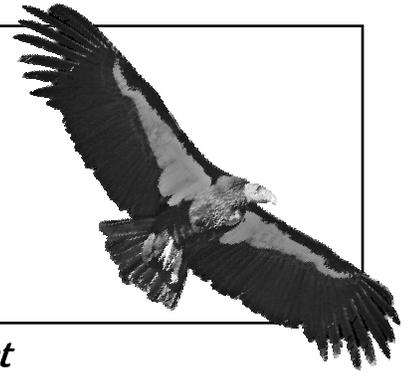


The **CALIFORNIA CONDOR**

Ventura Audubon Society **JANUARY 2011** Volume 31 Number 5
A Chapter of the National Audubon www.VenturaAudubon.org



CALL NOTES ..Bruce Schoppe, President

Education is an important part of what Audubon does. Our monthly programs and field trips provide learning opportunities as well as information. The beginner's bird walk is a popular field trip. With financial support from many members, Susan Bee has helped bring Audubon Adventures to many classrooms in Ventura County. Susan and Neil Ziegler have conducted field trips with students from El Rio School. John Connor, our newest board member has initiated a program to involve biology students from CSUCI, Ventura and Oxnard colleges in our activities. Jim and Janice Susha, with help from Susan Bee, Neil Ziegler, Reed Smith and video from Don Desjardins, have been working on a CD/DVD presentation called "For The Kids" that can be used in the classroom to augment Audubon Adventures or as a standalone program.

The importance of education to Audubon was highlighted by an Education Summit in August. Audubon California actually sponsored two summits, one in

northern California and another at Debs Park in Los Angeles. Several of our Board members attended the summit at Debs Park.

Larger chapters, especially those with nature centers, have very ambitious programs and employ full and part-time staff. The efforts of VAS stood out among the smaller chapters for its ambition and scope. We do a lot that we can be proud of!

The importance of environmental education cannot be over emphasized. Surveys continue to show a decline in the percentage of adults who see climate change as "real". And, locally, it is frustrating to see the number of people who ignore the "No Dogs" or "Dogs Must Be on Leash" signs at the very beaches where we have fencing and signs to protect snowy plovers and least terns. Environmental education must connect participants to nature and to a place. You have got to love the place to save it! (continued on Page 6)

JANUARY PROGRAM ...Janice Susha, Program Chair
Tuesday January 11th, 7:30 p.m., Poinsettia Pavilion, 3451 Foothill Rd, Ventura

THE BIRDS OF ALASKA... by Larry Arbanas

There was a day in 1986 when Larry Arbanas realized he wanted to become a filmmaker. On this particular day he was driving Vicki's Cadillac as she and 2 other fellow realtors all were complaining about their nice shoes getting wet every time they had to exit the car to look at yet another house. Out of some void Larry blurted out, "Wouldn't it be great if all these homes were on a video and we could watch them in the office?" Vicki and the others agreed, but soon returned to more pressing matters...staying dry! However, Larry had just found his way out of real estate sales and into video real estate marketing.

Three years later the Exxon Valdez crashed into the rocks of Prince William Sound in Alaska, an event that forever changed the way Larry looked at his profession and how humans interact with the natural world. It was during that time that Larry found his real love as a filmmaker, producing nature and environmental documentaries.

Today Larry produces films for the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, PBS, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land management. Recently he was sent to Mexico for Maya Lin, creator of the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington, DC to film the amazing raptor migration, the River of Raptors in Veracruz, Mexico.

Larry will give a program on The Birds of Alaska. Many of the wonderful birds we see in California were once eggs in nests in Alaska. Many of the brown and gray shorebirds we see here were brightly colored on the breeding grounds up there. If you like tundra, Caribou, Bluethroat, Bristle-thighed Curlew and beautiful Alaskan scenery, please join us at this presentation.

