



White-tailed Kite

June, 2006

Mission: To promote the awareness, appreciation and protection of native birds and their habitats through education, research and environmental activities.

June Membership Meeting – Potluck Dinner at [Chico Creek Nature Center](#) Friday, June 16, 6 p.m.



Great news! The heat is on and that means it's time once again for our annual potluck dinner. It's a time for all of us to come together and celebrate this wonderful natural world we live in. We will be able to do all the things we never have time for at the regular meetings, visit with old friends and get to know new ones, talk about birds and birding, and share stories of recent adventures and travels. Plus, we will have games and some prizes. We have had a great time each month at the meetings this year so be sure not to miss this one, as it is our last meeting until September. Bring a dish to share, a beverage for yourself or to share, a plate and fork, and possibly a chair if you like. See you there!

May General Meeting – May 15, 2006, 6:30 p.m., Chico Creek Nature Center

High energy and enthusiasm characterized Altacal's May general meeting. Over 40 members came to hear about [California Audubon](#) and the work that they are involved in. Claudia Eyzaguirre, whose job it is to coordinate the 50 local California Audubon chapters spoke about her role as a go-to person for the locals. In addition, she outlined some of the work she and California Audubon are involved in. High on their agenda is working to pass a \$5.4 billion [Conservation Funding Initiative](#) that will be on the November ballot. This initiative will provide funds for safe drinking water, coastal and forest protection, restoration of rivers, lakes and streams, and local and state parks. Claudia also spoke about a major effort focused on saving the [Endangered Species Act](#). After 30 years of serving as America's premier safety net for wild animals and plants on the verge of extinction, the Endangered Species Act faces its most serious attack from a Congressman in our own backyard. Rep. Richard Pombo (R-CA) has authored a rewrite of the ESA, an "Extinction Bill" that would repeal designation of critical habitat among other devastating policies.

Glenn Olson, Executive Director of California Audubon followed Claudia with a slide presentation entitled *100 years of Audubon*. In it, he focused on the many important environmental successes that Audubon has had a hand in over the last 100 years starting with "[Audubon Wardens](#)" who enforced the laws in the first national wilderness and protected areas established by President Theodore Roosevelt in the early 1900's. When congress refused to allocate money to enforce the laws, Audubon stepped forward and raised money funding over 50 wardens. More recently, Audubon has experienced huge successes in protecting the greatest riparian corridor in California, the Kern River Preserve. Twenty-five

years after conservationists started acquiring and restoring land on the South Fork Kern River, [Audubon's Kern River Preserve](#) now encompasses 3,462 acres, including five miles of frontage on the South Fork of the Kern River. Other important current projects include a major effort to preserve and restore the [Salton Sea](#), an important bird habitat and nesting area for pelicans, cormorants, terns, grebes, ducks and gulls. The Salton Sea now covers 376 square miles (making it larger than Lake Tahoe). Also, a very successful [Landowner Stewardship Program](#), which works with private landowners in the Central Valley to design and implement conservation projects on farms, ranches and other rural properties. Wildlife Friendly Farming projects are designed to maintain and enhance the physical and economic conditions for agriculture, while improving habitat for wildlife.

Overall, the evening was very positive, well received and appreciated by our members. We can all take pride in our support of the work and mission of California Audubon.

Sister Society ([Cape Cod Bird Club](#)) News



Greetings from Cape Cod. We are in the midst of a week-long stretch of rainy, windy weather. We've had a few days here and there of sunshine, but the nor'easter weather of late is pretty typical of our spring time. These storms, however, bring exciting sightings to the coast along the [Cape Cod Bay](#). Some of the highlights of this weekend (May 13 and 14) include: an **Albatross sp.**, **Red and Red-necked Phalaropes**, **Manx Shearwaters**, **Wilson's** and **Leach's Storm Petrels**, **Red-throated Loons**, **Pomarine Jaeger**, and even **Long-tailed Jaeger**, and **Northern Gannet** by the hundreds!

