



White-tailed Kite

NEWSLETTER OF THE ALTACAL AUDUBON SOCIETY

Chapter of the National Audubon Society serving Butte, Glenn, and Tehama Counties of Northern California

DECEMBER 2006 / JANUARY 2007

ALTACAL Program Meetings

Program meetings for the general community are held on the third Monday of each month (except for July and August) at 6:30 p.m. at the Chico Creek Nature Center, 1968 E. 8th St.

December

Monday, December 18, 2006, 6:30 p.m.
Chico Creek Nature Center

MEMBERS' SLIDE SHOW

Come see what Altacal members have been up to as they show off their photos for our annual members' slide show! There are always some great new (and sometimes old – that's OK too) pictures to see and tales to hear. Feel free to bring some of your own slides (35 mm or electronic) if you like. We'll try to work it out so everyone gets a chance to participate. The meeting will be at the Chico Creek Nature Center, 1968 East 8th Street.

Member
Alita Huber
with a banded
Northern
Saw-whet Owl

Photo by
Dawn Garcia



January

Monday, January 15, 2007, 6:30 p.m.
Chico Creek Nature Center

BIRDS TO BE FOUND FROM SIERRA CITY TO THE YUBA PASS

Presented by John McCormick

Our program presenter for January, John "Mac" McCormick, is a retired high school biology teacher of 35 years and the co-director of the San Francisco State University (SFSU) Sierra Nevada Field Station Bird Banding Program. Mac has banded birds at the Sierra Nevada Field Campus since the inception of the banding program in 1991. He has caught and banded thousands of birds that most people only hope to see. He is co-author of the Checklist of the Birds of the Sierra Valley and Yuba Pass Area and compiled the Checklist of the Birds of San Bruno Mountain State and County Park.

Mac will present an electronic slide program that will cover the birds to be found from Sierra City to the Yuba Pass area. He will emphasize the variety of habitats that can be found in this area of the Sierras and the bird life that takes advantage of this variety. These include the Sierra City Upper Foothill vegetation (Black Oak and Canyon Live Oak mixing with a variety of conifers - Ponderosa Pine, White Fir, etc.); the Yuba Pass Upper Montane Belt (Red Firs, Lodgepole Pines and Quaking Aspen) and the Sierra Buttes Subalpine Habitat (Western Hemlock and Western White Pine). While these habitats are found elsewhere in the Sierra, Mac figures that nowhere are they more accessible than in this roughly ten-mile drive. Naturally, this makes for a variety of birding opportunities and he will present handouts with accompanying "slides" on areas that he likes to bird. He will also throw in birding tips on how he distinguishes among a few of the difficult field identifications.

ALTACAL AUDUBON SOCIETY

Board of Directors

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BOARD MEETINGS

5:00 p.m., 1st Thursday of each month
(except July and August)

Altacal Audubon Society / Snow Goose Festival Office
635 Flume St., Chico

The public is welcome to attend

Thanks

We continue to thank Mary Lue Moore who volunteered to be in charge of the hospitality function at our membership meetings. Her homemade cookies disappear quickly!



We are experimenting with a new format for the White-tailed Kite and we thank Denise Devine, graphic designer for the attractive layout of the paper version of the December/January issue. Denise's work may be familiar to those of you who receive the The Pipevine, the newsletter of the Mount Lassen Chapter of the California Native Plant Society.

Thanks also to Carolyn Short for all her work on the Altacal Audubon Society brochure. It's a colorful, attractive source of information about Altacal and the local birding habitats. You can pick one up at our next monthly Membership Program Meeting. Carolyn specializes in small-run art books for artists, photographers, designers and authors. Her web site address is www.shortrunpublishing.com.

Help Wanted

We still have an opportunity (and a need) for someone to be on the Board of Directors as our **Membership Committee Chairperson**. If you'd like to contribute in a less formal way, let's say for example, by helping us update a membership spreadsheet occasionally, we'd be delighted to accept whatever level of volunteer time and effort suits you. For details, contact Alison Shedd at 530-343-6919 or ashedd@vninc.com. Also, we are looking for someone to be our **Finance Committee Chairperson**, a newly created Board of Directors position. For more information, contact Phil Johnson at 530-570-7139 or pjohnsonhardwood@sunset.net

Finally, in all our areas of interest (e.g., Field Trips, Education, Conservation, etc.) we are trying to get things done more efficiently and effectively by asking members to contribute in any way they can by contacting a Committee Chairperson or other Board member and offering to help in some area of interest. There's no need to sign on for a particular position or office and you can be sure you'd be appreciated.

