



# SONG SPARROW

Fall 2015 Vol. 42 No. 2  
www.napasolanoaudubon.com

## Tricolored Blackbird: Headed for Extinction?

California is our home, and it is also home to dozens of species of flora and fauna found nowhere else on Earth. Birds such as Yellow-billed Magpie, Nuttall's Woodpecker, and Tricolored Blackbird can be found almost exclusively here. Because these birds have very limited ranges and habitats, they are particularly vulnerable to habitat loss.

The particular case of the Tricolored Blackbird is dramatic. In the 1930's, as many as 3 million individuals ranged throughout California. Today, fewer than 150,000 birds exist, and the speed of decline is increasing. Researchers believe that since 2011, populations have declined as much as 44% to their lowest levels ever. Why is this happening?

Tricolored Blackbirds are "colony nesters," meaning they breed and raise their young in groups that can number tens of thousands of birds; one colony in Madera County recently hosted as many as 50,000 individuals. So, if a colony is threatened, a huge percentage of the entire population is at risk.

The natural breeding habitat for Tricolored Blackbirds is in wetland marshes, but in the past 200 years, more than 90% of California's wetlands have been converted to other uses. In response, the resilient Tricolors discovered that the new agricultural lands surrounding them made a good alternative, and so adapted to nesting in grain fields.

Unfortunately, much of this grain needs to be harvested in spring before the Tricolors finish raising their babies, often causing an entire nesting season to fail. So, what can we do to save our blackbird?

One approach is to ask farmers to delay harvesting fields with nesting birds until after the chicks fledge, and then compensate farmers for their financial loss. This approach is being attempted, with some success, in the Central Valley. A second approach, and the one that Solano Land Trust is taking, is to restore the original habitat the Tricolors want and need.

How can you help? You can volunteer with Solano Land Trust, as described below. Contact your representatives and California Fish and Wildlife to let them know of your support for listing the species as Endangered. And, if you're birding and find a Tricolor, report it on eBird. Read more about Audubon California's efforts at: <http://ca.audubon.org/tricolored-blackbird-0>

Let's work together to save the Tricolor Blackbird!



*Male Tricolored Blackbird at Rush Ranch*

## HELP THE TRICOLORED BLACKBIRD AT RUSH RANCH

*By Sue Wickham*

To the untrained eye there are lots of black birds at the corral at Rush Ranch these days. But wait – what are those funny white and yellow stripes? Educated birdwatchers know these to be Tricolored Blackbirds!

Solano Land Trust (SLT) is beginning a project to protect and enhance Tricolored Blackbird nesting habitat. For years, Tricolors have nested in the

cattails at the Upper Spring Branch Creek stockpond. SLT will repair an eroding berm and add additional fencing and offsite water to limit cattle seasonally to the pond. SLT will also enhance the pond to encourage more cattail and other wetland species. Funds for this project come from a grant which SLT recently received from Wells Fargo through the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

We need volunteers to help with monitoring the effects of the restoration on Tricolored nesting populations.

If you are interested in helping, SLT is gathering names of potential volunteers for an email list for project updates. E-mail Sue Wickham at [sue@solanolandtrust.org](mailto:sue@solanolandtrust.org) to join the list.

## PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Fall migration is upon us, bringing new birds and some reliable favorites to our area (White-crowned Sparrow, I'm looking at you!). Fall is also bringing new and exciting developments to NSAS, as we are expanding several of our programs.

**New Walks!** You just can't seem to get enough of our birds! Based on your feedback, we have added a Tuesday morning walk and a walk for photographers. Check our website for dates and times, and let me know what else you would like to see.

**New Conservation Programs!** Not only are we having fun watching birds, we are also working hard to collect data to help improve their lives. This issue of the Song Sparrow has dedicated its front page to the Tricolored Blackbird, a bird that desperately needs our help. We are excited to partner with SLT on their brand new project at Rush Ranch, restoring Tricolored Blackbird habitat.

**New Education Programs!** Most exciting of all, I am thrilled to announce the hiring of our very first Educational Coordinator, Alex Greene, thanks to a generous grant from Napa County Wildlife Conservation Commission. With this funding, Alex will be visiting classrooms to teach kids about birds on topics from biology to behavior, providing more Junior Audubon walks, and expanding the NestBoxes@Schools program.

I also have good news for those who missed out on the first run of our *Breeding Birds of Solano County*. We have decided to reprint the book! The book has been printed and bound, and we should have copies in hand by October. You can pre-order your copy on our web site.