During the warmer, dryer days so far this spring, we have seen the expected diversity of warblers and other songbirds migrating north. [Beech Forest at Race Point \(Provincetown\)](#) is a terrific migrant trap and sightings have included: **Pine Warbler**, **Palm Warbler**, **Black and White Warbler**, **Worm-eating Warbler**, **Black-throated Green Warbler**, **Blue-gray Gnatcatcher**, and **Blue-headed Vireo**. **Eastern Towhee** are suddenly everywhere and **Ruby-throated Hummingbirds** and **Baltimore Orioles** have been back since around May 1. The southern tip of South Beach in Chatham is seeing hundreds of north bound shorebirds, including **Black-bellied** and **Semi-palmated Plovers**, **Yellowlegs** and **Whimbrel** to name a few. On the Cape Cod Bird Club nest box trails, we have eggs or hatchlings of **Eastern Bluebird**, **Black-capped Chickadee**, **Tree Swallow** and **Tufted Titmouse**.

Good Birding!

Conservation Corner

Keeping Cats Indoors- Helping Birds, Wildlife and Cats

Dawn Garcia, Conservation Chair

As birders we love to celebrate spring with the birdsongs and courtship behavior of our migratory and resident friends and the fledglings that will come from this year's effort. However, adult birds face many challenges trying to get the kids out of the nest. The nestling phase is the most vulnerable time for a bird, dealing with potential competition from brown-headed cowbirds, ecto-parasites like mites and lice, their own siblings in times of food shortage, native predatory snakes, birds, mammals and non-

native predators such as introduced rats and cats. Cats are considered “super-predators;” there are many more cats than natural native predators (such as a bobcat) and they have a high fecundity rate, birthing up to several litters per year! Millions of free-roaming domestic cats and feral cats kill **hundreds of millions of birds** and other wildlife a year. Cats are excellent hunters and even a well-fed friend often kills wildlife due to its predatory instincts. Naïve fledgling birds are particularly vulnerable.

So what is the solution? Keep cats indoors, under supervision or on a leash while you enjoy the yard together, or build an outdoor enclosure for your pet to enjoy the out-of-doors. I’ve seen many of these enclosures adorned with dangling kitty toys, carpeted platforms, and views of bird feeders. Some are connected to windows or kitty-doors so cats have indoor and outdoor access whenever they please. Clever! The American Bird Conservancy has a well-developed [Cats Indoors!](http://www.abcbirds.org/cats/) campaign (<http://www.abcbirds.org/cats/>), complete with tips on helping you keep your kitty inside and links to how or where to buy outdoor enclosures.

In addition, the American Veterinary Medical Association recommends that cats remain indoors for the health and safety of the cat. Indoor cats typically have a much longer lifespan than their free-roaming friends. Outdoor cats are exposed to cars, dogs, mean people, other cats, parasites, and disease. Although it is not an issue here yet, domestic cats in Germany and Austria have contracted the H5N1 avian influenza virus, presumably from feeding on infected birds.

Keeping an indoor cat will help protect all of our wildlife, furred, scaled and feathered, and your keep your cat healthier too.

Rex Burress

Songbird America

Two interesting books on birds have appeared recently. One, *Songbird Journeys*, by Miyoko Chu, gives a detailed account of the lives of migratory birds and their challenges. The chapter on "Flight Across the Gulf" illustrates the particularly perilous 600-mile journey that millions of migrants make across the Gulf of Mexico rather than following the equally perilous land route. Even hummingbirds are known to make that crossing!

Although Pacific Flyway migrants aren’t faced with the gulf dilemma, the strenuous effort does take its toll. The author, who made her mark in integrative biology with a study on ‘the enigmatic migratory behavior of the phainopepla,’ states that many songbirds live for less than two years, with more than 85% of annual mortality occurring during migration. Several million succumb to radio towers, windmills, and other high structures.

