

The CALIFORNIA CONDOR

Ventura Audubon Society **MARCH 2014** Volume 34 Number 7
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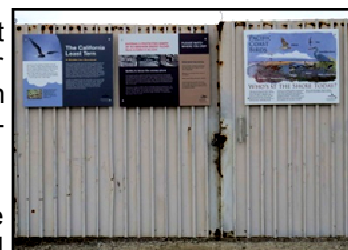
CALL NOTES ...Bruce Schoppe, President Public Education

Part of our mission is education about bird and wildlife conservation issues. It surprises me that so few people seem to understand (or appreciate) the incredible natural event that occurs on our beaches every spring and summer when the California least terns and western snowy plovers arrive to nest. They don't understand why the "symbolic" fences are on the beaches and they don't understand why their dogs shouldn't run free!

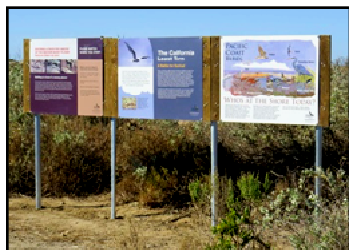


With that in mind, VAS purchased three sets of three signs designed by California State Parks. The original plan was to put them all at Ormond Beach but, the irruption of terns and plovers at Hollywood Beach in 2013 changed those plans.

One set was placed on the fence of the maintenance yard at the end of Harbor Blvd. near the harbor entrance. Another set has been installed at the west end of Hollywood Beach on the walls of the restrooms. For both of these, we appreciate the help and support of the Maintenance crew of the Channel Islands Harbor District.



The final set was recently installed at Ormond Beach at the end of Arnold Road opposite Walter's Fuller's office. For these, we have to thank the Oxnard City Corps crew ...and Walter!



One sign is WSP specific, another is CLT specific and the third tells about shore birds in general.

The signs are timely because, early March, the symbolic fencing will go up again at these and other beaches and the birds will begin setting up their breeding territories & nest sites in mid-March and April. The "crunch" will come, of course, as the weather improves and beach usage increases, especially at Hollywood Beach. There, the 4th of July weekend becomes really threatening.

We (VAS and VC Shorebirds) have obtained grant funding for monitoring at both Hollywood Beach and Ormond Beach. We will also have lots of signs by student artists (resulting from the education and outreach efforts of Michael Glenn at USFWS) to augment the official stuff. The last component is volunteers to help further educate the public, especially on busy weekends and especially with regard to their dogs! **Volunteers needed!**

March Program - 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, March 11th Poinsettia Pavilion, 3451 Foothill Road, Ventura

"The Sound of Birds from Acorn Woodpecker to Zone-tailed Hawk," with Don Klabunde

The program for our March 11 meeting at 7:30 p.m. at the Poinsettia Pavilion will be presented by Don Klabunde - "The Sound of Birds - from Acorn Woodpecker to Zone-tailed Hawk." Join us in celebrating the sonic and visual diversity of birds in this audio-visual tour of over 200 species. A short technical description of how birds vocalize and why is followed by a flash-card presentation of each species. First the bird's song & call, followed by Don's photographs as the species name is revealed. How many species can you get by calls and song alone? Audience shout-outs encouraged. Be prepared for a Big Day indoors.!

Don Klabunde is a retired physicist, lifelong photographer, and chapter photographer for Conejo Valley Audubon Society. Some of his interests include nature and astrophotography, animal behavior and evolution, gardening and observing the local wildlife. **Laura Gulovsen, Program Committee**

BEYOND BASICS ...Article and Photos by David Pereksta

Learn the Common Birds

After discussing the challenges and pitfalls to bird identification over the last few months and working our way through various ways to sidestep these, in my last installment of this series (at least for the time being) I am going to discuss one of the essential fundamentals to mastering bird identification...learning the common birds!