BIRD OF THE MONTH – JANUARY 2011

Article and Photo by DAVID PEREKSTA

COMMON GROUND-DOVE (Columbina passerina)



Bird status and distribution is always changing and some species have expanded their range into our area. A species that has moved westward into Ventura County in the last 30 years is the Common Ground-Dove.

The Common Ground-Dove, the smallest dove in the U.S., is a tiny, stocky dove with a short tail and neck, and stubby wings. It is light grayish-brown with black spots on its back and upperwing coverts. The feathers on the head and breast have dark centers that create a “scaled” effect. The adult male is iridescent blue-gray on the nape and hind neck, and pinkish on the face and underparts. The adult female lacks the iridescence on the hind neck and the pinkish tones of the face and underparts. The primaries and the wing linings flash rufous in flight and the short, rounded tail is brown and black, with narrow white corners. The blackish bill is pink at the base and the feet and legs are bright pink. It nods its head as it walks, and when flushed it flies with rapid wingbeats in a zigzag course for a short distance before it drops to the ground or lights on a branch. The call is a low repetitious *woo-oo, woo-oo, woo-oo, woo-oo*, with rising inflection at the end of each syllable. The similar looking Ruddy Ground-Dove is a rare vagrant to our area, but has occurred in recent years. It shows no “scaling” on the head and breast, no reddish color at the base of the bill, and has different wing markings.

Common Ground-Doves walk quietly on the ground in semi-open habitats with low brush and grass. In the west, they can be found in brushy fields, orchards, ranch yards, and thickets along streams. They forage primarily on seeds, but will also eat small fruits and berries; all of which they find while walking around on the ground. They often forage in pairs and will come to bird feeders for seed.

In the U.S., Common Ground-Doves are resident in southern California, southern Arizona, and southwest New Mexico; and from central Texas to southern South Carolina and south to the Gulf of Mexico and throughout Florida. They also occur in Mexico, Central America, and northern South America. They are permanent residents in most areas, but northern populations may move south in winter.

In Ventura County, Common Ground-Doves have increased with the spread of agriculture. Prior to 1980, there were only three published records for the county; however, by the mid-1980s the species was noted as being uncommon to fairly common in citrus (especially lemon) and avocado groves in the Las Posas Valley, the Oxnard Plain, and the Santa Clara River Valley. The species expansion into Ventura and Santa Barbara Counties coincides with the increase in avocado acreage in the area at that time. Places to look for them within the areas identified above include the Saticoy Spreading Ponds, Wheeler Canyon, Camarillo Regional Park, Santa Rosa Park, and Riverview Linear Park. Although they have expanded into the county over the last 30 years, they have since disappeared from some places around Ventura due to the loss of groves to development.



JANUARY *FIELD TRIPS* ...*Judy Dugan*

Beginners are welcome on all field trips. Light drizzle does not necessarily cancel trips, but heavier rain will. If in doubt, call the leader.

Saturday, Jan 8, 9:00–11:00 a.m. 8:00 for birding. Restoration Work Day, Nature Conservancy's Briggs Road/Mission Rock property. Leader: Sandy Hedrick (340-0478). We will be breaking new ground with this event at one of the Conservancy's largest holdings as part of the Santa Clara River Parkway. We will meet at the gate at the end of Mission Rock Rd. To reach the property, take Briggs Rd off Hwy 126. Take the frontage road on the south side of 126 to Mission Rock Rd and follow it to the TNC gate at the end. Wear safe field attire, including closed-toe shoes, long pants and a hat. Bring tools for weeding if you have them and water. There are no facilities on site.

Jan. 14-17 – Morro Bay Birding Festival – No VAS trip planned.

