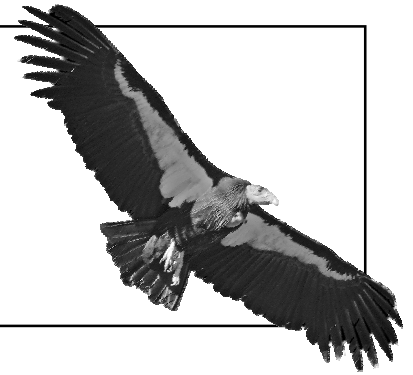


# *The* **CALIFORNIA CONDOR**

Ventura Audubon Society **APRIL 2009** Volume 29 Number 8  
A Chapter of the National Audubon [www.VenturaAudubonSociety.org](http://www.VenturaAudubonSociety.org)



## **CALL NOTES ...Neil Ziegler, President**

### **BIRDATHON!**

Spring has arrived and so has the **VAS Annual Onik Arian Memorial Birdathon**. This is our only major fundraiser for the year and with your generous response this Society can continue to provide outstanding monthly programs, publish a monthly newsletter, develop educational outreach programs, fund special conservation and environmental projects, and help inform the public on important birding and wildlife issues.

Any scheduled field trip during the month of APRIL may be used to pledge money per species seen, or you may prefer to make a donation in any amount.

Please use the green pledge form and preaddressed envelope provided in this newsletter to send in your pledge or donation.

For those of you who receive the newsletter via email, note that the attachment pledge form has the address to send in your donation.

## **REMINDER**

Please save **Saturday May 16<sup>th</sup>** for the annual year end picnic and election meeting at the Hedrick Ranch Nature Area in Santa Paula. More information and driving directions will be provided in the May newsletter.

## **PAINLESS WAYS TO CONTRIBUTE TO VENTURA AUDUBON**

You can help support Ventura Audubon Society by purchasing optics equipment through Eagle Optics. To participate go to [venturaaudubon.org](http://venturaaudubon.org) and click on the link Eagle Optics. For every purchase through this site Eagle Optics will donate 5% of the sale to Ventura Audubon. If you prefer to order by phone (800-289-1132), just ask for the 5% donation to Ventura Audubon when you order.

**APRIL PROGRAM ...Janice Sussha, Program Chair**  
**Tuesday April 14, 7:30 p.m., Poinsettia Pavilion, 3451 Foothill Rd, Ventura**

### **BOTANICAL ADVENTURES: THE CANADIAN ROCKIES** **Barbara Collins**

Barbara Collins, who has a Ph.D. from the University of Illinois, has been teaching at California Lutheran University since 1963 with courses for a major in biology: Flora of Southern California, Wildflowers of the Sierras, and California Plant Communities. She has performed numerous environmental impact studies and has been for several years a consultant for Westlake Lake Management Association. She has authored 10 books, including the third edition of "Key to Coastal and Chaparral Flowering Plants of Southern California." In 2007 she received the President's Award for Excellence in Teaching.

The program will be a PowerPoint presentation of wildflowers in the chaparral, deserts, mountains, and the Canadian Rockies. The presentation will also include adventures in hunting rare and endangered plants, and viewing some of the garden flowers in the area. Please join us!

# BIRD OF THE MONTH – APRIL 2009

Article and Photo by DAVID PEREKSTA

## Bullock's Oriole (*Icterus bullockii*)



April brings numbers of northbound migrants through Ventura County. Many pass through to points further north while others stay to breed. The Bullock's Oriole is both a common migrant and breeder locally.