Clare Aslan, a graduate student at UC Davis, is initiating some field work in Bidwell Park and the Big Chico Creek Ecological Reserve looking at bird use and dispersal of nonnative trees. Since she is in the earliest stages of this project, she is still trying to get up to speed on birding, particularly her ability to bird by ear. She plans to be in Chico on alternate weekends (December 4-5, 8-10, January 6-7 and 20-21) throughout the fall and winter and wonders if there's a chance that any members who are more familiar than she is with Chico-area birds would be interested in going out with her some mornings. If you're interested, you can contact Clare at ceaslan@ucdavis.edu.

REMINDER: If you haven't yet sent in your new local membership form (there's one in the back of the newsletter) **please do so soon. After this issue of the White-tailed Kite, only local members will receive the newsletter by mail, although it will be available on our web site, www.altacal.org.**

The Audubon *Christmas Bird Count*

Background of the Christmas Bird Count

This year the Altacal Audubon Society will participate for the 51st time in the annual Audubon Christmas Bird Count (CBC) in Chico and in Oroville. More than 50,000 observers participate each year in this all-day census of early-winter bird populations. The results of their efforts are compiled into the longest-running database in ornithology, representing over a century of unbroken data on trends of early-winter bird populations across the Americas. Simply put, the Christmas Bird Count is citizen science in action.

Prior to the turn of the century, people engaged in a holiday tradition known as the Christmas "Side Hunt": They would choose sides and go afield with their guns. Whoever brought in the biggest pile of feathered (and furred) quarry won. Conservation was in its beginning stages around the turn of the 20th century, and many observers and scientists were becoming concerned about



declining bird populations. Beginning on Christmas Day 1900, ornithologist Frank Chapman, an early officer in the then budding Audubon Society, proposed a new holiday tradition - a "Christmas Bird Census"- that would count birds in the holidays rather than hunt them. So began the Christmas Bird Count. Thanks to the inspiration of Frank M. Chapman and the enthusiasm of twenty-seven dedicated birders, twenty-five Christmas Bird Counts were held that day. The locations ranged from Toronto, Ontario to Pacific Grove in Monterey County, California (the only California count that year) with most counts in or near the population centers of northeastern North America. Those original 27 Christmas Bird Counters tallied a total of 90 species on all the counts combined.

What Do the Count Data Tell Us?

The primary objective of the Christmas Bird Count is to monitor the status and distribution of bird populations across the Western Hemisphere. The count period, which is from December 14th to January 5th in North America, is referred to as "early winter," because many birds at this time are still in the late stages of their southward migration, so it is not "true" winter. When we combine these data with other surveys such as the Breeding Bird Survey, we begin to see a clearer picture of how the continent's bird populations have changed in time and space over the past hundred years.

The information is also vital for conservation. For example, local trends in bird populations can indicate habitat fragmentation or signal an immediate environmental threat, such as groundwater contamination or poisoning from improper use of pesticides. From feeder-watchers and field observers to count compilers and regional editors, everyone who takes part in the Christmas Bird Count does it for love of birds and the excitement of friendly competition and with the knowledge that their efforts are making a difference for science and bird conservation. As long as there are birds to be counted, the Christmas Bird Count will go on being the most popular and rewarding bird census the world over.

CHICO CBC COUNTERS 2005 THE SUMMARY DATA

Dec 18, 2005
Number of Participants: 15
Number of Party Hours: 42.25
Species Reported: **100**
Low Temperature: 38
High Temperature: 51
AM Weather: Cloudy Rain: Light
PM Weather: Cloudy Rain: Light

Compiler: Phil Johnson
Participants (partial list): Nicole Edmison, Mike Fisher,
Scott Huber, Phil Johnson, Nicholas Kerhoulas, Jennifer Patten, Tim Ruckle, Debby Ladiges, Ann Mammaro

ALTACAL 2006 CBC DATES ON PAGE 4.

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.

December 17, Sunday

CHICO CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

All levels of birders are welcome to join us on the Chico Christmas bird count. Beginners will be paired up with experienced birders. Bring warm clothes, hiking shoes, lunch, bird books and binoculars. You will be assigned an area and spend the day counting all of the birds in this area. If anyone is interested in doing just a half day, please let the compiler, Phil Johnson, (530-570-7139) know ahead of time so arrangements can be made for the day's assignments. We will meet at 7:30 a.m. at the Chico Creek Nature Center. At 5:00 p.m. there will be an optional dinner and compilation at a local restaurant. For possibly updated information, check the Altacal web site at www.altacal.org

