

The **CALIFORNIA CONDOR**

Ventura Audubon Society **DECEMBER 2013** Volume 34 Number 4
A Chapter of the National Audubon www.VenturaAudubon.org



CALL NOTES ..Bruce Schoppe, President

The annual **Christmas Bird Count** is scheduled for January 4, 2014. (Yes, it is almost 2014!) We have scheduled the count for a bit later in the allotted time period in hope of more birds. We'll bird the same eight sectors as we have for years. A potluck will follow (as usual) at Church of the Foothills (as usual). Please see Page 4 for details.

From December 14 through January 5 tens of thousands of volunteers throughout the Americas take part in an adventure that has become a family tradition among generations. Families and students, birders and scientists, armed with binoculars, bird guides and checklists go out on an annual mission - often before dawn. For over one hundred years, the desire to both make a difference and to experience the beauty of nature has driven dedicated people to leave the comfort of a warm house during the Holiday season.

Each of the citizen scientists who annually brave snow, wind, or rain, to take part in the Christmas Bird Count makes an enormous contribution to conservation. Audubon and other organizations use data collected in this longest-running wildlife census to assess the health of bird populations - and to help guide conservation action.

Ventura Audubon's piece of this effort is a 24 kilometer (15-mile) diameter circle centered, roughly, on Canada Larga Road. 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 on Page 4.

The VAS count circle offers a variety of habitat and, always, an interesting assortment of species. The area is the wintering home for many species and others that migrate through on their way to wherever they winter. And, there is always the possibility of a rarity. And, this year, we would like to include an owl search, time and place to be determined. Please let Alexis Frangis know if you are interested (alexisraehamilton@gmail.com).

Anyone can participate in the CBC. 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 me. Their phone numbers and email addresses are on Page 4. There is no cost to participate. Locally, more than 80 people participated last year and we recorded 181 species.

***December Program~ 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, December 10th
Poinsettia Pavilion, 3451 Foothill Road, Ventura***

"A Naturalist's Guide to the Santa Barbara Region" with Joan Lentz

Join **Joan Easton Lentz** as she introduces us to the amazing diversity of our region's natural history. In this presentation we will go on a journey of the area's flora and fauna by sharing photographs and hearing passages from her newly released book. Joan will guide us on a rewarding naturalists' road trip.

Joan Easton Lentz is an author, teacher, and research associate of the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History and a native of Santa Barbara. Read more about her latest book on Page 7.

**Please plan to stay after the program to share coffee, tea and cookies and meet Joan. She will have copies of her new book available (\$35.00) and will be happy to personally autograph your copy.

...Laura Gulovsen: Program Committee Co-Chair

BEYOND BASICS ...Article and Photos by David Pereksta

Challenges of Bird Identification Against the Waves of Hope and Expectation

It is a quiet Saturday morning in late September on the Oxnard Plain. As expected, cars are littered along the margins of Laguna Road and birders are blocking traffic looking for that elusive rare migrant. The silence is shattered by the exclamation, "PROTHONOTARY WARBLER!!" Birders race to the scene and are befuddled by the sight of a Wilson's Warbler. The observer said it was bright yellow so they thought it was a Prothonotary. Suddenly, the next shout follows, "BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLER!!" Everybody runs to the spot only to find an innocent Black-throated Gray Warbler. Then things go positively haywire when the word gets out that there are not one, but two Red-throated Pipits at Marina Park! This is just too good to be true and people start to migrate to this spot where the carefully documented Red-throated Pipit found on Thursday had not been seen in over a day. Much to everyone's surprise the two Red-throated Pipits are Savannah Sparrows. It is fall and the annual epidemic has started...everyone is catching Laguna Fever!

Laguna Fever (named for the famous Laguna Road tamarisks) is the term I have dubbed for the mindset birders get into during the fall migration where they are looking so hard for rare birds, they find them no matter what. There are different strains of the virus that are evident in most years including the "Although no one else has seen it today, I saw it because someone had it here yesterday" strain, the "I saw the bird found yesterday and I found a second individual" strain, and the "I found the same species found yesterday at Laguna at this other spot... and I did not get a picture" strain. Sometimes they claim the rare bird from one location has moved to an entirely different location! Like I always say, "Rare birds are rare because they are rare" and as a result, birders need to carefully identify and document rare species before causing mass hysteria and outrage at our local migrant traps. In nearly all of the scenarios I describe above there is usually inadequate documentation to support the subsequent sightings and a similar looking species is present that was misidentified. The email tirades on both sides of this issue this year were both entertaining and disturbing.



