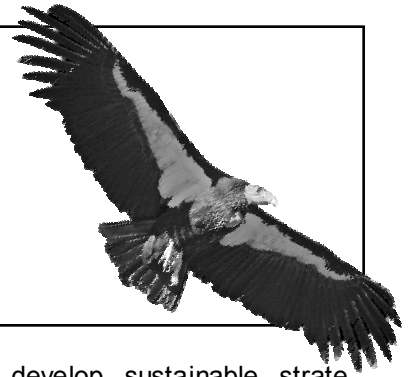


# The CALIFORNIA CONDOR

Ventura Audubon Society **NOVEMBER 2009** Volume 30 Number 3  
A Chapter of the National Audubon [www.VenturaAudubonSociety.org](http://www.VenturaAudubonSociety.org)



## CALL NOTES

...Bruce Schoppe, President

In September, SOAR (Save Open-space and Agricultural Resources) organized a conference titled *SOAR and Sustainable Community Strategies*. Held at the Broome Library at CSUCI, Ventura Audubon Society was a co-sponsor. The conference didn't get a lot of attention in the press and that's unfortunate. It seemed to be directed, primarily, towards elected officials but the message that the conference sought to spread is important to all of us who care about the preservation of habitat for birds and other wildlife.

California has embarked upon an ambitious plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2020 (AB 32 – California Global Warming Solutions Act). Achieving that goal will be a “stretch”. Recognizing that passenger vehicles are the single largest source of greenhouse gases in California, the legislature also passed and the governor signed SB 375 – Redesigning Communities to Reduce Greenhouse Gases. Also known as the anti-sprawl bill, it requires

California communities to develop sustainable strategies for growth. California and Ventura County will grow. That's inevitable. How we grow is what is important. Land use, transportation and housing are key components.

The thrust of the SOAR Conference was to encourage Ventura County and its 10 cities to duplicate the cooperation that resulted in SOAR as they work to complete the implementation plan required by SB 375. Supervisor Steve Bennett, one of the originators of SOAR, helped organize the conference. The City of Ventura has been a leader in developing strategies that fit with the intent of this legislation. City Manager Rick Cole said that we “really have only one choice. We must lead. We don't want to be the San Fernando Valley”.

*Climate Plan* ([www.climateplan.org](http://www.climateplan.org)) addresses “the land use decisions that shape our climate and our lives”. A sustainable community strategy ought to mesh nicely with the Audubon mission and goals. There will be resistance. Incentives for development are strong, especially for farmland adjacent to cities. We need to be informed, aware and ready to speak up.

**NOVEMBER PROGRAM ...Janice Susha, Program Chair**  
**Tuesday November 10th, 7:30 p.m., Poinsettia Pavilion, 3451 Foothill Rd, Ventura**

## **THE DARK SIDE OF THE LOON ..Gail Oskerenko & Darwin Long**

Gail Osherenko filmed, produced, and narrated *The Dark Side of the Loon* in 2007-2008. She lives in Santa Barbara, California and watches loons in Vermont in the summer. Film making combines her passion for film and photography with her background in environmental law and science. The *Dark Side of the Loon* premiered at the Santa Barbara International Film Festival this year.

Gail teaches coastal and ocean law and policy at UCSB Bren School of Environmental Science and Management and is a Project Scientist with UCSB's Marine Science Institute. She now chairs the Board of the Environmental Defense Center. Gail holds a law degree from UC Davis, and worked as an environmental lawyer before moving to Vermont in 1981 and becoming immersed in Arctic studies. Gail's first film, *Arctic Expedition*, was also an official selection in 2007 at Santa Barbara International Film Festival.

Darwin Long, a biologist and aviculturist, is one of the three scientists who assisted with the filming of *The Dark Side of the Loon*. Darwin will also be available for any questions. For the Morro Bay Winter Study, Darwin is the head field biologist who bands and conducts the only long-term and detailed study of wintering Common Loons.

## *BIRD OF THE MONTH – NOVEMBER 2009*

*Article and Photo by DAVID PEREKSTA*

### *White-tailed Kite (Elanus leucurus)*



Raptors are more evident in Ventura County during the fall and winter when several species migrate to our area. One of our resident species that increases in abundance at this time is the White-tailed Kite.

