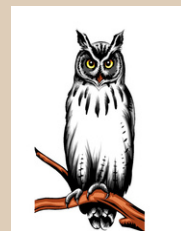


# The Hoot Owl



#1 Dec. eBird Pic  
Mark Elness  
Loggerhead Shrike

## Hootin' Back!

A wonderful team of local birders is dedicated to restarting the "Hoot Owl" and resuming publication. In addition to old favorites like the newest activities of the SJAS, field trips, and rare birds, we plan to add new location write-ups, featured birders, more photos and more!

[Read More ....](#)

## Upcoming Events



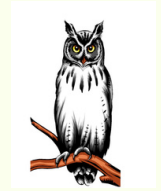
Scroll to page three to read about the wonderful events and field trips sponsored by the SJAS.

[Read More ....](#)

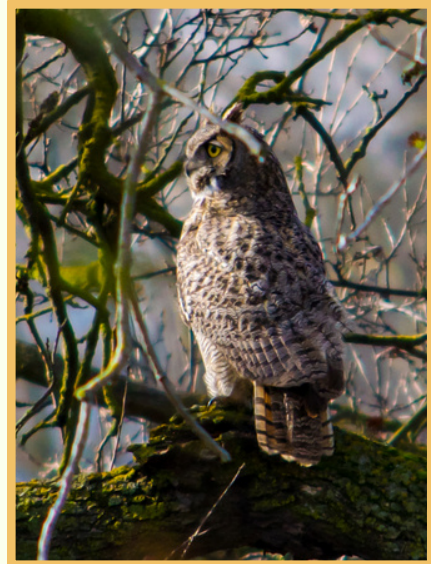
## CBC 124 Recap

Donna Marciano and Kasey Foley have written about our two Christmas Bird Counts put on by the San Joaquin Audubon Society.

[Read More ....](#)



## More Stories Inside



Photos from The Levees at River Islands by Philip Fiorio

### Grants

San Joaquin Audubon Society provides grant funds for organizations and schools working to conserve our local environment. We encourage groups to apply that are interested in birding, conservation, restoration, and environmental literacy.

[Read More ....](#)

### Rare Bird Sightings

Read up on the latest rare bird sightings and pictures as well! Is Mark Elness the Centipede Grim Reaper? Check out his amazing pics of the Sage Thrasher!

[Read More ....](#)

### Location Writeup The Levees at River Islands

In this issue, Philip Fiorio writes about this wonderful habitat along the Southern Delta. It was the top-performing hotspot in 2024 with over 160 species reported!

[Read More ....](#)





# From the Editors

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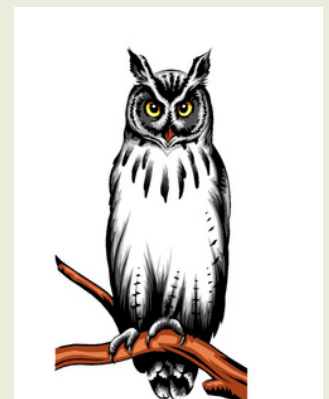


I discovered birding in 2020, and what began as a casual interest soon became a deep passion. The San Joaquin Audubon Society welcomed me with open wings, offering not just birding knowledge but a community of like-minded nature enthusiasts. Their commitment to conservation, education, and fostering appreciation for the natural world continues to inspire me.

It's a pleasure to give back by editing this wonderful newsletter, and I'm grateful to my amazing Hoot Owl team—Elizabeth Olin, Henry Koertzen Srini Raman, and Tod Pohlmann—for their dedication and help.

I encourage you to stay connected with us and explore the incredible resources on our [website](https://sanjoaquinaudubon.org), or better yet, go on one of our fieldtrips!

Happy birding!  
Philip Fiorio, Editor



# Recurring Field Trips

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## **Introductory Birding at Lodi Lake**

1st Saturdays

Join leader Cavan Allen along Laurel Avenue at Lodi Lake. Birders of all skill levels are welcome, but the focus will be on birding fundamentals. Extra binoculars and field guides will be available.



## **Cosumnes River Walk**

2nd Saturdays

Join leader Jim Rowoth for the monthly River Walk bird count through the varied habitats of the CRP. Meet at the visitor center on Franklin Blvd.

## **Woodbridge Wilderness birding**

3rd Saturdays

Join leader Cavan Allen for our monthly census of this small riparian area on the banks of the Mokelumne River. Meet at the north end of Meadowlark Lane in Woodbridge.

## **Birding the Mokelumne River Fish Hatchery**

3rd Sundays

Join leader Liz West for our monthly census of this lovely riparian area on the Mokelumne River below Camanche Dam. Meet in the fish hatchery parking lot below the dam.

## **Beginner Birding South County**

4th Saturdays

Join leader Henry Koertzen for a beginner friendly bird walk. Binoculars and field guides will be available. The location varies by month.





For more information on our field trips,  
please check out our facebook page or  
website!