Why do birders catch Laguna Fever? There has actually been some recent literature on this subject, which has defined "bird-getting" and "list-building" as problems. List-building is actually one of the choices in our drop-down menu for rejecting records in eBird. The desire to build a life list, year list, or county list can certainly cloud someone's judgment and makes it very easy to misidentify birds. The perception and expectation that you may see a certain bird is a very strong power of suggestion that can be tough to overcome, especially if there are no other birders to corroborate. Under the influence of Laguna Fever, birders tend to find what they are expecting to see and do not objectively observe what they actually see. Kenn Kaufman lists "expectations and desire" as the number 1 pitfall to bird identification.

There were several examples of Laguna Fever this year and the one I will highlight due to space limitations is the Black-throated Green Warbler at Hailes Road. I found a Black-throated Green Warbler at the Hailes Road tamarisks on Oct 1. This is a fact because two other birders saw the bird with me and we all obtained undeniably identifiable photos. Despite extensive searching the next day, it was not seen again...a one-afternoon wonder. Well... until it was reported repeatedly from Laguna Road over the next few days. I was there for some of those sightings and all of them involved misidentified Townsend's Warblers. When I asked one very confident observer why they called it a Black-throated Green Warbler, they replied "it has a green back." Well, it also had a yellow breast, which Black-throated green Warblers do not. Another claimed they had "refound" it at Laguna while I was there so I clarified that it was not found at Laguna in the first place. Their response was, "really?...oops." Other examples include the "refinding" of the Laguna Road Yellow-green Vireo a week after it left and the Savannah Sparrow/Red-throated Pipit incident at Marina Park.



With the advent and popularity of eBird, accurately identifying and documenting what you see is important if you choose to use this citizen science portal. I am amazed at how terrified birders are about documenting a rare bird sighting. One birder recently asked me if they needed to describe (in eBird) the rare bird we were looking at because I was there. When I told them that they should, I thought they were going to have a coronary right on the spot. Documenting and describing birds is a good habit to get into and is a simple process when you break it down in to its parts. Next month, I will start administering the cure for Laguna Fever with, what is likely going to be, a multi-part series on bird identification.



DECEMBER 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.

Tues Dec 3, 8:30 a.m. Santa Clara River Estuary/ Surfers' Knoll. Leader: Adele Fergusson (805) 415-4304. We should see a good variety of shorebirds, such as Whimbrel and Least Sandpipers, as well as grebes and a variety of ducks. 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.

Sat Dec 7, 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. **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).

Sat Dec 14 – 8:30 a.m. Lang Ranch/Oakbrook Regional Park. Leader: Eric Waian. Directions: Take Hwy 101 south. Take exit 43B to merge onto CA-23N toward Moorpark. Take exit 15 for Avenida De Los Arboles. Turn right on Avenida De Los Arboles. Turn right on N. Westlake Blvd. Take first left onto Lang Ranch Pkwy. Lang Ranch is on the north side of L.R. Pkwy. We will meet at the playground equipment at the east end of the park right across from the Chumash Indian Museum. We will bird Lang Park & then cross the street into woodland & chaparral area to look for species such as woodpeckers, thrashers and Oak Titmice. **To car pool,** meet at 7:45 at the Pacific View Mall in Ventura. Take Coastal View Dr entrance off Mills & park in the lot directly across from the parking garage entrance.

Sat Dec 21, 8:30 a.m. Arroyo Verde. 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 (Jan 4), looking for the Common Yellowthroat & White-breasted Nuthatch, among others. 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. **NOTE:** There is a \$2 entrance fee for parking on the weekends!

No Beginner's Bird Walk scheduled for December. No Tuesday walk scheduled for January.

Mark your calendars!

Sat Jan 4 – Christmas Bird Count

Sat Jan 11 – Ormond Beach

Sat Jan 25 – Beginners' Bird Walk - End of Arnold Rd

VAS
Christmas Bird Count!
January 4, 2014



HAPPY HOLIDAYS!
HAPPY HOLIDAYS!

