



# White-tailed Kite

NEWSLETTER OF THE ALTACAL AUDUBON SOCIETY

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

FEBRUARY / MARCH 2010

## ALTACAL Programs

Program Meetings for the general community are normally held on the third Monday of each month at 6:30 p.m., at the Chico Creek Nature Center, 1968 E. 8th St.

In December the meeting is held on the second Monday and in July and August there are no Program Meetings.

### February

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

### TRICOLORED Blackbird

Presented by Dr. Robert J. Meese

The **Tricolored Blackbird**, *Agelaius tricolor*, is a near-endemic California passerine, with more than 98% of all individuals occurring within the state. It has limited protection under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and is currently a State Species of Special Concern and a Federal Species of Conservation Concern. Yet, its numbers are in decline.

A conservative estimate puts the number of tricolors during the 1930's in the millions, with the Central Valley segment alone as a likely 2-3 million birds. Statewide surveys between 2000 and

2005 produced a range of estimates between 150,000 - 260,000+ birds, and the 2008 Statewide Survey estimated 400,000 birds in California. The southern California population is in especially dire straits, with a total of 5,500 birds observed in the 2008 Statewide Survey and 5,200 observed in an intensive survey in 2009. (continued on page 2.)



Bob Meese and Tricolored Blackbird

### March

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

### Birds of NAMIBIA

Presented by Dr. Roger Lederer

Dr. Lederer will present a slide show of the birds of Namibia. Once called German Southwest Africa, Namibia is on the Atlantic coast northwest of South Africa and west of Botswana. A very safe and sparsely populated country, it has the largest sand dunes in the world as well as a variety of other habitats. There are 680 bird species in Namibia, the **Dune Lark** being the only endemic, but 15 other species are near-endemic. In a brief preview, Dr. Lederer will discuss the book, *Birds of Bidwell Park*.

Dr. Roger Lederer is Professor Emeritus of Biological Sciences at California State University, Chico whose, (continued on page 2.)



A Desert Scene in Namibia

## ALTACAL AUDUBON SOCIETY

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## BOARD MEETINGS

5:15 p.m.

2nd Wednesday of each month

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

*Altacal members are welcome to attend*

## From the *President*

A grateful "thank you" to all of you who supported Altacal's programs and mission by contributing to the Altacal Fall Fund Drive (\$1345) and the Annie B's Community Drive (\$593). In this and future White-tailed Kite newsletters you'll see the good work the donations supported.

PHIL JOHNSON

### (continued from page 1.) *February* Program

Please join us in welcoming Robert J. Meese, Ph.D., Department of Environmental Science & Policy, University of California Davis, to our February Altacal program. Dr. Meese has been working with Tricolored Blackbirds for many years and will share with us some of what he has learned. His work has included an intensive banding effort as part of a statewide effort to identify and document movement patterns and fidelity to breeding colonies. The banding of tricolors began in 2007 and has continued annually, with over 25,000 tricolors banded by autumn, 2009.

Following the presentation, Dr Meese will lead a short discussion of the future of the Tricolored Blackbird in the Central Valley and elsewhere, as there is much reason for concern.

### (continued from page 1.) *March* Program

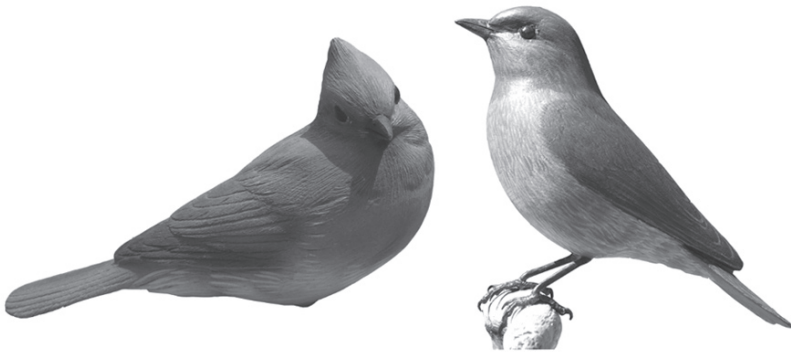
interests are ecology, science education and ornithology. He has published over thirty scientific research papers, and five books, Ecology and Field Biology, Bird Finder, Pacific Coast Bird Finder, Amazing Birds (in six languages) (2007), and Birds of New England (2008). Dr. Lederer taught at the university level, worked with governmental agencies, environmental organizations and schools, and presented hundreds of public presentations to a wide variety of audiences. He has been consulted by BBC, National Geographic, Weather Notebook, National Public Radio, National Canadian Television, Vanity Fair Magazine, the Guinness Book of World Records, The Weakest Link, Real Simple Magazine, the Detroit Free Press, Voice of America, and many other organizations and individuals on the topic of birds. He currently has a blog, Those Amazing Birds, sponsored by the Chico Enterprise-Record newspaper.

Dr. Lederer served as Chair of Biological Sciences, Dean of the College of Natural Sciences, Director of the Bidwell Environmental Institute and the first Endowed Professor of Environmental Literacy. He is still active, serving as president of the local science fair board, writing another book, maintaining his popular website, Ornithology.com, and birding the world.

He has traveled to nearly 90 countries and for the past several years has been a guest speaker and naturalist on several cruise lines across the world, speaking on ecology and of course, birds.

# Chico Creek Nature Center

**to OPEN  
NEW BUILDING**



The Chico Creek Nature Center (CCNC) will open its new building to the public in early Spring, 2010. The facility will house a permanent Bidwell Park interpretive exhibit along with a children's nature lab.

The highly visual exhibit in Howard S. Tucker Hall showcases the Park's ecological systems, biological diversity and cultural history through topographical maps, photographic murals, Mechoopda Maidu cultural objects, native flora samples, birds of Bidwell Park wood carvings, informative digital kiosks, and specimen drawers for hands-on exploration. The adjoining Kristie's Nature Lab is a state-of-the-art science lab designed to enhance the Center's Camp Chico Creek and K-6th school programs.



