



Song Sparrow

Quarterly Newsletter of the Napa-Solano Audubon Society
Volume 39 No.2 Winter 2008-2009

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

Greetings

I know winter has arrived, but as I write this, the weather is balmy, with temperatures in the 80's, and I'm still enjoying fresh tomatoes & basil from the garden. The weather has been ideal for our field trips, for gazing out the window at some of the migrants stopping by our feeders... **and for launching new projects!** I am pleased to announce that we have just received a grant from Together Green in support of a new habitat restoration project. We launched the project by constructing bird boxes with the help of residents at the Yountville Veterans Home. They are so excited that we promised to return soon to lead a bird walk, help them install the boxes, and perhaps start a new "Vets Home birding group." Early next year we will conduct community workshops, events, outreach and site visits for project participants. You can read more about this exciting new project in the next section.

Our Benicia Christmas Bird Count is right around the corner: Monday, Dec.15. Please sign up to help in the field, at home monitoring your feeders or by preparing & helping to host the dinner for our worker-bees! To sign up, contact Robin Leong: robin_leong@netzero.net (707) 643-1287. For the Angwin Christmas count on Jan.1, 2009 contact Floyd Hayes: floyd_hayes@yahoo.com (707) 965-6401.

New Year resolutions: I hope that many of you will decide that this is the year to become involved! Help us with the Solano Breeding Bird study (you don't need to be an expert—find details on our website). Or, from your window at home, you can contribute to birding science by joining Project Feeder Watch—an excellent program through Cornell University. Check it out at www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw. AND I believe, all of us need to become more involved in protecting our Important Bird Areas. Learn more on the Audubon California website www.ca.audubon.org and sign up to receive Audubon Action Alerts & Advisory information.

-- Cheryl Harris, President

Together Green Habitat Restoration Project

We are pleased to announce that NSAS was one of 41 project proposals chosen for funding by Together Green, a cooperative effort of National Audubon and Toyota (who provided the funding). Many thanks to Karen Sheldon for her foresight and diligence in helping to develop this interesting project and for writing our winning proposal! Our project is titled, "Habitat Restoration on Vineyards, Agricultural Lands and Beyond." We are partnering with Katey Taylor, Viticulturist for Icon Estates (and a fellow Audubon member). Katey is an active leader in the Napa Sustainable Winegrowers Group and has already implemented habitat improvement measures.



Workers planting native vegetation. Photo by Katey Taylor

Kelly MacLeod is doing the research and coordination of our project to provide the information & support needed by local landowners to take significant conservation steps on their land. Measures will include installing diverse native vegetation as hedge rows and around ponds; reestablishing
See "Habitat Restoration Project," next page

Habitat Restoration Project, continued

wildlife corridors; removing invasive species; and installing nesting boxes and floating platforms to provide enhanced nesting options. These actions help reestablish the native ecology while maintaining the use of the lands for agriculture. It gives landowners the opportunity to learn about and participate in conservation efforts that open the door to broader environmental stewardship.

One of the project goals is to increase nesting opportunities for cavity nesting birds, whose declining numbers are due in part to clearing of woodlands & resulting lack of snags. We have been fortunate to receive a donation of about 50 boxes from Frank Oliver, who enjoys building them at his home in Palmdale. Some of these we have given to schools; others will be used on Land Trust or other properties. Thank you Frank! Our first workshop was held at the Yountville Veterans Home on November 15. We constructed 30 bluebird and kestrel boxes with the help of the Home's residents and with assistance from students of Chico State University. Some of these boxes will be installed on the Veterans Home property and the remaining will be made available to landowners who participate in our project. Our big thanks to Max Hunter, who cut the wood at his shop, and to Wally Neville who managed & coordinated the activity. Thanks also to Susan Heims and Karen Zanetell, who organized the activity at the Vets Home and to John Holt and Keith Gish for assisting with the project. More bird box workshops are being planned and we will need your help.

If you would like to become involved or receive notices about upcoming workshops and events, please sign up for our Restoration project email list by sending a request to nsas_TG@yahoo.com or call Kelly (707) 738-6461. Very soon our website www.napasolanoaudubon.com will have a brand new page entirely dedicated to this project, with more information including resources & contacts. Many thanks to Genji Schmeder, who donated his services to develop this new part of our web site. *—Cheryl Harris*

“Yolano Birding”

Birding Reports from Manfred Kusch

Manfred Kusch lives on on the Solano side of Putah Creek, about half way between Winters and Davis, so his birding straddles the line between Solano and Yolo counties. Manfred sends reports to the Solano Breeding Bird Atlas group, and we enjoy them so much we wanted to share a little of them with those who receive our newsletter. The following excerpt was dated November 14.

