

# *The* **CALIFORNIA CONDOR**

Ventura Audubon Society **OCTOBER 2019** Volume 54, Number 11  
A Chapter of the National Audubon [www.VenturaAudubon.org](http://www.VenturaAudubon.org)



## **CALL NOTES...Cynthia Hartley**

One of the things I love about being part of the [Audubon](#) community is a chance to network with others who care deeply about birds, and like us are working to protect them and their habitat. In Ventura our chapter is very focused on our conservation work, planning chapter activities and building our volunteer network, and it is easy to forget we aren't the only ones doing this work.

This past summer I had the opportunity to attend the [Audubon Convention](#) in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. I joined 600 Audubon members, staff and college students for 4 days of workshops, seminars and birding. Out of the 107 chapters that were represented I met many with similar questions and challenges, and heard many successes. As a new president (I found out the day before I left on this trip), I was able to network and ask advice from experienced chapter presidents from Tulsa Oklahoma, upstate New York, Ohio and Washington State.

Among the seminars I attended we heard a lot about Audubon's strategic priorities. Audubon National considers these priorities to be the most impactful ways we can protect birds against the many challenges we all face in the future. As a chapter it's important for us to know how our work fits in with these priorities

Following are Audubon's conservation priorities and how our Chapter plays a role:

**Climate:** Audubon scientists are building models to predict which species will be most impacted by climate change and developing strategies to help them, which directly informs the other priority areas. In fact, in early October a new climate report will be released by Audubon that will have updated analysis on how climate change will impact birds, so keep an eye out on the news. Through citizen science projects many of you have contributed to the body of knowledge that has gone into this work, and which will help future analyses (e.g. the Christmas Bird Count, Pelican Survey and use of the eBird App). We also relay Climate Action alerts to our members via social media when critical legislation needs our support. When you raise your voice to be heard by your representatives and those who influence policy it helps birds and supports this priority.

**Coasts:** We align very closely with Audubon as a coastal chapter with breeding populations of least terns and snowy plovers. At Ormond and Hollywood Beaches, Ventura Audubon has taken a leading role with our Shorebird Recovery Program (see the article on page 5 of this newsletter). A number of chapter members have participated in our Volunteer Naturalist program to help us conduct public outreach at nesting beaches, and our Education Committee provides birders to assist school field trips to our beaches. Our conservation committee comments on coastal projects that impact birds, have weighed in on several Local Coastal Plans, and our committee members attend many meetings to provide comment.

**Water:** This primarily entails work at the policy level. The goal is to ensure adequate water to critical ecosystems, including the Colorado River Delta, the Salton Sea, the Mississippi River and Delta, the Great Lakes, and the Greater Everglades. Audubon is lobbying for increases in federal and state funding to enhance water management and habitat restoration. This is not something our chapter is working on from a "boots-on-the-ground" perspective, but again, we relay action alerts when important legislation needs our support.

*CALL NOTES...(Continued on Page 2)*

**Working Lands:** This involves increasing bird friendly habitat by working with land owners (such as farmers and ranchers) to encourage practices that help birds. For example, encouraging rice farmers to flood their fields at key migration times, or plant hedgerows and field edges to benefit warblers and bluebirds. Again, this isn't something our chapter is directly involved in, but we certainly welcome your thoughts and suggestions for our community.

**Bird Friendly Communities:** Audubon says it well, "The goal here is to transform human habitats into bird-friendly communities." Although the Ventura chapter doesn't yet have this type of program our neighbor chapter Conejo Valley Audubon Society in east Ventura County does through their Our Lawns to Native Habitat program. For my part, I planted my yard with natives that provide food and cover for birds. Many of my birding friends have also done so. I see this as a natural next step for our chapter if we find members who would like to lead such a program.

## **OCTOBER PROGRAM**

### ***The Bald Eagles of Lake Casitas ...Bob Massey & Sally Carless***

**7:30 p.m. Tuesday, October 8th, Poinsettia Pavilion, 3451 Foothill Road, Ventura**



The program will cover two time periods. The first from the arrival of a pair of Bald Eagles at Lake Casitas in the year 2010 through the tumultuous time leading into and including the year of 2015 and a bit about eagle magic, healing, and friendships made under the eagle trees. The second from 2015 to present day covering viewing, life cycle stages, identification and some earmark behaviors and simply the beauty of these magnificent birds.

