

The CALIFORNIA CONDOR

Ventura Audubon Society **JANUARY 2014** Volume 34 Number 5
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CALL NOTES ...Bruce Schoppe, President

Volunteer in the New Year!

Happy New Year, Birders! I'm looking forward to another year of interesting programs and enjoyable field trips in addition to the education, conservation and restoration work that Ventura Audubon does so well. We succeed because we have the help of dozens of volunteers.

It is January -- which means that spring is just around the corner! By March the symbolic fencing will be going up on Ventura County beaches as we prepare for the arrival of the federally threatened Western Snowy Plovers and the endangered California Least Terns. Both species find our beaches attractive. The Central Coast including Ventura County is at the center of the recovery effort.

In 2013, we were surprised (pleasantly) by the huge numbers of terns and plovers that chose to nest at Hollywood Beach. Hollywood Beach turned out to be the one bright spot among county beaches, aided, in part, by the fact that the beach has not been dredged.

At this point, it doesn't look like there will be money in 2014 for the Corps of Engineers to do any large scale dredging of Hollywood Beach. The money that is available, likely, will only permit dredging of the channel into the harbor. So, there is a high probability that we will see the return of many of the same terns and plovers and they will again find a large beach perfect for nesting!

Hollywood Beach is very heavily used. In 2013, we pulled together on short notice a small cadre of volunteers to act as docents on the beach. We will need you again in 2014! The beaches that are in state parks have rangers and environmental staff aided by volunteers to monitor and protect the birds. Hollywood Beach and Ormond Beach don't have that advantage and must depend entirely upon volunteers. We'll seek grant money for monitoring but, with ongoing budget constraints, that money may not be available. Volunteers are needed. If you can help, please call or email me or any board member. We'll provide training and identification badges. We are also planning additional outreach to homeowners and residents of Hollywood Beach.

If being a docent is not what appeals to you, how about leading a field trip? Each of our outings brings 20 or more birders who enjoy the scenery and the birds. It isn't necessary to be an expert birder but some familiarity with the destination is helpful. If you are interested, please call or email Karin Kersteter.

January Program- 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, January 14h Poinsettia Pavilion, 3451 Foothill Road, Ventura

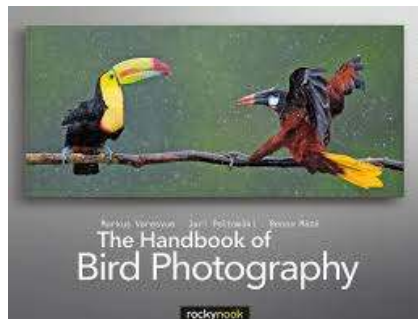
CAMERA BUFFS! ...YOU ARE the January Program!!

We will start our new year off on an upbeat note by being treated to a showing of some of the best pictures from our fellow Audubon photographers.

This is guaranteed to be a fun filled evening with a special surprise from John and Dee Lockwood.

Do come out and support our VAS members-you'll be glad you did!

Laura Golovsen, Program Committee



BEYOND BASICS ...Article and Photos by David Pereksta

Combatting Laguna Fever and Single Field Mark Syndrome

Well....last month's column generated more comment than any other I have written! I was expecting that so I guess that is a good thing and all the direct feedback, while varied, was positive. To recap, I discussed the annual epidemic of "Laguna Fever" where the hopes and expectations of finding rare birds lead to frequent misidentifications. I am now using that as a launching point to discuss common obstructions to bird identification and how to overcome them.

With the misidentification examples mentioned last month, the common theme was that the focus on one obvious field-mark on all those birds led to the ignoring of other fieldmarks and characters that would have allowed for a correct identification (ID). In addition to "Laguna Fever," I also thought I dubbed the term "Single Field Mark Syndrome," but a search of the Internet proved me wrong (damn you, Kimball Garrett!). "Single Field Mark Syndrome" is perhaps the leading cause of bird misidentifications. People frequently send me photos looking for ID corroboration and ones that they have misidentified are usually the result of focusing/getting stuck on one salient feature while ignoring the others. Many of these mistakes are often favoring the ID of a rare species. It is critical to carefully eliminate similar looking commoner species before jumping to a rare species ID. Expectations are difficult to combat because the reporting on local listserves focuses on uncommon and rare species; most of which are provided by skilled and experienced observers. Subscribe to the "Facebook Bird ID Page of the World" if you want to see multiple daily examples of birders and photographers hopelessly butchering simple bird IDs. Some of you are thinking I am being too harsh, but in the day and age of being able to post a picture on the Internet for advice before thoroughly reviewing it, new birders are not learning the skills they need to identify birds easily on their own. Websites like "whatbird.com" should be shut down for everyone's own good!

