



# Song Sparrow

Quarterly Newsletter of the Napa-Solano Audubon Society  
Volume 35 No. 2 Winter-Spring 2006

For updates and information not included in this newsletter,  
check the web site: [www.napasolanoaudubon.com](http://www.napasolanoaudubon.com)

## Greetings from the President

Happy New Year to All! Winter is one of the most exciting times of the year in our area. Just today I had a chance to see three amazing rarities found by birders in Solano County – an Ovenbird, a Blue Jay, and a Northern Shrike! For some species, the breeding season has already begun. The pair of Barn Owls on First Street in Benicia was mating last night, and several pairs of Great Horned Owls were dueting right before dusk today. Napa-Solano Audubon has many events planned to help you take advantage of the season. The SF Bay Flyway Festival is fast-approaching, and there are field trips organized to Buchli Station, Mount Vaca, and Klamath Basin, just to name a few. We have six General Meetings left before summer including interesting programs on Southeastern Arizona, Audubon Canyon Ranch, and extraordinary video footage of Mono and Clear Lakes. Happy Birding!

--Eric Pilotte

## San Francisco Bay Flyway Festival Jan. 27-29, 2006

The San Francisco Bay Flyway Festival is nearly upon us! Our chapter is participating in this exciting event in many ways: leading field trips, "manning" marsh stations with spotting scopes, offering information about chapter activities at our informational exhibit, leading hands-on activities for kids, and more. It is a great opportunity to meet other birders, hear their stories, and find out about other Bay-area conservation activities.

More than 15 regional outings will be held throughout the weekend including a Friday tour of the American Canyon Wetlands by David Takeuchi & a Mare Island "Birding Hot Spots" tour by Robin Leong. Robin will also lead an early morning Saturday tour to see rails at Benicia State Rec. Area. On Sunday, join Eric Pilotte and Jerry Karr for a tour of Cullinan Ranch. There are also boat trips, mushroom

walks, trips to Skaggs Is., Rush Ranch, Tolay Creek, Shollenberger Park, Lynch Canyon, Viansa Wetlands and more!

A number of our members will be posted at stations along the marsh trail (adjacent to the Festival building) throughout the day to assist visitors as they proceed on a self guided tour - viewing & identifying the birds of this beautiful marsh area.

There are many, many exciting birding programs, a wildlife art exhibit & auction, bluegrass music, vendors featuring a wide array of optics, wildlife books, art, jewelry and much, much more. Please see the Flyway Festival website for details & to sign up for outings. Some outings require preregistration and are limited to 25 participants. The flyway website is: [www.sfbayflywayfestival.com](http://www.sfbayflywayfestival.com).

## General Meeting Location

Our monthly General Meetings are always conducted at the Solano County Education Building. The building is located at 5100 Business Center Drive, Fairfield (very convenient, just off the I-80 freeway near Cordelia). Meetings start at 7 pm with announcements from the chapter officers, followed by a short break for refreshments and then a presentation from a guest speaker. Everyone is welcome! Read on for meeting dates and guest speakers. We are considering new locations for meetings next year. Let Eric Pilotte or Cheryl Harris know if you have an idea for a good meeting location.

**PLEASE NOTE THAT THE GENERAL MEETINGS ARE NOT ALWAYS ON TUESDAYS EVERY MONTH!!**

**ALSO:** Check the web site if you can for last-minute updates related to all chapter activities ([www.napasolanoaudubon.com](http://www.napasolanoaudubon.com)).

## **Family Field Trip to Buchli Station, Napa Saturday Feb. 4, 2006**

Join NSAS members Cheryl Harris and Pat Hildreth for a family-oriented introduction to ducks and shorebirds in the marsh adjoining Bouchaine Vineyard. We will be birding the Huichica Creek Unit of the Napa-Sonoma Marshes Wildlife Area, at the end of Buchli Station Road. We expect to see a hawk or two, and maybe a falcon or owl. Pack a lunch if you wish to picnic at the Bouchaine Vineyards and sample their wine. Support your local eco-friendly winery!

Meet at the Buchli Station Parking Lot at 9:00 am. From Hwy 29 coming from Napa or Vallejo, turn west onto Hwy 12/121. Turn left on Duhig Road (Domaine Caneros is on the corner). Go South on Duhig Road, turn left on Los Amigos Road and continue 1.5 miles to Buchli Station Road on your right. Go to the end of Buchli Station Road and you will come to the parking lot.