BEGINNERS' BIRD WALK ...Allen Bertke

The Beginner's Bird Walk at Ojai Meadow Preserve turned up 38 species. Although we didn't see birds in huge numbers, there was a lot of variety. Among the highlights were a late Western Tanager and Western Kingbird, Barn Owl, Cedar Waxwing, Warbling Vireo, Northern Flicker, American Kestrel and a lone Vaux's Swift that must have gotten lost from his migrating brethren.

Regarding the swift, someone mentioned that it was a "really swift Swift". When they asked my take on that, I stated that I wished someone had named a swift species after Jonathan Swift. Then if it would fly by and my friend Jimmy Swift was here, we could say "Look, Mr. Swift saw a swift Swift's Swift". They really shouldn't encourage me. Swiftly moving on...

On the other side of the eucalyptus grove I discovered a row of Chinese Pistache trees that attracts an amazing number of species when their berries ripen in the fall. Not only do the usual bluebirds, finches, juncos, and blackbirds load up, but so do Hermit Thrushes, kingbirds, phoebes, warblers, Wrentits, waxwings, and even woodpeckers. Maybe if some of the berries ferment just right, we might be treated to the antics of some inebriated birds! In addition to this bonanza, the owner of the home next to those trees has several seed feeders and hummingbird feeders, as well as a Barn Owl box. At times, it can be quite a show over there. Hmm... you can pay your admission fees at my booth in front. Reservations suggested.

We really do need more rain. Every tree and plant was looking stressed. The pond was completely empty, with cracks at the bottom like you might see at a dry lake bed in Death Valley. The streams were gone and the whole area was as dry as an old snake skin. I was really surprised by the number of species we observed – almost double what I could find when scouting just several days prior. Of course, that might have something to do with the fact that I was only out there for 20 minutes, while walking my dog, flying my kite and singing loudly while listening to "Born To Be Wild" on my Ipod. But seriously, I think the little bit of rain that we had in between my scouting outing and the bird walk got the little guys perked up. Sometimes that's all it takes. See you all on the next walk.

VENTURA AUDUBON CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

We will do our Christmas Bird Count on **Saturday, January 4, 2014**. Bird counts take place all over North America with a few in the Caribbean and Latin America, as well. This will be the 114th Christmas Bird Count conducted by National Audubon and, following the change in policy initiated last year, it will again be free! The data on bird distribution collected during the counts is used to assess the health of our bird populations. On the Ventura Audubon count last year, we recorded 181 species and more than 20,000 individual birds.

Volunteer counters are assigned to one of the section leaders who coordinate the count in each of eight areas within the VAS count circle. If you wish to participate in the count, please contact the section leader of the area where you would like to count. He/she will give you the start time, meeting place and other details. You may contact me if you want to volunteer where needed.

Section 1	Ventura River	Kay Register	kaybirder@aol.com	258-1025
Section 2	Lake Casitas	Allen Bertke	bertke@pacbel.net	640-9037
Section 3	Ojai	Rick Burgess	rburgess@toaks.org	449-2326
Section 4	Canada Larga	Neil Ziegler	neilziegler@yahoo.com	983-7207
Section 5	Wheeler Canyon	Gary Tuttle	Gt10k2826@verizon.net	525-2327
Section 6	Ventura City	Eric Waian	dawaians@roadrunner.com	630-0100
Section 7	SCRE & Coast	Alexis Frangis	alexisraehamilton@gmail.com	217-4833
Section 8	Ocean	David Pereksta	pereksta@pacbell.net	404-8265

We will get together at the end of the day to review the day's highlights and to consolidate the sector counts for a provisional total of species count. Karl Krause will again serve as Compiler. The end of day review includes a **potluck dinner at the Church of the Foothills, 6279 Foothill Road, Ventura at 6:30 PM**. The potluck is open to members, friends and guests; you do not have to be a field observer to be included. Those attending are requested to bring the following types of dishes based on the first letter of your last name.

Main Dish: K - R

Salad: A - J

Dessert: S - Z

Please bring your own place settings, utensils and beverages (water and hot coffee are provided). See you there!