Howard S. Tucker Hall and Kristie's Nature Lab

Altacal Audubon Society has played an integral role in the development and growth of the CCNC, having founded it in 1982 and for many years being responsible for its day-to-day operations and financing. Altacal continues to hold its free monthly programs at the CCNC and often collaborates on Bidwell Park birding events with the Center.

Altacal recently collaborated with California Audubon and the CCNC on a Birds of Bidwell Park visual and auditory bird exhibit for the new interpretive facility, thus helping to fulfill Altacal's commitment to assist the CCNC to finance the exhibit design and construction. The support also furthers Altacal's mission of promoting the awareness, appreciation, and protection of native birds and their habitats through education, research, and environmental activities.

For more information, visit the CCNC web site [www.bidwell-park.org](http://www.bidwell-park.org) or call 891-4671.

Birds of Bidwell Park wood carvings,  
Oak Titmouse, Western Bluebird, Northern Flicker (not to scale)



## 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.*

February 6, Saturday

### **WATERFOWL IDENTIFICATION FIELD WORKSHOP**

Part 4: Swans and Cranes

Trip leaders: Jay Bogiatto and Scott Huber

Swans and Cranes are the 'jumbo jets' of our wetland birds and their distinctive voices are harbingers of fall and winter. The 4th installment in our series of Waterfowl Field Workshops will provide opportunities for us to study the huge gatherings of resting and feeding Tundra Swans in area rice fields and we'll be scoping for neck-banded swans from Canada and Alaska as well as checking for very rare **Trumpeter**, **Whooper** and **Bewick's Swans**. **Sandhill Cranes** prefer drier fields and we'll hope to see them performing their unique and beautiful dance. While learning more about these species we'll be surrounded by numerous species of ducks and geese which we'll also take time to identify and assist participants with I.D. tips.

Participants will be provided instruction on the nuances of identification, including general impression of size and shape, silhouette, field marks, flock pattern and vocalizations. Participants are encouraged to bring their own binoculars or can check out binoculars and field guides purchased thanks to a grant by the Butte County Fish and Game Commission. Spotting scopes purchased under the same grant will be available for shared use by all participants.

Jay Bogiatto teaches ornithology, waterfowl biology and zoology at CSU, Chico. Scott Huber is past field trip director for Altacal Audubon. contact Scott Huber at 321-5579 or 343-1306. Space is limited.



Tundra Swan

February 13, Saturday

### **UPPER BIDWELL PARK**

Trip Leader: Steve King

*NOTE! – This bird walk will be held on the second Saturday of each month from February through June. Trip leaders will be Steve King and others.*

On February 13, March 13, April 10, May 8 and June 12 we will have our "new" monthly field trip to Upper Bidwell Park. These dates are the second Saturday of each month. For February and March, we will meet at 8 a.m. at the almost-new parking lot on the left just past the gun club (follow Wildwood Ave for 1.75 miles and turn left just before the gate). From there, we may start walking, or drive a short distance further up the park road and start our field trip at a different location. Bring binoculars, water, snacks walking shoes and proper clothing. Rain cancels. Contact: Steve King at 342-6715. **Also, the bird species seen on this bird walk in Upper Bidwell Park will be entered in the Great Backyard Bird Count. Come and enjoy the day with us!**

February 14, Sunday

### **CHICO STATE BIRDING CLUB WINTER SURVEY 2010**

Trip Leader: Jay Bogiatto

Altacal will accompany Chico State Birding Club members on CSBC's Winter Birding Survey. By keeping a thrice-yearly record of the numbers of species and number of individuals, CSBC is continuing a comparative record, year-to-year, of the abundance and scarcity of avian species in our region.

Meet at 7 a.m. at the east end of Holt Hall, CSU campus (near palm tree), we'll go to a variety of habitats and return around 7 p.m. Dress warmly, wear comfortable walking shoes, bring water, lunch, and if you have them, binoculars, scopes and field guides.

We'll go to the following places for the estimated amount of time at each place. Forest Ranch (low elevation montane coniferous forest) -1.5h. Crown Point Road (chaparral) -.5h. Llano Seco Unit, Sacramento River, NWR (semi-permanent marsh) -1h. Other Llano Seco Stops/Little Butte Creek Slough -(semi-permanent marsh) -.5h. Sacramento NWR (marshland complex) -2.5h. Thermalito Afterbay (lake/reservoir) -.5h. Feather River @ Oroville (riparian lotic) -1.5h. Return to Chico via Pentz Road.

Participants are encouraged to plan on doing the whole day but may join or leave at any time during the day. Contact information: Jay Bogiatto, rbogiatto@csuchico.edu or Nancy Nelson, 530 345-0580. See you at the palm tree!

February 21, Sunday  
**RAPTOR RUN**

Trip Leader: Jennifer Patten

Meet at the Chico Park & Ride on Hwy 32 (the lot nearest the freeway) at 8 a.m. We'll look for raptors in the Lassen and Meridian Rds areas, and then if we have time, we'll drive south and look for raptors in the Cottonwood Rd. and Nelson Ave areas. Targets are **Bald Eagle, Ferruginous Hawk, Rough-legged Hawk, Prairie Falcon, Merlin, and Burrowing Owl** as well as more commonly seen species. Bring binoculars, scope if you have one, water, and a lunch. We should be back around 1 p.m. Rain cancels. Contact Jennifer Patten at 345-9356 or [jpchico@sbcglobal.net](mailto:jpchico@sbcglobal.net)

March 6, Saturday  
**SOUTH RIM TRAIL / UPPER BIDWELL PARK**

Trip Leader: Mauricio Schrader

Come experience Upper Bidwell Park from the less-used South Rim Trail. This will be a fairly strenuous hike on a sometimes rough and steep trail. Mauricio enjoys birding by ear and wants to help those wishing to expand the soundscape all around us - great views of the canyon and Big Chico Creek. Bring binoculars, water, snacks or lunch and wear shoes and clothes suitable for the weather. Meet at the Centennial Ave entrance next to the Falcon's Point Gate at 8 a.m. Rain Cancels. The hike will end between 12 and 1 p.m. Contact Mauricio Schrader at 518-7265.

