



Song Sparrow

Quarterly Newsletter of the Napa-Solano Audubon Society
Volume 36 No. 2 Winter 2006/2007

For updates and information not included in this newsletter,
check the web site: www.napasolanoaudubon.com

New Meeting Location

Reminder of Our New Meeting Location!!

In case you missed the announcement in our last newsletter, our monthly meetings now take place in Vallejo at the ***Florence Douglas Senior Center***, 333 Amador St., just a block north of Georgia St. There is plenty of well lit parking area and easy access.

Let's carpool! For those living in Napa Valley, contact Cheryl (224-6133) for carpool location. For those living in Fairfield, Vacaville or beyond, contact Alan Moore (372-6878).

Upcoming Membership Meetings

December 12 It's a POTLUCK! Our meeting this month is our annual potluck, beginning at 6:30 p.m. Bring a dish and join us!

January 9. Our meeting on this date features a program on Burrowing Owls by California Dept. of Fish and Game biologists, Brenda Johnson and Esther Berquette. Burrowing Owls have been designated as a Species of Special Concern in California.

February 13. On this night, our special program will be given by Leonard Liu from PRBO Conservation Science. Leonard has agreed to speak to us about rails - birds such as the Sora and Virginia Rail, which are in the family Rallidae. Did you know that rails are distantly related to cranes? (Sounds like a construction project, doesn't it?) Come out tonight and learn all the details!

March 13. Warren Savary, Field Associate with the California Academy of Sciences's Department of

Entomology, will speak to us tonight on the topic of arachnids. Warren's specialty is Solpugids (a group of arachnids containing about 900 species), but he's a wealth of information on scorpions, too. Please join us!

Napa-Solano Audubon Field Trip Schedule - 2006-2007

December 16	Benicia Christmas Count Preview
December 18	Benicia Christmas Bird Count
January 1	Angwin Christmas Bird Count
January 13	Vic Fazio Yolo Wildlife Area
February 2, 3, 4	San Francisco Bay Flyway Festival
February 17, 18	Panoche Valley – San Benito Co.
March 3	Solano Breeding Bird Atlas
March 17	Sunol Regional Wilderness – Alameda Co. Field Trip and picnic
April 14	Mitchell Canyon – Mt. Diablo
April 28	Maycamas (tentative) – Sonoma Co.
May 12	Bodega Bay
June 9, 10	Mono Lake

Unless otherwise indicated, the following applies to all field trips:

Coordinator: David Takeuchi, (707) 643-5544

Standard Carpool Location: in Vallejo, across from Baskin Robbins in the Wal-Mart Shopping Center.

Bring snacks and liquids, and pack a lunch. It's always a good idea to wear a hat, and bring sunscreen & bug repellent. Dress in layers. Don't forget your binoculars.

*A reminder from the Field Trip Coordinator:
Car-poolers will share driving expenses (recommended \$.30/mi to be split by the number of riders, excluding the driver).*

**Field Trip to Yolo Wildlife Area, Yolo Co.
Saturday Jan 13, 2007**

Leader: Mary Schiedt

Destination Location and Time: Yolo Wildlife Area Headquarters, 8:00 AM on Chiles Road / Road 32B. On I-80 eastbound, take the Mace Blvd exit and get into the middle lane. You will drive about two miles east on Chiles Road, and the headquarters building is on your right. Depending on water on the road, our plans are subject to change.

This is a freshwater marsh, riparian woodland, and valley grassland habitat. We should see an abundance of shore birds, water fowl (ducks, geese, swans), cranes flying overhead, and grassland birds and raptors.

Carpools leave the standard carpool location at 7:15 am.

**Field trip to Los Banos, Panoche Valley
February 17 and 18, 2007**

Leader: David Takeuchi (davidtakeuchi@aol.com) Use "LB/Panoche" as your subject!

Destination Location and Time: Meet at 8:30 AM at the Santa Nella Motel 6, 12733 state Hwy 33, Gustine, CA 95322. You can reach them at (209) 826-6644 or 1-800-4MOTEL6, or go on line at www.motel6.com and key in Los Banos, CA. It is \$4.00 per night cheaper if you go on line. There is a 24 hour cancellation requirement. Also you need to specify a non-smoking room. There is a nearby mini mart (makings for a sandwich) and several gas stations. Be sure to gas up the evening before each trip as there are no services. There is a Denny's Restaurant within walking distance, open 24 hr, so you can have an early breakfast and/or order a take out lunch.