NOTES FROM THE FIELD

...David Pereksta

The unprecedented **Blue-footed Booby** invasion of 2013 continued with many of the individuals that arrived in mid-September remaining through October. As many as 15 **Blue-footed Boobies** continued regularly on Anacapa Island through 30 Oct with a high count of 20 on 13 Oct. One continued on the outer breakwater at the Ventura Harbor through 7 Oct. The **Brown Booby** that first arrived in August continued on the channel marker at the Ventura Harbor through 30 Oct.

Waterbird and shorebird numbers and diversity decreased during October, but a few notable species were found. Two **Snow Geese** were on the sod along Arnold Road 16-20 Oct (KR). **American White Pelicans** were found at expected sites for the species including two at Lake Sherwood on 16 Oct (MH) and three at the Santa Clara River estuary on 22 Oct (JA). A juvenile **Yellow-crowned Night-Heron** at the end of Arnold Road on 5 Oct (WF) was the first one seen away from the breeding and roosting areas on Point Mugu since their recent expansion there. A **Common Gallinule** was at the Ventura Water Treatment Plant on 30 Oct (DP). Two **American Oystercatchers** that passed the Jehl Scale test were on Anacapa Island on 12 Oct (m. obs.) and at least one of the hybrid **American x Black Oystercatchers** continued at the Ventura Harbor through 26 Oct. The only other notable shorebirds were a **Pacific Golden-Plover** along Arnold Road 12-23 Oct and a **Solitary Sandpiper** at the Camrosa Water Treatment Plant 15-16 Oct (JB).

October is still early for wintering raptors, but a few uncommon species arrived near the coastal portions of the county. The **Zone-tailed Hawk** has apparently returned for another winter in the Ojai area and was seen 17-24 Oct (BT). A **Golden Eagle** was in Canada Larga 24-25 Oct (FD). **Burrowing Owls** were reported from the Ventura Harbor on 5-6 Oct (LVS), San Buenaventura State Beach on 7 Oct (AF), Arnold Road on 13 Oct (DDJ), and Point Mugu on 17 Oct (RK).

Uncommon to rare sapsuckers and flycatchers appeared at a variety of locations. A **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** was along Canada Larga Road on 25 Oct (KK) and another was there 26-28 Oct (AB). Reports of a **Red-naped Sapsucker** at Canada Larga may have pertained to one of the Yellow-bellieds. A **Red-naped Sapsucker** was at the Ozena Fire Station in the north county 17-25 Oct (JB). A **Scissor-tailed Flycatcher** at College Park in Oxnard 21-22 Oct (STu) was one of the few records ever for the county and like most of the others, it did not stay long. **Least Flycatchers** were reported from the Camarillo area 21-22 Oct (JB) and at Bubbling Springs Park in Port Hueneme 26-30 Oct (JB & DP). Individual **Tropical Kingbirds** were found at the Camrosa Water Treatment Plant on 15 Oct (JB) and at Ormond Beach on 16 Oct (DP & JAI).

The tamarisk rows on the Oxnard Plain and in Camarillo continued to produce eastern vagrants and off-course migrants during October. The Laguna Road Tamarisks held a variety of rare migrants including a continuing **Yellow-green Vireo** through 8 Oct, a **Prothonotary Warbler** 9-16 Oct (AS), a **Tennessee Warbler** 6-12 Oct (DP), a continuing **American Redstart** through 2 Oct, a **Black-throated Blue Warbler** 9-11 Oct (DP), a **Palm Warbler** 2-4 Oct (KK) with two there on 3 Oct (RM), and a **Clay-colored Sparrow** 1-2 Oct (AS). The Hailes Road tamarisks had a **Yellow-green Vireo** 1-2 Oct (RM) with perhaps the same bird continuing 18-22 Oct, a **Lucy's Warbler** 1-3 Oct (RM), a **Chestnut-sided Warbler** 17-24 Oct (AS), a **Black-throated Green Warbler** on 1 Oct (DP), a **Blackburnian Warbler** 1-3 Oct (JB), and **Clay-colored Sparrows** on 10 Oct (LE) and 17 Oct (AS). The tamarisks at Pleasant Valley Park in Camarillo hosted a **Magnolia Warbler** 8-13 Oct (JB). A **Pine Warbler** was at a tamarisk row near Camarillo on 14 Oct (DA).