# Upcoming Field Trips

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Saturday, May 3, 2025	Monthly Lodi Lake Bird Walk
Sunday, May 4, 2025	Connolly Ranch Field Trip
Saturday, May 10, 2025	Birding the Cosumnes River Preserve
Sunday, May 11, 2025	Pinnacles NP Field Trip
Wednesday, May 14, 2025	Medford Island Field Trip
Saturday, May 17, 2025	Birding the Woodbridge Wilderness Area
Saturday, May 24, 2025	Birding the Mokelumne River Fish Hatchery
Saturday, May 24, 2025	Annual General Membership Meeting and Picnic at Fish Hatchery
Sunday, May 25, 2025	Calaveras Big Trees State Park Field Trip
Saturday, May 31, 2025	McDonald Island Field Trip
Saturday, June 7, 2025	Monthly Lodi Lake Bird Walk
Friday, June 13, 2025	Indian Grinding Rocks State Park Field Trip
Saturday, June 14, 2025	Birding the Cosumnes River Preserve
Sunday, June 15, 2025	Birding the Mokelumne River Fish Hatchery
Wednesday, June 18, 2025	Black Hole Field Trip
Saturday, June 21, 2025	Birding the Woodbridge Wilderness Area
Saturday, June 28, 2025	Beginner Birding in South County
Saturday, July 5, 2025	Monthly Lodi Lake Bird Walk
Saturday, July 12, 2025	Birding the Cosumnes River Preserve
Sunday, July 13, 2025	Silver Lake Field Trip
Wednesday, July 16, 2025	McDonald Island Field Trip
Saturday, July 19, 2025	Waldo Holt Preserve Field Trip
Sunday, July 20, 2025	Birding the Mokelumne River Fish Hatchery
Saturday, July 26, 2025	Beginner Birding in South County

# Recent Rare Bird Sightings

**Bird Sightings January 1st to March 31st**

**By Liz West**

- Roger Muskat reported an immature Brown Pelican at the Stockton Waste Treatment ponds on January 2nd. It is possibly the same individual reported in December.
- Mark Elness photographed the continuing Costa's Hummingbird at Heritage Oak winery on January 20th. The hummingbird was present through February 2nd.
- Philip Fiorio reported hearing a Rufous-crowned Sparrow at Carnegie OHV on January 30th. This is the expected location in the county but has become harder to see with restricted access at the park.
- On February 5th , Mark Elness found a Sage Thrasher on Waverly Rd. It was reported through February 17th.
- During a February 10th private survey for the Nature Conservancy on Little Venice Island, Jason Talbott spotted a Red-throated Loon.
- Kasey Foley saw a Black-and-White Warbler in Swenson Park on February 15th. It was present through March 19th.
- On February 18th, Philip Fiorio found a Greater Scaup among some Lesser Scaup at the Ripon Sewage ponds.
- A Summer Tanager was reported on ebird at American Legion Park in Stockton on March 9th. The tanager was last reported March 13th.