December 30, Saturday

OROVILLE CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

All levels of birders are welcome to join us on the Oroville Christmas bird count. Beginners will be paired up with experienced birders. Bring warm clothes, hiking shoes, lunch, bird books and binoculars. You will be assigned an area and spend the day counting all of the birds in this area. If anyone is interested in doing just a half day, please let the compiler, Phil Johnson, (530-570-7139) know ahead of time so arrangements can be made for the day's assignments. We will meet at 7:30 a.m. at the Agricultural Commissioner's Office on Nelson Rd. just east of Highway 70. At 5:00 p.m. there will be an optional dinner and compilation at a local restaurant. For possibly updated information, check the Altacal web site at www.altacal.org

January 2-4, Tuesday/Wednesday/Thursday

MORRO BAY BIRDING TRIP

Chico schools have the first week in January off. Have you made your birding plans for that week? Altacal's Field Trip Committee Chairman, Scott Huber, and his wife and children regularly visit family in Morro Bay and bird 'hard' when they do. The area (near San Luis Obispo) is one of the state's top coastal birding locations. Last winter's list included **Townsend's Warbler, Peregrine Falcon, Chestnut-backed Chickadee, Eurasian Collared-Dove, Black-bellied Plover, Black Turnstone** and **Wandering Tattler**, among others. The highlight is a kayak trip on the bay for shorebirds. They will be birding all day long on January 2,3 and 4 (Tuesday,Wednesday and Thursday) and invite anyone interested to join them. For more information call Scott at 530-899-5957.

January 6/7, Saturday/Sunday

TULE LAKE / KLAMATH

For updated information on this trip check the Altacal web site at www.altacal.org

January 14, Sunday

OXIDATION PONDS / INDIAN FISHERY

We will meet at the Park-'n-Ride on Hwy 32 in the lot nearest Hwy 99 at 7:30 a.m. and carpool to the oxidation ponds. There we will spend a couple of hours walking the levees behind the City Sewage Treatment Plant where we hope to find many species of local and migrating waterfowl and other birds and mammals. Then we will go over to the Indian Fishery Day Use Area of Bidwell-Sacramento River State Park and walk the guided nature trail. The trail winds through an oak woodland forest adjacent to an oxbow lake. Woodpeckers abound along with woodland and aquatic birds. In addition you may see river otters, beavers and pond turtles. We should be back at the Park-'n-Ride by 12:30 p.m. Call or e-mail Mike Fisher for more information at 530-627-4777 or fisherm1@pacbell.net. Rain cancels.

Opportunities and Events

January 25-28, 2007, Thursday-Sunday

8th Annual

SNOW GOOSE FESTIVAL of the Pacific Flyway

This premier birding and nature festival draws attention to the multitudes of migrating waterfowl that can be found wintering among the unique habitats of the Sacramento Valley through a series of presentations, field trips, workshops, exhibits, tours and children's activities. Entrance to the festival is free with many special events occurring throughout the weekend. Prices for workshops and field trips typically range from \$7 to \$20, with the exception of special tours of the Sutter Buttes and the Wetlands to Foothills field trip. Many activities can accommodate both adults and children, with discounted rates for nature enthusiasts under the age of 18.



SNOW GOOSE FESTIVAL

Additionally, the headquarters of the Festival at the Chico Masonic Family Center always features several free events, including live animal exhibits and children's activities. There will be an Uptown-Downtown Reception and Wildlife Art Exhibit. The reception will be on Friday, January 26 at Avenue 9 Gallery and 24hr Drive By Gallery, with Chico Trolley transportation between venues. The Wildlife Art Exhibit continues January 19 - February 4. There will also be a Gathering of Wings Banquet and Silent Auction at the Sierra Nevada Brewery at which Glenn Olson, Executive Director of Audubon California, will be the Guest Speaker. Snow Goose Headquarters is at the Chico Masonic Family Center during the Festival. Visit the Snow Goose Festival website for program updates and registration information: www.snowgoosefestival.org. For further information, you can reach us at either 530-345-1865 or 800-852-8570 ext. 313 or info@snowgoosefestival.org



Bird Walk and Birding Trip REPORTS

September 22-24, 2006

POINT REYES NATIONAL SEASHORE

Enjoying magnificent weather and spectacular scenery, ten lucky birders were treated to a wonderful weekend of birding, camping and barbecuing local oysters over campfires. From the sandy beaches, mudflats and dunes to rocky headlands, coastal prairies, and Douglas-fir forests, Point Reyes is where each Fall, eastern migrants misdirect themselves and wind up on the Point Reyes Peninsula. Some of the key areas for spotting these vagrants are at the Historic Ranches (dairy ranches), the outer peninsula and lighthouse, Drakes Beach, Chimney Rock, the Fish Docks, Earthquake Trail, Olema Marsh and Abbotts Lagoon. A total of 109 birds were seen. Here are just a few highlights of our trip.