This is an overnight trip. Contact David to be placed on the list of attendees. You must be a member of Napa/Solano Audubon to come on this trip. You may wish to arrive the night before. The driving time from Vallejo is about 2 hours. From Vallejo take I-780 to Benicia and merge into I-680. Continue on I-680 south and merge onto I-580 east towards Stockton. I-580 becomes I-5 south. Take the CA-33 exit towards Santa Nella/Gilroy (0.3 mi). Turn right onto Santa Nella Rd/CA-33 (0.1 mi) and you are at the Motel 6. You may plot this on Mapquest.

On February 17, from Motel 6 we will drive south on CA-33 and turn left on Henry Miller Road, left on Ingomar Grade, right on Henry Miller Ave, pass Hwy 165, continue eastbound on Henry Miller Ave for

approximately 1 mile. The entrance to the Los Banos Wildlife Area parking lot is on the left. The entrance to the wildlife area is in the southwest corner of the parking lot. The entrance fee is \$2.50 unless you possess a valid California hunting or fishing license.

About the area: The Los Banos Wildlife Area is a 5,586 acre mosaic of seasonal and permanent wetlands, grasslands, and riparian areas. It was founded in 1929 and is the oldest state wildlife area in California. All public roads are graveled, but during wet weather conditions, they can sometimes be muddy. It's not uncommon to view over 15,000 ducks and geese on the Buttonwillows Lakes.*

We will stay overnight at the Motel 6 and have dinner at the rustic Wool Growers French Basque Restaurant about 8 miles away. The next morning, February 18, we will meet at 8:30 AM and bird the Panoche Valley. Be aware that this is a very isolated area with no services. Take along whatever you need, because you won't find anyplace to get it in Panoche Valley. Leaving Motel 6 go north on Santa Nella Rd/CA-33, (0.1 mile) and merge onto I-5 South. Continue on I-5 South for 27.8 miles and take the Shield Ave exit to Mendota. Turn right on Little Panoche Rd/Shields Ave/Country Road CR-J1. We will bird the Little Panoche Valley Road and return home via CA-25 to Hollister, Hwy 101 to Gilroy, and Hwy 680 to Martinez. If we do the Panoche Valley loop, we will end back at I-5 and return via I-5 north.

About the area: The Little Panoche Detention Reservoir is good for waterfowl, swallows, and swifts. Most of the rest of the route is grassland habitat, and is good for sparrows, gnatcatchers, thrashers, bluebirds, and raptors.* The target bird for this trip is a "Chukar".

Bring your walkie talkies, and set them to 22 / 11. Gas up before each days trip. Contact David early if you wish to carpool.

*Courtesy of excerpts taken from the Fresno Audubon Society birding website.

Please check our website for the latest news on Napa Solano Audubon: www.napasolanoaudubon.com

**Field trip to Solano County
Saturday Mar 3, 2007**

Leader: Robin Leong

Destination Location and Time: Solano County Education Building, 5100 Business Center Drive, across from COSTCO in Green Valley, 8:00 AM. Join Robin as he leads us to his favorite breeding bird grounds to scout for signs of activities among our “amorous” feathered friends. Learn about the Solano Co. Breeding Bird Atlas (which will be in it’s 3rd year of a 5 year census) and how NSAS activities revolve around it.

CARPOOL LOCATION: Solano County Education Building.

Field Trip to Sunol Wilderness Area

Birding and Picnic - Saturday Mar 17, 2007

Leader: David Takeuchi

Destination Location and Time: We will meet at 8:30 am in the Alameda Creek Picnic area. From the Walnut Creek / Danville area, go south on I-680 and exit at Calaveras Road/Highway 84 just south of the town of Pleasanton. Turn left onto Calaveras Road and proceed to Geary Road, which leads directly into the park. **There is a \$5.00 parking fee.** Ask for directions at the kiosk on how to get to the Alameda Creek picnic sites. No reservations are planned.

Alameda Creek, Alameda County’s largest stream, harbors an inviting creek side community of alder, willow and sycamore. Coast live oaks abound along with valley and blue oak, elderberry, madrone and gray pine. If we have an early spring, we may see some wildflowers. Ground squirrels, magpies and red-tailed hawks may be seen by visitors year round. Observant hikers may notice blacktail deer. Mountain lions are uncommon, but are occasionally sighted. Birding is superb along Alameda Creek; persistent birdwatchers may identify 40+ species in a single morning. The Acorn Woodpecker, Black Phoebe, Titmouse, Turkey Vulture and Yellow-billed Magpie are commonly sighted. A bird list is available at the Visitor Center.

