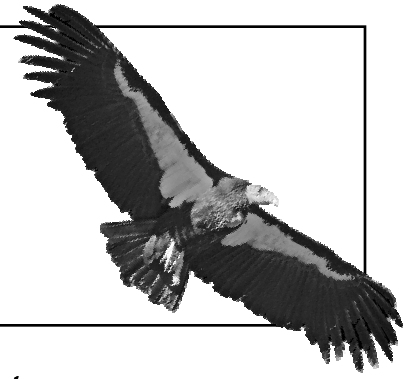


The CALIFORNIA CONDOR

Ventura Audubon Society **DECEMBER 2012** Volume 33 Number 4
A Chapter of the National Audubon www.VenturaAudubon.org



CALL NOTES ...Bruce Schoppe, President

~LAST PRINT ISSUE!!~



This will be the last issue of the newsletter that is printed on paper and mailed. Starting with the January 2013 issue, *The California Condor* will only be available in digital form. A link will be emailed each month to those who have provided their email address to us. It will also be available in Adobe PDF format on our website. There are still more than 400 copies being mailed. We don't want to lose contact with those 400 people!

It is easy to sign up for email delivery. Just go to the website (www.venturaaudubon.org) and enter your email address in the box provided on the main page. We are using Constant Contact software to manage the email list. It is secure and you can unsubscribe at any time. For those who do not have access to the internet, please call Jackie Worden at 652-0577 or any Board member or write to us. We'll see that you continue to receive a copy in the mail.

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

The 113th Christmas Bird Count will take place on December 15, 2012. And, it's FREE! The \$5 per participant fee has been eliminated. The report will no longer be printed and mailed. Instead, like *The Condor*, it will be available in digital form only. We'll have the same eight sections and birders of all levels are invited to participate. The usual Pot Luck gathering will take place that evening at Church of the Foothills. Please see Page 4 for details including the alphabetical assignments for the pot luck.

IN MEMORIAM ...REED V. SMITH

Last year, we dedicated the Christmas Bird Count to the speedy recovery of Reed Smith. Unfortunately, though he fought hard, that recovery was not to be. Reed passed away on October 21, 2012. Reed was a strong advocate for birds, wildlife, and conservation. He was especially dedicated to the protection and monitoring of Western Snowy Plovers and California Least Terns on Ventura County beaches. He was an important member of the Ventura Audubon Society leadership team for many years, and we depended on him for all matters of science and the VAS web site. We will miss him! We will be dedicating a memorial to him, and those of you who wish to contribute may do so on the website using PayPal or by mail to the VAS post office box.

DECEMBER PROGRAM ...Audrey Vincent

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

THE CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT: 100 YEARS OF CITIZEN SCIENCE

REBECCA COULTER and JARED DAWSON take a look at the history of the oldest continuous citizen science project in the country, and just how we set out to count (and not re-count!) every bird within a 15-mile circle in 24 hours! **REBECCA** has been birding passionately since her first Christmas Bird Count in 1995, when she realized that the count leader could identify bird species *by ear*. She teaches birding classes through SBCC Continuing Education and the Santa Barbara Botanic Garden, and works as the volunteer manager at the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History. **JARED** is a retired cartographer who has lived in So. Cal. for 50 years. A Golden Gate Audubon walk in SF was all it took for him to fall in love with birding. He has studied bird vocalization recording with Cornell, and has given several birding-themed presentations in venues ranging from the Unitarian Society to the Valle Verde retirement community as well as for the Audubon Society. Come and get the scoop!

BIRD OF THE MONTH – DECEMBER 2012

Article and Photo by David Pereksta

Mountain Bluebird (*Sialia currucoides*)



Some winter visitors are regular and predictable in their occurrence while others vary in numbers and places they occur. An irregular winter visitor whose numbers vary annually is the stunning Mountain Bluebird.

The Mountain Bluebird is a sky-blue bird of open western sagebrush plains, mountain meadows, and timberline areas. The adult male is entirely sky-blue with the color deepest on the upperparts, wings, and tail. The female also shows bright sky-blue on the wings, tail, and rump, but the head, back, breast, and flanks are uniformly grayish-brown with a white belly and undertail coverts. Females show a white eye-ring and whitish edges on the wing coverts. Juveniles look similar to females, but are strongly spotted. The Mountain Bluebird's relatively long bill, legs, and wings; its more horizontal perching posture; and its lack of rusty tones help distinguish it from other bluebirds. The song is a series of low, burry whistles. Birds in winter flocks give an unmusical *veer* or *terr* note.