Hang on, this is going to be an exciting and busy year! Want to help us make it even bigger? Check out Page 5 of this newsletter for information about volunteer and donation opportunities to keep this momentum rolling.

-- Wendy Schackwitz, President  
napa-solano-birds@outlook.com

# Bluebird Monitoring Update

By Earl Swenerton & Wendy Schackwitz

This marked the second year of NSAS's partnership with Solano Land Trust (SLT) to help the Western Bluebird. SLT managed bluebird recovery programs on three of its properties this year, and NSAS provided the bulk of the nest box monitors.

In 2015, we nearly tripled the numbers of successful fledglings over the previous season! Total fledged birds were 66 Western Bluebirds, 5 Ash-throated Flycatchers, and 25 Tree Swallows.

The increase can be attributed to a new trail and an upgrade and location change of existing boxes. We replaced older, shallow boxes with newer deeper boxes. We also removed boxes from fence posts and mounted them on poles to reduce predation.

We also encountered some disappointments. A new bluebird project initiated by the Boy Scouts at Rush Ranch was unsuccessful, as we learned there is not enough optimal habitat around the marshland where the boxes were placed. In the future, we will relocate those boxes to other areas which are more attractive for Western Bluebirds.

In addition to the trails on SLT property, NSAS also launched a Nestboxes@Schools program at Donaldson Way Elementary and American Canyon High School, where we installed several nest boxes on school grounds. Thanks go out to Alex Greene for managing the program, the California Conservation Corps and American Canyon High School for providing volunteers for the installation, and Jeff Bonneville who



Western Bluebird chicks in nest at Donaldson Way Elementary, taken by Teacher Maureen McCullough.

provided monitoring. Unfortunately, there were no successful nests at the American Canyon High School this year. As with the Boy Scout project, we believe this is due to where the boxes were placed, and we will be moving the boxes to more promising locations next year. The elementary school had a much more successful year with two successful Western Bluebird nests!

Finally, a big Thank You to nest box monitors! You have been the backbone of the monitoring program and the project would not exist without your hard work.

### Body Lengths Traveled Per Year in Migration

(in millions!)

Sandhill Crane	7 mil
White-crowned Sparrow	47 mil
Rufous Hummingbird	135 mil

## A BIT O' BIOLOGY: WESTERN BLUEBIRDS

- If you watch carefully, you might notice more than three adults feeding a single nest box. Sometimes kids from the previous year will help out their parents by bringing food to their new brothers and sisters!
- Want to control insect pests without nasty pesticides? Try installing a bluebird nest box. Studies have shown that on vineyards that have installed nest boxes, birds consume more than twice as many insects than those without nest boxes.
- Bluebirds are cavity nesters, but their bills are not designed to carve their own holes. So, they rely on holes made by woodpeckers (or boxes you build!). Consider leaving dead trees standing, so woodpeckers and other birds can make homes.

# Calendar of Events

## PROGRAMS

Programs are held on the second Tuesday of the month at 7pm at the Fairfield-Cordelia Library Meeting Room at 5050 Business Center Drive off of the Green Valley Road exit in Fairfield. For more detailed directions, go to [napasolanoaudubon.com](http://napasolanoaudubon.com)

### **Audubon Waterbird Program at Richardson Bay**

Tuesday, Sep 8, 7pm

Audubon California recently initiated a Waterbird Program housed at the Richardson Bay Audubon Center & Sanctuary in Tiburon. The program focuses on protecting and enhancing populations of waterbirds found on San Francisco Bay, such as Surf Scoter, Greater & Lesser Scaup and Western & Clark's Grebes.

Come learn from Kerry Wilcox about the goals of the program, why Richardson Bay was chosen, and how we hope to scale conservation actions up to San Francisco Bay and the Pacific Flyway.

Kerry Wilcox is the Waterbird Program Manager at the Richardson Bay Audubon Center & Sanctuary in Tiburon, CA. He has been working with Audubon since 2006, and prior to that was a biologist with the Institute for Bird Populations in Point Reyes Station.

### **Bird Conservation Across the Annual Cycle & The Global Change Challenge**

Tuesday, Oct 13, 7pm

Migratory birds are defined by their ability to fly long distances and find food seasonally across the annual cycle, but these regular migration patterns are being disrupted by rapid changes in land use and in climate.

Recent technology advances have provided the methods to study these changes in more detail. Miniaturization of transmitters and technology advances have allowed us to reveal the full-annual cycle movements of passerines for the first time, and analyses have been developed by Audubon's Science Division to predict

future climate and how changes may alter suitability of areas for birds. John Takekawa will discuss these science advances and how they may be used in bird conservation.

