



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 2017

ALTACAL Programs

Programs 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. Chico.

In December the program is held on the second Monday and in July and August there are no programs.

February

Monday, February 20, 2017 6:30 p.m.

Chico Creek Nature Center

March

Monday, March 20, 2017 6:30 p.m.

Chico Creek Nature Center

WESTERN BURROWING OWLS in Northern California

Presented by LARRY JORDAN



Larry Jordan became aware of Burrowing Owls several years ago when, one winter evening on his way home from town he spotted an odd looking, long-legged owl on the gravel road leading to his home. He had no idea what it could have been and had to look it up in his field guide.

He soon learned that this small owl, active both day and night, was declining at a dangerously fast pace. He joined the California Burrowing Owl Consortium and began plans to increase local populations of this charismatic species. The artificial habitat created at Tuscan Preserve, here in Chico, is his first success in this effort to increase the number of Western Burrowing Owls in Northern California.

Larry is the Shasta County Coordinator for the California Bluebird Recovery Program and webmaster for Wintu Audubon Society. He is also co-founder of a movement to produce a new revenue stream for our National Wildlife Refuges by creating a Wildlife Conservation Pass.

Flora, Landscape & Avifauna of the CARIBOU ARM North Fork of the Feather River

Presented by GERRY INGCO

With his extensive career in forestry starting at an early age, Gerry knows well the flora and fauna of the many national forests he worked in. Join Gerry as he talks about the natural features, biological and human history of the canyon of the North Fork of the Feather River, with emphasis on the Caribou Arm of the North Fork of the Feather River. He will be adding local avian species among his slides too.



ALTACAL AUDUBON SOCIETY
Board of Directors

President	STEVE OVERLOCK 530 828-0966 stephenoverlock@sbcglobal.net
Vice President	KEN SOBON 530 592-3350 ksobon@thermalito.org
Secretary	CRIS CLINE ccline1028@gmail.com
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Membership	CATHY CARTER 530 342-9152 scarab4ever@gmail.com
Publications / Newsletter	DENISE DEVINE 530 345-8444 dsrdevine@hotmail.com
Publicity / Web Site	WAYLAND AUGUR 519-4724 wba@acm.org
Field Trips	MATT FORSTER 619 347-2269 findforster@yahoo.com
Sanctuary / Lands / Refuge	KEN SOBON 530 592-3350 ksobon@thermalito.org
Conservation Co-chair	SCOTT HUBER 530-321-5579 wmsscotthuber@gmail.com
Education	VACANT
Programs	JENNIFER PATTEN 345-9356 jpchico@sbcglobal.net
Sac NWR Bookstore	LEANN MCCONNELL 530 893-4703 leannmc2006@sbcglobal.net
Director - at-Large	KATHRYN HOOD 321-2852 verdant44@gmail.com
Director - at-Large	MARILYN GAMETTE 343-3154 gamettec@aol.com
Director - at-Large	DAWN GARCIA 530 513-1785 avifan59@gmail.com
Director - at-Large	MARY MUCHOWSKI 530-228-0625 mmuchowski@earthlink.net

from the President

by STEVE OVERLOCK



GREETINGS TO ALL

Just a friendly reminder that March is our annual membership renewal month. Please watch for a letter and renewal form to arrive in the mail soon and thanks in advance for keeping Altacal going strong.

Altacal welcomes Scott Huber back onto the Board as our Conservation Director. It is a perfect fit with the changes happening at a national level. Scott's desire to take on some of these critical issues and causes that are now at risk offers a ray of hope.

After over a decade of directing the NSW0 Banding Program and working as our Conservation Director, Dawn Garcia is taking a much deserved break from the lead role in such ventures. She is still dedicated to environmental science and will continue on as a Director-at-Large with Altacal - we are very grateful for her past service and looking forward to her help in this new role.

Also, Mary Muchowski, who we all know as our Christmas Bird Count organizer, has offered her services as a Director-at-Large as well. It's a natural fit as she does so much for Altacal anyway. Welcome Mary, and Thank You.

Altacal is also exploring the addition of an Executive Director to lead us into this new era. Please contact Dawn, Mary, or Matt for more information.

