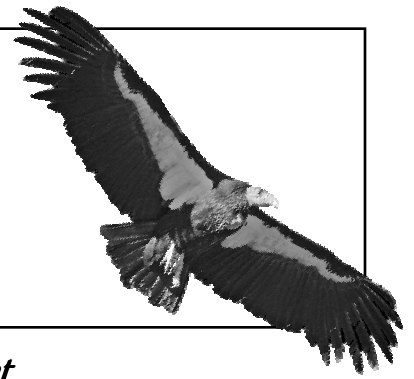


The CALIFORNIA CONDOR

Ventura Audubon Society **NOVEMBER 2010** Volume 31 Number 3
A Chapter of the National Audubon www.VenturaAudubon.org



CALL NOTES ..Bruce Schoppe, President

CANADA LARGA

The Ventura City Council voted on October 11 to add 800 acres of the Canada Larga Valley to the existing Westside/Northside Study Area despite the determined opposition of a coalition of environmental groups including Ventura Audubon. The vote was 4 to 3 with Councilmen Brennan and Morehouse and Mayor Fulton opposed. Thus begins an 18 to 24-month process to study the economic and environmental issues associated with developing the area. The justification for adding Canada Larga apparently is "executive housing" that seems important to some in the City.

The Westside Study area includes the Brooks campus and the USA Gasoline refinery sites. The original area is within the city's current "sphere of influence" and we

would probably not oppose that IF planners are careful to preserve the riparian habitat along the Ventura River. We have heard that development plans for the area include a large expansion of the Brooks campus, 350 housing units for faculty and students and, perhaps, 750 "market rate" housing units. Some of these parcels are in the river's flood plain. Such extensive development could threaten the riparian habitat.

The addition of Canada Larga is much more problematic. Now zoned AE40 under County rules, it is protected by SOAR. If annexed to the City, it would no longer be under SOAR and a vote would not be required to approve any development plans. Development would threaten the 141 species of birds observed in the valley over the (continued on Page 6)

NOVEMBER PROGRAM ..Janice Susha, Program Chair *Tuesday November 9th, 7:30 p.m., Poinsettia Pavilion, 3451 Foothill Rd, Ventura*

Pelagic Birding Off Southern California: What You See When You Go to Sea **with DAVID PEREKSTA**

The waters of offshore southern California are one of the last birding frontiers in the state. An exciting mix of local breeders, arctic nesting migrants, and austral migrants that are rarely if ever seen from land can be found at sea if you know when, where, and how to look for them. A limited number of trips, unpredictable weather, and challenging viewing conditions make pelagic birding trips an adventurous way to explore this frontier. Birders wishing to see these special birds must find some of the few scheduled trips each year, get a reservation before they sell out, and hope that the weather and birds cooperate. David Pereksta will show us what experiences southern California pelagic birding trips offer. David has spent over 100 days at sea off southern California and will describe the species that occur off our coast, where local pelagic trips go and how they operate, and how best to schedule a trip to see the birds (and marine mammals) you are looking for. Bring your soda crackers, Dramamine, and binoculars for this program that is richly illustrated with the best of the thousands of photos of birds and marine mammals David has taken at sea.

David is an Avian Biologist with the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Regulation and Enforcement, where he studies and analyzes the effects of offshore oil and gas, and renewable energy development on birds off the Pacific coast. Throughout his career with various Federal and State agencies, he has studied several imperiled bird species including Snowy Plovers, Piping Plovers, Least Terns, Ospreys, Northern Goshawks, Brown Pelicans, Spotted Owls, and Ivory-billed Woodpeckers. An avid birder for over 30 years, he has birded throughout North America and the American tropics, including leading trips to Belize, Costa Rica, and Peru. He has seen over 1,500 species in his travels in the Americas; photographing nearly 1,000 species along the way. Don't miss this!

BIRD OF THE MONTH – NOVEMBER 2010

Article and Photo by DAVID PEREKSTA

Vesper Sparrow (*Pooecetes gramineus*)



As fall migration dwindles in November, some migrants stay to spend the winter in the county. An uncommon to rare migrant and winter resident that can be found with some searching is the Vesper Sparrow.

The Vesper Sparrow is a large and chunky sparrow that has pale gray-brown upperparts with dark brown streaks and dull off-white underparts with thin dark brown streaks on the throat, breast, sides, and flanks. It has distinctive white outer tail feathers best seen in flight; however, they are often obscured on a perched bird. The wings have a chestnut patch on the shoulder and buff wing bars. A white eye-ring stands out against the brown cheek patch with a pale center and pale side of the neck. The dusky upper mandible contrasts with the flesh-colored lower mandible. The song is rich and melodious, consisting of two pairs of clear, unhurried, slurred notes, the second pair higher pitched, followed by a descending series of rapid trills. It is easy to confuse with other grassland birds and sparrows, especially the Savannah Sparrow which is smaller, has a less distinct eye-ring, and lacks the prominent white outer tail feathers.

