



# Song Sparrow

Quarterly Newsletter of the Napa-Solano Audubon Society  
Volume 38 No. 3 Spring 2008

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

## A Successful Flyway Festival

Many thanks to Sarah Rohrs and Andrea Wolf, staff writers with the Times-Herald, for their wonderful pictorial articles featured on the front page of the newspaper on Feb. 2. They created an excitement in the community that despite the rain, led to a great turnout & much enthusiasm for our field trips, programs & activities.

Thank you to all of our members who volunteered at this year's SF Bay Flyway Festival. More than 25 of our members participated in the festival by leading field trips, 'manning' stations in the marsh, sharing information at our membership table, helping with children's activities & giving presentations.

Congratulations to our member, Mike Moshier for winning the first place award for his beautiful Northern Harrier photograph (the photo appeared in our last newsletter.)

It was FUN! It feels great to be an active participant in our community. Perhaps YOU could join us by helping with future events. Please contact me if you would like to know about our upcoming activities at the Earth Day event, April 19, Celebrate Urban Bird Activities in May or school activities throughout the spring. *—Cheryl Harris*



NSAS member Sue Johnson with Flyway Festival visitors at one of the observation stations in the marsh.

## Entanglement

During the California Audubon Conference last October, we heard stories of individual action that had positive environmental impacts from around the state, including protection for snowy plovers on beaches near Mendocino. I looked at an audience of 250+ members, and thought about what their individual lives were like. I wanted to ask each one: tell me one thing that you're doing related to the environment. I didn't have a chance to ask my "what is your one small thing?" question there, but I would like to ask it now, to our NSAS members. We all do "small things" that we may not think are important, but that are educational and inspiring to others... I would like to share my "one small thing" and I hope to hear many from our members.

"Entanglement" is the name of my folder that contains photos and documentation of monofilament line (fishing line), left at the waterfront in Benicia. When I realized how birds can become entangled in it, I started picking it up. I spoke to fishermen, the mayor, and the head of the parks and recreation department about the danger to wildlife. I spoke at city council meetings and became pretty emotionally upset when no one seemed to be taking action. I continued to pick up line and talk to whoever was around, including the local fishermen and bait shop owner.

Several years have passed, and we have a much cleaner waterfront at First Street Pier. The working solution came from the local fishermen and the bait shop owner taking responsibility for cleaning up the area even though they weren't the ones discarding the lines. Parks and Recreation also responded by putting up special containers and signage that says: put your used fishing line here. We have three containers in the first street pier area, and have been promised containers for five more waterfront areas that were identified as having discarded monofilament line during coastal cleanup days. Thanks to Sue Wickham and her associates for keeping those coastal cleanup records!

This is "one small thing," still in progress. *--Sue Johnson*

## Solano Breeding Bird Atlas Kick-off of the 2008 Season

The 2008 nesting season is approaching and will mark the penultimate year of the five-year Atlas project. In order to get a good start, a potluck Atlas season kickoff meeting will be held on March 2, 10am at the USGS office on Mare Island. After three years of atlasing, there remain unexplored or partially completed blocks in need of dedicated attention. We have reports from 84 of the 92 priority blocks. Suisun Marsh, the Vaca Mountains and the eastern Solano prairie all have unassigned blocks for new or returning volunteers. During the meeting, Atlas strategies and progress will be discussed, opportunities to take on new blocks detailed and every question about birds and data entry answered. If you have been putting off taking part in the Atlas, please join us in this very important fourth year.

Thus far, atlasers have discovered more than 150 species. With about 20 of these yet to be confirmed, there is ample opportunity for everyone to add important new distributional information about Solano birds. We need a great deal more data on aquatic species such as rails and teal. Poorwill and the small woodland owls are still only voices in the night – no nests have been found nor young observed. Despite the recent warmth and the vigorous voices of territorial Hutton's Vireo and Bewick's Wren, it is a little early to be actively scouring a block. However, it is not too early to get started searching for the sounds of territorial rails and owls or scouting for the best habitat in your block. At the March 2nd meeting, owls, rails, scouting and everything Atlas will be revealed. See you there.