Finally, a huge thank you to Jennifer Patten and Kathy Trevino and everyone who helped with Snow Goose Festival no. 18. It just doesn't happen without such organizational leadership and so many knowledgeable, personable and wonderful volunteers.

Thanks

BOARD MEETINGS

5:15 p.m.
2nd Wednesday of each month

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

Altacal Audubon Members are welcome to attend

Conservation Corner

Conservation on the Rise - Welcome back Scott Huber! You may remember him as one of Altacal's energetic past Presidents. The board welcomes Scott Huber as Altacal's new Conservation Director. As for me, a volunteer (we all are) board member I have been looking for a co-conservation director for many years because of the enormity of opportunity our chapter has; locally, regionally and nationally, and in tandem with Audubon and National California. The position should be strong, active and have an energetic leader- Scott represents this. I have really enjoyed my service and now look forward to work with Scott on his conservation committee, as he moves forward with our conservation efforts. Welcome Scott!

DAWN GARCIA, Director-at-Large, Conservation Committee

by SCOTT HUBER

BIRDING FRIENDS,

I am excited to rejoin the Altacal Board as the Conservation Chair. The timing of my reunion is not a coincidence, it is predicated on the changes in political leadership at the national level. In 2008, California Audubon identified Climate Change as a major concern for birds and their habitats. Their website states that "Global warming is a serious threat to California birds ...global warming threatens the survival of 170 California species in the coming decades."

As a non-profit organization we do not take positions on candidates. That said, with the stated position of our new president, that global warming is a "hoax"; that he's "not a big believer in man-made climate change"; and that "nobody really knows" if climate change exists - our views are clearly in opposition to these. Additionally, the official 2016 platform of the party that now controls both chambers of congress claims that "environmental extremists" are working to "sustain the illusion of an environmental crisis". Given these examples, I believe that there has never been a more important time for those of us who care about birds, wildlife and natural systems to get involved; to raise our voices; to stand and be counted.

The Altacal bylaws direct the Conservation Committee to "study and recommend action on local, state and national government legislation, policies and activities affecting natural resources." Every day projects are being proposed and actions are being taken that affect birds. As the Conservation Chair I encourage you to help your Audubon chapter to get in front of these issues, by being vigilant and bringing to our attention any issue that you perceive as a threat, and I invite you to email me these concerns.

Examples of issues that we want to be made aware of include: Applications for development in sensitive areas, large-scale tree cutting or removal, instances of illegal take of birds or animals, upcoming policy changes by local government, etc. My goal is for our group to become more active in supporting actions that help birds, and more outspoken in combatting actions that have a negative impact on wildlife. Our highest priority is challenges in our own backyard – Butte, Glenn and Tehama counties, while lending our support to state and national projects.

Also part of our bylaws: "The Conservation Committee shall keep abreast of the conservation actions and efforts of local birding and environmental groups and recommend to the Board whether and the extent to which Altacal should participate in such actions or efforts." To this end, I anticipate that we will continue to lend our manpower to such efforts as the Thermalito Afterbay Grebe Conservation Project and Tri-colored Blackbird surveys. It is my feeling that Altacal should not just participate in the actions and efforts of others, but should take the lead on developing strategies that benefit the numerous California Bird Species of Special Concern that call our region home for all or part of the year, including: Burrowing Owl, Short-eared Owl, California Spotted Owl, Yellow Warbler, Yellow-breasted Chat, Tri-colored Blackbird and Yellow-headed Blackbird.

The next four years may be difficult for the environment, but as Albert Einstein said: "In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity." Please join me in seizing our opportunity to become a force for conservation.

UPCOMING Birding Trips

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

Check the Altacal Facebook page for updates.