During my walk along the creek this morning I was alerted to some avian excitement by the sudden loud clucking and alarmed vocalizing of a large group of turkeys in the dense

underbrush on the north bank of Putah Creek, upstream from my house. I assumed that perhaps a coyote had attacked them but was puzzled by the fact that none of the turkeys had flown up into the trees as they usually do when my dog charges them. As I scanned the area around the turkeys, I suddenly became aware of a very large raptor sitting on a slanted tree trunk about 20 feet above the creek and not more than 100 feet from where I stood. As soon as I made eye contact it took off, flying upstream flapping its huge wings and showing a bright white band at the base of its tail. No doubt about it, it was a juvenile Golden Eagle. I checked the spot where it had roosted but found no sign of a meal. While it was soaring above the trees it was immediately harassed by a mature Red-tailed Hawk, which provided an instructive size comparison.

The rest of my walk was less exciting. Birds were everywhere, but just the usual suspects: Yellow-rumped Warblers, 1 Orange-crowned Warbler, Anna's Hummingbirds, woodpeckers, nuthatches, increasing numbers of Dark-eyed Juncos, Wood Ducks, goldfinches, Black Phoebes, various sparrows, etc. The one unusual bird—because it is only a very rare visitor around here—was a Golden-crowned Kinglet mixed in with its more numerous Ruby-crowned cousins. What are the chances of finding one of the smallest and largest rare visitors to my place on the same day just a few minutes and a few yards apart? *--Manfred Kusch*

Other Fall Birding Notes

On October 18, we were given an interesting and informative tour of the Suisun Water Treatment Plant by Outreach Specialist Margaret Kralovec and Glen Graves. The light was perfect at the ponds as we enjoyed beautiful Gadwall, Ring-necked Duck, Cinnamon, Green and Blue-winged Teal. The combination of our tour and stopping to watch birds made us aware of the important role the Plant plays in returning purified water into the Suisun Marsh. We then drove down Chadbourne Rd. and had good looks at Lesser and Greater Yellowlegs in the newly created Wildlife Sanctuary, flooded fields on Jacksnipe Rd. Other highlights were several Loggerhead Shrike, White-tailed Kite and Otter seen at the bridge. *—Margaret Barson*

Larry Kent found a Swamp Sparrow at Kennedy Park lagoon on Nov. 13. This is the first one seen in the county in 3 years. Heermann's Gull and Clay-colored Sparrow were seen at Hennessey Nov. 5. Both county firsts. A Ring-necked Duck X Greater Scaup hybrid returned to Hennessey for the 3rd year. This hybrid has never been documented in western North America before. A "Prairie" Merlin was at Buchli Station Oct. 22. A pair of Great Horned owls can be seen near the end of Buchli Station Rd. at the last (abandoned) house on the right, They roost in the trees. Two Peregrine Falcons have been chasing a flock of 10000 starlings at Huichica recently, or so I hear. *—Murray Berner*

A Saddle-billed Stork escaped from Safari West in Santa Rosa in early October. It was seen and photographed on Oct. 25 along Industrial Way in Benicia by Bill Behrends of Vallejo. If by chance you see the bird, report it to Peter Lang, owner of Safari West (www.safariwest.com/contact/).

—David Takeuchi



*Saddle-billed Stork (not the same one that escaped)
Photo used by permission from Arno Meintjes*

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 January, February and March programs.

Tues. December 9, 2008, 6:30 pm Holiday Potluck Party

In December we will continue our tradition of skipping a formal program in favor of a more social and festive potluck dinner. Bring a favorite dish to share, your own table service, and a new or used bird or wildlife book for exchange (or be creative—bring a bird game, art or other fun item). NSAS will provide drinks, door prizes and “entertainment.” Those of you who would like to share stories or photographs, please bring them on a cd or dvd configured to be shown from a laptop. Bring a friend!

Tues. January 13, 2009, 7:00 pm Photographing Birds

A Presentation by Oliver Klink and Munir Kureshi

Why photograph birds? Birds are such beautiful creatures. They lead fascinating lives. They exhibit interesting behaviors such as predation, courtship, reproduction, and nesting. However, they don't stay still for very long and can be challenging to photograph!

Oliver Klink and Munir Kureshi have worked hard at these challenges over the last few years. And they have earned some interesting stories to go with their pictures, such as the Black Crowned heron picking up ducklings, or the hummingbirds hugging a backyard fountain. Visit their website for a preview of their amazing work: www.incredibletravelphotos.com.