–Murray Berner

## 2008 Tricolored Blackbird Survey

Audubon California's Landowner Stewardship Program is coordinating the 2008 statewide survey for Tricolored Blackbirds in collaboration with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. This citizen-based, statewide survey provides critical information for determining the status of Tricolored Blackbird populations in California and is critical in conservation strategies to protect this species.

**TRICOLORED BLACKBIRD POPULATION.** A statewide survey in California is particularly important because more than 95 percent of the world's Tricolored Blackbirds live in California. Historically Tricolored Blackbirds were perhaps one of the most numerous birds in California. In 1859 Heermann reported flocks of thousands and saw a wintering

flock in Solano County "numbering so many thousands as to darken the sky for some distance by their masses." Accounts such as these were reported from many areas across California, especially the Central Valley, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, since then Tricolored Blackbirds have experienced dramatic declines as a result of habitat loss. Today, Tricolored Blackbirds rely heavily on suitable habitat in and around the agricultural fields of the state, making appropriate management of agricultural lands and protection of native habitat critical for their continued survival. Continued loss of habitat and this species' use of agricultural grain crops continue to threaten this species.

**VOLUNTEERS NEEDED.** The colony locations and numbers of Tricolored Blackbirds change from year to year, making it impossible to track without the help of volunteers across the state. The survey will take place over one full day that is convenient for you between April 25 and 27th, 2008. If you are interested in participating, please contact Rodd Kelsey (530) 795-0660 or [rkelsey@audubon.org](mailto:rkelsey@audubon.org)

## Friday Bird Walks in Napa

Each Friday NSAS offers a morning field trip to a destination in Napa or Solano County. A carpool meets in Napa at 8:00am and the trip concludes by noon. A weekly email describing the coming Friday's birding is delivered to a list that now exceeds 100 NSAS members. A typical trip attracts a dozen birders. In addition to great trips with good old regular birds, through the seasons we try to catch the local "spectacles" of birding: spring shorebirds at American Canyon; winter raptors and Mountain Plovers in the Solano prairie; or fall warblers at Lagoon Valley. The morning's birding nearly always includes a good walk of variable length. For example, there are three sides to Lake Hennessey and we have birded them all. Huichica Creek Wildlife Area can be approached a number of ways on foot, each of them offers a unique perspective of grassland and marsh. Land Trust properties are popular destinations, including Lynch Canyon in Solano and Foote Botanical Preserve in Napa. Beyond learning about the local birdlife, each trip usually includes a talented plant expert. In searching for variety each week, new and interesting birding locations have turned up, and participants have welcomed us to their homes, ranches and Atlas blocks. It is a great experience of learning and sharing. You are invited along each and every Friday of the year.

--Murray Berner

## NSAS Selected Board Members

President	Cheryl Harris	(707) 224-6133	Please check our web site for a complete list of Board members The Board meets once a month and any member is welcome Please call Cheryl Harris if you are interested
SCBBA / CBC	Robin Leong	(707) 643-1287	
Field Trips	David Takeuchi	(707) 643-5544	

## Audubon Educators

NSAS is sponsoring the Audubon Adventures program in 16 schools this year. Kathy DeBernardi, one of the participating teachers in this program, arranged to have a Bald Eagle brought to Napa through the Alaska Raptor Center. She did this in conjunction with one of this year's themes, entitled, "Baldy is Back." She raised the \$4500.00 necessary to bring the eagle here through grants and donations. The eagle then toured 10 other schools. He was amazing! Kathy is definitely utilizing and enjoying this program. Additionally, our education committee is doing introductory activities and bird walks with local girl scout troops and other youth groups. Monday Feb. 18, we led a beginning bird walk for Redwood Middle School students who were eager to participate in the Great Backyard Bird Count. --Pat Hildreth & Cheryl Harris

