

February/March/April 2026



The Hoot Owl

San Joaquin Audubon Society



My Backyard

René Reyes expands
on creating bird habitat
at his Stockton home

Townsend's Warbler from the
Lodi Lake Fieldtrip

Text and Photos
by Kasey Foley



More Stories



Black-headed Grosbeak taken by René Reyes in his Backyard

Birding Goals

Birders Jim Gain, Sammy Cowell, and Elizabeth Olin share their Birding Goals for 2026 and highlights from last year

[Read More](#)

Rare Bird Sightings

Read up on the latest rare bird sightings.

[Read More](#)

Guest Presenters

Guest presenters, John Trochet will present about Climate Change and the Birds of the Zuni Mountains Region of New Mexico. Aaron Haiman will present about the Birds of the California Delta.

[Read More](#)

Recurring Field Trips

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 Cosumnes River Preserve. 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.

Sandhill Crane Festival



Amy Weiser with the Crane and her American Barn Owl Watercolor displayed



Recent Rare Bird Sightings

Bird Sightings October 1st to December 31st.

By Liz West

On October 7th, Mia Kuhnle reported a Gray Flycatcher in an almond orchard next to a slough near Milton and Duncan Roads.

Philip Fiorio photographed a Green-tailed Towhee, November 4th at Mavis Stouffer Park in Ripon.

Ivy Schlegel reported a Short-eared Owl at Staten Island on November 7th. The owl was last seen on December 6th. On December 14th, Jim Blankenship saw one at Isenberg Crane Preserve. It is turning out to be a good winter for them.

Kasey Foley photographed an all-white crane on Woodbridge Rd., November 12th, after sending photos off to Gary Ivey it was confirmed as a Sandhill Crane.

On November 26th, Mark and Lorna Elness reported that a pair of Hooded Oriole were in their backyard in Manteca. The Hooded Orioles were present through December 20th and increased in number to four. They think that orioles might stay the winter.

Rohan Veerabatheni photographed a Band-tailed Pigeon at Micke Grove Park on November 30th. While on the December 21st Fish Hatchery bird count, Ralph Baker was the only one to see two Band-tailed Pigeons.

Emmet Iverson and Adrian Hinkle reported a Neotropic Cormorant flying with a Double-crested Cormorant over Wimpy's Marina on December 12th.

On December 30th, David Yee found a female plumaged Cassin's Finch at Hutchins⁵ Street Square.