The White-tailed Kite has long, pointed wings, a long, square-tipped or slightly notched tail, a rounded head, and a small bill. Adults have a white head and underparts, gray crown, back, and upperwings, with black upperwing coverts (black “shoulders”). The tail is white with pale gray central feathers, but appears white from below. The underside of the wing is whitish, with some gray showing through the flight feathers, and a dark spot at the wrist. The red eyes are framed by dark feathers, the legs and feet are yellow. Juveniles are generally pale, but have a rusty chest, brown streaking on the head, brown scaling on the back, blackish on the upperside of the wings, and a dark band near the tip of the tail. The most common vocalization is a descending whistle, *teew*, often repeated.

The White-tailed Kite inhabits open country including grasslands, agricultural fields, marshes, and roadside borders. Marshy areas with clumps of large trees are favored roost sites in the winter, where many individuals may gather. It forages by gracefully hovering over open areas and then dropping down with feet first and wings held high to capture rodents. Because of its short legs and weak feet, it targets smaller prey than more aggressive raptors. White-tailed Kite abundance in California is tied to the abundance of its primary prey, the California Vole (*Microtus californicus*). Subsequently, populations of White-tailed Kites fluctuate in long-term cycles based on prey availability. The species has increased dramatically since the 1940s (when it was considered rare) and spread to new areas. Populations increased in California until they peaked in the mid-1970s; after which they have declined due to habitat loss and conversion.

The species is a permanent resident of the lowlands of California (except desert regions), the grasslands of southeastern Arizona, and southern Texas. It is uncommon in Florida and rare in southern New Mexico. It is widespread throughout the American tropics where clearing of forests has created more habitat for it. It does not regularly migrate, but do wander widely to find prey.

Within Ventura County, White-tailed Kites occur widely where suitable habitat is found. Roosts have been located during the winter in Canada Larga and on the Oxnard Plain. Other reliable locations include Rancho Sierra Vista, Lake Casitas, the Santa Clara River Valley, Simi Valley, Ormond Beach, Point Mugu, Ventura, Oxnard, and Camarillo on farms and golf courses. Look for them hovering over open areas or perched conspicuously atop trees or snags.



## *NOVEMBER 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.**

**Sunday, Nov. 1, 9:00-12:00 a.m. Restoration Work Day, Santa Paula. Hedrick Ranch Nature Area Restoration Program. Sandy Hedrick: (340-0478).** Arrive at **8:00 for birding** which usually yields some interesting birds. Our efforts include weed abatement, planting of native plants, and establishing trails. **Long pants and boots or closed shoes are required.** Bring water, gloves & sun protection. Take Hwy 126 to Santa Paula, 10<sup>th</sup> St. Exit. Go under freeway, rt. on Harvard, rt. on 12<sup>th</sup> and cross the 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).

**Friday, Nov. 13, 7:50-12:00 a.m. Pt. Mugu Naval Base. Leader: Mugu Staff.** Registration for this trip ended on Oct. 28. **For those registered, please note:** You must have picture ID cards with names matching the names on the list. Vehicles, articles and personnel are subject to search. Cameras and video equipment are not allowed. Please bring a scope if you have one. We will meet at the main entrance at Navalair Rd. and Mugu Rd. Parking lot is to the right near Buildings 112 & 116.

**Saturday, Nov. 14, 8:00 a.m. Soule Park, Ojai. Leader: Jack Gillooly (646-3867).** Birds are a bonus amid the autumn colors & the rugged Topa Topas rising above. Brisk mornings bring out winter feeding flocks: sparrows, bluebirds, & warblers. Big trees give us woodpeckers and raptors. Bushes hide thrushes & thrashers. Join us for an easy, flat walk around one of our most scenic birding spots. From Ventura, go north on Hwy 150 through Ojai, turn right on Boardman Rd, and turn right at park entrance. Meet at lot just inside the gate - \$3. To car pool, meet at the Pacific View Mall across from the parking garage entrance off Mills Rd. at 7:30.

