



White-tailed Kite

NEWSLETTER OF THE ALTACAL AUDUBON SOCIETY

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

APRIL / MAY 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.

April

Monday, April 19, 6:30 p.m.
Chico Creek Nature Center

May

Monday, May 17, 6:30 p.m.
Chico Creek Nature Center

Birds of OAXACA, MEXICO

Presented by Shelly Kirn

Shelly Kirn teaches field biology, conservation ecology, general biology, and human anatomy and other classes at CSU, Chico. She is a faculty advisor to the honors biology student club (Omicron Theta Epsilon) and the Chico State Birding Club (CSBC). Shelly has been birding for 15 years and enjoys traveling throughout the US (and occasionally beyond) to see birds.



A rich archaeological and cultural heritage provide a colorful backdrop for incredible birding in Oaxaca. Close to 700 species of birds are found in Oaxaca, the most of any Mexican state, including over two dozen endemic to Mexico. From Oaxaca City, which is located within the central valley of the state, we visited foothill habitats and high elevation cloud forests.

(continued on page 2.)

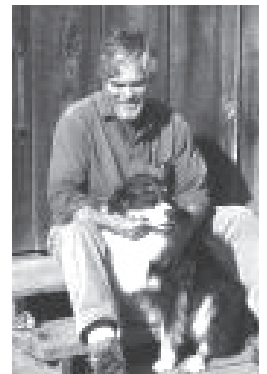
Orange-breasted Bunting

GARDENING for Birds

Presented by John Whittlesey

John Whittlesey owns Canyon Creek Nursery & Design. He has served as the horticulture chairperson for the Mount Lassen Chapter of the California Native Plant Society and is a graduate of the California School of Garden Design.

Gardens can be more than just lawns bordered by shrubs and flowers. By considering the needs of birds and other wildlife, our gardens can be designed to attract more birds, bees, butterflies, and still satisfy our desire to have a pleasing garden space. Learn the critical elements for planning a garden for wildlife: providing food, water, space and shelter. We will discuss specific plants, useful for attracting birds. A reliable, clean source of water is critical in attracting and keeping birds in the garden



John Whittlesey and Friend

ALTACAL AUDUBON SOCIETY

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Director - at-Large	JOHN MERZ 345-4050 jbmerz@sbcglobal.net

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*

Altacal is in need of a Membership Chairperson beginning as soon as possible. The position requires an estimated five-to-ten hours a month. Training will be provided. Duties can be negotiated to accommodate candidate's schedule.

ASSOCIATED SKILLS / DUTIES

Basic understanding of Microsoft Excel and Word, or compatible computer programs used to maintain data entry of local and national members; communicating through e-mail; attending monthly Board Meeting; and compiling and sending information packets to new national members.

Please contact Carolyn Short (carolynshort@mac.com) or Phil Johnson (ptjptj@gmail.com) if interested.

PHIL JOHNSON

New Local Birding Sites on ALTACAL Web Site

We are in the middle of creating a Birding Sites section that's part of the current www.altacal.org web site. They are currently a "work in progress" and are available by visiting <http://altacal.org/sites>. This web page will give you access to information about Birding Sites and Hikes in the three counties within Altacal's sphere of influence - Butte, Glenn and Tehama. At this time, seven sites have been published. We will continue to update the pages as more articles are completed.

If you're interested in helping to complete the section by writing an article on one of your favorite birding sites, contact Steve King at 566-6136 or e-mail Steve at sking.chico@gmail.com.



(continued from page 1.)

April Program

The humid pine/oak forests are home to some incredible localized species including **Dwarf Jay**, **Bumblebee Hummingbird**, and **Chestnut-sided Shrike-Vireo**. The giant cactus scrub of the foothills is habitat for **Oaxaca** and **Bridled Sparrows**, **Slaty** and **Dwarf Vireos**, and **Ocellated Thrasher**. A few days in the coastal town of Puerto Escondido provided opportunity to visit the tropical semi-deciduous forest of Sierra Madre del Sur and the Pacific Coastal Lowlands (with rivers, bays, and lagoons). I hope to provide an overview of this wonderful Mexican birding location and to give a "taste" of the diverse culture of Oaxaca. From mescal production and tasting, to insects for dinner, to traditional rug weaving, the "land of seven moles" has something for everyone.

Chestnut-sided Shrike-Vireo

11th Annual *Snow Goose Festival* of the Pacific Flyway

January 28-31, 2010 *was wildly successful!*

This year we had an incredible four days with good weather for field trips, workshops, presentations, free family activities, demonstrations, exhibit booths, nature vendors, plus a three-week Pacific Flyway Art Exhibit. With nearly 70 activities to choose from, birders and nature lovers of all skills and ages found a wealth of choices at this year's festival. Activities involving birds, bats, gardening for wildlife, photography, storytelling, children's poetry, wildlife films, and more were offered. Exceptional destinations such as the Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge, Del Rio and Sul Norte Restoration Sites, Llano Seco Rancho, Sutter Buttes, Black Butte Lake, Lema Ranch, Lundberg Family Farms, Rancho Esquon, Massa Organic Farms, Bidwell Park and more were offered.

A grand total of 123 species of birds was observed by trip leaders and participants, with Marathon Big Day Birding listing the most sightings at 117! A notable discovery was sightings of Golden Eagles on several field trips. Keynote speaker, Stephen Shunk of Oregon, did a thoughtful and humorous talk about birding in winter that allowed those in the audience to laugh and learn.