Vesper Sparrows got their name from naturalist John Burroughs who felt that they sang most impressively in the evening. Unlike some sparrows, male Vesper Sparrows require elevated singing perches such as fence posts, shrubs, and scattered trees. At all seasons, they favor open grassy or weedy fields, often in dry situations with open soil including weedy roadsides, dry shrublands, savanna, sagebrush, high mountain grasslands, stubble fields, grassy sand dunes, gravel pits, and woodland clearings. Not as shy as many grassland sparrows, they can be easily observed; often dust-bathing in the bare soil of fields or dirt roads. They often associate with Savannah, Brewer's, or Lark Sparrows and fly up to a tree when disturbed.

Vesper Sparrows breed across Canada south to central California, central Arizona, Nebraska, central Missouri, Tennessee, and western North Carolina. They winter from central California, central Arizona, Oklahoma, southern Illinois, coastal New Jersey, and Long Island to the Gulf Coast, central Florida, and southern Mexico.

In Ventura County, Vesper Sparrows are uncommon to rare transient migrants and winter visitors. They are rare migrants along the coast from mid-September to early November and wintering birds can be found between mid-September and March. Locally, they occur in grassland areas, weedy agricultural fields and alfalfa, and semidesert scrub. More common in the interior, they are most likely to be found in the north county in the Cuyama and Lockwood Valleys and in the grasslands along Cerro Noereste Road, although these areas are birded little in the winter so records are lacking. They are rare on the coastal slope, but have been seen in weedy areas at Canada Larga Road, the Ojai Meadows Preserve, Rancho Sierra Vista, the Saticoy Spreading Ponds, Ormond Beach, the Oxnard Plain, Ahmanson Ranch, grasslands near Moorpark, and Big Sycamore Canyon.



NOVEMBER *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, call the leader.

Monday, Nov. 1 – Deadline for Pt. Mugu Registration

Saturday, Nov 6, 9:00–11:00 a.m. 8:00 for birding. Restoration Work Day, Nature Conservancy's Briggs Road/Mission Rock property. Leader: Sandy Hedrick (340-0478). We will be breaking new ground with this event at one of the Conservancy's largest holdings as part of the Santa Clara River Parkway. We will meet at the gate at the end of Mission Rock Rd. To reach the property, take Briggs Rd off Hwy 126. Take the frontage road on the south side of 126 to Mission Rock Rd and follow it to the TNC gate at the end. Wear safe field attire, including closed-toe shoes, long pants and a hat. Bring tools for weeding if you have them, and water. There are no facilities on site.

Saturday, Nov. 13, 8:30 a.m. Soule Park, Ojai. Leader: Jack Gillooly (646-3867). Birds are a bonus amid the autumn colors & the rugged Topa Topas rising above. Brisk mornings bring out winter feeding flocks: sparrows, bluebirds, & warblers. Big trees give us woodpeckers and raptors. Bushes hide thrushes & thrashers. Join us for an easy, flat walk around one of our most scenic birding spots. From Ventura, go north on Hwy 150 through Ojai, turn right on Boardman Rd, and turn right at park entrance. Meet at lot just inside the gate – parking \$3. To car pool, meet at the Museum of Ventura Co, 100 E. Main St. (side parking lot) at 8:00 a.m.

Thursday, Nov. 18, 7:50-12:00 a.m. Pt. Mugu Naval Base. Leader: Mugu Staff. Registration for this trip ended on Nov. 1. **For those registered, please note:** You must have picture ID cards with names matching the names on the list. Vehicles, articles and personnel are subject to search. Cameras and video equipment are not allowed. Please bring a scope if you have one. We will meet at the main entrance at Navalair Rd. and Mugu Rd. Parking lot is to the right near Buildings 112 & 116.

Sunday, Nov. 21, 8:00 a.m. Wheeler Canyon. Leader: Gary Tuttle (525-2327). This canyon provides good birding opportunities. We will be looking for raptors, ground doves, Western Bluebirds and maybe a Lewis' Woodpecker. Take Foothill Road from Ventura toward Santa Paula beyond Wells Rd. and past Aliso Canyon Rd. until you come to Wheeler Canyon Rd. on the left. Meet at the beginning of the road where there is parking.

Saturday, Nov. 27, 8:30-10:30 a.m., Beginners' Bird Walk, Camino Real Park, Ventura. Leader: Allen Bertke (640-9037). Many good birds in this park with its barranca and eucalyptus trees. We should see Red-shouldered Hawks and maybe the start of the season for White-crowned & Golden-crowned Sparrows. **Note directions:** Meet outside the park. In Ventura take Telegraph Rd toward Ventura College. Across from VC turn onto Estates, take a right on Aurora, go to the grass beltway & park closest to the last house in the residential tract. We will start birding along the barranca and go into the park.