Most migrants fly at night, sometimes as high as 12,000 feet, directed by those mysterious senses we have only recently begun to understand better. During the day they try to feed and renew their inner capacities. Every fall I notice the arrival of warblers that suddenly appear in the morning along the Feather River, evidently having flown at night, and they seem ravished for food. On the same note, I have seen masses of swallows gather on an autumnal evening to possibly prepare for flying all night. Cliff swallows travel from the Yukon to South America and back each year, a journey of 12,000 miles, and some, like Arctic terns, fly even farther. They must like to fly with wings! Or do they have any choice?

Stated is "Of 10,000 species of birds on earth, 4,600 are songbirds." I wonder if that number is a generalization? My "*Birds of America*," Golden Guide, 1966, says 8,600 species in the world. "Wildlife Fact Finder" says 9,000. Have I missed something in new discoveries? Experts say there are about one million insect species on earth, but perhaps 10 million undiscovered. The same with fungi; an estimated

60,000 species have been described but maybe 1.5 million undiscovered. Do we really know any absolute facts about earth?

The other book, "*Return to Wild America*," largely involves a retracing by author Scott Weidensaul of Roger Tory Peterson and James Fischer's 30,000-mile bird and wildlife survey around the margins of North America they made in 1953. Environmental revelation was just beginning that year when the Supreme Court denied construction of a highway along the historic Chesapeake Canal that was a major bird habitat refuge.

Peterson had added to the zeal of birders in America with the publication of his first field guide in 1934, an effort that was rejected by three publishing houses until Houghton Mifflin printed just 2000 copies. The book sold out in a week, and over the past 70 years has sold over seven million copies...and still going strong in spite of Sibley!

Rachael Carson added to the bird consciousness of the nation with her book, *Silent Spring*, in 1962, and Earth Day started in 1970 followed by the Environmental Protection Agency and Endangered Species Acts, legislation the industrial age promoters have continued to condemn. Overuse of natural resources is a continual threat to the wildlife integrity of the country, as the author noted in his early 2000 follow-up journey. John Muir said "The battle for conservation will go on endlessly. It is part of the universal warfare between right and wrong." Watch!

Avi-Fact

We often see [Yellow-billed Magpies](#) (*Pica nuttalli*) and [Nuttall's Woodpeckers](#) (*Dendrocopus nuttallii*) in our area. These birds (and many other birds, flowers, insects and animals) were given scientific names that honored [Thomas Nuttall](#), a 19th century ornithologist and botanist who published the *Manual of the Ornithology of the United States and Canada*, the first useful, small-size bird book on the ornithology of the two countries. Not everyone put him on a pedestal, though. It has been said that Native Americans who saw him gathering birds and plants reportedly thought he was insane.

Upcoming Bird Walks and Birding Trips

All of our field trips are open to beginning birders. Anyone with a sense of wonder is welcome to participate.

June 3-4, Saturday/Sunday – [Willow Lake](#) - Willow Lake is a jewel of a birding spot. On last year's trip everybody had a great time. This lake has a unique floating bog that you can walk out onto. We will walk up the feeder stream into Lassen National Park to visit Terminal Geyser and other geothermal areas. Last year we encountered many nesting birds such as **Pileated Woodpecker**, **Sandhill Cranes**, **Spotted Sandpiper**, and **Tree Swallow**. **Warblers** and **Woodpeckers** are abundant. This is a camping trip (a very basic USFS campground) but you can drive up for the day to join us as well. Bring your canoe if you want. Contact the trip leader pjohnsonhardwood@sunset.net or 893-3222.

June 14, Wednesday – Phil Johnson and Gaylord Grams will lead a search for nesting [Yellow-billed Cuckoos](#) near the Sacramento River at three separate sites. Meet at 5 p.m. the Indian Fishery Nature Trail parking lot where West Sacramento Ave. meets River Road. We will bird the area until 6 p.m., then move to other locations. For more information or to confirm call 872-0739 or 893-3222.

