



SONG SPARROW

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Drought: The Hidden Toll on Birds

Winter rains will not be a quick fix for California's birds.

Signs of California's drought are visible everywhere, from dry streams and lakebeds to hills still golden-brown well into autumn.

Some effects of these conditions on birds are clear. Dry conditions in the Central Valley reduce available habitat for migrating and wintering waterfowl along our Pacific Flyway. And fewer flowers means less nectar and food for hummingbirds.

But many effects are less apparent, if potentially more impactful and longer lasting.

As wetlands shrink, they offer less food and cause birds to crowd together. In these conditions, weak and hungry birds are more susceptible to disease, increasing mortality.

Outside of wetlands, the drought has resulted in fewer insects and small mammals. With less food for songbirds and raptors, these birds have failed to raise chicks successfully, or even to nest at all.

"We are losing an entire generation," says Andrea Jones, Audubon California Bird Conservation Program Director, "we have seen significant declines in species including Red-shouldered Hawks, Golden Eagles and White-tailed Kites."

The effects are compounded when this happens in consecutive years, and is especially hard for songbirds that only live five or six years. Analysis of Christmas Bird Count data from Texas for four-year periods before and after their drought found nearly 50 species with significant population declines at the end of the period.

The loss of bird life has implications beyond just having fewer birds around. Birds play key roles in ecosystems, such

as helping with pollination, insect control, and propagation, so fewer birds could impact everything from fire danger to our food supply.

Aside from conserving water, you can help in many ways. By participating in a Christmas Bird Count or using eBird, you help scientists to study the problem by documenting bird populations. You'll find the schedule for our CBCs on page 4 of this newsletter.

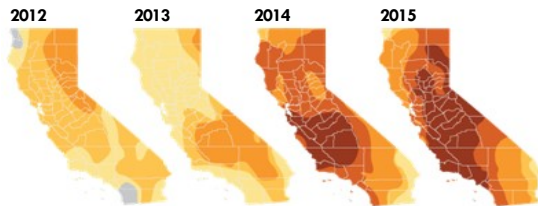
Keeping feeders stocked over the winter will also help birds to survive. Page 5 offers tips on what kinds of food to use for different types of birds.

Most importantly, let your representatives know that climate change is an issue that you care about, and support candidates that will take action to mitigate it.

A Record-Breaking Drought

41% of the state is facing "exceptional drought", the most severe kind.

Abnormally dry Moderate drought Severe drought
Extreme drought Exceptional drought



Progress at the Salton Sea

First restoration project of hopefully many kicks off.

A ceremony was held November 5 to mark the beginning of a \$3.5-million project to restore 420 acres of Red Hill Bay on the southeastern shore of the Salton Sea, the first such project undertaken at the sea.

For decades, the largest lake in California was a true oasis, supporting millions of birds, as well as agriculture and recreation. But in recent times, drought and water use policies have caused the lake to shrink rapidly.

The surface level is projected to drop by 20 feet in years to come, exposing miles of lake bottom. Beyond the impact to birds that depend on the sea, this will cause significant human impact as pesticide-laden dust from the former bottom will exacerbate the region's already high asthma rates.

Due in part to advocacy by Audubon California, officials are beginning to take action.

In October, Gov. Jerry Brown signed a bill to require the state's Natural Resources Agency to deliver a list of "shovel-ready" projects for the Salton Sea to the Legislature by March 31.

INSIDE

Junior Audubon at Napa Creek

Bit o' Biology: Western Grebe

Christmas Bird Count

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

The holiday season is in full swing: lights and decorations are everywhere, advertisements are flooding my mail and email boxes, and traffic at the shopping malls is awful.

While this time can be quite stressful, it is nice to know that we Birders have a way of celebrating the holiday season that takes us away from the hub-bub and chaos: Christmas Bird Counts.

Spending a day in the quiet of nature observing birds, and then settling in for a party at the end to share our discoveries is a refreshing break from the hectic holiday timeline.

This year, NSAS will host two CBCs, Benica Dec 14 and Angwin Jan 1. We are also hosting two CBC4Kids events, one in partnership with Connolly Ranch and the Napa Library on Dec 19, and one in partnership with Solano Land Trust at Rush Ranch on Jan 2.

Why does our chapter spend so much effort of CBCs? Well first, they are terribly fun! And, data collected is critical for tracking the health of bird populations through time. In fact, National Audubon's Climate Report relied heavily upon the data we citizen scientists collected during these events. (climate.audubon.org)

Can you help? We need volunteers to count birds, help with the celebration parties, and assist leading the kids walks. Please contact me if you are able to help with any of these events.