February 11, Saturday

CENTRAL VALLEY BIRD CLUB AND ALTACAL

Trip Leader: Matt Forster

Join CV Bird Club and Altacal for a wonderful day of birding! We'll be leaving Chico for a Raptor/Forebay/Afterbay extravaganza. Altacal members will have a chance to bird with our fellow bird lovers of the Central Valley Birding Club. We'll begin by traveling down Cottonwood Rd in search of Ferruginous Hawks, Rough-Legged Hawks, Peregrine and Prairie Falcons, Merlin, Bald and Golden Eagles, Swans, and Burrowing Owl. Our next stop will be the Thermalito Forebay where we will be scanning for Canvasback, Redhead, Common Loon, Horned Grebe, Hooded Merganser, and other waders and divers. Next up will be the Thermalito Forebay for gulls and others. From there we can either head to Gray Lodge or sit and wait for our winter resident Short-eared Owls on Tres Vias Rd. Meet at Chico Park & Ride at 10 am (closest to Hwy 99). The trip will run until dusk so bring lunch, snacks, and plenty of water. Contact Matt (findforster@yahoo.com) for more information.



above -
Belted Kingfisher
Sac-NWR
Jan 2, 2017
by John Lewis

Hooded Merganser
Cal-Park Ponds
Dec 23, 2016
by John Lewis

February 18, Saturday

TUSCAN LOOP TO GENETIC RESOURCE CENTER

Trip Leader: Matt Forster

Meet at Chico Park & Ride at 9 am (closest to Hwy 99). We'll drive up to the Tuscan Loop to look for California Thrasher, Wrentit, and other chaparral birds. From there we'll slowly drive down Old Humboldt road in search of Lewis's Woodpecker, Rufous-crowned Sparrow, and raptors. We'll end by taking a leisurely stroll around the Genetic Resource Center to see what high elevation birds might still be around. We should be back to the Park & Ride by 12:30 pm. If rain, please pay attention to our Facebook page for updates or contact Matt (findforster@yahoo.com) for more information.

February 25, Saturday

SACRAMENTO NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE (GLENN)

Trip Leader: Matt Forster

Might be a little early for spring migrants but there will be plenty to see with the permanent residents. Meet at Chico Park & Ride at 8 am (closest to Hwy. 99). We'll then carpool to the Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge in Glenn County. All birders and nature lovers are welcome, especially those just learning about birds or wanting to learn about the birds of the Pacific Flyway. Bring binoculars, lunch, water, and a snack. Contact Matthew Forster at findforster@yahoo.com for more information.

March 11, Saturday

BIRDING THE PROPOSED SITES RESERVOIR

Trip Leader: Matt Forster

Join us for a trip to Colusa County and the proposed Sites Reservoir where we have been extended an invitation to bird on private property. This historic area is home to Bald and Golden Eagles, Burrowing Owls, Horned Larks, Falcons, Greater Roadrunner, Barn Owl, Great Horned Owl, Rock Wren, and many others. Not only will we be able to bird this gorgeous area, but we will also learn the history of this beautiful valley. We will be leaving the Chico Park & Ride in Chico (closest to Hwy 99) at 8 am. There is no set return time. Limited to 12 people, RSVP to Matt Forster, findforster@yahoo.com for more information.

March 18, Saturday

TABLE MOUNTAIN BIRD AND FLOWER WALK

Trip Leader: Matt Forster

Meet at Chico Park & Ride off Hwy 32 (closest to Hwy 99) at 9am. We'll be scouring beautiful Table Mountain to view wildlife and wildflowers! Hawks, Falcons, Horned Larks and other low range mountain birds. We'll also get beautiful looks of blooming wildflowers and Canyon and Rock Wrens from the waterfalls! Bring lunch, water and walking shoes! Matt Forster, findforster@yahoo.com, 619-347-2269



POACHERS

Use Social Media To Kill Rare-to-area Duck In Oroville

by DAWN GARCIA

Who would have known there is an underground group of poachers seeking rare birds to kill and mount as trophies? And that they are likely using social media to find their targets. Carolyn Short and I were walking dogs on our favorite Brad Freeman trail starting at the diversion dam on the Feather River. We usually connect with the cardio-pumping Dan Beebe trail, but this day 12 January 2017, we decided to go in reverse, first taking the flat along the river through the tunnel. Just above the train trestle Carolyn pointed to the river and said "what is that?" With binoculars it materialized into the **Long-tailed Duck**, the notable duck that was first observed during the **Oroville Christmas Bird Count** and discovered by Altacal Audubon Society members and bird counters Matt Forster and Diego Bustamante on 30 December 2016. Since the discovery of this *rare-to-the-area duck*, many birders had been to look for it and posted our findings on Facebook and local bird list-serves. That very day at least 10 birders came to see it, including Carolyn and I. Birder JT Lewis came out to photograph this beauty and these are the best photos we have of the bird (live bird-JT photo above). Photos were reviewed by plumage and molt experts and it was identified as an immature male.