# Rare Birds

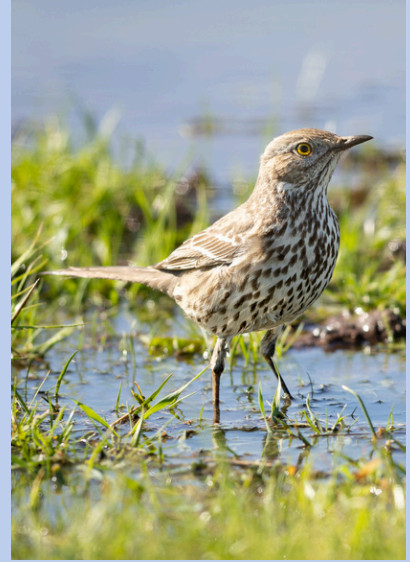
Photos by Mark Elness



Sage Thrasher



Sage Thrasher



Sage Thrasher



Costa's Hummingbird



Costa's Hummingbird



Mountain Bluebird



# Rare Birds

## Kasey and Rich Had a Day!



**Chipping Sparrow**



**Purple Finch**



**Black-and-white  
Warbler**



**Western Tanager**



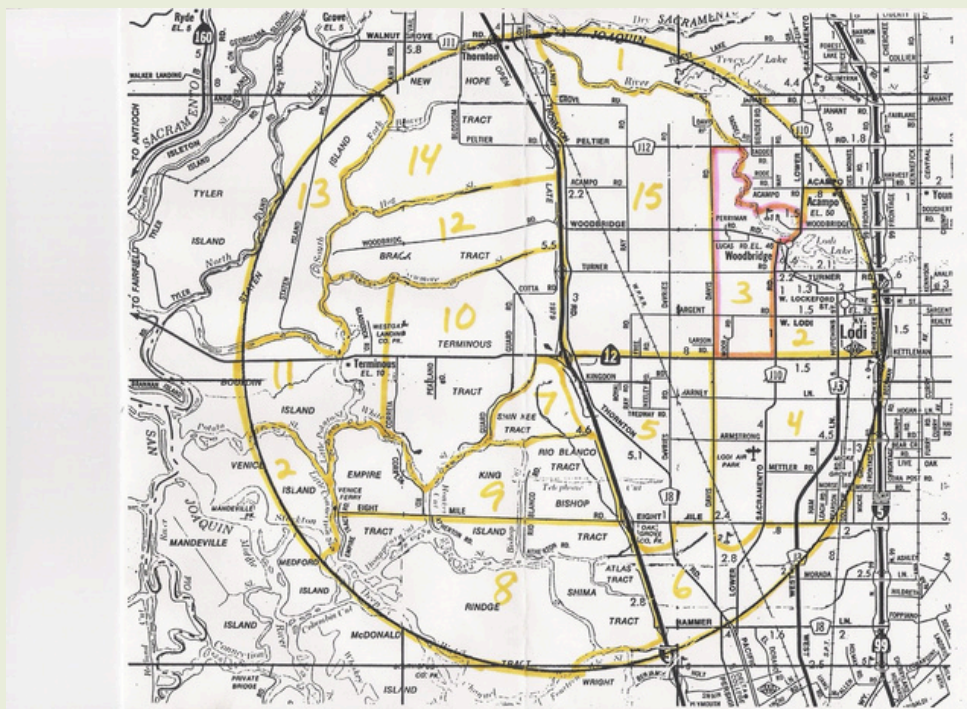
**Black-and-white  
Warbler**



**Bullock's Oriole**

On February 15th, Kasey Foley and Rich Peterson found and photographed this amazing array of unusual birds for this time of year at Swenson Park in Stockton.

# Christmas Bird Count Stockton



## Christmas Bird Count 2024

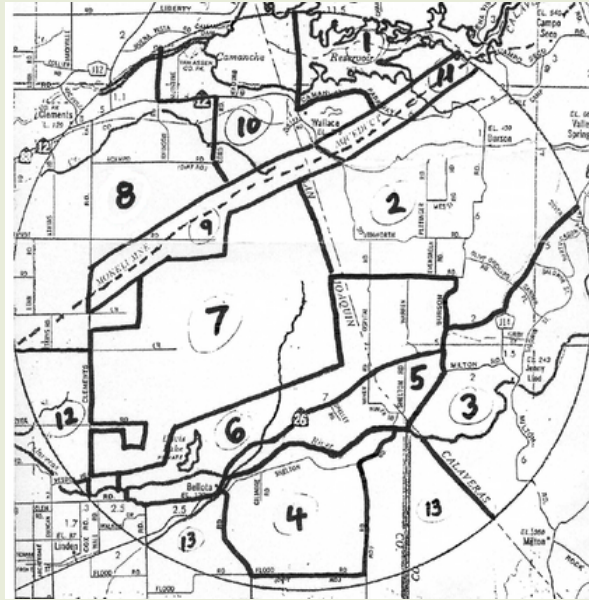
The Christmas Bird Count is a national bird census conducted every year between December 14 and January 5. The 2024 Stockton Christmas Bird Count was held on Sunday, December 15, with 45 participants venturing into 15 sections surrounding the area around Highways 5 and 12. It was a very cold day, 34 degrees to start and 51 degrees at the end, with heavy fog and very light wind. This year, we had a total of 148 species, which is an increase from last year's 138 species count. A few of the highlights were 4 Western Screech-Owls, 1 out-of-season Hooded Oriole, and over 120 Red-tailed Hawks. It was a great day of fun!

Written by Donna Marciano



# Christmas Bird Count

## Wallace-Bellota



Thirty One birders joined in the Wallace-Bellota Christmas Bird Count on Saturday, December 28, 2024, that covered parts of eastern San Joaquin County, western Calaveras County, and a small chunk of Amador County at Camanche Reservoir and included the town of Wallace. The weather was overcast but fairly mild with almost no wind. We found 139 species, up from 134 last year, but down from our one-time high of 143 in 2016. The count consists of rolling hills spotted with remnants of Blue oak, Live oak, some Valley oak, and California Buckeye with cattle pastures, vineyards, and orchards.

Some interesting species seen during this count were one Tennessee warbler for the first time ever on this count, a Bonaparte's gull for only the second time on this count, two Red-breasted merganser, and five Band-tailed pigeons. Also, a high count of 61 Mute swan were counted, up from 13 last year.

Respectfully submitted,  
Kasey Foley, Compiler

Photos by Philip Fiorio





# Grants

## San Joaquin Audubon Grant Opportunities

San Joaquin Audubon Society provides grant funds for organizations and schools working to conserve our local environment. We encourage groups to apply that are interested in birding, conservation, restoration, and environmental literacy.

This year, we funded the following projects:

### **Linden High School**

Sent three students to Nature Bridge, an outdoor and environmental education camp in Yosemite National Park

Bought four sets of binoculars

### **John McCandless STEM Charter School**

Built two new raised garden beds

Provided seven solar powered fans for the school greenhouse to improve ventilation

### **Lathrop High School**

Sent 50 eleventh and twelfth grade students to the Youth Environmental Literacy Summit at Knights Ferry.