An additional highlight was having Huell Howser of the PBS series "California Gold", film the festival.

The Snow Goose Festival of the Pacific Flyway will be held again in January 2011.



We would like to share some of the figures of the festival with you

- **23** fantastic Steering Committee members, and over 50 incredible volunteers
- **40,000** insert-brochures were printed and distributed by CN&R
- **745** registered on-line, **152** off-line (includes walk-ins) for the field trips, workshops, banquet and reception for a total of **897**
- **234(+)** at the Uptown-Downtown Wildlife Art Reception
- **246** people at the "Gathering of Wings" Banquet
- **76** cities and towns were represented, with participants coming from as far away as Seattle, WA and England
- On Sat and Sun approximately **1200+** adults and children came to see the exhibits and free activities
- **67** fee \$ events (**47** field trips / **19** workshops and presentations/art reception and banquet) **9** free events, **40+** exhibits/booths
- **63** super field trip leaders and workshop presenters
- **25** of the greatest sponsors



SNOW GOOSE
FESTIVAL

**So mark your calendars now for
JANUARY 27 - 30, 2011**

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.

April 10, Saturday

SECOND SATURDAY UPPER BIDWELL PARK BIRD WALK

Trip Leader: Steve King

On 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. Meet at 8 a.m. at the 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 566-6136.



Table Mountain Wildflowers

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 Nancy Nelson, 345-0580 -concownancy@earthlink.net.

April 18, Sunday

PINE CREEK / INDIAN FISHERY

Trip Leader: Skip Augur

Two trips in one! Our first stop will be the Pine Creek Unit of the Sacramento River National Wildlife Refuge. We will walk and bird parts of this restored site looking for grassland and riparian birds. Next, we will visit the Indian Fishery area of the Bidwell-Sacramento River State Park. Here, we will take a 1/2-mile nature trail to see several species of woodpeckers and many other resident and wintering woodland and aquatic birds. We may also see River Otters, Beavers and Western Pond Turtles. Beginning birders are always welcome. Let the trip leader know ahead of time if you need to borrow binoculars or a field guide.

Meet at the Park & Ride closest to Hwy 99 at 8:30 a.m. We will carpool to the Pine Creek Unit and then to Indian Fishery. We will return around 1 p.m. Rain cancels. Contact Skip Augur wba@acm.org or 530-519-4724.

April 29 - May 2, Thursday - Sunday

KERN RIVER VALLEY PRESERVE

Trip Leaders: Scott and Liam Huber

Kern County is arguably ‘America’s Birdiest County’ and Altacal is planning an extended field trip during the peak of migration. This coincides with the Kern River Valley Spring Nature Festival and we may be able to take advantage of some of their guided excursions and certainly their expertise. Diverse habitat types from nearly sea level to almost 10,000 feet mean lots of bird diversity and Kern is renowned for a number of normally difficult species such as **Mountain Quail, Le Conte’s Thrasher, Spotted Owl, Lawrence’s Goldfinch** and others. Some of California’s most legendary migrant traps are in this area and we’ll visit one or more of them.



Liam and Scott will be guiding the group on Thursday and Friday. Participants will be on their own Saturday and Sunday and will need to arrange their Festival activities and their own lodging/camping. Our plans are just being developed for this trip so if you are interested please contact us right away. Scott Huber 321-5579

Woodpeckers of the Kern River Valley by N. John Schmitt

May 8, Saturday

**SECOND SATURDAY UPPER BIDWELL PARK
AND HOOKER OAK FOR LUNCH**

Trip Leader: Steve King

This is the second-to-last (until the fall) monthly field trip to Upper Bidwell Park. These dates are the second Saturday of each month. For May, we will meet at 8 a.m. at the 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 maybe drive a short distance further up the park road and start our field trip at a different location. Transients as well as our summer birds should be common now, for this outing. Bring binoculars, water, snacks, walking shoes and proper clothing for the expected weather conditions. Bring a lunch, if you plan to go to Hooker Oak for lunch and a little more birding at noon. Rain cancels. Contact: Steve King at 566-6136.

May 8, Saturday

**PICNIC LUNCH AND BIRD WALK
AT HOOKER OAK**

Trip Leader: Steve King

For those who cannot make the morning hike in Upper Bidwell Park and those who would like to continue their birding adventure from the morning walk in Upper Bidwell Park, let's meet at Hooker Oak Recreation area at noon for lunch and a little more birding. This area has many short, easy walks. This is a great area for **Phainopepla**, although at this time of the year, anything is possible in this area! Bring binoculars, water, lunch (or eat first and join us) walking shoes and proper clothing for the expected weather conditions. Rain cancels. contact: Steve King at 566-6136.

May 16, Sunday

**KAYAK TRIP THROUGH
THE OROVILLE WILDERNESS**

Trip Leader: Gaylord Grams

We will meet at the Chico Park & Ride at 8:30 a.m. and arrive at the Oroville Fish Ladder area around 9 a.m. We will do a car shuttle and then float/paddle about seven river-miles to the take out. This is a good time to see heron and egret rookeries along the river, as well as the resident birds and possible early migrants. Some kayak experience is recommended as we paddle through riffles and a few tight spots. Rain or high water cancels. For more information check the Altacal web site www.altacal.org or contact Nancy Nelson, 345-0580 - concowncancy@earthlink.net.