## **General Meeting Thursday, Feb. 16, 2006 7:00 pm Program: SF Bay Rookery Study, Audubon Canyon Ranch**

Audubon Canyon Ranch has a developing research facility on the east shore of Tomales Bay called Cypress Grove Research Center. Through Cypress Grove Research Center, Audubon Canyon Ranch studies wintering shorebirds, monitors water birds on Tomales Bay, investigates processes for restoration of coastal marshes, and tracks the reproductive performance of heron and egret colonies throughout the northern San Francisco Bay Area. Katie Etienne, Research Coordinator for Audubon Canyon Ranch, will speak to us about their rookery research and educate us about the nesting herons and egrets in our area.

## **Field Trip to Klamath Basin Weekend of Feb. 18-19, 2006**

Klamath Basin, located near the California-Oregon border, is one of the top birding experiences in the United States! We will join former NSAS member Charlotte Kisling and bird Lower Klamath and Tule Lake National Wildlife Refuge as well as selected spots in the area which may include Butte Valley, Miller Island, Lava Bed National Monument, and Fort Klamath. We will get up before dawn on at least one day to see the amazing 'eagle flyout' at Bear Valley. You should see more Bald Eagles than you have ever seen in your life outside of Alaska; also Golden Eagles, Ferruginous Hawks, Rough-legged Hawks, Prairie Falcons, tens of thousands of Snow, White-fronted and Canada Geese, ducks galore, Northern Shrike and Pronghorn Antelope. Dress very warmly, in layers, including gloves and scarves,

and bring snacks and drinks for at least two days. Don't forget your Motorola 2-way radios.

The Klamath trip is by RESERVATION only. You must notify David Takeuchi if you are coming so we can expect you. David can be contacted at davidtakeuchi@aol.com or (707) 643-5544. Friday will be a travel day to get there. Return late Sunday or Monday. We will meet at the Golden Eagle Motel early Saturday morning (100 First Street, Dorris, CA. (530) 397-3114). Let the motel reservation clerk know that you are coming with Napa Solano Audubon. Room rates are \$42.00 plus tax for single occupancy and \$50.00 plus tax for two beds. Another birding group will be there that weekend, so make your reservations soon!

## **General Meeting Thursday, Mar. 16, 2006 7:00 pm Program: Member's Photography**

Several of the NSAS members pursue bird photography as a hobby. The purpose of this program is to give everyone (even if you're not a member) an opportunity to share pictures. Any nature pictures are welcomed (not just birds,.. butterflies, landscapes, etc.). Each person can take from 5 to 15 minutes to share a small series of photos and the stories that go with them. If you would like to be included, please contact Eric Pilotte, who will be coordinating the different presentations and the order, etc. If desired, a small set of digital photos can be submitted ahead of time and we will prepare a slide show for you, or you can talk to Eric if you want to bring your own laptop or a set of slides, etc. Traditional slides are fine (NSAS has a slide projector), and don't be afraid to just bring some regular prints to share! Now don't be shy! We look forward to a lively and varied program!

## **Field Trip to Mount Vaca Saturday, Mar. 18, 2006**

Robin Leong will lead us to Mix Canyon, Mount Vaca and Lake Solano for lunch. The purpose of this trip is two-fold: We want to scout the area for our Solano County Breeding Bird Atlas (and Robin can tell newcomers about that project). We also want to visit Mt. Vaca, a 40 + acre property which in the future will be a County Park (partly in Napa County). We will eat lunch at nearby Lake Solano County Park, where there are restrooms and picnic facilities. There is a \$5 fee for parking so if you want to avoid this please carpool.

CARPOOL LOCATION: Fairfield: 7:30 AM at the Solano County Board of Education Parking lot at 5100 Business Center Drive. Dress in layers, bring snacks and liquids, and pack a lunch. A reminder from the Field Trip Coordinator: Car-poolers will share driving expenses (recommended \$.25/mi to be split by the number of riders).

**General Meeting  
Tuesday, Apr. 11, 2006 7:00 pm  
Program: Birds and Wildlife of  
Mono and Clear Lakes**

Larry Arbanas, a videographer working for Earthwhile, gave a splendid and memorable program to our chapter last year. This new program will be on the images of birds and other wildlife he collected this past summer in Northeast California at Mono and Clear Lakes.

**Field Trip to Mines Road in  
Alameda County  
Saturday Apr. 15, 2006**

Meet at Mile Post (MP) 0.2, Mines Road, 9:00 am. Load up with a full tank of gas. We will be traveling through three counties. Plan on a trip that will end around 5:00 pm. Expect to be home after 6:00 pm. Mines Road winds through a canyon following a riparian creek. It opens into a meadow that can be spectacular with spring wildflowers. Due to the varied habitats, we should see many birds. Take I-580 east to Livermore. Turn south on N. and S. Livermore Avenue to the end. Turn east on Tesla Road, go 1/2 mi then turn south on Mines Road.  
CARPOOL LOCATION: Vallejo: 7:30 am across from Baskin Robbins in the Wal-Mart Shopping Center. Bring snacks and liquids, and pack a lunch. Dress in layers. A reminder from the Field Trip Coordinator: Car-poolers will share driving expenses (recommended \$.25/mi to be split by the number of riders).

