



Song Sparrow

Quarterly Newsletter of the Napa-Solano Audubon Society
Volume 39 No.3 Spring 2009

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

Together Green: "Habitat Restoration on Vineyards, Agricultural Lands & Beyond"

I hope by now you are aware that Napa Solano Audubon Society has started an exciting new project focusing on local habitat restoration. In February, we had our first workshop at Skyline Park in Napa & had a wonderful response from nearly 90 participants, representing vineyards, farms & ranches, parks & open space preserves. Seven presenters spoke about managing invasive weed species, designing and planting native hedgerows to support wildlife & pollinating insects, planting native plants around ponds and installing bird boxes and other nesting habitat on agricultural properties. The program ended with tours of the Martha Walker Native Habitat Garden and the CNPS growing grounds. Attendees pledged to take measures to improve habitat on their properties, including removing invasive weeds, planting native habitat plants, putting up bird boxes and more. Plans are now in the works for visiting some of these properties, planting demonstration hedgerows and offering a pollinator workshop. Check the official Habitat Restoration Project website for event updates & for new resource materials: Field checklists, Biogeography of Napa Co., Lists of recommended local native plants & more! www.napasolanoaudubon.com/habrest/

Thank you so much to our volunteers who helped make this event a great success: Margaret Barson, Betty Labastida, Sylvia Klenz, Keith Gish, Jake Ruygt, Terry Chappell and a very special thank you to Darrell Lee who responded to a last minute plea for help with AV—it could not have happened without you!! Bird boxes provided to participants were the result of many hours of donated labor by volunteers Wally Neville with help from Keith Gish & Robin Leong. Thanks to Western Dove-tail & Max Hunter for use of the shop equipment & professional assistance. AND thank you to Carmen & Frank Oliver who built 100+ bird boxes to donate to the project.



Nearly 90 people attended our first workshop

As I mentioned in the last newsletter, we have also established a partnership with volunteers from the Yountville Veterans Home. I'm happy to report that we recently had a *second* workshop for building bird boxes with the Veteran's Home residents. They are pleased to be helping with the project & are looking forward to watching & learning about the activities of birds on their beautiful grounds. Thank you to Wally Neville, Keith Gish, John Holt, Tom McNicholas, Katey Taylor and Pat Hildreth for organizing & assisting this new group of volunteers. -- Cheryl Harris, President

Volunteers Needed: Heron and Egret Project

Audubon Canyon Ranch (ACR) is seeking volunteers to help with the North Bay Heron and Egret Project (HEP), part of a continuing effort to monitor colonially nesting herons and egrets in the northern San Francisco Bay region. Data collected by volunteers contributes to ACR's intensive regional monitoring of nesting distributions, nest survivorship, nest productivity, and intra-seasonal timing of nesting. Join dozens of other volunteers who rally forth every spring to

See "Heron and Egret Project," next page

Heron and Egret Project, continued

observe these majestic birds. Heron and Egret Observers who "adopt a nesting site" make five or more visits to their colony during the nesting season (early March to late June) and record bird behavior and nesting success.

The ability to identify Great Blue Herons, Great Egrets, Snowy Egrets, Cattle Egrets, and Black-crowned Night-Herons is necessary, but for those of you who are just starting out, we can pair you with a seasoned observer for "in the field" training. Access to a spotting scope is recommended; loaners are available. If you are interested in joining the ranks of Heron and Egret Observers throughout the North Bay, contact Emiko or Bonnie at Audubon Canyon Ranch at 415-663-8203 or cgrc@egret.org.

A Successful Flyway Festival

Rain on Friday didn't dim the spirits of those who joined us at the RCD Demonstration Vineyard nor out in the marsh & other areas. Beautiful weather on Saturday brought crowds: 54 at Joanne Castro's Rush Ranch walk!

Murray Berner's group at Hudeman Slough had great views of raptors: Rough-legged & Ferruginous hawks, Golden Eagles, Great-horned Owl, AND nice long looks at a beautiful Merlin. Other leaders found some extraordinary birds as well. Several families and Girl Scout troops joined our Family Bird walks and we entertained lots of visitors at our exhibit table inside & at our stations in the Mare Island wetlands.

Thank you so much to all of our members who volunteered and participated in so many ways to make this event a success. Special thanks to Janet Thiessen for organizing our activities in the marsh and at our membership table. Thanks also to Rollye Wiskerson for stepping in to shuttle our volunteers to the far reaches of the marsh.

Among the works showcased in the festival gallery were lovely pieces by our Audubon members Alan Moore, Wally Neville & Hilary Zunin. Hilary's work is also on display at the Napa library throughout March. Her works "Upstart Crows and Other Flights of Fancy: Transformative Photography" are intriguing & thought provoking. Stop by to meet Hilary at the library art reception on Friday March 6, from 6pm to 8pm.