The Webster Foundation gives San Joaquin Audubon \$6,000 per year. The funds are used to help support San Joaquin County citizen scientists, conservation organizations, and schools that have conservation projects and environmental literacy activities. Applications are limited to \$1,500 so that multiple projects can be funded each year.

If you are interested in applying for funds, the application is available on the San Joaquin Audubon Society website. We will accept applications for the 2025-26 year from August to October 2025.

Written by Michele Marta

# Location Write-Up

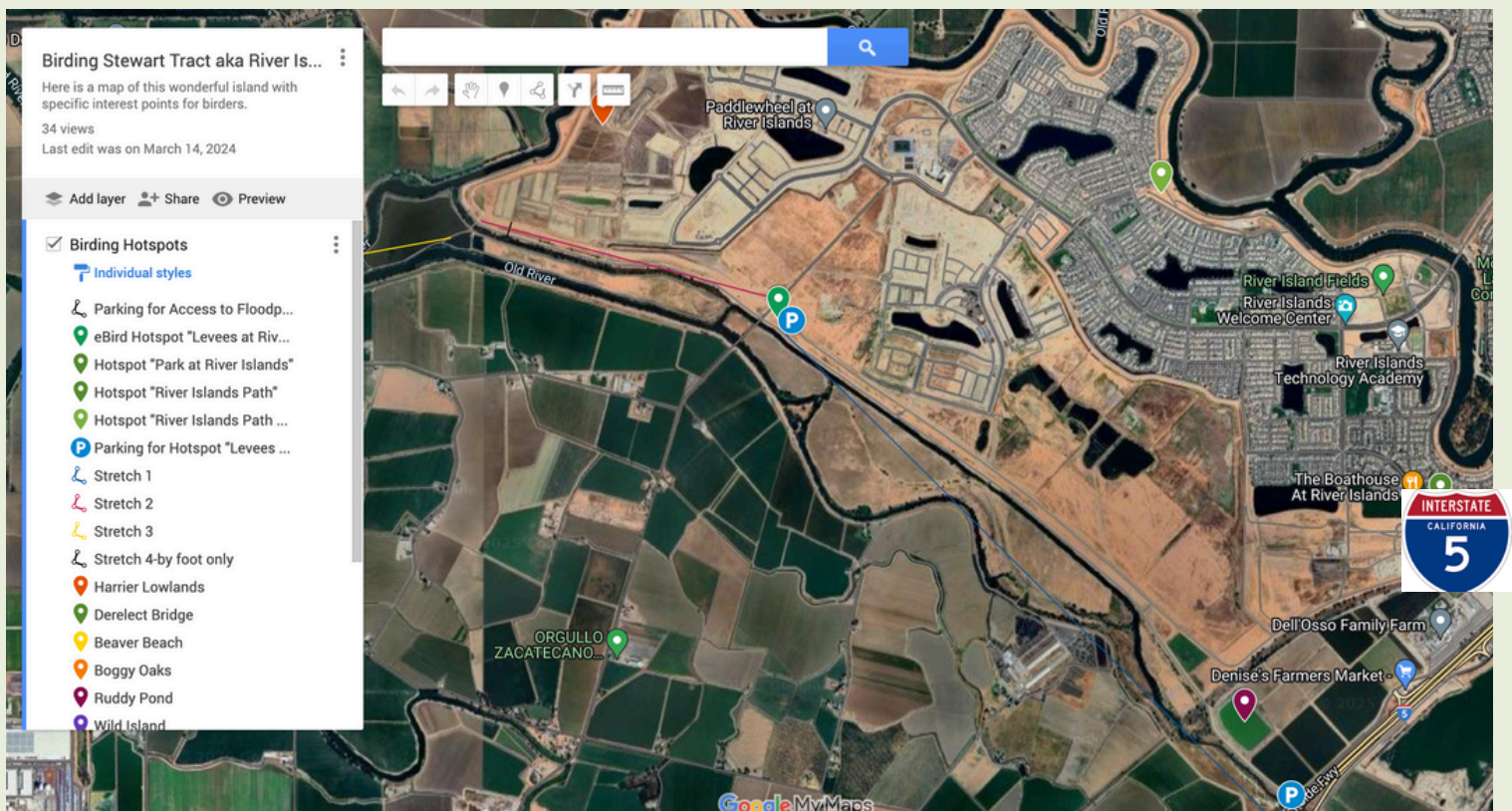
## Levees at River Islands

by Philip Fiorio

This is my favorite spot within the River Islands/Stewart Tract Area. The land on the levees and beyond feels wild and remote. Most of my best sightings have been here, and there are two main access points. The ideal parking is along Paradise Road, just before crossing the Old River bridge to Tracy. While it's a dirt parking area, it has enough space for about a dozen cars. From there, you can walk or bike along the gravel levee road. You can easily spend a whole day exploring the area and not backtrack.

The other parking option is on Manthey Road, just past Del Osso Family Farms, near the bridge before the road dead-ends.