On 12 Jan, Carolyn and I marveled at our closest look at the duck. Now the bird was only 150' away, seemed undisturbed, and gave us nice binocular views for a good 30 seconds before turning and flying north across the river. We oohed and aahed at the great views of this bird in flight- black back and wings split by white scapular feathers and that long central tail feather."Marvelous, lucky us, our best view yet," we exclaimed as we continued our walk upstream. Only 10 minutes later we were startled by popping sounds, gun-like, but very different than the typical shots from the nearby shooting range.

Looking across the river, off the Cherokee Road spur, we heard more shots. "They're shooting!" I said to Carolyn as I looked through my bins. I saw gulls flying in a tight circle and something white in the water, including white feathers scattered on the river surface. "HEY, stop shooting!" I yelled to two guys, the shooter outside of the truck, in camo with a long-barreled gun and one in the driver's seat of the white standard-sized extended cab pick-up. Startled by us, he jumped in their truck and took off. Unfortunately I could not see the make of the vehicle or its license plate. I scanned the water again and saw a black and white bird, not distinctly contrasting like a bufflehead or golden-eye, but less patterned. "That could be the long-tail duck." "No way!" "Yes, call CalTIP!" Fortunately Carolyn had her phone, called them and also the police. From one of those conversations a game warden returned our call. We hoofed it back to the car so we could try to retrieve the floating bird from the north side of the River.

When we got there I looked through my bins and yes, it was the Long-tailed Duck, unmoving, beak underwater, dead, about 100' off bank. While we waited for someone official we called JoAnna Arroyo and she brought an inflatable raft. We pumped up the raft, I jumped in and paddled to the duck. Back on shore, I handed him to Carolyn; we took pictures, admired the plumage and pattern and were saddened that this bird who brought so much excitement to the birding community, including us only 1 hour before, was the victim to selfish gun-toting poachers.

What we learned later was even more unbelievable. These men were not likely naïve shooters using birds as target practice, but were knowledgeable poachers, intent on killing a rare species for collection purposes. The California Department of Fish and Wildlife warden was unable to make it to the site but we had a good conversation, and I sent him maps and pics. He said, "The duck was killed unlawfully on state park property. The poachers mount the rare ducks and collect bands as trophies, especially the GPS collars on geese. I'm sure they heard about the duck through the grapevine, most likely Facebook."



Social media. We know it has many benefits, and we are learning, many downfalls. This Long-tailed Duck might have been found, followed and targeted due to the birding community's excited Facebook and local birding listserve posts. After searching the internet, JoAnna found a number of blogs that

spoke to the rarities found by birders, joking about how birders would react when birds were found dead, and the demise of some ducks because of information posted. This story is meant to alert birders that there may be bad-intentioned people following posts, and alert poachers that we are aware of this.

Shooting rarities is not a new phenomenon. I include an example of a past discussion by the American Birding Association 2012: <http://blog.aba.org/2012/05/shooting-rarities.html>

For more about Long-tailed Ducks go to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology: https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Long-tailed_Duck/lifehistory

To report poaching call CDFW, 1-888-334-caltip (888-334-2258). Call your local police if poaching is occurring where people might be in danger.