At Historic Ranch "A" a **Yellow-throated Warbler** was found up in the cypress trees near the ranch. We all had great view of this beautiful bird. Out at the lighthouse, **Savannah Sparrows**, **Brandt's** and **Double-crested Cormorants**, **Brown Pelicans**, **White** and **Golden-crowned Sparrows**, a **Rock Wren**, and an **American Redstart**, along with **Hermit Thrush**, **Pacific-slope Flycatcher**, and a female **Western Tanager** were sighted in the cypress trees near the lighthouse. Down at Drakes Beach in the willow by the parking lot were **Yellow Warblers** and **Orange-crowned Warblers**, and near the marsh area a **Least Tern** was flying low over the water and a **Sora** and a **Virginia Rail** were spotted in the tules. On the beach were **Heermann's**, **Ring-billed** and **Western Gulls**.

As we hiked out to Chimney Rock, which overlooks Drakes Bay, a **Great Horned Owl** was roosting in a tree along the trail and it kept an eye on us. The viewpoint at the end has steep cliffs down to the ocean where several **Brown Pelicans**, **Brandt's**, **Pelagic**, and **Double-crested Cormorants**, and **Common Murres** were seen. As we headed back, a **Peregrine Falcon** was perched on a cliff preening itself. The Fish Dock area produced **Elegant** and **Common Terns**, **Surf Scoters**, and **Common Loons**.

Early Sunday morning we headed to Olema Marsh where we all had good looks at a **Virginia Rail**, a **Sora** and an **American Bittern** along with **Mallards**, **Cinnamon Teals**, and **American Coots**. In the parking lot at Abbott's Lagoon one **Bobolink** was mixed in with **White-crowned Sparrows**. Then, on our way back from the lagoon, a male and female **Palm Warbler** were spotted in the scrubs near the trail. Also seen were **Gadwalls**, **American Wigeons**, **Northern Shovelers**, **Lesser Scaup** and **Ruddy Ducks**. We also heard a **Wrentit** call across from the freshwater lagoon.

Above photo - Point Reyes National Seashore

L-R - Tim Ruckle, Randall Peterson, Jennifer Patten (trip leader), Ruth Kennedy, Mike Fisher and Veronika Kehoe, by Carolyn Short

October 1, 2006, Sunday

COON HOLLOW WILDLIFE AREA

Altacal members joined the Chico State Birding Club on a field trip to Coon Hollow Wildlife Area (about 23 miles N.E. of Paradise). The area turned out to be birdier than we expected it to be. Flocks of kinglets, sparrows, nuthatches and other small birds abounded. We got some awesome looks at a number of **Golden-crowned Kinglets** (a lifer for some of us). A juvenile **American Dipper** called from a rock in the creek, a kettle of 35 **Turkey Vultures** flew by overhead (an awesome sight) and we were teased by a possible (probable?) **Northern Goshawk** at a distance. To top off the trip, Scott Huber followed the drumming of a **Pileated Woodpecker** and led us right to it! We had a total of three separate sightings of it. All told, we saw about 38 species of birds and had a grand outing.

October 14, 2006, Sunday

"BIRD 'TIL YOU DROP" BIRDING TRIP

Altacal members went on a Chico State Birding Club field trip through Butte and Glenn counties that started on the Chico State campus and progressed through the day to 7 Mile Lane, Llano Seco, Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge (Willows), Thermalito Afterbay, Bedrock Park, Williams Road (near Butte college), and Crown Point Road (off Hwy 32). We visited chaparral, oak woodland, riverine riparian, agricultural, seasonally flooded wetlands, open water, and marsh habitats. Our goal was to get 100 species for the day. We began birding at 7 a.m. and ended the day around 6:30 p.m. with 96 species! We were so close to triple digits but ran out of daylight. We were pretty happy with what we saw though, considering the time of year and the limited number of migrants. Among the species seen were **Golden Eagle**, **Wrentit**, **Say's Phoebe**, **Sandhill Crane**, **Loggerhead Shrike** and **Eared Grebe**. We all had a very enjoyable day in some beautiful surroundings.

October 31, 2006, Tuesday

HALLOWEEN OWL PROWL

Ten souls braved the scary Halloween night in search of creatures of the night on an Altacal bird trip to Big Chico Creek Ecological Reserve. But instead of ghouls and goblins all were rewarded with treats in the form of three or four different species of owls. We began the evening by calling across the canyon for **Northern Pygmy-Owls** and within minutes we heard a response from a very determined defender of his territory. We then changed to the **Western Screech-Owl** song and shortly a pair of screech owls responded by alternately calling from two different locations. Efforts to call in a **Great Horned Owl** failed but it stimulated a

(continued on page 8.)