The Bullock's Oriole is a medium-sized oriole with a rather short, square tail, long wings, and straight bill. Unlike all other orioles, the entire lower mandible and edge of the upper mandible is pale. Adult males have a black crown, nape, back, and eyeline. The eyeline is offset by a bright orange eyebrow and cheek. The wings are black with a broad white wing patch and the tail is black with orange-yellow outer tail feathers. A narrow black bib runs from the chin down the middle of the throat to the center of the upper breast. The remainder of the underparts and the rump are orange, paling to yellow-orange below the breast. Females have a pale gray back, a yellowish eyebrow, a pale yellow rump, and thin white wingbars. The yellow on the underparts is restricted to the throat, breast, and undertail coverts, with the belly and flanks a grayish white. Immature males are similar to females, but the yellow-orange on the underparts is brighter and they have black lores and bib. The song is a musical series of whistles that end on a sweeter note: *kjp, kit-tick, kit-tick, whew, wheet*. Calls include a short rattle and other notes.

Bullock's Orioles breed in broadleaf deciduous woodlands, especially riparian areas with cottonwoods and sycamores, and often nest in eucalyptus trees near the coast. Spring migrants arrive by mid-March and most pass through by early May. Fall migrants appear by mid-July and are common during late August and September. As a breeding species, they are most numerous in the woodlands of coastal and foothill canyons. They prefer open woods and edges rather than the interior of dense forests. Their distinctive nest, like other orioles, is a hanging pouch that is woven of plant fibers, bark, grapevines, grass, yarn, or string. Bullock's Oriole was formerly merged with Baltimore Oriole (*I. galbula*) as a single species, Northern Oriole. The two species interbreed where their ranges meet on the Great Plains.

They breed from southern British Columbia, southern Saskatchewan and western North Dakota south to Baja California, central Mexico, and southern Texas. The species departs early from breeding grounds to molt in the desert southwest. They winter primarily from Mexico to Costa Rica, but small numbers remain in coastal California in groves of blooming eucalyptus trees.

Bullock's Orioles occur widely throughout Ventura County from mid-March through September. Migrants may be seen in any wooded area including parks and neighborhoods. Breeding pairs can be found widely in a variety of wooded areas, but reliable locations include Big Sycamore Canyon, LaJolla Canyon, Rancho Sierra Vista, Canada Larga, Wheeler Gorge, Rose Valley, Lockwood Valley, and riparian habitat along the Santa Clara River and other rivers and streams throughout the county. Wintering individuals are rare, but they are occasionally found in groves of blooming eucalyptus trees like those at Camino Real Park where they have been seen with Baltimore Orioles.



## APRIL FIELD TRIPS ...Judy Dugan

Beginners are welcome on all field trips. Light drizzle does not necessarily cancel trips, but heavier rain will. If in doubt, please call the trip leader.

**Birdathon: Any scheduled trip in April may be used to pledge money per species seen!**

**Wednesday, April 1, 8:30 a.m. Lake Casitas. Leaders: Jan Lewison (643-3353) & Linda O'Neill.** We should see Snowy & Great Egrets, Great Blue Herons, spring migrants, and many more. Take Hwy 33 towards Ojai; exit Casitas Vista Rd. Turn rt. and go under freeway past Foster Park to 1<sup>st</sup> rt., Santa Anna Rd. Follow to park. Or take Hwy 33 to Hwy 150, turn left and follow signs to the lake, or meet at the Ventura Co. Museum at 8:00 to car pool.

**Saturday, April 4, 8:00 – 12:00 a.m. Restoration Work Day, Santa Paula. Hedrick Ranch Nature Area Restoration Program. 8:00 a.m. for birding, 9:00 a.m. for work. Leader: Sandy Hedrick (340-0478).** Wear sturdy work shoes and gardening gloves. Take Hwy 126 to Santa Paula, 10<sup>th</sup> St. Exit. Go under freeway, right on Harvard, right on 12<sup>th</sup> and cross S.C. River Bridge. Go 3.7 miles to 20395 S. Mountain Rd. Turn in and go north towards the river approximately ½ mile on the agricultural road to parking area adjacent to the S.C. riverbed.