John Takekawa is Director of Bird Conservation for the Science Division of the National Audubon Society and also Scientist Emeritus with the U. S. Geological Survey Western Ecological Research Center.

### **A New Vision for the Salton Sea**

Tuesday, Nov 10, 7pm

The Salton Sea, an inland saline lake covering 350 square miles in southern California, is a critically endangered Important Bird Area that hosts 2/3 of California's bird species.

Andrea Jones, Director of Bird Conservation for Audubon California, will highlight why the Salton Sea is so critically important that over 400 species of birds use the habitats of the Salton Sea and will describe which species are most threatened by a changing Sea. She will discuss past efforts to "restore" the sea and how Audubon is engaging in a new solution for the Salton Sea that would be beneficial to both birds and people.

**No program in December.**

## PHOTOGRAPHY WALKS

Saturday Sep 5, 7am

We are excited to launch a brand new walk! Tosh Giles will lead a 2-3 hour walk that will focus on photographing birds. Come learn a few tips, or share a few of your own. This event is limited to 10 participants. Please RSVP to Tosh Giles, [toshgiles@gmail.com](mailto:toshgiles@gmail.com)

## JUNIOR AUDUBON RESUMES

NSAS continues its kid-friendly birding group, Junior Audubon! Younger birders tend to be highly motivated and learn quickly, but they can have difficulty finding ways to connect to each other and often get lost in adult-oriented bird outings.

Junior Audubon hopes to remedy these issues by offering a free group exclusively for teens and pre-teens. The group meets twice each month for two hours. Parental attendance is optional. The outings are set in different habitats near Napa and focus on improving birding skills and learning bird ecology. Our next walk will be Aug 29<sup>th</sup> at Westwood Hills Park from 8:00 to 10:00 a.m. Details on additional walks will be announced on our website.

## FIND US ONLINE!

For more details on all of these events or to sign up for email announcements about walks and field trips, check our web site at [napasolanoaudubon.com](http://napasolanoaudubon.com).



Like us on Facebook!  
[facebook.com/NapaSolanoAudubon](https://facebook.com/NapaSolanoAudubon)

## BIRDING WALKS

### **Tuesdays and Fridays**

NSAS offers bird walks on alternating Tuesdays and Fridays at various locations in Napa and Solano Counties. Details for these walks are emailed two days before the walk. Be sure to sign up for the email announcements!

## BEGINNING BIRDING

On the first Saturday of each month, we offer walks and workshops for beginning birders, alternating between American Canyon Wetlands and Newell Open Space Preserve. All workshops begin at 9am., followed by bird walks at 9:30am until noon. Contact Wendy at [napa-solano-birds@outlook.com](mailto:napa-solano-birds@outlook.com) for more information.

### **Habitat & American Canyon Wetlands Bird Walk**

Saturday, Sep 5, 9am

What are the elements that create a wildlife habitat? How can you create a wildlife sanctuary in your own yard? We will explore the things a bird needs to live its life and explain how you can take a few easy steps to create a wildlife habitat in your own yard.



## Project Feeder Watch & Newell Canyon Bird Walk

Saturday, Oct 3, 9am

If the winter weather has you spending more time indoors, but you still want to watch birds, this is for you! Project Feeder Watch is a Citizen Science project that records birds visiting feeders during the winter months. Learn how you can participate, how the data are collected, and what scientists have used the data for.

## Migration & American Canyon Wetlands Bird Walk

Saturday, Nov 7, 9am

Ever wonder why migrating geese fly in a V? Or why migrating hawks and vultures fly around in big circles? This month we will answer these questions and explore why some birds migrate and others stay put. Then we will walk through American Canyon Wetlands.

## FIELD TRIPS

**Note:** Field trips require RSVPs to the trip coordinator.

### Mono Lake (2 days)

Sat-Sun, Sep 19-20, 8am

Leader: Bartshe Miller, Education Director, Mono Lake Committee

Join us for a two-day, Fall birding trip to the eastern Sierra Nevada at Mono Lake. On Saturday we'll explore the areas around the lake and upland areas nearby, led by the education director of the Mono Lake Committee. Birds we hope to see include Horned and Eared Grebe, White-faced Ibis, Wilson's Snipe, Wilson's Phalarope, Red-necked Phalarope, Vaux's Swift, Horned Lark, Pinyon Jay, Clark's Nutcracker, Black-billed Magpie, Townsend's Solitaire, Green-tailed Towhee, and Yellow-headed Blackbird. Sunday's birding will be decided by the group. The trip

is limited to 12 people. **RSVP by Sep 8, 2015** to Bruce Thomsen at [brucecthomsen@yahoo.com](mailto:brucecthomsen@yahoo.com) or (707) 224-1906.