October Program Meeting REPORT

October 16, 2006, Chico Creek Center

We were fortunate to have Ms. Rita Carrillo Guevara Stockton, a native of Ecuador, and her husband, Ken Stockton, take us on a tour of beautiful Ecuador by way of slides and stories. Rita began by giving us an introduction to the culture and resources of her country and as well as an overview of its religious, ethnic and linguistic make-up. Ken then took us on a virtual tour of the different biozones including coastal, high Andes, upper Amazon, cloud forest and island. His slides of the many bird, reptile and mammal species were a highlight of the presentation. Ken explained that although the Galapagos Islands, located 600 miles off the coast, are the principal tourist destination, the mainland of Ecuador is far more diverse and contains many more bird and animal species. He emphasized the need for eco-tourism as an alternative to commercial exploitation of the country's resources. Overall Ken and Rita were very positive about the future of Ecuador. Through their tour company, Carrillo Tours 530-205-6312, Rita and Ken offer low-cost bird watching and ecological tours throughout Ecuador with an emphasis on its culture and people.

Next Scott Huber presented a fascinating story of the first Butte County record of a **Clay-colored Sparrow** that he found at Llano Seco on October 10. He had been "sparrowing" there for the



past couple of weeks. On that day, he noticed a small sparrow associated with some **White-crowned Sparrows** but only about 2/3 their size. Scott used slides showing correspondence with experts and photos taken by himself and J.T. Lewis to show how the identification was verified. Congratulations to Scott for this County record! Other members recounted sightings they had over the past month and recommended birding books recently read.

Clay-colored Sparrow found at Llano Seco on October 10
by Scott Huber. Photo by J.T. Lewis

(continued from Bird Walk, page 7.)

loud screech from what was most likely a **Barn Owl**. We then went over to the Northern Saw-whet Owl banding station run by Dawn Garcia and her two volunteers, Julie Nelson and Randall Peterson. Although it was a slow evening, patience rewarded us with the capture of a single **Northern Saw-whet Owl**. We were able to observe the netting, banding and recording of all the information taken from this small owl. We also learned from Dawn about the science involved in her banding operation. It was a first for many on the trip and a delight to behold. Everyone got a chance to experience the magic of these small but impressive birds.

October 29, 2006 PARADISE RIDGE

On a warm, sunny Sunday morning in Paradise eight of us casually walked the bike trail in lower Paradise on an Altacal birding trip. Afterward, we moved up to the tall pines around De Sabla Reservoir. The birding was somewhat quiet (32 species) but included a long look at a **Red-breasted Sapsucker** and other lower-elevation residents. Higher up at DeSabla reservoir we saw the newly arrived **Buffleheads**, a **Ring-necked Duck** and **Canada Geese**. The pines were noisy with **Red-breasted Nuthatches**, **Brown Creepers** and **Ruby-crowned Kinglets**; all frequently heard, but seldom seen. Everyone enjoyed not only the birds but also the beauty of the forests.

November 9, 2006, Thursday OLLI UPPER PARK BIRD WALK

Altacal members participated in a "Birding in the Chico Area"

bird walk in Upper Park as part of a course led by Carl Waters under the auspices of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) – formerly Prime Timers. About 40 people attended and Altacal's liaison to the course, Tim Ruckle, provided Carl with 40 Butte County checklists and Altacal brochures. He and the attendees enjoyed them and Carl and Tim mentioned Audubon's meeting times and the upcoming meeting program. The class divided into four sub-groups, each with a leader and a scope. The total number of species seen hasn't been tallied yet but Tim's group saw 21 species including a **Say's Phoebe** (a life bird for two of the group) and a **Snowy Egret** (Carl said he'd never seen one at Horseshoe Lake before). Some of the group members were expert flora folks so we were treated to their knowledge as well. It was a beautiful day and we all enjoyed the outing.

(continued from Conservation Corner, page 6.)