**\*Note\*** Access to this area is currently pedestrian-only despite “No Trespassing” signs.



# Location Write-Up

## Levees at River Islands

by Philip Fiorio

### Hotspot #1: Levees at River Islands

176 Species on [eBird](#)

#### Target Birds

**Year-round:** Belted Kingfisher, Red-tailed Hawk, Northern Harrier, White-tailed Kite, American Kestrel, Great Horned Owl, Wrentit, Yellow-billed Magpie, House Wren, California Quail, Loggerhead Shrike, Tree Swallow, Great Blue Heron, Snowy and Great Egret, Common Yellowthroat, and Acorn, Nuttall's, and Downy Woodpeckers.

**Summer:** Swainson's Hawk, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Bullock's Oriole, Blue Grosbeak, Northern Rough-winged Swallow.

**Winter:** Red-breasted Sapsucker, Orange-crowned, Yellow-rumped, Black-throated Gray Warblers; Merlin, Ducks, Shorebirds, and Teals.

**Migrants:** Western Flycatcher, Willow Flycatcher, Western Tanager, Yellow and Wilson's Warblers, and Lazuli Buntings.

**Rarities:** Common Poorwill, White-throated Sparrow, Brown Creeper, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Hooded Merganser, Lewis' Woodpecker, Least Tern, Brown Pelican, Solitary Sandpiper, Lesser Yellowlegs, and Yellow-headed Blackbirds.





# Picture Gallery

## Levees at River Islands

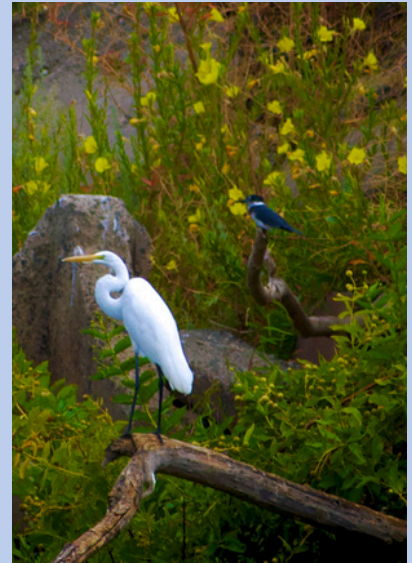
Photos by Philip Fiorio



**Blue Grosbeak**



**NOHA Near Miss!**



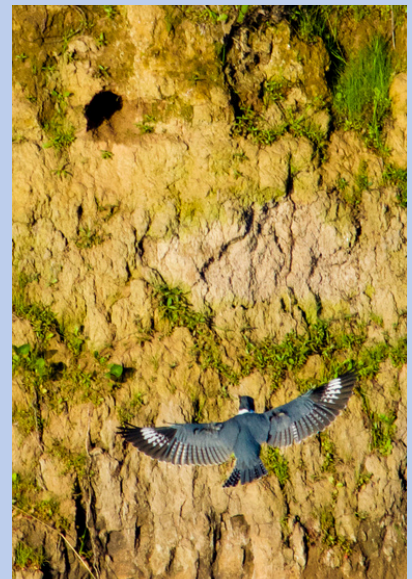
**Along the River**



**Least Tern**



**Common Poorwill**



**Kingfisher Burrow**

# Location Writeup

## Levees at River Islands

### Imaginary Journey



Let's begin our journey by walking north along the east side of the slough. The gravel road, which doubles as a levee along Paradise Cut, runs parallel to a waterway on your left, with an open field on your right. After a quarter-mile, you'll encounter an artificial pond, although fenced off and with limited views. Nevertheless, this pond attracts waterfowl.

Please be cautious when crossing the train tracks, as there is no warning system, though trains are rare and slow. Blue Grosbeaks frequent the waterway here in the summers, with pairs spotted both years I visited.

After crossing the tracks, you'll find an artificially flooded field that's great for ducks and shorebirds, particularly during wet winters. The area also has high blackbird numbers, thanks to a large dairy across the water, and I've even seen a Yellow-headed Blackbird one fall.

Continuing north, the fields and waterways teem with wildlife. In spring, summer, and fall, the fields bloom with sunflowers, thistle, and fiddleneck, attracting seedeaters.

Further along, there's a bridge over Paradise Cut. I don't recommend crossing due to private property, but standing on the bridge offers a great vantage point. Loggerhead Shrikes frequently perch on powerlines along this stretch, and a pair nests nearby. The levees here also attract falcons, harriers, kites, and hawks.

As you continue walking, you'll eventually reach Paradise Road, the other parking access point.