March 13, Saturday  
**UPPER BIDWELL PARK**

**See FEB 13 hike for details.** *This bird walk is held on the second Saturday of each month from February through June.*



Bear Hole, Upper Bidwell Park



Happy hikers on the Flume Trail

March 27, Saturday  
**PARADISE FLUME TRAIL**

Trip Leader: Dawn Garcia

See the dramatic scenery of the west branch of the North Fork of the Feather River. This is not for people nervous of heights or with poor balance. Much of it is walking on narrow (two-foot) metal walkways over the flume, jutting 100' plus above the river. In late March we hope to see/hear our summer resident and migrant birds; **Townsend's, Nashville, Orange-crowned,** and **Black-throated Gray Warblers, flycatchers, tanagers and grosbeaks** and possibly looks at the elusive **Rufous-crowned Sparrow** and maybe a singing **Winter Wren**. But the beauty of this walk is really the highlight from scenery to spring bloomers. **Fawn lilies** with other early flowers showing off. After our hike we will stop at a local chocolate shop. Meet at Holiday Market, 6848 Skyway, Paradise, at 9 am. Carpool with high clearance vehicles. Limited to 12 people. Bring snacks and water. Go to <http://skingchico.com/ParadiseFlumeTrail/ParadiseFlumeTrail.php> to see Dawn's write-up of the flume trail .

April 10, Saturday  
**UPPER BIDWELL PARK**

**See FEB 13 hike for details.** *This bird walk is held on the second Saturday of each month from February through June.*

April 11, Sunday  
**TABLE MOUNTAIN**

Trip Leader: Gaylord Grams

Come out to see the spring wildflower show on Table Mountain. This trip will include stops in Cherokee, the Cherokee Cemetery and the ponds along the road. Then we will hike on Table Mountain to see the birds, flowers and waterfalls. Meet at the Chico Park & Ride on Hwy 32 (lot nearest Hwy 99) at 8 a.m. or at Spring Valley School (corner of Hwy. 70 and Pentz Rd) at 8:30 a.m. Bring a lunch, water and shoes for hiking. Contact Gaylord Grams at 872-0739.

# *Banding* REPORT

## NORTHERN SAW-WHET OWL (*Aegolius acadicus*)

### Fall 2009 Monitoring Project Big Chico Creek Ecological Reserve

by DAWN GARCIA

In November 2009, we completed the fifth year of the Northern Saw-whet Owl (NSWO) Project migration monitoring, contributing to local owl ecology and to the broader monitoring program, Project OwlNet (<http://www.projectowl.net.org/index.htm>). Since 2008, the owl team has been well-prepared for consistent coverage for fall monitoring. With three permitted banders and competent, dependable assistants, we were able to run the station five nights per week during the owl migration period (mid-October through mid-November). We were also awarded a Student Research grant to purchase and maintain equipment.

## 2009 RESULTS

### NSWO

In 2009, we conducted 28 nights of monitoring, totaling 550 net hours. We captured the lowest number of NSWO ( $n=25$ ) per effort in all five years. We had six same-season recaptures; the longest period between first capture and recapture was 16. The ratio of hatch-year (HY) owls to after-hatch-year (AHY) owls increased slightly since 2007 but still favored AHY birds. In 2006, the HY birds outnumbered AHY birds by 20%. As is typical with our station and other stations, females made up the bulk of the captures (92%) with two birds classified as unknown (8%) and no individuals classified as males in 2009.

### INCIDENTAL OWL DETECTIONS AND CAPTURES

We detected four species of owl: NSWO, Great Horned Owl (GHOW), Western Screech-Owl and Northern Pygmy-Owl. Incidental captures included three pallid bats, one northern flying squirrel and 2 Wrentits. No other species of owl was captured. Keith Paul erected an Anabat detector late in the season which detected Mexican Free-tail, Western Red, and two species of Myotis bat.

### OUTREACH

We hosted two public events this fall, 1) "Owl-o-Ween" - an Altacal Audubon Society field trip for ten people and 2) an "Owl Night Out" a Snow Goose Festival fund raiser, for six people.



Northern Saw-whet Owl, photo by Dawn Garcia

## DISCUSSION

### OWLS

The 2009 season was literally very quiet except for two juvenile Great Horned Owls that were persistently vocal around the banding station. We have considered the possibility of the presence of the Great Horned Owls impacting our Northern Saw-whet Owl capture rate. I think it is unlikely, based on observations of GHOW being present in the past and still netting NSWO, and the presence of larger owl predators at other stations still having high NSWO capture rates. Saw-whet Owls may have been more silent due to the presence of GHOW, but I think generally there was a decreased number of NSWO in our area. As suspected in 2008, several large fires occurring in the region could have affected owl productivity and prey base, and reduced nesting habitat where our population of NSWO originates (unknown); perhaps contributing to the fairly dramatic and continuing decline in captures in 2008 and 2009.

### FUTURE REPORTS AND EFFORT

To satisfy the goals of the original proposal, I will be developing a station manual including protocols and comprehensive results. This year marks the final year of the project, but we have requested funding to continue the project for another five years, 2010-2015. An examination of the five-year dataset only reveals timing of migration and begs continued monitoring to better understand our local NSWO population parameters.

### THANKS

My appreciation and hearty thanks go to volunteers Mike Fisher, Julie Nelson, Steve and Raina King, Ken Hashagen, Nancy Nelson, Keith Paul, Michelle Ocken, and Emily Wilson for running the station in 2009. We appreciate the logistical and financial support from the Big Chico Creek Ecological Reserve staff and the grant committee.

**EDUCATION****Results of  
ECOLOGY in FLIGHT  
Fall Program 2009**

**A**fter a popular spring program sponsored by a collaborative grant with Audubon California, and in partnership with Kids and Creeks and the Big Chico Creek Ecological Reserve (BCCER, CSU Chico), members of Altacal Audubon Society were funded to continue the bird banding station for the Ecology in Flight program. Dawn Garcia, Steve King, and Michelle Ocken were the main banding crew - teaching kids the value of bird banding as a science and conservation tool. Two volunteer photographers, Ken Hashagen and Robin Siegel, also contributed their time and photos.