Benicia Christmas Bird Count Recap—December 2008

We counted an all-time high of 172 species in the Benicia Christmas Bird Count (CBC) held on Monday, December 15, 2008. I'm glad that we once again had good participation, with the 3rd most counters ever, and the 4th highest number of hours logged. The total number of birds observed was way down, about 89,000 compared to an average of about 118,000 over the previous 10 years, and this was reflected in lower than average counts for most individual species. We did tie

our all-time high count of Western Meadowlarks. Other highlights include a Long-tailed Duck, the first-ever counted in the Benicia CBC, as well as a Townsend's Solitaire seen for the first time in 21 years and the second time ever in our count. We found also 3 species that have been highly irregular in the Benicia count: Brown Pelican, Pelagic Cormorant, and White-winged Scoter. Notable misses included Green Heron, Prairie Falcon, Western Screech Owl, and Yellow-billed Magpie.

Thanks to all who participated in the count, and to Valero Refinery for sponsoring our event. Their grant paid for the boat charter plus some of the food which made our Benicia count nearly revenue neutral. Thanks to Keith & Phyllis Gish and Pat Hildreth for cooking up some great food & organizing an excellent potluck dinner. I would like to start forming a committee to improve this count: We need volunteers that have experience in developing maps; Volunteers are also needed to help with public relations -- contacting newspapers, radio, and television. And volunteers to locate & gain permission into new areas. And, of course, we need to keep looking for new sponsors for this count to make it revenue neutral for NSAS. *—Robin Leong*

NSAS Selected Board Members

President	Cheryl Harris	(707) 224-6133
Field Trips	David Takeuchi	(707) 643-5544

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.

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 March, April and May programs.

Tues. March 10, 2009, 7:00 pm Local Woodpeckers, Inside and Out

Imagine, for a moment, slamming your face into a brick wall at 16 miles per hour. This self-destructive (and foolish) act would require you to exert about 1,200 g of force, almost certainly resulting in your death. Yet, a woodpecker applies the same force pounding its head against a tree up to 20 times per second, and as many as 12,000 times per day!

Join Oregon naturalist and woodpecker specialist, Stephen Shunk, as he tells us *See "Woodpecker Program" next page*

Woodpecker Program, continued

about woodpecker adaptation and specialization, emphasizing the North Bay's seven nesting woodpecker species. Steve Shunk started birding nearly two decades ago in San Jose's Alum Rock. He now leads birding tours across western North America through his company, Paradise Birding. Steve co-founded the East Cascades Bird Conservancy and the Oregon Birding Trails project and he currently leads bird surveys for various agencies and organizations from his home base in Central Oregon. For the last 10 years, Steve has studied woodpeckers on the east slope of Oregon's Cascade Mountains, and he recently completed the Peterson Reference Guide to Woodpeckers of North America.

Tues. April 14, 2009, 7:00 pm
Salton Sea Ecosystem Restoration

Did you know that the Salton Sea is California's largest inland body of water, much larger than Lake Tahoe, with a salt concentration 35-40 times that of the Pacific Ocean? It is also recognized by Audubon as an Important Bird Area with an "exceptionally high year-round diversity of birds." Come learn more about this fascinating resource from Jerry Boles, Environmental Program Manager for the California Department of Water Resources (DWR). Mr. Boles will help us understand the importance of the Sea to both wildlife and people, explaining environmental issues, restoration activities, recent agreements and legislation affecting the Salton Sea.

Jerry Boles has been involved with restoration activities at the Salton Sea since March 2005. Previously he was Chief of the Water Quality and Biology Section in the Northern District (Red Bluff) office of DWR. Now, he is Chief of the Colorado River and Salton Sea Office for DWR in Sacramento where he has been working to develop the long-term monitoring and restoration plans for the Salton Sea.

Regardless of whether you can attend the presentation, we recommend that you check out this link to a brochure to learn more about why the Salton Sea has been called "California's Everglades." Find the link from this page on our web site at www.napasolanoaudubon.com/programs/Salton_Sea.htm.

Tues. May 12, 2009, 7:00 pm
Old wine in new bottles: California Butterflies in the Anthropic Landscape

Dr. Arthur Shapiro, Ph.D., is a UC Davis professor in entomology, evolution and ecology. He is the author of *A Field Guide to Butterflies of the San Francisco Bay and Sacramento Valley Regions*. Come join us as Dr. Shapiro shares his lifelong passion in a presentation that will reveal how our native low-elevation butterfly fauna has adapted to the profound ecological transformation of lowland northern California over the past 200 years.

NSAS Adopts "Green" Resolution

This newsletter was printed on paper with 30% recycled content. The NSAS Board formally adopted a resolution to make an effort toward "green" practices in January 2009. Space would not allow us to include the resolution here, but we will include it in a future newsletter.

