

The **CALIFORNIA CONDOR**

Ventura Audubon Society **MAY-JUNE 2020** Volume 61, Number 18
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CALL NOTES...Cynthia Hartley

With this newsletter we bring to a close our 2019-2020 VAS season. Needless to say, this year has been a roller coaster ride for our chapter, our members and community. After mid-March when stay at home restrictions were enacted, we ended up having to cancel our monthly chapter programs, birding field trips and our Annual Meeting in May where we gather to picnic together, elect our new board and celebrate another year of birds. We also canceled our biggest fund raiser of the year, the annual Bird-A-Thon.

Thank you to everyone who attended chapter programs, we miss seeing all of you! Since then a huge thank you to all of you who responded to action alerts, followed us on social media, read our newsletters, volunteered your time and donated to our chapter. We are so very grateful to those of you who contributed to Bird-A-Thon despite the cancellation of our April mailing! We could not do what we do without you. Through all of this, birds have been a constant. It was a delight and a relief to welcome all of our familiar nesting birds this spring. Spring also brought the return of snowy plover nesting season, which began on schedule despite the human drama. It is an affirmation of our chapter's mission.

To recap our 2019-20 accomplishments, we began our year with the first new VAS president in 10 years. VAS had several important achievements in grant funding this year; we were 1) awarded an Endangered Species Act Section 6 (S6) grant for our Shorebird Recovery Program on Ormond and Hollywood beaches; 2) included as a partner organization on a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) grant to continue least bell's vireo work on the Ventura River and 3) received an Audubon in Action grant to build the CSUCI Audubon Chapter which we helped launch 2 years ago. For the first time in our history we hired staff and created an executive director position. It was a big step for our chapter and it means we are entering a new world, and hopefully increasing our impact in our programs.

Soon after these big changes took place, we faced the challenges of a global pandemic which immediately stopped all group activities, cancelling all VAS activities for the rest of the year. On the heels of all this, we witnessed on national news the confrontation between one of our fellow birders who is also a board member of NYC Audubon. As he asked a woman to leash her loose dog in a location that requires leashed pets, which many of us have done before, their interaction morphed into a racial attack on him. That week began one of the most profound racial justice movements our nation has seen in generations. What a year of extremes!

Our chapter's work slowed during all of this, but it did not stop. After the March closures, our board of directors and subcommittees met via Zoom. Snowy plover nesting season started on schedule, almost at the same time as the COVID shelter at home orders. We have continued our nest monitoring program, and even our volunteer program (although with modifications).

We close this year with changes to our board of directors. I would like to thank our out-going board members Janice Susha, Jim Susha and Jackie Worden. Janice has been an active board member for 20 years, serving as secretary, program chair, and most recently our newsletter editor. Jim has also had a very long tenure and worn many hats simultaneously, including webmaster, publicity, and the chapters incoming and outgoing Constant Contact emails to the membership. Jackie has led our least bell's vireo recovery work and has been responsible for the acquisition of numerous grants to support that work, including two NFWF grants. Happily, Janice, Jim and Jackie will join our Advisory Committee and will continue to contribute to our chapter. I would also like to say a special thank you to Betsy Bachman who is our outgoing Education Chair. She has been our go-to person for leading school field trips

CALL NOTES..(Continued from Page 1

At the same time, we are welcoming 3 new incoming board members; Rainey Barton, Cody Swanson and Alecia Smith. Each one brings a love of birds and special talents to our chapter. Watch for special articles on our board members in upcoming newsletters. Our season officially closes on June 30th and the new board starts on July 1st, starting our 2020-21 season. Next year will continue to be a year of change and adaptation. We have many opportunities for anyone who would like to make a difference in the lives of birds. Because this comes at a time when we must re-invent outreach, the possibilities are very open ended for how this will move forward. Please reach out to me at ed@venturaaudubon.org if you would like to be involved in any of the following areas:

- Education Chair: Lead school field trips, grade school through high school.
- Program Chair: Coordinate our monthly programs. With on going COVID concerns we will likely be conducting programs online.
- Social Media: We need help monitoring our social media accounts and increasing our outreach impact on Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, etc.
- Newsletter: With the retirement of our newsletter editor, we need help producing this important outreach tool. If a newsletter seems like a big commitment, we also would welcome anyone interested in writing articles, highlighting volunteers or about conservation topics.