Looking for a unique holiday gift? The 2nd edition of the Breeding Birds of Solano County has arrived, and we have it, as well as other items available for purchase on our website.

Finally, welcome our new Educational Chair! Eric McKee has joined the board and will be working with our Educational Coordinator, Alex Greene, to bring the joy of birding to new birders, young and old.

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

Junior Audubon Rocks Napa Creek

By Alex Greene, Education Coordinator

NSAS launched a new project this fall: the Napa Creek Monitoring Project, which will document the bird diversity along a restored stretch of Napa Creek. To collect the data, we're turning to citizen scientists. But these aren't your typical citizen scientists: none of them is older than 15!

The three participants were recruited from Jr Audubon, a program that NSAS began offering this past spring. These teens are highly-skilled birders, and after a month of protocol training, they began monitoring in November.

Our monitoring protocol uses the "point count" technique. The observer stands still and records all birds they can hear and see. This protocol was provided by the Napa County Flood Control and Water Conservation District, and they use it in a similar water-bird study along the Napa River.

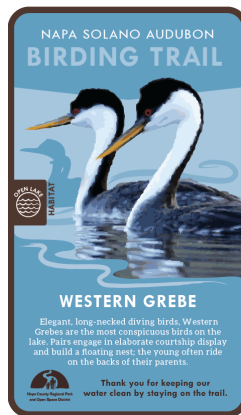
The restoration was performed along both Napa River and Creek during the

Flood Protection Project that was passed by voters in 1998. The project has been ongoing for several years, includes the recent changes around the Oxbow area, and is close to completion. A surprising diversity of songbirds now frequents these restored areas, including unusual species like Willow Flycatcher, Blue Grosbeak and White-throated Sparrow.

By surveying restored and non-restored sections of the creek, we hope to provide a framework for capturing this diversity. Comparing these two habitats will allow us to precisely study the effects of the creek restoration on bird communities.

The efforts of the project, both educational and scientific, will contribute to greater awareness of the crucial but threatened riparian habitat here in our own backyard.

And, it will help Jr Audubon kids become future Environmental Advocates!



New Lake Hennessey Birding Trail

Hikers at Lake Hennessey will soon be learning about local birds while exploring the lake.

In partnership with Napa County Regional Park and Open Space District, NSAS has designed signs like the one shown here that will be installed this winter on the Shoreline trail, starting from the Conn Valley Road parking area.

Thanks to NSAS Volunteers Laura Erickson, Murray Berner, and Alex Greene, and to Chris Cahill from Napa County Parks and Open Space District.

A BIT O' BIOLOGY: WESTERN GREBE

- ❑ Western Grebe courtship displays are among the most complex known in birds, and involve a pair running across a lake surface in unison, with neck extended.
- ❑ Only four lakes in Northern California, including Lake Almanor and Clear Lake, host nearly 50% of the US breeding population.



- ❑ While Western Grebes are not currently endangered, they are suffering reproductive challenges due to drought, reservoir level management, and human impacts. This year, only 1 chick survived for every 3 adults, and in some years recently, the ratio has been as low as 1 to 16.

Calendar of Events

PROGRAMS

We're moving again! Due to some scheduling issues, programs will be held at the Florence Douglas Senior Center, 333 Amador Street, Vallejo. The date will continue to be on the second Tuesday of the month at 7pm (unless noted otherwise). For more detailed directions, go to napasolanoaudubon.com

No Program in December

A Truly Oaklandish Heronry Story

Tuesday, Jan 12, 7pm

In 2014, Oakland's Night Heron Rookery suddenly became the focus of a viral national media frenzy. Golden Gate Audubon seized the moment to focus the public's attention on bird-safe tree care, then went on to inspire a whole city to appreciate the astonishing birdlife living right downtown. It's a rather wild and crazy story ...with a lot of positive upside reminding us how local Audubon projects can really make a difference.



Cindy Margulis is the Executive Director of Golden Gate Audubon Society. Cindy has volunteered for GGAS for years. Additionally, she's been a wildlife monitor, docent, and public advocate for numerous organizations and agencies, including: International Bird Rescue, San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory, USF&WS, Oakland Zoo, and the East Bay Regional Park District.

The Big Year, Napa Style

Tuesday, Feb 2, 7pm

(Note: This program is on the **first** Tuesday of February)

Inspired by books like *The Big Year* and *Kingbird Highway*, Napa residents Mike and Wendy Schackwitz attempted their own Big Year in 2015. Their efforts took them from San Diego to New Brunswick, from the Florida Keys to Nome, Alaska, and almost everywhere in between. Mike will talk about the triumphs, trials, and tribulations of doing a big year, and

what they learned along the way.