**Saturday, April 11, 8:30 a.m. Meher Mt., 9902 Sulphur Mountain Rd. Leader: Betsy Bachman (646-4407).** This 200 acre property is a mixture of oak woods and open fields. With a water source, natural habitat & feeders, there should be a large variety of birds. Another plus is a great view with elevation of 2900 ft. To car pool, meet at the Ventura Co. Museum at 7:30 or at the Park'n Ride lot at Ojai Ave & Fox St in Ojai at 8:00. Access to Sulphur Mt. Rd. is from Hwy 150 in Upper Ojai (not Hwy 33 in Casitas Springs). Driveway is on the left side of the road & clearly marked. Parking is on the right, inside the gate, not at the house. No smoking, and as usual, no dogs allowed.

**Wednesday, April 15, 8:30 a.m. Bird & Plant Walk, Arroyo Verde Park. Leaders: Carl and Nancy Schorsch (643-5825)** The orioles will be abundant and hopefully the wildflowers will be blooming and Carl will identify them. Meet at the last parking lot with restrooms on the left. Park is at Day Rd. and Foothill Rd. in Ventura.

**April 18 & 19, San Luis Obispo Weekend Birding Trip. Leader: Neil Ziegler (983-7207). Saturday, 8:00 a.m. Laguna Lake.** From Hwy 101, take the Madonna Rd/Hwy 227 exit. Follow on Madonna Rd to the park which is located midway along the north side of Madonna Rd. In the varied habitats, we should see wetland birds, migrating warblers, various sparrows & perhaps Blue Grosbeaks. From there we will go to other birdy sites in the area. On Sunday, we will go to Montana De Oro. There are many choices for lodging, but many are already booked for that weekend, so you should make your reservation ASAP. You can always cancel. I made a reservation at Travelodge, 1825 Monterey St. (805-543-5110). Contact Judy (642-0842 or [catmai03@yahoo.com](mailto:catmai03@yahoo.com)) if you plan to go.

**Saturday, April 25, 8:30 – 10:30 a.m. Beginners' Bird Walk. Ojai-Persimmon Hill area. Leader: Allen Bertke (640-903).** Join us at Allen's place. We should see Hooded & Bullock's Orioles, Western Bluebirds, hummingbirds, and many more. Bring binoculars, a field guide, hat and water. From Ventura, take Hwy 33 to Creek Rd. Turn right and follow Creek Rd. for about 5 miles. Just past the 10mph left hand curve, take 1<sup>st</sup> right onto Saddle Lane (Look for Persimmon Hill sign; Saddle Lane sign is difficult to see.) Once on Saddle, go straight at the stop sign. 481 Saddle Lane will be the 4<sup>th</sup> house on the right past the stop sign.

### Mark Your Calendar:

May 2 – Heritage Valley (Fillmore/Piru) Hotspots  
 May 16 – Annual Picnic  
 May 23 – Canada Larga – Beginners' Walk

## HEDRICK RANCH NATURE AREA STATUS REPORT ...Sandy Hedrick

## BEGINNERS' BIRD WALK ..Allen Bertke, Leader

The past season marked the tenth year of VAS participation in habitat restoration activities at the Hedrick Ranch. Hundreds of volunteers have given innumerable hours laboring to remove invasives and replace them with native habitat. Our original vision for restoration of the area has been largely achieved.

Major milestones (during this time) include the acquisition of the 225 acre Hedrick Ranch Nature Area (HRNA) by the Coastal Conservancy and deeding to Friends of the Santa Clara River for stewardship. VAS has worked closely with FSCR as the primary volunteer organization involved in restoration. Over one half million dollars in grants to support the restoration process have been received from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, US Natural Resources Conservation Service, California Department of Fish and Game, and State Water Resources Control Board.

Approximately 45 acres of river terrace and upper floodplain habitat have been largely cleared of arundo and other invasive weeds and a native plant nursery has been established on-site to propagate local native plants for HRNA restoration efforts.

There has been a radical transformation of the restoration area from cattle pastures choked with thistle and non-native grass and surrounded by dense arundo, to a rich riparian habitat. Surveys in the spring of 2008 found 65 bird species on or adjacent to HRNA, and 28 species breeding. Probably most significant was the presence of at least 11 pairs of endangered Least Bell's vireo breeding on or adjacent to the area last year.