### Point Reyes National Seashore

Saturday, Oct 24, 8am

Leader: Gordon Beebe, President, Madrone Audubon Society

This trip will take us to the coast as we drive to the lighthouse and Chimney Rock, stopping at several locations along the way to view land migrants in the uplands and fall migrants and wintering shorebirds along the coast. You never know what might show up in migration at Point Reyes! This trip is limited to 15 people. **RSVP by Oct 14, 2015** to Bruce Thomsen at [brucecthomsen@yahoo.com](mailto:brucecthomsen@yahoo.com) or (707) 224-1906.

### Stones Lake NWR in Elk Grove and Woodbridge Sandhill Crane Fly-In

Sunday, Nov 29, 8am

Leader: Friends of Stone Lakes NWR Board member/Woodbridge Ecological Reserve docent

We will start at Stone Lakes National Wildlife Refuge, wintering home to dunlins, sandpipers, and avocets, as well as waterfowl and Sandhill Cranes. After lunch, we will visit Woodbridge Ecological Reserve to view Sandhill Cranes and other unique wintering waterfowl, hear a presentation on Sandhill Cranes and their Reserve habitat, and view the cranes' impressive, nightly fly-in at a location that is only open to the public during these special tours. Tours usually conclude a half-hour after sunset. Viewing these magnificent birds warbling and flying in to roost for the night is an awesome sight! Cost is \$5 to \$10. This trip is limited to 30 people. **RSVP by Nov 21** to Wendy Cole at [beehaven2@comcast.net](mailto:beehaven2@comcast.net).

## Napa-Solano Audubon Fall 2015 Calendar at a Glance

Sat Sep 5	Photo Walk
Sat Sep 5	Beginning Birds
Tue Sep 8	Tuesday Walk
Tue Sep 8	Program
Sat Sep 12	Jr Audubon Walk
Fri Sep 18	Friday Walk
Sat Sep 19-20	Field Trip
Sun Sep 20	Sonoma Optics Fair
Tue Sep 22	Tuesday Walk
Sat Sep 26	Jr Audubon Walk
Fri Oct 2	Friday Walk
Sat Oct 3	Jr Audubon
Sat Oct 3	Beginning Birds
Tue Oct 6	Tuesday walk
Tue Oct 13	Program
Fri Oct 16	Friday Walk
Sat Oct 17	Jr Audubon Walk
Sat Oct 17	Sanitation Fair
Tue Oct 20	Tuesday Walk
Sat Oct 24	Field Trip
Fri Oct 30	Friday Walk
Sat Nov 1	Jr Audubon Walk
Tue Nov 3	Tuesday Walk
Sat Nov 7	Beginning Birds
Tue Nov 10	Program
Fri Nov 13	Friday Walk
Sat Nov 14	Jr Audubon Walk
Tue Nov 17	Tuesday Walk
Fri Nov 27	Friday Walk
Sat Nov 28	Jr Audubon Walk
Sun Nov 29	Field Trip

[napasolanoaudubon.com](http://napasolanoaudubon.com) for more info or to sign up for email alerts.

### Preview of 2016 Field Trips

January: Benicia State Rec Area

February: Grizzly Island

March: Pescadero State Beach & Marsh

April: Mount Diablo

May: 7-day trip to SE Arizona with Tony Battiste (limited to 8 people)

## CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT WORKSHOP

All Christmas Bird Counts (CBC) have birders that bird by foot, car, boat, kayak, or even ATV. But, there is an easy way to help if you can't partake from the road or the water: stay home and count species at your bird feeders or in your yard!

NSAS will offer two workshops in Benicia a few weeks before this year's CBC that will teach an easy technique for doubling the species count in your yard. To sign up for one of our feeder watch classes, call 707-291-7488 to reserve a spot on Nov. 30 or text 707-334-2497 to reserve Dec. 7. Time and location TBD. The only requirement is that you participate in the Benicia CBC on Dec. 14 from your yard.

CBC4Kids



Last year's Christmas Bird Count for Kids was so much fun, we are planning two events this year, one in Solano County and one in Napa!

Look for dates and locations to be announced soon on our web site or in our Events email list.