Shorebird Recovery Program Report

Nest Monitoring update

Snowy plovers and least terns were unaware this spring of COVID stay at home orders, so they have been nesting right on track, oblivious to our human drama. Fortunately, their habitat is open beach and we have been able to be right there with them with plenty of social distancing while we continue to do our work monitoring their progress. We have conducted our nest monitoring program on Ormond and Hollywood Beaches throughout the spring.

Nesting Status, June 30 2020:

Nest Numbers	Hollywood Beach	Ormond Beach
Snowy Plover	6	47
Least Tern	21	17

Hollywood Beach: This is one of Ventura County's busiest urban beaches, located in the unincorporated area adjacent to the busy Channel Islands Harbor. It is a little over 1 mile in length and our monitoring area is about 100 acres. We fence between 1 to 4 acres of nesting habitat during nesting season. We also place wire "exclosures" on snowy plover nests to protect them from predators.

Hollywood Beach Challenges and Successes: Due to the constant presence of dogs, heavy recreational use by humans, and predation by crows, chicks that hatch have poor survival rates on this beach. Despite this it is an important wintering beach for snowy plovers and we often see in excess of 100 snowy plovers in the fall. It is also a crucial "back up" beach when other nesting beaches fail. As it happens, this year is such a year, with nesting of least terns down on their normal beaches and up on Hollywood Beach. This year is the first time in 5 years least terns have nested at Hollywood Beach! The first tern nest since 2014 hatched on June 19th. More nests will probably have hatched by the time this newsletter is published.

SHOREBIRD RECOVERY ... (Continued from Page 2)

Ormond Beach: This beach is much larger and more remote than Hollywood Beach. The northern end of Ormond is adjacent to Hueneme Beach, and it extends south for 2 miles to the Pt Mugu boundary. Backing Ormond Beach is the Halaco EPA superfund site, a power plant and agricultural fields. Currently there are homeless encampments on the Halaco slag heap. We monitor about 200 acres of sand, and we fence over 100 acres of nesting habitat year-round. Over 100 signs inform the public about nesting habitat restrictions. This is a very labor-intensive beach! We also use predator exclosures on snowy plover nests and monitor at least half of the snowy plover nests at any given time with trail cameras.

Ormond Beach Challenges and Successes: This year we have had problems with a group of off roaders who cut the habitat fences (at least 6 times) and have ridden motorcycles and quads inside the nesting habitat. We have also had individuals tampering with nests, by moving predator exclosures off of nests, taking eggs and removing our markers from nests. Despite the problems we have been having at Ormond, we are reaching near record numbers for snowy plover nests this year. So far at least half of our snowy plover nests have hatched, and we have already fledged many chicks. These birds have a high probability of returning in future years to raise their own families. Our numbers of least tern nests are low compared to past years, but we have had several nests hatch and chicks are already a week old and looking really good. We are seeing new pairs of least terns courting in the habitat so we expect to have some late nesting.

Thank you to our dedicated nest monitors who work tirelessly to track, protect and advocate for our endangered shorebirds!

What can you do?

1. If you visit one of these beaches, please respect the fencing. Please share your knowledge about nesting habitat and fence closures with others.
2. If you take your dog to the beach, do not go to Ormond Beach which has a year-round dog ban. If you go to Hollywood Beach, do not go between the hours of 9am-5pm. Before 9am and after 5pm, be sure to keep your dog on a leash.
3. Attend Volunteer Naturalist training to learn more about snowy plovers and least terns. After taking training please become an ambassador for these amazing birds **There is still one more Volunteer Naturalist training this year, July 9th!** We have updated our training materials, so even if you have already taken Docent or Volunteer Naturalist training in the past, we recommend you consider taking a refresher. If you are interested, please email volunteer@venturaaudubon.org to sign up, or to request information.

Volunteer to help our Shorebird Recovery Program:

- We need help with social media, video processing, and “boots on the ground” to help patrol the beach and watch for trouble makers in the nesting habitat.
- Do you have skill with animation? We have plans to create an animation short to communicate our message to a new audience and we are looking for an animator.
- We also have plans to create a series of Public Service Announcement (PSA) style short videos to post to our YouTube channel. If you like to act, direct or edit video please contact us!

