

The CALIFORNIA CONDOR

Ventura Audubon Society **FEBRUARY 2015** Volume 35 Number 6
A Chapter of the National Audubon www.VenturaAudubon.org



CALL NOTES ...Bruce Schoppe, President

The Christmas Bird Count was a fun and successful event. Thanks to all who participated and special thanks to the team that organized it. They included co-compilers Alexis Frangis and Frank DeMartino, the sector leaders and potluck organizers John Connor and Estelle Ichino. We had several new participants; we covered a lot of territory and there was plenty of food at the potluck! What more could we ask – except, perhaps, more birds! The preliminary count is 179 species but, I am told, it may be one or two more than that. A full report is forthcoming.

Next on the Citizen Science agenda is the Great Backyard Bird Count!



The Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) is an annual four-day event that engages bird watchers of all ages in counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of bird populations. Participants are asked to count birds for as little as 15 minutes (or as long as they wish) on one or more days of the event and report their sightings online at www.birdcount.org. Anyone can take part in the Great Backyard Bird Count, from beginning bird watchers to experts, and you can now participate from anywhere in the world!

It's free, fun, and easy. Each checklist submitted during the GBBC helps researchers at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society learn more about how birds are doing, and how to protect them and the environment we share. Last year, participants turned in more than 144,000 online checklists, creating the world's largest instantaneous snapshot of bird populations ever recorded.

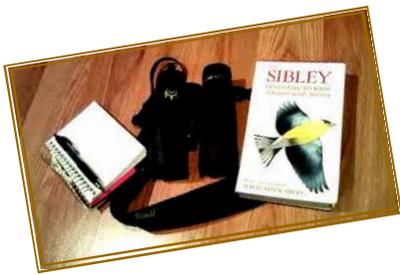
The 18th annual GBBC will be held **Friday, February 13, through Monday, February 16, 2015**. Please visit the official website at www.birdcount.org for more information. For those who join us, the Beginner's Bird Walk on Saturday, February 14, 2015 at Lake Casitas will be the GBBC Bird Walk, too!

FEBRUARY PROGRAM ...WHY WE BIRD with DAVID RICE **7:30 p.m. Tuesday, February 10th, Poinsettia Pavilion, 3451 Foothill Road, Ventura**

David Rice has a junior member National Audubon Society pin on his bulletin board but did not start actively birding until his mid-twenties. When backpacking in the Sierra, he saw a male Western Tanager across a stream and wanted to see it better. One thing led to another: a tiny pair of binoculars, birding in the San Francisco Bay Area by himself, joining Golden Gate Audubon, taking Joe Morlan's classes, a better pair of binoculars, Christmas counts, birding up-and-down California... Forty years later, he still thanks that tanager.

In the past forty years books about birding, as opposed to books about birds, have become a sub-genre of nature writing. He will read passages from *Why We Bird* and read from what other authors have said about why they birded. After his reading, he hopes we might have a conversation about why we bird.

...Audrey Vincent, Program Committee



NOTES FROM THE FIELD

...David Pereksta

DECEMBER 2014

December brought a fair amount of cold and wet weather into our region, and did appear to bring some birds with it as well. Although there have not been any rare Siberian species like those found elsewhere in California in December, it is still early in the season so keep an eye out at your favorite birding spots.

A variety of uncommon waterfowl continued to arrive throughout December. A **Ross's Goose** was amongst a flock of Canada Geese near the Buenaventura Golf Course on 18 Dec (GJ). Three **Wood Ducks** continued at Conejo Creek North Park throughout December. A **Eurasian Wigeon** was at the Ventura Settling ponds on 13 Dec (FD), another was at Conejo Creek North Park 5-31 Dec (DK & CK), and another continued at Point Mugu through 5 Dec. Numbers of **Blue-winged Teal** continued at Point Mugu with a high of 70 there on 21 Dec (DP & CM). **Greater Scaup** continued at Point Mugu through December with a high of 17 on 5 Dec. Individual **Common Goldeneyes** were reported from Arnold Road 8-19 Dec (ST et al), the Ventura Settling Ponds on 8 Dec (ST et al), and Simi Valley on 20 Dec (MP). Fourteen **Common Mergansers** were at Lake Casitas on 7 Dec (FD, DL, & CL) and another was in the Ventura River Estuary on 24 Dec (KR). Two **Hooded Mergansers** continued at Point Mugu through 5 Dec with one remaining until 21 Dec.