**Sunday, Nov. 22, 8:00 a.m. Wheeler Canyon. Leader: Gary Tuttle (525-2327).** This canyon provides good

birding opportunities. We will be looking for raptors, ground doves, Western Bluebirds and maybe a Lewis' Woodpecker. Take Foothill Road from Ventura toward Santa Paula beyond Wells Rd. and past Aliso Canyon Rd. until you come to Wheeler Canyon Rd. on the left. Meet at the beginning of the road where there is parking.

**Saturday, Nov. 28, 8:30 – 10:30 a.m. Beginners' Bird Walk, Saticoy Ponds. Leader: Allen Bertke (640-9037).** The ponds are located on the northeast side of Hwy 118/Los Angeles Ave. From Ventura take Wells Rd. which turns into Los Angeles Ave./Hwy 118 and cross over the Santa Clara River Bridge. The entrance to the ponds will be on your left just after the Vineyard Ave. intersection. Please be prompt as we need to enter together. We should see a variety of ducks, such as, Teal, Gadwall, & Bufflehead. Scopes would be helpful.

### **Mark Your Calendar:**

Dec. 5 – Hedrick Ranch  
**Jan. 2 – Christmas Bird Count**

# Save Water!

***BEACH BREEDING***  
*(or the secret life of terns and plovers)*  
...Reed Smith

The breeding season for Western Snowy Plovers and California Least Terns is over for the year. Ventura County public beaches again made a contribution to the preservation of these species.

The number of Least Tern nests was down 40% this year. My best guess for a reason is that there were no anchovies in nearshore waters. The terns were not seen foraging outside the surf line until late August, well after the bulk of the nesting was done. The pairs that nested did so in areas that had adjacent estuaries or freshwater ponds. On Ormond beach the birds foraged in the J. Street Estuary and ponds located on The Nature Conservancy land behind the dunes. McGrath lake and the Santa Clara River estuary were used as were the ponds on the golf courses along Olivias Park Drive and in the Ventura Water Treatment plant. These food sources might not have been enough as the number of tern nests abandoned was up.

Young terns learn from their parents how to be a tern. I was reminded of this when I saw an adult tern land in the middle of the nesting area with a fish in its mouth. Two almost ready to fly chicks ran over. The adult then started running toward the fence with the chicks following. When the adult reached the fence it flew over. When the chicks did not fly over the adult returned to the center of the area and repeated the leading and flying. I saw the adult do this 5 times without getting the chicks to fly.

In July someone picked up a Least Tern chick and turned it in to the kiosk at McGrath State Beach. Least Tern chicks are slow walkers and easy to chase down. If they are returned immediately to the location they were picked up the parents will find them and continue feeding them. The location this chick was found was not known and so it went to UCSB's Coal Oil Point Reserve for rearing. When it was 5 weeks old Dr. Cristina Sandoval, who had worked hard to raise the bird, brought it down to Surfer's Knoll and released it where there were many terns and fledglings. Will this bird survive? We don't know. Adult terns feed fledgling young and augment their food as the young learn to hunt fish. The adults accompany the young as they return south for the winter. We don't know if this youngster will learn the skills to survive without its parents helping.

If you see a plover or tern chick on the beach all alone don't assume that it needs your help. The adult plover is probably nearby trying to distract you from the chick. The adult tern is likely off finding fish to feed the chick. Please leave all chicks on the beach where they are seen.

Snowy Plovers had various nesting experiences this year. Hollywood Beach had the same number of nests as last year, but the location was different. Their traditional nesting area had been groomed by the County and then dredged away by the US Army Corps of Engineers. As a result they birds nested on the groomed portions of the beach. When the nests hatched the chicks were moved down to the south end of the beach where the County doesn't groom the beach in the summer. Ungroomed beaches have plenty of insect life for adult and young plovers. Groomed beaches are pretty sterile.

Ormond Beach had difficulties this year with people living on the beach. When one homeless person left, another took up residence. They trespassed inside the fenced areas and left trash and food around that attracted predators. There were also many cases of people trespassing inside the fenced nesting areas. As of this writing the beach landowners have not agreed to allow us to post signs on the fenced areas that would make the prohibition against entry inside the fences or living on the beach enforceable by the Oxnard Police Department.