Mark Your Calendar

December 1 – Arroyo Verde Park, Ventura

December 4 – Saticoy Ponds

December 5 – Restoration Work Day

Dec. 18 – Christmas Bird Count



BEGINNERS BIRD WALK

...Allen Bertke

The Case of the Absent Leader

First of all, let me apologize for not being present at the last Beginner's Bird Walk. I am truly sorry and hope I didn't disappoint anyone. Now, here is a good challenge. How do I write an article about leading a bird walk that, because my neurons weren't firing properly, I didn't even attend? I have been told that some of you readers actually look forward to reading my drivel. So for my two or three loyal readers, I guess I will have to make something up. Here goes: "Our last Beginner's Bird Walk was really good. We saw all of the usual suspects and then everyone went home. The End."

Have you ever had one of those days where you carefully laid out plans for an event, told everyone about it and then forgot to show up? Me neither – until the last Beginner's Bird Walk. The walk was moved from the usual 4th Saturday of the month to the 3rd Saturday due to a scheduling conflict with another Audubon event, but that was decided six weeks prior, so no excuses there. Evidently my brain is hardwired for the 4th Saturday, so I dutifully circled that date on my calendar. Even so, I certainly had plenty of clues to correct the error of my ways.

The Ventura Audubon newsletter, which I pointedly read to make sure my walk was mentioned, stated explicitly that the walk was on the **3rd Saturday**, but that didn't sink in. A gentleman mentioned to me at an Audubon walk the week before that he was looking forward to my walk **the following week**, but that didn't register either. Finally, a woman who called me for directions on the Thursday before the walk said she would see me **that weekend**, but like a joke about the ceiling, it went over my head. One would think that one of those things would have triggered a synapse in my mind to set me straight. But nooo! My mush for a brain didn't take any of the hints. Brain cramp!

Should I just write it off as a "senior moment"? Does this mean that I am now an old Coot in training? Have I gone over the hill? They say there are two things you lose when you get old. The first is your memory, and uh.....I forget the other one. Anyway, I'll see you all on the next walk. I promise I will show up this time. Wait. What day is this? Did I miss it already?



Nine VAS volunteers collected 21 bags of trash and recyclables at the Ventura River on Coastal Cleanup day.

OJAI BIRDING FESTIVAL

November 19-20
The Ojai Retreat, 160 Besant Rd.
Ojai, CA 93023

The Ojai Birding Festival is an educational event sponsored by The Ojai Retreat, a non-profit group.

The event begins Friday evening with check-in at 6:00 p.m. The program begins at 7:00 with a PowerPoint presentation by Allen Bertke "Birds of the Ojai Valley." All day Saturday there will be field trips including a guided boat tour of Lake Casitas, a walking tour of The Ojai Meadows with Jesse Grantham and an evening program.

The \$25.00 fee includes Friday evening and Saturday field trips on land. An additional fee for boat tour of Lake Casitas is \$25.00

Please register early, space limited to 40 participants. Sorry, because of costs we cannot make refunds.

Please call or email Becky for registration and more information. (805) 272-5292 or ojaibird@gmail.com.





NOTES FROM THE FIELD

...David Pereksta

The Santa Clara River estuary finally breached for the first time this year. The artificial breaching resulted in a significant fish kill (including federally endangered steelhead and tidewater gobies) and attracted large numbers of fish eating birds. While shorebirds were largely absent, notable species found after the breaching included a **Common Moorhen** 18-24 Sep (KR), a **Sabine's Gull** on 17 Sep (EF), three **Common Terns** on 24 Sep (DP), and three **Bank Swallows** on 17 Sep (RM & AA).

Elsewhere along and near the coast, reports of other uncommon species continued. **Greater White-fronted Geese** were widely reported with 2 immatures at the Ventura River Mouth on 1 Oct (KR), 25 along Arnold Road on 3 Oct (ST) and 2 overhead there on 6 Oct (LH & DVP), and 6 at the Saticoy Spreading Ponds on 6 Oct (RM). Shorebirds of note included a **Solitary Sandpiper** in Revolon Slough on 11 Oct (RM), **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** along Arnold Road on 2 Oct (LAAS), and the continuing **Pacific Golden-Plover** at Arnold Road through 6 Oct. Reports from the Point Mugu vicinity included two **Blue-winged Teal** on 16 Sep (DP), the continuing juvenile **Reddish Egret** through 1 Oct (first found by Mugu staff on 8 Sep), two **Parasitic Jaegers** on 3 Oct (ST), 65 **Black Skimmers** 16 Sep-1 Oct (DP), and an astounding four **Yellow-crowned Night-Herons** on 16 Sep (DP). The presence of two adults and two juveniles indicates that they likely nested on the base this year (suspected by AS in July), which would be the northernmost breeding record ever for **Yellow-crowned Night-Heron** along the Pacific coast. Other reports included a **Common Tern** at the end of Perkins Road on 3 Oct (ST) and a **Burrowing Owl** at the end of Casper Road on 24 Sep (DVP).