## General Meetings and Programs

General Meetings are usually held on the second Tuesday of each month at The Florence Douglas Senior Center, 333 Amador St., Vallejo (see map on our website). Meetings begin at 7 pm with about 15 minutes of social time, sharing of birding experiences and refreshments; this is followed by announcements and a short period of chapter business (field trip, conservation, and membership reports, etc.), and finally most meetings feature a special presentation or guest speaker. See below for details on our programs for March & April 2008 (May Program details will be announced via email).

### Tuesday, Mar. 11, 2008 7:00 pm Birds of Peru with Gordon Schremp

Peru is one of the most biologically diverse countries in the world and is home to over 1,800 species of birds. This evening, Gordon Schremp will present an overview of his recent trip to that country that will include photos of the various flora and fauna encountered during the two-week excursion from the coastal plains to the dense rainforest interior. Whether your interest is raucous macaws, inquisitive monkeys, or menacing caimans, the program should provide an enlightening glimpse of some of the splendors of South America.

### Tuesday, Apr. 8, 2008 7:00 pm Exploring the Sierra as a Naturalist and Artist

Naturalist, educator and artist John (Jack) Muir Laws delights in exploring the natural world and sharing this love with others. He has worked as an environmental educator for over 25 years in California, Wyoming, and Alaska. He is trained as a wildlife biologist and is an associate of the California Academy of Sciences. His illustrations capture the feeling of the living plant or animal, while also including details critical for identification. His most recent book, "The Laws Guide to

the Sierra Nevada," is an illustrated field guide to more than 1,700 species of plants and animals and is beautifully illustrated with 2,710 original watercolor paintings. This comprehensive and easy to use guide allows botanists to identify the insects that come to their flowers, birders to identify the trees in which the birds perch, or hikers to identify the stars overhead at night. Jack will present an illustrated lecture about the natural history of the Sierra Nevada, and the process of creating a field guide. He also teaches field sketching and natural history classes throughout the state and will bring original illustrations that have been painted in the field.. Bring a pencil and a notebook for a quick bird sketching lesson.

## Spencer Creek Journal

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

*By Ann Smith, Napa-Solano Audubon Society*

**Nov. 2007.** A Raven crossed the sky outside our north windows in a most unusual fashion. It made a half downturn each 30' or so and then returned to level, while making an unusual "awk"/moaning call. I could think of no explanation. One Black Phoebe perched above the driveway and the uncommon White-throated Sparrow (tan-striped, a juvenile) is still present. Wild Turkeys are thinning out, and the number of Anna's Hummingbirds at the feeders has declined drastically. Other birds use the nectar, including Townsend's Warblers and chickadees. Fall's first Ruby-crowned Kinglet showed up Nov. 21, moving constantly through the trees. Fox Sparrows have arrived and are scratching enthusiastically through fallen leaves.

I heard a tree frog croak, marveling at the loud noise coming from the tiny frog. They search for water in unlikely spots; one emerged from the base of a flower pot when I watered. A lone vole is dashing in and out of its hiding place, stashing seeds for the winter.

**Dec. 2007.** Several American Goldfinches, their golden backs now tan, have joined Lesser Goldfinches on the feeder sock. A small flock of male Wild Turkeys flies up each evening to roost in a neighbor's oak tree. Hermit Thrushes have arrived to feast on berry-bearing plants such as toyon and pyracantha. Bewick's Wren and Purple Finch both appeared. A juvenile Sharp-shinned Hawk blew away all the yard birds except one Downy Woodpecker, which remained frozen in place for at least fifteen minutes. Pileated Woodpeckers call back and forth daily. On Christmas Day, the hillside has one golden poppy and one California fuchsia bloom. The first milkmaids have produced their tiny white flowers.

