

The **CALIFORNIA CONDOR**

Ventura Audubon Society **SEPTEMBER 2016** Volume 37, Number 1
A Chapter of the National Audubon www.VenturaAudubon.org



CALL NOTES ...Bruce Schoppe, President

Welcome back to another season. It's nice to be back and it's nice to have you back. We will have interesting programs monthly beginning with the one detailed below for September. Debby Burns is scheduling programs – if you have any suggestions, please contact her. And, as you will see, we'll have field trips almost every week. Adele Fergusson is planning the field trips this year. We are in need of field trip leaders; so, if you can help, please contact Adele. And, thank you to all the Board members and other volunteers who continue to make Ventura Audubon Society successful.

It has been an active summer producing some notable events. Undoubtedly, top of the list was the adoption in June by the City of Oxnard of an ordinance to enhance the protections at Ormond Beach. Effective in early July, it prohibits all dogs (except service dogs) whether on or off leash as well as other domestic animals such as horses year-round. It has other provisions designed to protect birds, animals and plants. Since early July, a group of volunteers has helped Walter Fuller inform and educate folks coming to Ormond Beach. Some people have been bringing their dogs to Ormond for years but, unfortunately, many did not observe the leash laws. Most people have accepted the new restrictions (sometimes reluctantly) and say they will walk their dogs elsewhere. We provide information on beaches that permit dogs and the location of dog parks in Ventura County. Oxnard has been very supportive, providing signs and deploying enforcement personnel to Ormond Beach. Violations can result in fines up to \$500. Even at this early date, the results seem positive. We see fewer dogs and, conversely, more families with young children coming to Arnold Road.

Obtaining such comprehensive protection including the ban on dogs is somewhat unprecedented. It took strong support from the City Council as well as from the other landowners (State Coastal Conservancy and The Nature Conservancy). We must especially thank Mayor Pro Temp Carmen Ramirez who has championed Ormond Beach for a very long time. Karen Krause and Cynthia Hartley were also instrumental in making the case for these protections.

Board members Debra Barringer and Jim Susha attended several meetings of the Ventura County Watershed Protection District which is designing improvements to levees on the Santa Clara River. We are supporting efforts of the Sierra Club to encourage the District to include floodwater capture and more habitat friendly engineering in their plans. Please see the article elsewhere in the newsletter by Debra Barringer.

Please join us at any of the programs and on the field trips, aka bird walks. If you can volunteer a few hours a month for any of our programs and projects, please contact any member of the Board. It is especially important to cover Saturday afternoons at Ormond Beach when Walter is away and to expand our educational efforts in the schools – with in-classroom presentations and with Audubon Adventures.

SEPTEMBER PROGRAM ...Debby Burns ***7:30 p.m. Tuesday, September 12th, Poinsettia Pavilion, 3451 Foothill Road, Ventura*** ***"WILDLIFE OF THE PANTANAL," Presented By PAUL ABRAVAYA***

The Pantanal is the largest tropical wetland area in the world. Pantanal means large swamp in Portuguese. It is mainly in Brazil but is also found in Paraguay and Bolivia. Estimated to be up to 75,000 square miles, eighty percent of the area floods during the wet season with up to fifty-five inches of rain. A huge diversity of aquatic plants and a large array of animals make the Pantanal of great interest to biologists and naturalists.

Paul has a special interest in tropical nature because of its diversity and beauty. As a member of the Peace Corps he worked in Brazil and has discovered a new species of hummingbird and a new genus of mammal. He is a hunter with a camera, stalking and waiting for the moment to capture a good photo. He uses his photographs to educate and help people to become aware of the beauty of the natural world. Please join us!



NOTES FROM THE FIELD

...David Pereksta

APRIL - JULY 2016

Two **Greater Scaup** and a **Black Scoter** continued at Point Mugu through 3 Apr. As many as twelve **Common Mergansers** were at Lake Piru on 20 Apr-20 May (ST) and as many as 19 were at Lake Casitas on 19 Apr-1 May (KK). Likely breeding **Common Mergansers** were along Sespe Creek on 21 Apr (JR). Rare in winter but almost unprecedented in summer, a **Red-necked Grebe** was at Ormond Beach 13-17 Jul (LE). Uncommon waders included a **Reddish Egret** in Mugu Lagoon 5-28 Jul (JM & DP) and a continuing **Cattle Egret** at the Ventura Settling Ponds through 1 Apr.