**Earth Day Celebration  
Saturday, April 22, 2006  
11 am – 3 pm Skyline Park, Napa**

The Environmental Education Coalition of Napa County is sponsoring an Earth Day Celebration. Join us for a wonderful slate of activities in this beautiful regional park...Family activities, food, games, entertainment, naturalist-led hikes, birding in the Martha Walker Garden. Watch for details on our website:  
[www.napasolanoaudubon.org](http://www.napasolanoaudubon.org).

**General Meeting  
Tuesday, May 9, 2006 7:00 pm  
Program: TBA**

Our May program is still not confirmed as this newsletter goes to press. We have a tentative agreement for NSAS member John Robinson to give a presentation with photos from a recent trip to Costa Rica. Check the web site for a final announcement about the May program as the date draws closer.

**Field Trip to Napa River  
Ecological Reserve and Lake  
Hennessey  
Saturday, May 13, 2006**

Meet at Napa River Ecological Reserve (NRER) parking lot at 9:00 a.m.. The reserve is located east of Yountville on the north side of Yountville Cross Road between Highway 29 and the Silverado Trail in Napa Valley. We will bird North Lake Hennessey later that morning/early afternoon. Pack a lunch. Dress in layers and bring sun screen. NRER is a 73-acre riparian forest and meadows. The foot bridge across the Napa River has not been replaced so we will be birding the west side of the river. At this time of the year we will be looking for nesting birds. It has been said that due to the wide variety of habitats, Lake Hennessey may provide the best all-round birding in Napa County. The lake is midway between Napa and Calistoga on the east side of Napa Valley. Drive north on Silverado Trail and turn right onto Howell Mt. Road. At the junction of Howell Mt. Road and Conn Valley Road, follow Conn Valley Road to the lake. The road ends in a parking area. Ospreys and Bald Eagles have nested here. With luck we may see nesting Lawrence's Goldfinches.  
CARPOOL LOCATION: Vallejo: 8:00 a.m. across from Baskin Robbins in the Wal-Mart Shopping Center. Reminder from the Field Trip Coordinator: Car-poolers will share driving expenses (recommended \$.25/mi to be split by the number of riders).

**2005-2006 NSAS Board Members**

President	Eric Pilotte	(707) 751-1890
Vice President	Cheryl Harris	(707) 224-6133
Secretary	Laurie Schremp	(707) 446-1150
Treasurer	Janet Renfrow	(707) 255-6780
Education	Pat Hildreth	(707) 252-8928
Webmaster	Dave McMullen	(707) 643-7471
Conservation	Jerry Karr	(707) 643-7089
Publicity	Cheryl Harris	(707) 224-6133
Field Trips	David Takeuchi	(707) 643-5544
Membership	Gordon Schremp	(707) 446-1150
SCBBA / CBC	Robin Leong	(707) 643-1287
At Large	John C. Robinson	(707) 864-8279
Newsletter	vacant	
Flyway Festival	vacant	
Programs	vacant	

**Remember:** Check the web site if you can for last-minute updates related to all chapter activities ([www.napasolanoaudubon.com](http://www.napasolanoaudubon.com)).

## **General Meeting Tuesday, June 13, 2006 6:30 pm Potluck: hors d'oeuvres & Dessert**

We will continue our tradition of wrapping up the year with a potluck. For a fun change this year, we will skip the main dishes and have only hors d'oeuvres and dessert. So bring a dish to share and come prepared for some great conversation. As there is no formal program, we invite everyone to bring pictures or a short story to share about a personal birding experience. Contact Eric Pilotte or Cheryl Harris if you would like to give a short presentation using slides or a computer projector (but don't feel intimidated by that, sharing a story only is great).