We are hopeful for another productive year of breeding for riparian birds on the HRNA this year. Some early returnees are showing up now. Scheduled events upcoming for VAS members at the area this spring include a restoration work-day April 4 (see field trips) and the annual B-B-Q and birdwalk on May 16. Many thanks to all the dedicated VAS members who have given their efforts to restore a significant habitat area on the Santa Clara River.

## SANTA BARBARA AUDUBON BENEFIT FUND RAISER

The Santa Barbara Development committee is having a fundraiser on July 18 and 19th, an alfresco art exhibit and sale by Southern California Artists Painting for the Environment, from 11am to 6pm in the La Arcada, a plaza off State and behind the SB Art Museum. SCAPE and the Santa Barbara Audubon Society are cohosts. There will be a raffle for a mixed case of Los Cinco Locos wine and beautiful art for sale.

*Welcome back my friends  
To the show that never ends  
We're so glad you could attend  
Come inside, come inside*

-Emerson, Lake and Palmer

For the third year in a row, the Beginner's Bird Walk was combined with the Great Back Yard Bird Count, which in itself is in its twelfth year. I guess that makes our little walk the 3<sup>rd</sup> annual 12<sup>th</sup> annual Great Back Yard Bird Count.

I always get a kick out of that name – it's like the carnival barker announcing his next show. "Yes, friends, come inside and witness the Spectacular, the Fabulous and Stupendous, the GREAT Back Yard Bird Count! Be amazed at the acrobatic goldfinches, hanging upside down to feed! Marvel at the tiny but feisty hummingbirds, so bold I have seen them chase after Red-tailed Hawks that get too close to their nests! Look in awe at the woodpeckers, who can rapidly hammer a tree without getting a concussion!"

Yes, we saw all of those birds, and more. A total of 55 species were observed by the eagle eyes of our participants. Unfortunately, none of those eagle eyes actually spotted an eagle, but the Osprey and Red-tailed Hawks weren't bad.

The duck species were a little on the light side, with only Mallards, Gadwalls, Ruddys, a lone Common Merganser and two hybrid domestic domestics making an appearance. However, we were graced with a pair of Mew Gulls, which was very nice. There were the usual sparrows, finches, blue birds and blackbirds, with special guest appearances by a Phainopepla, Red-breasted Sapsucker, some Violet-green Swallows and a Nuttall's Woodpecker.

See you all on the next walk. In the meantime keep your eyes open wherever you are, for bird watching truly is the show that never ends.





## NOTES FROM THE FIELD

...David Pereksta

Throughout late February and early March, many of the wintering birds that were reported over the last few months continued with a few new birds of interest being found. With April approaching, it is a perfect time to go out and start looking for migrants moving north through the county. We are already seeing early signs of migration with flocks of swallows being reported in early March, **Rufous Hummingbirds** showing up at backyard feeders, and reports of **Warbling Vireos** and **Wilson's Warblers** returning.

The following suggestions are lifted from past year's columns, but are always relevant for April. Flocks of loons, scoters, and seabirds will be streaming by offshore and can be scoped from Mugu Rock and other coastal points. Shorebirds will be moving through coastal wetlands and estuaries like Mugu Lagoon and the Santa Clara River Mouth. Neotropical migrant songbirds will be passing through the county's canyons, mountains, and woodlands returning from a winter in the tropics and should be looked for in places like Sycamore, LaJolla, Santa Paula, and Sisar Canyons and Wheeler Gorge Campground.

The only **Lewis's Woodpecker** reported in the county this winter was found in east Ventura 15-16 Mar (RM). This species has become increasingly difficult to find locally in the winter.