# We Need You!

If helping our local birds sounds like a worthy cause, then volunteer with us! Young or young-at-heart, indoor person or outdoor, you can volunteer for as much time as you like, and in many different ways. You'll make new friends, learn a lot about our birds, and make a difference. We need you for projects like these:

## Bird Seasons

As the climate changes, plants are changing when they flower and insects are changing when they hatch. How is this impacting birds? Bird Seasons will collect data to help answer this question. Volunteers visit our local Important Bird Areas once a month and record the birds they find, which will be used to track changes in migration, feeding, breeding, and other life cycle stages. Contact Wendy Schackwitz, napa-solano-birds@outlook.com

## Tricolored Blackbird Monitoring

Enjoy visiting Rush Ranch? Want to make your visits also help save one of California's most imperiled species? Join our team of Tricolored Blackbird monitors. Contact Sue Wickham, sue@solanolandtrust.org

## NSAS in Schools

Our new Educational Coordinator needs your help! Assist on field trips, classroom visits, etc. Contact Alex Greene, accidentalshrike@gmail.com

## Events

Help us share how wonderful birds are by assisting at community events like Festivals, Earth Day and Farmer's Markets. Volunteers can help with set up and take down, or "manning" the

booth for a few hours to share what our group does and encourage participating at future events. Our next events are Sonoma Nature and Optics Fair, Sept 20, and American Canyon Sanitation Fair, Oct 17. Contact Diane Ley, leydm@aol.com

## BOARD POSITIONS

Want to have even a greater impact? Consider joining our Board.

### Education Chair

Like working with kids? Want to help battle Nature Deficit Disorder? You will develop a plan for how NSAS reaches kids in and out of schools, and work with our paid Educational Coordinator to implement it.

### Ways and Means Chair

Help us fund our important work! This role is responsible for securing funding through planning events such as the annual Bird-a-Thon and silent auctions, soliciting gifts and donations, and writing grants.

### Conservation Chair

Do you care about decisions being made in your community that affect birds and their habitat? Help NSAS be an environmental watch dog for your community! As a Conservation Chair you will monitor activities and policies in your local area that affect birds and report these to the Board, including flagging any legislative bills that need letters of support or opposition.

For more information about any board position, contact Wendy Schackwitz, napa-solano-birds@outlook.com

## DONATE

### Memberships

If you're already a member, then Thank You! If not, then consider joining today. Memberships support our education, citizen science, and advocacy efforts, as well as monthly programs, field trips, and this newsletter. Sign up today using the Membership link on our web page.

### Donations

Your one-time or recurring monthly donation can be designated to specific purposes, such as Education. Visit our web page for more details or to make a pledge.

If your workplace offers a Matching Gifts program, then choose Napa-Solano Audubon to double your impact!

### Amazon Smile



Support  
Napa-Solano Audubon  
Society.

When you shop at [smile.amazon.com](https://smile.amazon.com),  
Amazon donates.

[Go to smile.amazon.com](https://smile.amazon.com)

amazon smile

If you shop at Amazon.com, consider using Amazon's fundraising program, AmazonSmile. Amazon will donate 0.5% of the price of your eligible purchases to the non-profit of your choice, at no cost to you! Go to [smile.amazon.com](https://smile.amazon.com) and enter Napa-Solano Audubon in the Search field. Then click Select and shop as you normally would.

## MEMBER'S CORNER

Bluebird Monitor Betty "Mo" Mosher had a pleasant surprise waiting for her when she returned to her car after a morning of inspecting nest boxes and counting bluebird chicks.

"The picture was taken May 22 at Lynch Canyon. The four little Western Bluebirds had recently fledged from one of the nearby nest boxes."

We'd love to hear from you! Please submit your photos, short stories, poems, etc, to us so we can share them. Email your submissions to [napa-solano-birds@outlook.com](mailto:napa-solano-birds@outlook.com)



INSIDE  
Tri-colored Blackbird:  
Headed for Extinction?



## Breeding Birds of Solano County is Back!

Napa-Solano Audubon is excited to announce the SECOND EDITION of the *Breeding Birds of Solano County*!

After more than six years of preparation and extensive field work, this book is the culmination of our Solano Breeding Bird Atlas project and the definitive resource on the nesting birds of Solano County. Much more than just a landmark scientific publication, this is a true work of art: a hard cover book with the finest possible paper and materials, a professional layout and design, and hundreds of high-quality color photos.

To pre-order your copy, go to our web site at [napasolanoaudubon.com](http://napasolanoaudubon.com).

