

The CALIFORNIA CONDOR

Ventura Audubon Society **FEBRUARY 2014** Volume 34 Number 6
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CALL NOTES ...Bruce Schoppe, President

Some Good Things

I'm happy to report that VAS has been awarded two grants to help with cowbird management and the restoration of a viable population of Least Bell's Vireo on the lower Ventura River. Southern California Edison has given us \$5,000 and California Audubon has given us \$3,000. These grants give us a good start towards the estimated \$24,000 needed to manage the habitat from the estuary to Foster Park. Most of the work will be done on land owned by the Ventura Hill-sides Conservancy or the County. Coupled with the restoration and trail building ongoing by VHC, restoration of Least Bell's Vireo will be a major step in implementing the vision of the Ventura River Parkway. We are grateful to both organizations for their support. Since restoration of LBV's is a multiyear effort, it is nice to know that we can reap for these grants in future years.

At a meeting in December, the Ventura City Council directed staff to prepare an ordinance banning single use plastic bags in Ventura. Hopefully, we will see adoption of this ordinance in early summer. Last year, in one of our programs, we learned about the huge volume of plastic trash accumulating in the "Pacific Gyre" poisoning or entrapping birds and other sea life. Recently, an article in the LA Times described the "plastisphere" created by particles of degraded plastic no bigger than grains of salt. On these particles, bacteria take up residence and they feed single-celled animals that, in turn, feed the larger predators. We have created an environment very different from that in which creatures evolved and we don't fully understand the consequences. I think that Santa Barbara already has such an ordinance and the Los Angeles ordinance went into effect the first of the year.

I just finished reading *The View from Lazy Point* by Carl Safina – for the second time! Safina is among my favorite environmental writers. In *The View from Lazy Point*, he writes about the impact of global climate change from the standpoint of the birds and fish and other creatures near his home on Long Island and around the world -- mostly greatly reduced. As I was thinking about this issue of Call Notes, I read a part about the oil and water needed to make the millions of plastic water bottles Americans use each year. For example, it takes three times as much water to make a bottle as it will contain! And, they are made from oil – estimates run between 17 and 50 million barrels annually, he says. Carl Safina makes the case for action very effectively. I recommend the book to everyone, if you haven't read it already. I think *The View from Lazy Point* ought to be required reading in every high school and college. And, I think we shouldn't be using plastic water bottles. Or, bags.

February Program - 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, February 11th Poinsettia Pavilion, 3451 Foothill Road, Ventura

TREASURES OF THE SEA; the CHANNEL ISLANDS ...Kate Faulkner and Tim Coonan

The five northern Channel Islands were ecological "fixer-uppers" in 1980 when included in the newly established Channel Islands National Park. All of the islands had experienced over 100 years of ranching, alien plants and animals, and the decimation of native wild life. In recent decades there has been a concerted effort to restore the natural and cultural history of the islands. We will focus on Santa Cruz Island for its complexity, challenges, and rewards of conservation stewardship today. **Kate Faulkner** is Chief of Natural Resources Management at Channel Islands National Park where she is responsible for ecological monitoring and restoration. She has worked for the National Park Service for 33 years. **Tim Coonan** is the Supervisory Wildlife Biologist for Channel Islands National Park. He has overseen the terrestrial monitoring program and the protection and recovery of the endangered Island Fox.

BEYOND BASICS ...Article and Photos by David Pereksta

Finding the Bird in Your Book, Before Finding it on Your List

Over the last two months we have reviewed some common pitfalls to correctly identifying birds. I introduced what I call “Laguna Fever” where one’s desire to find rare birds clouds their judgment and ultimately leads to misidentifications; some of which can be publicly shameful. I then discussed “Single Field Mark Syndrome” and prescribed the cure of evaluating as many field marks as possible to correctly identify a bird.

The next step is to check your evaluation of field marks and the easiest way to do this is to consult a “good” field guide; ideally you should invest in several of them. While apps and digital guides are the new rage, I believe they are no substitute for a print guide; especially for beginners/novices. I prefer field guides featuring artwork as opposed to photographs, although great strides have been made in the latter in recent years due to the advances in digital photography. In most cases, a photo cannot show everything a painting can and a field guide with good artwork can display species in similar poses and show all relevant field marks (which even a good photo can miss) to allow for easy comparisons. A good field guide will illustrate most of the species that could be seen in a given region; display a variety of plumages including males and females, immatures and juveniles, distinctive subspecies, and any seasonal variation; describe behavior and preferred habitat, and include seasonal range maps. I recommend the Sibley, National Geographic, and Peterson Guides (you should have all of them). In addition, all three of these also have more compact Eastern and Western guides. There are also a number of good photographic guides published by Stokes, Kaufmann, Smithsonian, Princeton Press, and others. I find that these work well as a compliment to the guides I identified above, but I caution using them exclusively due to their limitations. There are also a number of in-depth guides to specific taxonomic groups (shorebirds, gulls, sparrows, etc.) so if you are overwhelmed with one of these groups, there is nothing better than buying a book that focuses on their specific identification challenges.