**Jan. 2008.** Heavy rain in January's first week brought Spencer Creek higher, crashing its way down to Tulocay Creek  
See "Spencer Creek Journal," next page

*Spencer Creek Journal, continued*

and then to the Napa River. There are now two White-throated Sparrows, one tan-striped and one white-striped, trying to drive each other off. A Sharp-shinned Hawk has learned that it can drive Mourning Doves into our east-facing window and then easily retrieve them from the ground. Its depredations have made all the birds very jumpy.

My husband cleaned out the birdhouses and found many nests from last year, including a feathery Tree Swallow construction, the sticks of the House Wren, the neat circles of titmice and bluebirds, and several that couldn't be identified. The Oak Titmice, of which some family has nested in the same box every year for the 19 years we've been here, were back checking out their just-emptied nest box within ten minutes. One wonders whether the missing nest might have been this year's. If so, there should be enough time to replace it.

### **BOOK REVIEW** **"Living On The Wind"** **by Scott Weidensaul**

I wanted a book that would help me "get lost in nature," so I decided to re-read Scott Weidensaul's "Living On The Wind." The title alone alerts us to the mysteries of migration. Where do the birds at my feeders "live"? Those that migrate are in an annual cycle in search of food and breeding opportunities. These birds "live" all along a yearly route that takes them from feeding grounds to breeding grounds.

Every species has a different pattern and timing for migration. Weidensaul profiles several species, including Arctic Tern and Swainson's Hawk, traveling their migration routes and describing the birds, their habitats, and behaviors. He takes you along on his travels and talks about the various people who are working to conserve bird habitat.

The book becomes personal when I realize that the Swainson's hawk that nested on Ray Erickson's ranch and followed his tractor for grasshoppers was flying to Argentina during our winter and doing the same thing there. But the Argentine ranchers are actively spraying to kill the grasshoppers, so the hawks are at great risk of pesticide poisoning.

This book really expanded my rudimentary concepts of migration. I found it fascinating that birds don't necessarily go and return on the same migratory routes. Winds are important and they choose routes with the most favorable wind conditions. Thus, some species fly down the western side of North America on the way to South America, but they return on the eastern side of North America flying north to Alaska or the Arctic. Another new fact for me: birds that soar want to be over hills that create thermals. These soaring birds don't fly over water in migration since water doesn't create thermals. *-Sue Johnson*

## **Monthly Field Trips**

Details for the March, April, May & June field trips are provided below. Unless otherwise indicated, the following applies to all field trips:

**COORDINATOR:** David Takeuchi (707) 643-5544. David is the Coordinator for all Field Trips. If calling and want a return call, leave the city of your return phone number. Email him at davidtakeuchi@aol.com (enter: "Subject: Field Trip").

Carpoolers will share driving expenses. The recommended rate of reimbursement to the driver is 30 cents per mile, to be split by the number of riders, excluding the driver.

Bring snacks and liquids, and pack a lunch. It's always a good idea to wear a hat, bring sunscreen and bug repellent. Dress in layers. Don't forget your binoculars! Heavy rain cancels. Non-members are always welcome.

### **CARPOOL LOCATIONS:**

Cordelia/Suisun: Solano County Office of Education parking lot (5100 Business Center Drive, Fairfield) near Costco.

Vallejo: Old Wal-Mart parking lot across from Baskin-Robbins (5182 Sonoma Blvd.). From Sonoma Blvd., turn east at the Meadows Drive traffic light.

Napa: Riverpark Shopping Center; by Sweeney's Sportshop, 1537 W. Imola Avenue, between Coombs and Jefferson Streets.

## **Saturday, Mar. 15, 2008**

### **Field trip to Eastside Lake Berryessa**

**DESTINATION LOCATION AND TIME:** 8:30 AM at the north end of the east side road where it meets Knoxville Rd. The east side road is the first (and only) right hand turn after passing the northern tip of the lake at Eticuera Cr.