Christmas BIRD COUNT RESULTS

by MARY MUCHOWSKI

Ken and Jim Thomas, Oroville CBC, Dec 30, 2016 by Mary Muchowski

December 17, 2016

CHICO CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

COMPILER: Mary Muchowski

Thirty-five people showed up to volunteer for the Chico CBC on a cold morning, but it turned out to be a fine day to volunteer for Altacal Audubon. The highlight was definitely a **Red-naped Sapsucker** found by Matt, Ken and Jim's team! My team found a **Black-throated Gray Warbler** at One Mile, and Diego, Cris and Gary got 5 **Mountain Bluebirds** in Upper Park. We did pretty good on raptors with 14 **Bald Eagles**, one **Golden Eagle**, 5 **Ferruginous Hawks**, 71 **Red-Tails**, 39 **Red-shouldered Hawks**, 6 **White-tailed Kites**, 30 **American Kestrels**, 2 **Peregrine Falcons**, 13 **Cooper's Hawks**, 4 "**Sharpies**", 8 **Northern Harriers** and 4 **Merlins**. We had **111 species** and **25,935 individual birds!** We met at Woodstock's Pizza (thanks for the discount Woodstocks!) to tell our stories from the day and tally all the birds.



Red-naped Sapsucker, Chico CBC, Dec 17, 2016 by Ken Sobon

December 30, 2016

OROVILLE CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

COMPILER: Gaylord Grams

While we were a little tentative about holding this count on a Friday (to avoid holding it on New Year's Eve or New Year's Day), we had a record turnout of volunteers, and the weather turned out to be great for counting birds. Once again, Matt Forster found the best bird: a very rare **Long-tailed Duck!** Diego said that Matt had been talking about finding one in the Oroville area all morning, so they had lunch near the Diversion Dam (not in their count area) and low and behold, Matt found a first year male LTDU between the Diversion Dam and the Railroad bridge! Of course, it took a little convincing to get Diego to even look, because he thought Matt was joking (which he is known for). John (JT) Lewis got the best picture of it. Diego also found some **Mew Gulls** on the upstream side of the Railroad Bridge. Phil, Andy and Hilary found a **Red-breasted Merganser** on the Afterbay, along with 1260 **Canvasbacks**, 125 **Redheads** (!), and five **Cackling Geese**. Dave, Mike and Paul found a couple of **Blue-Gray Gnatcatchers**, 5 **Barrow's Goldeneyes**, and 3 **Merlins** in the Oroville Wildlife Area. Ken, Charlie, Jim and I found 24 **Bald Eagles**, 3 **Ferruginous Hawks**, one **Rough-legged Hawk**, a **Merlin**, 3 **Burrowing Owls**, and 2 **Prairie Falcons** on the Nelson/Cottonwood Route. We ended up counting **28,173 individual birds of 122 species.** (see page 5. for a sad update)

Sooty Grouse
Oroville CBC
Dec 30, 2016
by Dave
Fundakowski



Habitat Gardens

GROWING OUR COMMUNITY WILDLIFE CORRIDOR

by MELINDA TEVES, Project Coordinator



A brilliant team of 'habitat' gardeners at Wildflower School

Local kids at Wildflower School and at the Boys & Girls Club are chipping in to restore our community's wildlife habitat and protect our water. Their enthusiasm is contagious, and a really fun part of Altacal's Neighborhood Habitat Certification Program. This program, which supports the creation of habitat-friendly and water-wise gardens, now includes 220 local gardens with 70 fully certified 'habitat' gardens.

If you have a chance to view our 'Wildlife Corridor' map on our new website, you can see how our community wildlife corridor is growing. Qualifying for 'certification' is very do-able. We encourage participants to:

1. Replace at least half a lawn with natural landscaping
*Sheet-mulching with cardboard rather than landscaping-cloth helps preserve soil health.
2. Include native California plants in your new landscape. These plants are ideally adapted to our climate and to the needs of local wildlife.
3. Use low-water-volume irrigation to help conserve water.
4. Avoid the use of sprays to encourage beneficial insects and pollinators.
5. Pick one or two from some fun wildlife-friendly suggestions like: providing a safe bird bath (10 ft from cat hiding places), or cultivating a wildflower patch, or keeping a brush pile ... or another from our list of wildlife stewardship suggestions.

The Neighborhood Habitat Certification Program provides local resources and coupons to help folks get started. And 'Certified Neighborhood Habitat' participants can receive a small garden sign to help us spread the word on how fun and important it is to build habitat.