Once you own one or more field guides, the next best step is to immerse yourself in them. When I get a new guide, I flip through it from cover to cover. One of the most important things for beginners is to get an idea of how the guide is organized, including the order of the families (most are ordered taxonomically). This helps immensely when you are in the field trying to find a bird in the book. For example, knowing that loons are towards the front of the book, woodpeckers are near the middle, and finches are near the end will help you get to the pages you need quickly. Some birding outlets sell quick index tabs for the different guides, but don’t bother with them...learn the book!

The Peterson guides described a great system for identifying birds that I learned from when I was a budding young birder. Roger Tory Peterson, who with his books made the greatest advance in the identification of birds since Audubon, emphasized evaluating a number of features including a bird’s size, shape, wing shape, bill shape, tail shape, field marks, behavior, flight style, tail pattern, rump pattern, wing pattern, eye stripes and eye rings, wing bars, and if applicable how it climbs, swims, or wades. Using these as points to key in on, help narrow your choices on a bird identification with each successive one evaluated. Other guides have similar information so find one (or a combination) that works for you.

Using the photos from **last** month (January, 2014) as an exercise (refer to that article), an evaluation of the field marks on those birds will help us identify them. The left bird is a brownish songbird with a fine bill, slender build, wing bars, streaking on the underside and back, a bold throat stripe, pale pink legs, and is ground dwelling in behavior. These features narrow it down to a pipit when compared against other songbird families (don’t be afraid to spend the time looking through the book to get here). A review of the three regular North American pipits rules out American Pipit (dark legs; unstreaked back) and Sprague’s Pipit (lacks bold throat stripe), which leads us to Red-throated Pipit. While this species is rare, the field marks and characters match perfectly. The right bird is also a brownish songbird, but this one has a yellowish conical bill, heavy body, wing bars, dingy gray underside, a streaked back, brown crown stripes and eyeline, a dark lateral throat stripe, and is ground dwelling in behavior. These features narrow it down to a sparrow and based on size, shape, lack of streaking on the underside, shape, and build further narrow it down to one of the four *Zonotrichia* sparrows. The head pattern alone eliminates all but White-crowned Sparrow and while it does not immediately look like the primary illustrations in the book, further investigation reveals it is an immature. While common seasonally in Ventura County, this age is frequently misidentified because many people do not look beyond adult birds in the guide.

Next month I will discuss the importance of learning common species and being able to eliminate them before concluding you have found a rare bird. Until then, here is another ID challenge and while not a rare bird, it can be difficult to identify to species. However, this picture shows everything you need to identify it correctly so open your favorite field guide to the shorebird section and give it your best. If you choose, email me at pereksta@pacbell.net with your answer and reasoning.





FEBRUARY FIELD TRIPS ...Karin Kersteter

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 1 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).

Tuesday, Feb 4, 8:30 a.m. Camino Real Park. Leader: Adele Fergusson (805) 415-4304. Note directions: Meet outside the park. In Ventura take Telegraph Road toward Ventura College. Across from Ventura College turn onto Estates, take a right on Aurora, go to the grass beltway across from the mobile home park. Park closest to the last house in the residential tract. We will start birding along the barranca and go into the park. We will be looking for a variety of birds including fall warblers, nut-hatches, scrub jays, juncos, woodpeckers & raptors. Bring binoculars, water and a field guide.

Saturday, Feb 8, 9:00 a.m. Coal Oil Point Preserve. Leader: Alexis Frangis (805) 217-4833. Join us on a special trip, as we visit one of the best remaining examples of a coastal-strand environment in our area. We will walk and bird Devereux Slough, a tidal lagoon. This area is considered an Important Bird Area. Note: Parking is extremely limited, so please plan on carpooling. Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the public parking lot next to the Ventura County museum on Main St. We will carpool and caravan to the location. Directions: North on Hwy 101 past Santa Barbara. Exit Storke Rd. and turn toward the ocean (south). Park on the street at the intersection of Storke and El Collegio Rd., near the entrance to the reserve.

