

Altacal Audubon Society, Inc.

Post Office Box 3671
Chico, California 95927-3671
<http://www.altacal.org>



White-tailed Kite

August, 2006

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

**September General Meeting – Monday, September 18, 2006, 6:30 p.m.,
[Chico Creek Nature Center](#)**

Birds of Bidwell Park

Join us on a virtual bird-watching trip through Bidwell Park presented by guest speaker, Roger Lederer. He will be discussing interesting facts about the common but fascinating feathered denizens of the "Jewel of Chico". Bidwell Park offers an amazing diversity of birds throughout the year. It's the perfect place for both the experienced and novice bird-watcher to learn about the birds we enjoy so much.

Roger is Professor Emeritus of Biological Sciences at CSU Chico. He has taught ornithology (his specialty) and ecology courses as well as worked with environmental organizations and schools. Roger's web site, <http://www.ornithology.com>, has many interesting and useful bird-related sections and links.

We send a big Thanks! to all of you who responded to our new local membership changes. Thanks also to those of you who sent donations above and beyond the new membership fee. If you have not yet sent in your new local (Altacal) membership form, please do so soon. The changes in the membership structure are necessary, and will ultimately serve our local chapter better.

Altacal Board of Directors Openings

Here's an opportunity to volunteer and participate more fully in Altacal activities as a Board member; to help determine the direction, programs and activities of the Society and to meet more folks who share your enthusiasms. We need a **Hospitality Committee** chairperson (as well as those who'd like to help but not necessarily be on the Board). If you're interested, call Linda Rowell at 894-1666. The **Membership Committee** will soon need a new chairperson. For details, contact Alison Shedd at 343-6919.

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



Altacal Audubon Society's annual potluck was a great success! The picnic tables outside the Chico Creek Nature Center were loaded with lots of delicious and healthy entrees. The perfect weather made it even more enjoyable as we all had fun taking part in some old-fashioned games. One was the water balloon toss where a few of us got wet. Another was the bird-song game where you had to guess ten bird's songs played on a tape. Several people did very well guessing all ten correct. One of their rewards was the opportunity to educate the rest of us by producing a bird call that we had to identify. In the end, after all our socializing, eating and playing games, we were treated to some vanilla ice cream made the old-fashioned way - hand cranked - with all of us taking a turn.

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



On the Cape, June is the time of the year when breeding birds are plentiful and migrants and rarities are few and far between. Some of the breeding birds that are always a joy to watch include [Common Yellowthroats](#), [Prairie Warblers](#), [Northern Bobwhites](#), and [Great Crested Flycatchers](#). Birders, and others interested in nature, should not overlook these somewhat abundant breeding birds. Common Yellowthroats and Northern Bobwhites each have their own distinctive call but prefer to stay hidden. To keep our birding skills sharp, we try to locate a calling Northern Bobwhite or Common Yellowthroat amongst the thick vegetation. To make sure that our warbler-finding skills stay keen, we try to find a singing Prairie Warbler in a field. The Prairie Warbler's song, which is distinctive, quickly rises in the musical scale in a zip, Zip, ZIP, ZIP, ZIP pattern. They can be tricky to find because they seem to throw their voices. The best way to locate a singing Prairie Warbler is to listen for the very last note. The last note of the song tends to give away their position. Another very interesting breeding bird is the Great Crested Flycatcher. They are very entertaining cavity nesting birds. They are not picky and will use any hole that they can find. Even an open mailbox will suit them just fine! They also love using pieces of string and snake skins to line their nests. We keep an eye out for a bird with a brownish back, yellowish stomach and a long piece of string, ribbon, or snake skin in its mouth.

[Nauset Marsh](#) has been quite productive lately with a [Harlequin Duck](#), breeding-plumaged [Common Loon](#), half a dozen [Great Egrets](#), and [American Oystercatchers](#) seen by many observers. Pilgrim Heights in Truro is another productive spot and on June 27 a [Mississippi Kite](#) and an immature [Bald Eagle](#) were seen. Another group of birding hot spots that hardly ever disappoints is the one-two combo of [Monomoy](#) and [South Beach](#). Several shorebirds, such as [Hudsonian Godwits](#) and [Lesser Yellowlegs](#) are already starting to arrive and there will be more on the way.