We'd really like to take this time, before we head into another beautiful springtime (hopefully a Garden Tour), to thank some of our kind partners. Thank you to Nani Teves, who helped us with grant-writing and getting the program started. Cal Water and the City of Chico have been very generous funders. Partner organizations, including the Mount Lassen Chapter of the California Native Plant Society, Butte County Master Gardeners, Butte Environmental Council, Floral Native Nursery, and Jennifer Jewell at the Gateway Museum have shared their valuable time and wisdom. Roger Lederer, Carol Burr, and John Whittlesey all provided much needed advice and expertise from the beginning. We've learned so much working on joint projects with such committed experts, and with many wonderful scientists, artists, students, and landscape designers. We'd love to also thank the program's creative participants and members who've shared terrific habitat-gardening ideas ... and even opened up their gardens to the public to share these ideas. Thank you all so much for your commitment and generosity!

We hope to partner with the Mount Lassen Chapter of the CNPS again for a Spring Garden Tour and will post on our new website soon. Happy 'Habitat' gardening everyone!





Studying WESTERN and CLARK'S GREBES on Thermalito Afterbay

by MAUREEN MORALES

The Altacal Audubon Society is taking part in the Audubon California Grebe Conservation Project. Altacal's role is two-part. They are to work on public outreach and education regarding Western and Clark's grebes and they are also to monitor and evaluate the Western and Clark's grebes success rates in breeding at Thermalito Afterbay in Butte County.

REVIEW OF SURVEYS OF GREBES AT THERMALITO AFTERBAY FROM 5/19/2016 TO 9/8/2016 Boat surveys of the Thermalito Afterbay have been conducted for numerous years now with a representative from California Dept of Fish & Wildlife, a representative from the California Dept of Water Resources, and a representative from Altacal Audubon. In 2016 the main surveyors are Ryan Martin, a senior environmental scientist from California Department of Water Resources in Oroville, Byron Stone from the California Department of Fish & Wildlife in Oroville, and Maureen Morales from Altacal Audubon. We are conducting two types of surveys. Roughly monthly we conduct a full survey of the entire Thermalito Afterbay and get a count of the Western & Clark's grebes and a count of the nests and/or young we encounter. We also conduct "cove surveys" which are surveys of just the nesting coves to see how the grebes are progressing at their nesting and incubation of eggs. These types of surveys are done weekly to bi-weekly during the height of the breeding season. Later in the season we observe how successful the grebes were at raising their young by counting the numbers of chicks present and also get a rough count of the brood sizes by viewing how many young are with one adult.

The full lake surveys are conducted in a small motor boat that can survey the large lake in four to five hours. The nesting cove surveys are conducted in a small boat called the Mud Buddy which can operate in the shallow and pond weed filled coves that the grebes favor for nesting without getting the propeller caught up in the plants. These surveys generally take two hours.

The surveys of Western and Clark's grebes at Thermalito Afterbay began in 2016 on May 19. The total number of grebes counted was 632; species breakdown is 392 WEGR (Western Grebes), 240 CLGR (Clark's Grebes). At that time of the year, the grebes appeared to be paired up with multiple observations of courtship displays such as "head bobbing" and "rushing". No nests or nesting behavior was observed.

The nesting season began in earnest in early July. We found the grebes to be nesting in Larkin Cove which is on the east side of the lake and found 32 complete nests there. The next time we went to Larkin Cove 2 weeks later, all of the nests were abandoned. We cannot hypothesize

why they were abandoned. The pond weed was especially thick there in 2016, which could have introduced water that is too warm or land mammal predation, but it is impossible to say exactly what the cause of the nest abandonment was.

We proceeded to survey the more westerly coves where nesting has occurred in the past. We went to the Ski Cove and saw no nesting occurring. Then we continued west to the Clay Banks. There we observed many grebes in pairs and performing courtship displays. We also saw a few nest starts.

On our next survey on August 3, 2016 we found that the grebes had made 59 nests in Ski Cove! There they stayed for the rest of the nesting season and successfully reared their young. They eventually had a total of 74 active nests in Ski Cove.

On our survey on August 25, 2016 we counted 82 chicks (60 WEGR, 22 CLGR). It was a successful breeding season.