Saturday, Feb 15, 8:30 a.m. Ventura Botanical Gardens. Leader: Jackie Worden (805) 652-0577. Join wildlife biologist Jackie Worden for a stroll through the proposed Ventura Botanical Gardens. Jackie will point out birds, critters & native plants, and discuss the plans and progress of the VBG. Test your skills at identifying red-

breasted versus red-naped sapsuckers! Meet at 8:00 at the BBQ area at Grant Park. (There are no facilities at Grant Park, so be prepared!)

Tuesday, Feb 18, 8:30 a.m. Lake Casitas. Leader: Adele Fergusson (805) 415-4304. We should see egrets, herons, ducks & raptors. Bring a scope if you have one. **To car pool,** meet at the Museum of Ventura Co., 100 E. Main, (side parking lot) at 8:00 a.m. **Directions:** Take Hwy 33 towards Ojai; exit Casitas Vista Rd. Turn rt. and go under freeway past Foster Park to 1st rt., Santa Ana Rd. Follow to park. Or take Hwy 33 to Hwy 150, turn left and follow signs to the lake. Meet at Lake Entrance.

Saturday, Feb 22, 8:30 a.m. Beginner's Bird Walk. Saticoy Ponds. Leader: Allen Bertke (805) (805) 640-9037 Bring scopes and meet outside the gate. Please be prompt as we need to enter together. If you do not have a waiver on file, you will need to complete one before entering the area. **Directions:** The ponds are located on the northeast side of Hwy 118/Los Angeles Ave. From Ventura take Wells Rd. which turns into Los Angeles Ave./Hwy 118 and cross over the Santa Clara River Bridge. The entrance to the ponds will be on your left just after the Vineyard Ave. intersection. Recent trips to this location have given great views of American Pipits, American White Pelicans, Buffleheads and even a Wilson's Snipe!

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, Page 6)

This will be the fifth year **VAS** has proudly helped sponsor this event featuring films documenting wildlife conservation successes and challenges. Films, fun, and food sums up the triple treat of the upcoming Wild and Scenic Film Festival hosted by the Ventura Hillside Conservancy for a fifth consecutive year. The two night event will be held Friday, March 14 and Saturday March 15, 2014 at the Ventura Poinsettia Pavilion. The last 4 years, both nights have sold out! General Admission is \$10 each night. For tickets and information, go to <http://www.venturahillside.org/> Hope to see you there!

*Alaska to Baja: Audubon Offers a New Way to Explore the World of Seabirds**

New interactive map unveils the important places along the Pacific Flyway for marine birds



Seabirds are some of the world's most fascinating wildlife species. In an effort to raise awareness about the plight of these birds and the habitats they depend on, Audubon has released a new interactive map that allows users to explore some of the most important places for these birds. The map extends from the icy Beaufort Sea along Alaska's north coast to the tropical seas of Mexico's Baja Peninsula.

The interactive map specifically identifies newly designated globally significant marine Important Bird Areas. Started by BirdLife International, the Important Bird Area program identifies places essential to nesting, migrating, or wintering birds. Global status means an Important Bird Area affects a significant portion of the world population of a species.

"The information on this new map is essential to both researchers and policy makers - as well as to bird enthusiasts who just want to learn more about these terrific birds," said Michael Sutton, Audubon's vice president of the Pacific Flyway.

Just off the Pacific Coast of North America fly some of the world's most fascinating birds: the elegant Laysan Albatross, the elusive Ashy Storm-Petrel, the adventurous Arctic Tern, the hardy Spectacled Eider, and many others. This stunning diversity of species is drawn to our waters because of the extensive habitat available for feeding, resting, and breeding.

Easy to use and packed with photos and fun facts about seabirds, the map allows people to browse the newest marine IBAs to learn more about where seabirds nest and feed. For those that want a more in-depth view, or that need information about certain species or places, the map has deeper layers with species profiles for the key bird species, the habitat descriptions, as well as detail about the conservation issues being faced. Some threats to seabirds include ocean pollution, human overfishing of critical food fish, and human-caused disturbance to breeding and roosting sites.

The map includes:

216 new and potential marine IBAs

More than 33 million seabirds

150 species occur in this study area

Amazing diversity of habitats: tropical waters, rocky islands, vast open ocean, the icy seas of the Arctic

Many questions faced Audubon scientists at the beginning of the project. How do you draw a boundary on the ocean? Seabirds nest in dense colonies on cliffs and rocky islands, but how far away from land is important to the birds? What about places in the middle of the ocean with no landmarks but good feeding areas for birds? Using vast amounts of data from the US Geological Survey's North Pacific Pelagic Seabird Database and the US Fish & Wildlife Service's North Pacific Seabird Colony Database, plus a strong dose of ingenuity, our staff figured out how to answer those questions and make a map that is not just a useful tool for conservation, but also a fascinating exploration of the little-seen world of these amazing birds.