Waterbirds, seabirds and shorebirds of note occurred in a variety of locations. A **Red-necked Grebe** was in the Ventura Harbor 3-31 Dec (BS). **American White Pelicans** continued in abundance throughout December including as many as 45 at Lake Sherwood through 31 Dec, as many as 15 at the Santa Clara River Estuary/Ventura Settling Ponds through 28 Dec, and an individual at Point Mugu through 24 Dec. Other **American White Pelican** reports included 11 in the Channel Islands Harbor on 19 Dec (WB), 2 at Lake Piru on 20 Dec (RB), and 9 near the Saticoy Ponds on 28 Dec (AS). Uncommon waders included a **Least Bittern** at Lake Sherwood on 20 Dec (MH), two **Cattle Egrets** on the Oxnard Plain on 21 Dec (CM & DP), and two continuing **Reddish Egrets** and 17 **Yellow-crowned Night-Herons** at Point Mugu through December. As many as fourteen **Red Knots** remained at Point Mugu through 21 Dec. A **Marbled Murrelet** was seen from a seawatch near the Ventura/Los Angeles County line on 21 Dec (AS & OJ).

Wintering raptors and other birds of prey included a continuing **Zone-tailed Hawk** near Lake Casitas on 21 Dec and a **Golden Eagle** in Wheeler Canyon during December (GT). A **Bald Eagle** continued at Point Mugu through 31 Dec and a **Prairie Falcon** remained through at least 21 Dec. Owls at Point Mugu included three **Burrowing Owls** continuing through 21 Dec and a **Short-eared Owl** on 5 Dec (DP, MR & AS).

A number of uncommon landbirds were found locally during December. A **Lewis's Woodpecker** continued at Lake Sherwood through 31 Dec, which appears to be the only one wintering in the county thus far. Two **Tropical Kingbirds** were at Point Mugu on 5 Dec (DP, MR & AS) and another continued at the Camrosa Water Treatment plant and Cal State University Channel Islands through 31 Dec. Four **Vermilion Flycatchers** continued at Point Mugu through 31 Dec. Several species rarely seen locally in the winter were discovered on the Thousand Oaks Christmas Bird Count on 21 Dec including a **Palm Warbler** and two **Brewer's Sparrows** at Cal State University Channel Islands (JB & AB), a **Swamp Sparrow** along Callegas Creek (OJ & AS), 11 **Vesper Sparrows** at Rancho Sierra Vista (ABev), and a **Grasshopper Sparrow** at Rancho Potrero (FD). Other sparrows of note included a **Clay-colored Sparrow** in Ojai on 21 Dec (JG) and a **Vesper Sparrow** in the Arroyo Simi on 20 Dec (MP). As many as 16 **Mountain Bluebirds** continued along Canada Larga Road through 31 Dec. **Varied Thrushes** continued to be reported widely throughout December and observations were too numerous to summarize here. **Pine Siskins** have been around in modest numbers this winter including reports from Santa Paula on 22 Dec (KK), Ojai 12-21 Dec (JG), Thousand Oaks on 21 Dec (AS), and Camarillo on 26 Dec (AS).

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), e-mail or call David Pereksta at <pereksta@pacbell.net> or 659-5740.

Observers: Joel Barrett, Rita Beck, Walter Berk, Allen Bertke, Anthony Bevilacqua, Frank DeMartino, Jesse Grantham, Mary Hansen, Oscar Johnson, Gareth Jones, Chrstal Klabunde, Don Klabunde, Karl Krause, Carol Langford, Dee Lyon, Curtis Marantz, Matthew Page, David Pereksta, Kay Register, Martin Ruane, Adam Searcy, Brad Sillasen, Steve Tucker, and Gary Tuttle



FEBRUARY 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. For all trips, please wear appropriate clothing (layers are suggested), comfortable shoes, and bring snacks, water, hats, sunscreen, binoculars and field guides.

Tuesday, Feb 3, 8:30 a.m. Canada Larga. Leader: Adele Fergusson (805) 415-4304. We will drive and walk as we bird this beautiful canyon road and one of our best birding hotspots. **Directions:** From 101 N, take the 33 and exit Canada Larga Rd. Meet at the beginning of the road. **IMPORTANT NOTE:** This is a fairly busy county road, so please use good birding etiquette. Do not stop your car in the middle of the road and always bird from the shoulder. Target birds will include: American Pipit, Red-breasted Sapsucker, Nuttall's Woodpecker, and Lark Sparrow, with a possibility of Mountain Bluebirds!.

Saturday, Feb 7, 8:00 a.m. Work Day Hedrick Ranch. Leader: Sandy Hedrick (805) 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).