Saturday, Jan. 15, 8:30 a.m. Ormond Beach Nature Conservancy. Leader: Richard Handley (535-5533). The Nature Conservancy owns approximately 175 acres of remnant wetlands. 200-300 species of birds are present during the year. We should see a variety of ducks including the Pintail, several herons and the Belding's Savannah Sparrow. **Directions:** From Ventura go south on Victoria Ave (app. 5.3 miles). Turn left on Channels Island Blvd, turn right on Ventura Rd, turn left on Port Hueneme Rd (app. 1.2 mi.), turn right on Arcturus (app. .4 mi.), and right on McWane Blvd. Drive to the end of McWane Blvd and park on either side of the road before the barriers.

Saturday, January 22, 8:30 – 10:30 a.m. Beginners' Bird Walk, Saticoy Ponds. Leader: Allen Bertke (640-9037). The ponds are located on the northeast side of Hwy 118/Los Angeles Ave. From Ventura take Wells Rd. which turns into Los Angeles Ave./Hwy 118 and cross over the Santa Clara River Bridge. The entrance to the ponds will be on your left just after the Vineyard Ave. intersection. Please be prompt as we need to enter

together. We should see a variety of ducks, such as, Teal, Gadwall, & Bufflehead. Scopes would be helpful.

Saturday, Jan. 29, 8:30 a.m. Foster Park. Leader: John Pavelko (640-9040). Take Hwy 33 from Ojai or Ventura to Casitas Vista exit. Park under the overpass where we will meet by the Santa Anna Bridge. To car-pool from Ventura, meet at 8:00 at the Museum of Ventura Co. on Main St. (side parking lot). Some of the birds we may see are bluebirds, egrets, and maybe a Hermit Thrush.

Mark Your Calendar:

Feb. 19 – Beginners' Walk – Carpinteria Salt Marsh

HAPPY
NEW YEAR
2011

EDUCATION AND OUTREACH ...Susan Bee

It has been a fulfilling experience for Neil Zeigler and I to visit Rio Real School to introduce the children in the Migrant School Program to our Ventura County birds and birding. The students meet on Saturday morning to be given special attention to bring them up to speed in order meet their regular, week day classroom requirements. Thus far we have visited Mr. Walsh's 5th grade class and Mr. Rosales' combined 6th-8th grade class.

We arrive laden with stuffed birds, nests, binoculars, hand outs and VAS' self produced DVD for kids featuring Ventura County birds in their habitats. Fortunately, I happened upon a shopping basket on wheels at the local thrift store to assist us hauling in all our props. Suppressing my public speaking phobia, I start the program with a brief talk about basic bird facts and why we are so lucky to live in Ventura County where we have so many different bird habitats attracting many different bird species. Neil discusses the stuffed birds which invariably fascinate the kids. Since we are always asked, "How did the bird die?", we initially assure the kids that the birds died of natural causes. We allow gentle touching of the birds and encourage the many questions the students have about the Brown Pelican, California Quail, Barn Owl etc. that we bring to the classroom. (If any VAS member has a stuffed bird they would like to donate for our education program, please contact me. Our birds are getting a trifle worn.)

On to the DVD, which is a 15-20 minute interactive program, we can slow or speed up as our time allotment necessitates. Then we show the students how to use binoculars, with the first instruction being, "Put the strap around your neck so you don't drop them." The kids are always anxious to get outside and look for all those intriguing birds we saw on the DVD. This is our challenge since school yards generally support such species as American Crows, House Sparrows and Starlings. But the kids don't know that these species are not exciting to birders. Just getting the binoculars to focus correctly on any bird is an accomplishment for a young beginner.

With Mr. Rosales' class, Neil and I searched for awhile before we located an "exciting" bird, a Kestrel sitting on top of a bare walnut tree eating his breakfast. With Neil's scope, the kids could clearly see the bird's markings. On our way back to the classroom, the kids spotted some birds on the grass at the fence line. We were all thrilled to see they were a flock of about 15 Western Meadowlarks. The boys got down on the bellies and snaked closer like commandos and the birds were amazingly cooperative in not taking flight until the boys were 15 feet away. It was a struggle to tear the kids away from the school yard birding experience and return them to the classroom. Who knew?... a Kestrel and Western Meadowlarks in a school yard!