The Hooded Oriole Winter Guests at the Elness Manteca Garden



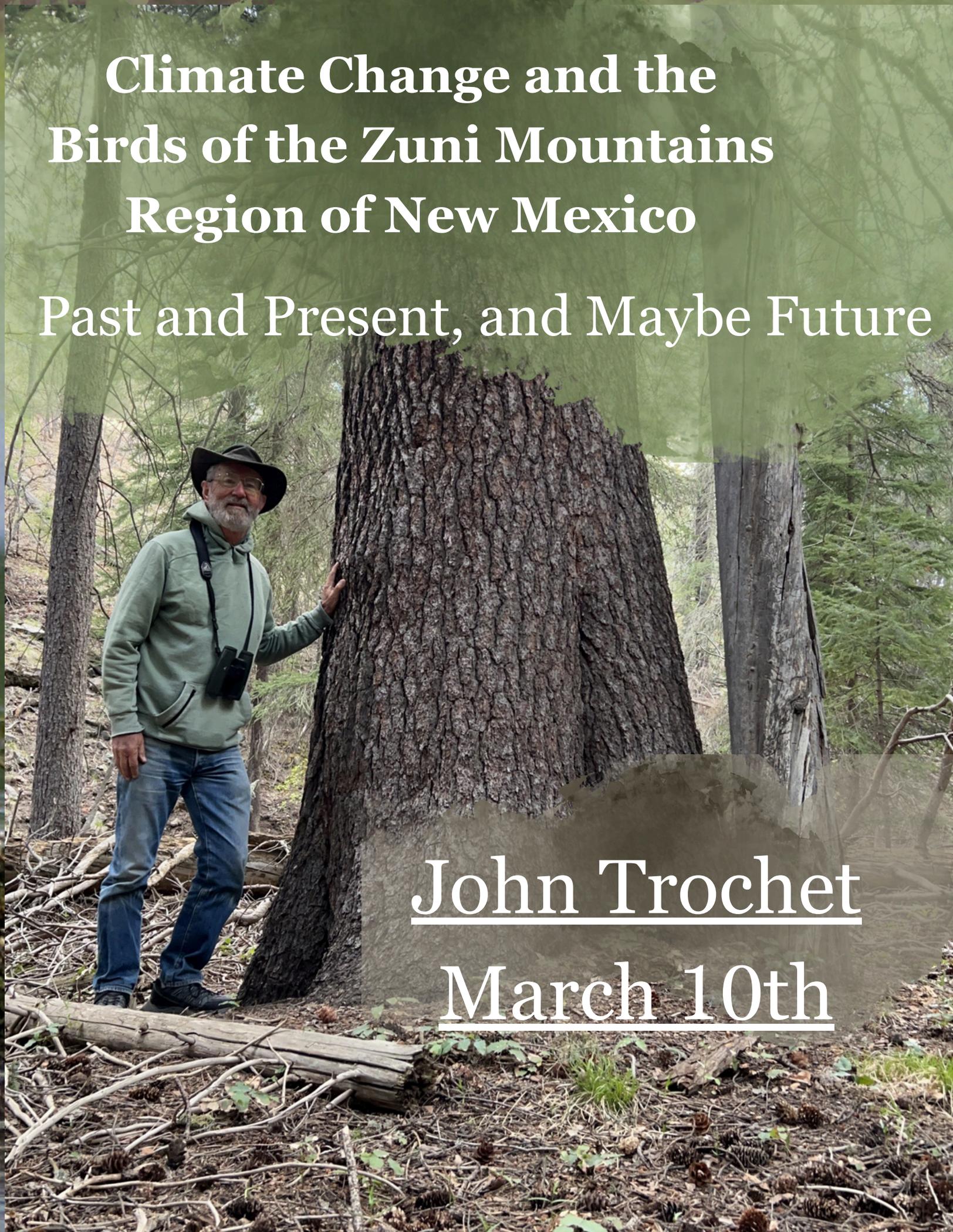
Guest Presenters

Birds of the California Delta

Aaron Haiman

February 10th

Nesting Forster's Terns by Philip Fiorio in Delta

A photograph of a man with a beard and glasses, wearing a green hoodie, blue jeans, and a brown hat, standing in a forest. He is leaning his hand against the trunk of a large, dark-barked tree. The forest floor is covered with dry sticks and pine cones. The background shows more trees and a slightly hazy sky.

Climate Change and the Birds of the Zuni Mountains Region of New Mexico

Past and Present, and Maybe Future

John Trochet

March 10th

SJAS Fieldtrip Spotlight

Lodi Lake 12/6/25



Hermit Thrush

Text and Photos
by Kasey Foley

The Lodi Lake Beginning Bird Walk took place on an overcast, chilly morning (42-43 degrees F) with a slight periodic breeze. Five bundled up birders joined the trip leader, Cavan, to hopefully search out some winter wonders.

The morning started out slowly with small numbers of birds showing themselves or even being heard. We were lucky enough to see a nice sized group of Wood Ducks, a Green Heron, and a Common Goldeneye in the river.

We took the dirt trail to the back park part of the river when we heard several Sora and Virginia Rail calls. We were unable to see any of the birds but they continued to call along the trail at different locations.

When we came back to the main dirt trail we ran into another birding group and exchanged bird sightings including a Townsend's warbler seen by the other group. Shortly, we also came upon *our* first Townsend's warbler then several more followed along with many Orange-crowned warblers and a Hutton's vireo.

We got excited when we saw a very large pigeon quickly fly by thinking it was a Band-tailed but photo inspections revealed it was a Rock Pigeon. As some of us walked to our vehicles, others discovered a Red-breasted sapsucker just outside the Nature area so we had to run back to get photos, whew! Though cold, it turned out to be a lovely day as always when you get to go birding.

Lodi Lake Fieldtrip

Photos by Kasey Foley



Wood Ducks



Fox Sparrow



Orange-Crowned Warbler



Spotted Towhee

Birding Goals



JIM GAIN

My goal for the year 2025 was to observe 90% of all species seen by all observers in Stanislaus County. I observed 225 which was 93% of that total. My second goal, which was real motivation, was to photograph 90% of the species I had observed.

With the Eurasian Wigeon that I photographed on December 16, I had recorded 205 species photographed for 93% of my total. This year, I plan on doing the same in San Joaquin County.