Saturday, Feb 14, 8:30 a.m. Beginner's Bird Walk/ Great Backyard Bird Count – Lake Casitas. Leader: Allen Bertke (805) 640-9037. The Beginners' Walk will be combined with the Great Backyard Bird Count sponsored by the National Audubon Society & Cornell Lab of Ornithology. To car pool, meet at the Museum of Ventura Co., 100 E. Main (side parking lot), at 8:00 a.m. **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. 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.

Saturday & Sunday, Feb 21 & 22. Weekend Trip! Leader: Alexis Frangis. Mark your calendars and plan on joining us for an amazing weekend of winter birding in Orange County! Shorebirds, ducks and geese, rails and sparrows all abound in the wetlands and coastal areas of Orange County during the winter. We will begin the weekend at the beautiful Bolsa Chica Ecological Reserve. Target birds for Bolsa Chica include Reddish Egret, Eurasian Wigeon, Harlequin Duck, Redhead, and Red Knot. We will also take a short drive to San Joaquin Wildlife Sanctuary in Irvine, home of Sea & Sage Audubon Society (gift shop!) and many fabulous birds, such as Green Heron, Osprey, Virginia Rail, Common Gallinule, Bonaparte's Gull, Forster's Tern, and Caspian Tern. Our leader will also plan a few surprise destinations! Our lodging will be in the Huntington Beach area to keep drive time to a minimum. **Please RSVP to venturabirding@yahoo.com by Feb 1. IMPORTANT: When you RSVP, please include your First Name, Middle Initial, Last Name, Phone Number, Date of Birth, and Zip Code.** You will be sent all the trip details, including lodging info.

Thursday, Feb 26, Reservations for Friday, March 20 Pt Mugu Trip Due. Reservations are required. Limit 20 – VAS members only unless there is space available after the deadline. There is a new process for obtaining entry to the base. You must contact Janice Susha (armybrat1@verizon.net) to RSVP. She will send you a form, which must be completely filled out and returned by **Feb 26.** No late or incomplete forms will be accepted.

Saturday, Feb 28, 9 a.m. – noon. Surfrider Ormond Beach cleanup. Leader: Cynthia Hartley cynhartley@gmail.com. Please come and help us clean up the beach in preparation for the 2015 breeding season at Ormond Beach. Removing man-made debris makes the area less attractive to predators and helps with nest survival. Western Snowy Plovers start nesting as early as March, so our beach cleanup will occur before there is any chance of disturbing nesting or courting pairs. Please come and help our recovery efforts with these birds, as well as the California Least Tern that also nests on this beach. Bring water and snacks. Wear layered clothing, sunscreen, and closed shoes. Porta potties on site. Surfrider Foundation will provide beach cleanup supplies, although you are welcome to bring your own. Volunteers sign a liability waiver. Underage volunteers are welcome, but must have a parent or guardian present in the beginning to sign a waiver. Surfrider also keeps metrics on

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SHARING THE BEACH WITH RARE BIRDS

by Debra Barringer

In the last two summers, Hollywood Beach in Oxnard supported an unprecedented increase in nesting by two sensitive birds species: the California Least Tern and the Western Snowy Plover. Their “nests” are merely scrapes in the sand, and their eggs (and for snowy plovers, their feathers) blend exactly into the sand so are difficult for most people to see. In 2013, 30 snowy plover nests were initiated, over 4 times the average of 7 prior to 2013. In 2014, there were 29 plover nests recorded. Hollywood Beach is a busy public beach, so trained nest monitors put up stake and rope fences to alert visitors to keep a distance away in order to protect fragile nests. They also used wire “cage” enclosures over plover nests to keep most predators out. Volunteers acted as docents to answer visitors’ questions and local school kids provided artwork used on educational signs. Ventura Audubon is responsible for getting the monitoring, docent, and sign programs running and provides funding.

Unusually high numbers of least terns also chose Hollywood Beach for nesting in 2013 and 2014. In 2013 there were 209 least tern nests, and 120 nests in 2014, an over 1,000 percent increase from the average of 11 nests recorded pre-2013. Least terns also use a simple nest scrape in the sand; however, these tiny terns have developed a fierce aerial defense mechanism that includes dive-bombing potential threats and even defecating on them! This likely helps the plover nests that are nearby as well. Even so, this year monitors saw the defense system fail. Four American crows ignored the least tern aerial threats and proceeded to predate 34 nests in June. Fortunately, they moved on and these terns were likely able to re-nest. One thing that may have contributed to the crows’ lack of fear is that they and other birds have been fed by people in the nearby parking lot. Also, when trash is left on the beach it attracts crows, gulls, and other predators.