# Location Write-Up

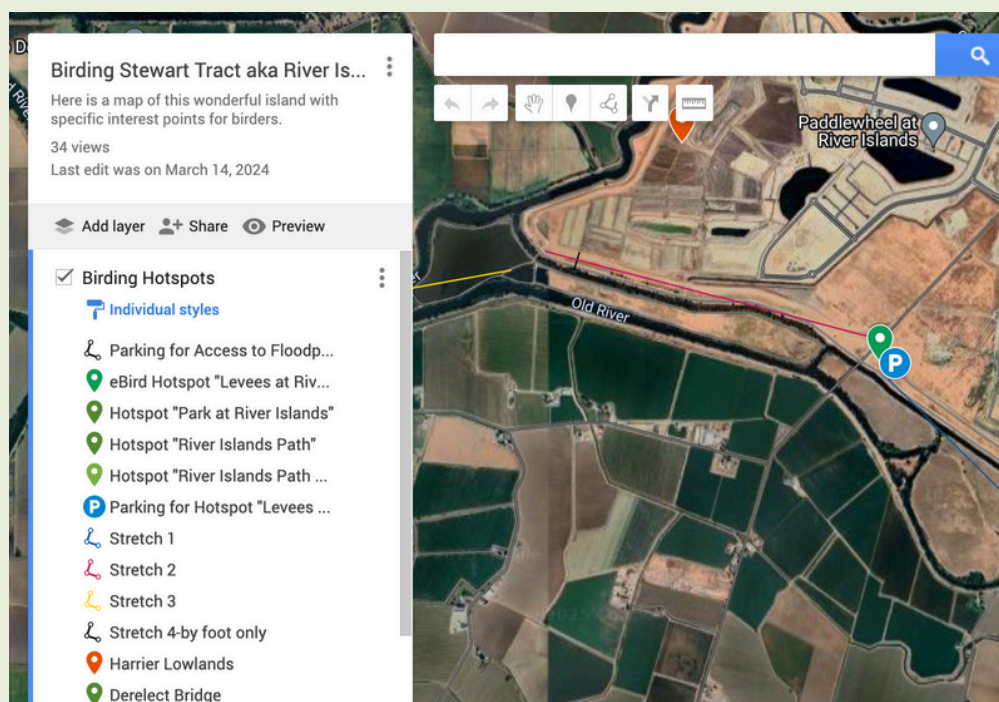
## Levees at River Islands

by Philip Fiorio

From Paradise Road, the path leads to a shallow marshy waterway where I've had most of my Common Poorwill sightings. It's also a prime location for Virginia Rail, Sora, Wood Ducks, and various herons and egrets. Keep following the path until it meets Old River, where you can either turn east toward Hotspot #2 or head west into a vast floodplain. This area becomes a bird paradise when winter floods recede in summer, attracting hundreds of shorebirds.

Instead of heading toward the levees, you decide to explore the floodplain to the west, where the water seems to trail off. What looks like a bridge isn't quite what it seems; instead of taking you over water, it leads you down to a vast stretch of land not protected by levees. It feels like stepping onto an island untouched by modern hands. Last winter, this entire area was submerged, as the heavy rains turned it into a watery expanse. When the waters receded over the summer, the landscape was teeming with life—hundreds of shorebirds feasting on fish and crayfish, creating a dynamic scene that felt almost prehistoric.

As you follow the bridge down, you access the expansive floodplain, a place where three large open fields stretch out before you. These fields are bordered by the Old River, with tree-lined shores enclosing them. Right now, the GPS image on eBird shows these fields covered with water, but this isn't the usual state. When the water subsides, seed-producing plants cover the landscape, drawing flocks of finches and sparrows to feed.