We will hike and bird Little Yosemite which is a scenic gorge on Alameda Creek about two miles upstream from the Visitor Center.

Carpools leave the standard carpool location at 7:30 am.

This is a Potluck Picnic. Bring your favorite dish to share with 5 people. Don’t forget your serving utensils.

Paper plates, plastic fork and knives, napkin and paper cups will be provided. Bring your own drinks.

2006-2007 NSAS Board Members

President	Cheryl Harris	(707) 224-6133
Vice President	vacant	
Secretary	Pat Hildreth	(707) 252-8928
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	Eric Pilotte	(707) 751-1890
Newsletter	John C. Robinson	(707) 864-8279
Flyway Festival	vacant	
Programs	Darrell Lee	(707) 746-1862

Spencer Creek Journal

*Nature notes from four hilly acres by
Spencer Creek in Napa’s southeastern foothills*

by Ann Smith, Napa-Solano Audubon Society

AUGUST. Absent for four years, gray foxes have returned to breed. Their bushy-tailed kits have been chasing each other, soliciting their dad for regurgitated food, and checking for dog biscuits. However, they’ve had bad luck. One kit with weak hindquarters disappeared, and another has been found dead in a neighbor’s yard, possibly shot elsewhere. Two kits and the parents remain. A pair of crows nested nearby, raising several young who wake me each morning with begging calls. Two Pileated Woodpeckers with one large fledgling add to the noise with their exceptionally loud contact cackle. Hutton’s Vireo and Bewick’s Wren are here in small numbers. Several bird species, including Wild Turkeys and Black-headed Grosbeaks, have had late broods, so tardy spring rains may have impacted earlier nests. Volunteer “naked ladies” (*Amaryllis belladonna*) bloom in unlikely places. I can barely hear Spencer Creek, now at its lowest ebb, but a plant new to me, leather-root (*Horta macrostachya*), has been found in the creek by a visitor. A colorful Budgerigar escapee settled in the oak trees for one day at the end of the month.

(Spencer Creek Journal is continued on outside page of newsletter)

Benicia Christmas Bird Count

Mark your calendars for Monday, December 18 & join us to make our 60th anniversary of this storied CBC a great success. Last year we had 170 species! Additionally we found four new species for our count: Blue Jay, Cassin's Vireo, Great-tailed Grackle and Cassin's Finch. Following the count, join us for a hearty potluck dinner at our new meeting place - the Florence Douglas Senior Center. Call Robin Leong to sign up for the count 643-1287. And please contact Liz Knight 448-6596 if you can bring food for the dinner.

Collaborative Funding Grant Received

Thank you to our member Karen Sheldon for developing an outstanding grant proposal which we were recently awarded by California Audubon. The grant for \$1789 is for a Community Nesting Box construction project which will result in increased community participation and awareness of the activities of our Napa-Solano chapter. We also hope that it will help build interest and involvement in our Solano Breeding Bird Atlas project.

We will need your help in several ways: a volunteer to develop brochures or info sheets, people with woodworking equipment to put together "kits" with materials cut to size, and help with scheduling workshops for building the nest boxes. For more information or to help plan or publicize these events, please contact Robin Leong or Cheryl Harris.

San Francisco Bay Flyway Festival

The 2007 SF Bay Flyway Festival is scheduled for Feb. 2-4, 2007. So, mark your calendars, tell your friends & consider the many ways that you can participate: lead a walk, give a program, help with hands-on children's activities, share information about chapter activities at our booth. This is a wonderful family event - please help make it extra special by participating in whatever way you can. Call Cheryl 224-6133.

Members: Our newsletter is only sent quarterly. Please be sure to send your email address to Gordon Schremp (email: gschremp@energy.state.ca.us) if you would like to receive occasional items of interest.

Below, bird watchers are intensely focused on the wonders of the bird world. Photo by Al Moore.



RARITY FOCUS

Once considered a rare vagrant to Arizona and California, Streak-backed Oriole has become a fairly regular Mexican visitor over the last decade (see your National Geo guide, page 444-5, or your "big" Sibley, page 518). Despite its regularity north of the border, it is always a thrill to find one of these beautiful orioles, as was the case in October 2006 in California.