If you were to visit the Wellfleet Bay Wildlife Sanctuary you'd want to watch where you step because the young [Fowler's Toads](#) are out in force.

Good Birding!

Conservation Corner

Dawn Garcia

Conservation at Home - [The Sycamore Glen Mountain Vista Subdivision](#)

New subdivisions and commercial developments are popping up in Chico's grasslands and foothills. Many restrictions are on the books (State, Federal and local) to protect our natural resources, but these regulations are often violated in favor of the development and to the demise of the natural resource. . One such development is the proposed Sycamore Glen Mountain Vista in north Chico north of East Avenue and between Floral and Ceanothus. Due to the extensive vernal pool complex existing on this property, [Butte Environmental Council \(BEC\)](#) has been following this development and has reported the following information.

The site is in northeast Chico, California, and is 165 acres with the largest vernal pool found in Chico. The project proposes to fill 6.28 wetted acres of jurisdictional wetlands for a residential and commercial development. Federally listed species known to reside on this site include the [vernal pool fairy shrimp](#) (*Branchinecta lynchi*) and [vernal pool tadpole shrimp](#) (*Lepidurus packardii*); the [Butte County meadowfoam](#) (*Limnanthes floccosa* ssp. *Californica*) is potentially found there. In addition, the [Western Spadefoot Toad](#) (*Spea hammondi*), a State Species of Concern, occurs on the site. No bird surveys were conducted although the habitat during certain times of year is conducive for the following protected species: [Swainson's Hawk](#) (*Buteo swainsoni*), [Ferruginous Hawk](#) (*Buteo regalis*), and [White-tailed Kite](#) (*Elanus leucurus*). To lessen impact on critical habitats and wildlife, the developer must submit an alternative plan. Although this is not the proposed alternative, **there is a viable Biological Resources Alternative from the Environmental Impact Report (EIR)**. This development alternative allows multi-family housing and will best protect the existing critical areas and wildlife by preserving the watershed to maintain a viable ecosystem with approximately 130 acres protected.

How You Can Help

This development will be presented to the Planning Commission and City Council likely this fall, 2006. Meetings are open for public comment. The City needs to know how the public feels about protection of critical habitats and wildlife. **Should the Sycamore Glen Mountain Vista development be permitted, only the Biological Resources Alternative from the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) should be accepted.** You need not have any expertise, just an interest in protection of our environment and ensuring that the City works with developers to protect our natural resources by creating best alternative plans. The planner overseeing this development, Patrick Murphy, will notify you of the meetings regarding this development, per your request. Please email Patrick at pjmurphy@ci.chico.ca.us or call his office at 879-6803. You can also view public documents (including the alternative plan) at the City Hall. For a more detailed description of this project, check out the following links.

The ACOE Public Notice including the project description

<http://www.spk.usace.army.mil/pub/outgoing/co/reg/pn/200400544.pdf>

The map of the site and project

<http://www.spk.usace.army.mil/pub/outgoing/co/reg/pn/200400544-draw.pdf>

Rex Burress

The Great Speckled Bird

I came across an old 1936 country song by Roy Acuff called, "The Great Speckled Bird." The content was taken from the Bible, Jeremiah 12:9, and in researching I found that three different translations produced three different interpretations. King James referred to "Mine heritage is unto me as a speckled bird," another is simply "a brightly colored bird," while the New International Version states "a speckled bird of prey." What is a speckled bird?

In our ["Sibley" field guide](#), there is no reference to "speckled" birds, if you think of a speck as being smaller than a spot. Most birds with markings are either streaked, splotched, and rarely spotted, as are some birds of prey, including the [Spotted Owl](#). [Northern Flickers](#) have a spotted breast, and our [Spotted Sandpiper](#) has a spotted chest—but only during the breeding season, April through August. Many of the shorebirds have a confusing array of varied spots and slashes.

The closest thing to speckled is noted in two introduced birds – the [European Starling](#) and the [Guineafowl](#). Adult Starlings are infused with small spots during the non-breeding period, while in the December-to-August breeding time they take on an oily greenish-black iridescence. The odd plumage seems to have worked considering that they have spread all over America after their introduction from Europe in the late 1800's. Plumage variation drives beginner bird-watchers crazy!

