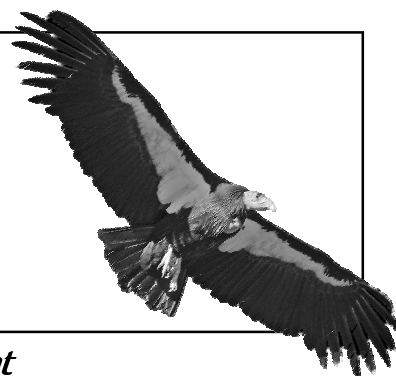


The CALIFORNIA CONDOR

Ventura Audubon Society **NOVEMBER 2011** Volume 32 Number 3
A Chapter of the National Audubon www.VenturaAudubon.org



CALL NOTES ...Bruce Schoppe, President

TWO RIVERS

Ventura Audubon is fortunate to have parts of two rivers and their riparian habitat for birding: the Santa Clara River and the Ventura River. Both have been substantially modified over the years, yet they retain elements of their original wildness that can be restored. Their estuaries provide critical habitat as well as great birding opportunities. Development threats continue but a variety of organizations have stepped in to acquire land and restore natural habitat.

The California Coastal Conservancy has played a major role providing funds for acquisitions and studies. A recently published study on the Historical Ecology of the two rivers and the Oxnard Plain provides a look at what was. The Coastal Conservancy is the lead agency in efforts to restore Ormond Beach and has funded studies of potential "parkways" on the lower reaches of both rivers.

Grassroots organizations include the Friends of the Santa Clara River (<http://www.fscr.org/>) and a more recently formed Friends of the Ventura River (<http://friendsofventurariver.org/>). Ventura Audubon has worked for years with our own Sandy Hedrick and Friends of the Santa Clara River to restore the 220+ acre Hedrick Ranch Nature Area. Invasive plants were removed and replaced with native plants, some grown in their own nursery. 190 species of birds including the endangered Least Bell's Vireos have been recorded on the site. VAS

schedules one workday a month at HRNA or an alternative site downriver on property owned by The Nature Conservancy. Check the Field Trip listing each month for the date, time and location.

On the Ventura River, the process is at an earlier stage. Ventura Hillside Conservancy (<http://www.venturahillside.org/>) has acquired 17 acres of riparian habitat in the river bottom stretching from the wastewater treatment plant almost to Foster Park. It is hoped that the area can be included in the Christmas Bird Count. With the California Coastal Conservancy, the group seeks to implement the conceptual lower Ventura River Parkway Plan. With support from the Ventura Parks & Recreation Commission, it has asked the City to request that the County Watershed Protection District open the levee for a public access trail. The National Park Service Rivers and Trails Conservation Assistance Program has selected Friends of the River for assistance in designing and developing trails for the Parkway in 2012. Farther up the river, the Ojai Valley Land Conservancy (<http://www.ovlc.org/>) has restored several areas on the river and its tributaries and the Matilija Coalition (<http://www.matilija-coalition.org/>) hasn't given up its goal of removing the dam!

These are long term efforts. Land acquisition and restoration are slow and tedious. The recently completed "managed retreat" at Surfer's Point was, I'm told, twenty years in the making! So, the benefits of current efforts will accrue, mainly, to future generations. But that's OK?

NOVEMBER PROGRAM ...Janice Sussha, Program Chair

7:30 p.m. Tuesday, November 8th, Poinsettia Pavillion, 3451 Foothill Road, Ventura

INLAND ISLANDS of WOODPECKERS, Presented by Stephen Shunk

Join Oregon naturalist and woodpecker specialist Stephen Shunk as he interprets the lives and times of our local woodpeckers from the western Transverse Ranges north of Santa Barbara to the Laguna Mountains west of Anza Borrego. He will discuss natural history, adaptation, and hybridization among our resident and migratory woodpecker species, as well as potential identification challenges.

Nine species of woodpeckers hold year-round territories in largely complimentary habitats. Winter also brings an influx of flickers and sapsuckers to the region, when some of the resident species wander a bit. Some of Southern California's local woodpecker populations have developed uniquely specialized lifestyles suited to their preferred islands of

(continued on Page 4)

BIRD OF THE MONTH – NOVEMBER 2011

Article and Photo by David Pereksta

BURROWING OWL (Athene cunicularia)



A number of our wintering species arrive and take up their seasonal residence in November. One of our wintering species that has been declining locally and throughout its range is the Burrowing Owl.