Neil and I look forward to future visits to Rio Real. The reward comes when the students ask you to come back, and they always do.

BEGINNERS BIRD WALK ...Allen Bertke

Our latest Beginner's Bird Walk was held at Camino Real Park. There were some interesting species on display for us, including a posing Red-shouldered Hawk, a perched Merlin and an elusive, but noisy Red-breasted Nuthatch. The Merlin sighting was interesting. When I first saw it perching high in a leafless tree, all I could see was a portion of its breast. From that distance and angle, it looked just like a female House Finch. I was just about ready to prematurely call it that when it suddenly changed position, revealing a flat head with a faint mustache and a short, sharp bill – definitely a Merlin! However, what came out of my mouth was "It's a House...Merlin". The group must have thought that I had discovered a new species!

We were also treated to a very friendly, practically tame, Townsend's Warbler. It was feeding in the grass, far away from the nearest tree. We kept inching closer and closer, thinking we would surely scare it away, but it paid us no mind. It just bounced around on the grass, feeding on something that must have been delicious, and looking up periodically to check our progress. I think it would have eaten out of my hand if I had a fistful of whatever it was eating. It was either very confident in its escape capabilities or very lacking in self preservation.

See you all on the next walk, and remember, a good birder is a person out standing in their field!



NOTES FROM THE FIELD

...David Pereksta

Waterfowl and waterbirds, which are arriving for the winter or passing through to points further south, were reported widely throughout the county over the last month. The most notable sighting was a female **Harlequin Duck**, the first in the county since 1997, seen offshore from a boat on 25 Nov (OJ). Thirty-three **Greater White-fronted Geese**, 38 **Cackling Geese**, and 4 **Common Mergansers** were at Lake Casitas on 20 Nov (RM & EW). The Saticoy Spreading Ponds hosted a juvenile **Tundra Swan** on 4 Dec (JM), a pair of **Snow Geese** and a **Ross's Goose** 3-4 Dec (KR), and 4 **Blue-winged Teal** and a **Common Merganser** on 3 Dec (KR). A pair of **Blue-winged Teal** were at the water treatment plant in Port Hueneme on 6 Dec (DK). A drake **Wood Duck** and three female **Hooded Mergansers** were at the Victoria Lakes Golf Course on 26 Nov (DP). A **Horned Grebe**, 3 **Redheads**, and 23 **Common Mergansers** were in the ponds near RiverPark in Oxnard on 12 Dec (DP). The **Red-necked Grebe** continued at the Ventura Harbor through 28 Nov and has been moving around widely in the area. A **Common Moorhen** and a **Blue-winged Teal** were near the harbor at the Ventura Wastewater Ponds on 22 Nov (KR). **Thayer's Gulls** were reported from several locations including one at Miranda Park on 6 Dec (DK) and two at RiverPark on 12 Dec (DP).

Point Mugu and adjacent areas hosted a number of notable species. The Ventura Audubon trip to Point Mugu on 18 Nov had the continuing **Black Scoters** and **Yellow-crowned Night-Herons**, as well as a **Ferruginous Hawk**, **Prairie Falcon**, and **Vermilion Flycatcher** (MR et al.). Two **Long-tailed Ducks** were also found at Mugu Lagoon in early December (MR). An **American Bittern** was unusually easy to see and photograph at the end of Arnold Road 28 Nov-5 Dec (JC). Other birds along Arnold Road included a **Bald Eagle** on 8 Dec (FD), a **Common Moorhen** 7-8 Dec (JC), and two **Pacific Golden-Plovers** on 17 Nov (AS).

Numbers and diversity of raptors increase during the winter and several uncommon species were seen over the last month. The **White-tailed Kite** roost in Camarillo was supporting as many as 40 individuals through 9 Dec. The **Zone-tailed Hawk** continued in Ojai and was seen through 20 Nov when it was over the Ojai Meadows Preserve. Two **Bald Eagles** were found at Lake Casitas including a third-year bird on 20-22 Nov (RM & EW) and an adult on 22 Nov (KK).