Finally, both Sally and Bob will answer any questions the audience may have regarding the eagles, Bob and Sally's work as photographers, photographic techniques, and any other questions which may come to mind.

#### **Bob Massey – Biography**

Bob Massey is nature lover and advanced amateur photographer. When he was 10 years old his parents moved to one of the original farm houses in a secluded area of Monmouth County, New Jersey. It was there he developed his love of nature and a passion for observing animal behavior. Surrounding woodlands and a lowland marsh on the property afforded him the opportunity to sit quietly for many hours and observe a wide variety of animals including rabbits, muskrats, snakes, snapping turtles and red wing blackbirds to name a few.

When Bob moved to California in 1969, he took up photography in a big way. He built a darkroom in his apartment and brought home pictures from a multitude of trips to various California wilderness areas and the Canadian Rockies.

Photography went on the backburner in 1972 when he married Anna Madden. Subsequently he moved with his family from Los Angeles to Ventura in 1979. In the year 2000 he joined Ventura County Sheriff's K9 Search and Rescue team and it rekindled to a small degree his interest in wilderness photography. It would not be until late in 2014, after Anna's passing one year prior, that Bob finally re-committed to making photography a significant part of his life. Almost at the same time, he had read about a pair of Bald Eagles at Lake Casitas and a wonderful exhibit by photographer Sally Carless. Surprisingly, he had longed to observe Bald Eagles since he was 5 years old. Somehow, in all his travels, that opportunity had eluded him. Now, in 2014, the time was right to finally get a look at a Bald Eagle in the wild. During the next 5 years, Bob devoted a significant portion of his time to documenting the lives of these incredible birds. It has been a journey of love and discovery. Bob's photographs of the Lake Casitas Bald Eagles are his attempt to document and pay tribute to the magnificent beauty of one of nature's finest creatures.



## ***OCTOBER 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.**

**A few reminders about birding etiquette: Stay behind the leader, move quietly, ask questions, listen to what people are pointing out. When socializing, stay behind the group. If you have any questions you may contact me at [fieldtrips@venturaaudubon.org](mailto:fieldtrips@venturaaudubon.org) Adele Fergusson**

### **Sunday, October 6, 8:00AM Matilija Riparian Area and Lake**

**Leader : Jesse Grantham**

This can be a wonderful spot to view many migrant warblers. Wear closed shoes as the paths meander and there are some rocks.

**Directions:** Meet at Nordoff High School, the group will carpool from there to Matilija.

### **Saturday, October 12, 8 or 9 a.m. Conservation Work Day Fillmore Fish Hatchery**

**Leader: Sandy Hedrick (805) 340-0478**

We will be doing maintenance on the Native Plant Interpretative Garden planted in 2017 by FSCR and UCSB with a Grant from the Coastal Conservancy. It is located on a parcel at the Hatchery entrance. Garden work will begin at 9 until 11:30.

At 8 a.m., Sandy will lead 1-hour bird walk and tour of a portion of the 300-acre hatchery property that is slated for restoration. Just like at HRNA long pants and closed shoes are required. Bring water, gloves, and sun protection.

**Directions:** Meet at the Fish Hatchery which is located to the right off Highway 126 just 1.2 miles East of Fillmore and 26 miles from Ventura.

### **Monday, October 14, 8:30 a.m. Laguna Tams**

**Leader: Adele Fergusson (805) 415-4304**

The tamarisk trees at Laguna Rd are a migrant hot spot. Migrating birds mostly warblers are attracted to the insects in the trees and a number of uncommon to rare birds often show up at this location.

**Directions:** From Hwy 101, take Rice Ave south (towards the ocean), turn left (east) on E Pleasant Valley Rd, turn right on Laguna Rd. Please observe good birding etiquette at this location, as it is a fairly busy road in an agricultural area, please do not park in front of driveways or the tamarisk trees.