On the afternoon of Monday, 9 October, an adult male Streak-backed Oriole was found in Zzyzx, California (Yes, that's Zzyzx.). California State University maintains a field station, the Desert Studies Center, at Zzyzx.. This facility is a functional oasis in the Mojave Desert about 60 miles east of Barstow. For 30 years Zzyzx was the site of the Zzyzx Mineral Springs and Health Spa, before it began being used by the California State University system in the mid-1970s. Today a consortium of seven CSU campuses manages the 1,280-acre site in a special arrangement negotiated with the Bureau of Land Management.

The male Streak-backed Oriole seemed to spend most of its time in palms near the main pond in the area, or else among salt bushes and tamarisk trees at one or another scattered location within the site. Most observers who made the trip to this isolated locale were fortunate in being able to find the bird, at least through the early morning of Tuesday, 17 October.

*Portions of this newsletter were made possible by the E-bulletin on the National Wildlife Refuge Association's website:
www.refugenet.org/birding/birding5.html*

Below, a Loggerhead Shrike perches on a fence post near an active nest site in Contra Costa County. Shrikes are commonly found in the Central Valley of California. Photo by John C. Robinson



MEGA-BIRD-CARNIVORE ANNOUNCED

Witness the wonder of discovery ...

In late October, paleontologists at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County released an amazing find. Apparently, a curious teenager in Argentina has discovered a fossil skull belonging to the largest bird ever found - a swift, flightless predator that was 10 feet tall and weighed perhaps 400 pounds. Apparently the bird pursued its prey across the plains of Patagonia 15 million years ago. As reported in the 26 October edition of the journal, NATURE, the skull, tapering to an impressive and powerful beak, belongs to a previously unknown offshoot of extinct birds known as phorusrhacids, or "terror birds." These birds most likely preyed on rodents that once grazed on South American savannas and were the size of sheep.

Luis Chiappe, paleontologist and director of the museum's Dinosaur Institute, said that this remarkable creature is now the largest bird known to science, with a skull larger than that of a horse. Until now, scientists thought that these unusual flightless birds became more portly and less agile as they evolved into bigger and bigger carnivores. To the contrary, the slender leg and foot bones found with the immense skull more closely resemble those of a typical running bird.

An Argentine high school student, Guillermo Aguirre-Zabiala, found the skull two years ago among rock outcroppings in his village east of Bariloche. The teenager was so motivated by his discovery that he changed his course of study from psychology to paleontology and earth science.

Napa-Solano Audubon Society
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Continuation of Spencer Creek Journal

SEPTEMBER. Black-headed Grosbeaks and Hooded and Bullock's Orioles have left to winter in Mexico. Wilson's Warblers, wearing their black skullcaps, are departing, too. Early in the month a group of Wild Turkeys brought me to the window with loud alarm calls, whereupon an inexperienced bobcat chased them all down the hill and up into the trees; turkeys really have to be motivated to fly from their enemies, much preferring a speedy walk. A Winter Wren made a brief appearance in a dense patch of woods and moved on. Many hawks, their numbers probably swollen by those migrating through, are hunting the local birds. A Sharp-shinned Hawk dove on a Steller's Jay and missed, and a neighbor reported one making a failed try for a Pileated Woodpecker; but they often succeed, leaving behind a pile of bird feathers. Both pocket mice and voles hide under rocks and make quick forays out for spilled bird seed. Black-tailed deer are moving into breeding season, and a large buck chased a doe with her fawn through the yard, trying to encourage her into breeding condition. On Sept. 23, three winter bird species arrived: Fox Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, and Golden-crowned Sparrow. Spencer Creek is beginning to rise, helped along by many tree species using very little water as they enter winter dormancy.

OCTOBER. Wintering Red-shafted Flickers are showing up to join the breeding flickers and all the other woodpeckers: Downy, Nuttall's, Hairy, Pileated, and Acorn. I think this must be woodpecker heaven. Fall's first Ruby-crowned Kinglet came in for peanut butter. The woods are carpeted with fallen leaves, big-leaf maple holding the prize for most ground covered. A spectacular yellow, black, and white Townsend's Warbler and a Hermit Thrush were near the lane, and a Yellow-rumped (Myrtle's) Warbler arrived. The gold-crowns are trying to get all three notes of "Three Blind Mice" into their plaintive song, but most are settling for "three blind" until spring is closer. Two Band-tailed Pigeons were found on a foray up the hillside trail, and California fuchsia still blooms a deep red late in the month. One Golden-crowned Kinglet chased insects through the trees, and a female Purple Finch, with her prominent tan eye stripe, was drawn in by the bird bath. Bird migration must be nearly over, but it's been fine entertainment along Spencer Creek this year.