Mike Schackwitz has been birding casually for 15 years, while working as a Program Manager at Microsoft on services like Hotmail and MSN Messenger. Which had nothing to do with birds, but was still fun.

The Great Gray Owls of California and the Pacific Northwest

Tuesday, Mar 8, 7pm

The tallest owl in North America, the Great Gray remains elusive, mysterious and a highly-prized sighting among birders. The Great Gray Owl is on California's Endangered Species List and those individuals found in the Sierra are the world's southernmost in their species. Harry Fuller will discuss this bird's breeding range and annual life cycle and explore what challenges it faces with climate change.



Harry Fuller is on the Board of Directors of the Klamath Bird Observatory and co-founder of Ashland, OR's Mountain Bird Festival featuring the area's nesting Great Gray Owls. He annually leads a trip in the Pacific Northwest for Golden Gate Audubon.

The first Christmas Bird Count was held in 1900. The 27 participants counted in 25 locations, and tallied 89 total species.

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT FOR KIDS

This year we will have 2 events!

Napa: Dec 19, Napa Library
Solano: Jan 2, Rush Ranch Nature Center

Kids 7-18 and their parents are invited to NSAS's Annual Christmas Bird Count for Kids Events run from 8:30am to 12:30pm. Families meet for a Binocular Boot Camp program, then break into groups to survey a variety of habitats. After surveying bird life, families gather to share their findings, adding them to the Citizen Science website eBird. Chil-

dren must be accompanied by an adult.

To register for the Napa event, please go to <http://bit.ly/birdcount4kids>.

To register for the Solano event, email Wendy Schackwitz at napa-solano-birds@outlook.com

JUNIOR AUDUBON IN DECEMBER

NSAS continues its kid-friendly birding group, Junior Audubon, for teens and pre-teens and any parents who want to attend. Our next walk is on December 12 at 8am on the Lincoln to Trancas Trail. This interesting segment of trail runs along the Napa River and is hardly ever birded. It is mostly wooded habitat with a few fields, and the usual Napa River birds are all present. Leaders from the Audubon Society will provide binoculars and field guides. Contact Alex Greene for more information at accidentalshrike@gmail.com.

BIRDING WALKS

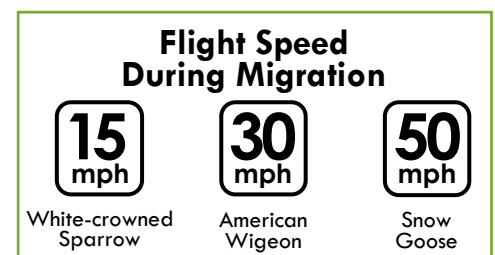
Tuesdays and Fridays

NSAS offers bird walks on most 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 on our website!

BEGINNING BIRDING

Walks and workshops aimed at Beginning Birders are held twice per month on Saturdays. All workshops begin at 9am, followed by bird walks at 9:30am until noon. Contact Wendy Schackwitz at napa-solano-birds@outlook.com for more information.

Walks are listed on the following page.



Beginning Birding, continued

Hummingbirds @ Home

Saturday, Jan 9, 9am, Newell Open Space
Saturday, Jan 16, 9am, Rush Ranch

Learn about a Citizen Science project that is not only gathering information about hummingbirds, but focusing on the habitat upon which they rely. Participants of the workshop will receive a 'Hummingbirds at Home' kit, including wildflower seeds of native California flowers, materials for creating a hummingbird feeder from recycled materials, and more.

Great Backyard Bird Count

Saturday, Feb 6, 9am, AmCyn Wetlands
Saturday, Feb 13, 9am, Rush Ranch

Feb 12-15 is the national Audubon Great Backyard Bird Count, and this workshop will show you how you can participate and help scientists better understand the world around us by recording the birds that you see in your backyard.

Basic Bird Identification

Saturday, Mar 5, 9am, AmCyn Wetlands
Saturday, Mar 19, 9am, Rush Ranch

How do the experts tell all the different species apart? Hear tips for finding and identifying typical California birds, including how to identify a bird just from its silhouette! Participants receive a free guide to beginning birding.

FIELD TRIPS

Note: Field trips require RSVPs to the trip coordinator.

Pre-Scout for Benicia CBC

Saturday, Dec 12, 9am-2pm
Leader: Robin Leong

Scout several locations in advance of the Benicia Christmas Bird Count (CBC) on Monday, Dec 14. Preview several areas

in the 15 mile diameter Benicia CBC circle. You will learn how to estimate the number of species seen, as well as how to tally as many species as possible.

This is not just practice! All species seen on this field trip will be included in the final CBC report.