We were asked to develop a new banding site upslope of our research site, Toyon slope, due to vehicle access limitations. This new station, the Ecology in Flight Site, allowed us to discuss avian species abundance and diversity amidst chaparral and oak/conifer habitat.

**BIRD BANDING RESULTS**

We captured a total of 157 individuals of 14 species over the six banding days. As is typical for our fall/winter monitoring, both **Hermit Thrushes** and **Spotted Towhees** were our highest captures at 48 and 28 individuals, respectively. The majority of these two species were hatch year (HY) birds (birds hatched in 2009) indicating a good reproductive year for both species; 73% of Hermit Thrushes were HY birds and 68% of Spotted Towhees were HY. Due to the molt strategy of the **Bushtit**, our second largest capture (n=31), we were unable to determine the age of these individuals, but could determine the sex based on iris color. After the preformative molt, males have a brown iris and females develop a yellow iris. Twenty out of 31 Bushtits were male (65%). In fact, in all species where we could determine sex based on dichromatic plumage (new words for the kids!), the Towhees, Bushtits, and **Ruby-crowned Kinglets**, males dominated in our captures.

We also had some pleasant surprises; our first captures of **Golden-crowned Kinglets** (n=2, both female), and a **North-ern Mockingbird** which was the first recorded detection of this species on the reserve. The Mockingbird was likely enticed downslope to the ripening Toyon berries, from homes above on the ridge.



Dawn Garcia and student

**STUDENTS, SCHOOLS, AND STATIONS**

A total of 312 students from 11 classes and 7 schools observed and participated in net checks and activities at the bird-banding station. Other stations included a grassland restoration activity (350 native grass plugs planted), a cultural event showing how jewelry and food were made from local resources, and a song creation from their experience on the Reserve. The concept of the program was to get students outside to explore the cultural and biological wonders of the BCCER, and understand the connectivity between them. Aside from paid staff, 72 volunteers contributed 362 hours to help run the stations. Based on student engagement and teacher feedback, the program was quite successful with the banding station a special highlight! Want to see what the kids thought? Go to <http://www.kidsandcreeks.org/> and watch the video they created.



Ecology in Flight students

# Snow BIRDS

by Rex Burress

When I visited Florida and the Everglades several winters ago, there was a rather annoyed attitude among the residents toward “the snowbirds” from the north. Those birds didn’t have feathers even though they walked on two legs like people, which is what they were - people - retirees from the northern snowy states flocking down to Florida for the winter.

However, in my Missouri homeland, there is a bona fide local snowbird that in reality is the **Dark-eyed Junco**. The most common version is the slate-colored, (*Junco hyemalis*), that spends the summer in Canada and then descends to the southern states for winter. They had no trouble flitting among the weed patches with the sparrows even in snowy weather and finding enough seeds for survival. “Everyone knows the little Common Snowbirds” said John Audubon.

Even though not named snowbirds, there were other Mid-western winter species that endured the rigors of snowy undisciplined weather. The most noticeable red **Northern Cardinals** brightened the drab thickets, and **Blue Jays** (*Cyanocitta cristata*) scrounged a living of nuts and meat scraps even though disdain small seeds. **Northern Bobwhite quail** were homebodies as were a variety of sparrow seed-stalkers. Rarely, a real snowbird, the partially white **Snow Bunting** (*Plectrophenax nivalis*) would drift down from Canada.

Birds of the winter are well-adapted to snowy conditions, but even so, some severe weather can take a toll of songbirds, and mortality can be as much as 30% to 50%. The critical factor is not the cold but deep snow or ice covering up food sources. During the day birds must eat enough food to sustain them overnight, according to Roger Lederer. “They might put on 10% percent extra body weight during the day, but then the extra fat is used up overnight keeping them warm.”

Nectar foods are especially important for the Anna’s Hummingbirds that spend the winter in Central California, including Oroville and the Feather River region. They do have the ability to go into a conservative metabolism/dormancy at night to conserve energy, but even so, backyard sugar-water feeders help out. The flowering eucalyptus trees along the river are attractions to nectar feeders, but the tree’s flowers are at a low-ebb this winter of 2009.

Oroville, CA, also has a junco species- -the dark-headed Oregon Junco, one of the six groups of **Dark-eyed Juncos**, but are not generally referred to as snowbirds. The more prominent birds worthy of being called snowbirds are the migrant **Snow Geese** that would rather avoid snow by drifting down from Canadian tundra summer nesting grounds to CA valley marshes.



The summer Feather River flycatchers and swallows definitely dislike insect-killing snows and migrate to southern fly-lands like the retired senior people go south! Ironically, one flycatcher species, the **Black Phoebe**, remains along the Butte County, CA

streams to go swooping out over the water to snatch low-flying aquatic insects.

Rain, shine, or snow, Altacal Audubon Christmas Bird Counters conduct a census that usually reveals about 130 species present in the Oroville area. Who knoweth where the bird goes, or what directs its decisions, or what the weather will be?

*“Hear! Hear! screamed the jay from a neighboring tree, where I had heard a tittering for some time. Winter has a concentrated and nutty kernel if you know where to look for it.”*

Henry David Thoreau

# The Audubon Christmas Bird Count

December 19, 2009

## CHICO CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

Compiler: Phil Johnson

This year's Chico CBC was a record-breaker for sure. Here's what our group of 20 birders came up with:

**American Bittern** 10 (record high, first since 1990), **Snowy Egret** 52 (record high), **Green-winged Teal** 143 (record high), **Cinnamon Teal** 13 (record high, first since 1991) and **Western Sandpiper** 13 (record high, first since 1995). All of these records are due to excellent improvements that have been made to the City of Chico Water Pollution Control Plant Outflow Ponds (what we call the Oxidation Ponds). Add to that, 9 **Sora** rails and 6 **Virginia Rails** (each one shy of a record) that were seen at the Oxidation Ponds. The ponds are not open to the public yet, so please stay away until further notice. When they do open, we can all look forward to some great birding close to Chico.

