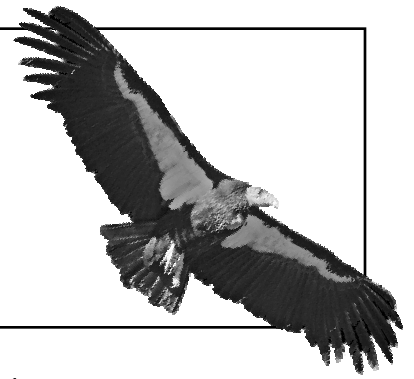


The CALIFORNIA CONDOR

Ventura Audubon Society **FEBRUARY 2012** Volume 32 Number 5
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CALL NOTES ...Bruce Schoppe, President



On February 18th, we invite you to take part in the Annual Great Backyard Bird Count at Lake Casitas. Allen Bertke, who leads the monthly Beginner's Bird Walks, will also lead this field trip. We'll have extra binoculars for those who need them and Allen will be his usual witty self.

The GBBC is a joint project of Audubon and The Cornell Lab of Ornithology and is intended to be a "do it your own way" sort of program. Officially, it takes place from February 17 – 20, 2012. Each year, tens of thousands of people throughout the U.S. and Canada take part in the Great Backyard Bird Count. Participants count in their backyards, out their office windows, at local parks and nature centers, and absolutely anywhere else! You can spend as little as 15 minutes counting birds or

even make a whole week end of it. Ventura Audubon usually dedicates the February Beginner's Birdwalk to the GBBC.

People of all ages and all levels of bird-watching experience are welcome. The GBBC is a great way to learn more about the birds in our community and connect with nature, and is perfect for fledgling birders.

You can count by yourself, with your family, community group, school, friends, or Ventura Audubon! It's an ideal way for more experienced birders to introduce children, grandchildren, and others to the wonderful world of birds.

You can learn more about the GBBC at its website: www.birdcount.org.

Ventura Audubon offers beginner's field trips every month from September through May, usually led by Allen Bertke. It is not necessary to be a beginner to enjoy a Beginner's Bird Walk. They are always in interesting places and we usually see a lot of birds. Neither should you stay away from any other field trip if you consider yourself a beginner. We encourage participation by anyone interested in birds and an enjoyable walk in the great outdoors!

FEBRUARY PROGRAM ...Janice Sussha, Program Chair

7:30 p.m. Tuesday, February 14th, Poinsettia Pavillon, 3451 Foothill Road, Ventura

NEW RESTORATION PROJECTS PLANNED for the OJAI MEADOWS

and the VENTURA RIVER PRESERVES with Brian Stark

Brian's presentation will preview coming attractions for restoration at the Ojai Meadows Preserve and the Ventura River Preserve. "We have substantial plans for new activities that are sure to enhance bird habitats along with those of other wildlife and fish. I'll also have some bird-related current events from our preserves, and mention some opportunities for people to get involved if they'd like to help us improve habitats."

Brian is the Conservation/Operations Director at the Ojai Valley Land Conservancy. During his 18 years in the conservation and restoration fields, Brian has managed over 35 physical restoration projects concentrating on steelhead migration barriers, riparian and in-stream habitat enhancement, and erosion control. He has also managed projects involving water quality improvement, watershed planning, and community organization, and has authored a number of conservation and restoration plans based on lessons learned on his many projects.

BIRD OF THE MONTH – FEBRUARY 2012

Article and Photo by David Pereksta

Rock Wren (Salpinctes obsoletus)



February is a good month to seek out our local resident breeding species. One species that can be found in Ventura County where its preferred arid and rocky habitat occurs is the Rock Wren.

The Rock Wren is a stocky terrestrial bird that lives in open, rocky, and often arid regions of western North America. It is variably pale with grayish-brown upperparts that are very finely speckled with white and black, and a cinnamon rump. The round tail is brown above, barred with black, tipped with buff on the corners, and has a black subterminal band. The eyebrow is buffy, but not sharply demarcated. The underparts are dull white, becoming buff to dull cinnamon on the flanks, lower belly, and undertail coverts with fine dusky streaking on the breast. Its song is a mimid-like series of couplets, *tra-lee*, repeated 4 or more times and sometimes interspersed with tinkling notes. Calls include a *ti-keer* and a dry, fairly high trill on one pitch. The Canyon Wren looks similar and occupies some of the same areas, but can be distinguished by its rich brown upperparts, white throat and breast, and rusty belly.