### **CARPOOL LOCATIONS AND TIME:**

From Vallejo: 6:30 AM

From Cordelia/Suisun: 6:30 AM

From Napa: 7:00 AM

**LEADER:** Murray Berner

**TRIP DESCRIPTION:** For those of you who are unable to join Murray on his Friday morning bird walks, this is your opportunity to bird with our renowned Napa County birder. Besides leading bird walks and teaching bird ID at Napa College, Murray has done the text narrations for our "Breeding Birds of Napa County," and Hermann Heinzel's "Birds of Napa County." Both books are available for purchase at our programs & field trips.

We should see waterfowl, common loon, nesting bald eagle and osprey, prairie falcon, Lewis's woodpecker, magpies, and early migrants. Time permitting, we may also drive up Knoxville Rd. Pack a lunch. We will bird until mid-afternoon.

## Saturday, Apr. 19, 2008 Field Trip to Castle Rock Park

**DESTINATION LOCATION AND TIME:** 9:00 AM in the parking lot near the park entrance of Castle Rock Park (near Walnut Creek).

**CARPOOL LOCATIONS AND TIME:**

From Vallejo: 8:15 AM  
From Cordelia/Suisun: 8:15 AM  
From Napa: 8:00 AM

**LEADER:** Murray Berner

**TRIP DESCRIPTION:** This is a recreational gem. A stream flows through a heavily wooded canyon where woodland birds sing and spring flowers bloom. I rate this higher on my list than Mitchell Canyon. Peregrine falcons have nested on Castle Rock. We may cross several shallow streams, so wear appropriate foot gear. Pack a lunch. Bring your camera. The trip will end around 1 PM, but some may hike the nearby historic Borges Ranch after lunch.

**Directions to Castle Rock Park:** Go south on Hwy 680 to Walnut Creek. Exit at Treat Blvd, head east. Turn right on Bancroft Rd. which becomes Walnut Ave. at the Ygnacio Valley Rd junction. Continue on Walnut Ave., which ends at Castle Rock Rd. Turn right on Castle Rock Rd. to the very end. Parking is limited. If the parking is full, back track about 1/4 mile where there is a large grassy parking lot on the left.

## Saturday, Apr. 26, 2008 Field Trip to Mayacamas Mountains Audubon Sanctuary, Sonoma County

**DESTINATION LOCATION AND TIME:** 9:00 AM, Jimtown Store, <http://jimtown.com/> 6706 State Highway 128 (Alexander Valley Road), Healdsburg, CA 95448

**CARPOOL LOCATIONS AND TIME:**

From Vallejo: 7:30 AM  
From Cordelia/Suisun: 7:15 AM  
From Napa: 7:45 AM

Please carpool as much as possible as parking is limited on the Sanctuary property and no cars may be left at Jimtown Store.

**GUEST LEADER:** Tom McCuller, Madrone Audubon Soc.

**TRIP DESCRIPTION:**

Mayacamas is located in the northern Coast Ranges, just above the Alexander Valley, a major wine-producing region of Sonoma County. Pine Flat Road cuts directly through the center of the Sanctuary for about four miles. The sanctuary supports a mix of grassland, chaparral, oak woodland, mixed evergreen forest, semi-permanent streams, and a small vernal pool. Mayacamas boasts 10 species of oak, three species of pine (including Knobcone Pine) and stands of Sargent Cypress. The area's major serpentine outcrops support unique chaparral communities and grasslands with some of the state's

rarest plant species. Sensitive breeding birds include Bell's Sage Sparrow and Purple Martin. Other sensitive animals: Northwestern Pond-Turtle, and possibly Foothill Yellow-legged Frog, Calif. Red-legged Frog, Calif. Tiger Salamander, Western Spadefoot and American Badger. Sensitive plants include: (CNPS List 1B) *Cryptantha clevelandii* var. *dissita*, serpentine cryptantha, *Streptanthus brachiatus* ssp. *Hoffmanii*, Freed's jewel-flower, *Calystegia collina* var. *oxyphylla* and Mt. St. Helena Morning-Glory. Bring your camera, lunch and drinks; there are no facilities available once we leave the store.