Two **Magnificent Frigatebirds** were over the Ventura Settling Ponds on 18 Jun (BE & LN) and likely one of the same birds was seen there again on 21 Jun (JH). As many as 92 **Brown Boobies** were on Anacapa Island through 11 May (JH). **American White Pelicans** continued at the Santa Clara River Estuary and Ventura Settling Ponds through 27 Jul with a high count of 11 on 15 Jun (BN). A **Common Gallinule** continued at the Ventura Settling Ponds through 27 Jul. Rare along the coast this far south, an **Ancient Murrelet** was at Point Mugu on 4 Apr (JM). A **Black Tern** was at the Ventura Settling Ponds on 29 Jul (AO). **Black Skimmers** were reported widely with a number of sightings between Mugu Lagoon and Ventura 3 Apr-28 Jul (m. obs.). Two **Ruffs** continued on the Oxnard Plain through 24 Apr.

The nesting pair of **Bald Eagles** with two chicks continued at Lake Casitas through 16 Jul. A juvenile **Bald Eagle** was at Lake Piru on 20 Apr-2 Jun (ST) and an adult was there on 25 Jun-6 Jul (JB). Lake Piru continues to be one of the most reliable locations to find **California Condors** where as many as five were seen 2 Jun-7 Jul.

Calliope Hummingbirds were scarce this spring with one along Sespe Creek on 15 May (DP) and another early southbound migrant (or fire displaced individual) in Ventura on 26 Jun (DP). **Lewis's Woodpeckers** were not found in their traditional wintering haunts locally this last winter so one at Lake Piru on 20 Apr was notable (ST). Migrant **Hammond's Flycatchers** included one at Sycamore Canyon on 6 Apr (BH) and one at Tule Creek on 22 Apr (DP & JA). **Gray Flycatchers** were found in Quatal Canyon with one on 17 Apr (TT) and three 22-29 Apr (DP & JA), while several were in the Lockwood Valley on 29 Apr (DP & AS). A migrant **Dusky Flycatcher** was in Quatal Canyon on 22 Apr (DP & JA) and three were in traditional breeding areas on Frazier Mountain on 20 May (DP). An **Eastern Kingbird** was at the Ventura Settling Ponds on 11 Jun (MT). **Clark's Nutcrackers** are rarely seen locally away from Mount Pinos so a pair on Frazier Mountain 20 May-17 Jul was notable (DP). **Townsend's Solitaires** Included one in Cherry Canyon on 29 Apr (KK) and another on Mount Pinos on 1 May (GJ). A **Mountain Bluebird** was unseasonal on Frazier Mountain on 20 May (DP). A **Gray Catbird** was described convincingly at Rancho Sierra Vista on 3 Apr (KT). An **American Redstart** was at Arroyo Verde Park on 1 Jun (NA). A **Summer Tanager** was at Marion Cannon Park in Ventura on 13 May (FD). A few **Rose-breasted Grosbeaks** turned up this spring including individuals in Camarillo on 27 May (BH) and Ojai on 13 Jun (JG). A **Dickcissel** landed on one of Island Packers' boats on 19 May and eventually flew off to Anacapa Island. Ventura County's first **Field Sparrow** continued in Ojai through 23 Apr and was joined by a **Brewer's Sparrow** on 2 Apr (JG). **Scott's Orioles** included two in Dry Canyon on 20 Apr (JR), a pair in Quatal Canyon 22-29 Apr (DP & JA), and one in the Lockwood Valley 29 Apr-1 May (DP & AS).

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 no calls about nuisance birds), call or e-mail David Pereksta at pereksta@pacbell.net or 659-5740 .

Good birding,
David Pereksta

Observers: Jesse Altstatt, Noah Arthur, Joe Beck, Linda Easter, Bob Ehr, Jesse Grantham, Bruce Henderson, Jim Howard, Gareth Jones, Dexter Kelly, Karl Krause, John Mueller, Ben Newman, Lisa Nied, Adrian O'Loughlen, David Pereksta, Jesse Ross, Adam Searcy, Keith Taylor, Michelle Townsley, Sarah Tremondt, and Thomas Turner



SEPTEMBER FIELD TRIPS ...Adele Fergusson

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. For all trips, please wear appropriate clothing (layers are suggested), comfortable shoes, and bring snacks, water, hats, sunscreen, binoculars and field guides.