*Reprinted from **AUDUBON CALIFORNIA, December 2013**



NOTES FROM THE FIELD

...David Pereksta

Offshore of Ventura, five **Blue-footed Boobies** continued at Anacapa Island through 30 Dec and a **Short-tailed Shearwater** was seen in the channel on 17 Dec (JF et al.). Along the coast, eight **American White Pelicans** were in Port Hueme on 5 Dec (DC) and thirty were at the Santa Clara River Estuary 19-22 Dec (AF). A **Bald Eagle** was seen over PCH near the LA county line on 5 Dec (DG).

In the greater Ventura River area, a **Ferruginous Hawk** continued along Canada Larga Road through 15 Dec and a **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** continued through 24 Dec when it was observed with an injured wing. New finds at Canada Larga included two **Golden Eagles** on 15 Dec (MT) and a **Red-naped Sapsucker** on 24 Dec (ST). Individual **Lewis's Woodpeckers** were at Ojai Meadows and Lake Casitas on 31 Dec (DP). Unusual in the lowlands, a **Townsend's Solitaire** was near the Ojai Meadows through 22 Dec (GS & JG).

Several of the county's large lakes hosted a variety of uncommon species. Birds of note at Lake Casitas included 2 **American White Pelicans** (KK), a **Ferruginous Hawk** (JBe), and a **Lapland Longspur** (KK) on 2 Dec; 11 **Cackling Geese** and 3 **American White Pelicans** on 3 Dec (KK); a **Snow Goose** on 15 Dec (KR); and 4 **Redheads** and 4 **Common Mergansers** on 30 Dec (KK). Lake Sherwood hosted as many as 31 **American White Pelicans** through 29 Dec, two **Wood Ducks** 25-30 Dec, and a **Red-naped Sapsucker** 17-22 Dec (MH).

New finds in December at Point Mugu included a high of 37 **Blue-winged Teal** on 22 Dec (DP et al.), 3 **Redheads** on 27 Dec (DP & MR), 11 **Greater Scaup** 13-27 Dec (DP), as many as 3 **Black Scoters** 13-27 Dec (DP & MR), a **Common Goldeneye** 20-27 Dec (MR), a **Red-necked Grebe** on 22 Dec (DP), as many as 6 **American White Pelicans** 20-22 Dec (DP & DDJ), a **Prairie Falcon** on 13 Dec (DP), and a female **Vermilion Flycatcher** on 22 Dec (DP). Continuing birds included as many as 4 **White-winged Scoters** through 27 Dec, 10 **Yellow-crowned Night-Herons** through 31 Dec, a **Ferruginous Hawk** through 22 Dec, as many as 15 **Red Knots** through 27 Dec, a **Stilt Sandpiper** through 22 Dec, and a male **Vermilion Flycatcher** through 27 Dec.

The Oxnard Plain continued to produce noteworthy birds in December. Rare along the coast in southern California, a **Sandhill Crane** frequented the strawberry fields along Casper Road 8-30 Dec (MT). A presumed continuing **Red-throated Pipit** was along Casper Road through 14 Dec. Geese on the sod fields included as many as four **Snow Geese** and two **Ross's Geese** 26-30 Dec (ST & KR) and 11 **Cackling Geese** on 26 Dec (ST & AF). A large gull flock near Casper and Arnold Roads contained as many as four **Thayer's Gulls** 26-30 Dec (ST, DDJ & KR). A **Lapland Longspur** continued on the sod fields along Las Posas Road on 4 Dec and a **Mountain Plover** was at the Camarillo Airport on 10 Dec (PG).

The Camrosa Water Treatment Plant hosted six **Hooded Mergansers** 8-31 Dec (JB & JM), as many as eight **American White Pelicans** 18-23 Dec (JB & AC), and a **Tropical Kingbird** on 22 Dec (JM). Nearby, a "**Harlan's**" **Red-tailed Hawk** was near CSUCI 13-31 Dec (JM). A **Swamp Sparrow** was in Calleguas Creek on 8 Dec (JB) and the same or possibly another was there on 22 Dec (MP).