Parks in Simi Valley and Ventura produced a number of birds predictably found at each during the winter. Rancho Simi Park hosted a **Greater White-fronted Goose** 18-24 Nov (DT), **Eurasian Wigeon** 17-18 Nov (CK), **Plumbeous Vireo** 14 Nov (MP), as many as five **Red-breasted Nuthatches** 14-24 Nov (MP), and a **Brown Creeper** on 18 Nov (DT). Continuing birds at Camino Real Park included a **Red-breasted Nuthatch**, **Hermit Warbler**, and **Black-and-white Warbler** through 28 Nov.

Other notable reports included three **Short-tailed Shearwaters** and an **Ashy Storm-Petrel** in offshore waters on 28 Nov (OJ), individual **Lewis's Woodpecker** at Canada Larga on 14 Nov (JC) and near the Ojai Meadows on 20 Nov (NG), and a **Townsend's Solitaire** on Pine Mountain 27 Nov (DT). **Red-breasted Nuthatches** reports continued including three in Camarillo on 16 Nov (DP), individuals in east Ventura yards on 16 Nov (DDJ) and 4 Dec (RM), and one in a Thousand Oaks yard on 9 Dec (RF). The only report of **Pine Siskins** was of "lots" visiting a yard in Ojai from October through mid-December (BT).

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

Jeff Cartier, Frank DeMartino, Don DesJardin, Rick Farris, Noah Gaines, Oscar Johnson, Dexter Kelly, Chrystal Klabunde, Karl Krause, Robert McMorran, Jim Moore, Matthew Page, David Pereksta, Kay Regester, Martin Ruane, Adam Searcy, Bob Tallyn, Daniel Tinoco, David Torfeh, and Eric Waian.



VENTURA AUDUBON SOCIETY

P.O. Box 24198
Ventura, CA 93002

Non-profit Organization
U.S. Postage Paid
Oxnard, CA 93030
PERMIT NUMBER 382

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

VAS OFFICERS AND CHAIRS

President	Bruce Schoppe	658-2396
Vice-President		
Secretary	Joyce Schoppe	658-2396
Treasurer	Jan Lewison	643-3353
Conservation	Sandy Hedrick	643-2408
Newsletter	Dee Press	484-8415
Membership	Art Marshall	642-1585
Field Trips	Judy Dugan	642-0842
Publicity/Education	Susan Bee	640-0779
Science/Webmaster	Reed Smith	652-0706
Programs	Janice Sussha	983-3929
At Large	Jim Sussha	983-3929
	Jack Gillooly	646-3867
	John Connor	654-1805
	Marianne Slaughter	484-8415
	Nancy Schorsch	643-5825

JANUARY BOARD MEETING

The Tuesday, January 4th Board of Directors meeting will be held at the home of Jim & Janice Sussha, 2207 East-ridge Ct., Oxnard. Any VAS member is welcome. Call 983-3929 for information.

CALL NOTES (continued from Page 1)

Audubon's Educational Program Standards require that the:

- programs take place primarily outdoors
- programs be designed for a specific audience
- programs be based on current and sound science
- programs employ inquiry based learning, and programs motivate participants to take conservation action

Regardless of how much we do and have done, we cannot rest on our laurels. There is more to do. And, we can always use new volunteers for any and all of these programs

THE CALIFORNIA CONDOR is published nine times per year (September—May). Members are encouraged to submit articles, announcements, letters and drawings in WORD format or in the form of an e-mail message. *The deadline is noon on the 12th of the month preceding the next issue.* E-mail to: birderez@roadrunner.com Call Editor Dee Press at 484-8415 for more information.

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 fundraising barbecue. Call the President for information. Board Meetings are held on the first Tuesday of the month. A Membership Form is available on our web site.