A number of other uncommon to rare passerines were seen throughout the county in October. This has been a good year for **Red-throated Pipits** in California and locally two were found along Arnold Road on 12 Oct (N&MF) growing to three on 13 Oct (DDJ) and six on 18 Oct (AS, S<), decreasing to three by 20 Oct, and at least one continuing through 30 Oct. The **Plumbeous Vireo** returned to Rancho Simi Park for another winter 8-25 Oct (JC) and a **Black-and-white Warbler** was also there on 8 Oct (JC). A **Chestnut-sided Warbler** continued along Arnold Road through 2 Oct. A **Palm Warbler** was on Anacapa Island on 22 Oct (JB). Barranca Vista Park in Ventura hosted a **Baltimore Oriole** on 11 Oct (RM) and a **Plumbeous Vireo** on 24 Oct (FD). A **White-throated Sparrow** and a "**Slate-colored**" **Dark-eyed Junco** were foraging together on the lawn at the Ozena Fire Station on 25 Oct (DP). A **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** was in Camarillo 15-22 Oct (AS).

(continued on Page 6)

NOTES... (continued from Page 5)

A pelagic trip and other excursions offshore found a few species of note. A **Manx Shearwater** continued offshore of Ventura through 7 Oct. An **Arctic Tern** was west of San Nicolas Island on 12 Oct (DP et al.) and two **Craveri's Murrelets** were in the Santa Barbara Channel on 18 Oct (JBo). A **White-winged Scoter** was migrating south with a flock of **Surf Scoters** south of Anacapa Island on 30 Oct (DP).

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), email or call David Pereksta at pereksta@pacbell.net or 659-5740.

Good birding,
David Pereksta

Observers: John Adams, Jessie Altstatt, Dorian Anderson, Joel Barrett, Jeff Bouton, Allen Bertke, Jeff Cartier, Frank DeMartino, Don DesJardin, Linda Easter, Alexis Frangis, Mary Freeman, Nick Freeman, Walter Fuller, Mary Hansen, Rebecca Kelley, Karl Krause, Robert McMorran, David Pereksta, Kay Register, Adam Searcy, Bob Tallyn, Linda Terrill, Scott Terrill, Steve Turley, Laurie Van Stee