Also seen were **Great Egret** 39 (record high by 1), **Red-shouldered Hawk** 40 (record high), **Spotted Sandpiper** 7 (record high, thanks to Mauricio and Mike A. and "the boating incident" which we will not discuss here, just ask them next time you see em'), **Rock Pigeon** 1360 (record high, who cares though?), **Say's Phoebe** 7 (record high) and **Western Bluebird** 524 (record high, but not by much).

Then there's the Corvidae family. **Common Raven** 110 (record high). Ravens were impossible to find back in the 50's, 60's and 70's, but we are seeing a steady increase in the past five years. I am not sure why. Anybody have any guesses? - **American Crow** 193. Crows took a plunge in the wake of the West Nile virus. Last year we had a record low for Crows at 110. This year's numbers are still way lower than historic levels - **Yellow-billed Magpie** 310. Magpies are getting back closer to average after the West Nile wave.

**Loggerhead Shrike** 1 (Shrike numbers have plummeted in the last 10 years, keep an eye out for them) - **Eurasian Collared-Dove** 53 (record high, 3rd year seen on count). **Cackling Goose** 5 (seen at Horseshoe Lake in Upper Park).

### 118 species total.

A big thanks goes out to the King's for hosting the compilation dinner! They fed us well and warmed us up after a long day in the cold.



December 20, 2009

## RED BLUFF CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

A number of Altacal members met with birders from around the North State to assist with the first Red Bluff Christmas Bird Count to be held since 2006. Despite sometimes rainy conditions the count was a big success and a number of noteworthy species were detected including **Tree Swallow** and **Black-throated Gray Warbler** (both rare in winter), and J.T. Lewis of Chico located a first-ever for the count, a wintering **Hooded Oriole**!

January 3, 2010

## OROVILLE CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

Compiler: Scott Huber

This season's Oroville Christmas Bird Count, held January 3, 2010 rather than late 2009 as is customary, was more notable for it's great weather than for it's variety of bird species.

After many days of wet weather the count day was mostly sunny and warm. Twenty-six counters hit the field at 7:50 am. In addition to many Altacal regulars we were joined by newcomers Larry Jendro and Merrily Stover, out-of-the-area birders Terry Colborn and Karin Grillo and young birders Canyon Williams (9) and Liam Huber (12).

The final tally for the day was **124 species**. Noteworthy species and numbers included 5400 **Canvasbacks** all rafting together on a corner of Thermalito Afterbay, 39 **Bald Eagles** – an apparent record for this count, 13 **Lewis's Woodpeckers** which is in line with thoughts that this is an irruptive period for the species, and regrettably, not a single **Loggerhead Shrike** – the fourth year in what appears to be a dramatic decline in shrike numbers in the Oroville area.

Although not regulars on our list, a number of off-the-list species made a repeat appearance this year including 43 **Common Ravens**, 20 **Sandhill Cranes**, 110 **White-faced Ibis** and the now nearly annual **Peregrine Falcon**. **Eurasian Collared-Dove**, making it's first ever CBC appearance on the 2008 count, was back with a vengeance this year at 36, and **White-throated Swifts** were recorded for the first time ever on the count with 5.

Thank you to all who participated and helped make the most of this gorgeous winter day!

# Bird Walk and Birding Trip

## REPORTS

November 15, Sunday

### GRAY LODGE WILDLIFE AREA

Trip Leader: Gaylord Grams

On a beautiful Fall day - great weather, great birdwatching and great participants - we began by walking the self-guided nature trail. The trail includes two bird blinds, an observation deck and many open ponds with clear unobstructed views. While on the trail we experienced two impressive **Snow Goose** "fly-ups" as the air became a locomotive thunder of wing beats and bird calls as thousands of geese flew against the blue, cloud-free sky, then resettled in a nearby pond. By the end of the day we identified 68 species including 18 separate species of ducks and geese. Birds of special interest were **Eared Grebe**, **Eurasian Wigeon**, **Bald Eagles** and an occasional "Blue" Goose (Snow Goose dark phase) – and two well-fed **otters**.

November 29, Sunday

### COLUSA NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

What a spectacular autumn day it was at Colusa National Wildlife Refuge to see the fly-off of thousands of ducks and geese at sundown. But even before we arrived at the refuge, our group who left Chico to caravan down, took 7-mile Lane/Z Road, and were in complete awe at the masses of **Snow Geese** that were in the flooded rice fields. We stopped, took pictures, and just listened to their incredible calls. When we finally arrived at Colusa NWR we had about 45 minutes of daylight left to bird a hiking trail along a slough and saw **Wood Ducks**, **Red-tailed Hawk**, **Nuttall's Woodpeckers**, **California and Spotted Towhees**, **Yellow-rumped Warblers**, **Hermit Thrush**, **Brewer's Blackbirds**, **Song Sparrow**, and **White and Golden-crowned Sparrows**. What was especially nice was Refuge Manager, Mike Peters, meeting with our group and giving us information about Colusa NWR, and where the best spot for the fly-off would be. So off we went on the auto loop, to the best possible spot to see the fly-off. And we sure did find it! Just as we arrived Snow Geese were starting to lift off in mass, in the setting sun.

Then, ducks followed, not quite in masses, but in smaller numbers, filling the darkening sky. Sights and sounds that all of us will never forget! Waterfowl and other bird species seen included, **Northern Shoveler**, **Cinnamon** and **Green-winged Teal**, **White-faced Ibis**, **Bufflehead**, **Black-crowned Night-Heron**, **American Bittern**, **Bald Eagle**, **Great Horned Owl**, **Greater White-fronted Goose**, **Gadwall**, **American Wigeon**, **Great Blue Heron** and **Great Egret**.

December 5, Saturday

### RAPTOR RUN

Trip leader: Michelle Ocken

Four birders showed up for a pleasant, if not chilly, December 5th field trip. As this was a Raptor Run, our focus, of course, was to find as many different raptors as we could in this half-day trip. Both Cottonwood and Nelson Rds. are great for viewing raptors in the winter in this area because of the wide-open fields that provide great foraging for these aerial hunters.