The Burrowing Owl is one of the easiest owls to identify in North America. It is a small owl that is pale brown-colored over the head, back, and wings with barring on the breast and belly and spotting on the head and back. It has pale eye-brows, a white throat, a very short tail, and a rounded head that lacks ear tufts. The exposed, sparsely feathered legs appear extremely long. Calls include a double-noted *Coo-coo*, given only by males during early stages of the breeding season, and a sharp “chatter” call given by both sexes when they are approached too closely. Individuals often bob up and down when vocalizing. A rasping call, similar to a rattlesnake’s rattle, may be given from inside the burrow when disturbed.

Burrowing Owls are conspicuous residents of dry or sparse grassland and agricultural areas where they often perch by burrows or on fence posts during the day, making them easy to spot. They hunt mainly in the early evening and at night, hawking insects in midair and attacking rodents from a perched or hovering position. Burrowing Owls do not dig their own roost or nest holes, but take over burrows abandoned by ground-squirrels or other animals and enlarge them. They also make use of artificial levees and berms including those along agricultural fields on the Oxnard Plain. Loss of grassland habitat, excessive rodent control, and heavy use of pesticides have led to dramatic declines of the species.

The Burrowing Owl occurs from the southern prairies of British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and central Manitoba south through western and midwestern states into Central and South America. It is also resident in central and southern Florida. The species migrates from the colder parts of its range in winter which results in a movement of more northerly birds into the southern and coastal regions of California.

In Ventura County, Burrowing Owls are rare transients and winter visitors most frequently found in agricultural and grassland areas near the coast. They have decreased in numbers in all seasons and are likely extirpated as a breeder in interior valleys in the county. The species is most reliably found around the runways and in the dunes on the Navy Base at Point Mugu. Audubon-sponsored field trips regularly see them there during the late fall and winter. They have also been found regularly on the berms along Casper, Arnold, and Edison Roads on the Oxnard Plain. Other places with recent wintering birds include Emma Wood State Beach, the Saticoy Spreading Ponds, Canada Large Road, the Ventura Harbor, and Cal Lutheran University.



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, please call the trip leader.

Sunday, Nov. 6, 9:00 – 12:00 a.m. Friends of the Santa Clara River volunteer workday at The Nature Conservancy, Santa Paula. Arrive at 8:00 for birding. Leader: Sandy Hedrick (340-0478). Long pants and boots or closed shoes are required. Bring water, gloves & sun protection. **Directions:** Go east on Hwy 126 through Santa Paula, turn right at the light which is Hallock Dr., go straight to the end & park near the gate. Rain will cancel.

Monday, Nov. 7, 8:30 a.m. Canada Larga Rd. Leader: Adele Fergusson (415-4304). Directions: Take Hwy 33 toward Ojai. Exit Canada Larga Rd. Meet near the beginning of the road. We will walk and drive the canyon. Enjoy the beautiful canyon & its many birds including hawks, Western Bluebirds and a variety of sparrows.

Sunday, Nov. 13, 8:30 a.m. Camino Real Park. Leader: David Torfeh (647-3325). NOTE DIRECTIONS – Meet outside the park. In Ventura take Telegraph Road toward Ventura College. Across from VC 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 should see Red-shouldered Hawks and the beginning of migrant sparrows & warblers.

Thursday, Nov. 17, 7:50-12:00 a.m. Pt. Mugu Naval Base. Leader: Mugu Staff. Registration for this trip ends on Nov. 3. **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 Naval Air Rd. and Mugu Rd. Parking lot is to the right near Buildings 112 & 116.

Saturday, Nov. 19, 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 - \$3. **To car pool,** meet at the Museum of Ventura Co., 100 E. Main St (side parking lot) at 8:00 a.m.