SAMMY COWELL

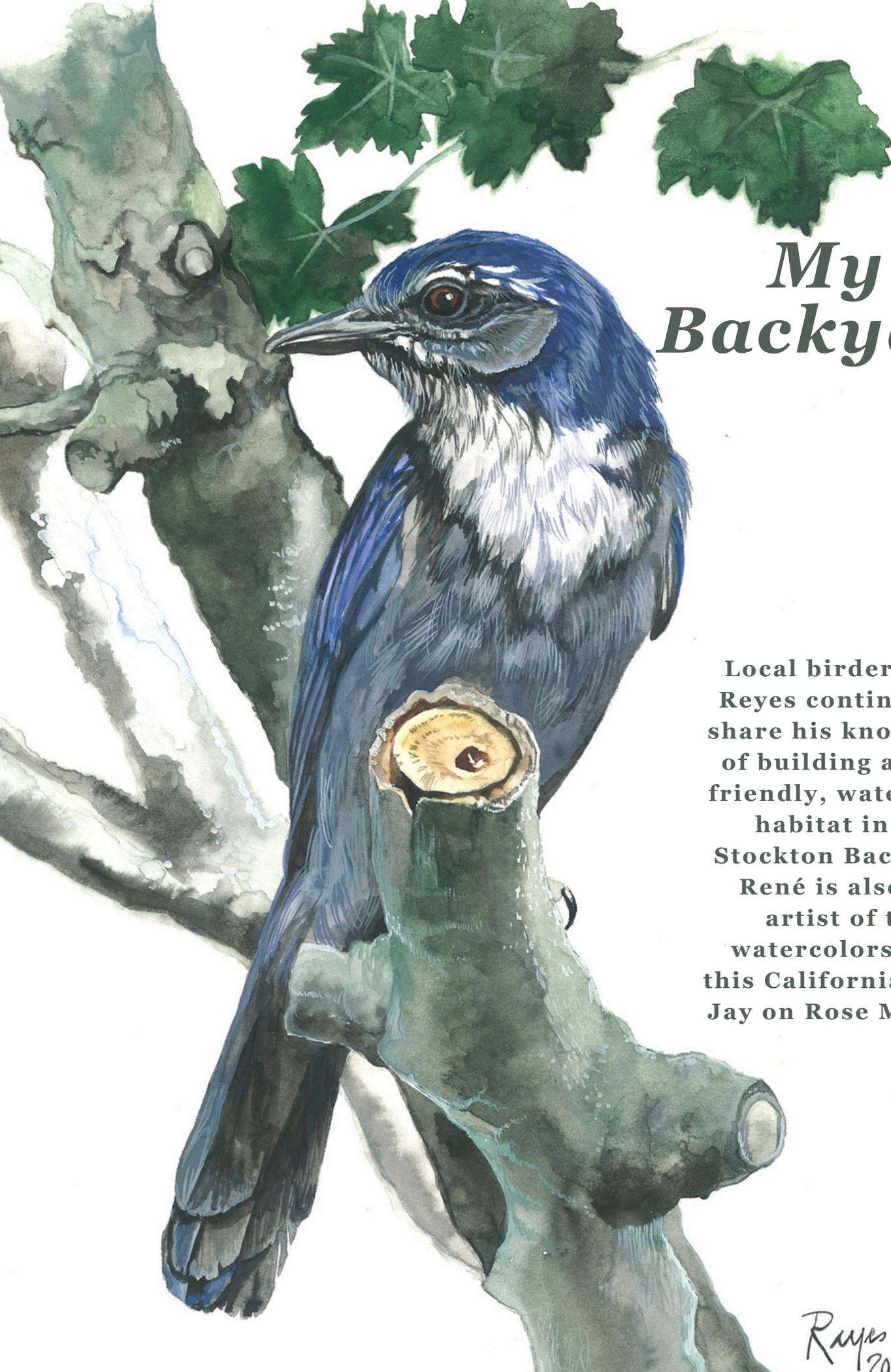
Goal 1: See 200 species in Calaveras County for the year. I chose this mark as a nice round number, but I honestly think I may have sold myself short! As of this writing (January 16), I'm at 112 species (putting me on track for 2,555 species by the end of the year!). Jokes aside, I think I could get between 215-230, which brings me to goal no. 2

Goal 2: Find a new species never seen in Calaveras County before, and bring Calaveras out of dead-last!