### **Saturday, October 19, 8:00 a.m. Ojai Meadows**

**Leader: Tevin Schmitt (661) 904-1563**

This beautiful preserve is a birding hotspot and includes a restored wetland and native plantings. Target birds will include: Western Bluebirds, Sora, White tailed Kites, Western Meadowlark, Merlin, Lark Sparrow, Lincoln's Sparrow and White-crowned Sparrows.

**Directions:** Take Hwy 33 toward Ojai and turn left at the Y. The preserve is on the left side. Parking is available in front of the entrance and also at Nordoff High School. We will meet at the entrance.

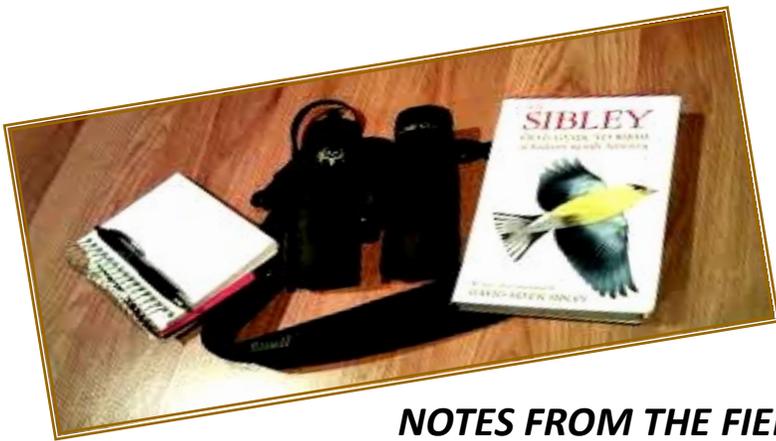
### **Saturday, October 26, 8:30 a.m. Lake Casitas**

**Leader: Kay Regester (805) 258-1025**

There will be lots of walking, so wear comfortable shoes and bring snacks and water. Bring scopes if you have them!

Target birds will include: the resident Bald Eagles, Green Heron, Chipping and Lark Sparrows, Common Merganser and Spotted Sandpiper. We hope to see a lot of Hawks.

**Directions:** Take Hwy 33 towards Ojai; exit Casitas Vista Rd. Turn right twice and go under freeway past Foster Park to first right, Santa Ana Rd. Follow to park, on left. Or take Hwy 33 to Hwy 150, turn left and follow signs to the lake. Park out front and we will walk into the park.



## NOTES FROM THE FIELD ...David Pereksta

August is a great month for southbound shorebird migration and movement of other waterbirds locally. A **Pacific Golden-Plover** was on the Oxnard Plain 22-23 Aug (LS). The **Ruff** returned to the Point Mugu area for her sixth consecutive year on 21 Aug (LS) and is expected to winter again. The first **Pectoral Sandpiper** of the fall migration was on the Oxnard Plain on 25 Aug (DP) and a **Semipalmated Sandpiper** was in the same vicinity on 21 Aug (LS). Eleven **Red Knots** were near Point Mugu on 25 Aug (DP). **Solitary Sandpipers** included one on the Oxnard Plain on 18 Aug with a second bird on 21 Aug (LS), and another at Matilija Lake 25-31 Aug (JG et al.). The **Cattle Egret** continued near Point Mugu through 25 Aug. Nine **Reddish Egrets** in view at once near Point Mugu on 23 Aug is an all-time high count for one location in California (DP & LS).



Sightings of boobies continue to along the coast and offshore after recent warm water events. A **Nazca Booby** was off Ventura on 3 Aug (JB) and a **Masked Booby** was at Hollywood Beach on 12 Aug (JM). One of the few **Brown Boobies** reported locally this year was seen from Pitas Point on 20 Aug (BF). **Brown Boobies** have started nesting on Santa Barbara Island, which represents the first breeding of that species in the conterminous U.S.



August is on the early end of southbound passerine migration in southern California, but a few species of note were found. After their initial discovery in July, the **Chestnut-backed Chickadees** continued along Rincon Creek throughout August (m. obs.), which may indicate their long-awaited establishment in Ventura County. A **Summer Tanager** was at Matilija Lake 24-25 Aug (JG et al.) and a **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** was in an Ojai yard on 29 Aug (BK). September will bring a variety of passage migrants so be sure to get out and bird some of our local migrant traps.