The simple way to break the chains of "Single Field Mark Syndrome" is obvious...assess as many features of a bird as you can to settle on an ID. I like to compare it to a fingerprint analysis. If you were suspected of a crime and they were going to indict you based on having a one character match on a fingerprint, you would be outraged. You would demand they go back to confirm that other characters match because a good fingerprint match should be based on 12 points, not one! The same concept should apply to bird ID; you might not need 12 matching points, but you should certainly have more than one! Based on some of the ID mishaps identified last month, looking at just one more field mark would have prevented those like the black cap on the Wilson's Warbler (eliminating Prothonotary Warbler) or the conical seed-crunching bill on the Savannah Sparrows (eliminating Red-throated Pipits).



When you identify a bird, you go through a process of evaluating fieldmarks. For birds you have seen often, this is a quick, and most times automatic, process. For unfamiliar birds, it takes longer. If you believe you have found an uncommon or rare species and you plan to share this bird on a listserv or report it to eBird, you should be prepared to document your sighting with a photograph (if you can get one) and a written description. While many birders find documenting a sighting to be intimidating, it is as simple as writing down the field marks, behaviors, and other factors that led you to your ID. Ideally, this description should be done in the field while observing the bird or done from photographs you took of the bird later. I find that a great way to practice documenting things is to describe what you see in your photographs. A description should only include what you observed, ideally in your own words, and should not be a rewriting of what the field guide says. Some eBirders are great at writing a 20 minute-long description of a bird they observed for a few seconds. Undoubtedly, they are using their books more than their own observation, which quickly becomes a slippery slope. Anyone can convince you they saw a bird if they write down what the book says it looks like. I also caution underthinking and overthinking an ID; both are dangerous. One of the most common local misidentification problems is Red-tailed Hawk because birders overthink juveniles and immatures that do not show red tails.

Next month I am going to dive deeper into this discussion with the features I find are valuable to look for when documenting a bird and how to use a field guide to get you there. Perhaps the "Classic" field guide of all time has the key in its opening pages, which I will discuss. Until next month, I have left you with a few photos to practice on; one may be rare and one may be common. Be prepared to defend your answers and learn how to "check your work!"



JANUARY FIELD TRIPS ...Karin Kersteter

Saturday Jan 4, VAS Christmas Bird Count. See newsletter Page 4 for areas, section leaders, potluck, and other information.

Sunday, Jan 5, 8:00 a.m. Restoration Work Day, Santa Paula. Hedrick Ranch Nature Area Restoration Program. Sandy Hedrick: (805)340-0478. Arrive at 8:00 for birding which usually yields some interesting birds. **Work from 9am – noon. Long pants and boots or closed shoes are required.** Bring water, gloves & sun protection. Take Hwy 126 to Santa Paula, 10th St. Exit. Go under freeway, rt. on Harvard, rt. on 12th and cross the S.C. River Bridge. Go 3.7 miles to 20395 S. Mountain Rd. Turn left onto the dirt road & follow it to the end (approx. ½ mile).

Sunday, Jan 12, 9:00 a.m. Butterfly & Birding Trip, Ellwood Mesa Butterfly Preserve, Goleta. Leader: Bruce Schoppe (805)658-2396. Join us on a delightful, easy ½ mile walk to view over-wintering Monarch butterflies. We will also bird the preserve while we walk. Wear sturdy shoes that can get dirty and dress in layers. Butterflies are best viewed in mid-morning. **Directions:** Allow 45 minutes for driving. From Hwy 101 exit Storke Rd./Glen Annie and head south away from the mountains. Turn right on Hollister Ave, drive about 1.2 miles and take a left on Coronado Drive. Entrance to the Preserve is at the end of Coronado Dr. on the right. There is ample street parking and a restroom at the parking lot. **To car pool:** Meet at the Museum of Ventura Co., 100 East Main (side parking lot) at 8:15 a.m.