One Ormond mystery was the disappearance of the eggs from 5 nests in one week. No predator tracks were seen. The eggs were just gone. Did they make a homeless person's breakfast?

McGrath State Beach had more plover nests this year than last year. The single most detrimental species to their nests was human beings. Nests were vandalized, anti-predator exclosures removed and eggs stolen.

Dogs in nesting areas have been shown to be a significant problem resulting in decreased chick survival. Even if the dog doesn't chase birds the adult birds see it as a predator. The adults will attack the dog or try to distract the dog away from the chicks, leaving the chicks vulnerable. The number of dogs off leash was down on Ormond Beach where there has been an active enforcement effort. Hollywood Beach continued to have lots of dogs off leash and many dog owners who knew of the leash laws pointedly ignored the laws. On Mandalay State Beach one dog owner released her dog inside the fence. When asked why she did that she said that she thought the fence was the "dogs run free" area, sigh.

Nest monitoring can be frustrating with nest failures, but rewarding at seeing courting, nest initiation, incubation, hatching, rearing and eventual young survival to adulthood.

Thanks go to our members who have helped this year in keeping track of my favorite birds. Cynthia Hartley, Mariana Franco, Danielle Glenn, Chris Kahler, Jan Lewison, Paula Odor, Neil Ziegler, Nancy Schorsch and I all spent many hours counting, checking, band reading, putting up fences and confronting bird miscreants.



## NOTES FROM THE FIELD

...David Pereksta

The Oxnard Plain produced a few uncommon or rare migrants over the last month. Sightings from Arnold Road included a continuing **Pacific Golden-Plover** through 11 Oct, a **Pectoral Sandpiper** and two **Yellow-headed Blackbirds** on 27 Sep (EW, MP & RM), a **Sage Thrasher** on 20 Sep (M&JS), and a **Virginia's Warbler** in the willows there on 10 Oct (NG). Wetlands adjacent to Point Mugu had a continuing **Ruff** and **Stilt Sandpiper** through 27 Sep; a **Baird's Sandpiper**, 4 **Pectoral Sandpipers**, 2-3 **Bank Swallows**, and a **Northern Waterthrush** on 13 Sep (CM et al); 4 **Stilt Sandpipers**, a **Solitary Sandpiper**, and a **Bank Swallow** on 17 Sep (DP); and 2 **Cattle Egrets**, 31 **Pectoral Sandpipers**, and a **Tropical Kingbird** on 27 Sep (DP & LS).

Coastal lagoons, estuaries, and wetlands produced noteworthy sightings of a variety of waterbirds. **Greater White-fronted Geese** were reported widely including 20 at the Ventura Sewer Ponds on 25 Sep (FD), 1 near Point Mugu on 27 Sep (DP & LS), and 2 at the Ventura River Estuary on 1 Oct (KR). **Blue-winged Teal** were at the Ventura Sewer Ponds on 25 Sep (FD). A **Greater Flamingo** was reported by a lifeguard on the beach at County Line on 8 Oct and it was later found at Mugu Lagoon on 11 Oct (MP). This individual is undoubtedly an escape from captivity. At least two **Reddish Egrets** continued at Mugu Lagoon through 11 Oct.

Passerine reports trickled in from coastal migrant traps and elsewhere, but no reports were received from some reliable hotspots like Sycamore Canyon! The Laguna tamarisks held a few interesting birds including a **Least Flycatcher** on 20 Sep (DP), a **Prairie Warbler** on 12 Oct (RM), a **Blackpoll Warbler** 20-26 Sep (M&JS), and an **Indigo Bunting** on 26 Sep (TM). **Vermilion Flycatchers** reports included a male at the Fillmore Fish Hatchery on 19 Sep (B&CL), a juvenile at McGrath State Beach 21 Sep-9 Oct (MM), and a male at the Olivas Park Golf Course on 26 Sep (RR). Single **Black-and-white Warblers** were reported from a Camarillo backyard on 26 Sep (CD) and at Lake Casitas on 9 Oct (MA). A **White-throated Sparrow** was at Camino Real Park on 6 Oct (KR).