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 659-5740 or <pereksta@pacbell.net>

Good birding,  
David Pereksta

Observers: Joel Barrett, Bob Friedrichs, Jesse Grantham, Bob Kilpatrick, John Mallinckrodt, David Pereksta, and Larry Sansone

***Beach Reports 2019 - Shorebird Recovery Program  
...Cynthia Hartley—President***



We are fortunate in Ventura County to have two very special shorebird species that nest on our beaches. The California Least Tern (CLT) arrives to our shores every spring, returning from their winter journey to the offshore waters of Central America and Brazil, while the Western Snowy Plover (WSP) is resident year-round. Both species have seen critical declines in their numbers over the past several decades as a result of human impacts to the habitat they thrived in previously for thousands of years.

These species nest from San Buenaventura State Beach at the end of our county to Pt. Mugu at the south end, and even on San Nicholas Island. Two beaches in our county, Hollywood and Ormond Beaches, are unusual in that there isn't a single landowner, such as California State Parks or a military base. Instead land ownership is a patchwork of private, city, county and state entities. There is no dedicated city or county funding for staff or even a coordinated recovery program for endangered nesting shore-birds.

Recognizing the CLT and WSP populations require better protection and improved habitat for long term recovery, Ventura Audubon Society began building our own coordinated recovery plan that we call the Shorebird Recovery Program. Our objectives are to oversee and implement changes that provide safer and more natural habitat to reduce the threats that impact nesting success for these species. This includes surveying breeding beaches each year to monitor nests; protecting nesting areas with fencing, signs; as well as training volunteers in our Volunteer Naturalist program to conduct public outreach and education.

We have worked with The California Coastal Conservancy, The Nature Conservancy, Oxnard City, the Ventura County Harbor Department and Federal and State Fish and Wildlife Agencies. We partner closely with California State Parks which owns several beaches that have nesting populations of WSP and CLT. State Parks have their own management program for monitoring and protecting these birds, and we share a volunteer program and support each other's efforts.

In three separate monthly reports we will publish nesting summaries for Hollywood Beach, Ormond Beach, and California State Beaches in Ventura County.

**Hollywood Beach – Small but Important!**

Our first beach update is Hollywood Beach, which is one of the most urban beaches in Ventura County. It has the Channel Islands Harbor on one end, a hotel complex on the other end, and in between beach facing homes and development. We monitor this beach even though nesting numbers are typically quite low compared to other nesting beaches. Birds are unaware of invisible boundaries dictated by human land ownership and will shift nesting between beaches based on changes to habitat and the presence of predators. We had two incredible years at Hollywood Beach (2013 and 2014) when the sand trap area, typically used for dredging, became unusually wide because the dredging was delayed for a year or more. In addition, other area beaches faced catastrophic nest losses due to heavy predation.

***BEACH REPORTS...(Continued on Page 6)***

## *BEACH REPORTS... (Continued from Page 5)*

In 2013 the nesting numbers at Hollywood Beach were 209 CLT nests (2000% over average) and 29 WSP nests (300% over average) and were also very high in 2014. The beach was later returned to the regular dredge cycle which reduced available nesting habitat, raven predation declined everywhere and the birds returned to their usual nesting beaches. However, we learned an important lesson, not to dismiss the value of habitat based on trends over a short period of time. We continue to monitor the nesting on this beach, advocate for habitat protection and are ever watchful for another unusual nesting year.