Saturday, Jan 18, 8:30 a.m. Arroyo Simi, Simi Valley. Leader: Need Volunteer (please call Karin at (805)901-2203 if you would like to volunteer). A mostly natural bottomed channel in Simi Valley is host to a wide variety of excellent (and sometimes surprising) birds. Recent birding trips to this channel have given excellent views of waterfowl, including Green Herons and Sora, as well as Buffleheads, Hooded Mergansers and all three varieties of teals. Sparrows are also seen here, including Lincoln's, Song and Savannah. **Directions:** Allow 45 minutes for driving from Ventura. From Hwy 101, take Hwy 23 and exit Tierra Rejada Rd. Turn right on Tierra Rejada. Turn left on Madera. Turn right on Easy St and park along the street near the entrance to the bike path. We will bird the channel on both sides of Madera Rd. **To car pool,** meet

at 7:45 a.m. at the Pacific View Mall in Ventura. Take Coastal View Dr. off Mills & park in the lot directly across from the parking garage entrance.

Saturday, Jan 25, 8:30 a.m. Beginners' Bird Walk. Ormond Beach/Arnold Rd. Leader: Allen Bertke (805)640-9037. Join us at this excellent coastal location, where we will look for a variety of waterfowl. Our 2012 field trip revealed Willets, Whimbrels, Black-necked Stilts, Black-bellied Plovers and other interesting birds. We will also look for Yellow-headed Blackbirds, Peregrine Falcon, and Blue-Gray Gnatcatchers. Dress in layers, as the morning may be chilly. Please bring a scope if you have one. **Directions:** Hwy 101 south and exit on Rice, turn right and continue to Hueneme Rd. Turn right on Hueneme Rd. After Olds Rd. take a left on Arnold and continue to the end of the road. **Please note:** Avoid leaving valuables in your car if you are parking it at the end of Arnold Rd. **To car pool,** meet at 7:50 a.m. at the Pacific View Mall in Ventura. Take Coastal View Dr. off Mills & park in the lot directly across from the parking garage entrance.

Upcoming Weekend Birding Trip! Saturday and Sunday, March 8–9. Salton Sea. Leader: Neil Ziegler (805) 983-7207). The list of resident birds at Salton Sea is incredible; it includes such species as Gambel's Quail, American White Pelican, Costa's Hummingbird, Burrowing Owl, Verdin and Abert's Towhee. Add to this list the massive number of over-wintering shore birds, and you have one outstanding birding location! We hope the timing of our trip will allow us to enjoy cooler temperatures, over-wintering shore birds (such as Sandhill Cranes) and perhaps early migrants. RSVP to Karin at venturabirding@yahoo.com or (805)901-2203 by February 8 if you would like to join us for this exciting birding trip. Lodging and other pertinent information will be forwarded to those who RSVP.

Mark Your Calendar

Saturday, Feb 1 – Hedrick Ranch, Santa Paula
 Tuesday, Feb 4 – Camino Real Park, Ventura
 Saturday, Feb 15 – Ventura Botanical Gardens
 Saturday, Feb 22 – Beginners' Bird Walk – Saticoy Ponds

BEGINNERS' BIRD WALK ...Allen Bertke

We made it a double-destination trip on the latest Beginners' Bird Walk. The first stop was the Fillmore Fish Hatchery, the famous human-watching area for birds. The birds saw 23 humans in all. In addition to the usual bird species, we humans were able to see fly-bys of a Belted Kingfisher and a White-faced Ibis, a Common Yellowthroat, a Lesser Goldfinch and some Killdeer, *kil-deering* out of sight. We watched a huge flock of European Starlings simultaneously land in a tree and instantly disappear. How do they do that? Do they have sophisticated internal GPS systems that can pick an inch wide spot to land without crashing into each other? And how is it that a giant flock of birds can roost in a tree all night and not one of them has any white droppings on their back in the morning? If I parked my car under that same tree all night, it would be white in the morning.

Maybe they carry little umbrellas that pop up from their backs that they use to keep themselves from getting "rained" on. I'm beginning to think that some of the leucistic birds that I have seen in the past – you know, the ones that might have an odd white tail feather or a white patch or stripe on its wing that it shouldn't have – are really just birds that didn't have enough umbrella coverage. All I know is that if I was a bird in a roosting flock, I would always be picking out my spot at the top! Next, we were off to Piru Lake. It seemed rather quiet, but looking at the list, we accumulated another 23 species in addition to the 22 at the fish hatchery. Among those seen at the lake were 3 condors – basically just specks, way out in the distance, a nice Red-breasted Sapsucker, a Lark Sparrow, and a close up view of a Spotted Towhee. We walked a little farther than normal at the lake, going out to the second parking lot and the picnic area by Reasoners Cove. At normal lake levels, one could tie their fishing pole to a picnic table at water's edge while firing up the grill. Now, you can still tie your pole there, but it would take about a half mile cast to get your bait in the water!