June 4 - 6, Friday - Sunday

SIERRA VALLEY / YUBA PASS

Trip Leader: Mac McCormick

This trip covers a variety of mountain habitats. We will bird the marshes and open fields at the headwaters of the Feather River, the sagebrush lowlands of the Sierra Valley, the conifer woodlands of Yuba Pass and we'll take a short trip to the Lake Basin area (Sand Pond Boardwalk). This trip always gives us a good variety of birds. Last year we witnessed many young birds being fed by their parents. Friday and Saturday nights we will camp out at the Salmon Creek Campground. Contact Nancy Nelson if you wish to go. She will be helping Mac with the camping and transportation arrangements. Nancy Nelson 345-0580 concowncancy@earthlink.net



Oak Titmouse at Hooker Oak by Steve King

June 12, Saturday

**LAST OF THE SECOND SATURDAY
UPPER BIDWELL PARK WALKS (new time)**

Trip Leader: Steve King

This is the last of our "Second Saturday" field trips. This is the end of the spring migration so we should see birds that are spending the summer in the upper park. **Yellow-breasted Chats** should be singing and many birds will be feeding their young. Let's meet at 7:30 a.m. (earlier time) at the parking lot on the left just past the gun club (follow Wildwood Ave for 1.75 miles and turn left just before the gate). We may start our trip from here, or maybe drive a short distance farther up the park road and start our field trip at a different location. Bring binoculars, water, snacks, walking shoes and proper clothing for the expected weather conditions. We should be back before noon. Rain cancels. contact: Steve King at 566-6136.

The *Conservation Corner*

by DAWN GARCIA, Conservation Chairperson

Construction of BURROWING OWL Burrows



On Saturday, February 20, ten local birders and Burrowing Owl enthusiasts managed to construct eight artificial burrows in Chico. Larry Jordan of the Wintu Audubon Society had received a grant from Audubon California to construct some artificial burrows on the site. The weather held as we installed two groups of four burrows each in the heavy wet soil of a location where the habitat will be conserved in perpetuity. We did it because of the decline of burrowing owls in California (they are considered a "Species of Special Concern") and the lack of real protection for them. Development projects can result in eviction of owls, caving-in their burrows, and killing of the burrow makers (ground squirrels) - a policy allowed by the California Department of Fish and Game. So, our thanks go out to a landowner who likes Burrowing Owls.

There have been Burrowing Owls seen at this location for nearly twenty years according to the resident biologist who studies the vernal pools located on the property. One owl was spotted when Larry visited the site a couple of weeks ago to mark out the locations for the hand-dug burrows.

top - Burrowing Owl in one of the burrows
by Michelle Swartout

middle - Larry Jordan, Michele Swartout, Claudia Lyons-Yerion

bottom - l-r - Michelle Ocken, George Horn, Dorothy Davis,
Dawn Garcia, Steve King, Nancy Nelson, Lonnie Swartout,
Michele Swartout, Claudia Lyons-Yerion and Larry Jordan

THANK YOU

Larry expressed his thanks to Michelle Ocken, Steve King, and Nancy Nelson from Altacal Audubon, Michele and Lonnie Swartout and the Wintu Audubon President, George Horn for all their hard work on the dig. He gave special thanks to Claudia Yerion, Wintu Audubon Conservation Chair and Dawn Garcia, Altacal Audubon Conservation Chair for helping him coordinate the event (as well as doing a good deal of shoveling) and Dorothy Davis and Howard Wurlitzer for their constant support that led to this segment of the Burrowing Owl Project.

Of course without the grant from Audubon California none of this would be possible. Thanks to Garry George, Chapter Network Director, for his insightful consideration of the Burrowing Owl problem in California, we may be able to turn the tide of the decline of this species. We would also like to thank Jordan Wellwood, Central Valley/Sierra Nevada Conservation Coordinator, for her constant advocacy for the Burrowing Owl and other conservation issues in California.

Cross your fingers and hope for occupancy by breeding Burrowing Owls! Fortunately, there is at least a wintering owl on site, a good sign for good Burrowing Owl habitat.

On a follow-up visit by Nancy Nelson, a Burrowing Owl was seen in the entrance of one of the artificial burrows. We are not sure if this is the one wintering there, or a new bird. Even later, on March 13, Michelle Swartout, an AAS/Wintu member and part of the digging crew, saw a Burrowing Owl sitting in the opening of one of the burrows.



EDUCATION**ALTACAL YOUTH SCHOLARSHIPS****Curing Nature Deficiency Syndrome**

Do you know a youngster who shows an interest in the natural world? With all of the electronic distractions available to kids these days it seems difficult to find those who choose to spend their time outdoors. We're looking for two special 4th, 5th or 6th graders who demonstrate an affinity for wildlife, natural history or the out-of-doors to receive Altacal Audubon Society 2010 Youth Scholarships.

Scholarship recipients will attend **San Francisco State's Sierra Nevada Field Campus** for a four-day course observing and

learning the Birds of the Sierra Nevada. The youngsters, each with one parent guardian, will enjoy semi-permanent tent accommodations with cots and all meals for the duration of the workshop.

If you know of a deserving young person whose interest in nature can be heightened by this experience, please contact Altacal Audubon's Education Director, Scott Huber for more information 530-321-5579 or birdtours@altacal.org.



UP THERE!
by Kathleen Huber

QUIZ

Rex Burress mentions on page 10. that President Roosevelt considered FRANK M. CHAPMAN to be the leading bird authority of his time.

In 1911, Chapman named a bird after his friend, ornithologist and famous bird artist, LOUIS AGASSIZ FUERTES.

What bird is it and to what other bird is it most closely related?