**Directions:** From US-101 going north, Pass thru Santa Rosa and Healdsburg and take the Lytton Springs Rd exit towards Alexander Valley Rd. Turn right at Lytton Springs Rd. Turn right at Healdsburg Ave. Turn left at Alexander Valley Rd. and go 3.5 mi to Jimtown Store. From Napa, Take CA-29 N to Calistoga. Continue on CA-128/Foothill Blvd which eventually becomes Alexander Valley Road. Alexander Valley Road/CA-128 makes a 90 degree turn to the left at the junction of Pine Flat Rd. Go 0.3 miles to Jimtown Store. Distance to Jimtown Store is about 70 miles from Vallejo, 44.5 miles from Napa.

## May 14-16, 2008 Field Trip to Kern River Preserve By Invitation Only

**LEADER:** Bob Barnes

**TRIP DESCRIPTION:** This field trip is sponsored by NSAS and is open only to "Friends of Napa Solano Audubon Society." Due to the limited number of spaces, attendance is by invitation only. There will be a minimum additional charge of \$15.00 per person to help pay the professional guide. Email David Takeuchi for a reservation ([davidtakeuchi@aol.com](mailto:davidtakeuchi@aol.com) Subject: Kern Field Trip). He will reply with confirmation, itinerary and accommodation information.

Read about the Kern River Valley at this web site: <http://kern.audubon.org/bioregion.htm> and learn why we will be visiting this special birding wonderland. To learn more about the birds of the area, visit Bob Barnes web site (<http://valleywild.org/index.html>).

## Saturday, Jun. 14, 2008 Field Trip to Archer Taylor Preserve, Gourmet Picnic

**DESTINATION LOCATION AND TIME:** 9:00 AM in the parking lot of Archer Taylor Preserve, in the western hills on the outskirts of Napa.

**CARPOOL LOCATIONS AND TIME:**

From Vallejo: 8:00 AM  
From Cordelia/Suisun: 8:00 AM  
From Napa: 8:15 AM

See Archer Taylor Field Trip and Picnic, next page



*Archer Taylor Field Trip and Picnic, continued*

**LEADER:** Murray Berner

(contact David Takeuchi for any questions about the Potluck)

**TRIP DESCRIPTION:** Archer Taylor Preserve is nestled in a picturesque redwood grove, with a winding stream lined with ferns. It has an almost tropical atmosphere. In some ways it reminds me of inaccessible Green Valley Falls. Come and bird this wonderland with Murray. The bird walk will be followed by our gourmet picnic in the redwoods. Please bring a potluck dish to share with five people.

**Directions:** From Highway 29 (freeway) take the Trancas Street/Redwood Road Exit (Exit 19). After exiting take Redwood Road west for approximately 8 miles following the signs to the Hess Collection Winery. Please note the following important points along the way: At about 1 mile from Highway 29, the LEFT LANE will continue towards the Preserve; the right lane veers to the right to Dry Creek Road. Stay in the left lane following Redwood Rd. At about 4.5 miles from Highway 29, you'll see a bridge and sign for the Hess Collection Winery on the left side of the road. You must make a deliberate LEFT turn to continue on Redwood Rd. (If you continue straight, the road name changes to Mt. Veeder). Continue past the Hess Collection for about another 2 miles, past the "End of County Road" sign, and through two stone pillars along the steep, one lane road. Continue past the second stone entrance and follow the signs to the Preserve. When you reach the stone house, veer RIGHT along the dirt road around the house and then turn RIGHT down into the orchard. There is a kiosk and visitor sign-in along the woods to your LEFT. You may park in the orchard or along the woods near the kiosk.