After you learn the layout and organization of a field guide (or guides) as I discussed last month, start with the basics and learn the common birds for the area. The range maps and text, will help you learn the status and distribution of local species, but it also helps to draw on other resources. I and others have painstakingly reviewed the status of every species on Ventura Audubon's Checklist of the Birds of Ventura County and it is one of the best resources that describes the seasonal status and relative abundance of the birds in Ventura County. Another great resource is the bar charts for the "Abundance and Status of the Birds of Southern California" in "A Birder's Guide to Southern California." These charts not only show the seasonal abundance or status of the birds of southern California, but it also identifies the habitat affinities of all the species included. With these resources, spend time studying and learning what birds to expect locally in different habitats including all their various plumages.



Warbling Vireo

Once you have learned the common birds, they should be your first check-down when identifying birds in the field. I have seen many observers jump to the conclusion of finding a rare bird, when they blatantly overlooked the marks identifying it as a more common species (remember Laguna Fever?). Ruling out similar looking common species is a critical step to identifying a rare or uncommon bird. The other side of the common bird coin is that once you master the common species, the rare or uncommon birds jump out at you when you see them. Practice these principles and they will become automatic over time.

An important part of this process is learning the variability within common birds. Not all birds within a particular species look the same and there are a few species that cause problems with local birders at certain times of the year. One in particular that is prevalent during the outbreaks of Laguna Fever is the Warbling Vireo. Warbling Vireos are a common migrant, but are variable and can have subtle differences that make them easy to confuse with other rarer species. Some spring birds can show a darker contrasting cap than normal and some in recent years have been misidentified as Red-eyed Vireos. Others in the fall can be very yellow underneath and are commonly mistaken for Philadelphia Vireos or even Yellow-green Vireos. The amount of yellow aside, structure is just as important to identification of these vireos. While the extent of yellow can initially fool an observer into thinking they have found a Philadelphia Vireo during the fall, Philadelphia Vireos are stockier than Warbling Vireos with a shorter tail, shorter bill, and dark lores. In addition, no matter how yellow a Warbling Vireo may look or how contrasty its crown may be, they always have pale lores (a "blank-faced" look) and a white throat.



Philadelphia Vireo

If you are looking for a bird (rare or common), get acquainted with its field marks before you go out birding so you know what to focus on. Continuing with the example given above, Philadelphia Vireos have dark lores and yellow throats so if you know the differences to focus on, you should always make the correct ID. The best way to avoid embarrassing mistakes is to prepare before you go out and check your work!! Furthermore, do not take common birds for granted and remember that just because a bird may look different than you normally expect does not mean that it is not within the normal range of variation for the species. Instead of focusing on one feature that does not look right (remember Single Field Mark Syndrome?), check as many other features as you can including fieldmarks, structure, posture, and all the others discussed last month that are highlighted in any good field guide. I hope you find this series of articles informative and useful, and that it enhances your enjoyment of observing birds in the field.



MARCH FIELD TRIPS ...Karin Kersteter

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, Mar 1, 8:30 a.m. Santa Clara River Estuary. Leader: Alexis Frangis (805) 217-4833. Shorebirds and ducks will be the highlights of this trip. On the 2013 trip, we saw such species as Snowy Plover, Black Turnstone, Whimbrel, Gadwall, and Surf Scoter. Take Harbor Blvd. to Spinnaker and enter the Ventura Harbor. Follow Spinnaker as it curves around to the right. Surfers' Knoll is on the left. Please bring scopes. Wear shoes suitable for walking in deep sand.

Sunday, Mar 2, 8:00 a.m. Restoration Work Day, Santa Paula. Hedrick Ranch Nature Area Restoration Program. Leader: Sandy Hedrick (340-0478). Arrive at 8:00 for birding which usually yields some interesting birds. **Work from 9am – noon. Long pants and boots or closed shoes are required.** Bring water, gloves, & sun protection. Take Hwy 126 to Santa Paula, 10th St. Exit. Go under freeway, rt. on Harvard, rt. on 12th 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).