Mountain Bluebirds differ from other bluebirds in their preference for more open habitats, their hovering foraging behavior, and their tendency to gather into large flocks in the winter. They breed in montane meadows, dry grassy openings, and rocky fell fields at high elevations. Living in more open terrain, this species may nest in holes in rock crevices, dirt banks, or human structures when tree cavities are not available. They gather in large flocks at lower elevations during the winter, often associating in our area with Western Bluebirds.

The species breeds in higher plains and mountains of western North America from east-central Alaska east to southwestern Manitoba and locally in Dakotas; south to southern California, northern Arizona, and southern New Mexico. It winters in plains, agricultural areas, and deserts through the middle and southern portions of the breeding range south to central Mexico.

Mountain Bluebirds are an uncommon and irregular winter visitor in the arid valleys of the north county and a rare fall transient and winter visitor near the coast. They are most often found in agricultural areas and short, open grasslands. They arrive during October and most depart by mid-March. Numbers vary substantially year to year; they may be common one year and virtually absent the next. Its breeding status is unclear in the Mount Pinos area where they may be a rare breeder. While reported during the summer on occasion, most are likely misidentified Western Bluebirds, which are common in the Ventura County mountains. Just because a bluebird is in the mountains does not make it a Mountain Bluebird; look at it carefully! The most reliable local places in the winter are the lower half of Quatal Canyon and the Cuyama Valley (both of which are shared in part with Santa Barbara County), and the Ozena and Lockwood Valleys. They also occur near annually in Canada Larga and have occurred (rarely) on the Oxnard Plain, at the Saticoy Spreading Ponds, and below Lake Piru.



DECEMBER 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 trip leader.

Sunday, Dec. 2, 9:00-12:00 a.m. Restoration Work Day, Santa Paula. Hedrick Ranch Nature Area Restoration Program. Sandy Hedrick: (340-0478). Arrive at **8:00 for birding** which usually yields some interesting birds. We will be assisting in restoration on an adjacent property owned by the Nature Conservancy. **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, Dec. 4, 8:30 a.m. Ventura Wildlife Ponds at Ventura Water Treatment Plant. Leader: Adelle Fergusson (415-4304). Enjoy a morning of mostly waterfowl birding. Spotting scopes are always welcome. **Directions:** Take Harbor Blvd to Spinnaker and enter Ventura Harbor. The Water Treatment Plant is on Angler before Spinnaker curves to the right. Park in the lot on the right side of Spinnaker and meet at the gate. Note: Take care in crossing Spinnaker due to the blind curve.

Sunday, Dec. 9, 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. **Directions:** 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, Dec. 15. VAS Christmas Bird Count. See newsletter for areas, section leaders, potluck, and other information.

Sunday, Dec. 16. Carpinteria Christmas Bird Count. For those of you who like to do more than one bird count, join Carpinteria in their 4th count. For information contact

Rob Denholtz at 805-684-4060 or 845-489-7242.

Saturday, Dec. 29, 8:30 a.m. Foster Park & Ventura River Walk. Leader: Jackie Worden (652-0577). We will meet inside the entrance to the park and bird in the park and some of the Ventura Hillside Conservancy land to the south. It will be chilly until the sun gets to us. **Directions:** Take Hwy 33 toward Ojai, exit at Casitas Vista Rd, go right & park under the freeway bridge. (Parking is also available inside Foster Park for \$4.) **To car pool,** meet at the Museum of Ventura Co. 100 E. Main St (side parking lot) at 8:10 a.m.

Mark Your Calendar:

Tuesday, Jan. 8 – Lake Casitas
Saturday, Jan. 26 – Saticoy Ponds



**HAPPY HOLIDAYS
TO ONE AND ALL!!**

BEGINNERS BIRD WALK ...Allen Bertke

In a dry grassy area near the path around the lake, a Loggerhead Shrike gave us some entertainment by catching what looked to be a large Potato Bug, spiking it onto a sharp part of a bush, repositioning it a couple of times and then finally consuming it. Nice show! I hear for his evening show he catches two or three bugs, puts them on a skewer and slowly roasts them over an open fire. Then he has S'mores for dessert.