(Answer on page 16.)

Here's a clue – a painting of it by Fuertes.



BIDWELL PARK as a CAT SANCTUARY?

The SCIENCE, ETHICS and LAWS Behind Trap, Neuter and Return (TNR) Finding a Solution to Benefit Wildlife and Cats.

The Current Situation and TNR Definition

As many of you may know there is an increase in the feral and abandoned (F&A) cat population in Bidwell Park. To discuss the situation, the Bidwell Park and Playground Commission held a “Cat Dialogue” meeting at the Chico City Council Chambers on February 24th. The Chico Cat Coalition (CCC), founded to remove and house these cats, has experienced a decline in resources (funding, housing and volunteers) and can no longer run their trap/removal/adoption program of cats in the park. As a misguided alternative, the CCC proposed to establish a Trap, Neuter and Return (TNR) program in Bidwell Park. Currently there are illegal “cat feeding stations” in the park. A TNR program would propose to keep these cats in “managed colonies,” where if possible, they could be trapped, neutered, and then returned to the colony. Basically, Bidwell Park would become a park managed for abandoned, subsidized cats - not wildlife.

You can see the problems with these colonies: cat populations would increase because many cats would not be captured and would continue to reproduce; some people would think these cats are well-cared-for and would dump their pets (the source of abandoned cats); and wildlife would take a hard hit. This scenario occurred in Bidwell Park prior to the trap and remove program established by the CCC. Ground nesters such as our state bird, the **California Quail**, are especially susceptible to free-roaming cats. Their numbers were dramatically reduced when cats were prevalent and when cats were removed, their numbers rebounded. There is abundant information about TNR, but a succinct, ten-minute video describes the practice and tells the story at <http://www.youtube.com/abcbirds#p/u/1/-fvN7FNUPas>

Wildlife Impacts from Cats

At the meeting, Altacal's representative, Scott Huber, presented plenty of studies confirming the negative impact that cats have on birds and other wildlife. To recap, millions of free-roaming domestic cats and feral cats kill hundreds of millions of birds and other wildlife a year. Cats are excellent hunters and even if well-fed they often kill wildlife due to their predatory instincts. Where cats interface with wildlife, they are considered “super-predators;” there are many more cats than natural native predators (such as bobcats) and they have a high reproductive rate, birthing up to several litters per year. Generally, cats are found at densities 10-100 times higher than similarly-sized native predators. These colonies of feral cats can spread disease to each other, other pets (dogs in the park), people, and wildlife.

Some diseases include rabies, toxoplasmosis, both H5N1 avian influenza virus, presumably from feeding on infected birds, and recently H1N1 or swine flu. Parasites (roundworms, tapeworms, fleas, etc) are also spread to people and wildlife by cats. Feral and abandoned cats have made the list of the 100 worst invasive species globally.

The Ethics of Cat Abandonment

A wildlife veterinarian studying the effects of TNR on cats and wildlife says the R in TNR stands for Re-abandonment. Cats are pets, not wildlife. They were domesticated and enjoy being part of the family; the comforts of a warm home, a lap, a caress. The American Veterinary Medical Association recommends that cats remain indoors for the health and safety of the cat. Indoor cats typically have a much longer lifespan than their free-roaming friends. Outdoor cats are exposed to cars, dogs, mean people, other cats, parasites, disease, native predators, and inclement weather. Our local and state laws address the welfare of cats.

Local and State Protections for the Welfare of Feral Cats

During the forum, an unanswered question, “Is it illegal to trap, neuter, and return cats to Bidwell Park?”, stimulated me to re-research the legal protections of abandoned and feral cats. Based on Chico City Codes, it is illegal to dump cats in Bidwell Park (up to a fine of \$1,000.00). It is illegal to feed animals in Bidwell Park (12R.04.185). The impoundment code (7.04.015) says a cat should be impounded if it is running at large and creating a nuisance (such as killing wildlife, spreading disease, etc.). Butte County requires rabies vaccinations and reporting for all cats (4-20.2). Butte County animal welfare section says that legally animals must have food, water, and shelter from weather. California penal code, 597, which addresses animal welfare, also says that it is illegal to fail to provide animals with food, water, shelter, and protection from weather. Based on legal code, TNR, unless the R stands for Removal, is clearly an illegal and inhumane activity. TNR is not a solution for feral and abandoned cats in Bidwell Park.

Protections for Native Wildlife

Native wildlife is also afforded protections. These include State and Federal Laws which local jurisdictions follow. These are protections for all native species (State codes), those that are state and federally listed (State and Federal Endangered Species Act), and neotropical migratory birds (The Migratory Bird Treaty Act).

PET CAT SOLUTIONS

by Dawn Garcia

Kee cats indoors (or if outdoors, keep in enclosures for cat and wildlife protection). The American Bird Conservancy has a well-developed Cats Indoors! campaign (<http://www.abcbirds.org/abcprograms/policy/cats/>) complete with tips on helping you keep your cat inside and links to how or where to buy outdoor enclosures. The National Audubon Society supports this program and advocates responsible ownership of all pets (<http://www.audubon.org/bird/cat/>). Other supporters of keeping cats indoors include the American Ornithologists' Union, American Association of Wildlife Veterinarians, International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, National Association of State Public Health Veterinarians, Inc., and the Cooper Ornithological Society.



Do these cats look territorial to you? One TNR myth is that cats are territorial and will keep others from joining the colony, thus abating rising populations. This is true with native cats, but not true for hungry, feral cats. Colony feeding also attracts non-native rodents like Norway Rats.

