As we come to the end of another program year, it is appropriate to thank those who make it all possible. We have a dedicated Board of Directors working to fulfill our mission to “promote at the local level, by education and action, the protection and restoration of bird populations and wildlife habitat for the benefit of humanity and the earth’s biodiversity”.

In addition to Board members, we have committee members, field trip leaders, the Christmas Bird Count Leaders, contributors to the newsletter and a host of others who volunteer many hours to make it all happen. Thank you. I want to single out two people, in particular, who are stepping down from leadership roles.

Audubon Adventures forms an important part of the educational efforts for youngsters. As Education Chair, Susan Bee has shepherded that program including presenting programs in classrooms. It has become more challenging as the classroom environment has changed in recent years but Susan has established a connection with teachers and administrators in several school districts and always manages to enroll a number of classrooms. Susan has also served as Publicity Chair, making sure the word gets out to the community! She is stepping down this year after seven years on the Board. Thank you.

Judy Dugan has been organizing our field trips, also for eight years. She, too, is stepping down from that position but will continue on the Board. She has done an excellent job scheduling trips and leaders as is indicated by the number of participants on every field trip. Judy also plans our annual trip out of the immediate area. This has become very popular, not only for birding successes but for the good times and camaraderie enjoyed by the participants. Thank you.

All members are invited to the Annual Meeting and BBQ on Saturday, May 18, 2013 at Area #2, Camp Comfort County Park (11969 N. Creek Road, Ojai, CA). The cost is $12.00 per person ($6.00 for children). There is a parking fee of $4 per vehicle. We will bird among the trees and along San Antonio Creek starting at 9:00 a.m. Around 11:00 a.m., we’ll conduct a short business meeting to elect directors for 2013 – 14. Then, we’ll eat! This is a new location that we hope will attract some newcomers as well as the stalwarts. See May Field Trips, Page 3 for directions to Camp Comfort.

There will be BBQ tri-tip and chicken, salad and beans as well as a vegetarian entrée of Portobello mushrooms. Sorry, you cannot mix entrees. Members attending are asked to bring an appetizer or dessert to round out the meal. Although recyclable paper plates will be used, we suggest that you bring your own plates and utensils that can be washed and reused in order to be truly earth friendly! Water will be available. BYOB – or soft drinks, if you prefer.

Please RSVP as early as possible by sending your check to the VAS post office box or call or email Marianne Slaughter (484-8415, twobirderz@gmail.com) or Bruce Schoppe (658-2396, bschoppe6698@sbcglobal.net) You may also pay at the door but please do RSVP (especially if you want the vegetarian entrée) so that we will have enough food!
The time has come to revamp the “Bird of the Month” and delve deeper into understanding birding issues locally and beyond. I hope this will be the first of a new era of articles about local birds and birding.

Understanding changes to bird taxonomy is important for maintaining the various bird lists you keep. The Checklist Committee of the American Ornithologists’ Union (AOU) publishes an annual amendment (formerly biannual) to their Checklist of North American Birds in the July issue of its journal “The Auk” in which they review new scientific information and accordingly revised the taxonomy of individual species or families of birds. Based on the AOU’s findings, the American Birding Association’s (ABA) Checklist Committee decides whether to incorporate those changes to the ABA’s checklist; the one that most listers in the U.S. and Canada use. Many birders have a keen interest in these amendments because they often result in the “lumping” or “splitting” of species, which subsequently affects their various lists. The split of the Xantus’s Murrelet last year added a species to the Ventura County list. The latest set of proposals before the AOU this year includes a proposed split of the Sage Sparrow.

Sage Sparrows are birds of open flatlands with scattered low sparse brush and shrubby chaparral in California. They can be very inconspicuous and hide well amongst limited vegetation, but are usually first betrayed by their high, light call that can be heard at a distance. They often run on the ground with their longish tail cocked upward and when they perch they flick their tail in a down-up motion like a phoebe.

There are five subspecies, which have had a complex taxonomic relationship to one another for 115 years. They include three resident subspecies clementae (San Clemente Island; endangered), cinereus (central Baja California), and belli (western California), and the migratory canescens (San Joaquin Valley and Mojave Desert) and nevadensis (Great Basin). While it was previously thought that three subspecies (clementae, cinereus, belli) were a distinct coastal species and the other two a distinct interior species, the latest information supports four subspecies (now including canescens) representing a coastal species (“California Sage Sparrow”) and nevadensis as the interior species (“Great Basin Sage Sparrow”).