Tues. February 10, 2009, 7:00 pm Wetland Icons: Herons and Egrets of San Francisco Bay

Find out what goes on in heron and egret nesting colonies and how these beautiful birds help us to enhance the protection of healthy wetlands. Dr. John P. Kelly will present the natural history and conservation of herons and egrets, based on region-wide studies of nesting in the San Francisco Bay area since the early 1990s.

John Kelly is the Director of Conservation Science and Habitat Protection for Audubon Canyon Ranch (“ACR”— website: www.egret.org). John develops and oversees programs in conservation research, ecological restoration, and natural resource management in several areas of central coastal California, including the ACR sanctuaries in Marin and Sonoma counties and associated systems such as Tomales Bay and San Francisco Bay. Since 1990, John has conducted studies of herons and egrets at all known heronries in the northern San Francisco Bay area. John holds a PhD in Ecology from UC Davis and an MS in Wildlife from Humboldt State University.

Monthly Field Trips

Details for the December, January, & February 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”).

Bring snacks and liquids, and pack a lunch. It's always a good idea to wear a hat, bring sunscreen and bug repellent.

See “Monthly Field Trip General Information,” next page

Monthly Field Trip General Information, continued

Dress in layers. Don't forget your binoculars! Heavy rain cancels. Non-members are welcome on most field trips.

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.

Check the details for the specific trip to see which carpool locations will be used for that trip. The Carpool times listed are departure times. Please arrive early. Finally, 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.

Saturday, Dec. 6, 2008
Family Field Trip to American Canyon Wetlands

DESTINATION LOCATION AND TIME: 9:00 AM, Parking lot at the corner of Eucalyptus Drive and Wetlands Edge Road in American Canyon.

CARPOOL LOCATIONS AND TIME:
From Napa: 8:30 AM

LEADER: Janet Renfrow

TRIP DESCRIPTION: This is a Family and Beginning Birding Fieldtrip. Don't know the difference between a Robin and a Meadowlark? Do you have children or grandchildren who share your love of birds? Join us for a super December morning in American Canyon along the marshes. We will focus on listening as well as watching the many residents of the marsh! See the "Monthly Field Trips" section above for further information.

Saturday, Dec. 13, 2008
Christmas Count Scouting Trip

DESTINATION LOCATION AND TIME: 8:00 AM, Cordelia/Suisun Carpool location (Solano County Office of Education Building, 5100 Business Center Drive, across from COSTCO off of Green Valley Road).

CARPOOL LOCATIONS AND TIME:
From Cordelia/Suisun: 8:00 AM
From Napa: 7:30 AM

LEADER: Robin Leong

(Continued above)

TRIP DESCRIPTION: This year's Benicia Christmas Count will be held on Monday, December 15. "Pre-count" is done for 3 days consecutive days before count day. Robin Leong, our Christmas Count Chairman, will lead us to various areas in the count circle to add birds we may not see on count day. Be prepared to bird until 2:00 PM. If this is anything like count day, we will stop and eat lunch at a fast food joint. See Monthly Field Trips section above for further information.

Saturday, Jan. 10, 2009
Field Trip to San Joaquin County!

DESTINATION LOCATION AND TIME: 9:00 AM at the Carl's Jr. Restaurant near the corner of Hwy 12 and Starr Road / N. Thornton Road. Take Hwy 12 towards Lodi, go through the I-5 underpass, and take a right at the stop light.

CARPOOL LOCATIONS AND TIME:
From Napa: 7:00 AM
From Cordelia/Suisun: 7:30 AM

LEADER: David Yee

TRIP DESCRIPTION: We are fortunate to have David Yee, San Joaquin County's preeminent birder, leading us on this birding adventure. David has been birding this area for 30 years and has contributed rare bird sightings to Northbay Birds. We may see a rare vagrant, and will look for both the greater and lesser **Sandhill Cranes** at Woodbridge Road and Staten Island. We will visit various other locations to look for wintering waterfowl, shorebirds and land birds. Pack a lunch. We should finish up by 2:00 PM. See the "Monthly Field Trips" section above for further information.