ELIZABETH OLIN

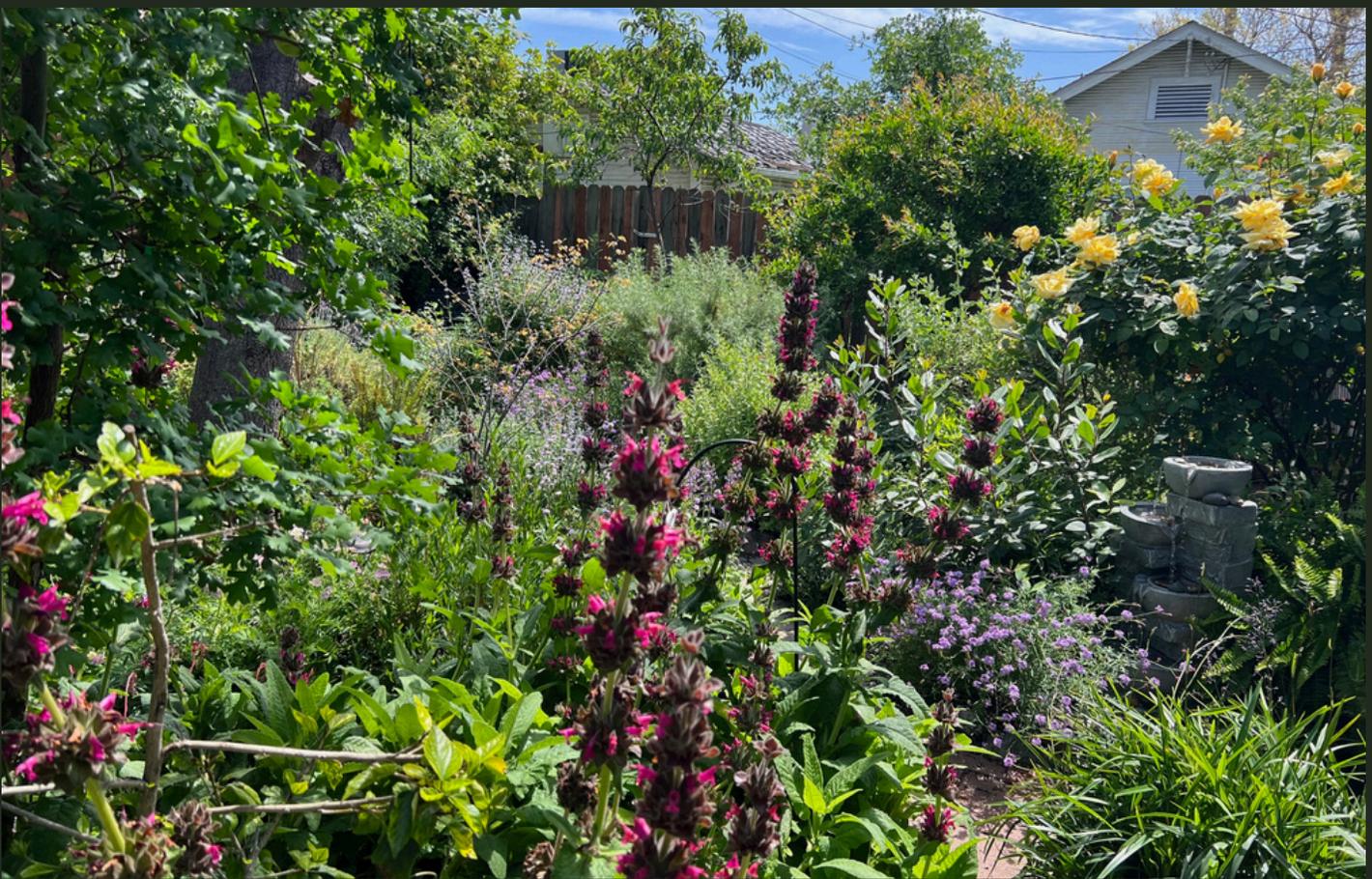
My goal for 2026 is to submit a sound recording on eBird for at least 100 bird species, and I plan to write about the experience on my [birding blog](#).





My Backyard

Local birder René Reyes continues to share his knowledge of building a bird-friendly, water-wise habitat in his Stockton Backyard. René is also the artist of the watercolors, like this California Scrub Jay on Rose Mallow.