Montane birds appear to be on the move to lowland areas this fall, which should continue and intensify as we approach winter. A **Mountain Chickadee** was seen in the Ondulando area of Ventura in early September (ETG). **Red-breasted Nuthatches** are turning up across southern California and locally reports have come from Camino Real Park on 10 Oct (EW), Rancho Simi Park on 12 Oct (MP), and the Wolff Road tamarisks on 13 Oct (DP). **Pine Siskins** were reported from feeders in mid-Ventura on 7 Oct (RM), east Ventura on 9 Oct (RM), and Ojai on 12 Oct (BT). **Evening Grosbeaks** have been showing up on the coast in northern California this fall, but one in Ventura on 7 Oct (LH) may be an indication that we may see the same phenomenon in southern California.

Reports of eastern vagrants and other uncommon migrants increased as expected during late September and early October. The tamarisk rows on the Oxnard Plain have not had many birds so far this fall but a **Yellow-green Vireo** 11-13 Oct, **Tennessee Warbler** on 11 Oct, and **Palm Warbler** 11-12 Oct were at the little birded tamarisks along Wolff Road (RM). Big Sycamore Canyon hosted an **American Redstart** 21-26 Sep (TM), a **Black-poll Warbler** on 3 Oct (ST), and a **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** and **Green-tailed Towhee** on 25 Sep (DVP). Individual young male **Rose-breasted Grosbeaks** were reported from a feeder in east Ventura on 9 Oct (RM) and a Camarillo backyard on 11 Oct (CD). A female **Baltimore Oriole** and a **Tricolored Blackbird** (the latter unusual at that location) were at Camino Real Park on 22 Sep (DVP). Several **Chimney Swifts** were vocalizing amongst a flock of five *Chaetura* swifts over the Saticoy Spreading Ponds on 6 Oct (RM).

Several pelagic trips made it to Ventura County waters over the last month. A trip in the vicinity of the northern Channel Islands yielded a **Fork-tailed Storm-Petrel**, 4 **Least Storm-Petrels**, a **South Polar Skua**, and 2 **Long-tailed Jaegers** in Ventura County waters (JF, TM, DP et al.). A pelagic trip to Ventura County waters far offshore on 3 Oct produced several notable sightings including 5 **Black-footed Albatrosses**, 78 **Leach's Storm-Petrels** including 1 "*soccorensis*" (a candidate for a taxonomic split), 4 **Least Storm-Petrels**, 2 **Sabine's Gull**, 19 **Arctic Terns**, and 6 "*hypoleucus*" **Xantus's Murrelets** (JF, PL, DP, MS et al.).

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

Good birding,
David Pereksta

Observers: Allison Alvarado, Chris Dellith, Jon Feenstra, Erin Feinblatt, Lauren Harter, Paul Lehman, Los Angeles Audubon Society, Todd McGrath, Robert McMorran, Matthew Page, David Pereksta, Kay Regester, Matt Sadowski, Adam Searcy, Bob Tallyn, Elisa Taylor-Godwin, Steve Tucker, David Vander Pluym, and Eric Waian.

VENTURA AUDUBON SOCIETY

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CANADA LARGA (continued from Page 1)

last 10 years of Christmas Bird Counts, including 11 classified as "threatened" or "species of special concern". The City would also become responsible for fire and police and other municipal services in this fire and flood prone area.

Stay tuned. The draft Westside/Northside Development Report is available at:

<http://www.cityofventura.net/files/file/comm-develop/Westside%20North%20Avenue%20Summary%20Report.pdf>

AUDUBON ADVENTURES THANKS

Many thanks to Victoria Ammons, Betsy Bachman, David and Nancy Bishop, Estelle Ichino, Sharon Berg, John Connor, Judy Dugan and Marianne Slaughter for their generous contributions to this school year's Audubon Adventures program. This support allows VAS to place this environmental education curriculum in our local classrooms, giving our kids an opportunity to learn about nature and how to treasure it. Additional contributions to complete this effort are most welcome.



HAPPY THANKSGIVING!

VAS OFFICERS AND CHAIRS

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	Jack Gillooly	646-3867
	John Connor	654-1805
	Marianne Slaughter	484-8415
	Nancy Schorsch	643-5825

NOVEMBER BOARD MEETING

The Tuesday, November 2nd Board of Directors meeting will be held at the home of Art Marshall, 4499 Whittier St., Ventura, at 7:15 pm. Any VAS member is welcome. Call (805)642-1585 for information.

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: birdierz@roadrunner.com Call Editor Dee Press at 484-8415 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 fundraising 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.