Addresses or Links to Stores and Products mentioned before:

Saturday Farmer's Market on 305 Wall St., Chico
Greenfeet, 1360 East First Ave., Chico, <http://www.greenfeet.com>
Chico Natural Foods, 818 Main Street, Chico, CA
Thanksgiving Coffee Company, <http://www.thanksgivingcoffee.com/>
Calculating your Carbon Footprint, <http://www.carbonfootprint.com/>
Altacal Audubon Society, <http://www.altacal.org/>
Karita's Handmade Natural Soaps, <http://www.karitashandmade.com/>
La Rocca Vineyards, <http://www.laroccavineyards.com/>

SISTER SOCIETY NEWS

Cape Cod Bird Club

Here are some of the birds (and turtles) that have been sighted over the last two months on Cape Cod, MA, the home of our Sister Society, the Cape Cod Bird Club. It's interesting to compare their sightings with ours in Northern California.

The Cape Cod Bird Club held a member picnic at the Wellfleet Bay Wildlife Sanctuary on September 30, and to the enjoyment of all the birders, 93 **Forster's Terns** showed up at the sanctuary's beach. Seen among them were a large flock of **Common Terns** and a **Black Skimmer**. A juvenile **Baltimore Oriole** was reported on October 12 in Brewster. An injured **Atlantic Puffin** was discovered in the Tedeschi's parking lot in Provincetown on October 12. This unusual visitor to Cape Cod was taken to Wildcare in Orleans for treatment. A **Swamp Sparrow** was one of the highlights during a Massachusetts Audubon birding trip to the town of Harwich in Harwich on October 20. It was seen in the brush along the road separating East and West Reservoir. Winter birds started to arrive in late October. Tallied at Corporation Beach in Dennis on October 23 were: 2 **Common Loons**, 71 **Surf Scoters**, 22 **White-winged Scoters**, 500+ **Common Eiders**, 4 **Long-tailed Ducks**, 50 **Red-breasted Mergansers**, 1 **Horned Grebe**, 200+ **Northern Gannets**, and 8 **Bonaparte's Gulls**.

In October, large numbers of dead **Common Eiders** continued to be reported from bayside beaches in the Wellfleet area. Large eider mortalities are an annual event on the Cape and Islands. Previous years' studies from the Tufts School of Veterinary Medicine noted that the birds were emaciated and loaded with para-



sites which may be the cause of their death. A **Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtle** was found in October on the beach off Old Pier Road in Wellfleet. Unfortunately, it was not alive. Dropping water temperatures and strong winds are the recipe for turtle strandings.

Residents were requested to move stranded turtles above the high tide line rather than putting them back into the water. They were also cautioned not to remove them from the beach and to cover them with seaweed so they are no longer exposed to the cold wind. They were then told to mark the spot with a piece of obvious beach debris, and call the Wellfleet Bay Wildlife Sanctuary, providing them with detailed information including the beach and town where the turtles were found.

A walk down Long Beach in Centerville on October 26 produced the following sightings: 2 **American Golden-Plovers**, 12 **Common Loons**, 20 **Laughing Gulls**, and a **Bonaparte's Gull**. Storm chasing on October 28 at Race Point in Provincetown resulted in an impressive bird list including 3 **Red-throated Loons**, 8 **Greater Shearwaters**, 90 **Northern Gannets**, 75 **Common Eiders**, 3 **White-winged Scoters**, 20 **Red-breasted Mergansers**, 6 **Parasitic Jaegers**, 350 **Laughing Gulls**, 10 **Bonaparte's Gulls**, 42 **Black-legged Kittiwakes**, 450 **Common Terns**, and 9 **Forster's Terns**.

Forster's Terns were also reported from Wellfleet Harbor, Boat Meadow Creek in Eastham, Skaket Beach in Orleans, and Paine's Creek in Brewster. A **Hermit Thrush** was spotted at the Wellfleet Bay Wildlife Sanctuary on October 27 and an **American Woodcock** in a North Eastham backyard on October 30. Another highlight was a report of a **Scissor-tailed Flycatcher** in Truro on November 3 and on November 4th a **Peregrine Falcon** was spotted making lunch of a **Greater Yellowlegs** at the Massachusetts Maritime Academy in Bourne.

Altocal Sightings

If you have any interesting sightings in December and January, you can send them to the Newsletter Editor at tim.ruckle@sbcglobal.net by January 7 for possible inclusion in the next newsletter.