FERAL AND ABANDONED CAT SOLUTIONS

by Scott Huber

As illustrated above, F&A cats are a potentially devastating threat to birds in Bidwell Park. Solving that threat requires not only working on issues concerning birds, but also issues involving cats. Although cat issues are obviously outside of the Audubon Society's mission, it is clear that the two are inexorably intertwined.

While Altacal Audubon Society has not yet taken a position with regard to solutions to the F&A cat problem, the following are some that might be considered; some solutions seem obvious and logical, and would seemingly require non-controversial, easily supportable fixes, such as developing funding strategies for cat solutions.

- a local education campaign focused on keeping cat's indoors.
- requiring that all cat owners residing within Chico City limits license their cats (only dogs are required to be licensed).
- assessing a significant penalty for unlicensed cats.
- providing low or no-cost spay and neuter opportunities.
- enforcing current City laws regarding cats - the city is required to catch 'nuisance animals' and take them to a shelter (the City of Chico Animal Control Department currently abdicates this job to it's contractee, the Chico Cat Coalition).
- enforcing City laws regarding the feeding of any animal in Bidwell Park (unless part of a sanctioned trapping program).
- installing signage at park access points detailing the problem and the penalties.

- increasing vigilance and increasing penalties for cat-dumping and cat-feeding.
- Offering a significant reward for the identification of cat-dumpers and cat-feeders. If the City chooses to employ a contractee to deal with the cat issue, then the contractee must comply with the same city codes, or terms of the contract that accomplish the same mission of removing all cats from the park.

Other potential solutions would require greater consideration and more effort on the part of Altacal, these include:

- Insisting that the City of Chico find an acceptable answer to the question: "What do we do with cats that are removed from Bidwell Park?" and insist that the City provide the necessary funds to achieve that solution.
- Applying for grant funding for bird projects in Bidwell Park, that, as a component of habitat enhancement, include funds for F&A cat education, publicity, research, trapping, removal.
- Assisting the City of Chico, C.C.C. or another contractee in developing funding strategies for cat solutions.

What is done to benefit birds and bird habitat is Altacal's concern. What is ultimately done with cats removed from Bidwell Park must be decided by others. Supporting solutions that result in the protection of Park birds and other wildlife, by way of the permanent removal of cats from Bidwell Park, is consistent with Altacal Audubon Society's mission.

The President Who *Loved Birds*

by Rex Burress



Unknown to many, our 26th President of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt (TR) 1858-1919, our “conservation president” who established 230 million acres of parks, forest reserves, and wildlife refuges, was a passionate bird watcher.

Eastern naturalist John Burroughs said TR knew birds better than anyone he had ever met, and his expertise started as a child in New York City where he was born. In spite of being a sickly asthmatic during his youth, he became a skilled field birder and taxidermist, trained by one of John James Audubon’s student taxidermists, and the intrigue never ended.

TR started his own natural history museum in New York City to show his specimens. “Roosevelt began his life as a naturalist, and he ended his life as a naturalist, and his interest was never abandoned at any time,” said historian Paul Cutright, which was echoed by Emerson who wrote, “The lover of nature is he whose inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other, who has retained the spirit of infancy even into the era of manhood.”

Taking up ranching in North Dakota helped TR to become energized and healthy, a trait he kept the rest of his life as he adopted the “strenuous life.” He was working or traveling or reading or writing every hour of the day, and would “rough it in the out of doors,” whether leading the Rough Riders in the Cuban war, or hunting big game in the mountains.

Theodore came into power during the “feather wars” when hunters, unrestricted by laws, were killing millions of egrets, pelicans, and even hummingbirds for the millinery trade, primarily for ladies hats. It took the combined efforts of many people dedicated to saving birds to slowly establish protection, and one giant step was taken when TR, with a “I so declare it,” made Pelican Island in Florida the first Federal Bird Reservation, March, 1903. The Pelican Island Indian River Lagoon contained some 4,300 species of plants and animals and 370 bird species, but without laws the biota were being wiped out.

The Audubon Society funded the first game warden at Pelican Island, Paul Kroegel, and also warden Guy Bradley, who was murdered protecting birds in 1905. After the second Audubon warden was killed in 1908, the New York State Assembly outlawed the commercialization of feathers with passing of the Shea-White Plumage Bill in 1910. William Finley led the west coast Audubon and kept tabs on the Klamath basin plume hunters. The going rates per dozen birds were: teal, \$3, mallard, \$5, pintail, \$7, and canvasback, \$9.

Roosevelt considered ornithologist Frank M. Chapman, who published “Bird Studies with a Camera” in 1901, the leading bird authority. Chapman kept a bird count of species he saw women wearing as apparel on Fifth Avenue. In one hour of one day in 1885, he identified 174 birds of 40 different species adorning ladies’ hats.

Roosevelt was the only serious bird-watcher to ever become president of the United States. Most ornithologists were people who just started counting birds they saw and became carried away with listing, but TR took a special joy in studying birds. Now, 100 years after his presidency, there are 27 million birdwatchers in the United States (as of 2009) making it the most popular hobby pursuit in America.