In Ventura County, canescens is known to breed in Quatal and Ballinger Canyons and the Cuyama Valley; belli breeds in the Lockwood and Ozena Valleys, and in chamise dominated chaparral habitat within the transverse ranges, the Santa Monica Mountains, and the hills around Simi Valley. The interior race has not been seen in Ventura County, but migrants or wintering birds away from breeding areas should be discriminated carefully. Watch for the AOU’s decision on this proposal this summer!
A Special Thanks to all our leaders this year. You are the reason the walks are so popular and successful!

Saturday, May 4, 8:00 a.m. Hedrick Ranch Nature Area, Santa Paula. Leader: Sandy Hedrick (340-0478). We will bird this lovely area with the possibility off seeing Least Bells Vireos, Yellow-breasted Chats, & a Thick-billed Kingbird. We will also look at the progress made during the past year on the restoration program. Directions: Take Hwy 126 to Santa Paula, 10th St. Exit. Go left under freeway, right on Harvard, right on 12th, cross 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).

Saturday, May 11, Wheeler Gorge, Bird Walk & Presentation. 8:30 a.m. Leader: Jack Gillooly (649-3344). Car pool 7:30 a.m. from Ventura Museum, 100 E. Main (side parking lot). Car pool 8:00 a.m. from Nordoff H.S. Directions: From Ventura take Hwy 33 towards Ojai. At the “Y” intersection turn left on Hwy 33 and go past Matilija Springs through 2 tunnels (about 8 miles) & meet at the Visitor Center. We will look for Steller’s Jays, Hermit Thrushes, sapsuckers and perhaps the elusive American Dipper. Presentation at 11:00 "Birds of the World" by Erin Koski at the Visitor Center. Note: You do not need an Adventure Pass.

Saturday, May 18, 9:00 a.m. Camp Comfort. Bird Walk followed by Annual Meeting & BBQ at 11:00 a.m. Cost for BQ - $12, $6 for children. We can bird among the trees and along the lush San Antonio Creek. Directions: Take Hwy 33 north toward Ojai. Exit right onto Creek Rd. (Note this is just past Old Creek Rd.) Go approximately 4 miles to Camp Comfort. Parking Fee: $4.

Saturday, May 25, 8:30 – 10:30 a.m. Beginners’ Bird Walk, Canada Larga Road. Leader: Allen Bertke (640-9037). Directions: Take Hwy 33 toward Ojai. Exit Canada Larga Rd. Meet near the beginning of the road. We will walk and drive this road where we may find Blue Grosbeaks, Lazuli Buntings, orioles, bluebirds and raptors. Bring binoculars, a field guide, hat & water.

June Tip Planned by the New Field Trip Chair, Karin Kersteter

Saturday, June 1, 8:30 a.m. Mt Pinos (Frazier Park area). Leaders: Allen Bertke (640-9037) and Rick Burgess. Directions: Please allow at least 1 ½ hours travel time. Take Hwy 126 to 5 North. Exit Frazier Park Rd. If you require a pit stop, there is a McDonald’s in Frazier Park. Continue on Frazier Park Rd west, following the signs to Mt Pinos. One mile past the campgrounds at the top of the mountain is a large parking lot. Meet your leader at this parking lot. Note: You must display a Los Padres Nat’l Forest Adventure Pass or Golden Age Passport to park in this lot (available in Ojai at the Park Ranger Station or at Big 5 Sporting Goods) Note: The walk to the summit is at a very high altitude (8300’ +) and can cause dizziness and difficulty breathing. If you suffer from health issues, there will be an optional lower altitude “meadow” walk. When the groups return to the parking lot, we will drive to the outside of McGill Campground and walk in to eat lunch and look for White-headed Woodpeckers. Please bring lunch, water and snacks, as there are no food facilities at the summit. (There are restrooms in the campgrounds.) To car pool, meet at 6:30 a.m. at the Pacific View Mall in Ventura. Take Coastal View Dr entrance off Mills & park in the lot directly across from the parking garage entrance. Mountain birds are shy – please observe good birding etiquette by remaining on the trail, and speaking and moving quietly. We should see White-headed Woodpeckers, Chipping Sparrows, Mountain Chickadees, Pygmy Nuthatches, Northern Flickers and Steller’s Jays.