Tuesday, Mar 4, 8:30 a.m. Emma Wood State Beach. Leader: Adele Fergusson (805) 415-4304. Park on the street at the far west end of Main St. beyond the bridge over the Ventura River. We will walk into the State Beach area. A nice combination of scrub habitat, beaches, and open ocean allows for a broad range of species. We will search for sparrows, mockingbirds, warblers and kestrels in the scrubby area, and egrets, heron, and a variety of peeps along the water's edge.

Saturday and Sunday, March 8–9. Salton Sea. Leaders: Neil Ziegler (805)983-7207 and Alexis Frangis (805) 217-4833. The list of resident birds at Salton Sea is incredible; it includes such species as Gambel's Quail, American White Pelican, Costa's Hummingbird, Burrowing Owl, Verdin, and Abert's Towhee. Add to this list the massive number of over-wintering shore birds, and you have one outstanding birding location! We hope the timing of our trip will allow us to enjoy cooler temperatures, over-wintering shore birds (such as Sandhill Cranes) and perhaps early migrants. RSVP to Karin at venturabirding@yahoo.com or (805)901-2203 by February 8 if you

would like to join us for this exciting birding trip. Lodging and other pertinent information will be forwarded to those who RSVP.

Saturday, March 15, 8:30 a.m. Ventura County Game Preserve. Leader: Neil Ziegler (983-7207) Always a very special trip! On past trips, we have seen species such as Vermillion Flycatcher, Marsh Wren, Northern Harrier, Peregrine Falcon, and American Bittern. We cannot drive the grounds so there will be considerable walking (about 2 miles total). **Directions:** Take Casper Rd. south from Hueneme Rd. (between Saviers Rd. and Hwy.1). Follow the left curve to the barn/house buildings and park on the road outside the buildings. Please bring scopes, binoculars and field guides. **To car pool,** meet at 7:45 a.m. at the Pacific View Mall in Ventura. Take Coastal View Dr. off Mills & park in the lot directly across from the parking garage entrance.

Friday, March 21, 7:30 a.m. Re-scheduled Pt Mugu Trip. Friday, Mar 21, 7:30-noon. Pt. Mugu Naval Base. Leaders: Mugu Staff & David Pereksta. For those registered, please note: You must have picture ID cards with names matching the names on the list. Vehicles, articles and individuals are subject to search. Cameras and video equipment are not allowed. Cell phones are permitted, but no photography is allowed. Please bring a scope if you have one. **Directions:** From Hwy 101, travel south on Las Posas Rd, west on Hueneme Rd, south on Wood Rd, crossing over PCH. Meet at the main entrance at Naval Air Rd. and Mugu Rd. near Buildings 112 & 116. Drive to gate -1 at Frontage Rd.

Saturday, Mar 22, 8:30 a.m. Taft Gardens. Leader: Allen Berke (805)640-9037. Join us at a private botanical garden featuring plants from Australia and South Africa. With blooming plants and plenty of water, this is sure to be a bird hotspot. Due to lack of parking, carpooling is **required**. Please meet at the Museum of Ventura Co., 100 E. Main St. (side parking lot) at 7:50 a.m. We will caravan to the garden. **Directions:** Hwy 33 to Baldwin Rd/Hwy 150, turn left. Proceed 2.3 miles and turn right at the cluster of mailboxes on a hard to see, unmarked private road (it is 1/2 mile past the better marked Ranch Rd.) Drive another 1/2 mile on the private road and meet at the large white wall with a paved pull out.

(...continued on Page 6)

BEGINNERS' BIRD WALK ...Allen Bertke

For this month's Beginners' Bird Walk we checked out the marshy area with many shallow ponds and ditches at the end of Arnold Rd., in Oxnard/Port Hueneme. I said ponds and ditches, but I didn't say anything about water in them. Due to our recent Saharan weather pattern, the area looked more like, well, the Sahara.

