

The CALIFORNIA CONDOR

Ventura Audubon Society **DECEMBER 2009** Volume 30 Number 4
A Chapter of the National Audubon www.VenturaAudubonSociety.org



CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT- CITIZEN SCIENCE ...Bruce Schoppe, President

On January 2, 2010, Ventura Audubon will conduct its 30th Christmas Bird Count. It will be the 110th such event for national Audubon. The Christmas Bird Count is an important "citizen science" project. To quote the Audubon website: "The data collected by observers over the past century allow researchers, conservation biologists, and other interested individuals to study the long-term health and status of bird populations across North America. When combined with other surveys such as the Breeding Bird Survey, it provides a picture of how the continent's bird populations have changed in time and space over the past hundred years.

The long term perspective made possible by the Christmas Bird Count is vital for conservationists. It informs strategies to protect birds and their habitat - and helps identify environmental issues with implications for people as well."

Ventura Audubon's piece of this effort is a 24 kilometer (15-mile) diameter circle centered, roughly, on Canada Larga

Road and includes a variety of habitats. That circle is divided into eight sectors with a leader and a team of birders in each. The details regarding leaders and the plan are contained on Page 4.

Ventura is a great birding location and we always place well up on the list for most species found. There is some friendly competition with neighboring Audubon groups. But, it is, after all, a numbers game. The birds must be there to be seen and we must have birders to see them. The area covered by a 15-mile diameter circle (if I remember my geometry correctly) is approximately 175 sq. miles. Some of that is inaccessible but there are areas within the circle that we don't cover because we don't have enough birders. In addition to being a "citizen scientist", it's great fun. What's better than a day in the field in southern California followed by a potluck dinner with other birders?

If you are an experienced birder (or, even if you are not), and would like to be a citizen scientist for a day, please contact one of the sector leaders or Karl Krause. Their phone numbers and email addresses are on Page 4. There is a \$5.00 fee per participant that goes to national Audubon to help cover the costs of compiling the data and preparing the reports. If you would like to help with the potluck, please call Linda O'Neill at 649-9408.

DECEMBER PROGRAM ...Janice Susha, Program Chair Tuesday December 8th, 7:30 p.m., Poinsettia Pavilion, 3451 Foothill Rd, Ventura New Series on Rare Birds Coming to Public Television by Don DesJardin

Don DesJardin has been part of the birding scene in Ventura County since 1989. During that time, he has spent countless hours capturing birds on both film and video. Although he has traveled to many exotic places around the world seeing new birds and places, he always returns to what he calls his "local patch", Ventura County.

Don will present the pilot that is part of a "New Series on Rare Birds" coming to public television. The screening will be followed by a short Q&A.

Videographer and bird expert Tim Barksdale (aka Birdman) is working with Cortina Productions on this series. "Adventures with Birdman" combines extreme eco-adventure travel with one wildlife cameraman's personal quest to find, film, and share some of the world's rarest and most elusive birds before they vanish.

In the series' first episode, Birdman sets out in search of the Jocotoco Antpitta (*Grallaria ridgelyi*). After an exhaustive search, and with help from local bird guides, Birdman and viewers are treated to unbelievable, astonishing close up views. Birdman is blown away, and you will be too. By the end of this adventure, you will also see a number of hummingbird species, including the Ecuadorian Hillstar, Booted Racquettail, Velvet-Purple Coronet, and Empress Brilliant, and other birds like the Paramo Ground Tryrant, Black-billed Shrike Tyrant, Andean Gull, Variable Hawk, and Common Potoo. "Adventures with Birdman" is designed to raise awareness and inspire conservation action. The show is currently in production, aiming for a Fall 2010 broadcast.

BIRD OF THE MONTH – DECEMBER 2009

Article and Photo by DAVID PEREKSTA

Horned Grebe (Podiceps auritus)



Winter draws a variety of loons, grebes, and other waterbirds to the nearshore marine waters along the Ventura County coast. The most uncommon of our regularly occurring wintering grebes is the Horned Grebe.

The Horned Grebe in breeding plumage has a dark back contrasting with a rufous neck, breast, and flanks. The black head has conspicuous golden ear tufts above the eyeline. Most of the individuals seen locally are in nonbreeding plumage (pictured), which have a dark head and back that contrast with white cheeks, throat, and breast. Birds in all plumages have red eyes and a whitish tip on their slender bill. In nonbreeding plumage, it can be distinguished from the similar Eared Grebe by its clean white cheek and foreneck; both of which are dirty gray on the Eared Grebe. In addition, the peak of the head is behind the eye on the Horned, but over the eye on the Eared.