Check the schedule on Page 8 for summer birding on Mondays!
We started last month’s beginners’ bird walk at the Fillmore Fish Hatchery and then moved on to Piru Lake. At the fish hatchery we were observed by at least 35 Great Egrets, a few Black-crowned Night Herons, several Coots, four Cinnamon Teal, Brewer’s and Red-winged Blackbirds, Brown-headed Cowbirds, Song Sparrows, a flock of flying White-faced Ibis, Lesser Goldfinches, a Hooded Oriole and more. The birds had a great time viewing and identifying us through the protective netting over the hatchery.

We then moved on to Piru Lake and things really started to click. First, I noticed it in my shoulder and elbow, but then my knee got louder than both of them. At the lake, it was our turn to identify some birds, rather than the other way around. In addition to the usual suspects, we saw a Red-breasted Sapsucker, some Buffleheads, and five soaring California Condors! The latter were spotted before we even entered the park. We had all pulled over just before the kiosk to do some birding outside the park. Almost immediately someone spotted one, and as we observed for a while, four more came into view. That’s the second time in a row that I have led a group to Piru Lake and found condors. It’s not supposed to be that easy.

Usually, I have found that the best way to see a rare bird is to go with a non-birder. They always seem to spot the bird before I do, and then look bemused while I get all excited over the find. For example, a few years ago I read that some condors were sighted at Piru Lake. I asked my non birding wife if she would like to take a drive out that way. I promised her it would just be a fun outing and that I was not going to spend hours looking for a bird. Right.

After the hour’s drive from Ojai to the lake, we entered the park and almost immediately a Red-breasted Sapsucker flew right across our windshield and landed in a tree by the side of the road. While I was engrossed in the sapsucker, my wife, pointing ahead, said “Do you think those birds could be the condors?” I thought to myself “Yeah, right. The condors have just been waiting for us to enter the park so they could fly right up to greet us.” I skeptically glanced up to where she was pointing, fully expecting to see crows or maybe a couple of Red-tailed Hawks, but I recognized the giant carrion eaters right away. If it wasn’t for her I would have missed them completely and continued to gaze at the sapsucker while they were flying overhead. “Hurry,” I said. “Take your binocs and get out of the car!” We got out just in time to see two California Condors fly right over us. “Wow,” my wife said. “Beautiful birds. Can we go home now?”

See you all on the next walk. Bring a non-birder.
April is here and migrants are starting to arrive throughout the county including a number of reports of Western King-birds; Warbling Vireos; Nashville, Yellow, and Black-throated Gray Warblers; Black-headed Grosbeaks; and Hooded and Bullock’s Orioles. Now is one of the most exciting times of year to get out and bird so be sure to enjoy the spring migration!

Waterfowl and other water birds were still reported over the last month, including a few new finds, but most have already left for breeding grounds to the north. The Greater White-fronted Goose and Ross’s Goose continued at Lake Sherwood through 20 Mar and another Greater White-fronted Goose was near Point Mugu through 29 Mar (LS). A male Eurasian Wigeon and 10 Blue-winged Teal continued at Point Mugu through 16 Mar. In addition to the wintering Black Scoter at Point Mugu, which continued through 24 Mar, two Black Scoters were found at Ormond Beach on 21 Mar (JB). A Long-tailed Duck was seen from a boat near Anacapa Island on 16 Mar (JB). A female Common Mer-ganser upstream of Wheeler Gorge Campground on 3 Apr may be an indication of breeding in that area (RD & MK). Two Red-necked Grebes were offshore of Point Mugu on 15 Mar with one still there on 16 Mar (DP); one of which was likely the individual that has been seen there on-and-off since early January.

As many as six Least Bitterns were reported at Matilija Lake 16 Mar–5 Apr (PG et al.) and a minimum of three were at Lake Sherwood 24 Mar-6 Apr (DP & MH). Largely overlooked in the past, it appears they are annual breeders if not residents at these lakes and a few other sites around the county. The Reddish Egret and as many as seven Yellow-crowned Night-Herons continued at Point Mugu through 5 Apr. American White Pelicans, perhaps some of the ones that have been seen on and off at the Santa Clara River estuary (SCRE) this winter, were reported again including two at SCRE on 21 Mar (JA) and three on the outer breakwater at the Ventura Harbor on 29 Mar (ST). A Common Gallinule was reported from the Ventura Settling Ponds on 26 Mar (AA et al.). The hybrid American x Black Oystercatcher continued at the Ventura Harbor through 20 Mar. Gulls of note included a Thayer’s Gull at Point Mugu on 15 Mar (DP) and four Black-legged Kittiwakes south of Anacapa Island on 20 Mar (DP). Early Elegant Terns included one offshore of Ventura on 23 Mar (JB) and two at Mugu Lagoon on 24 Mar (DP). The first Black Skimmer of the year was at Mugu Lagoon on 5 Apr (DP).