**OCTOBER
SIGHTINGS**



Blackburnian warbler



Black-throated Green Warbler



Chestnut-sided Warbler



Palm Warbler



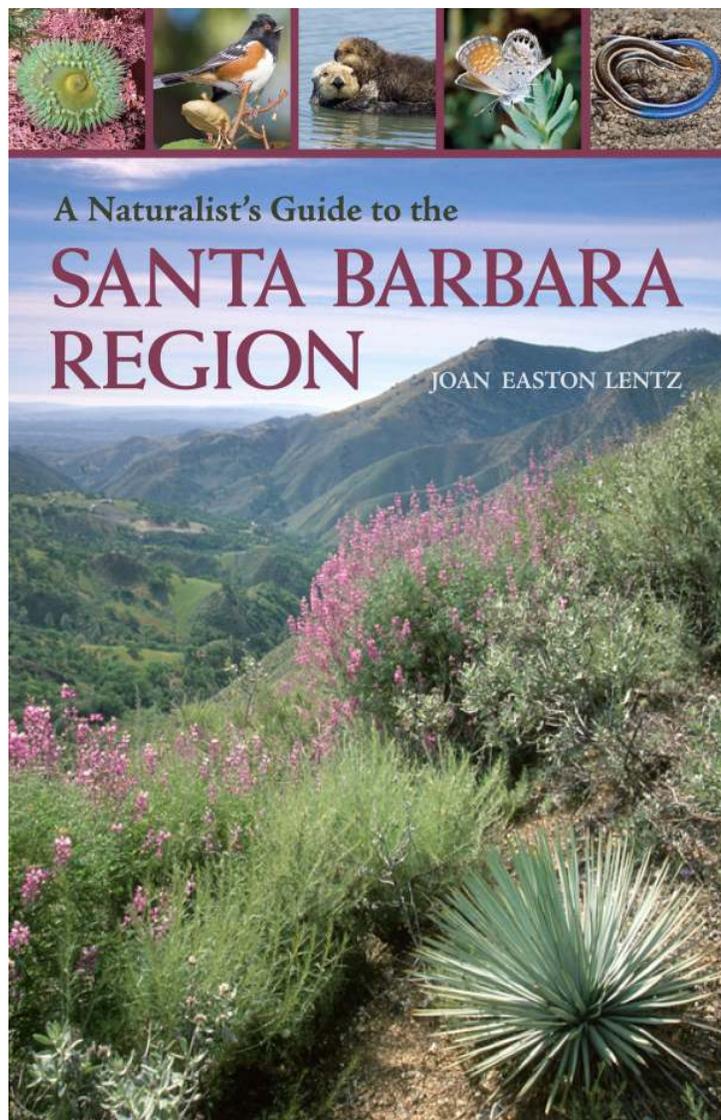
Pine Warbler



Magnolia Warbler

*Images from polkcountybirds.com

**...MORE ON OUR
DECEMBER PROGRAM SPEAKER,
JOAN LENTZ, AND HER NEW BOOK**



One of the richest biological hotspots on the planet

The Santa Barbara region is at the cusp of Northern and Southern California, where animals and plants from both areas mingle and create ecosystems of great diversity. In the first-ever comprehensive nature guide to the area, accomplished author, teacher, and Santa Barbara native Joan Easton Lentz shares her lifelong knowledge of this region renowned for its unique natural resources and legendary scenery. Taking readers on a journey from tidepools to mountain peaks and pinyon-juniper woodlands, Lentz combines lucid and evocative nature writing, including on-the-scene journal entries, with a rich array of illustrations, creating a highly personal and scientific handbook. *A Naturalist's Guide to the Santa Barbara Region* at once deepens our understanding of the land and its array of inhabitants and inspires us to head outside.

**Advance Praise for
*A Naturalist's Guide to the Santa Barbara Region***

"There are few more qualified to write about the natural history of the Santa Barbara region than Joan Lentz, and certainly none more passionate. This is a book to read and page through in the easy chair, and a wonderful guide to take with you into the field. It is a gift to all of us who treasure this marvelous country, and an invitation to all those setting out to discover it."

—Karl L. Hutterer, Emeritus Director
Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History

About the Author

Joan Easton Lentz is an author, teacher, and research associate at the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History. For over thirty-five years, she has been a serious student of the natural history of the Santa Barbara region, concentrating on its bird life. Lentz has written three books, the most recent being *Introduction to Birds of the Southern California Coast* (University of California Press, 2006).

VENTURA AUDUBON SOCIETY

P.O. Box 24198
Ventura, CA 93002

ATTENTION ALL CAMERA BUFFS **YOUR photos ARE the January Program!**



One for the money, two for the show, three to get ready, and four to go! We want **you** to share some of your special bird pictures with an appreciative audience at our monthly program meeting on January 14th.

Bring your .jpeg photos on a flash drive or disk, size them (if possible) to 1024x768ppi (longest side), and sRGB color space.

Please call one of the Program Chairs (listed on the back page of the newsletter) if you wish to participateand, of course **YOU** do!

720 N. Thousand Oaks Blvd.
Thousand Oaks, CA



Wild Birds Unlimited
Nature Shop

Richard Armerding, Co-Owner,
(CVAS birder)

**In the Whole Foods shopping center off
Wilbur**

VAS OFFICERS AND CHAIRS

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Vice-President	Neil Zeigler	983-7207
Secretary	Joyce Schoppe	658-2396
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Conservation	Sandy Hedrick	643-2408
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	Janice Susha	983-3929
	Judy Dugan	642-0842
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Program Committee:	Laura Gulovsen	642-6544
	Margaret Wilson	647-7962
	Audrey Vincent	525-5826

JANUARY BOARD MEETING

The next **bi-monthly** Board of Directors meeting will be held on January 7th at the home of Jim & Janice Susha, 2207 Eastridge Ct., Oxnard. at 7:15 p.m. Call 805-983-3929 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: deepress2@gmail.com. Call Editor Dee Press at 484-8415 for more information.