Saturday, Jan. 17, 2009
Field Trip to Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge

DESTINATION LOCATION AND TIME: 9:15 AM, Visitor Center at Sacramento NWR, 752 County Rd. 99W, Willows, CA 95988 phone: (530) 934-2801

CARPOOL LOCATIONS AND TIME:
From Napa: 7:00 AM
From Cordelia/Suisun: 7:30 AM

LEADER: Tom McNicholas

TRIP DESCRIPTION:
The Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge Complex, located approximately 90 miles north of Sacramento and 2 hours from Napa, consists of five national wildlife refuges and three wildlife management areas that comprise over 35,000 acres of wetlands and uplands. In addition, there are over 32,000 acres of conservation easements in the Complex. The Refuges and easements serve as resting and feeding areas for nearly

See "Sacramento NWR Field Trip," next page

Sacramento NWR Field Trip, continued

half the migratory birds on the Pacific Flyway. Duck and geese numbers peak during the winter; we expect to see snow and Ross' geese, mallard, wigeon, teal, bufflehead, ruddy duck, northern shoveler and ring-necked ducks. Driving and walking tours will start at the visitor center in Willows following a ranger presentation. We will plan to return home by mid afternoon (approx 3 PM) to allow the drive back before dark. Heavy rain cancels. See the refuge web site below for bird lists and additional details and the "Monthly Field Trips" section above for further information.

www.fws.gov/sacramentovalleyrefuges/

**February 21 & 22, 2009
Weekend Field Trip to Elkhorn
Slough and Monterey**

This trip is open only to members of Napa Solano Audubon. A RESERVATION IS REQUIRED. Email your reservation request to Darrel Lee snorkler@juno.com with a copy to David Takeuchi davidtakeuchi@aol.com. Updates will be provided to those who will be attending.

CARAVAN ASSEMBLY LOCATION AND TIME: Vallejo carpool location 7:00 am (old Wal Mart parking lot). Please arrive early and be prepared to leave at 7 am.

LEADER: Darrell Lee snorkler@juno.com (707) 746-1862

TRIP DESCRIPTION:

We'll bird our way down to Monterey via Elkhorn Slough, Moonglow Dairy, Capitola and Monterey Harbors on Saturday. After checking into our motels, Darrell will lead an optional tour down to Big Sur to look for California Condors before the 5:55 PM sunset. Sunday we'll visit the Monarch

butterfly sanctuary and drive the scenic 17 Mile Drive. Last year Darrell took a German birder down, and they saw ten California Condors, four Snowy Plovers, a Greater White-Fronted Goose, hundreds of dolphins, and seven pods of migrating California Gray Whales. See Monthly Field Trips section above for further information.

Additional Friday Field Trips

In addition to the field trips above, our weekly Friday Bird Walks continue through the Winter and Spring, led by Murray Berner. A carpool meets at the regular Napa location (see above) at 8:00 AM each Friday. Visitors are most welcome. An email usually goes out to a special list of "Friday birders" a couple of days prior to the trip describing the destination for the week. Contact Dave McMullen or Cheryl Harris to be added to this email list. Heavy rain cancels.

**October "Gathering of Friends"
Event was lots of fun!**

Thank you to Katey Taylor of Icon Estates for hosting a delightful evening back in October. More than 50 of our members joined us for a lovely wine & social evening on the beautiful grounds of the Franciscan "Oakville House." Katey led us on a walk through the vineyards to the irrigation pond that she has restored for improved wildlife habitat – complete with a floating nest platform. This was the impetus for our new Habitat Restoration project. We will encourage landowners to plant native vegetation for wildlife at many of the "sterile" irrigation ponds we see throughout our area. A very special thank you to Sylvia Klenz for donating her time and resources in planning, organizing & putting on this event! And thank you to those of you who provided the delicious food and donated items for the silent auction. It was a great success! --Cheryl Harris

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** for **2009** 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" and Mail to: Napa-Solano Audubon Society, P.O. Box 10006, Napa, CA 94581

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



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Rufous-tailed Hummingbird in Belize.
Photo by NSAS member Mike Moshier.

Event Calendar At-a-Glance

- Sat. Dec. 6** Birding with Children Field Trip
- Tue. Dec. 9** Holiday Potluck Party
- Sat. Dec. 13** Scouting Field Trip for Benicia CBC
- Mon. Dec. 15** Benicia Christmas Bird Count & Dinner
- Sat Jan. 10** Field trip to San Joaquin County
- Tue. Jan. 13** Meeting & Program: Bird Photography
- Sat. Jan. 17** Field Trip to Sacramento NWR
- Tue. Feb. 10** Meeting & Program: Herons and Egrets
- Feb. 21-22** Field trip to Elkhorn Slough, Monterey
- Tue. Mar. 10** General Meeting Program: Woodpeckers
- Sat. Mar. 14** Field Trip to Guerneville, Russian River

Plus weekly Friday Bird Walks in & around Napa

Please check the website for any last-minute updates regarding our events. www.napasolanoaudubon.com

SAVE PAPER! Request to receive your newsletter by email only. Send requests to our webmaster Dave McMullen (red-tail@comcast.net).