Saturday, Nov. 26, 8:30 – 10:30 a.m. Beginners' Bird Walk. Ojai Meadow Preserve. Leader: Allen Bertke (640-9037). Directions: To car pool, meet at the Museum of Ventura Co., 100 E. Main St. (side parking lot) at 8:00 a.m. Take Hwy 33 toward Ojai and follow it to the preserve. Parking available in front of the entrance and also at Nordoff High School. We will meet at the entrance. There is usually a large variety of birds, such as raptors, meadowlarks, sparrows, egrets, and bluebirds. No Beginners' Walk in December.

Mark Your Calendar:

Saturday, Dec. 3 – Friends of the Santa Clara River Workday – www.fscr.org for info.

Monday, Dec. 5 – Ventura Wildlife Ponds

Saturday, Dec, 10 – Canada Larga

Saturday, Dec. 17 – Christmas Bird Count



BEGINNERS' BIRD WALK ..Allen Bertke, Leader

Foster Park fostered 24 species of birds for us on the latest Beginner's Bird Walk, including a Green Heron, a Kingfisher, a Common Yellowthroat, a Spotted Sandpiper, an Anna's Hummingbird and an Oak Titmouse. Notice all of the birds I just mentioned were singular birds. Although we saw a fair amount of species, we didn't see a lot of birds – perhaps only 40 or 50 in total.

About half way through the walk, while we were all gathered in a group, a beautiful male Bluebird landed on the ground about 8 feet from us. Usually when birds do that in my presence, they quickly recognize their mistake of getting too close to us scary humans and hurriedly take flight to safety. Not this bird! Unconcerned, he cocked his head and looked at us inquisitively, as if thinking we were giant mealworm vending machines. The photographers in the group had a field day. The bird must have loved the sound of the clicking cameras, because at least 3 or 4 separate times, he flew up into a low branch, and then back onto the ground right in front of us again. What a ham!

Later, I got a quick glance at a Song Sparrow, but we were only getting a very broken view of it through the bushes, so it was difficult for everyone to make out what it was. As I was trying to describe it while looking through my bins, I said "It's definitely a Song Sparrow. It's black and white and streaky all over," which reminded me of the joke about the newspaper – it's black and white and red (read) all over. Of course, that would also describe a really embarrassed zebra - or a really sun-burned zebra.

We heard the squawky, rising call of a Spotted Towhee and the bouncing ball song of the Wrentit, although we never did see either one. My nickname for the Spotted Towhee is now the Obama Bird, after its call – *Barack, Barack*. Ok, it's a little hokey, but I bet the group will remember that bird the next time they hear its call! Thanks to everyone for participating, and we will see you all on the next walk!

NOVEMBER PROGRAM (continued from Page 1)

of habitat, and at least one endemic subspecies inhabits the region's pine forests.

Steve started birding in 1989 and the last 14 years has led birding tours and workshops throughout North America with his company, Paradise Birding. He co-founded the East Cascades Bird Conservancy and served as its first President, and co-founded the Oregon Birding Trails program and coordinated its flagship project, the Oregon Cascades Birding Trail. Steve recently completed the *Peterson Reference Guide to Woodpeckers of North America*.



THANK YOU!



Many thanks are extended to Marianne Slaughter and Dee Press, Bob Tallyn and Betsy Bachman, and Judith Rothman for their generous donations to VAS' environmental education program, Audubon Adventures. Their dona-

tions provide our county's elementary school students with an introduction to the environment that surrounds them. At a cost of \$45 per classroom, this program explores the natural world with the many opportunities for hands on learning. Please consider supporting a classroom this year.

GOT KIDS?

Gull Wings Children's Museum is having an event out at the **GenOn station at Ormond on November 12, from 9-12**. There will be seed planting, native plant transplanting, leaf "printing," and bird watching planned as activities during the event. There may also be making native plant "seed bombs" that kids can take with them to either plant in their yards or toss in unkempt areas of their neighborhoods. The event will be held in the contractor's parking lot just to the side of the plant itself, at the border of the wetlands. The goal is to get kids (and their grown-ups) out in nature and to learn about some of the activities going on to help preserve our natural ecosystems and our wetlands.