October/November - Various members of the Huber clan spotted the following birds on these dates at these locations:

Oct 9 - **Clay-colored Sparrow** (first Butte Co record) at Llano Seco
Oct 11 - **Bonaparte's Gull** (3) and **Cattle Egrets** (3) at Llano Seco
Oct 17 - **Brewer's Sparrow** (2) at Teichert Pond
Oct 20 - **Great-tailed Grackle** (3) at 7 Mile Lane
Oct 25 - **Ring-necked Duck** and **Eurasian Wigeon** at 7 Mile Lane
Oct 27 - **Varied Thrush** at Butte Creek Ecological Preserve
Oct 30 - **Wilson's Snipe** (2) at Chico Oxidation Ponds
Nov 2 - **Burrowing Owl** at Bruce Road

October 17 - While walking along the dirt road on the south side of Chico Creek across from the Municipal Golf Course, Steve King saw 7 (4 males and 3 females) **Wood Ducks**. He also saw a **Phainopepla** just beyond the gate. In addition, there was a Grebe in the slow water below the rock wall. He didn't have binoculars with him but was fairly certain it was a **Pied-billed Grebe**. He doesn't remember ever seeing a Pied-billed Grebe in the park before.

October 30 - Kathryn Hood spotted a large flock of mixed **Snowy** and **Great Egrets** joined by 50 to 60 **White-faced Ibises** on road 39 between HW 45 and HW 99 in Glenn County. And on November 3 she saw a half dozen **Sandhill Cranes** flying west over HW 45 south of Hamilton City and also was treated to the sight of a **Bald Eagle** over Stoney Creek on the south side of the bridge on HW 32 in Glenn County.

October 30 - Dawn Garcia, while engaged in a scientific song-bird-banding project at the Butte Creek Environmental Preserve, spied an adult **Bald Eagle** and a **Canyon Wren** as well as a **Varied Thrush**.

November 1 - Jennifer Patten saw eleven **Tundra Swans** flying over her house. On November 3, while hiking the North Rim trail in Upper Park, she saw lots of **Western Bluebirds** and one **Say's Phoebe**, and on November 7 she got a look at a **Cooper's Hawk** flying quickly through the trees in her neighborhood.

November 10 - J.T. Lewis and Mike Skram saw, among other birds, a **Townsend's Solitaire** at Butte Meadows Campground; a **Pine Siskin** at Butte Crossing near Bambi Inn; a **Varied Thrush** at Butte Meadows Rd, 1 mile before Cherry Creek Campground; a **Cassin's Finch** at Humboldt Summit; a **Northern Pygmy Owl**, an **Evening Grosbeak**, a kettle of **Common Ravens**, and a **Northern Goshawk** at Butte House Meadows; and a **Winter Wren** at Scout Rd. (road left, off Butte Meadows Rd. at Bambi Inn intersection) at a meadow north of road, about 1 mile from intersection.

Rex Burress

River Watcher

I was sitting in my car down by the riverside at Oroville when I noticed a **Nuttall's Woodpecker** land in an almond tree. I watched as it clung to an almond nut and began to peck on the protective layers. It worked intently, and finally broke through into the inner pulp before flying on to another seed. I mused about whether that insect-eater was opening the way for insect invaders to attack the opening so it could come back and reap the sweepstakes. **Red-breasted Sapsuckers** do that in the winter, often drilling a ring of holes around some preferred tree to sip the sap and stuck insects.

Soon, an **Oak Titmouse**, another insect eater, came along and took a few nibbles in the opened almond. Something was going on with the birds and the almond tree that left me seeped in mystery. Bird watchers pass by and make the observation but seldom linger long enough to see what the birds do during the rest of the day.

Woodpeckers are distinct forms of birds equipped with that chisel-beak and a head that will take a lot of pounding. Some of the major chiseling is done in dead snags where a nesting cavity is hollowed out. They seem to love to dig wood and a profusion of holes are made, some becoming cherished homes for other birds. The introduced **English Sparrows** and **European Starlings** contest occupancy of the choice sites, and **Tree swallows** need such crevices, too.

Chips fly when woodpeckers sense termites or beetles in dead trees, and recently I found a small oak covered by galls, those

swellings made by egg-laying gall insects. Every brown "oak apple gall-ball" had been burrowed into by a woodpecker sensing the gall larvae inside.

One of the most showy of Feather River woodpeckers is the **Acorn Woodpecker**. They are responsible for those multitude of holes etched into the bark and snags of old trees where they store their winter cache of acorns. Working as a commune, they cooperate in not only raising young, but in attacking animals intent on invading their granaries. Woe be to the squirrel that wanders into their territory. Down by the Oroville riverside, **Acorn Woodpeckers** sometimes act like flycatchers, dashing out over the water to snatch some sizable insect. The adults are irresistible to watch, dressed as they are in colorful clown-like costumes of red, black, and white feathers, swooping from limb to limb as if flying was some game. Colonies of the acorn gang also frequent the grand old oak and sycamore trees in Bidwell Park in Chico.

A large woodpecker type called the **Northern Flicker** often lands on the ground and probes for ants, but more commonly they like to linger on a high branch as if contemplating the world. The hammering of a Flicker, or the even larger **Pileated Woodpeckers** that are often found in the Feather River Canyon, can fill the woodlands with a distinctive sound of the wild.