One place that produced a wealth of uncommon or vagrant migrants was San Nicolas Island, thanks to regular bird surveys being conducted this fall. Notable species included a flock of **Greater White-fronted Geese** on 29 Sep, a **Townsend's Solitaire** on 23 Sep, a **Black-throated Blue Warbler** on 29 Sep, a **Black-and-white Warbler** on 24 Sep, a **Clay-colored Sparrow** on 13 Sep

and several from 29 Sep-1 Oct, a **Lark Bunting** on 30 Sep, a "**Pink-sided**" **Dark-eyed Junco** 29 Sep-1 Oct, **Indigo Buntings** on 13 & 29 Sep, a **Bobolink** on 29 Sep joined by another on 1 Oct, an **Orchard Oriole** on 24 Sep, and a **Baltimore Oriole** on 29 Sep (JM).

Several pelagic trips to offshore waters within Ventura County (based on bird listing rules) produced a number of uncommon or rare species. A **Red-footed Booby** landed on a research vessel ESE of Anacapa Island on 20 Sep (MF), which is not an uncommon practice for that species. A trip to Santa Barbara Island on 25 Sep found a flock of 1,200+ storm-petrels that contained **Black**, **Ashy**, and 4+ **Least** (NL). That same trip also found two **South Polar Skuas**, and a juvenile **Long-tailed Jaeger** (NL). A Los Angeles Audubon trip on 26 Sep found Ventura County's first **Blue-footed Booby** on East Anacapa Island, as well as a **South Polar Skua** and several **Long-tailed Jaegers** (TM, DP, et al). A trip to 2,000 fathom waters more than 50 miles past San Nicolas Island on 11 Oct yielded three **Least Storm-Petrels** and four **Red-billed Tropicbirds** as well as **Burrowing Owl** and a **Grasshopper Sparrow** that landed on board (JF, DP, et al).

A few other reports are worth noting from scattered inland locations around the county. A **Prairie Falcon** (MA) and a **Burrowing Owl** (DR & BD) were at Lake Casitas on 9 Oct and **Common Mergansers** reports there included 13 on 29 Sep and 7 on 9 Oct (DR & BD). A **White-winged Dove** was in an east Ventura backyard 25-28 Sep (RM). The only report from the north county was of a **Swainson's Hawk** in the Cuyama Valley and a **Williamson's Sapsucker** at the Pine Mountain Campground on 20 Sep (MS & DS).

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 [pereksta@pacbell.net](mailto:pereksta@pacbell.net) or 659-5740.

Observers:

Michael Allen, Frank DeMartino, Chris Dellith, Becky Donahue, Jon Feenstra, Michael Force, Noah Gaines, Bill and Carol Langford, Nick Lethaby, Curtis Marantz, Todd McGrath, Jimmy McMorran, Robert McMorran, Martin Myers, Matthew Page, David Pereksta, Kay Regester, David Roine, Roger Root, Larry Sansone, Mark and Janet Scheel, Maggie Smith, Doug Stinson, and Eric Waian.

**VENTURA AUDUBON SOCIETY**

P.O. Box 24198  
Ventura, CA 93002

Non-profit Organization  
U.S. Postage Paid  
Oxnard, CA 93030  
PERMIT NUMBER 382

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

**VAS CHRISTMAS  
BIRD COUNT, 2009**

**Saturday, January 2, 2010**

**Come out & be a part of  
this important event!**

**Look for details in your  
December Newsletter**



**HAPPY THANKSGIVING!**

***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 Susha	983-3929
At Large	Jim Susha	983-3929
	Jack Gillooly	646-3867
	Jeff Goldberg	649-1132
	Marianne Slaughter	484-8415
	Nancy Schorsch	643-5825

***NOVEMBER BOARD MEETING***

The Tuesday, November 3rd Board of Directors meeting will be held at the home of Judy Dugan, 262 Teloma Dr. Ventura, at 7:15 pm. Any VAS member is welcome. Call (805) 642-0842 for information.