Monthly Field Trips

Field trip details are provided below for 6 trips from March thru June, 2009. 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 David 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. Dress in layers. Don't forget your binoculars! Heavy rain cancels. Non-members are welcome on most field trips.

CARPOOL LOCATIONS:

Cordelia: 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 Sports., 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, Mar. 14, 2009
Field Trip to Jenner, Russian River

MEET: 8:30 AM, lower parking lot at Goat Rock State Beach.

CARPOOL: From Vallejo: 6:45 AM, From Napa: 7:00 AM

DIRECTIONS: Goat Rock State Beach is on Highway 1, about 2 miles south of Jenner. It is about 1 mile south of the intersection of 116 and Highway 1.

LEADER: Lisa Hug is a naturalist and birder from Sebastopol. Formerly a ranger at Point Reyes National Seashore, she is currently an independent biological contractor and *See "Russian River Trip," next page*

Russian River Trip, continued

freelance naturalist. She teaches bird-watching classes for various organizations. Check out her website:

www.lisahugsnorthbaybirds.com

TRIP DESCRIPTION: We will explore the beautiful coastline of northern Sonoma County. Goat Rock State Beach is at the mouth of the Russian River and is incredibly scenic. It is a beautiful area to observe wildlife, including a large Harbor Seal haul-out, and waterfowl in both the Russian River and the ocean. We might be lucky and spot some offshore alcids. Then we will drift inland in search of land birds in the riparian habitat along Willowside Rd. and other local haunts. The trip will end around 3:00. Pack lunch, water and snacks.

Saturday, Mar. 28, 2009 Field Trip to the Timm Ranch

MEET: 7:30 AM, Cordelia Carpool location

CARPOOL: From Napa: 7:00 AM, From Cordelia: 7:30 AM

Carpooling is required for this trip as we must enter the ranch using the fewest vehicles possible. If you live far north of the Cordelia carpool location and want to meet us at the ranch gate by special arrangement, call Dave McMullen prior to the trip at 707 643-7471.

LEADER: Dave McMullen, NSAS member and webmaster.

TRIP DESCRIPTION: We are fortunate to have permission to visit the Timm Ranch, a beautiful large piece of private land in northern Solano County, west of the 505 interstate and south of Winters. The ranch covers well over 2000 acres, with rangeland transitioning to rolling oak savannah with pockets of woodland and bigger hills as you travel east to west. A few small ponds usually hold water in late March. Common birds include Western Meadowlark, Acorn Woodpecker, Western Bluebird, Oak Titmouse, and Lesser Goldfinch. Usually Rock Wrens are seen, and other interesting species on occasion, such as Horned Lark, Northern Shrike, and 10 raptor species (not all on 1 trip!). There will be no bathrooms. Bring water, lunch or a snack. We will drive around the ranch property and stop in some places to walk on mostly flat dirt road or gentle slopes. The ranch can be muddy in March. Wear hiking boots or sturdy shoes. We'll have lunch before we depart. A picnic blanket might come in handy or we can sit in the cars and eat. We should finish up and leave the ranch by about 1 pm.

Saturday, Apr. 11, 2009 Field Trip to Black Diamond Mine Regional Park, Mt. Diablo

MEET: 8:30 AM, Black Diamond Mine parking lot.

CARPOOL: From Napa: 7:00 AM, From Cordelia: 7:30 AM,
From Vallejo: 7:30 AM

(continued above)

DIRECTIONS: Take 680 south to Hwy 4 east toward Antioch. Exit on the right on Somersville Road. Follow Somersville Road south and it eventually leads into the park. Pass the park office on your left and continue to the parking lot near the end of Somersville Road.

LEADER: Eugenia Larson. Eugenia has been birding for almost 40 years, beginning in the 60's in Delaware and 18 years in the St. Louis area. Over the years she has been active with many environmental and nature groups, including the Mount Diablo Audubon Society. She retired from the staff of "Save the Bay" five years ago.

TRIP DESCRIPTION: There is an entry fee (\$5 last year per car). According to *Birding Northern California* by Jean Richmond, "this park is a mixed habitat of rolling valley grassland, open oak woodland and chaparral, with interesting rock formations, spectacular views and historical coal mining sites." Birds include woodland, chaparral and some grassland birds. California Thrasher, Wrentit, and Rufous-crowned Sparrows are possible. Bring lunch and a beverage. We will hike in the morning and return to the cars/picnic area for lunch, so no need to carry lunch. Parts of the trails may rocky and steep, so wear hiking boots or good sturdy shoes.