Uncommon passerines (and several woodpeckers) were reported throughout the county. A **Red-naped Sapsucker**, **American Dipper**, and **Varied Thrush** were in Santa Paula Canyon on 8 Dec (DP). A **Williamson's Sapsucker** and two **Mountain Bluebirds** were in Quatal Canyon on 10 Dec (JB). A **Painted Redstart** was a one-day wonder at Arroyo Verde Park on 4 Dec (JB) and a **Brown Creeper** was there 4-22 Dec (DP). Late warblers included a **Black-throated Gray Warbler** in Ventura on 13 Dec (KR), and a **Black-throated Gray Warbler** and **Hermit Warbler** at Point Mugu on 22 Dec (TM). A **Grasshopper Sparrow** was at Rancho Potrero on 22 Dec (FD) and a **White-throated Sparrow** continued at a feeder in Newbury Park through 22 Dec. Uncommon **Dark-eyed Junco** subspecies included a "**Pink-sided**" **Dark-eyed Junco** at Hobert Park on 1 Dec (DCo) and a "**Slate-colored**" **Dark-eyed Junco** at Camino Real Park on 5 Dec (KK). A likely returning (from last year) male **Summer Tanager** was in Camarillo on 16 Dec (DP).

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), call or e-mail David Pereksta at Pereksta@pacbell.net or 659-5740.

Observers: Joel Barrett, Joe Beck, Dennis Cabral, Angela Chapman, Dan Cooper, Frank DeMartino, Don DesJardin, Jon Feenstra, Alexis Frangis, Peter Gaede, Dave Gallup, Jesse Grantham, Carolyn Greene, Mary Hansen, Karl Krause, Todd McGrath, John Mueller, Matthew Page, David Pereksta, Kay Regester, Martin Ruane, Gideon Seraphine, Michelle Townsley, and Steve Tucker

17TH ANNUAL GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT

Counting birds is a fun, free, family-friendly way to discover and help the birds in your community.

▶ Visit birdcount.org to learn more.

February 14-17, 2014



American Robin by 2013 GBBC Participant Gwen Starrett



The Cornell Lab
of Ornithology



GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT!

The 2014 GBBC will take place Friday, February 14, through Monday, February 17. Please join us for the 17th annual count!

The Great Backyard Bird Count is an annual four-day event that engages bird watchers of all ages in counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of where the birds are.

GBBC checklists can be accepted from anywhere in the world!

Everyone is welcome—from beginning bird watchers to experts. It takes as little as 15 minutes on one day, or you can count for as long as you like each day of the event. It's free, fun, and easy—and it helps the birds.

Participants tally the number of individual birds of each species they see during their count period. They enter these numbers on the GBBC website.

New participants must set up a free GBBC account to submit their checklists or use login information from an existing account for any other Cornell Lab citizen-science project. You'll only need to do this once to participate in all future GBBC events.

As the count progresses, anyone with Internet access can explore what is being reported. Participants may also send

in photographs of the birds they see for the GBBC photo contest.

Scientists use the GBBC information, along with observations from other citizen-science projects, such as the Bird Count, Project FeederWatch, and eBird, to get the “big picture” about what is happening to bird populations. The longer these data are collected, the more meaningful they become in helping scientists investigate far-reaching questions, like these:

- How will the weather influence bird populations?
- Where are winter finches and other “irruptive” species that appear in large numbers during some years but not others?
- How will the timing of birds’ migrations compare with past years?
- How are bird diseases, such as West Nile virus, affecting birds in different regions?
- What kinds of differences in bird diversity are apparent in cities versus suburban, rural, and natural areas?

For complete information, to register, find printable data sheets to use in the field, how to submit you data, etc, go to <http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc/howto.html>

Good birding!

The Great Backyard Bird Count is led by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society, with Canadian partner Bird Studies Canada and sponsorship from Wild Birds Unlimited.

VENTURA AUDUBON SOCIETY

P.O. Box 24198
Ventura, CA 93002



720 N. Thousand Oaks Blvd.
Thousand oaks, CA



Mark Your Calendar:

Saturday, March 1 - Ormond Beach Clean Up

Sunday, Mar 2 – Hedrick Ranch, Santa Paula

Tuesday, Mar 4 – Emma Wood

Saturday & Sunday Mar 8 & 9 – Spring weekend trip
to Salton Sea

VAS OFFICERS AND CHAIRS

President	Bruce Schoppe	658-2396
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	Audrey Vincent	525-5826

MARCH BOARD MEETING

The next **bi-monthly** Board of Directors meeting will be held on March 4th at the home of Judy Dugan, 262 Teloma Dr. in Ventura. at 7:15 p.m. Call (805) 642-0842 for more information. Any VAS member is welcome.

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.