## Hummingbird Monitoring Network

The Hummingbird Monitoring Network (HMN) is a non-profit conservation organization that supports projects to improve hummingbirds' ability to survive and reproduce.

HMN is banding to monitor and gather data on populations. There are currently two banding sites in California, one in Southern California and one at the McLaughlin Preserve at Napa County's Northern border. HMN seeks additional sites & is working with the Napa County Land Trust to set up a monitoring site at the Archer Taylor Preserve in west Napa.

The Land Trust is seeking volunteers to help with a hummingbird census by monitoring hummingbird feeders at the preserve and to eventually take part in a banding project. If you are interested, or would like more information, contact Janet Barth at 224-3464. More about HMN – log on to their website at [www.hummonnet.org](http://www.hummonnet.org).

## An Unforgettable Moment

*A Memo from Margaret Kralovec,  
Environmental Outreach Specialist  
Fairfield-Suisun Sewer District  
Internal Memo of December 18, 2007.  
Printed here by permission.*

There was no warning for last Saturday's deadly assault here in Fairfield. Without notice or sound to disturb the peaceful morning, the silent assailant made his move with lightning fury, slamming the unsuspecting victim to the ground. Startled witnesses cried out and collided as they leaped away from the terrifying assault. Farther away, other onlookers gasped. Everything happened at such a blinding speed that even those who witnessed it were unsure of what they had actually seen. Stunned and disoriented, the wounded victim vainly struggled to flee, but was pinned to the ground, defeated; life was draining away through ribbons of slashed flesh. How long did it take to die? Probably long enough to see that his attacker was suddenly distracted by a sound, a movement, perhaps a shadow. Could there be another attacker? Yes, and this one was clearly no friend to the first. The interloper was even more commanding than the original assailant – large, threatening, and clearly unwilling to settle for just a share of the loot. Reluctantly the first attacker let go of the victim, who by then was too close to death to escape. In that split instant, the first vanquisher became the second vanquished, and was forced to abandon the spoils of the attack. The new attacker grabbed the now-lifeless carcass and carried it into nearby shadows.

A convoluted new plot for Law and Order? An elaborate metaphor for a hostile corporate takeover? No, it was last weekend's thrilling Napa-Solano Audubon field trip to the Fairfield-Suisun Sewer District holding ponds. We began by surveying the empty northwest pond basin, watching several of the spectacularly beautiful Ring-necked Pheasants that you are used to seeing along the District's front driveway. Suddenly, a Peregrine Falcon, famous for its plunging attacks upon its victims at speeds that can exceed 150 mph, made a lightning strike on a duck. The attack itself was silent from our distance, but nearby pheasants signaled the attack with cries and furious flapping as they escaped. We watched in amazement at the sight of the falcon standing upon its struggling prey, tearing at its flesh with its beak. The dying bird thrashed one webbed foot in the air, our only clue that it was a duck (though admittedly, the chances were good, given the bird population in our holding ponds). Just as we thought the excitement was dying down, a Red-tailed Hawk (yes, the big one with – you guessed it – a reddish tail) challenged the falcon and appropriated the spoils. The Peregrine Falcon tried to regain his prey with a couple of threatening passes over the Red-tailed, but the big hawk was – dare I say it? – unflappable. Seemingly annoyed, the big raptor finally picked  
*See "Unforgettable Moment," next page*

*Unforgettable Moment, continued*

up the duck in its talons and hoisted it into the branches of a nearby pine tree. It was a real "circle of life" moment (no Elton John music, no cartoon animals) and a stunning event to witness. I think we all could have returned home right then and there with a great story to tell, but we stayed on and saw more species, like Green-winged and Cinnamon Teal, Northern Shoveler, Ring-necked Duck, White-tailed Kite, Northern Harrier, Dark-eyed Junco, Tree Swallow, Anna's Hummingbird, Canada (not Canadian) Goose, American (not America) Coot, Mallard, and Mallard hybrids, and lots, lots more. The weather was nippy, the viewing was fine, and the company was genuinely delightful!