Birds sometimes have a way of humiliating a person. As we were crossing the boardwalk, I had an embarrassing moment when I could not identify a flock of about ten birds feeding on the rushes. I thought to myself "How could I not know what these are?" My mind was racing – brown, almost no field marks, finch like – but smaller than a House Finch and no markings like goldfinches, very acrobatic like Bushtits, but not grey enough and the bill was too conical, flitting around like warblers, but again, too brown and the bills were more finch-like. There I was, a supposedly knowledgeable birder guiding a group of bird watchers, but feeling like a politician – a leader without a clue. I could feel my status gradually slipping away.

Then, it came to me – Nutmeg Mannikins! As opposed to Storefront Mannequins. I had only seen two on other occasions, one of them at this lake, but both birds that I had previously seen were adults with strong barring on the belly. These appeared to be all juveniles. Anyway, crisis averted. I was redeemed and could then revert to my previous status of Marginally Competent Leader.

Thanks to everyone for their participation and I will see you all on the next walk.

VENTURA AUDUBON CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT DECEMBER 15 , 2012

Ventura Audubon will conduct its Christmas Bird Count on Saturday, December 15, 2012. Bird counts take place all over North America with a few in the Caribbean and Latin America, as well. This will be the 113th Christmas Bird Count conducted by National Audubon and the first in more than fifty years that is 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 Register	kaybirder@aol.com	258-1025
Section 2	Lake Casitas	Allen Bertke	bertke@pacbel.net	640-9037
Section 3	Ojai	Rick Burgess	burgess@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. We will also have 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: A – J Salad: S – Z Dessert: K – R

Please bring your own place settings, utensils and beverages (sodas and hot coffee are provided).



NOTES FROM THE FIELD

...David Pereksta

Wolff Road – A first county record of **Pine Warbler** was seen briefly on 11 Oct (DB). **Yellow-green Vireo** 24-28 Oct (FD), **Blackpoll Warbler** 28 Oct-2 Nov, **American Redstart** and **Red-breasted Nuthatch** on 24 Oct (PG & DP), **Palm Warbler** on 26 Oct (KO). **Pine Warbler** 11-12 Oct (DB)??

Laguna Road – **Blackpoll Warbler** 11 and 24 Oct (FD) and two **Golden-crowned Kinglets** on 27 Oct.

Hailes Road – **Chestnut-sided Warbler** 30 Oct-3 Nov (AS), a **Palm Warbler** was found 1-2 Nov (AS) with as many as six there 3-6 Nov (KR & JC)

Pleasant Valley Park – A bird found 11-13 Oct (AS) was confirmed as a **Bay-breasted Warbler**. The eastern vagrants found on 10-11 Oct continued including the **Philadelphia Vireo** through 16 Oct, the **Blackburnian Warbler** through 12 Oct, **Lucy's Warbler** through 12 Oct. A **Golden-crowned Kinglet** was there 16 Oct with two there 17-31 Oct (DP) as well as a **Red-breasted Nuthatch** (DP).

Ojai Meadows – **Eastern Phoebe** on 23 Oct with two there on 26 Oct (JG), **Summer Tanager** 22-24 Oct (JG). Another **Eastern Phoebe** was found north of Lake Casitas on 3 Oct (JC).

A **Palm Warbler** was at **Camino Real Park** on 18 Oct (KK) and the **Baltimore Oriole** continued through 14 Oct. A **Clay-colored Sparrow** was at **Rancho Simi Park** on 30 Oct (DC). A **Summer Tanager** was in **Camarillo** 1-5 Nov (DP).

A **Yellow-green Vireo** was in a row of tamarisks on private property in **Camarillo** on 13 Oct (ST) and as many as five **Palm Warblers** were there 1-2 Nov (AS).

Four **Yellow-crowned Night-Herons** and a male **Vermilion Flycatcher** were at **Point Mugu** on 9 Nov (MR et al.). **Pacific Golden-Plover** continued along **Casper Road** through 14 Oct. A **Swainson's Hawk** was at **CLU** on 4 Nov (FD & CD).