Other issues this year included high wind events that blew off plover nest enclosures; people removing enclosures, exposing the eggs to easy predation; and all-terrain vehicles and bicycle tracks traveling through the nesting area fence coming alarmingly close to fragile eggs. Least terns and snowy plovers are both listed under the Endangered Species Act so it is a crime to disturb them during nesting. The nesting birds seem to get accustomed to people staying outside the fence and observing from a distance. It is disturbing for them to have people and their dogs approach too close and some birds may abandon nests, leaving eggs to perish or be predated. Hollywood Beach has an alarming lack of dog leash regulations enforcement.

The breeding area on which snowy plovers and least terns have chosen to nest at Hollywood Beach was actually developed as a “sand trap” to keep naturally moving sands from entering the Channel Islands Harbor mouth. After several years’ hiatus, dredging resumed in fall of 2014, radically reducing the width of the beach where the birds have been nesting. It remains to be seen how 2015 nesting will be affected.

Ormond Beach, also in Oxnard, has seen a decline in least tern and snowy plover attempted nesting and nest success in recent years. Many nests were abandoned for unknown reasons. Some possible factors include food availability (lack of beach wrack for plovers or near shore fish for terns), unknown disturbances perhaps at night, or predators leaving no trace. Ventura Audubon continues to support monitoring at Ormond and encourages birders to visit or volunteer as docents.

The past year breeding results from McGrath and Mandalay State Beaches were lower than usual for unknown reasons. San Buenaventura Beach, an unlikely new plover nesting hotspot, had its first ever chicks surviving to fledging! At McGrath, one plover even nested in a lobster trap that had washed ashore raising the interesting question of whether it knew what it was doing!

Ventura Audubon will be recruiting volunteers in spring to be beach docents for all Ventura County beaches. Alexis Frangis with California State Parks has secured a grant to fund a docent coordinator for the 2015 season. Watch the newsletter for details to come.



A new Education Committee has formed and will be working with Michael Glenn of U.S. Fish and Wildlife, helping with school programs about the Snowy Plover and Least Tern, including taking classes to the beach. There is also an opportunity to work with him on other environmentally oriented outreach in the schools. Time commitment is flexible. Contact Adele Fergusson at adelefergusson@yahoo.com or Michael Glenn at michael_glenn@fws.gov if you are interested in helping out.

VENTURA AUDUBON SOCIETY

P.O. Box 24198
Ventura, CA 93002



FIELD TRIPS... (continued from Page 3)

beach trash and will provide a data card so you can help them track what you find. **Directions:** Hwy 101 south and exit on Rice, turn right and continue to Hueneme Rd. Turn right on Hueneme Rd. After Olds Rd. take a left on Arnold and continue to the end of the road. **To car pool**, meet at the parking lot behind Carrows at the Vons Shopping Center at Harbor and Seaward at 8:30 a.m. **Rain policy:** heavy rain or winds cancel.

Webpage (with map): <http://www.terpconnect.umd.edu/~cynhart/OrmondBeachCleanup/>

Save the date!

Sunday, March 1 – Work Day, Hedrick Ranch

Tuesday, March 3 – Tuesday Walk at Lake Casitas

Friday, March 20 – Pt Mugu. Limited to 20 VAS members and sign up is required!

Saturday, March 28 – Beginner's Bird Walk – Ormond Beach/Arnold Rd

VAS OFFICERS AND CHAIRS

President	Bruce Schoppe	658-2396
Vice-President	Neil Zeigler	983-7207
Secretary	Joyce Schoppe	658-2396
Treasurer	Marianne Slaughter	484-8415
Conservation	Sandy Hedrick	643-2408
Field Trips	Karin Kersteter	901-2203
Publicity	Jim Susha	983-3929
Webmaster/Science	Alexis Frangis	217-4833
Membership	Jackie Worden	652-0577
At Large:	Adele Fergusson	415-4304
	John Connor	654-1805
	Janice Susha	983-3929
	Judy Dugan	642-0842
Newsletter Editor	Dee Press	484-8415
Program Committee:	Laura Gulovsen	642-6544
	Margaret Wilson	647-7962
	Audrey Vincent	525-5826

If you are not sure if your membership has expired, please **email** Jackie at jbworden7@gmail.com and she will check it out for you.

BOARD MEETING: There will be a Board of Directors meeting on **Thursday, March 3rd** at the Susha's, 2207 Eastridge Ct., Ventura. Call (805) 983-3929 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 Oxnard 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 the VAS 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 **10th** of the month preceding the next issue.* E-mail to: deepress2@gmail.com.