Because of the accomplishments of the Fairfield-Suisun Sewer District, there are clean, inviting ponds that provide an attractive stopover for the migrating birds of the Pacific Flyway. I wanted to share with you that our Audubon visitors were genuinely interested in and grateful for the treatment plant and its contributions to the natural habitat and local bird viewing. Their appreciation should serve as a reminder to us that our work at the District makes a meaningful contribution to our local watershed.

Our current landscape plan makes it impossible to "stop and smell the roses," but don't forget to take a few moments to stop and enjoy the remarkable birds our ponds attract.

pond, no more than 60 feet away, moving rather steadily toward us. As more of our NSAS group arrived and looked on, the Clapper passed within 10 feet of us, seemingly completely at ease. Mike really knows how to start a birding day!



*Clapper Rail in Louisiana. Photo by Dave McMullen 2005*

And Sue Johnson knows how to end a beautiful day on the Bay! Returning to our cars, Sue was still scanning the marshland with binoculars when she asked, "What is that raptor on the post?" After several minutes of observation and discussion, there was not yet unanimous agreement on the species. Then, as if to assist in its ID, the Merlin took flight, ending further debate.

It was an altogether fabulous outing. For the day, we saw 52 of the 103 species reported in the LEBNIC brochure to have been seen during December-February; 45 commonly seen, 5 uncommonly seen, and 2 rarely seen. In addition, we saw Orange-crowned Warbler and Fox Sparrow, which are not on the LEBNIC at all for any season. The species list is available on request. --Keith D. Gish and Sue Johnson

**Field Trip Report  
Palo Alto Baylands Jan. 12, 2008**

Arriving at the parking lot of the Lucy Evans Baylands Nature Interpretive Center (LEBNIC) in Palo Alto, Mike Mosier stood near his truck, camera in hand. As we tumbled out of Keith's van, Mike, with a smile like a California sunrise, showed us pictures of the Clapper Rail he had been observing on the shore. A quick look at his camera's digital screen sent us all scrambling for scopes and binos. As we approached the edge of the tidal pond, immediately someone exclaimed, "There it is!" It was feeding at the mudflat/vegetation edge of the tidal

**FRIENDS of the NAPA-SOLANO AUDUBON SOCIETY**

100% of *Friends of the Napa Solano Audubon Society* membership dues remain in our local chapter to support local birding, local conservation education and advocacy, and local birding science.

\$25 individual or \$35 family. Please JOIN or **RENEW TODAY** by completing the following:

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL: \_\_\_\_\_ (receive timely reminders or notification of events)

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

CITY: \_\_\_\_\_ STATE: \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

Please contact me about volunteer opportunities.  I prefer to receive my newsletter by e-mail ONLY.

I am enclosing an additional \_\_\_\_\_ donation to support citizen science and educational projects.

Make your check payable to "Friends of NSAS" & mail to: Napa-Solano Audubon Soc P.O. Box 10006, Napa, CA 94581

**Napa-Solano Audubon Society**  
**P.O. Box 10006**  
**Napa, CA 94581**



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### **American Bittern**



*American Bittern on the nest. Photo by NSAS member Darrell Lee.*

### **Event Calendar At-a-Glance**

- Tue. Mar. 11** General meeting, Program: Birds of Peru
- Sat. Mar. 15** Field Trip to Lake Berryessa
- Tues. April 8** General Meeting, Program: John Muir Laws
- Sat April 19** Field trip to Castle Rock
- Sat. April 19** Earth Day Napa Valley
- Sat April 26** Field trip to Mayacamas Audubon Preserve
- Tues. May 13** General meeting, Program TBA
- Wed. May 14** Trip to Kern River Preserve
- Tues. June 10** General meeting, elections
- Sat. June 14** Field trip & potluck, Archer Taylor Preserve

**Plus weekly Friday Bird Walks in & around Napa**

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