Horned Grebes are less gregarious than Western and Eared Grebes, especially during the breeding season. During the breeding season, they are found on lakes and ponds that have both open water and marshy vegetation. In winter, they occur on coastal saltwater and nearby lakes. Their diet varies with habitat and season; in summer mainly insects and crustaceans and in winter mostly fish. They forage by diving from the surface and swimming underwater, propelling with their feet. Usually solitary feeders, they sometimes forage in association with Surf Scoters.

The species breeds from Alaska and northwestern Canada south to northern Washington and east to Wisconsin. It winters on the Atlantic Coast from Nova Scotia to Texas and on the Pacific Coast from southeastern Alaska to Baja California. In recent years its wintering range has changed with more birds wintering on man-made reservoirs in the southeastern states. They are also found in the Old World where they were formerly known as the Slavonian Grebe.

Horned Grebes are uncommon winter visitors and transients along the Ventura County coast, where they frequent nearshore waters including protected bays, harbors, and rarely coastal sloughs. Fall migrants appear in mid-October and depart by late April. The species is widespread along the length of the coast, but never numerous. They can be seen from beaches and coastal points, but are most frequently seen in the Ventura and Channel Islands Harbors, and Mugu Lagoon. They are rarely found at the Ventura and Santa Clara River mouths. Inland of the coast, they have turned up at the Ventura Sewer Ponds, Lake Casitas, and the quarry ponds near RiverPark in Oxnard. Summer records are rare, but some have lingered into July at Mugu Lagoon.



DECEMBER 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.

Saturday, Dec. 5, 9:00-12 a.m. Restoration Work Day, Santa Paula. Hedrick Ranch Nature Area Restoration Program. Come at 8:00 for birding! Leader: Sandy Hedrick (370-0478). Long pants and boots or closed shoes are required. Take Hwy 126 to Santa Paula, 10th St. exit (S/B). Go left under freeway, right on Harvard, right on 12th, cross S.C. River Bridge. Go 3.7 miles to 20395 S. Mountain Rd. Turn left onto the dirt road & follow it to the end (approx. ½ mile).

Saturday, Dec. 12, 8:00 a.m. Ventura Wildlife Ponds at Ventura Water Treatment Plant. Leader: Reed Smith (652-0706). Enjoy a morning of wonderful waterfowl birding. Spotting scopes are always welcome. **Directions:** Take Harbor Blvd to Spinnaker and enter Ventura Harbor. The Water Treatment Plant is on Angler, a left turn before Spinnaker curves to the right. Turn in left and meet inside the gate.

Wednesday, Dec. 16, 8:30 a.m. Arroyo Verde Park, Ventura. Leaders: Carl & Nancy Schorsch (643-5825). Enjoy birding the oak woodland, grassy areas, and chaparral in this long, broad canyon. We will be pre-scouting for the Christmas Bird Count looking for among others the Common Yellowthroat, White-crowned Sparrow & White-breasted Nuthatch. Take Victoria Ave. north, left on Foothill Rd., right on Day Rd. entrance to the park. Meet at the last parking lot by the restrooms.

Wednesday, Dec. 30, 8:30 a.m. Canada Larga. Leaders: Jan Lewison (643-3353) & Jeff Goldberg. Take Hwy 33 toward Ojai. Exit Canada Larga Rd. Meet near the beginning of the road. We will walk and drive the canyon. Always a great walk & a good scouting previews

for the Christmas Bird Count! Some we may see are Western Bluebirds, Red-tailed Hawks & perhaps a Ferruginous Hawk.

Mark Your Calendar:

- Jan. 2 – Christmas Bird Count**
- Jan. 10 – Hedrick Ranch**
- Jan. 15-18 – Morro Bay Birding Festival**
- Jan. 16 – Saticoy Ponds**

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 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.

***Happy Holidays and good
birding in the New Year!... from your
VAS Board of Directors...***



THE 30th VAS CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

JANUARY 2, 2010

...Karl Krause



Ventura Audubon will conduct its 30th Christmas Bird Count on Saturday, January 2, 2010. Bird counts take place all over North America. The data on bird distribution collected during the counts is used to assess the health of our bird populations. On the Ventura Audubon count, we record an average of 21,000 individual birds spread among 177 species. We usually rank among the top 20 counts in the nation for the number of species seen.