Rock Wrens are found in arid barren areas including rocky outcroppings, cliffs, talus slopes, and rock dams, in rocky washes and boulder fields, and on ocean bluffs and earthen banks. They are rather tame and extremely active, often doing deep knee-bends. Their long, sharp-clawed toes allow them to scamper up sheer cliffs in search of insects and spiders while their flattened body and long slender head and bill facilitate exploring narrow crevices for prey. Rock Wrens are found from sea level to high mountain tops with birds from the latter dropping to lower elevations in the winter. Canyon Wrens prefer similar habitats, although generally with more shade and moisture, so the two species can often be seen in the same places.

The species breeds from interior British Columbia to Saskatchewan, south to Central America and from the Pacific coast to the western Great Plains and central Texas. It winters from California, southern Nevada and Utah, New Mexico, and central Texas south. Migrants reach coastal and lowland habitats not used in summer.

In Ventura County, Rock Wrens are an uncommon local resident with some increase of numbers in the winter. They can be encountered in arid rocky areas at La Jolla and Big Sycamore Canyons, Sandstone Peak, Hill Canyon, Camarillo Regional Park, and Rustic Canyon. They can also be found on rock rip-rap and dams at Mugu Rock, Lake Casitas, Lake Piru, and along the Ventura River; and in roadside canals at the Saticoy Spreading Ponds and the roads in agricultural areas on the Oxnard Plain. They are scarce in the higher elevations of the north county, but have been reported on Mount Pinos, Quatal Canyon, and along the Sespe. They are also present, and can be common on, Anacapa and San Nicolas Islands.



FEBRUARY FIELD TRIPS ...Judy Dugan

Beginners are welcome on all field trips. Light drizzle does not necessarily cancel trips, but heavier rain will. If in doubt, please call the trip leader.

Saturday, Feb. 4, 9:00 – 12:00 a.m. Friends of the Santa Clara River volunteer workday. Arrive at 8:00 for birding. Leader: Sandy Hedrick (340-0478). Meet at 8:00 for birding and 9:00 for a weed war at The Nature Conservancy's Peto property. Take Hwy 126 east through Santa Paula to the stop light at Hallock Drive & turn right. Go to the end of Hallock & park. Long pants and closed-toed shoes are required. Contact Sandy Hedrick for more information: 340-0478.

Monday, Feb. 6, 8:30 a.m. Santa Clara River Estuary/Surfers' Knoll. Leader: Adele Fergusson (415-4304). Take Harbor Blvd to Spinnaker and enter Ventura Harbor. Follow Spinnaker as it curves around to the right. Surfers' Knoll is on the left. Scopes are nice if you have one.

Saturday, Feb 11, 8:30 a.m. Emma Wood and Ventura River Estuary. Leader: Kay Regester (652-1073). Park at the far west end of Main St. beyond the bridge over the Ventura River. In addition to Great Blue Herons, egrets and sparrows, we will hunt for the Burrowing Owl.

Saturday, Feb. 18, 8:30–10:30 a.m. Beginners' Walk/Backyard Bird Count, Lake Casitas. Leader: Allen Bertke (640-9037). The Beginners' Walk will be combined with the Great Backyard Bird Count sponsored by the National Audubon Society & Cornell Laboratory. To carpool from Ventura, meet at the Ventura Co. Museum (side parking lot) at 8:00 a.m. Take Hwy 33 to Hwy 50, turn left and follow signs to the lake or take Hwy 33, exit Casitas Vista Rd. Turn right and go under freeway past Foster Park to 1st right, Santa Anna Rd. Follow to the gate. Meet outside the gate. Parking is limited. We hope to see many birds including Clark's & Western Grebes, osprey & sapsuckers. Remember to bring binoculars.

Sunday, Feb. 19, 8:00 a.m. Ventura County Game Preserve. Leader: Eric Waian (630-0100). Always a very special trip! We will see ducks, peeps, ibis, raptors, and more. We cannot drive the grounds so there will be considerable walking. **Directions:** Take Casper Rd. south from Hueneme Rd. (between Saviers Rd. and Hwy.1). Follow the left curve to the barn/house buildings and park on the road outside the buildings. Please bring scopes.

Mark Your Calendar

Sunday, March 4 – Friends of the Santa Clara River Workday/Birding

Saturday, March 24 – Beginners' Walk – Emma Wood/Ventura River Estuary

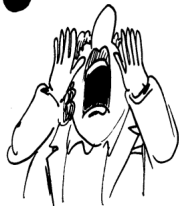


GO PAPERLESS!

Sign up to receive your newsletter via email – get your issues faster, help save natural resources, reduce waste, and help our chapter save money! You can read it online or print out the pages you need to refer to more frequently. It is in pdf format and will look and print exactly like the printed version. **Photos will be in color.** Send an email to Jackie Worden (jbworden7@gmail.com) to start your paper-free **California Condor** delivery today! (Offer good only for chapter, including national, members in good standing.)