Raptor reports were few, but there were some notable species found. Three California Condors were at Lake Piru on 23 Mar (LE). The nesting pair of Bald Eagles continued at Lake Casitas and was last reported on 1 Apr; please take special care not to disturb their nesting activities at this location. Migrant Swainson’s Hawks are rare in Ventura County so singles reported in Simi Valley on 25 Mar (MJ) and Ventura on 1 Apr (RM) are notable. A Northern Pygmy-Owl was in the Lockwood Valley on 12 Apr (WF & DP).

Uncommon or rare passerines and other landbirds included a few winter holdovers and newly arriving spring migrants. Migrant Hammond’s Flycatchers were reported from several locations including one at Wheeler Gorge Campground 1-2 Apr (ST & AF) increasing to three there on 6 Apr (DP), four at Sisar Canyon on 9 Apr (JB), and two in Matilija Canyon on 11 Apr (JB). A Gray Flycatcher was away from local breeding areas on Mount Pinos on 12 Apr (DP & WF). A Sage Thrasher was seen on East Anacapa Island on 12 Mar (CG). A Swamp Sparrow was in the reedy margins of Lake Sherwood on 20 Mar (MH). A White-throated Sparrow was at Santa Rosa County Park on 7 Apr, which may have been the same bird recorded on the Thousand Oaks CBC in late Dec (MH & KR), and another continued in Ojai through 28 Mar. A Yellow-headed Blackbird was at SCRE on 30 Mar (BH). Red Crossbills were reported from several locations including 15 in Quatal Canyon on 25 Mar (JB) and 11 on Frazier Mountain on 26 Mar (JB) where they are expected; unusual were flocks reported in Camarillo on 26 Mar (DP) and 27 Mar (AS). Two Lewis’s Woodpeckers continued near Lake Casitas through 22 Mar and the Eastern Phoebe and Palm Warbler continued at CSUCI through 16 Mar.

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

Observers: James Adams, Allison Alvarado, Joel Barrett, Rob Denholtz, Linda Easter, Alexis Frangis, Wes Fritz, Peter Gaede, Carolyn Greene, Mary Hansen, Brian Healy, Michael Jacobsen, Marv Kwit, Robert McMorran, David Pereksta, Kay Regester, Larry Sansone, Adam Searcy, and Steve Tucker
After an absence of nearly 100 years, a pair of Bald Eagles has two chicks in the nest near Lake Casitas. This pair has been spotted over the last 3-4 years at the lake, but this is the first year they were successful in hatching two chicks. According to faithful eagle watcher Linda Frazier who lives nearby, the chicks hatched around April 6th.

Adam Searcy of the Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology was kind enough to research Bald Eagle nesting on the Ventura County mainland, and found the last documented nest was in 1922. This appears to also be one of the few Bald Eagle nests ever definitely recorded for mainland Ventura County. They nested on the Channel Islands until at least the 1930s, possibly to/through the 1950s, returning in small numbers to both San Nicolas and Anacapa in the past 5-10 years.

Bald Eagles occur throughout our region, including Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo Counties (30 Bald Eagles counted in January 2013 at Lake San Antonio), and Big Bear Lake in San Bernardino County. Bald Eagles have also been re-introduced to the Channel Islands where successful nesting has been occurring for several years. Those birds have “wing-bling” – tags to identify individual birds. The Lake Casitas eagles are neither tagged nor banded, indicating they have arrived from elsewhere. Regular eagle watchers at the lake have spotted up to four Bald Eagles at one time, perhaps indicating eagles may be re-colonizing our region.

Bald Eagles (Haliaeetus leucocephalus) were delisted as federally endangered species in 2007. Nesting and wintering Bald Eagles are still listed as endangered by the California Department of Fish & Wildlife, and are protected under both the federal Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act and the federal Migratory Bird Act of 1918.

Both sexes have the same coloration, making it difficult to tell the two sexes apart. In most adult raptors, the female is considerably larger than the male, with female Bald Eagles weighing up to 14 pounds and males up to 10 pounds. Bald Eagles reach sexual maturity at about 4-5 years of age, which is also when they reach their full adult plumage with white head and tail. In captivity, Bald Eagles have been known to live up to 36 years. In the wild, a life span of 15-25 years is possible. Bald Eagles mate for life, but find a new mate quickly when the other one dies.