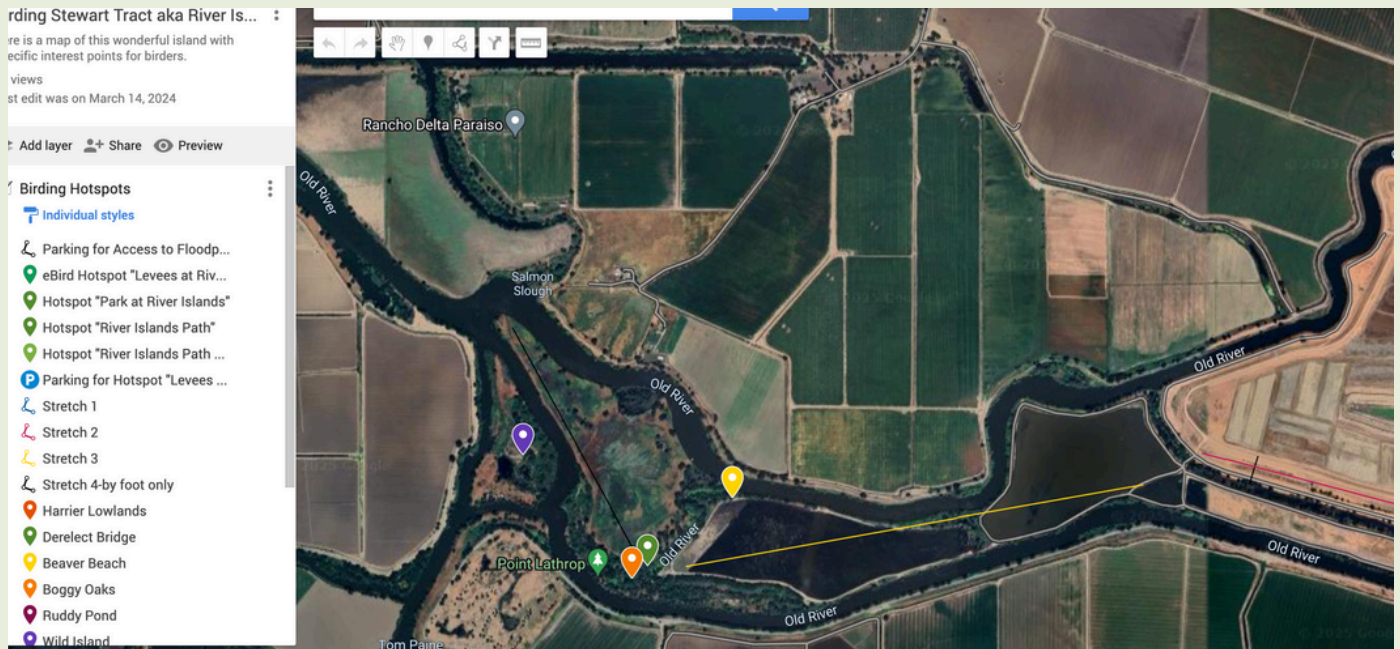
# Location Write-Up

## Levees at River Islands

by Philip Fiorio

As you venture deeper into this western island, you feel a sense of being removed from human traces altogether. The only modern reminder is the large power lines maintained by the power company, where large raptors often perch. Sometimes, Ospreys stop by, surveying the land from the heights of these towering lines.

This entire hotspot is also home to the greatest concentration of Great-horned Owls you've ever encountered. Even during the day, you can hear their haunting calls, echoing through the trees and brush. Sometimes, you'll catch a glimpse of them swooping down, diving into the undergrowth to hunt. They're masters of stealth, often seen too late, already gliding away across the fields or along the river trails. During the breeding season, their presence becomes even more pronounced, and their calls, hoots, and wingbeats fill the floodplain, a reminder of the untamed wildness that still exists here.





# Meet a Local Birder Mark Elness



San Joaquin Audubon  
Society President  
Srin Raman catches up  
with one of our  
local birders,  
Mark Elness

**Can you tell us a bit about yourself? (Name, what do you do, where do you live (city))**

Mark Elness, retired truck driver, Manteca CA

**What got you into bird watching?**

I think that after my wife, Lorna, and I bought a field guide and identified some resident common birds, we were hooked.

**How did you first become interested in birds?**

I've enjoyed nature all my life. Camping and fishing were my favorite activities growing up and I remember seeing Bald Eagles and Osprey and appreciating their majestic beauty.

My "spark bird" was the Black Phoebe. I would see them everywhere flying off their perches fly-catching and giving their beautiful distinctive call. After we ID'd the Phoebe and a gray, black, and white bird with a black bandit mask as a Loggerhead Shrike, we got excited and caught the birding bug.

**How long have you been birding?**

Since about 1997





# Meet a Local Birder Mark Elness

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## **How often do you go bird watching and with who?**

Lorna is my favorite birding companion.

We generally will go birding 3-4 times a week.

Her enthusiasm for nature and birds is infectious.

## **Do you do birding alone or with friends or any audubon chapter?**

Birding is a wonderful social activity and the SJ Audubon field trips are excellent! When my focus is on mostly photographing birds, I tend to go by myself as I can spend as much time as needed on a subject.

## **Who inspired you to get into birding?**

Going back almost 25 years now, I would say Jim Rowoth and David Yee are two of my biggest influences. While they didn't necessarily get me "into" birding, their generosity to this beginning birder and their patience and willingness to share their knowledge and expertise continues to this day. I owe them a debt of gratitude.



## **What's your favorite bird or birds?**

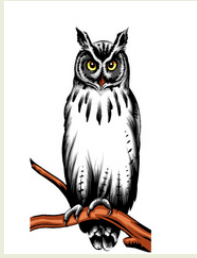
Whichever one I'm looking at or photographing! Loggerhead Shrikes remain one of my favorites.

## **What rare bird do you most want to see? Why?**

Swallow-tailed Gull. It's shown up on the CA coast at least twice and we've missed it every time. It is an incredible looking gull.







# Meet a Local Birder Mark Elness



**SR: What is the coolest bird you've ever seen?**  
The Slate-throated Redstart in San Francisco last year was amazing!! Such a beautiful bird.

**What unusual things have you done or places have you gone to see birds?**

Over 20 years ago, we hiked about 14 miles round-trip in the midday heat to see a Colima Warbler in Big Bend NP in Texas. We were badly dehydrated with heat exhaustion when we finished, but we did see the bird! Last year in the Rio Grande Valley also in Texas, we spent nearly 25 hours over 4 days on a finally successful Fan-tailed Warbler stake-out.

**What's the farthest you've gone to see birds? What was that like?**

Before Lorna started her teaching career and after I left corporate life, we embarked on a 3 month trip which took us around the perimeter of the Lower 48 states and into parts of Canada. While the timing of the trip missed most of migration, it was still an epic birding journey of over sixteen thousand road miles.

**Where is your favorite place to bird? Why?**

Southeast Arizona and South Texas, hands down. The resident and migrant birds are incredible, and the rarities that might show up can make your head spin.

**What is your favourite field guide?**

Sibley V2 phone app.