Nevertheless, we trudged onward. Dedicated birders are always optimistic. Surprisingly, we came up with 39 species. True, sometimes it was only one bird of each species, and even then, only viewable through a scope at high power, but still a good number. Some of the better species included a Peregrine Falcon, Northern Harrier, Horned Larks, American Kestrel, White-tailed Kite, Cooper's Hawk, a female Green-winged Teal, and American Avocets and Black-necked Stilts (scope views only, looking into the sun onto the Naval Base ponds). We saw Sanderlings, Willets and Marbled Godwits at the beach, but little else.

Admittedly, not the best day for close up viewing for beginners. Some of the views were so fleeting, or fly-by only, that I'm sure many of the participants will read this and think I am making it all up. They probably even missed the Blue-footed Waddle Wat.

For me though, it was a landmark day. My birding experiences have now been greatly enhanced. After years of being an ostrich about my declining distance vision, I finally sprang for Lasik surgery. What a difference! Now I can actually identify birds before using my binoculars. I realize now that I have been getting much better at birding by GISS not because I'm good, but because I *had* to. If you ever want to get this surgery, make sure to go to a reputable place. I passed on the first Lasik place that I checked out because it violated one of my cardinal rules - never go to a Lasik surgeon whose entire staff wears glasses. I also refuse to use a dentist with green teeth, or a cigar chomping, red faced, obese doctor. But then, that's just me. I was able to find a great Lasik surgeon, but I did freak him out after the procedure. The first words out of my mouth were "Who turned out the lights?" They tell me it was only a mild heart attack.

See you on the next walk. Pray for rain!

Berm Breaks at Santa Clara River Estuary ...Jackie Worden

The Santa Clara River estuary experienced a radical change in mid-February, with the breaching of the berm at the river mouth. The water which had collected upstream of the berm rapidly flowed out, leaving fish stranded and birds startled. Thousands of non-native carp were found, resulting in a bird feeding frenzy. According to State Park personnel, no steelhead or goby were found – good news for these two listed species.

Coastal estuaries are complicated places. Water quality varies from highly saline to nearly fresh depending on rainfall, ground infiltration, tides, and many other factors. The plants and animals that live in these dynamic locations must be adapted to these conditions, or able to move when water conditions drastically change. Under normal weather patterns, sufficient winter rainfall causes the river to break through the sand bar at the mouth and flow out to the ocean. With our region's lack of rainfall over the past several years, the sand bar had not breached for many years. The backup of water upstream into the Santa Clara River resulted in flooding of the adjacent McGrath State Park.

It is likely that nature will be allowed to take its course, without human intervention to breach the berm. Permits from multiple federal and state agencies would be required for any such action.

What's an Estuary? (from the NOAA website)

An estuary is a partially enclosed coastal body of water where freshwater from the land measurably dilutes saltwater from the ocean. This mixture of water types creates a unique environment that is critical for the survival of many species of fish, birds, and other wildlife. They provide safe spawning grounds and nurseries for fish and shellfish, ideal resting and refueling places for migratory birds, and habitat for many reptiles, amphibians and mammals. Marshes and other wetlands, which often fringe estuaries, protect marine life and water quality by filtering sediment and pollution from upstream sources. Estuaries also create natural protection to coasts and shorelines from damaging storm waves and floods.



NOTES FROM THE FIELD

...David Pereksta

Remnants of the booby invasion continued on Anacapa Island, now over 4 months since they first arrived in mid-September, with as many as five **Blue-footed Boobies** through 25 Jan and a **Brown Booby** there 3-25 Jan (JB). Another **Brown Booby** was off Ventura on 31 Jan (JB). A **Manx Shearwater**, which may or may not be the one that was seen several times last fall, was off Ventura on 4 Jan (DP & AS).