*I would like to see all harmless wild things,
but especially birds, protected in every way.
I do not understand how any man or woman
who really loves nature can fail to try to exert
influence in support of such protective
objectives as those of the Audubon Society.*

- Theodore Roosevelt

Secretary Salazar Releases NEW STATE OF THE BIRDS REPORT

Showing CLIMATE CHANGE Threatens Hundreds of Species

The report is the product of a collaborative effort as part of the U.S. North American Bird Conservation Initiative, between federal and state wildlife agencies, and scientific and conservation organizations including partners from American Bird Conservancy, the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Klamath Bird Observatory, National Audubon Society, The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, The Nature Conservancy, U.S.D.A. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the U.S. Geological Survey. Read details of the report: <http://www.stateofthebirds.org/>



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Bird Walk and Birding Trip

REPORTS



February 6

WATERFOWL IDENTIFICATION WORKSHOP Part 4: SWANS AND CRANES

Trip leaders: Jay Bogiatto and Scott Huber

A brave group of nearly a dozen risked a deluge but were treated to a wonderful post-storm day of waterfowl watching. Led by CSU, Chico's Jay Bogiatto and Altacal's Education Director, Scott Huber, the workshop's goal of studying both Sandhill Cranes and Tundra Swans was a resounding success. Our first opportunity for observing **Sandhill Cranes** came near Richvale where we were treated to a flock of about fifty in a fallow farm field. Scope study of these birds provided participants a rare chance to note the differences between Greater and Lesser Sandhills and to enjoy their legendary dance.



Another of our objectives was to find a neck-banded swan, and in the Loma Rica area near Marysville we were treated to great scope looks at a single black-banded swan in a group of perhaps 50 **Tundra Swans**. A follow-up with the North American Bird

Banding Laboratory provided us with background information on this individual which, as it turns out, was banded in March of the previous year near Fallon, Nevada. Waders, shorebirds, duck and raptors were in abundance and we enjoyed many spectacular sightings during this terrific clinic.

left top - Waterfowl ID birders. left bottom - Neck-banded Tundra Swan by Scott Huber

right top - Rufous-crowned Sparrow, Middle Trail in Upper Bidwell Park by Steve King

February 13

SECOND SATURDAY UPPER PARK BIDWELL PARK

Trip Leader: Steve King

We had eight people on the first of our "Second Saturday of the Month" field trips into Upper Bidwell Park (February through June). The weather was ideal. The hike started at Horseshoe Lake and followed the Yahi Trail to Day Camp where we moved up to the trail just on the north side of the main road and worked our way back to the cars.

We picked up a total of 41 species. Nancy Nelson kept a bird species list and count, which was submitted to the "Great Backyard Bird Count". The birds were pairing up! There were no large flocks of **Bush-tits**, mostly just pairs. Also, at least four **Tree Swallows** were seen at Horseshoe Lake and up the canyon. This is the north end of the Tree Swallow's winter range



but I suspect these swallows were migrating north. Also seen were two **Rufous-crowned Sparrows** (39.772683, - 121.766169). It was a great trip. Next month is going to be even better!

February 14

CHICO STATE BIRDING CLUB WINTER SURVEY 2010

Field Trip Leader: Jay Bogiatto

Nine Altacal and Chico State Birding Club (CSBC) members participated in the Winter Survey, a three-times-a-year survey of the bird species of Butte County. Following a protocol devised by Jay Bogiatto of CSUC's Biology Department, the group birded a variety of habitats in the county. At day's end they had identified 111 species (three of them by ear). Among the birds were thousands of **Snow Geese, American Wigeons and Northern Pintails**. "Best" birds perhaps were a female **Barrow's Golden-eye** and a hybrid male **Cinnamon Teal X Northern Shoveler**. Next time you read about an upcoming CSBC Survey, come on down. It's a lot of fun.

February 24

RAPTOR RUN

Trip Leader: Jennifer Patten

With a mix of winter weather, wind, rain and sunshine, twelve Altacal Auduboners went Raptor Running north of Chico to Meridian, Lassen, and Barber roads east of Hwy 99. But our first stop was the corner of Hwy 99 and Gardner, where reports of a rare **Harlan's Hawk** (subspecies of Red-tailed Hawk) was sighted. Sure enough, there it was, perched in one of the pine trees. What a picture-perfect view we all had of this beautiful hawk. While we stopped at the corner, a **Red-shouldered Hawk**, a **Red-tailed Hawk** and a flyover by several **Snow Geese** and **Sandhill Cranes** were added to our list. On to Meridian Rd, where the irrigated pasture lands are a haven for raptors looking for field mice, we stopped beside the road, took our scopes out and saw on fence posts and irrigation equipment various species - **American Kestrel**, **light-morph Red-tailed Hawk**, **female Northern Harrier**, **Say's Phoebe** and lots of **Common Ravens** and **American Crows**. Then on to some oak woodlands along Barber Rd where we saw **Lewis's Woodpeckers**, **California Quail**, **Lesser Goldfinches**, **Western Bluebirds**, a field full of **Turkey Vultures**, a pair of Red-tailed Hawks and two **Loggerhead Shrikes**. Just as we turned west onto Lassen, a **Ferruginous Hawk** was sitting on top of an electric pole. This big beautiful Buteo, rust on back and shoulders, inhabits dry open country and winters here. Along Lassen Rd are also many vernal pools where **Mallards**, **American Wigeon**, **Canada Geese**, **Northern Shovelers**, and **American Coots** were resting. We crossed over the Singer Creek bridge and heard the loud call of the **Greater Yellowlegs**. Another highlight along Lassen was a field full of **Horned Larks** and to end our day, we took a short drive down Lenninger Rd where a very large group of **Long-billed Curlews** were foraging.