### ***Hollywood Beach...Debra Barringer - Biologist***

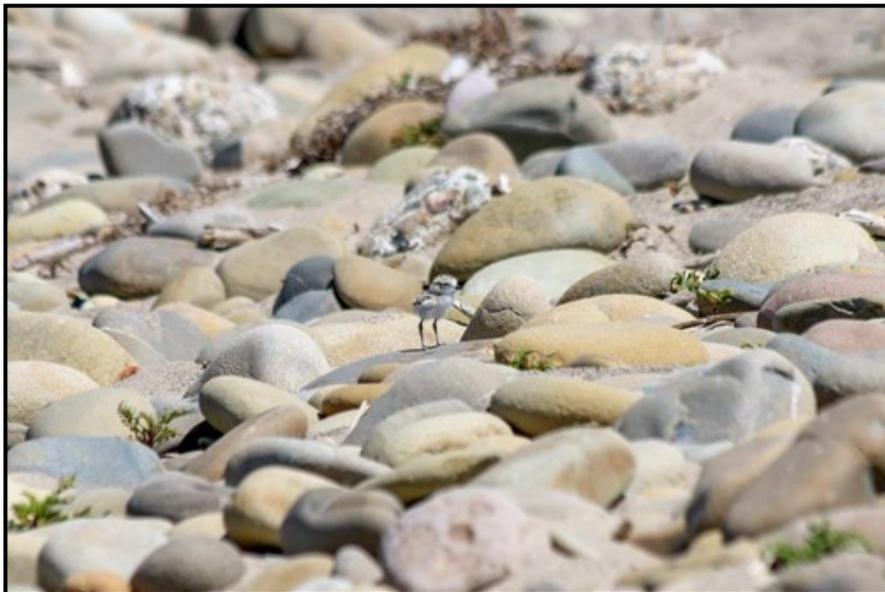
Incidents like the dredging years also illustrate the importance of having suitable alternative beaches available for nesting when the larger nest areas experience problems such as large depredation events, human disturbances, or weather-related nest losses. This year there were 5 WSP nest attempts on Hollywood Beach in 2019, the same number as in 2018. Monitors protected nest areas with 4-ft mesh fencing, which has proven very effective, or symbolic ropes and stakes when nests were placed outside fences. We used 3x3-ft wire predator enclosures over WSP nests that are effective in keeping other birds and larger mammals from eating eggs. A total of 15 eggs were laid, 8 hatched, 4 were abandoned, and 3 eggs were depredated before the nest could be protected with an enclosure. The latter was an unfortunate incident that was preventable. Monitors reminded the authorities that took the phone calls to contact them to prevent this in the future.

WSP chicks were observed on very few occasions, one at 13 days after hatch, but no fledglings were confirmed. American crows were observed daily and are once again suspected as the primary predators. Crows are clever and predate chicks when humans, off-leash dogs, golf carts, and other disturbances flush chicks from hiding places.

This remains Hollywood Beach's greatest challenge - that vulnerable chicks have to share the beach with humans, dogs, and vehicles and that human activity attracts crows. This year the nesting season ended by mid-July, about a month and a half later than last year's abruptly short nesting season. By July 19th, WSPs in groups appeared as migrators and hatch year WSPs from other beaches.

August-September counts on this beach are high - from 50 to 80 WSPs roosting in the wrack areas that monitors have been able to expand by working with sand-movers and groomers. Some in the public have complained about the un-groomed areas but this is evidence that wrack and debris are critical elements that provide habitat for migrating birds on our beaches.

CLTs were observed flying over the beach and foraging in nearby waters on 12 survey days. Even though CLT pairs touched down on the beach on two observed occasions, no scrapes or attempts to nest were recorded at Hollywood Beach this year.



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**MEMBERSHIP EXPIRATION:** If you are not sure whether your membership has expired, please **email** Deborah at [debburns38@gmail.com](mailto:debburns38@gmail.com) and she will check it out for you.

**BOARD MEETING:** The next Board of Directors meeting will be on Tuesday **November 5th, 2019**. Our meetings are held at Wild Birds Unlimited located at 4020 E. Main Street, Ventura, 805-765-4594. Because the store will be closed, parking is available. VAS members are welcome to attend.

**THE VENTURA AUDUBON SOCIETY** holds its monthly program on the second Tuesday of the month at the Poinsettia Pavilion, 3451 Foothill Rd. in Ventura at 7:30 p.m., September through April. Board Meetings are held bimonthly on the first Tuesday of the month. A membership form is available on the VAS web site. Our May meeting is a barbecue.

**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 15th of the month preceding the month of publishing.