Uncommon waterfowl and other waterbirds were reported widely in January, which was surprising given the lack of water due to drought conditions locally. The **Sandhill Crane** that was found in early December continued along Casper Road through 26 Jan. Several geese continued along Arnold Road including two **Snow Geese**, three **Ross's Geese**, and nine **Cackling Geese** through 2 Jan with one **Ross's Goose** continuing through 15 Jan. An **American Bittern** was along Arnold Road on 8 Jan (WF) and another was near Casper Road on 9 Jan (FD). A **Greater White-fronted Goose** was in the Camarillo area 10-23 Jan (PG). In the Ventura Harbor/Santa Clara River estuary area, continuing birds included two **Blue-winged Teal** at the Ventura Settling Ponds through 28 Jan, an **American White Pelican** in the Santa Clara River Estuary through 18 Jan, a **Common Gallinule** at the Ventura Settling Ponds through 4 Jan, and two **American x Black Oystercatcher** hybrids at the harbor through 31 Jan. A **Redhead** was at the Ventura Settling Ponds on 11 Jan (KR). Waterfowl in Arroyo Simi included as many as 17 **Blue-winged Teal** continuing through 21 Jan, a **Common Goldeneye** 1-22 Jan (MP), three **Common Mergansers** 21-22 Jan (JM), and as many as 11 **Hooded Mergansers** continuing through 31 Jan. Nearby at Rancho Simi Park as many as 8 **Blue-winged Teal** continued through 25 Jan, a **Common Merganser** was seen on 25 Jan (PH), and 9 **Hooded Mergansers** continued through 30 Jan. The **Eurasian Wigeon** continued at the golf course at the Simi Hills Neighborhood Park through 31 Jan. Four **Redheads** were in Oak Park 7-15 Jan (JM) and a high of 13 were at Lake Sherwood 6-17 Jan (MH). Three **Hooded Mergansers** were at the Buenaventura Golf Course on 1 Jan (EW).

In the greater Ventura River area, continuing birds at Canada Larga included a **Ferruginous Hawk** through 19 Jan and a **Red-naped Sapsucker** through 24 Jan. A **Burrowing Owl** was a new find there on 4 Jan (DP & AF). At Lake Casitas, the **Bald Eagle** pair was setting up their nest through 19 Jan with an immature bird occasionally spotted there with them. A **Burrowing Owl** was found there on the Ventura CBC on 4 Jan (PL), and other continuing birds at the lake included two **Common Mergansers** through 4 Jan, an **American White Pelican** through 19 Jan, and a **Ferruginous Hawk** through 6 Jan. Two **Hooded Mergansers** were along the Ventura River on 3 Jan (KR) and a **Wood Duck** was at the Ojai Waste Water Treatment Plant on 4 Jan (MB).

Continuing rare or uncommon species at Point Mugu included as many as 12 **Blue-winged Teal** and 18 **Greater Scaup** through 24 Jan; a **Black Scoter** through 1 Jan; 5 **White-winged Scoters**, a **Common Goldeneye**, a **Red-necked Grebe**, and 13 **Yellow-crowned Night-Herons** through 24 Jan; a high of three **American White Pelicans** through 26 Jan; a **Prairie Falcon** through 17 Jan; and 4 **Red Knots** and 2 **Thayer's Gulls** through 1 Jan. A **Eurasian Wigeon** was found on 17 Jan (MP et al.), a tagged **Bald Eagle** was seen there again on 24 Jan, and two **Vermilion Flycatchers** continued through 24 Jan when a third individual was also found (MR et al.). Elsewhere on the Oxnard Plain, a **Tropical Kingbird** continued near Round Mountain through 30 Jan and seven **Hooded Mergansers** continued there through 28 Jan. The "**Harlan's**" **Red-tailed Hawk** continued at the entrance to CSUCI through 26 Jan.