Every niche in nature seems to feature some bird especially adapted to live and feed there, and woodpeckers are among the most specialized. A woodpecker needs wood as surely as a deer needs shrubs, or a fish needs water. Call it habitat!

The woods are full of dead and dying trees,
yet needed for their beauty to complete the beauty of the living.
—John Muir

The Conservation Corner

by Dawn Garcia,
Conservation Committee Chairperson

Shopping for Bird and Eco-Friendly Christmas Gifts

As I write this we only have five weeks before Christmas, and as you read this it will be near countdown time! Among the joy that comes with gift giving can come excess wrappings, plastic (which stays on the planet forever) paper, and unwanted gifts. Wouldn't it be great to give gifts that you know will be enjoyed and are earth friendly? Turns out it is easy and convenient. Number one is to buy local products that support our neighbors, are unique to share with others, and easy to get. Walking or shopping online to purchase your gifts has the benefit of reducing your "carbon footprint."

This year I'm "wrapping" my gifts in the "Chico bag." I'm sure you've seen them at the Saturday Farmer's Market, Chico Natural Foods, or Greenfeet, the Planet's Homestore. These are colorful, reusable, nylon shopping bags made by a local guy, "Andy", and sold for \$4.50 for one, or a pack of five for \$20.00. You can use them as stocking stuffers or load them with other eco-friendly

tems. One such item would be a half pound of shade-grown, fair-traded organic coffee, or tea. Unlike monotypic sun-grown coffee plantations, shade-grown helps the birds by providing more habitat in a diversity of shrubs and trees interspersed with coffee plants, requires less-to-no pesticides and herbicides, and absorbs ozone-depleting gases. Fair-traded means the farmers actually get a fair wage for their product. Most of our local coffee shops and grocery stores sell at least one such product (Trader Joe's has one). A great online source is the Thanksgiving Coffee Company that sells not only bird-friendly coffee but gorilla-, people- and earth-friendly coffee and tea.

Filling your bag with other yummy products is easy if you visit our Farmer's Market in Chico. Organic wines from our local La Rocca vineyards (Forest Ranch), olives, almonds, jewelry, Karita's natural soaps and so many other local items can be purchased from the market and stuffed in your gift bags. Sweet Andy has some delicious candies and for those of us in Paradise, Joy Lynn's (on Bille Rd.) has unique and taste-bud-arousing goodies.

Finally, how about a membership to your local Audubon Society, other local organization or charity? Put this fine gift in a Christmas card and send it off, or include it in your Chico bag gift bag. Tie a reusable hemp bow or raffia ribbon around the handles and now you have a locally made gift bag stuffed with locally made, and/or earth-friendly items. What a great way to reduce unwanted plastic and wrapping, and to support our neighbors and our planet!

(continued on page 8.)

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 goes 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.

Submission of Articles to the *White-tailed Kite*

Notices or articles submitted for publication consideration should be sent by email message to the newsletter editor as Microsoft Word (if possible), attachments by the **7th of January** tim.ruckle@sbcglobal.net – Thanks, Ed.

OTHER AAS ACTIVITIES INCLUDE

Sponsoring and participating in the annual
SNOW GOOSE FESTIVAL

Sponsoring and participating in the annual
ENDANGERED SPECIES FAIRE

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

REMINDER: If you haven't yet sent in your new local membership form please do so soon. After this issue of the *White-tailed Kite*, only local members will receive the newsletter by mail, although it will be available on our web site, www.altacal.org

ALTACAL AUDUBON SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| <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 |

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Email _____

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IMPORTANT: Membership in Altacal Audubon Society 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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White-tailed Kite

DECEMBER 2006 / JANUARY 2007

DATES TO REMEMBER

- | | |
|-----------|-------------------------------|
| Dec 7 | Board Meeting |
| Dec 17 | Chico Christmas Bird Count |
| Dec 18 | Program Meeting |
| Dec 30 | Oroville Christmas Bird Count |
| | |
| Jan 2-4 | Morro Bay Birding Trip |
| Jan 4 | Board Meeting |
| Jan 7 | White-tailed Kite Deadline |
| Jan 6/7 | Tule Lake/Klamath Trip |
| Jan 14 | Oxidation Ponds Trip |
| Jan 15 | Program Meeting |
| Jan 25-28 | Snow Goose Festival |

For updated information check the Altacal website
www.altacal.org

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SNOW GOOSE FESTIVAL

January 25-28, 2007
Chico

ALTACAL

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