Saturday, Apr. 25, 2009 Field Trip to Putah Creek

DESTINATION MEET: 8:30 AM, 6444 Putah Creek Lane, Winters, CA 95694

CARPOOL: From Cordelia: 7:30 AM, From Napa: 7:00 AM

DIRECTIONS: The location has a Winters address, but is closest to Davis, at the northern edge of Solano county about 3/4 mile downstream from Stevenson bridge. At the intersection of Putah Creek Road and Stevenson Bridge Rd., take the private gravel road to the East. This is Putah Creek Lane, basically a continuation of Putah Creek Rd. eastward. Signs will guide you from the intersection to Dr. Kusch's house.

LEADER: Manfred Kusch recently retired from UC Davis, where he taught French and Comparative Literature for over 30 years. For the last 21 years Dr. Kusch has lived with his family along the South bank of Putah Creek about half way between Winters and Davis, where he has transformed part of his property into a private bird preserve that includes many native and Mediterranean plants, and a large riparian woodland along Putah Creek. The habitat near his home attracts many species of wintering and breeding birds. His nest boxes host Wood Ducks, Screech Owls, Barn Owls, Western Bluebirds, Tree Swallows, House Wrens and Ash-throated Flycatchers. His garden is abuzz with Hummingbirds during the breeding and migration seasons. Hooded Orioles regularly nest in his palm trees. The tour will include a 1 mile walk over mildly uneven terrain along the creek.

Sat. May 16, 2009
Field Trip to Point Reyes & Tomales Bay State Park

MEET: 9:30 AM, parking area for Jepson and Johnstone trailhead.

CARPOOL: From Vallejo: 8:15 AM, From Napa: 8:30 AM

DIRECTIONS: After Inverness follow road to a fork (left fork goes to Lighthouse). Take RIGHT FORK on Pierce Point Road for approximately 3/4 mile (before entrance to State Park) and park in lot on right side of road.

LEADERS: Joanne Castro, past NSAS President, and Sue Johnson, current Board Member.

TRIP DESCRIPTION: Plan for the day: First we will "Bird" the botanical paradise of trails and then drive to State Park for a **Gourmet Picnic** at Heart's Desire Beach. There is a **State Park fee** to enter park. Bring finger food to share at lunch potluck. Plates and coffee will be available.

Sat. June 13, 2009
Field Trip to Gates Canyon

MEET: 7:30 AM, intersection of Pleasants Valley Rd. & Gates Canyon Rd. north of Vacaville.

CARPOOL: From Napa: 6:30 AM, From Cordelia: 7:00 AM
NOTE: Cordelia Carpool will leave promptly at 7 AM !

DIRECTIONS: If coming via I-80 East, after Fairfield, exit at Pleasants Valley Rd. If coming via Hwy 128, Winters, turn left on Pleasants Valley Rd.

LEADER: Murray Berner, compiler of our ongoing Solano Breeding Bird Atlas

TRIP DESCRIPTION: The breeding season is a dynamic time at Gates Canyon in the hills west of Vacaville. About 50

species of birds nest at or near the canyon floor. Broods of Mt. Quail have been seen on the road. N. Pygmy Owl will be heard, perhaps seen. Six species of Woodpecker nest here. Pewees and grosbeaks are abundant. The canyon road is mostly paved with little traffic. We will pass through oak woodland, riparian thickets and chaparral habitats. Total walking distance will be up to three miles. Bring lunch and plenty of water. There are no bathrooms.

Additional Friday Field Trips

In addition to the field trips above, our weekly Friday Bird Walks will continue throughout the spring, led by Murray Berner. A carpool meets at the regular Napa location at 8AM each Friday (see "Monthly Field Trips" for carpool locations). Visitors are most welcome! An email goes out to a special list of "Friday birders" a couple days prior to the trip describing the destination for the week. If you are not included on this email list, Contact Dave McMullen or Cheryl Harris for any special announcements regarding the Friday walk for the week, and one of them can also add you to the email list.



Mute and Black Swans seen on the Friday walk to Edgerly Island on Feb. 20, 2009. Photo courtesy of Keith Gish!

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

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During the January field trip to San Joaquin County, a few of us were delighted to observe this Mink in a deep irrigation ditch on the side of the road. Careful examination of the photos revealed that the animal was hunting for and eating crayfish. Photo by Keith Gish.

Event Calendar At-a-Glance

- Tue. Mar. 10** General Meeting Program: Woodpeckers
- Sat. Mar. 14** Field Trip to Guerneville, Russian River
- Sat. Mar. 28** Field Trip to Timm Ranch
- Sat. Apr. 11** Field Trip to Black Diamond Regional Park
- Tue. Apr. 14** General Meeting Program: Salton Sea
- Sat. Apr. 25** Earth Day Napa Valley
- Sat. Apr. 25** Field Trip to Putah Creek
- Tue. May 12** General Meeting Program: Butterflies
- Sat. May 16** Field Trip to Tomales Bay
- Tue. Jun. 9** Potluck – details to be announced
- Sat. Jun. 13** Field Trip to Gates Canyon

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).