi (on the east side of Lodi Lake Park, off of Turner Rd.) at 8:00 a.m. Birders of all skill levels are welcome, but the focus will be on birding fundamentals.

SUNDAY, March 9—*Cosumnes River Preserve*

Join leader Jim Rowoth (487-3489 or rowoth@sbcglobal.net) for the monthly River Walk bird count through the varied habitats of the CRP. Meet Jim at the visitor center on Franklin Rd. Check website www.cosumnes.org for last minute updates. Double check with Jim for start time.

SATURDAY, March 15—*Woodbridge Wilderness Area*

Join leader Liz West for the monthly census of this delightful little park on the banks of the Mokelumne River. Meet at the north end of Meadowlark Lane in the town of Woodbridge at 8:00 a.m.

SUNDAY, March 16—*Mokelumne River Fish Hatchery*

Join leaders Liz West and Joanne Katanic for our monthly census of this lovely little riparian area below Comanche Dam. Meet in the fish hatchery parking lot at 8:00 a.m.

SATURDAY, March 22—*Rush Ranch & Grizzly Island*

Join leaders Liz West and Joanne Katanic for a visit to this Solano County preserve on the shores of the Suisun marsh. Meet at 7:30 a.m. in the McDonald's parking lot at Flag City (Interstate 5 & Highway 12) to carpool. Bring a lunch, as they have a nice picnic area.

SUNDAY, March 30—*Stockton Rural Cemetery*

Come along with Jim Rowoth for a morning visit to the beautiful and historic Stockton Rural Cemetery. Meet him at the office inside the gates at 8:00 a.m. We'll be on the look out for neotropical migrants and resident species alike.

SATURDAY, April 5—*Introductory Birding Field Trip*

See entry for Saturday, March 1. Join leader Dale Smith at the north end of Laurel Ave. in Lodi at 8:00 a.m.

SUNDAY, April 6—*Vernal Pools & Copperopolis Wildflowers*

Joint trip with Sierra Foothill Audubon. Join leader Steve Stockton at the Hogan Dam overlook, just south of Valley Springs, at 8:30 a.m. or at the IOOF Hall in Milton at 9:00 a.m.

WEDNESDAY, April 9—*Kiln Canyon Hummingbirds*

Join leader John Blades for our annual mid-week visit to this hummingbird hot spot in the foothills west of Tracy. Meet in the parking lot at Toot Sweets near the northwest corner of March Lane and Quail Lakes Drive at 7:00 a.m. to carpool.

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THE 43rd WALLACE–BELLOTA CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

On Sunday, December 28th, 45 intrepid bird enthusiasts took to the rural foothills and fields of eastern San Joaquin and western Calaveras counties to see what birds they could locate there between 7am and 6pm. Area Audubon society birders have been doing this in the same area, at about the same date for nearly 50 years. 44 miles were covered on foot and 421 by auto by 13 groups of from two to five birders per group. There was a record turn out of 45 birders aged from 10 to 75, some novices and others who started on this count 43 years ago. One group fielded a family of five, including a kid who aspires to become an ornithologist. She is off to a good start.

You know how dry it has been here and this was evidenced by the dry and nearly dry ponds in the area. There were not as many water birds as in wetter years, but Barrow's Goldeneye were spotted in the Calaveras River as they have been on only two other counts. For the first time on the count a (usually coastal) Sanderling was spotted by the group led by ace birder David Yee. Another first for this count was a Chipping Sparrow found by Andy Engilis who came down from Elk Grove to help with the count. (Most intelligent Chipping Sparrows go south for the winter.) Other unusual sightings included the hybrid Red-shafted X Yellow-shafted Flicker and the Slate-colored form of the Fox Sparrow.

The weather for the count was great but dry, and although we had a record number of counters the total number of individual birds was down as was the number of most species. The number of crows and magpies, impacted by West-Nile Virus, is still down but the number of Eurasian Collared Doves is up for the third straight year. The total number of species seen on the Wallace–Bellota Count did increase from 135 to 139 thanks to the efforts of our 45 counters. Come join us next year, you can help to locate, identify, count or record our local birds.

Band-tailed Pigeons / Passenger Pigeons

We did not note any Band-tailed Pigeons on the Wallace–Bellota Count this year although they have been seen on four of the prior counts. They move around in flocks and are attracted to areas where there is a large production of acorns (mast). This year some locations had abundant acorn production and others had an average year. Different species of oaks produce acorns on different schedules, which are not in synchrony. No wonder this species wanders. They do show up at the feeders of one of our neighbors who puts out peanuts and sunflower seeds. David Lukas (2011) describes them as being highly episodic, and Beedy and Pandolfino (2013) point out that they roam nomadically in search of food. They are hunted, but occur in smaller flocks than did the Passenger Pigeon, and so escaped extinction although their numbers did drop when they were heavily hunted.