Sunday, September 4, 2016 8:30 am Camino Real Park

Leader: Raeanne Koerner 805-701-1919

Camino Real is a grassy park surrounded by pines and eucalyptus and is an excellent birding spot. Target birds will include Red-shouldered Hawk, Pacific-slope Flycatcher, Yellow Warbler and Townsend's Warbler.

Note directions: We will meet outside the park and walk in. Take Telegraph Road toward Ventura College. Across from Ventura College, turn onto Estates, take a right on Aurora, go to the grass beltway across from the mobile home park. Park closest to the last house in the residential tract. We will start birding along the barranca and go into the park

Saturday, Sept 17, 8:30 am Surfer's Knoll/Santa Clara River Estuary.

Leader Kay Regester (805) 258-1025.

We hope to see a variety of shorebirds including Snowy Plovers, grebes, turnstones, Whimbrels, godwits, cormorants and sandpipers, as well as many ducks and gulls.

Directions: Take Harbor Blvd to Spinnaker and enter Ventura Harbor. Follow Spinnaker as it curves around to the right. Surfers' Knoll is on the left. Please bring scopes if you have them. We will be walking a good distance on sand, so please wear appropriate footwear and plan on dressing in layers.

Tuesday, September 20, 8:30 am Ventura Settling Ponds

Leader: Adele Fergusson (415-4304).

Enjoy a morning of mostly waterfowl birding. Spotting scopes are always welcome.

Directions: Take Harbor Blvd to Spinnaker and enter Ventura Harbor. The Water Treatment Plant is on Angler before Spinnaker curves to the right. Park either across from the entrance on Angler or if there is not room, park in the lot on the right side of Spinnaker past the Ventura Boat Yard and meet at the gate. Note: Take care in crossing Spinnaker due to the blind curve.

Saturday, Sept 24, 8:00 a.m. Emma Wood State Beach/Ventura River Estuary.

Leader: Neil Ziegler (805) 658-2396.

We will begin at 8:00 a.m. Emma Wood State Beach, where we will target Snowy and Semipalmated Plovers and Caspian Terns. We will then walk along the path that leads through the willow forest and across sand dunes to the Ventura River Estuary. The estuary is always an exciting place to bird, and target birds will include: Black-bellied Plover, Willet, Whimbrel, Black Turnstone, Red-necked Phalarope and Forster's Tern. There will be a fair amount of walking, so please dress appropriately in layers and comfortable shoes.

Directions: From US-101, exit California St, turn right and then make a quick left onto Thompson Blvd. Follow Thompson (becomes Garden St) and turn left on W. Main St. Follow W. Main St until just before it enters the northbound 101 freeway. Emma Wood is on the left. There is ample street parking along the outside of the park on W. Main St (we must park outside and walk in). Please do not leave valuables in your car, and be sure to lock it!



Mark your calendars!

Oct 1 and 4 Laguna Tams

Oct 29 – Prisoners Harbor, Santa Cruz Island, You will need to make a reservation with Island Packers (805-642-1393). The boat will be going directly to Prisoners Harbor.

BIRD LOVERS UNITED COUNT BROWN PELICANS

(Re-printed from a July 13, 2016 Audubon California press release)

Nearly 200 citizen scientists and volunteers surveyed California brown pelicans at 179 locations in California, Oregon, and Baja Mexico on May 7 – this was a first of its kind effort to engage birding enthusiasts across the West coast in a bi-annual survey of this iconic Pacific coast seabird. A fall survey is planned for this October.

The survey protocol was designed by experts to capture a comprehensive snapshot of pelican abundance and age distribution. This information is needed to understand how potential threats from changes in weather patterns, to changes in prey availability, changes in habitat or contaminants, could impact California brown pelican populations over the long term.

“Over time, data collected through citizen science surveys like this one can help shed light on longer term California brown pelican population trends,” said Steve Henry, field supervisor of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) in Ventura, the lead field station for the project. The citizen-science driven data will be combined with data from a five-year breeding survey at the Channel Islands, which is home to up to 20 percent of the breeding population.