Guineas are mostly domesticated in America, filtered down from their wild Asian origins, but they have a wandering nature and often stray from barnyards into forested areas. The gray body is speckled with an extreme profusion of white dots, making them virtually invisible when setting on a nest in the weeds. The loud cackle alerts the entire neighborhood to intruders, and guineas are mentioned in the book, "Birds of the Bible," as being an extreme delicacy in Palestine where they were obtained from Egypt.

It is gratifying that birds have been noted in early historical times and biblical recordings. Birds were referred to over 300 times in the King James Bible. They were commonly spoken of as "the fowl of the air," or "little sandy-colored quail which came up and covered the camp of Moses in the wilderness," and especially eagles, which even today command bird-watchers' attention all over the world. One of the verses, Isaiah 40:31, speaks of, "...they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles..."

To those who list birds and have "life lists," it may be interesting that a list of "unclean" birds not to be eaten is recorded in Deuteronomy 14:11-18. The list of 20 includes eagles, osprey, vultures, raven, owls, swans, pelicans, cormorants, storks, and herons...and the bat! - mostly flesh eating birds. Although edible, these birds are still not considered "game." Considering that America has about 650 species of birds, the Palestinian region has about 400 in that bleak, largely desert land, so the ancient observers did, indeed, have some birds to consider.

The dove is perhaps mentioned more than any other bird in the bible, portraying a gentle peace. "...The spirit of God descends 'like a dove'..." However, the [Mourning Doves](#) that frequent our bird feeder are bully birds that bump about to hold dominance and whiz through the sky at an impressive speed, as hunters well know. There is a [Spotted Dove](#) introduced from Asia, and a small population exists in Southern California. The small white spots are clustered around the neck. Could this be the great speckled bird penned by Guy Smith and recorded by Acuff? "Oh that I had the wings of a dove! For then would I fly away and be at rest." –Psalm 55:6

Avi-Fact

Cuckoo is an imitative (or, as our English teachers might have said, onomatopoeic) word. That is, its name more-or-less represents the sound associated with it. The earliest form in English is *cuccu* and there are variants and antecedents of it that appear in most Romance and German languages. The [Yellow-billed Cuckoo](#) (such as the one seen on a recent Altacal bird walk) is classified as genus *Coccyzus*, species *americanus*. *Coccyzus* is a Latinized form of the Greek *kokkuzo*, meaning “to cry cuckoo”, derived from *kukkux*, Greek for “cuckoo”. The species designation, *americanus*, is Latin for “American”; a reference to its range. The “Yellow-billed” refers to a field mark, the black-tipped, lower yellow mandible. The Yellow-billed Cuckoo has been called the “Raincrow” because it seems to call more often on cloudy days, but there’s not a lot of evidence indicating that it’s especially good at predicting rain.

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.

August (4) 5-6, Saturday/Sunday - [Lassen 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 570-7139 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

June 3-4, Saturday/Sunday - Willow Lake – (trip led by Phil Johnson) - We had another great trip to Willow Lake this year. Many patches of snow were on the road and the trails, but none deterred us from getting out. [Bald Eagles](#) were seen above the lake as soon as we got out of the car, and periodically throughout both days. The predominant sounds for the weekend were the [Sandhill Cranes](#) (6) in the marsh that kept up a chorus throughout the day. [Western Tanagers](#) and [Tree Swallows](#) gave us great displays of color. [Willow Flycatcher](#), [MacGillivray's Warbler](#), [Olive-sided Flycatcher](#), and [Pileated Woodpecker](#) were among the most celebrated sightings. Sunday morning we awoke to a chorus of [Coyotes](#) in the lower meadow. As we sipped our coffee, we looked across the marsh to find that two coyotes had each caught little downy [Canada Goose](#) chicks for their breakfast. Later we watched a Sandhill Crane being mobbed by the many nesting pairs of [Red-winged Blackbirds](#). They would land on the back of the Crane and peck away until the Crane would finally peck back. The trip started on the sad note of finding a just-hit [Mountain Lion](#) alongside of Highway 32 in Forest Ranch. Watching this big, beautiful animal breathe its last living breath was a painful reminder of the destructive aspects of automobiles. Please drive the speed limit and watch out for wildlife!!