July 8-9, Saturday/Sunday - [Sierra Valley/Yuba Pass](#) - This trip covers a variety of mountain habitats. We will bird the marshes and open fields at the headwaters of the Feather River, the sagebrush lowlands of the Sierra Valley and the conifer woodlands of Yuba pass. This trip always gives us a good variety of birds. Last year we witnessed many young birds being fed by their parents. We will meet at the Park 'n Ride at 7:30 a.m. on Saturday and carpool to the area. Saturday night we will camp out at the [Yuba Pass Campground](#). Contact Phil Johnson if you wish to go, so transportation and camping can be coordinated. pjohnsonhardwood@sunset.net or 893-3222.

August 5-6, Saturday/Sunday - [Lassen Volcanic National Park](#) - Beat the heat and head for the high country. We will meet at the Park 'n Ride at 7:30 a.m. on Saturday and carpool. We will get a group campsite and take short hikes in various Park locations. You can join us on the hikes, or lounge in camp and let the birds come to you. Contact Phil Johnson, pjohnsonhardwood@sunset.net or 893-3222 to coordinate camping. Some folks may want to go up on Friday night to extend the trip, so please call first.

Bird Walk and Birding Trip Reports

April 29, Saturday, [Upper Bidwell Park](#) – On a beautiful, sunny day Skip Augur led a bird walk in the woodlands along the creek and on the Upper Trail. The group saw over 30 species of birds including neotropical migrants such as **Bullock's Oriole**, **Western Tanager**, **Ash-throated Flycatcher**, and **Wilson's Warbler**. Resident breeders were also very much in evidence, with **California** and **Spotted Towhee**, **House Wren**, **Western Bluebird**, and many **Lesser Goldfinches** seen. There were also a few straggling **White-** and **Golden-crowned Sparrows** braving the heat.

April 30, Sunday – Butte County “Big Day” – Altacal Audubon Society members accompanied Chico State Birding Club members on one of their “Big Day” (well, “modified” big day) outings. Between 6 a.m. and 6 p.m. they spotted 101 species of birds in various locations in Butte County ([Llano Seco](#), [Gray Lodge Wildlife Area](#), [Bedrock Park](#), and others). Some of the birds seen were an **Eared Grebe**, **Green Herons**, **Blue-winged Teals**, **Redheads**, lots of **Whimbrels**, **Black Terns**, a **Vaux's Swift**, a **Swainson's Hawk** and **Hooded Orioles**.

May 7, Sunday – [Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge, Willows](#) – Anne Lise Feenstra (leading the trip) and Tim Ruckle, in a morning of birding saw 65 species on a beautiful day at the relatively dry SNWR. **Mallards**, **Marsh Wrens** and **Western Kingbirds** were especially abundant. Some of the other birds seen were **American Bitterns** in "freeze mode" in a relatively open field, **Greater White-fronted** and **Canada Geese**, nine other duck species, and **Red-necked** and **Wilson's Phalaropes** (occasional at SNWR) in full breeding plumage were spotted in the marsh among **American Avocets**, **Black-necked Stilts** and **Long-billed Dowitchers**. They also saw a **Green Heron** in the creek, a **Great Horned Owl** being mobbed by smaller, unidentified birds, a **Warbling Vireo** (rare at SNWR), **Western Tanagers**, **Black-headed Grosbeaks**, **Bullock's Orioles**, a **Wilson's Warbler** and **Orange-crowned**, **Townsend's**, **Black-throated Gray** and **Hermit Warblers** (the last four rare at SNWR). The warblers were very busy going about the business of chowing down (foraging) among the willows north of the parking lot.