The survey is a joint project of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology’s eBird program, state agencies, and the Audubon network. All participants reported their observations and photos through a special location in eBird, an online database of bird observations providing scientists, researchers and amateur naturalists with real-time data about bird distribution and abundance.

“Crowdsourcing data is an excellent way to encourage the public’s love of brown pelicans and get bird lovers out doing what they love -- birdwatching,” said Brigid McCormack, executive director of Audubon California, National Audubon Society’s lead office on the survey. “These volunteers are giving us an incredibly detailed view of how this species is doing in the light of threats from climate change and habitat loss.”

“This pelican survey really illustrates one of the key strengths of eBird,” said Brian Sullivan, co-leader of the program for the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. “eBird allows us to take a snapshot of a single species at a specific point in time across a wide geographical area. The only way to achieve that is to tap into the eyes and ears of bird watchers who are dedicated to gathering data that can then be used to preserve and protect the birds we all care about.”

California brown pelican populations plummeted in the 1970s due to the impacts of DDT and other pesticides in the environment. In 1970 only a single chick survived out of 552 nests at the U.S. Channel Islands’ Anacapa Island off the southern California coast. That same year, the species was listed as federally endangered. DDT was banned in 1972, and so began the fight to save the California brown pelican from extinction.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service published a recovery plan for the species in 1983, and strong increases in both productivity and nest attempts were observed in the mid-1980s. From 1985-2006 the Anacapa Island nesting colony produced a mean of 4,600 nests each year. In 2006, the Service estimated the entire California brown population at around 70,680 nesting pairs, equating to 141,360 breeding birds.

Due to this remarkable recovery, in November 2009, the California brown pelican was removed from the endangered species list, but remained protected under the provisions of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

Since delisting, conservation partners including the California Institute of Environmental Studies, National Park Service and other organizations have collected intermittent population data on brown pelican populations; however, funding for comprehensive monitoring efforts has been limited.

Through those surveys, scientists observed poor productivity of brown pelicans on Anacapa Island at the Channel Islands and across the species’ range. Changes in the population of key forage species including anchovy and sardines raise questions and concerns about the health of the breeding pelican population.

Although numbers suggest a population decline, this limited data does not necessarily indicate a long-term trend. By collecting this important data through citizen science surveys, scientists hope to understand how potential threats from changes in weather patterns, to changes in prey availability, changes in habitat or contaminants, could impact California brown pelican populations over the long term.

To get more information on how to participate in the next California brown pelican survey this October, please visit ca.audubon.org/brownpelicansurvey.

SANTA CLARA RIVER LEVEE PROJECTS

By Debra Barringer

Two Ventura County Watershed Protection District projects are in the planning phase that will affect the wildlife habitats of the Santa Clara River (SCR), considered the last, largely natural river in southern California. With Nina Danza of the Sierra Club as lead, VAS Board members along with other river advocates have been participating in stakeholder meetings and working groups to give input on the various alternatives.

One project known as SCR-1 is in response to levees located between Highway 101 and Highway 118 no longer passing certification with the Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE). The Nature Conservancy owns about half of lands bordering the north side of the river. A "soil cement" alternative has been chosen that would affect 2 miles of the SCR south bank. This is an impenetrable substance that solidifies the natural river bank, does not allow animal burrows, and ACOE also allows no natural vegetation restoration on it and within 15 feet of both sides.