VOLUNTEER NEEDED for PROGRAM CHAIR!

Volunteers!



For the 2012 general program year which starts in May, we are in need of a new Program Chairperson to replace Janice Sussha. This is a critical VAS Board position, and we are asking you to fill it.

The Chapter provides nine programs a year from September through April. The Program Chair's responsibility is to schedule programs reflecting the interests of our 850 person membership. Scheduling programs is actually a very interesting process because of the many and varied topics and the inherent knowledge of each speaker. A seven year history in Microsoft Word documents every program, program year, speaker, and all contact information. Program information is shared with Conejo, California, and National Audubon lists. Also, the Board, members, and local news are sources to draw upon. Janice

is happy to train you--indeed spending some time in advance of her departure is the best way to ensure a smooth transition.

Anyone interested in filling this role is welcome to call Janice Sussha at 805-469-9220 or Bruce Schoppe at 658-2396 for more information about this important position.

We **REALLY** need you! Come on and step up!



Education Chair ...Susan Bee

With much appreciation the VAS Board wants to thank **Robert and Delores Cathcart** and **Jim and Janice Sussha** for their very generous contributions towards our Audubon Adventures educational program. Through their generosity elementary children are discovering the magic of California's outdoors, the learning possibilities to be found there, and their role in caring for it. We are

pleased that so many donors have recognized the value in this program. **VAS has reached its goal of supporting 23 classrooms this year.** Thanks to all our generous donors

NEWSLETTER PROBLEMS?

If you're experiencing delivery problems with your newsletter, need to change your address, want to change your delivery type, or have questions about your membership renewal date, please contact **Jackie Worden** at jbworden7@gmail.com or call her at (805)652-0577. In addition to being our new Membership Chair, she also manages our mailing databases, so she's the one to make the changes.



Happy Valentine's Day!



NOTES FROM THE FIELD

...David Pereksta

The Ventura CBC was held on 17 Dec and tallied an impressive 180 species. Uncommon species for the count included **Snow Geese**, **Greater White-fronted Geese** and a record 68 **Cackling Geese** at the Olivas Links Golf Course; 4 **Brant** offshore (DP); 3 **Bald Eagles** at Lake Casitas and a **Golden Eagle** along the Ventura River; a **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** and 2 **Red-naped Sapsuckers** in Ojai; and a **Swamp Sparrow** at the Ojai Meadows Preserve (JG & RM). Species rare for the count included a **Long-tailed Duck** and 3 **Northern Rough-winged Swallows** at Lake Casitas (KK); the **Red-necked Grebe** in the Ventura Harbor; individual **Mountain Chickadees** in Ojai and Ventura (EW); a **Townsend's Solitaire** in Ojai (JG & RM); individual **Hermit Warblers** in Ventura (EW) and Wheeler Canyon; and a **Yellow-headed Blackbird** at the Santa Clara River estuary.

The Thousand Oaks CBC was held on 30 Dec and recorded 181 species including many highlights. The Point Mugu portion of the count tallied 144 species including (all sightings by DDJ, TM & DP or continuing unless noted; first dates in parentheses) 17 **Brant**, 15 **Blue-winged Teal** (23 Dec-6 Jan; DP, TM & MR), 3 **Greater Scaup**, a **Black Scoter** (23 Dec-6 Jan; TM, DP & MR), 3 **Common Goldeneyes** (23 Dec-6 Jan), 2 **Hooded Mergansers**, an **American Bittern**, 6 **Yellow-crowned Night-Herons**, a **Swainson's Hawk**, a **Ferruginous Hawk** (20 Dec-6 Jan; MR, DP & RM), a **Prairie Falcon** (23-30 Dec; DP, TM & MR), a **Crested Caracara** (19 Dec-6 Jan; MR, FF et al.); 4 **Clapper Rails**, 3 **Common Gallinules**, 5 **Lesser Yellowlegs**, 46 **Red Knots**, a **Thayer's Gull**, a **Black Skimmer**, a **Burrowing Owl**, 3 **Vermilion Flycatchers**, a **Summer Tanager**, a **Clay-colored Sparrow** (TM), a **White-throated Sparrow** (29-30 Dec; TM & DDJ), 3 **Tricolored Blackbirds**, a **Bullock's Oriole** (29-30 Dec; TM & DP), and two **Lawrence's Goldfinches**. Nine **Tundra Swans** were found at Point Mugu on 23 Dec (DP, TM & MR) but did not remain until count day and a **White-winged Scoter** (DP), "**Yellow-shafted**" **Northern Flicker** (DP & AS), and **Eastern Phoebe** (RB, DP & AS) were all found after count day on 6 Jan. Other highlights on count day included a pair of **California Gnatcatchers** and a **Costa's Hummingbird** at Cal Lutheran (D & LA); **Least Bitterns** at Lake Sherwood (MH et al.); 2 **Mountain Chickadees** in the Santa Monica Mountains (RB & DPers); and a **Vesper Sparrow** near CSUCI (MP).