There are some "experts" interested in "de-extinction" of the Passenger Pigeon who hope to resurrect a genetically approximate "simulacrum." They have recovered Passenger Pigeon genes from the toe pads of museum specimens and they plan to combine them with genes from the Band-tailed Pigeon which are genetically the most closely related species. The manipulated eggs would be inserted into a Band-tailed Pigeon. Does this seem like a good idea to you? A writer in the January 6th issue of the New Yorker points out that the Passenger Pigeons lived in large flocks which, when their habitat was destroyed "descended on cultivated fields like plagues of locusts." The writer also reminds us that in Dubai in 2011 a "chimeric duck" was successfully engineered which walked like a duck and quacked like a duck but at least reproductively was a chicken!

Steve Stocking Education Chair

Thank you!

In December we issued an end-of-year financial appeal, and nearly a hundred Chapter members responded generously, contributing over \$4000. Your contributions, coupled with a wonderful gift from the C.A. Webster Foundation—a long-time SJAS supporter—will allow us to expand our program in the coming year. Thanks!

Alan England, President/Membership Chair

Help SJ Audubon Go Green

Each issue of *The Hoot Owl* is distributed to 600+ recipients. That's a lot of paper and energy expenditure that adds to our carbon footprint—not to mention a \$2900 annual drain on our minimal treasury. Many conservation organizations are moving towards electronic-only communications. If you are willing to receive *The Hoot Owl* in an electronic-only version, please let us know at wdchkgsqrl@yahoo.com.

Thanks,
Alan England, President/Membership Chair

FIELD TRIPS

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SATURDAY, April 12—*Cosumnes River Preserve*

See entry for Sunday, March 9. Meet leader Jim Rowoth at the visitor center on Franklin Rd. Double check with Jim for start time.

SUNDAY, April 13—*Indian Grinding Rock State Park*

Join leaders Liz West and Joanne Katanic for a visit to this historic park nestled in the foothills of the Sierra. Meet at the Park and Ride at Highway 99 and Highway 12 (Victor Rd.) in Lodi at 7:00 a.m. to carpool. There is an \$8 per vehicle entry fee at the park. Bring a lunch as they have a nice picnic area.

SATURDAY, April 19—*Woodbridge Wilderness Area*

Join leader Jim Rowoth for our monthly census of this hidden jewel of a park on the banks of the Mokelumne River. Meet at the north end of Meadowlark Lane in Woodbridge at 8:00 a.m.

SUNDAY, April 20—*Mokelumne River Fish Hatchery*

Join leaders Liz West and Joanne Katanic for our monthly census of this lovely little riparian area below Comanche Dam. Meet Liz in the fish hatchery parking lot at 8:00 a.m.

SUNDAY, April 26—*Oak Grove Regional Park*

Join leaders Alan England and Dave Wagner for this morning visit to Oak Grove Regional Park. This park can be great during spring migration. Meet at the Starbucks on Trinity Parkway at 8:00 a.m. to carpool. There is a \$6 per vehicle entry fee at the park.

BIRD SIGHTINGS

December 9, 2013 - February 13, 2014
(All sightings pertain to San Joaquin County)

Submitted by Liz West

Nan Ballot found an out of season **Blue Grosbeak** along the Calaveras River west of I-5 in Stockton on December 28th. She has seen the grosbeak several times since then, most recently the 30th of January.

On January 16th, David Yee found a **Long-tailed Duck** and a gray morph **Gyr Falcon**. The Long-tailed Duck was in the Mokelumne River between Bouldin and Staten Islands. The Gyr Falcon was on the ground near Hwy 12 on Bouldin Island feeding on a kill, it then flew up and disappeared behind a berm.

Cliff Hawley, Joanne Katanic and Frances Oliver had an early **Violet-green Swallow** on Staten Island January 18th.

David Yee saw an immature **Glaucous Gull** in a flooded field at the west end of Woodbridge Rd. on January 25th. On January 29th, Terry Ronneberg found 18 **Western Gulls** at the Koster Rd. gravel pond.

Tristan McKee found a **Harris's Sparrow** on Austin Rd. just north of the entrance to Caswell State Park and at least one **Chestnut-collared Longspur** at the west end of West Lathrop Rd. in a large flock of Horned Larks on February 10th.

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

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The Hoot Owl is published six times a year by the San Joaquin Audubon Society.