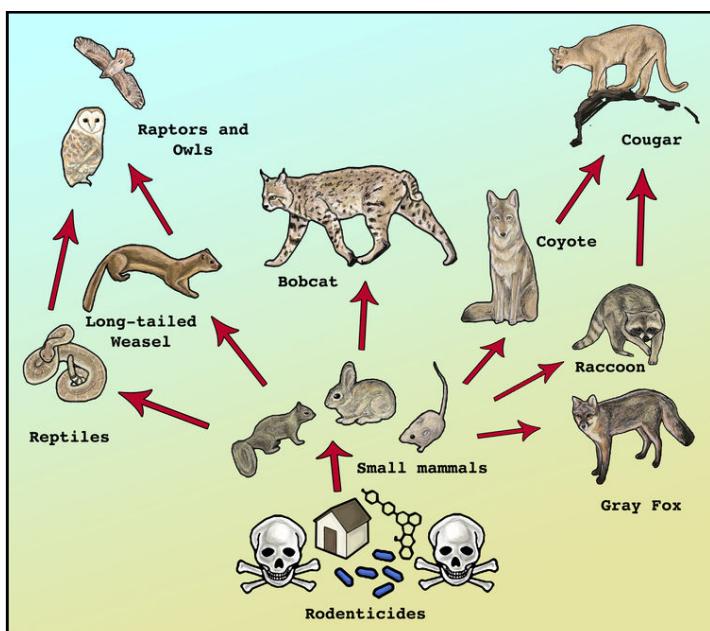
In addition to many sensitive bird and other wildlife species that rely on the river corridor for cover, food, water, breeding sites, and travel, the federally listed least Bell's vireo has been recorded to nest in several locations along the SCR-1 project area. Sierra Club and VAS supported alternatives that would either retain the most natural vegetation or include mitigation measures that would replace removed and disturbed habitat.

The other project known as SCR-3 affects existing SCR south bank levees located south of Highway 101 to the Bailard landfill that currently do not meet Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) new flood protection requirements. This project area has been an accident waiting to happen since the County/City allowed homes to be built within the known 100-year floodplain of the SCR. Despite VAS and Sierra Club input to choose the alternative to raise the height of existing dirt berm levees and capture more stormwater flows, proponents have chosen the alternative that will add a 968-foot long cement wall that is 6 feet high along the river in addition to adding a soil cement access road on the south bank.

Ms. Danza's expertise is in hydrology and she has been trying to steer the County to include more efforts to use open lands to trap stormwater so it can return to the groundwater naturally and not contribute to dangerous high flows further downstream. There has so far not been a lot of consideration of these ideas. Adding hardscape such as cement to a waterway actually speeds the flow of stormwater, allowing even less recharge to the groundwater aquifers. Ms. Danza has also been promoting the coordination of these projects with the SCR Parkway designs to include walking/bike paths along levees, some of which are being included.

As on coastlines, once armoring of the riverbank begins, it actually makes non-armored sections more unstable during storms, potentially causing more soil erosion and scour further downstream. This result may be used to justify more riverbank cement projects and thus begins a slippery slope of perceived need for continuous, cemented riverbanks as can be seen in parts of Santa Clarita upstream. The more non-natural riparian substrate there is, the less acreage for natural vegetation to grow and for wildlife to inhabit. Vegetation growing along waterways acts to slow down storm flows, roots hold riverbanks in place, and vegetation takes up water in addition to providing wildlife habitat. As we know, officials have seen the error of using cement along the LA River and have begun to remove some of it. Flood control can be achieved by providing the anticipated stormwater alternative places to go, which Ms. Danza is valiantly trying to promote. Also, the County has to absolutely stop permitting development in and near the natural river floodplain to assure public and property safety. It's too bad it takes catastrophic events (such as Hurricane Katrina levee failures) to bring these concepts to light.

VAS has also been very concerned about the common practice of using anti-coagulant rodenticides to kill rodents whose burrows are sometimes found in levees. Some of these poisons remain in the dead rodents to be transferred to predators, carnivores and scavengers that may feed upon them, including hawks, owls, vultures, coyotes, foxes, bobcats, and even family pets. The United Water Conservation District is undergoing trials of using owl boxes and raptor perches to control rodents to reduce their use of these toxins at levee and dams sites with some early success observed.



VENTURA AUDUBON SOCIETY

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MEMBERSHIP EXPIRATION: If you are not sure if your membership has expired, please *email* Jackie at jbworden7@gmail.com and she will check it out for you.

BOARD MEETING: There will be a Board of Directors meeting on Tuesday, September 6th, at the home of Bruce and Joyce Schoppe, 4875 Mascagni St, in Ventura. Call (805) 658-2369 for more information. VAS members are welcome.

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

THE CALIFORNIA CONDOR is published nine times per year (September-May). Members are encouraged to submit articles, announcements, letters and drawings, preferably in WORD format, or in the form of an e-mail message. *The deadline is noon on the 12th of the month preceding the month of publishing.* Send submissions to deepress2@gmail.com