## **A Special Year for the Benicia Christmas Bird Count**

After 100 % rain on our Christmas Bird Count in 2004, I was wondering what we did to the CBC Gods to deserve another predicted stormy day. Fortunately I told our counters to hang in there, telling them that predicting weather is not an exact science. We were truly blessed by warm, windless weather and had an amazing day! With the second highest number of volunteer field counters (89) and 4 bird feeder watchers, we recorded the second highest species count (170 vs. 171) for Benicia and the highest number of birds in 10 years (177,499 vs. 164,812 in 1999). We were lucky to find 4 new species to the Benicia count (Cassin's Vireo, Blue Jay, Great-tailed Grackle, Cassin's Finch), which is really something when you consider that this count has been going since 1930! The Blue Jay is especially rare, with only about 10 records in the state. Not only was the weather good, but our veteran birders are getting better at locating species by habitat. We had record numbers of Rufous-crowned Sparrows and Blue-gray Gnatcatchers. Also there were record numbers of burrowing owl locations. A Winter Wren was found for the first time since 1987. Three Hairy Woodpeckers, a Cattle egret and Osprey were counted (these were found only 3 times in the last 10 years!). Additional all-time high species counts for Benicia were: White-faced Ibis 20, Tundra Swan 1021, Scaup species 60,120, Ruddy Duck 11,473, Cooper's hawk 12, Merlin 13, Peregrine Falcon 7, Common Moorhen 71, Mourning Dove 949, Black Phoebe 261, Say's Phoebe 77, Common Raven 72, Chestnut-backed Chickadee 180, Ruby Crowned Kinglet 376, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher 11, Hermit Thrush 60, Hutton's Vireo 18, Rufous-crowned Sparrow 22, Lincoln's Sparrow 76, and Golden-crowned Sparrow 1726. Many thanks to all who participated!

--Robin Leong

**Remember:** Check the web site if you can for last-minute updates related to all chapter activities ([www.napasolanoudubon.com](http://www.napasolanoudubon.com))

## **Solano County Breeding Bird Atlas Report**

As you probably know, the Napa Solano Audubon Society has undertaken a 5 year project to do a Breeding Bird Atlas for Solano County. The purpose of a breeding bird atlas is to create a map showing where each bird species breeds within the county, as well as the areas of highest density and highest nesting probability. The first year of the Solano County Breeding Bird Atlas (SCBBA) is behind us, and it was a good first year!

Our first year produced some remarkable new finds, thanks to the fact that we have many outstanding well-known birders as well as trained scientist helping in this effort. The many skilled people helping with the atlas are too numerous to mention, but here are some highlights from our first year.

Ken Dexter, Sue Johnson and I checked a historical prairie falcon nest site and confirmed that 3 young fledged this year. Then Sue Johnson and I went to look for Black-chinned Hummingbird along Putah Creek, which we found along with a Swainson's Hawk nest and Tree Swallows feeding young in nest boxes. Gordon Murphy, a Dixon resident and raptor lover, has helped watch for Swainson's Hawks throughout the Eastern part of Solano. He reported 41 observations of either probable (PR) or confirmed (CO) breeding. I predict our atlas will show that there are many more Swainson's Hawks nesting than we realize. Uzelle Williams' Swainson's Hawk observation in Cordelia is the furthest west in Solano so far. Gordon also reported several Burrowing Owl nests.

Ed Pandolfino and David Quady, both excellent birders, are helping out on the SCBBA. They are compilers of the Lincoln and Oakland CBC respectively. It is also great to have Murray Berner back and Roger Muskat taking 4 blocks. UC Davis is conducting a BBA along Putah Creek (Both sides in one mile blocks). Bob Lewis and Rusty Scalf teach a birding class for Albany Adult Education. It is great that both of them have volunteered for blocks with the SCBBA.

One of the highlights of our first year was the furthest northern nesting record of a Cassin's Kingbird in California. Bob Lewis initially identified the bird within his block. Tim Jenkins and I later confirmed a pair of them feeding young. We made sure they were not a Cassin's x Western hybrid. This was very exciting; many others came to look at the species just to get it on their life or county lists.

We are fortunate to have PRBO Conservation Science doing surveys for Song Sparrows, Black Rail, and Salt Marsh Common Yellow Throat. PRBO confirmed Black Rail nesting at Benicia State Recreation Area → **Continued on page 5**

**SCBBA Report, continued**

and at Rush Ranch. We also have records of Song Sparrow maxillaris and samuelis subspecies nesting as well as the occidentalis subspecies of the Common Yellowthroat.

Some Tricolored Blackbird nesting colonies have been located! Joe Morlan found a colony in Lynch Canyon. Sarah Estrella, a biologist who works for the CA Water Resource Board in Stockton, found some large colonies around Rush Ranch. I had a colony of about 2,500 at a mitigation pond that was built for the Vacaville Dump near Brown Road but along State Route 113 .

One super-nesting find is Jack Edwards thinks he found a colony of Least Terns at Grizzly Island. If this pans out, Wow! Jack is a former CA Fish and Game warden at Grizzly Island.