May 13, Saturday - Rio Vista/Arneberg Sanctuary Bird Walk – As part of the [International Migratory Bird Day](#) celebration and in partnership with the [Sacramento River Preservation Trust](#), the [U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service](#) and Marilyn Gamette representing the [Bidwell Wildlife Rehabilitation Center](#), Altacal Audubon Society's Phil Johnson led a bird walk at the [Rio Vista Unit of the Sacramento River National Wildlife Refuge](#). The group started out the walk with good looks at **Black-headed Grosbeaks**, **Bullock's Orioles**, and **Ash-throated Flycatchers**. Soon after, they saw a **Black-chinned Hummingbird**. To the surprise of many, all of the hummingbirds they saw that day were Black-chinned (no Anna's were seen). In a large clearing of Mugwort, they saw **Lazuli Buntings**, **Common Yellowthroats**, and **American Goldfinches**. On top of one small Valley Oak, a **Blue Grosbeak** popped up long enough to give them a good look. Along a trail through a densely wooded area, they discovered the nest of a **Wild Turkey** with about ten eggs in it. Elsewhere, long-patterned drag marks in the dust bore evidence of the male Turkey's mating display. At lunch, Marilyn gave a presentation on owls which included two live birds that she had rehabilitated (a **Great Horned** and a **Western Screech-Owl**). Did you know that an owl's ears are in slightly offset locations on the head? This gives them a mechanism to better judge the distance of sounds.

Several hardy folks, led by Dave Tinker, continued on across the river to visit Altacal's own Arneberg sanctuary. They discovered a **Red-tailed Hawk** nest with three downy chicks inside. **Bullock's**

Orioles and **Western Kingbirds** were plentiful. Two dead coyote pups were found in the grasses. This property contains many large stately Valley Oaks, Sycamores, and Cottonwoods. A beautiful grassland with a small vernal pool also graces the area. Access into our refuge has proved challenging. Currently, the only sure legal access into the property is to canoe up Kopta Slough. The north end of the slough is the south end of Altacal's parcel.

Opportunities and Events

Audubon's Birding Basics - Did you know that birding is the number one sport in America? According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, there are currently 51.3 million birders in the United States alone, and this number continues to grow. If you are reading this, you probably are already aware of the joys of birding. If you have friends who might be interested in learning about birding you could tell them how to join as a local member of the [Altacal Audubon Society](#) and then point them to the National Audubon Society's useful section on its web site entitled "Birding Basics". It covers equipment, etiquette, how to study the basics, and lots more. And it can serve as a brush-up tutorial for more experienced birders as well. You can reach it at the following web address:

http://www.audubon.org/bird/at_home/bird_watching/index.shtml

June 16-18, 2006 - 5th Annual Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua, Lee Vining, CA – What's a Chautauqua, you say? Check out the web site and find out (Teddy Roosevelt said it was the most American thing in America). Three days of evening presentations, seminars, field trips, music, and great birding! The [Eastern Sierra Audubon Society](#) is one of the Chautauqua partners. Registration opened on April 17. Check to see what events are still open. All proceeds support continuing research in the Mono Basin. Contact: Mono Lake Committee, P.O. Box 29, Lee Vining, CA 93541 760-647-6595, info@monolake.org . <http://www.birdchautauqua.org/>

Sightings

(If you have any interesting sightings in June and July, you can send them to the Newsletter Editor at tim.ruckle@sbcglobal.net by July 20 for possible inclusion in the next newsletter.)

April 30 - J. T. Lewis reported that he and Mike Skram saw a **Snowy Plover** at Llano Seco so far north of the parking lot that they had to confirm ID by scoping from Seven Mile Lane, across from Grainland Rd. Earlier in the day, Jim Snowden had reported the bird 150-250 yards south of the lot. According to the Annotated Bird List for Butte County, there has not been a Snowy Plover reported since 1983. Here's a photo of a Snowy Plover.



April 30 – Tim Ruckle and other members of the Chico State Birding Club saw **Hooded Orioles** in the Fan Palms around the corner from Tacos Cortez (1110 Dayton Rd., Chico). Here's a photo of one of them taken by Ryan Mooney:



May 1-5 - Liam and Scott Huber watched a **Yellow-breasted Chat** on two separate occasions in early May at the Butte Creek Ecological Preserve. Both **Yellow Warblers** and **Wilson's Warblers** were observed in the riparian forest along Little Chico Creek at Bruce Road. They also saw an escaped **Cockatiel** fly over in Paradise! Here's a photo Liam took of the Yellow-breasted Chat:



May 5 - Dawn, Paul and Chris Garcia, Randall Peterson and Julie Nelson netted and banded a **Lazuli Bunting** and **Swainson's Thrush** among other birds at the Big Chico Creek Ecological Reserve. Also, in the oaks in Dawn's backyard she had a flock of about 15 **Evening Grosbeaks**. On the next day, she heard a **Western Wood Pewee** singing along the South Fork of the American River, the first she has heard this season. Here's a photo taken by Dawn of the Lazuli Bunting:



May 8 - The first **Blue Grosbeak** of the year arrived in Anne-Lise Feenstra's yard west of Orland. He has returned each day and, as of May 16, was still in her yard, singing away. She also saw a **Wild Turkey** on April 19, a first for her yard, and a **Black-chinned Hummingbird** on April 20, the first of this year. Here's a photo of a Blue Grosbeak.



May 11 – At the Butte Creek Ecological Preserve Liam and Scott Huber joined Dawn Garcia in seeing many different species of birds. Among them was a **Phainopepla** spotted by Liam. Here's Liam's photo of the bird showing its distinct crest in early morning light:



Organize Your Sightings and Participate in Citizen Science on [eBird](#)

What is eBird? It's a project developed by the [Cornell Lab of Ornithology](#) and the [National Audubon Society](#) that provides a simple way for you to keep track of the birds you see anywhere in North America. You can retrieve information on your bird observations, from your backyard to your neighborhood to your favorite bird-watching locations, at any time for your personal use. You can also access the entire historical database to find out what other eBirders are reporting from across North America. In addition, the cumulative eBird database is used by birdwatchers, scientists, and conservationists who want to know more about the distributions and movement patterns of birds across the continent.

Submission of Articles

(Notices or articles submitted for publication consideration should be sent by e-mail message to the newsletter editor as Microsoft Word (if possible) attachments by the 20th of the month for the next issue of the newsletter - tim.ruckle@sbcglobal.net– Thanks, Ed.)

Altacal Audubon Society Web Site

<http://www.altacal.org>

Altacal Board of Directors

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Board meetings are held at 5:00 p.m. on the 1st Thursday of each month (except July and August). The usual meeting place is the Chico Creek Nature Center, 1968 E. 8th St., Chico. The public is welcome to attend.

Local Chapter Membership Application

Please join us! Your membership will help Altacal Audubon Society continue its important work. Altacal Audubon Society (AAS) is a chapter of the National Audubon Society. In addition, AAS is a separately incorporated non-profit organization. With a local chapter membership, 100% of your membership dues go to support local projects and activities. AAS is an all-volunteer organization that conducts all of its programs with no paid staff. We offer regularly scheduled field trips focused on birds and bird habitats, our own website www.altacal.org/, a bi-monthly newsletter (*White-tailed Kite*), monthly membership meetings which include lectures and media presentations on birds and other natural history-related topics, and advocacy to protect and conserve local habitats as well as special projects and programs. Other AAS activities include:

- sponsoring and participating in the annual [Snow Goose Festival](#)
- sponsoring and participating in the annual [Endangered Species Fair](#)
- founding and providing continued support to the [Chico Creek Nature Center](#)
- owning and managing the Arneberg Sanctuary as a wildlife habitat and research area
- helping to monitor the bird populations at the [Del Rio Wildland Preserve](#) near the Sacramento River
- paying to maintain public access and a wildlife viewing blind at the Chico Oxidation Ponds
- leading annual [Christmas Bird Counts](#) in Chico and Oroville for the past 50 years

Welcome to the Altacal Audubon Society! Please indicate your choice of membership options:

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$15 Basic Membership | <input type="checkbox"/> \$50 Sponsor | <input type="checkbox"/> \$500 Patron |
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Important: Membership in Altacal Audubon does *not* include membership in the National Audubon Society. We encourage you to also support National Audubon in their important education and lobbying efforts. To join the National Audubon Society contact them at their website www.audubon.org/

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