Some of this success was due to the lake levels being kept high until late July which helped the success of the nesting activities. Grebes need to be nesting in water with fairly consistent water levels. If it gets too shallow they don't feel safe because they can't dive into the water to escape threats. When the grebes abandoned their first nesting colony at Larkin Cove some time between our cove surveys on July 7, 2016 and July 21, 2016, the lake levels were still very high. This gave the grebes the opportunity to move to Ski Cove and rebuild their nests. By August 3rd there were 60 nests in Ski Cove.

The breeding season at Thermalito Afterbay for the Western and Clark's grebes was a success in 2016. The breeding success ratio for young to adults on August 25, 2016 was $82/503=.16$. The breeding success ratio for young to adults on September 8, 2016 was $63/356=.17$. These numbers are similar to the averages in 2014 and 2015, both of which were also drought years. Prior to the drought years, the averages were significantly higher. The water levels at Thermalito Afterbay were kept high by the CA Dept of Water Resources until the nesting was nearly complete which contributed to their success.



Get to know YOUR NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES!



by ASHLEY HUFF, Visitor Services Assistant

Swans *BONDED FOR LIFE*

Have you ever witnessed the immaculate bond between two swans? Their loyalty and faithfulness to their mates is so well-known, that the image of two swans with their necks intertwined into the shape of a heart has become a universal symbol of relationships.

As the temperatures begin to drop, and the arctic starts to freeze over, thousands of tundra and trumpeter swans get a running start, like galloping horses, and burst into flight, leaving their breeding grounds in Alaska, Russia, and Canada behind, in search of the most suitable ice-free wintering grounds. They form long lasting pairs that stay together throughout the year and migrate in family groups with other waterfowl. By late November and early December, swans start to arrive in Oregon and California. But why don't we see them on the Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge Complex (Complex)?

Swans prefer shallow undisturbed bodies of water such as ponds, lakes, and riverine marshes - but harvested agricultural fields growing winter grain provide excellent foraging spots for these massive birds. One of the benefits swans have from mating for life is learning from their successes and failures each time they raise cygnets. Cygnets stay with their family for up to four years, which helps them remember areas that provide the best habitat for the winter season. This has bonded them to the land they have shared with their ancestors in the Sacramento Valley for generations.



Tundra Swans by Hazel Holby

The trumpeter swan is our largest native waterfowl stretching at 6 feet tall with a wingspan that may exceed 8 feet and weighing more than 25 pounds—almost twice as big as the more abundant tundra swan. To get that much mass airborne, swans require a 100-meter long runway of open water.

The Complex provides wintering grounds for hundreds of thousands of other waterfowl, and this kind of open water is hard to find for such impressive birds on our managed wetlands. Agricultural fields with waste grain are the most ideal spot to find these amazing creatures in the winter. There is plenty of food and less competition for space with other birds.

Starting in mid-February, these swans start getting the urge to travel again and they leave California to head north back to their breeding areas. By late March, they begin to arrive in the Great Salt Lake area of Utah and by mid-May most of them have made it back to the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta in Alaska.



Due to aggressive conservation efforts to protect swans from market hunters and feather collectors, there are now tens of thousands of swans in the western United States. One of the many places in the local area to witness the family and pair bonds is south of the Llano Seco Unit near the cross road between County Road Z and Seven Mile Lane. Another popular area includes "District 10" north of Marysville.

Banding

NORTHERN SAW-WHET OWL MONITORING MOVES IN TO 2017

by DAWN GARCIA, OMPD outgoing



In 2017, Altacal's Northern Saw-whet Owl project will be running for 13 consecutive years! And it will be under the new directive of banders Ken Sobon and Julie Newman. After 12 seasons of monitoring, I made a difficult decision to step down, and they stepped up! I couldn't be

happier to pass the pellet to these two professionals who have volunteered for the project. They recognize the value of long-term monitoring, and hope to answer other questions about spring migration and summer use of the Reserve. Ken Sobon is Altacal's Vice President, has volunteered with the project for 5 years, is a science teacher, and has lots of energy! Julie Newman is a retired wildlife biologist, has banded a variety of other species and has volunteered with our owl project for 2 years. A great combo!