We have also successfully implemented an on-line system for entering the official data for each year thanks to Steve Lombardi's tireless efforts. If you volunteered for a block for the atlas, and you have not yet entered your results for 2005, please do it ASAP! If you have not, and are technically challenged, Calvin Lou, the transcriber of the

Northern California Rare Bird alert and a Solano lister has volunteered to help.

Despite an exciting first year, we still need more recruits to help with this enormous project. If you are interested in helping with SCBBA, please contact me. You do not necessarily have to volunteer to "own" a block and work for 5 years. Just volunteering to help another block owner is a great way to pitch in. Many atlasers would love to have an extra pair of eyes and some company and support. If you are already a SCBBA volunteer, one of the best ways to make atlasing fun is to get some help from your birding friends and plan specific days to get out to your block. And it is not too early to get out and start work for our second year. Raptor nesting activity is already underway. Many of our blocks are in marsh. So another way to help is for kayakers, canoeists, and boat people to get our NSAS navy out there and find those marsh birds breeding!

It's not too late to get involved and enjoy the SCBBA fun! Send me an email if you are interested in helping or if you have any questions.

-Robin Leong robin\_leong@netzero.net (707) 643-1287

(Edited by Dave McMullen)

**FRIENDS of the NAPA-SOLANO AUDUBON SOCIETY**  
**Membership Only \$25 per year**

One hundred percent of membership dues will stay in our local Chapter to support local birding, conservation education and advocacy, and local birding science including the new Breeding Bird Atlas of Solano County. *Friends of the Napa-Solano Audubon Society* may receive periodic Song Sparrow newsletters but do not receive Audubon Magazine.

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- I do not wish to receive any communications from National Audubon Society
- Do not share any of my personal information with any other organization

Please make your \$25 check payable to Napa-Solano Audubon Society and mail it to:  
NSAS, P.O. Box 5027, Vallejo, CA 94591

National Audubon Society new memberships and renewal dues support national conservation issues. A token amount of national dues for each member is sent to the local chapter. National members receive Audubon Magazine and receive our local NSAS newsletter, *Song Sparrow*. National Audubon Society Membership is \$20 for the first year. To join National, send a check directly to National Audubon Society, Membership Department, PO Box 51005, Boulder, CO 80323-1005. You may also join or renew with National online at [www.audubon.org](http://www.audubon.org).

**Napa-Solano Audubon Society**  
**P.O. Box 5027**  
**Vallejo, CA 94591**



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## Snowy Owl in Solano County!

On the morning of Saturday, January 14, several NSAS members (and avid birders from all over California) raced to Liberty Island Road about 15 miles east of Vacaville, where a lone Snowy Owl was plainly visible just above a white fence about 50 yards off the road. Reports about the bird and its location had appeared on the internet, and there were perhaps 40 cars and 100 birders present Saturday mid-morning, despite very rainy and unsettled weather. During winter, Snowy Owls drift south in low numbers from their arctic range into the northern lower 48 United States. But this species is extremely rare in California. According to the California Bird Records Committee Master List, prior to this sighting, the last confirmed sighting was in Humboldt County in 1978.



Photo by NSAS member Bob Pitts, 1/14/2006

## Event Calendar At-a-Glance

- |                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| <b>Jan. 27-29</b>   | Flyway Festival   |
| <b>Sat. Feb. 4</b>  | Family Birding at Buchli Station, Napa  |
| <b>Thu. Feb. 16</b> | General Meeting   |
| <b>Feb. 18-19</b>   | Klamath Basin Trip (by registration only)   |
| <b>Thu. Mar. 16</b> | General Meeting   |
| <b>Sat. Mar. 18</b> | Field Trip to Mount Vaca  |
| <b>Tue. Apr. 11</b> | General Meeting   |
| <b>Sat. Apr. 15</b> | Field Trip to Mines Road, Alameda Co.   |
| <b>Sat. Apr. 22</b> | Earth Day Celebration, Skyline Park, Napa   |
| <b>Tue. May. 9</b>  | General Meeting   |
| <b>Sat. May 13</b>  | Field Trip to Napa Ecological Reserve & Lake Hennessey  |
| <b>Tue. Jun. 13</b> | General Meeting 6:30 pm start<br>Potluck: hors d'oeuvres and dessert  |
| <b>Jun. 17-18</b>   | Field Trip to Malheur National Wildlife<br>Refuge in Harney County, Oregon<br>(check web site for details later). |

Please check the website if you can for any last-minute updates regarding our events. [www.napasolanoaudubon.com](http://www.napasolanoaudubon.com)