Volunteer counters are assigned to one of the section leaders who coordinate the count in each of eight geographical regions within our count circle. If you plan to participate in the count, please contact the section leader of the area where you want to count for the start time and other details of the day.

We are also trying something new this year. Karl Krause, the compiler for the count, would like you to pre-register for the count by sending your name, address, phone number(s) and email address to him at krausefamily836@msn.com or by calling him at 525-2452. Please also indicate whether or not you want to receive the published summary of the count. Pre-registration is **not** a requirement to participate in the count and it does **not** commit you to the count. It is intended only to make registration for the count simpler on the day of the count.

Section 1 – Ventura River	Kay Regester	kaybirder@aol.com	652-1073
Section 2 – Lake Casitas	Allen Bertke	bertke@pacbell.net	640-9037
Section 3 – Ojai	Rich Burgess	rburgess@toaks.org	983-1312
Section 4 – Canada Larga	Jan Lewison	jml1920@aol.com	643-3353
Section 5 – Wheeler Canyon	Gary Tuttle	gt10k2826@verizon.net	525-2327
Section 6 – Ventura City	Nancy Schorsch	nanandcarl@sbcglobal.net	643-5825
Section 7 – SCRE & Beaches	Reed Smith	captreed@sbcglobal.net	652-0706

BEGINNERS' BIRD WALK

...Allen Bertke, Leader

A cloudless, warm beach day found our band of eager bird watchers ready to see the sights on the Beginner's Bird Walk at Emma Wood State Park. We were entertained by a distant Cooper's Hawk that buzzed a Red-tailed Hawk sitting on a pole, a colorful male American Kestrel sitting on the train trestle and a fabulous flyover of an Osprey, which made a later appearance with a fish in its talons, flying off upriver to enjoy its meal in privacy. Also glimpsed ever so briefly was what looked to be either a Peregrine Falcon or a Northern Harrier - flying into the sun and too far away to tell for sure. Let's just call it a Silhouette Raptor. Two Wrentits put on a nice show for us, and a California Thrasher posed very close to the group for a long time and sang his heart out, seemingly begging us to join in. We counted 38 species in all during our short walk.

The walk was also very educational. At one point we saw Killdeer, Semi-palmated Plovers and Spotted Sandpipers all together, showing the differences in size and the one band vs two bands on the Semi-palmated Plovers vs the Killdeer.

During the non breeding season it must appear to beginning birders that many birds are not named correctly. Such was the case on our walk, where we seemed to enter The Land of the Misnamed Birds. We saw two Spotted Sandpipers that had no spots, Black-bellied Plovers with lots of spots, but no black bellies, two Orange-crowned warblers with no orange crowns, several Pied-billed Grebes whose bills weren't pied (try saying that fast three times in a row), a Ruddy Duck that wasn't ruddy, a female Red-winged Blackbird with –you guessed it – no red wings (are you beginning to notice a pattern here?) and two Ruddy Turnstones who not only weren't ruddy but they weren't turning any stones either, since they were on the mudflats with the other shorebirds. The only thing we missed was a Red-necked Phalarope, which of course, would have had no red neck during this time of year. They are probably down in the Deep South somewhere with their other redneck friends. Anyway, thank you all for coming and see you on the next trip.



NOTES FROM THE FIELD

...David Pereksta

Lewis's Woodpeckers have been difficult to find locally in recent winters, but the species recently invaded the county in the best numbers in years. The first birds were seen on 30 Oct with one on Santa Ana Road, one along Canada Larga, and one near Lake Casitas (DDJ & BS). Subsequently, four were along Santa Ana Road on 31 Oct (DDJ), and seven were there on 8 Nov (MP & EW). Numbers continued to increase at Canada Larga with three on 3 Nov (NS), four on 6 Nov (DR & BD), and five on 7 Nov (KR et al), with three



Black-and-white Warbler

www.nationalzoo.si.edu

seen through 8 Nov. Two were also at the Las Virgenes Canyon Open Space near Calabasas on 7 Nov (JH).