June 14, Wednesday Evening - [Yellow-billed Cuckoo](#) Hunt – (trip led by Gaylord Grams and Phil Johnson) - WE FOUND ONE!!! You never go looking for this bird with big hopes. Very few pairs are found in the Sacramento Valley any more. Last year we looked twice with no luck. We were all just figuring that we would just have a pleasant walk along the riparian corridor at sunset and be happy with that. Then.... someone called out "Cuckoo!" and our spirits elevated tenfold. We had one bird that kept flying from tree to tree, attracted by a recorded call. It gave us great looks for about 10 minutes. A small party of birders who had split from the group earlier and headed deep into the forested area actually got to hear and see one as well. It was a lucky night. Many other birds were seen in the canopy as well. A [Muskrat](#) swam through the Indian Fishery slough in front of us. Perhaps all of the restoration efforts along the Sacramento River will, one day, make this sighting a common occurrence. Let's hope.

July 8-9, Saturday/Sunday - [Sierra Valley/Yuba Pass](#) – (trip led by Phil Johnson) - Once again, this trip proved to be the place to see fledgling birds being fed by the parents. At almost every place that we stopped, we witnessed this behavior. The trip started on Friday night at the Crocker campground in the hills above Beckworth. In camp we saw [Common Nighthawks](#) fly over and heard [Common Poorwills](#) in the distance. A large dawn chorus of songbirds awoke us on Saturday. Baby [Dark-eyed Juncos](#) were seen begging from their parents. [Mountain Bluebirds](#) were about.

Next stop was the Sierra Valley Marsh, where we encountered many [Yellow-headed Blackbird](#) chicks, baby [American Coots](#), and a group of miniature [Ruddy Ducks](#). [White-faced Ibis](#) were everywhere. [Wilson's Phalarope](#), [Willet](#), [American Avocet](#) and [Black-necked Stilts](#) were found in the shallow waters.

After that, the famous bird banding spot, Carman Valley. We didn't see as many warblers as we had hoped for, but got great looks at [Belted Kingfishers](#) on the ponds. The highlight here was coming across a mob of [Mountain Chickadees](#) chattering away at some predator in a pine tree. A close look revealed a juvenile [Northern Saw-whet Owl](#) in the tree.

Following that, we went to the Yuba Pass campground, where we were greeted by [Williamson's Sapsuckers](#) that had a nest in our campsite. [Cassin's Finches](#) were seen eating gravel off the shoulders of the highway. An [Olive-sided Flycatcher](#) and a [Fox Sparrow](#) were heard singing.

Sunday morning we walked the Sand Pond nature loop and the Gold Lake loop trail and took in the spectacular scenery of the area. We witnessed [Red-breasted Sapsuckers](#) feeding young. A [MacGillivray's Warbler](#) skulked about the alders. High overhead we saw [American White Pelicans](#).

In all, we saw 95 species.

Opportunities and Events

My Yard Counts

My Yard Counts is a new citizen-science project sponsored by the [Cornell Lab of Ornithology](#) that combines bird-watching observations around residences in rural, suburban, and urban settings with information about yards. By participating, you can help researchers identify the features in yards that are most important to birds. To help, all you have to do is count all the birds you see in the immediate vicinity around your residence during 20-minute sessions of bird watching scheduled according to your own preferences throughout the spring and summer. You'll fill out a one-time, online questionnaire about your yard or the area around your residence. Also, you'll have the option of keeping track of pet-wildlife interactions and reporting what you see online.

Why My Yard Counts

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology is testing the idea that our public parks, refuges, and wilderness areas will function better for birds if the surrounding areas also favor birds. The quantity and quality of habitat everywhere, including residential areas, may make a difference to the fate of bird communities across the landscape. For example, exhausted migratory birds may find food and shelter in yards and parks as they travel thousands of miles to and from their breeding grounds. Your yard may even be an important nesting area where birds can raise their young.