Several uncommon wintering species continued in Mugu Lagoon and on the adjacent Oxnard Plain. The **Tundra Swan** was discovered again near Point Mugu and five **American Bitterns** were also seen in the same area on 21 Feb (DB). Two **Pacific Golden-Plovers** on the sod fields along Arnold Road on 15 Feb (DP) were likely wintering and may have been the same individuals that lingered late into the fall. A **Common Moorhen** continued in an agricultural pond along Las Posas Road through 8 Mar, and the **Sandhill Crane**, two **Black Scoters**, four **Common Goldeneyes**, and at least seven **Black Skimmers** continued at Mugu Lagoon through 15 Feb. An adult **Reddish Egret** and one of the **Black Scoters** were at Mugu Lagoon through 24 Feb.

Elsewhere, a few other uncommon waterbirds were reported. Eight **American White Pelicans** and 33 **Common Mergansers** were at the ponds adjacent to River Park in Oxnard on 15 Feb (DP). Three **Blue-winged Teal** were at the water treatment ponds near the end of Perkins Road in Port Hueneme on 15 Feb (DP). Three **Hooded Mergansers** were along Conejo Creek on 7 Mar (EW), and a **Common Merganser** and two **Mew Gulls**

were at Lake Casitas on 14 Feb (AB). In addition, the **Eurasian Wigeon** remained at Lake Sherwood through 5 Mar, a **Black Oystercatcher** continued at the Ventura Harbor through 21 Feb, and the **Red-necked Grebe** was still at the harbor through 28 Feb.

Those searching for the **Worm-eating Warbler** at Camino Real Park over the last month did not find it, but reported the continuing **Williamson's Sapsucker** and two female **Bullock's Orioles** through 20 Feb.

Thank you to those who reported sightings during the last month. If you have any questions about local birds or have a good one to report, call or e-mail David Pereksta at 659-5740 or [pereksta@pacbell.net](mailto:pereksta@pacbell.net)

Good birding,  
David Pereksta

Observers: Dick Barth, Allen Bertke, Robert McMorran, David Pereksta, and Eric Waian



Pacific Golden-Plover

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**MEMBERSHIP MATTERS**  
...Art Marshall

*Please save this membership information for future reference.* If you are a member of National Audubon Society you are automatically a member of Ventura Audubon Society. Annual renewals for NAS are \$ 35. Members will get more than one reminder by mail from NAS. Multiple year renewals provide savings to members.

Membership in the Ventura Audubon Society only is available also. Renewal is \$ 20 per year. VAS membership only has no connection to the National Audubon Society, does not provide support for NAS, and does not include the annual magazine subscription. If you are a VAS member only and get your newsletter via e-mail, we do not have a viable method for advising you of your membership renewal expiration date. If you get your VAS newsletter via snail mail, your renewal date is written on the mailing label. For membership questions, problems with your newsletter subscription, or address changes, please call or e-mail Art Marshall at 642-1585 or [art-marsh@jps.net](mailto:art-marsh@jps.net)



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**HAPPY SPRING!**

**VAS OFFICERS AND CHAIRS**

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	Jack Gillooly	646-3867
	Jeff Goldberg	649-1132
	Marianne Slaughter	484-8415
	Nancy Schorsch	643-5825

**APRIL BOARD MEETING**

The Tuesday, April 7th Board of Directors meeting will be held at the home of Carl and Nancy Schorsch, 1175 Winthrop Lane, Ventura.at 7:15 pm. Any VAS member is welcome. Call (805) 643-5825 for information.

**THE CALIFORNIA CONDOR** is published nine times per year (September—May). Members are encouraged to submit articles, announcements, letters and drawings in WORD format or in the form of an e-mail message. *The deadline is noon on the 12th of the month preceding the next issue.* E-mail to: [birderz@roadrunner.com](mailto:birderz@roadrunner.com) Call Editor Dee Press at 484-8415 for more information.

**THE VENTURA AUDUBON SOCIETY** holds its regular meeting on the second Tuesday of the month at the Pointsettia Pavilion, 3451 Foothill Rd. in Ventura at 7:30 p.m., September through April. The May meeting is a fund-raising barbecue. Call the President for information. Board Meetings are held on the first Tuesday of the month. A Membership Form is available on our web site.