Starting a native garden in California’s Central Valley is an exercise in trial, error, adaptability, and self-education. Local examples of native landscapes were surprisingly scarce, and the nearest chapters of the California Native Plant Society (CNPS) were more than an hour away. Finding plants truly suited to my part of the Valley wasn’t easy either. The local garden club focused mostly on roses, and the “native” sections at nearby nurseries were often mislabeled or filled with species that weren’t native at all. Reliable expertise on authentic Central Valley natives was hard to come by, so I eventually realized I’d have to figure things out on my own.

So how does one begin a native garden? For me, the journey started with books and the internet. The first piece of literature I picked up was *California Native Gardening: A Month-by-Month Guide* by Helen Popper. It became my primary reference, offering practical guidance on everything from planting schedules to taking cuttings, watering routines, and more. Although the book leans toward Southern California conditions, I found the guide to be transferable to Northern California. I’ve also learned that a stack of Post-it notes goes a long way—marking key sections and jotting down what does and doesn’t work in my own yard.



Rufous Hummingbird at Hummingbird Sage

The internet has a lot of information on native plant gardening, but not all is relevant to the Central Valley. The first YouTube tutorials I watched repeated the same basic steps: plant in the fall, dig a hole twice as wide as the root ball, test drainage by filling the hole with water, backfill with the native soil, and water regularly for the first few weeks. Easy enough. But what does “water regularly” mean? What do I do if my soil drains very slowly? Central Valley soil can be stubbornly nonporous, and in some places, like my backyard, you hit a dense claypan just a foot or two down. Eventually, I realized I had to stop obsessing over every detail and simply begin.

Solarizing my yard (smothering the lawn with cardboard and mulch for a couple of months) gave me plenty of time to explore native plant options on [Calscape.com](https://www.calscape.com) for my zip code. To my surprise, there were more than 400 species listed. Of course, most of them weren't available in nurseries. I quickly learned it was easiest to do quick online checks right there in the nursery aisles. I started with 1-gallon pots of reliable sage perennials: Hummingbird Sage (*Salvia spathacea*), Black Sage (*S. mellifera*), White Sage (*S. apiana*), Purple Sage (*S. leucophylla*), and Cleveland Sage (*S. clevelandii*). They made a great foreground. These species tend to be stocked locally, they're hardy and drought tolerant, and they support native insects. For taller focal points, I picked up Toyons and *Ceanothus*. Sure enough, those first purchases turned out to be solid choices and almost all of them are still thriving in the yard.



Bushtits

Watercolor by the Author

The COVID lockdown fast-tracked my transition from traditional lawn to native landscaping. I was already in the midst of “solarizing”—smothering the last patches of turf with cardboard and mulch—when the world hit pause. With time at home, I dove into California Native Plant Society (CNPS) tutorials and virtual native garden tours, soaking up inspiration from my living room.

Calscape.org became my go-to resource, helping me identify plants suited to my zip code. I began ordering online from Annie’s Annuals (now Peaceful Valley) and Las Pilitas Nursery, and I compiled a list of local nurseries that stocked native species. One of my favorite discoveries was the overlooked “discount” and “discard” piles—where nurseries stash unsold, scraggly plants. To them, these were write-offs. To me, they were ugly ducklings waiting for a second chance. That’s how I ended up with monkeyflowers, and elderberries. My wife and I also started collecting cuttings during our hikes, bringing home tiny pieces of California’s wild beauty. Of course, there are rules regarding collecting cuttings, for example avoiding cuttings from state or federal parks.

The spring and fall migrations of 2020 turned my yard into a hotspot of avian activity. That year brought a flurry of “firsts” to my garden, including a White-throated Sparrow, a handful of Fox Sparrows, a Lincoln’s Sparrow, a pair of Townsend’s Warbler, a pair of MacGillivray’s Warblers, several Purple Finches, and many other unexpected visitors. Enhancing the garden with additional water features seemed to pay off, drawing in a wider variety of species. The highlight came in October, when a female Blackpoll Warbler arrived and lingered for nearly a week—long enough to attract local birders eager to catch a glimpse.

Highlight Birds

Photos taken in the Reyes Yard



Western Tanager



Western Tanager



Willow Flycatcher



Western Flycatcher



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 now until November 21st.

Written by Michele Marta

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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](#).

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