NOTES FROM THE FIELD

...David Pereksta

After a slow start to fall migration, numbers of birds started to appear in early October. Well-birded migrant traps on the Oxnard Plain hosted their usual variety of rare and uncommon migrants with the Laguna Tamarisks attracting a few exceptional birds during the last month. The two biggest highlights there were the county's first mainland record of **Gray Vireo** 1-6 Oct (JM et. al.) and the county's third **Connecticut Warbler** 2-6 Oct (SC et. al.). Other notable species from Laguna Road included a **Black-and-white Warbler** 1-2 Oct (JM et. al.) and two there on 3 Oct (DB), a **Nashville Warbler** 7-9 Oct (TM), an **American Redstart** on 25 Sep (TM), a **Brewer's Sparrow** 1-4 Oct (JM et. al.), a **Clay-colored Sparrow** 2-3 Oct (TM & AS), and **Willow Flycatchers** on 30 Sep (DP) and 9-10 Oct (DP & TM). Elsewhere on the Oxnard Plain, birds found along Arnold Road included an **American Redstart** on 12 Sep (WF), a **Vesper Sparrow** on 9 Oct (TM & DP), and two continuing **Pacific Golden-Plovers** through 9 Oct.

Other uncommon species were found in freshwater wetlands around Ventura. As many as seven **Bobolinks** were reported in a weedy wetland area at the Saticoy Spreading Ponds from 1-11 Oct (RM). Also of interest there was a **Greater White-fronted Goose** 7-9 Oct, three **Blue-winged Teal** on 7 Oct, and a **Palm Warbler** on 30 Sep (RM). Searches of the Ventura Settling Ponds found a pair of **Wood Ducks** on 14 Sep (FD) and six **Blue-winged Teal** on 16 Sep (KR).

Migrants were evident in other places along the coast near Ventura including a **Pectoral Sandpiper** and a **Yellow-headed Blackbird** at the Ventura River estuary on 27 Sep (KR), three **Pectoral Sandpipers** at the Santa Clara River estuary on 28 Sep (AF & JG), a **Nashville Warbler** and a **Clay-colored Sparrow** at Seaside Wilderness Park on 8 Oct (AS), and a **Virginia's Warbler** in a Ventura industrial park on 4 Oct (RM). The probable **American Oystercatcher** was reported again at the Ventura Harbor by several observers into early October. Further south along the coast, **Parasitic Jaegers** seen from shore included one south of Point Mugu on 14 Sep (AS) and one at Sycamore Cove on 30 Sep (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 659-5740 or <pereksta@pacbell.net>.

Observers: David Bell, Scott Cartier, Frank DeMartino, Alexis Frangis, Walter Fuller, Jennifer Gold, Todd McGrath, Robert McMorran, Jim Moore, David Pereksta, Kay Regester, and Adam Searcy.

OJAI RAPTOR CENTER OPEN HOUSE November 5th, 2011 12:00 noon- 4:00 pm

Come join us for our second annual open house at Ojai Raptor Center's new Rehabilitation Center at 370 Baldwin Rd, Ojai, CA 93023

Since the Center will not be open to the public, (rehabilitating birds are very sensitive, and require very little contact with people) this is a unique opportunity to see the vision for Ventura County's leading Rehabilitation Center.

Ojai Raptor Center (ORC), a non-profit 501(c) (3) organization, is dedicated to the rehabilitation and release of birds of prey and all wildlife and to providing educational programs to teach about raptors and our shared environment.

Hawks, eagles, and owls will be on hand to greet the guests on this wonderful afternoon. Meet the non-releasable "ambassador" raptors of ORC as the raptor specialists handling them explain how to reduce human-caused hazards to our native wildlife. "Raptors are learning how to live among us in our cities and towns, as well as being an important part of the ecology of our farmland and ranches. We need to learn how to co-exist with them," explains Kim Stroud, Director of the ORC.

ORC takes in over 1400 native birds annually from the Tri County area, focusing on birds of prey (raptors) many of which are released back to the wild.



VENTURA AUDUBON SOCIETY

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NOVEMBER BOARD MEETING

The Tuesday, November 1st Board of Directors meeting will be held at Bruce & Joyce's, 4875 Mascagni St, Ventura. Any VAS member is welcome. Call 658-2396 for information.

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

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