Even as we protect wilderness areas for birds, we can explore the impacts of improving altered, human-dominated landscapes in between, yard by yard. For more information, go to the following web site:

<http://www.birds.cornell.edu/MyYardCounts>

[Vote Yes on Proposition 84 - the Clean Water, Parks and Coastal Protection Act](#)

California is facing enormous population growth in the coming years, with 25 million new residents expected by 2040. But our investment in infrastructure is not keeping pace with our population growth. Current funding for natural resources and environmental protection programs is critically low. In fact, funding for resources makes up less than 1% of the overall state budget. Proposition 84 makes the investments needed to ensure that all Californians will have access to safe drinking water, better protection from floods and opportunities to enjoy parks, natural landscapes and our rivers, lakes, beaches, bays and coastline.

A broad coalition of interests – water districts, conservation and environmental groups, local government entities, business organizations, museum and park interests, elected officials, and civic groups – has been formed to support Proposition 84, the Clean Water, Parks and Coastal Protection Bond Act. Altacal Audubon Society is among them, and urges you to vote for Proposition 84 in November. More information can be found online at:

<http://www.cleanwater2006.com/about/facts.php>

Sightings

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

Early June - On the hottest weekend in June the Hubers observed [MacGillivrays Warbler](#), [Hermit Warbler](#), [Hairy Woodpecker](#) (grayish Pacific variant) and numerous others at Trinity Lake. Over Independence Day weekend they tallied 84 bird species on a trip to Morro Bay. Noteworthy sightings were: singing [Swainson's Thrush](#), [Chestnut-backed Chickadees](#), [Wilson's Warbler](#), [Common Yellowthroat](#), nesting [Pigeon Guillemot](#), numerous [Heerman's Gulls](#), close-up views of [Black-crowned Night-Heron](#), several [Eurasian Collared-Doves](#), seven [Snowy Plovers](#) and [Peregrine Falcons](#) with young on the aerie. On the return trip via Big Sur; fighting elephant seals, frolicking sea otters, a herd of captive zebras, a herd of reintroduced elk and a 36' long [whale carcass](#) were sighted! Here's a photo they took of a **Black-crowned Night-Heron**:



June 20-28 – Among the Hawaiian native “lifers” Jackson and Mela Shedd saw in [Kaua'i](#) were some [Honeycreepers](#) at [Koke'e State Park](#), ['Amakihi](#) and ['Elepaio](#). Mela also saw an ['Anianiau](#). Some lifer pelagic species of note at [Kilauea Point National Wildlife Refuge](#) were [Wedge-tailed Shearwater](#), [White-tailed](#) and [Red-tailed Tropicbird](#), [Laysan Albatross](#), and [Red-footed Booby](#). They also saw the [Nene](#) (the Hawaiian State Bird), [Hawaiian Coot](#), and *sandvicensis* (Hawaiian) race of [Common Moorhen](#). Most birds seen were introduced. Some of their favorites were the [White-rumped Shama](#), [Red-crested Cardinal](#), and [Spotted Dove](#). Also of interest were the number of California species on the islands, as well as species introduced to the States. [California Quail](#), [Western Meadowlark](#), [Mourning Dove](#), [Northern Cardinal](#), [House Finch](#) and [Barn Owl](#) have all been introduced to Hawaii. California non-natives introduced over there are [Ring-necked Pheasant](#), [Chukar](#), [Wild Turkey](#), [Cattle Egret](#), [House Sparrow](#), and [Rock Pigeon](#).

Jackson took these photos of a **Nene** and a **White-rumped Shama** (following in that order below):



July 2 - Black Butte Lake, Grizzly Flats area - While kayaking, Phil Johnson observed nesting [Western Grebes](#) and [Clark's Grebes](#) in shallow grassy margins of the lake (floating grass mats with 2-3 eggs each). Two [Osprey](#) platforms had young being fed by adults. Many [Wood Ducks](#) were present as well. On **July 5, at Hogsback Rd (East of Red Bluff)**, Phil saw numerous [Horned Larks](#) (probably breeding there). Here's a photo Phil took of some Grebe eggs:



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 Web Site: <http://www.altacal.org>

Altacal Board of Directors

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	Jackson Shedd	342-5144/Jacksons3@aol.com

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 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$25 Family | <input type="checkbox"/> \$100 Sustaining | <input type="checkbox"/> \$1000 Benefactor |

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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