The Ventura River watershed produced a number of interesting sightings over the last month. The **Zone-tailed Hawk** has returned again to Ojai and was seen near its traditional roosting

area 30 Oct-11 Nov (DR & BD). Presumably another **Zone-tailed Hawk** was seen in Fillmore on 30 Oct (DDJ & BS). Also in Ojai were a **Mountain Chickadee** on 6 Nov (DR & BD) and a **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** at a backyard feeder on 10 Oct (DS). Sightings at Lake Casitas included 22 **Greater White-fronted Geese** and a **Ross's Goose** on 28 Oct (DR & BD), a **Gray Flycatcher** on 15 Oct (KK), the continuing **Black-and-white Warbler** through 20 Oct. A **Golden Eagle** was along Canada Larga 6-7 Nov (DR & BD). Unusual along the coast was a **Hairy Woodpecker** at Emma Woods State Beach on 5 Nov (KR).

Passerine reports of interest were scarce again last month, but there were a few worth noting. The male **Vermilion Flycatcher** continued at the Olivas Golf Course through 4 Nov and the returning male at the Santa Paula Cemetery was seen 27 Oct- 8 Nov (KK). A **Golden-crowned Kinglet** was at Rancho Simi Park on 31 Oct (MP). Several **Varied Thrushes** were reported including one in a Lake Sherwood yard on 28 Oct, one on San Nicolas Island on 20 Oct (JM), and one at the Thousand Oaks Botanical Garden on 6 Nov (RS). The only new warbler sighting of note was far from the mainland; a **Painted Redstart** at San Nicolas Island on 21 Oct (JM).

Point Mugu and the Oxnard Plain had a few rare waders



Yellow-crowned Night Heron

Birdsofoklahoma.net

and uncommon land-birds. The escaped Flamingo first reported last month as a **Greater Flamingo** was later correctly identified as a **Lesser Flamingo** (MR) and continued into early November. A **Yellow-crowned Night-Heron** was found at Mugu 5-9 Nov and a **White-winged Dove** was there on 15

Oct (MR). Three **Reddish Egrets** continued at Mugu Lagoon through 16 Oct while a single was seen through 1 Nov. A **Least Bittern** was at the end of Arnold Road on 15 Oct (MA) and a **Sage Thrasher** was there on 2 Nov (JH).

The Arroyo Simi had 3 **Blue-winged Teal**, 11 **Hooded Mergansers**, and a **Common Moorhen** on 6 Nov (MP).

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, please notify me at pereksta@pacbell.net or 659-5740.

Good birding,
David Pereksta

Observers:

Michael Allen, Don DesJardin, Becky Donahue, Jim Hardesty, Jimmy McMorrان, Matthew Page, Kay Regester, David Roine, Martin Ruane, Brad Sillasen, Nancy States, Denise Steurer, Roger Swanson, and Eric Waian.



Varied Thrush

farm1.static.flicker.com

VENTURA AUDUBON SOCIETY

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AUDUBON ADVENTURES

...Susan Bee



The VAS Board would like to express its appreciation for the loyal "Audubon Adventures" support we received from Judy Rothman and Victoria Ammons. We are still seeking to fund this environmental education program

for all of the signed up classrooms. Each costs \$45, but of course, any support is welcome. Label your check "Audubon Adventures" and mail it to VAS, P. O. Box 24198, Ventura, CA 93002. Thank you.



*Merry Christmas
and
Happy Holidays,
Everyone!*



VAS OFFICERS AND CHAIRS

President	Bruce Schoppe	658-2396
Vice-President		
Secretary	Joyce Schoppe	658-2396
Treasurer	Jan Lewison	643-3353
Conservation	Sandy Hedrick	643-2408
Newsletter	Dee Press	484-8415
Membership	Art Marshall	642-1585
Field Trips	Judy Dugan	642-0842
Publicity/Education	Susan Bee	640-0779
Science/Webmaster	Reed Smith	652-0706
Programs	Janice Sussha	983-3929
At Large	Jim Sussha	983-3929
	Jack Gillooly	646-3867
	Jeff Goldberg	649-1132
	Marianne Slaughter	484-8415
	Nancy Schorsch	643-5825

DECEMBER BOARD MEETING

The Tuesday, December 1st Board of Directors meeting will be held at the home of Jim & Janice Sussha, 2207 Eastridge Court in Oxnard, at 7:15 pm. Any VAS member is welcome. Call (805) 642-0842 for information.