We set out from the Park & Ride on our way to Cottonwood Rd. for the first leg of our trip. It was here that we got a great look at a **Ferruginous Hawk** sitting on a power line. It was very cooperative and let field trip participant Steve King snap off a few pictures of it before it flew away. On later inspection of the pictures, it was found that this bird was banded! Unfortunately, the band number was unclear so we were unable to report it, but it was still an exciting find! Also spotted were numerous Red-tailed Hawks and a number of American Kestrels. We proceeded down Cottonwood Rd. to a place where a Burrowing Owl had been spotted in the past but were unable to locate the bird this time. From there we continued our route to Table Mountain Blvd and eventually to Nelson Rd.

The group spotted two adult **Bald Eagles** soaring overhead on Nelson Rd. (likely flying over from the Feather River to the Forebay). Also spotted in this area were a **Prairie Falcon** and a **Merlin** (a first for one of our participants). Some additional raptors sighted on this outing included a **Red-shouldered Hawk** and **White-tailed Kites**. The group also got some great looks at a group of **Barrow's Goldeneyes** as we crossed the Forebay. Our **Burrowing Owl** was still proving to be elusive, however, so we altered our course and headed for Road Z (a known site for this well camouflaged and somewhat shy little raptor).

At first, there was no sign of the bird at all as we drove slowly, scanning the sides of the road looking for anything that looked out of place. It was evident that the grass near the road had recently been mowed and so we feared the worst, since it was next to the road that this owl had last been spotted. The group decided to get out and take a closer look and lo and behold, field trip participant Nancy Nelson flushed the owl right out from under her and into the field! We were all pretty excited to get such good looks at it, even if it was hard to locate in the newly plowed field - so cryptic.

At that point, the wind and chill were beginning to pick up and the group decided to call it a day. All in all, it was a fun and productive trip; one which everyone enjoyed.

# Altacal Sightings

If you have interesting sightings in the Butte, Glenn or Tehama counties in January or February send them to Editor@altacal.org by March 7.



Ferruginous Hawk, photo by Dawn Garcia

DECEMBER 10, 2009

On a mission to site a location for artificial Burrowing Owls on a friend's property, Dawn Garcia had a nine-species raptor day - including numerous **American Kestrels** and **Red-tailed Hawks**, several **Northern Harriers**, and one each of the following: **White-tailed Kite**, **4th-year Bald Eagle**, **Merlin**, **Prairie Falcon**, **Ferruginous Hawk** and **Burrowing Owl!** Tipped off by an Altacal Google Group member, she found the Burrowing owl on Lassen Road as well as the **Merlin** and **Ferruginous Hawk**. There was also an actively foraging **Rock Wren** at the Singer Creek bridge. The **Bald Eagle** was on Pine Creek, and all other sightings were off Meridian, Nord-Cana and all the way home to Paradise via 99 and the Skyway in Butte and Tehama Counties. Dawn noted that we are truly fortunate to have our undeveloped grazing lands that support such a diverse winter raptor community.

JANUARY 11, 2010

Dug Ringel told us that "...at this time every year when I am coming to work here at Chico State from my home in Concow, I see **Bald Eagles**, both mature and immature, heading west out of the foothills to hunt in the valley. Then, on the way home in the evening, I see the same thing again in reverse as they head back to the foothills to roost, or whatever bald eagles do. Many years ago Jim Snowden gave me some 35mm slides of pictures he had taken of numerous bald eagles perched in a cluster of oak trees in the foothills above Butte College. The birds were in stark contrast to the bare branches of the trees. There were probably 30 or more birds in a single group. I think Jim said the eagles were hunting waterfowl at this time of year."

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## Peregrinations

*Peregrinations reports on birds seen on trips outside the Butte, Glenn, and Tehama counties area except for those sponsored by Altacal Audubon Society or other local birding groups.*

DECEMBER 2009

On a visit with family in Cape Cod, MA over the holidays Tim Ruckle saw a bird that was new to him, a **Purple Sandpiper**. The sub-freezing temperatures and gale-force winds made birding difficult otherwise, but it was a starkly beautiful place in winter.

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## Bird Walk REPORT

January 9, Saturday

### LLANO SECO AND INDIAN FISHERY

Trip Leader: Nancy Nelson

**C**ool, foggy conditions didn't stop this group from getting out and enjoying the day. The weather made distant viewing at Llano Seco impossible, but we saw most of the expected ducks and geese. What we didn't see, we heard. Of note were two **Loggerhead Shrikes**, one at each viewing platform.

The same weather conditions at Indian Fishery made for slow birding. So we took that opportunity to explore the new trail to the river. For those not familiar with the area, Indian Fishery is located at the end of West Sacramento Avenue where it intersects River Road.

It's a nice picnic area with trails winding through oak woodland and along an oxbow lake. Usually it is a very birdy area.

Another trail, which has recently been improved, takes off from behind the park office trailer (south of the picnic area) and goes all the way to the Sacramento River. Although only about one-half mile long, it feels like a bit of an adventure. Once you reach the river, it is possible to walk south on the gravel bars for quite a distance. Only about five miles out of town, it's a great day-trip destination and perfect for kids. Check it out.

# Program REPORTS

*November*

November 16, 2009

## Sea Turtles and Birds of COSTA RICA

with Julie Nelson

What better way to spend a cold November evening than on a virtual trip to the tropics. At our November program, Altacal members and friends were treated to an overview of the fauna found along the Caribbean side of Costa Rica. Biologist and Altacal member Julie Nelson presented original photos and stories of her four months spent in this Central American paradise working as a research assistant for the Caribbean Conservation Corporation (CCC). Although she was there to do sea turtle conservation work, Julie had plenty of time to enjoy and photograph an amazing collection of wildlife including snakes, lizards, crocodiles, frogs, toads, freshwater turtles and birds.