Please email volunteer@venturaaudubon.org if you would like to inquire about volunteering or training



NOTES FROM THE FIELD ...David Pereksta

It goes without saying that this was the strangest March on record. From a bird perspective, things were as expected; we saw the arrival of many migrants including **Rufous Hummingbirds**, **Western Kingbirds**, **Warbling Vireos**, **Hooded Orioles**, **Black-headed Grosbeaks**, and others. It was exciting that endangered **Least Bell's Vireo** were also found in a number of places as their recovery and range expansion continues. However, March also brought extensive closures of some of our favorite local birding places as drastic measures were necessary to curb the spread of COVID-19. All of our lives have been upended at some level, and for many of us birds may be the last thing on our minds. When the curve starts to flatten and we do regain some normalcy, we will likely never approach our times together the same way again from how we meet as a group for a monthly meeting, or for a field trip, or a volunteer effort to benefit a local conservation cause. I hope that none of you have been severely impacted and that you are finding ways to stay connected with nature and birds as we seek to discover what our new "normal" will be. I have been sneaking out to secluded places to maintain my sanity while remaining socially distant, and continue to report to you what noteworthy birds have been around.

A pair of **Wood Ducks** was at the Ventura Settling Ponds on 30 Mar (BT & MK). Mugu Lagoon on Naval Base Ventura County hosted a pair of **Eurasian Wigeons** 6-29 Mar (MR, NL), a **Eurasian Green-winged Teal** 6-27 Mar (MR, DP), a continuing **Red-necked Grebe** through 13 Mar, a continuing **Ruff** through 6 Mar, and at least one **Reddish Egret** through the end of March. A flock of eleven **Cattle Egrets** was on the Oxnard Plain on 28 Mar (DP). As many as two **Yellow-crowned Night-Herons** continued at the Ventura Settling Ponds through 22 Mar and a **Common Gallinule** remained there through 28 Mar. In the pelagic realm offshore, a **Fork-tailed Storm-Petrel** was in the Santa Barbara Channel on 4 Mar (JH) and two **Brown Boobies** continued at Anacapa Island through 8 Mar.

California Condors continued at Canada Larga Road through 25 Mar. **Bald Eagles** included the pair at Lake Casitas throughout March, one at Lake Piru through 22 Mar, and one at Matilija Lake on 15 Mar (JG et al.). The two wintering **Swainson's Hawks** were in the Point Mugu vicinity through 13 Mar. What is assumed to be the same **Zone-tailed Hawk** that has been frequenting Ojai this winter was seen in the Canada Larga vicinity 20-25 Mar (DP, GVH) and the Foothill Road area of Ventura on 27 Mar (GP). Two **Short-eared Owls** continued in Mugu Lagoon through 20 Mar when they were found with a third individual.

A few new finds in March were likely wintering birds that had been overlooked including a **Baltimore Oriole** in Mission Oaks Park on 23 Mar (SK), and a **Northern Waterthrush** and a **Swamp Sparrow** on the Oxnard Plain on 28 Mar (DP). An early northbound **Bank Swallow** was over Point Mugu on 6 Mar (DP et al.). **Chestnut-backed Chickadees** continued to expand south in the county with one at the Ventura Settling Ponds on 6 Mar (TB) and another in downtown Ventura on 8 Mar (JM). Continuing birds included a **White-winged Dove** in Camarillo through 10 Mar, individual **Lewis's Woodpeckers** at Lake Casitas through 26 Mar and Canada Larga through 31 Mar, the **Tropical Kingbird** at CSUCI through 31 Mar, the wintering **Dusky Flycatcher** at Matilija Lake through 31 Mar, the **Green-tailed Towhee** at Wildwood Regional Park through 2 Mar, and the **Painted Redstart** at Arroyo Verde Park through 18 Mar.

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 805-659-5740 or <pereksta@pacbell.net>

Good birding,
David Pereksta

Observers: Tom Boucher, Jesse Grantham, Jim Howard, Sangeet Khalsa, Marv Kwit, Nick Lethaby, Jimmy McMorran, David Pereksta, Giles Pettifor, Martin Ruane, Bob Tallyn, Gerard Van Heijzen.

2019-2020 Conservation Notes **Bruce Schoppe, VP Conservation**

Migratory Bird Initiative

Celebrating Thirty Years of Partnering for Migratory Bird Conservation



Three decades ago, scientists realized that protecting birds across their full annual cycle required working with everyone along the way.