Harlan's Hawk by Nancy Nelson

March 6

SOUTH RIM TRAIL UPPER BIDWELL PARK

Field Trip Leader: Mauricio Schrader

Upper Park's sometimes difficult South Rim terrain did not deter our intrepid auditory birders from a rewarding hike through pine/oak woodland and riparian habitats. The luck of the Irish struck within minutes - a **White-throated Sparrow** sunning himself in a

Himalayan blackberry. A female **Anna's Hummingbird** was seen to land on her tiny nest in a Redbud within feet of the trail, while an **Orange-crowned Warbler** sang. We found a pair of **Red-shouldered Hawks** on their riverfront nest. One of our stragglers spied a **Northern Pygmy-Owl** on our way back out of the canyon. We all hurried back to the site but were not rewarded. A begging female **Oak Titmouse** led us to her cavity nest, where the male was seen bringing her lunch. **Osprey** and a migrating flock of **Sandhill Cranes** rounded out a great outing. Total count: 41 species.

Birders in Upper Bidwell Park by Raina King



Program REPORTS

February

February 15, 2010

TRICOLORED Blackbird

with Robert J. Meese, Ph.D.

A Chico Creek Nature Center full of Altacal members and supporters greeted Dr. Robert Meese at our February program meeting. Dr. Meese drove all the way up from Davis to talk about a subject for which he has great passion, the behavior and status of the Tricolored Blackbird, *Agelaius tricolor*. Passion and concern for the future of this near-endemic California passerine was communicated beautifully through a detailed multi-media presentation of the natural history, movement, breeding history as well as past, present and future status of this unique black-bird.

Dr. Meese explained that 98% of this species occurs within the State with just a few small isolated populations in Baja California, Nevada, Oregon and Washington. This means that if the California populations are lost, the species will be lost forever. The California population estimated in 2008 at approximately 400,000 birds is divided into two sub-populations, southern and northern. These two populations do not appear to overlap. Surveys in the 1930's estimated the number of Tricolored Blackbirds in the millions. Today, most of the remaining birds are part of the northern population. The southern population is in extreme danger with only 5,200 birds observed in an intensive 2009 survey.

Dr. Meese detailed the major factors that have caused problems for tricolors, primary among them land conversions for agriculture and urbanization, water diversions (Central Valley) and overdrafts (southern California), elimination of extensive Central Valley as well as coastal marsh habitats for agriculture and urbanization, deliberate poisoning and shooting (which continues to this day) as agricultural pests, market hunting, and destruction of colonies during the harvest of their grain field nesting substrate. The replacement of productive agricultural lands with woody perennials is of great on-going concern in the Central Valley. The continuing urbanization of southern California severely threatens the few remaining birds there.

Last year as part of his research dedicated to better understanding the breeding behavior of these birds, Dr. Meese and his team banded over 10,000 birds and since 2007 have banded a total of over 25,000 tricolors. Many of these were color banded and subsequent reports of sightings and recovered birds have added valuable information to that research.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

- Report observations of color-banded birds. Please enter records of sightings of color-banded birds into the Tricolored Blackbird Portal: <http://tricolor.ice.ucdavis.edu>.
- Report all colonies to Altacal Audubon staff via the Portal, or directly to Dr. Meese.
- Participate in the triennial Statewide Survey
- Contact Congressional representatives, <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/findyourreps.xpd?state=CA> and request that the LIP Program, <http://www.dfg.ca.gov/lands/lip/>, be re-funded.

Contact information

e-mail: rjmeese@ucdavis.edu

or leave a message on the Portal.



Dr. Meese and a Tricolored Blackbird

Altacal Sightings



If you have interesting sightings in the Butte, Glenn or Tehama counties in March or April send them to tim.ruckle@comcast.net by May 7.

JANUARY 24, 2010

Liam Huber attended Altacal's Waterfowl Workshop and reported that it ended up as a "Big Day", producing 109 avian species. Interesting findings were **136 Red-tailed Hawks, 4 Eurasian Wigeons, 47 Bald Eagles, 307 Canvasbacks, 3 Peregrine Falcons, 108 Black-crowned Night-Herons, 7 Eurasian Collared-Doves, 1 California Thrasher, 1 Blue Ross's Goose, 1 Blue Snow Goose, and 7 "Common/Eurasian" Green winged Teal.**

FEBRUARY / MARCH 2010

Phil Johnson saw **2 Rufous-crowned Sparrows** at Black Butte Lake on February 28th. On March 4, he spotted two **Red-shouldered Hawks** copulating in his front yard trees. On March 7, he viewed about **25 swallows** (species unknown) in Childs Meadows flying above the snow fields just below Lassen Volcanic National Park.

MARCH 2010

Dug Ringel reported that the California Department of Fish and Game has introduced what he believes are Merriam's strain of **Wild Turkeys** in the Concow area. He has a small flock that frequents the area near his home sporting both metal leg bands and green wing tags. They have markedly whiter rumps and prominent white tail bands. He said there's beautiful iridescence in the gobblers and that some of the hens are bearded. He has also recently seen Wild Turkeys along Arlington Road off of Hwy 89 near Taylorsville in Indian Valley (Plumas County) - probably Merriam's too.

MARCH 7, 2010

Nancy Nelson came across this **Harlan's Red-tailed Hawk** (see photo page 11.) just north of Cana. She assumed it was the same one that has been seen along Hwy 99 during the past month or so. She said it was very cooperative - posing for photos. Also of interest was a **Burrowing Owl** at the newly constructed artificial burrow off Hwy 99 on Hamilton-Nord-Cana Hwy.