On the way out to the cove area, Rod jokingly asked "what happens if we get tuckered out and can't make it back?" I told him that since our condor sighting was rather disappointing, I could stake him to the ground and use him for condor bait. The rest of us could come back next week for a great show. What's a small human sacrifice when it comes to an up close and personal view of feeding condors? I promised him that it wouldn't all be in vain. I would take a video of the show and put it in his closed casket to be buried with what was left of him. He wouldn't go for it. Rod, you are so selfish! That was dark, was it not? See you on the next trip. Don't walk too slowly if we are in condor territory.

VENTURA AUDUBON CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

We will do our Christmas Bird Count on **Saturday, January 4, 2014**. Bird counts take place all over North America with a few in the Caribbean and Latin America, as well. This will be the 114th Christmas Bird Count conducted by National Audubon and, following the change in policy initiated last year, it will again be free! The data on bird distribution collected during the counts is used to assess the health of our bird populations. On the Ventura Audubon count last year, we recorded 181 species and more than 20,000 individual birds.

Volunteer counters are assigned to one of the section leaders who coordinate the count in each of eight areas within the VAS count circle. If you wish to participate in the count, please contact the section leader of the area where you would like to count. He/she will give you the start time, meeting place and other details. You may contact Bruce Schoppe if you want to volunteer where needed.

Section 1	Ventura River	Kay Regester	kaybirder@aol.com	258-1025
Section 2	Lake Casitas	Allen Bertke	bertke@pacbel.net	640-9037
Section 3	Ojai	Rick Burgess	rburgess@toaks.org	449-2326
Section 4	Canada Larga	Neil Ziegler	neilziegler@yahoo.com	983-7207
Section 5	Wheeler Canyon	Gary Tuttle	Gt10k2826@verizon.net	525-2327
Section 6	Ventura City	Eric Waian	dawaians@roadrunner.com	630-0100
Section 7	SCRE & Coast	Alexis Frangis	alexisraehamilton@gmail.com	217-4833
Section 8	Ocean	David Pereksta	pereksta@pacbell.net	404-8265

We will get together at the end of the day to review the day's highlights and to consolidate the sector counts for a provisional total of species count. Karl Krause will again serve as Compiler. The end of day review includes a **potluck dinner at the Church of the Foothills, 6279 Foothill Road, Ventura at 6:30 PM**. The potluck is open to members, friends and guests; you do not have to be a field observer to be included. Those attending are requested to bring the following types of dishes based on the first letter of your last name.

Main Dish: K - R

Salad: A - J

Dessert: S - Z

Please bring your own place settings, utensils and beverages (water and hot coffee are provided). See you there!



NOTES FROM THE FIELD

...David Pereksta

Amazingly, Anacapa Island continued to host a number of **Blue-footed Boobies** throughout November and a few other uncommon to rare seabirds were seen in the Santa Barbara Channel. **Blue-footed Boobies** continued on Anacapa Island through 29 Nov with a high of 15 still there through 17 Nov. A **Blue-footed Booby** was reported from the outer breakwater of the Ventura Harbor on 17 Nov, but details were lacking. The **Brown Booby** continued on the outer breakwater at the Ventura Harbor through 23 Nov. **Flesh-footed Shearwater** reports from the Santa Barbara Channel included one on 8 Nov (LS), two on 17 Nov (OJ, AS et al.), and one on 24 Nov (JB). **Short-tailed Shearwaters** were reported in the Santa Barbara Channel by several observers including two on 19 Nov (GB), one on 24 Nov (JB), and one on 27 Nov (DP).

Perhaps the most exciting finds of the month were the numbers of Red-throated Pipits and longspurs discovered on our local sod fields. Two **Lapland Longspurs** were found on the sod along Arnold Road on 6 Nov (DC). Subsequently five **Lapland Longspurs**, a **McCown's Longspur**, and a **Red-throated Pipit** were found along Casper Road on 7 Nov (KK & DDJ) and a **Chestnut-collared Longspur** was found there on 8 Nov (DP). These birds and other individuals continued through much of the month with **Red-throated Pipits** remaining through 26 Nov with a high of three birds 8-18 Nov (JBo), numbers of **Lapland Longspurs** through 27 Nov with a high of 15 on 8 Nov (JBo & DP), and single **Chestnut-collared** and **McCown's Longspurs** through 18 Nov. Elsewhere on the Oxnard Plain, two **Lapland Longspurs** were along Las Posas Road on 12 Nov (KK) and a **Red-throated Pipit**, three **Lapland Longspurs**, and a **Chestnut-collared Longspur** were along Arnold Road on 16 Nov (TW). A **Red-throated Pipit** and two **Mountain Bluebirds** were on Anacapa Island on 17 Nov (OJ, AS et al.).