**Do you belong to any local birdwatching groups or organizations?**

SJ Audubon, Central Valley Bird Club, American Birding Association, Western Field Ornithologists.

**How could one become more interested in bird watching?**

Get out and go birding as often as you can. Feeding and attracting birds to your yard is very rewarding and gives you built in subjects on which to practice your visual ID and vocalization skills. Go on local field trips and don't be afraid to ask questions. Chase rarities! You can see some great birds, meet great birders, and bird in areas you may not visit normally.

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Lorquin's Admiral  
taken by  
Philip Fiorio

## San Joaquin Summer Butterfly Count now Fifty Years Old!

Please consider joining us for our annual summer butterfly count (San Joaquin Audubon field trip) on June 14, 2025. It is a full warm summer day, and in recent years we work hard to find more than ten butterfly species within the count area. But this is a very special year, the 50th year since this count was first started.

The Fourth Of July Butterfly Counts were first started in 1975 by the Xerces Society. Our San Joaquin County circle was set up and observed (counted) by many employees in the San Joaquin County Agriculture Commissioner's office. These trained professionals observed 27 butterfly species and over 300 butterflies that first count day. They continued the annual count through 1982, finding 30 species and over 700 butterflies in their peak year, 1978.

By 1983 county staff were no longer allowed to count butterflies, due to financial shortages resulting from Proposition 13. So in 1986, Dr. Kirby Brown, our county entomologist, joined us to organize an official Audubon field trip and revitalized this count. It involves catching many of these in our nets and looking for much small field marks than we do with birds. Even participants who have never looked at these insects before generally enjoy the habitats and learn several butterfly species by the end of the day. In our first few years we counted between 20 and 25 species and from 300 to 700 butterflies each year.

The data were collected and published by the Xerces Society up until 1983, when the North American Butterfly Association took over the counts. I'm proud to report that every year since 1986, we have counted and sent in our data. As with the Christmas Bird Counts, these butterfly data reflect many habitat changes and their effect on butterfly populations.





## San Joaquin Summer Butterfly Count cont.

The University of California Cooperative Extension joined us as a cosponsor of this field trip in 1998. Initially, we used the 4-H van and involved many of their entomologists in our annual endeavor. Now, we recruit from a large group of UCCE Master Gardeners, who help us identify and count butterflies. Meanwhile we started a second Summer Butterfly Count immediately adjacent to our count. This is the Cosumnes River Count, in Sacramento County, where several agencies have kept the native habitat in preserve. That count will be held on June 21, this year and you can sign up at their website if you are interested in comparing the difference between large preserves and our smaller park habitats. By now much of the former open space in our San Joaquin County has become housing so we worked a full eight hours last year to count eleven species, and 165 total butterflies, but within the past decade, we've counted as many as 19 species and 300 butterflies.

On Saturday, June 14th, we will start out at Oak Grove, where we divide up into two groups, covering the entire Miwok Trail, the closest to natural areas at that park. After that our group visits three more sites: county and city parks, along with state open areas. We encourage all to bring nets, and we try to share our nets. We especially encourage children, who often find our best butterflies. You will need to bring lunch and wear hats, sunscreen and comfortable shoes. We will provide a complementary color, life sized butterfly field guide for each participant.

If you are interested please contact Kathy Schick at [kschick2@gmail.com](mailto:kschick2@gmail.com) or (209)612-5130. Please call me ahead so I can arrange free parking for us and print out enough field guides for everyone.

- Dr. Kathy Schick



# SJAS Board Members and Membership Info

A California Chapter of the National Audubon Society serving the communities of Stockton, Lodi, Tracy, Manteca, Escalon, Ripon and Lathrop. All of San Joaquin County. Read our [Bylaws](#).

Officers

President: Srinivasan Raman (Srini Raman)

Secretary: Alan England

Treasurer: Elizabeth West

Membership, Publicity: [Alan England](#)

Field Trips: Henry Koertzen

Programs: Donna Marciano

Website: Srini Raman

Website: Alan England

Meetup: Henry Koertzen

Conservation Chair: Dave Fries

Tod Pohlmann

Hospitality: Michele Marta

Newsletter Editor: Philip Fiorio

Listserves Moderator: Pat Paternostro

Directors @ Large

Donna Marciano, Past President

Henry Koertzen

Tod Pohlmann

Amy Weiser

Ernie Maier

Michele Marta

Teams

Education & Grants – Donna Marciano, Michele Marta, Amy Weiser

Programs & Scholarship – Donna Marciano, Alan England

Social Media – Alan England, Henry Koertzen, Srini Raman

Hoot Owl – Philip Fiorio, Elizabeth Olin, Tod Pohlmann, Srini Raman

## 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 quarterly *Audubon Magazine* and to the bimonthly chapter newsletter, *The Hoot Owl*. 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**

**Stockton, CA 95267**

### *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—electronic copy \$15

**San Joaquin Audubon Society**

**Attn: Membership (Local)**

**P.O. Box 7755**

**Stockton, CA 95267**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail Address \_\_\_\_\_

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