Julie explained that she first became interested in sea turtles and the CCC while a graduate student at CSUC. Some investigation led to her securing a position as research assistant for an initial ten-week period at the CCC's Biological Field Station located adjacent to Tortuguero National Park, Costa Rica. The following year she returned again to work for an additional six weeks. Founded in 1959, the CCC is the oldest sea turtle conservation group in the world. The mission of the CCC to ensure the survival of sea turtles within the wider Caribbean Basin and Atlantic through research, advocacy and education. Since its founding the CCC has become the most accomplished sea turtle organization in the world. CCC's work has greatly improved the survival outlook for several endangered species of sea turtles and is a world-renowned leader in sea turtle research and conservation.

Most of Julie's work was with the Green Sea Turtle and the Hawksbill Sea Turtle. Both of these turtles nest on the Caribbean beaches of Costa Rica. Research is centered on 18 miles of protected beach belonging to Tortuguero National Park. Julie explained that Green Sea Turtles weigh between 200 and 300 pounds and nest at intervals of two, three, or more years, with wide year-to-year fluctuations in numbers of nesting females. They nest between three-to-five times per season, laying an average of 115 eggs in each nest, with the eggs incubating for about 60 days. Hawksbill Sea Turtles are one of the smaller sea turtles weighing between 100 and 150 pounds. Like the green turtles, Hawksbill's nest at intervals of two, three, or more years. They nest between two-to-four times per season and lay an average 160 eggs in each nest. Eggs incubate for about 60 days.



Leatherback turtle hatchling

Sea turtles nest at night to avoid predators. Julie's work included working the beaches each night to count, measure, tag, and protect the turtles as they came ashore to lay their eggs. She also counted the number of eggs each turtle laid, and she monitored their hatching. Julie shared wonderful photos she took of sea turtles coming ashore, digging their nest, laying eggs, covering the nest and returning to the sea. She also showed photos of baby turtles hatching and digging their way out of the sand and crawling out to sea. What an amazing story it is!

In addition to telling us about the sea turtles, Julie shared her experience working with CCC's Landbird Monitoring Project assisting researchers with mist-net capture stations, area-search bird censuses, and migration counts. The bird-monitoring work took place in various settings including the rainforest, rivers, canals, and near the beach, and with both resident and migratory species. Some of the most exciting birds she banded and photographed included: **Slaty-backed Forest-Falcon, White-necked Jacobin, American Pygmy Kingfisher, Western Slaty Antshrike, White-collared Manakin, Black-headed Trogon** and **Collared Aracari**.

# The Conservation Corner

by DAWN GARCIA, Conservation Chairperson

## December

December 14, 2009

### MEMBERS'SLIDE SHOW

December, of course, is a special time of the year for almost everybody. How fitting, then, that it also signals a favorite and highly anticipated Altacal program. Once a year, all members are invited to bring a few of their favorite photos taken over the past year and share them for all to see. It's an Altacal tradition, one that has been going on for as long as anyone can remember. For a long time it was held in September but a few years ago was moved to fill the December slot. At about this same time we took a huge technological leap forward transitioning from 35mm slides to an all-digital format. We continue to honor the slide tradition by calling this program our Members' Slide Show.



This year was surely one of the best shows ever. Seven members stepped up taking the opportunity to share their photos and attempt to wow the crowd. And WOW the crowd they did! In turn, John Lewis, Scott Huber, Liam Huber, Steve Emmons, Tom Pritchard, Steve King, Pam Hansen, and Phil Johnson each took control of the projector. Nature was the general theme but how that was defined and captured in pixels, took a variety of forms. Each person had his favorite subjects and locations. Birds, imagine that, were the dominant subject making up the vast majority of the photos. Probably 80 percent of all photos were of birds, bird's eggs, nests, or had some other avian focus. Also making a showing were reptiles, mammals, insects, and spiders. Not to be left out were magnificent landscapes as well as amazing land and rock formations. Occasional photos of plants, flowers and even a few people showed up. It really was a great mix of photographic talent presenting subjects with both artistic and technical appeal. A special thanks to all our photographers for a very enjoyable evening.

Now if you are thinking to yourself, I could have done that, you would be right! Just keep that thought and come December, make 2010 your year to share photos at the Altacal Members' Slide Show.

Hooded Oriole in Steven King's yard.

### BIRD COLLISIONS

Migratory birds play a crucial role in preserving ecosystems. They pollinate plants, distribute seeds and eat enormous numbers of insects. This behavior helps maintain healthy wetlands, forests, and agricultural lands. Many species of birds, especially small insect-eaters, migrate at night. Guided in part by the constellations, they are attracted to lights in urban areas. Consequently, cities surrounding migratory flyways pose a major threat to these nocturnal migrants. We are all aware that birds occasionally fly into windows, French doors, etc. and die. There's also a phenomenon called "bird / building collision" in which birds migrating at night become confused by the lights of tall buildings and crash into them.

Paul Riss of Toronto, Canada became so aware of the frequency and importance of such collisions that he published a book entitled *Common Birds of Toronto*. The cover of the book shows dead birds. Riss hoped to rescue birds hitting Toronto towers by creating a field guide containing ten species that fall victim to Toronto's office towers. The only difference between a traditional field guide and this one would be that all the birds illustrated would be dead. Riss was urged by the Fatal Light Awareness Program (FLAP) to write the book. The FLAP web site has information and links that

help prevent bird collisions of all sorts – not just collisions with tall buildings and towers by night. For example, <http://www.flap.org/> and [http://www.flap.org/great\\_lakes.htm](http://www.flap.org/great_lakes.htm) and particularly, [http://www.flap.org/development\\_guide-lines.pdf](http://www.flap.org/development_guide-lines.pdf)



Cover of the book, *Common Birds of Toronto*, shows dead birds.