Waterfowl and other wintering waterbirds started arriving at a number of local wetlands. Two **Snow Geese** continued on the sod fields along Arnold Road through 23 Nov when a third was found (FD), and six **Cackling Geese** were there 15-23 Nov (DP). A flock of 11 **Snow Geese** flew over Arnold Road on 14 Nov (MZ) and two **Snow Geese** were at the Saticoy Spreading Ponds on 21 Nov (JC). A **Wood Duck**, a **Redhead**, and the continuing **Common Gallinule** were at the Ventura Water Treatment Plant on 16 Nov (FD). Sixteen **American White Pelicans** were at McGrath Lake on 8 Nov with seven still there on 14 Nov (AF), one was flying over the Ventura Water Treatment Plant on 16 Nov (FD et al.), and one was at Lake Casitas on 30 Nov (DP). Four **American Oystercatchers** were on Anacapa Island on 17 Nov (OJ, AS et al) and the two hybrid **American x Black Oystercatchers** continued at the Ventura Harbor through 29 Nov.

Highlights from Point Mugu included a **Cackling Goose** (DP), twelve **Blue-winged Teal**, five **Greater Scaup** (DP), and five **White-winged Scoters** on 15 Nov (MR); as many as five continuing **Yellow-crowned Night-Herons** 8-21 Nov; a **Ferruginous Hawk** 8-17 Nov (DP); two **Red Knots** 8-15 Nov and six on 21 Nov (DP); two **Stilt Sandpipers** 8-21 Nov (DP); a **Pectoral Sandpiper** on 21 Nov (RM); a late **Wilson's Phalarope** 8-21 Nov (DP); and a **Vermilion Flycatcher** 8-15 Nov (MR).

A **Ferruginous Hawk** was along Canada Larga Road 16 Nov-1 Dec (KR) and a **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** continued there through 13 Nov. A **Red-naped Sapsucker** was at Lake Sherwood on 17 Nov (MH) and a "Yellow-shafted" **Northern Flicker** was at Foster Park on 30 Nov (DP).

Notable passerines continued to be reported in November, but the warblers seen in October did not remain. A **Black-and-white Warbler** was at Bubbling Springs Park 6-15 Nov (DC), an **American Redstart** was there 9-10 Nov (NG), and the **Least Flycatcher** continued there through 4 Nov. The young **Vermilion Flycatcher** continued at Freedom Park through 21 Nov and the **Plumbeous Vireo** continued at Rancho Simi Park through 12 Nov. A **Pacific Wren** was in Wheeler Gorge on 22 Nov (DP). Two **Townsend's Solitaires** were on Mount Pinos on 10 Nov (DP) and a **Varied Thrush** was in Ojai on 30 Oct (fide JG). A **White-throated Sparrow** was coming to a feeder in Santa Paula during November (GT) and another was at a feeder in Newbury Park on 26 Nov (RA & CB). A **Harris's Sparrow** was a surprise find on Anacapa Island on 29 Nov (JB).

Thank you to those who reported sightings during the last month. If you have any questions about local birds or have a good one to report (please no nuisance bird calls), email or call David Pereksta at pereksta@pacbell.net or 659-5740. Observers: Richard Armerding, Joel Barrett, Justin Bosler, Gilbert Bouchard, Catherine Bourne, Jeff Cartier, Dan Cooper, Frank DeMartino, Don DesJardin, Alexis Frangis, Noah Gaines, Jesse Grantham, Mary Hansen, Oscar Johnson, Karl Krause, Robert McMorran, David Pereksta, Kay Regester, Martin Ruane, Larry Scacchetti, Adam Searcy, Gary Tuttle, Tom Wurster, and Michael Zarkey

VENTURA AUDUBON SOCIETY

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Richard Armerding, Co-Owner,
(CVAS birder)

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Wilbur

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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 bi-monthly 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, preferably in WORD format, or in the form of an e-mail message. *The deadline is noon on the 1st of the month preceding the next issue.* E-mail to: deepress2@gmail.com. Call Editor Dee Press at 484-8415 for more information.