Uncommon passerines (and several woodpeckers) were reported throughout the county. **Red-naped Sapsuckers** were found at several locations including one at Corriganville Park on 2 Jan (MP), one in Camino Real Park on 4 Jan (EW), and one at Barranca Vista Park on 5 Jan (MT). The wintering **Plumbeous Vireo** resurfaced at Rancho Simi Park on 28 Jan. Uncommon in the coastal lowlands during the winter, individual **Brown Creepers** were at Camino Real Park 4-24 Jan (KK & EW) and Foster Park 22 Dec-6 Jan (JB). A **Townsend's Solitaire** continued in Ojai through 19 Jan and a **Varied Thrush** was in the Arundell Barranca on 1 Jan (JG). A **Nashville Warbler** continued to winter in a Ventura yard through 31 Jan (RM) and a **Black-and-white Warbler** was reported at the Ventura Settling Ponds on 3 Jan (CR). Sparrows of note included a **Vesper Sparrow** in Camarillo on 23 Jan (PG), a **Swamp Sparrow** in the Arundell Barranca on 1 Jan (JG), a **White-throated Sparrow** continued in Newbury Park through 11 Jan, and a **Harris's Sparrow** continued on Anacapa Island through 25 Jan. Two **Tricolored Blackbirds** continued along Arnold Road through 16 Jan, and three **Tricolored Blackbirds** and a **Yellow-headed Blackbird** were along Casper Road on 31 Jan (KR).

(...Continued on Page 6.

VENTURA AUDUBON SOCIETY

P.O. Box 24198
Ventura, CA 93002

(...*NOTES FROM THE FIELD*, continued from Page 5)

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 nuisance bird calls), call or e-mail David Pereksta at Pereksta@pacbell.net or 659-5740.

Good birding,
David Pereksta

Observers: Joel Barrett, Michael Berry, Frank DeMartino, Alexis Frangis, Walter Fuller, Peter Gaede, Jesse Grantham, Peter Haines, Mary Hansen, Karl Krause, Peter Larramendy, Judy Matsuoka, Robert McMorrin, John Mueller, Matthew Page, David Pereksta, Kay Regester, Chris Rohrer, Martin Ruane, Adam Searcy, Michelle Townsley, and Eric Waian



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(...*FIELD TRIPS*, continued from Page 3)

Saturday, Mar 29, 8:30 a.m. Beginner's Bird Walk. Carpinteria Salt Marsh Reserve. Allen Bertke (805) 640-9037. This reserve is one of the most important estuaries in our area. A nicely maintained path winds through wetlands, channels, and scrub brush, with great views of birds. We should see a variety of shorebirds, including Yellowlegs, Dowitchers, teals and grebes, as well as Belted Kingfishers, Savannah Sparrows (Belding), Blue-Grey Gnatcatchers, Loggerhead Shrikes, and possibly Clapper Rail. **Directions:** Take Hwy. 101 north to Carpinteria, exit Casitas Pass Rd., left on Casitas Pass Rd., right on Carpinteria Ave., left on Linden, right on 3rd St. to the marsh. **To car pool**, meet at the Museum of Ventura Co., 100 E. Main St. (side parking lot) at 8:00 a.m.

Mark Your Calendar

Tuesday, April 1 – Fillmore/Lake Piru
Saturday, April 5 – Hedrick Ranch, Santa Paula
Saturday, April 12 – Nature Conservancy Walk – Santa Clara River West
Saturday, April 19 – Nature Conservancy Walk – Ormond Beach

MARCH BOARD MEETING

The next **bi-monthly** Board of Directors meeting will be held on March 4th at the home of Judy Dugan, 262 Teloma Dr, Ventura, 93003. Call (805) 642-0842 for more information. Any VAS member is welcome.

THE VENTURA AUDUBON SOCIETY holds its regular meeting on the second Tuesday of the month at the Poinsettia Pavilion, 3451 Foothill Rd. in Ventura 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 our 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 1st of the month preceding the next issue.* E-mail to: deeypress2@gmail.com. Call Editor Dee Press at 484-8415 for more information.