# Opportunities and Events

## **SAN FRANCISCO BAY 14TH FLYWAY FESTIVAL Mare Island, CA**

**February 5 - 7, Friday - Sunday**

The 14th Annual Flyway Festival, promises more guided hikes and outings, tours and workshops on Mare Island than ever before. With over 70 events on the schedule, you'll have to watch closely to make sure you don't miss your favorite! You will find that one of the most unique aspects of the birding festival is the chance to soak up history on Mare Island and view an amazing array of bird-life all at the same time. <http://www.sfbayflywayfestival.com/>

## **13TH GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT**

**February 12 - 15, Friday - Monday**

Join bird watchers from coast to coast for the 13th annual Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC). The GBBC is open to bird watchers of all ages and skill levels. Participation is free and no registration is required. Participants can easily report what they see online at [www.birdcount.org](http://www.birdcount.org) and get an instantaneous snapshot of their record. The website also highlights events going on in local communities, information on the GBBC photo contest, and real-time data from across the U.S. and Canada! Last year, participants turned in more than 93,600 checklists online, creating the continent's largest instantaneous snapshot of bird populations ever recorded.

**A record of the bird species seen on Altacal's Saturday, February 13 bird walk in Upper Bidwell Park will be entered in the GBBC. Come and enjoy the day with us!**



## **CALIFORNIA DUCK DAYS Davis, CA**

**February 19 - 20, Friday - Saturday**

California Duck Days, a wetlands festival in the heart of the Pacific Flyway, in the Davis, CA area. A gala reception and Wildlife Art Show will launch the festivities on Friday evening at the Davis Art Center, from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. This event is free to the public. On Saturday the festival will feature one full day of field trips, workshops and other activities at the Yolo Wildlife Area Headquarters facility in South Davis. <http://www.yolobasin.org/events.cfm>

## **SALTON SEA INTERNATIONAL BIRD FESTIVAL**

**February 11 - 14, Thursday - Sunday**

Over 400 recorded species, 100 species per day.  
Salton Sea – Desert – Wetlands – Agriculture  
<http://www.newriverwetlands.com/saltonsea2010.html>

## **SAN DIEGO BIRD FESTIVAL**

**March 4-7,  
Thursday-Sunday**

Last year's San Diego Bird Festival set a new record for attendance and number of species observed. The field trips yielded a total of 250 observed bird species. Several trips spotted more than 100 species. This year's keynote speaker is Bill Thompson III, the editor of Bird Watcher's Digest, the magazine founded by his parents 30 years ago. He is the author of many books about birds and nature, including most recently, The Young Birder's Guide to Birds of Eastern North America. <http://www.sandiegoaudubon.org/birdfest.htm>



## **PANAMÁ March, 2010**

Steve Margolin of the Latin American Committee informs us that the LAC is offering an eleven-day trip to Panamá beginning March 4, 2010. Steve organized the Altacal trip to Panamá in 2008 and will be the escort on this trip. The main trip will visit the birding hotspots of Cerro Azul and the Canal Area (including two visits to the famous Pipeline Road), the highlands of Chiriquí Province to look for highland specialties like Resplendent Quetzal, and the San Francisco Preserve on the border between Panamá and Darién Provinces (2008 Altacal trip drove by there on the way to La Marea but did not stop). There is an optional four-day extension to the Azuero Peninsula in central Panamá, a bit off the beaten track, which will include a day of birding and snorkeling at Isla Iguana Wildlife Refuge in the Gulf of Panama and, time permitting, a stop at the craft market in El Valle. Guido Berguido, of Advantage Tours Panama and Conservation Director of Panama Audubon Society, will be the guide. The tour cost will include a donation for the education and conservation work of the Latin America Committee ([www.lacbirds.org](http://www.lacbirds.org)). Contact Steve at [sgmpanama@digitalpath.net](mailto:sgmpanama@digitalpath.net) or 342-6476.

# Local Chapter Membership Application

*Please join us!*

YOUR MEMBERSHIP WILL HELP ALTACAL AUDUBON SOCIETY CONTINUE ITS IMPORTANT WORK.

**A**ltacal Audubon Society (AAS) is a chapter of the National Audubon Society. AAS is a separately incorporated non-profit organization with a local chapter membership. 100% of membership dues goes to support local projects and activities. AAS is an all-volunteer organization that conducts all of its programs with unpaid staff. We offer regularly scheduled field trips that focus on birds and bird habitats, website, [www.altacal.org/](http://www.altacal.org/); a bi-monthly newsletter, *White-tailed Kite*; monthly membership meetings of lectures and media presentations on birds and 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*

Articles submitted for publication should be sent by email to the editor as Microsoft Word attachments by the 7th of the month prior to the next issue. (Jan, Mar, May, Jul, Sep, and Nov 7th)

## Newsletter Contributors

Thanks to all of you who contribute regularly by sending in items, articles and photos, and special thanks to Denise Devine who does the widely appreciated layout design of the paper version of the *White-tailed Kite* – Tim Ruckle, Editor.



## 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 over 50 years

## ALTACAL AUDUBON SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

- |  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$20 Basic Membership               | <input type="checkbox"/> \$50 Sponsor     | <input type="checkbox"/> \$500 Patron      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$35 Family                         | <input type="checkbox"/> \$100 Sustaining | <input type="checkbox"/> \$1000 Benefactor |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$10 Low Income / Student / Retired |   |  |

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 I would be interested in volunteering to help

**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/](http://www.audubon.org/)

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## *White-tailed Kite*

FEBRUARY / MARCH 2010

### **DATES TO REMEMBER**

|     |       |                              |
|-----|-------|------------------------------|
| Feb | 6     | Waterfowl Workshop           |
| Feb | 12-15 | Great Backyard Bird Count    |
| Feb | 13    | Upper Bidwell Park           |
| Feb | 14    | CSUC Bird Club Survey        |
| Feb | 15    | Program Meeting, Tricolored  |
| Feb | 21    | Raptor Run                   |
| Mar | 6     | South Rim/Upper Bidwell Park |
| Mar | 13    | Upper Bidwell Park           |
| Mar | 15    | Program Meeting, Namibia     |
| Mar | 27    | Paradise Flume Trail         |
| Apr | 10    | Upper Bidwell Park           |
| Apr | 11    | Table Mountain               |

For updated information check the Altacal website  
[www.altacal.org](http://www.altacal.org)

PRINTED ON RECYCLED PAPER

## **ALTACAL Programs**



February 15

**TRICOLORED**

March 15

**NAMIBIA**

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# ALTACAL

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