By Nat Seavy, March 10, 2020

American Redstart *Setophaga ruticilla*

In 1990, Ice Ice Baby topped the charts, Nelson Mandela was released from prison, East and West Germany reunited and people were talking about the decline of Neotropical migrant birds. (Neotropical migrants are birds that spend most of their lives in the tropics but migrate north for the nesting season.) In the previous year, John Terborgh had published his book *Where Have All the Birds Gone?* in which he argued that action needed to be taken sooner rather than later to address these declines. However, as the title of his book implied, there were questions among conservationists about how best to address these declines.

The same year Terborgh's book was published, a meeting of ornithologists concluded that there was no clear consensus on whether declines of migrants were driven by changes on the breeding grounds or wintering grounds. What was clear was that addressing these declines would require many organizations and agencies to working together across the western hemisphere.



It was in this context that [Partners in Flight was formed](#) in 1990 with the mission of “keeping common birds common and helping species at risk through voluntary partnerships.” Representatives from state and federal agencies, industry, and non-profit conservation organizations signed the original memorandum of understanding. Shortly after that, the group received funding from the US Fish and Wildlife Service to hire a coordinator and other staff.

For the [last 30 years](#), Partners in Flight has brought together these diverse stakeholders to lead science efforts to better understand bird ecology and factors that limit bird populations, as well as design and implement conservation plans to halt and reverse bird population declines.

“Partners in Flight has played a critical role in bringing together the bird conservation community and developing the resources and plans that allow everyone to work together to protect migratory birds,” says Jill Deppe, senior director of Audubon’s Migratory Bird Initiative.

The broad array of participants, including federal and state agencies, the military and various industries, “had the effect of greatly increasing the resources directed to bird conservation, and expanded our understanding of the status of and concerns about bird populations,” said Stan Senner, Audubon’s vice president of conservation.

Today, Partners in Flight is a dynamic and welcoming network of more than 150 partner organizations throughout the western hemisphere engaged in all aspects of landbird conservation.

CONSERVATION NOTES...(Continued from Page 5)

“Partners in Flight is a true grassroots initiative that has been the catalyst for ground breaking strategies for three decades. We’ve opened new opportunities for bird conservation that have included a [species vulnerability assessment](#) that incorporates keeping our common birds common,” said Bob Ford, Partners in Flight US national coordinator.

And the work is more important than ever. Although the declines of many Neotropical migrants have continued, with coordinated action we know the recovery of these populations is possible.

“There’s still much to be done, especially in view of the recent study on the loss of [three billion birds](#) in North America and the [current and future impacts of climate change](#),” said Senner.

As it was 30 years ago, keeping common birds common is an urgent call to action.

Audubon’s Migratory Bird Initiative aims to continue and grow the mission of Partners in Flight in a similar spirit using the latest in migration tracking technology. By collaborating with researchers and partners in bird conservation organizations across the hemisphere, the Migratory Bird Initiative will develop a first-of-its-kind platform to track the migratory journeys of 520 species, identify and address conservation threats along the full annual cycle, and engage the public in the joy of migration to protect birds and the places they need, today and tomorrow.



Financial contributions to our chapter allow us to continue our work protecting birds and their habitat.

- California Department of Fish and Wildlife and United States Fish and Wildlife Service, Endangered Species Act Section 6 Grant (S6)
- National Foundation of Fish and Wildlife (NFWF)
- Beth Zuma, Hueneme Patient Collective, 501 W Channel Islands Blvd, Port Hueneme, CA 93041
- National Audubon Society, Audubon in Action Grant
- Skunkmasters, 233 E. Channel Islands Blvd, Port Hueneme, CA 3-93041
- The Baltoro Trust, Yvon Chouinard Family Trustees

VAS OFFICERS & BOARD MEMBERS 2019-2020		
Officers		Email Address
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VP, Conservation	Bruce Schoppe	vpconservation@venturaausubon.org
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MEMBERSHIP EXPIRATION: If you are not sure whether your membership has expired, please **email** Deborah at debburns38@gmail.com and she will check it out for you.

OUR BOARD and CONSERVATION COMMITTEE MEETINGS, as well as our MONTHLY PROGRAMS will be virtual for the foreseeable future.. VAS members will be advised and certainly welcome to attend these meetings.

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.

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