On the science front, our project is the longest running research project on CSU, Chico's Reserves and has enlightened us to behavior and natural history of our local population of saw-whets and contributed to the continental effort, Project OwlNet. As a scientist it is always important to share data, and by the time you read this, the results of our owl monitoring efforts (2005-2015) will be published in the Central Valley Bird Bulletin, a local scientific journal, check it out here! <http://www.cvbirds.org/bulletin/>. Results of our 2016 season included another 57 owls! See the previous newsletter and my blog for some of the highlights: <http://birdbling.blogspot.com/>

As importantly to me as a conservationist, I am proud that we have introduced many community members to the enigmatic owl via field trips, charitable fund raisers, and student and volunteer recruitment. The project requires well-trained, dedicated volunteers, and we had a great 2016 crew; Ken and Julie, Julie Woodruff, Wyatt Hersey, Maureen, Erika Iacona, and Kim Armstrong. Thank you all for your enthusiasm and efforts. See you under the stars in 2017!

* On the Breeding Biology of Northern Saw-whet Owls (*Aegolius acadicus*)

Author(s): Jeffrey S. Marks, Ann Nightingale, Jenna M. McCullough Source: Journal of Raptor Research, 49(4):486-497. Published By: The Raptor Research Foundation DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3356/rapt-49-04-486-497.1> URL: <http://www.bioone.org/doi/full/10.3356/rapt-49-04-486-497.1>



by KEN SOBON, Owl Monitoring Project Director

As the new director, I am excited to continue the research that Dawn Garcia started. My intent is to not only continue her research but to add to and expand the data. Research has shown that Northern Saw-whet Owls are very opportunistic. If appropriate nest sites are provided they will take advantage of them.* In addition to the seasonal study of migration patterns of the Northern Saw-whet Owl, I plan to investigate whether or not our migrating and wintering owls will breed on the preserve if provided nesting boxes.

During winter vacation, with the help of some very enthusiastic college volunteers we built fifteen nesting boxes. The nesting boxes are roughly 10 X 8 X 16 and have a three-inch entrance hole. The boxes have been placed throughout the preserve on a variety of locations and different tree species. My team and I will conduct regular monitoring of the nesting boxes to see whether or not Northern Saw-whet Owls, Western Screech Owls, Kestrels, or even a Northern Flying Squirrel is utilizing them.

When we find that the boxes are being used we will measure chicks and adults and place a small aluminum band on their leg. The band number and data will be sent to The National Bird Banding Laboratory, a national database. With this information, we can see if the owls return to our site or one of the other 120 Project OwlNet banding stations across the country.

We will also conduct spring mist netting and banding, and fall mist netting and banding. Information from the project will contribute to local and regional knowledge and to the North American (US and Canada) program, Project OwlNet.

Local Chapter Membership Application

Please join us!

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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; membership **programs** with media presentations on birds and related topics; a bi-monthly **newsletter**, the White-tailed Kite; **website** www.altacal.org/; 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 to Denise Devine by email to dsrdevine@hotmail.com on the first of the month, prior to the next issue.

THANKS to all of you who contribute regularly by sending in reports, articles and photos for the White-tailed Kite – Denise, Editor.



OTHER ALTACAL ACTIVITIES

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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/

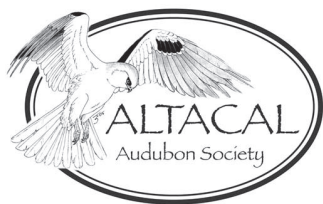
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CURRENT RESIDENT



White-tailed Kite

FEBRUARY / MARCH 2017

DATES TO REMEMBER

Feb	11	CV Bird Club
Feb	18	Tuscan Loop and GRC
Feb	20	Program - <i>Burrowing Owls</i>
Feb	25	Sac Nat Wildlife Refuge
Mar	11	Sites Reservoir
Mar	18	Table Mountain
Mar	20	Program - <i>Caribou Arm</i>

For updated information check the Altacal website
altacal.org

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ALTACAL Programs



Feb 20
Burrowing Owls

Mar 20
Caribou Arm

ALTACAL

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