MARCH 10, 2010

Mel Richardson had a male **Rufous Hummingbird** at his feeder in Paradise.

Butte County LIFE LISTS

Following is a list of birders and their Butte County "life lists" that is, the number of bird species they have identified in the county. Emulating the California County Birding web site (http://www.sterlingbirds.com/california_county_birding.htm) we asked responders to give us their counts minus "introduced species"- for example, Ring-necked Pheasant, Wild Turkey, Rock Pigeon, Eurasian Collared-Dove, European Starling and House Sparrow. So, these are all NIB (no introduced birds) totals. We contacted as many people as we thought might have seen a significant number (top 20 lists or thereabouts) of bird species in Butte County. If we missed any of you, forgive us and contact us so you can be included in the next version of this list. Otherwise, we view this as an informal tally that doesn't pretend to be complete. The numbers are those provided to us by the birders. There are people who have identified many bird species in the county who, whether they responded or not, and for a variety of reasons, are not on the list.

Tim Manolis	277	Bill Haas	228
Mike Skram	275	Scott Huber	226
Bruce Deuel	265	Liam Huber	226
Steve Laymon	262	Bud Widdowson	224
J. T. Lewis	252	Mike Fisher	217
Richard Redmond	246	Steve Glover	216
Roger Lederer	244	Jim Lomax	216
John Luther	244	Frances Oliver	205
Kent Van Vuren	239	Tim Ruckle	205
Rich Stallcup	238	Jackson Shedd	205
John Sterling	233		

Opportunities and Events



GODWIT DAYS SPRING MIGRATION BIRD FESTIVAL Arcata, CA

April 15 - 21, Thursday - Wednesday

The Festival has a variety of trips: pelagic tours, Spotted Owl field trips, and Big Days. It's a fun-filled week of nature and wildlife on California's North Coast. This year's keynote speaker is Jeff Bouton, research biologist, professional field guide, author, and Product Specialist for Leica Sport Optics.

For information: <http://www.godwitdays.com/>

POINT REYES BIRDING & NATURE FESTIVAL

**April 23 - 26,
Friday - Monday**

A birding and nature festival with many field trips over four days to a variety of destinations. For information: <http://www.pointreys-birdingfestival.org/site/>



MOUNT LASSEN CHAPTER CNPS NATIVE PLANT GARDEN TOUR Chico, CA

April 25, Sunday

Enjoy home, public gardens and nurseries that demonstrate how to use and maintain California native plants - donation \$8, children free with adult. Tickets are available during April at Mendon's Nursery, Floral Native Nursery, Little Red Hen Nursery, Plant Barn, and Lyon's Books. Day-of-tour tickets available at Chico Creek Nature Center. Information 530-893-2886. Mount Lassen Chapter California Native Plant Society

ANSWER TO QUIZ

from page 7.

Fuertes' Oriole or **Ochre Oriole** (*Icterus spurius fuertesi*) a subspecies of **Orchard Oriole** (*Icterus spurius spurius*).

But - some consider it a separate species (*Icterus fuertesi*)

KERN RIVER VALLEY SPRING NATURE FESTIVAL Weldon / Kernville, CA

April 30 - May 6, Friday - Thursday



Centered on the Kern River Valley, Southern Sierra Nevada includes Southern San Joaquin Valley birding trips. Of interest to Central Valley birders are some central valley trips including trips to Kern National Wildlife Refuge and Bakersfield birding hotspots (Spotted Dove, Rose-ringed Parakeet, Hart Park). 30 field trip options, many all seven days. Half-day field trips offered Sat and Sun. In addition to last year's, new offerings are more owling destinations, Little Lake/

Owens Lake trips, and Frog Spring/Kelso Creek Sanctuary trips. For information: Alison Sheehey, Festival Chair and Webmaster, Weldon, Kern County, CA, Kern River Valley Spring Nature Festival - P: 760-378-2029, E: bbarnes@lightspeed.net

31st ANNUAL ENDANGERED SPECIES FAIRE Chico, CA

May 1, Saturday

10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Cedar Grove in Lower Bidwell Park. Booths and information about endangered species. For information: <http://www.becnettripod.org/esf.html>

CALIFORNIA REDWOODS BIRD AND NATURE FESTIVAL (formerly Aleutian Goose Festival) Crescent City, CA

May 7 - 9, Friday - Sunday

Seventy field trips and workshop on birds, wildflowers, nature and Native American culture as well as boat and kayak trips. For information: <http://www.calredwoodsbirdfest.org/>



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. 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/; 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 for publication should be sent by email to tim.ruckle@comcast.net 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

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| <input type="checkbox"/> \$35 Family | <input type="checkbox"/> \$100 Sustaining | <input type="checkbox"/> \$1000 Benefactor |
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Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

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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

APRIL / MAY 2010

DATES TO REMEMBER

Apr	10	<i>2nd SAT</i> Upper Bidwell Park
Apr	11	Table Mountain
Apr	18	Pine Creek / Indian Fishery
Apr	19	Program Meeting, Oaxaca
Apr 22- May 2		Kern Valley Preserve
May	8	<i>2nd SAT</i> Upper Bidwell Park
May	16	Kayak Oroville Wilderness
May	17	Program Meeting, Gardening
Jun	4 - 6	Sierra Valley / Yuba Pass
Jun	12	<i>2nd SAT</i> Upper Bidwell Park

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

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ALTACAL Programs



April 19

OAXACA

May 17

GARDENING

ALTACAL

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