The Ventura River watershed/Ojai area continued to produce uncommon and rare species over the last

month. Canada Larga Road hosted an assortment of notable species including a **Zone-tailed Hawk** on 18 Dec (MP), the continuing **Prairie Falcon** through 10 Jan, a **White-winged Dove** 2-4 Jan (MT), **Mountain Bluebirds** 18 Dec-10 Jan (MP), a **Sage Thrasher** on 1 Jan (DP), and a "**Slate-colored**" **Dark-eyed Junco** on 5 Jan (KK). **White-throated Sparrows** continued at the end of Avenal Road with two being seen through 1 Jan and a single on 10 Jan. The last report of the **Varied Thrush** there was on 13 Dec. Lake Casitas hosted a **Bald Eagle** and three **Pine Siskins** on 13 Dec (KK) and a **Burrowing Owl** on 5 Jan (KK).

Waterfowl continued to be widely reported as is expected at this season. The Saticoy Spreading Ponds hosted a variety of geese including 18 **Greater White-fronted Geese** 2-9 Jan (MP), 7 **Snow Geese** on 2 Jan (MP), as many as 8 **Ross's Geese** 2-9 Jan (MP), and a single **Cackling Goose** on 18 Dec (MP) with as many as 7 being seen through 9 Jan (KK). Ducks of note included a **Redhead** on 5 Jan (KR) and seven **Common Mergansers** on 8 Jan (DP). Other reports of **Common Mergansers** included five at Lake Piru on 27 Dec (DP) and nine at RiverPark on 2 Jan (DP). A **Greater White-fronted Goose** and a **Wood Duck** were in the Moorpark Arroyo 8-9 Jan (CR). **Hooded Merganser** reports included as many as six at the Buena Ventura Golf Course 17 Dec-2 Jan (DP & EW), two from the Foster Park bridge on 1 Jan (DP & CM), and others in the Arroyo Simi 18 Dec-7 Jan (MC).

The **Red-necked Grebe** returned to the Ventura Harbor for another winter and was seen 16 Dec-10 Jan (RM). Other birds of note in the harbor included the continuing **Black Oystercatchers** and hybrid oystercatchers through 10 Jan, two **Wandering Tattlers** 17 Dec-1 Jan (DP), 8 **Ruddy Turnstones** 17 Dec-1 Jan (DP), 6 **Surfbirds** 17 Dec-1 Jan (DP), a **Thayer's Gull** on 1 Jan (DP), a **Burrowing Owl** on 10 Jan (KK), and a "**Large-billed**" **Savannah Sparrow** 1-10 Jan (DP) with another joining it on 10 Jan (KK).

Notable passerines were reported throughout the county. An **Eastern Phoebe** returned to a Camarillo yard for its second consecutive winter and was seen through 30 Dec. Rare in the lowlands near the coast was a **Pygmy Nuthatch** in a yard in the Ondulando neighborhood in late Dec (RB). A backyard in east Ventura hosted a **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** on 23 Dec and a **Black-throated Gray Warbler** on 1 Jan (RM). Sparrows of note near the eastern edge of the county included three **Vesper Sparrows** along the Chumash Trail in Simi Valley on 3 Jan (MP) and a **White-throated Sparrow** at Ahmanson Ranch on 24 Dec (SH).

VENTURA AUDUBON SOCIETY

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FEBRUARY BOARD MEETING

The Tuesday, February 7th Board of Directors meeting will be held at Neil Ziegler's home, 1921 Holly Ave. in Oxnard, at 7:15 p.m.. Call 983-7207 for more information.

THE VENTURA AUDUBON SOCIETY holds its regular meeting on the second Tuesday of the month at the Poinsettia Pavilion, 3451 Foothill Rd. in Ventura at 7:30 p.m., September through April. The May meeting is a barbecue. Call the President for information. Board Meetings are held on the first Tuesday of the month. A Membership Form is available on our web site.

THE CALIFORNIA CONDOR is published nine times per year (September—May). Members are encouraged to submit articles, announcements, letters and drawings in WORD format or in the form of an e-mail message. *The deadline is noon on the 12th of the month preceding the next issue.* E-mail to: birderz1@roadrunner.com Call Editor Dee Press at 484-8415 for more information.