Red-breasted Nuthatches continued to be reported throughout the county including in **Camarillo** 18 Oct-7 Nov (DP), **Newbury Park** on 20 Oct (CB), **Ojai** on 21 Oct (GS), near **Lake Casitas** on 31 Oct (JC). **Golden-crowned Kinglets** were in **Camarillo** 30 Oct- (DP). **Pine Siskins** have been arriving at backyard feeders in the lowlands including **Ojai** on 18-19 Oct (BT), **Ventura** on 17 Oct (MT) and 27 Oct (RL), **Newbury Park** on 17 Oct (RA), and

Red-naped Sapsuckers were reported away from expected locations including one in a **Ventura backyard** on 4 Nov (ETG) and another near **Lake Casitas** on 12 Nov (EC).

A **Pacific Wren** was in **Wheeler Gorge** on 11 Nov (MT). A Flock of blackbirds at **Underwood Farms** on 15 Oct had a **Yellow-headed Blackbird** and **Tricolored Blackbird** (JB).

Reports from **San Nicolas Island** included a **Varied Thrush** on 12-14 Oct, a **Tennessee Warbler** on 13 Oct, and a **Painted Redstart** on 14 Oct (RO'D). A two-day *pelagic* trip that reached the **Tanner and Cortez Banks** found a **Sabine's Gull**, **South Polar Skua**, and a pair of **Guadalupe Murrelets** (DP). Landbirds of interest that visited the boat included a **Red-breasted Nuthatch**, "Slate-colored" **Dark-eyed Junco**, and a **Yellow-headed Blackbird**.

Four **Blue-winged Teal** were at the **Ventura Settling Ponds** on 22 Oct (DP). The five **American White Pelicans** continued at the **Santa Clara River estuary** through 16 Oct with three staying through 29 Oct. As many as seven **Black Oystercatchers** continued on the **Ventura Harbor breakwaters** and were reported by many. An **American x Black Oystercatcher** hybrid was seen again on 22 Oct.

Thank you to those who reported sightings during the spring and summer. Contact David Pereksta at 659-5740 or pereksta@pacbell.net with questions about local birds or to report a good one (please no nuisance bird calls).

(Richard Armerding, James Baily, David Bell, Catherine Bourne, Jeff Cartier, Dan Cooper, Eric Culbertson, Cia DeMartino, Frank DeMartino, Peter Gaede, Jesse Grantham, Karl Krause, Rocky Ludes, Kris Ohlenkamp, David Pereksta, Kay Regester, Ryan O'Donnell, Adam Searcy, Gideon Seraphine, Bob Tallyn, Elisa Taylor-Godwin, Scott Terrill, Michael Tiffany)

VENTURA AUDUBON SOCIETY

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AUDUBON ADVENTURES

...Susan Bee

The overarching theme for this school year's Audubon Adventures is "Sharing the Earth". The 4 student newspapers that each child in a VAS sponsored classroom receives will feature these topics: "Share the Shores", "Caring for our Planet - Be a Friend to Birds", "The World of the Forest", and "Grasslands: A Prairie's Tale". Through these student newspapers our local school kids, grades 3 - 5, will have the opportunity to explore the natural history and environment of the earth. Thoughtful, entertaining articles and learning experiences provide meaningful challenges in reading, math and science. The teachers are provided with educational guides for each newspaper allowing them to broaden the subject matter. The guidelines established by the North American Association for Environmental Education are rigorously followed by National Audubon who produces the program.

Ventura Audubon Society sponsors this learning opportunity for our local schools. As one of our community outreach efforts, it allows us to share our concern and passion for the environment and wildlife with the young people in our community. Currently we are sponsoring classes in Santa Paula, Ventura and Oxnard, and would welcome new classrooms into the program. For further information call me at 640 0779 or email scbee1415@yahoo.com. Each classroom costs \$45. Please consider sponsoring a classroom this year.

Thanks to Victoria Ammons, Rodney Frykholm, Dee Press/Marianne Slaughter, and Susan Bee for funding 4 more Audubon Adventures classrooms!

VAS OFFICERS AND CHAIRS

President	Bruce Schoppe	658-2396
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Secretary	Joyce Schoppe	658-2396
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Newsletter Editor	Dee Press	484-8415
Program Committee	Laura Gulovsen	642-6544
	Margaret Wilson	647-7962
	Audrey Vincent	525-5826

DECEMBER BOARD MEETING

The Tuesday, December 4th Board of Directors meeting will be held at the home of Marianne Slaughter & Dee Press, 1656 Riente St. in Camarillo, at 7:15 p.m. Call 805 -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 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.