It may take several months to build a nest, which can be huge; 5-6 feet in diameter (sometimes up to 10 feet) and 2-3 feet deep, comprised of large sticks 3-4 feet long. Bald Eagles may use the same nest for many years, adding new sticks each year. They may also have one or two alternative nests within their territory. Bald Eagles have a long breeding season, from January to July or August. Once mated, the eagles lay one to three eggs per year, with eggs hatching in about 35 days. One or two chicks may fledge, and are flying within about three months. The young will be own their own about four months after hatch-out.

Bald Eagles are primarily fish-eating birds, but will eat carrion and other small prey items such as small mammals, reptiles, and birds (coots are often a staple for bald eagles). Bald Eagles are generally able to lift prey items up to about half their own body weigh; 3-4 pounds lifting is typical. The Bald Eagles at Lake Casitas have been seen carrying coots, ground squirrels, snakes, and fish.

IF YOU GO: The eagle nest is in the eucalyptus trees near Teacup #1, within the Lake Casitas Recreation Area. However, this area is closed to entry in order to reduce disturbance to the eagles. It is VERY important not to disturb the young eagle parents, so please stay away from the nest site. There are two excellent viewing locations located far enough away to avoid disturbing the birds. One is outside the fence, to the east of the RV storage area. Inside the recreation area, the best spot is at Teacup #2, a picnic table area. There will likely be folks there with spotting scopes to show you! Just scan the eucs until you spot them. You will also see many small nests in the trees; they are old heron nests. (If you'd like to see nesting herons, check the eucs to the NW of the café, at the edge of the big parking lot.)
LAST NEWSLETTER UNTIL SEPTEMBER-
I hope you have enjoyed them!
Have a great summer...
Dee Press, Editor

THOUSAND OAKS! GRAND OPENING IN JUNE

I will soon be opening a new Wild Birds Unlimited store in Thousand Oaks. For people unfamiliar with this store, we provide products and information for the hobby of backyard bird-feeding: bird food, feeders, bird baths, nest boxes, optics, etc. We will also love to have people come into the store just to talk about birds and the interesting visitors they have had in their yards.

The store will be located at 720 N. Moorpark Rd, Thousand Oaks, CA 91360. This is in the Whole Foods shopping center. Although I do not have an exact date when I will be opening, I hope to be open before the first of June. If people are interested in receiving information and announcements by email, they can sign up at our web site: thousandoaks.wbu.com

Thank you,
Richard Armerding (CVAS birder)
Wild Birds Unlimited
Thousand Oaks, CA
SUMMER BIRDING with ALLEN BERTKE

Are you ready for 7 Monday's of fun summer birding with Allen "Leader Bird" Bertke at the helm?  
8:30-10:30 except otherwise noted.  All levels of birders are welcome!

*June 10 Ojai Meadow Preserve.  Take Hwy 33 toward Ojai and follow it to Nordoff H.S. Park in the north part of the lot or spaces are available on the street.

*June 17 Canada Larga.  Take Hwy 33 towards Ojai.  Exit Canada Larga Rd.  Pass the bridge and go about 1/4 mile-park on the side of the road. We will walk & drive.

*June 24 Emma Wood State Beach.  Cross the Main St. bridge past downtown Ventura.  Park where the eucalyptus USED to be on the right side of road, opposite the privately owned camp grounds.  Bathrooms available.

*July 1 (new) San Marcos Foothills Preserve-Santa Barbara.  To car pool meet at the rear of the Museum of Ven. Co. parking lot,100 E. Main St. at 8:00 a.m.  Take Hwy 101 north to Hwy 154.  Take the Cathedral Oaks Rd. exit & head north (left turn off Hwy 154). Turn rt. on Via Chaparral (only a short distance from 154 turnoff) then turn right off Salv Rd.  Proceed across the bridge to nowhere & turn left.  Park near the entrance to the Preserve.  No facilities.

*July 8 Surfer's Knoll.  Meet in parking lot across from Ventura Harbor.  Bathrooms available.


*July 22 Carpenteria Salt Marsh.  To car pool meet at The Pacific View Mall across from the parking structure at 8:00 a.m.  Take Hwy 101 north to Carpinteria, exit Casitas Pass Rd.  Rt. on Carpinteria Ave., left on Linden & rt. on Sandyland Rd. to Ash.  Park along Ash.  Bathrooms available.  This will be our final outing and we have again been graciously invited to bring our lunch & a drink to Debby & Vince Burns ocean front home.  Details later.

...Laura Gulovsen