Benicia State Park Recreation Area

Saturday, Jan 23, 9am
Leader: Joanne Castro

Benicia State Recreation Area lies along the north side Carquinez Strait. The area consists of shoreline along the strait, marsh habitat, and some grass uplands. Birds expected are many ducks, marsh birds (including rails), robins, and some shorebirds. There is always the unexpected in this area as well. RSVP by Jan 20, 2016 to Bruce Thomsen at (707) 224-1906 or brucecthomsen@yahoo.com.

Rush Ranch Open Space and Grizzly Island Wildlife Area

Sunday, Feb 21, 8am
Leader: Ken Poerner, Land Steward,
Solano Land Trust

Rush Ranch is a 2,070 acre open space in southern Solano County, managed by Solano Land Trust. It is an Important Bird Area, bordered on one side by the Suisun Marsh, a vital component of the San Francisco Bay/Delta Estuary. Within its boundaries is one of the best remaining examples of brackish tidal marsh habitat, exceptionally rich in vegetation and wildlife. We will look for Burrowing, Great Horned, and Barn Owl, raptors, ducks, and Tricolored Blackbirds. Then, we will visit the marsh for rails, and continue on to Grizzly Island for ducks, shorebirds, possible bittern, and Loggerhead Shrike. Coordinator: Wendy Cole at 707-363-3170 or beehaven2@comcast.net.

Napa-Solano Audubon Winter Calendar at a Glance



Mon Dec 7	CBC Workshop
Fri Dec 11	Fri Walk
Sat Dec 12	Field Trip
Sat Dec 12	Jr Audubon Walk
Mon Dec 14	Benicia CBC
Sat Dec 19	CBC4Kids in Napa
Fri Jan 1	Angwin CBC
Sat Jan 2	CBC4Kids in Solano
Fri Jan 8	Fri Walk
Sat Jan 9	Beginning Bird Walk
Tue Jan 12	Program
Sat Jan 16	Jr Audubon
Sat Jan 16	Beginning Bird Walk
Fri Jan 22	Fri Walk
Sat Jan 23	Field Trip
Tues Jan 26	Tues Walk
Sat Jan 30	Jr Audubon
Tue Feb 2	Program
Fri Feb 5	Fri Walk
Sat Feb 6	Beginning Bird Walk
Sat Feb 6	Waterbird Festival
Sat Feb 13	Jr Audubon
Sat Feb 13	Beginning Bird Walk
Fri Feb 19	Fri Walk
Feb 19 – 21	SF Flyway Festival
Sun Feb 21	Field Trip
Tues Feb 23	Tues Walk
Sat Feb 27	Jr Audubon
Fri Mar 4	Fri Walk
Sat Mar 5	Beginning Bird Walk
Tue Mar 8	Program
Fri Mar 18	Fri Walk
Sat Mar 19	Beginning Bird Walk
Tues Mar 22	Fri Walk

Go to www.napasolanoaudubon.com for more info or to sign up for email alerts.



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CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT NEEDS YOU!

We hope you can join the fun as we conduct our annual CBCs. Birders of all levels are welcome! Help is also needed with potluck.

The 69th Benicia CBC is on Monday, Dec 14, followed by a potluck dinner. Contact Robin Leong at robin_leong@netzero.net for details or to sign up.

The 45th Angwin Christmas Bird Count is on Friday, Jan 1, and a potluck + catered dinner will follow. Contact Murray Berner at vireocity@hotmail.com.

We are also offering a 2-hour workshop on Dec 7 on counting species from your backyard if you can't attend the CBC. To sign up, call Mary at 707-297-6073.

Tricolored Blackbird Considered for Endangered Species Listing

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced in September that Tricolored Blackbird was one of several species being considered for protection under the Endangered Species Act.

Other birds under consideration are the Tufted Puffin and California Spotted Owl.

Public comments were accepted until November 17, and the petition is now under review. A decision is expected next year.

As highlighted in our last newsletter, Tri-colored Blackbird populations have declined as much as 44% since 2011, and by 95% since the 1930s.



Fill Your Feeder!

Join Project FeederWatch and help scientists learn about feeder birds

Food can be scarce for birds in the winter, especially after a time of drought, so Audubon encourages bird lovers to set up feeders. You get to watch the birds up close, and the birds get much-needed food. Everybody wins!

While you're at it, consider joining Project FeederWatch, a winter-long survey of birds that come to feeders, sponsored by Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Bird Studies Canada. The data you collect about the birds at your feeder are used by scientists to track large-scale bird movements and population trends. Go to feederwatch.org for more information or to sign up.

Either way, now is a great time to get your feeder set up. To make your yard even more appealing to birds, consider setting out fresh water, and if you have the room, leave piles of brush near the feeders for shelter. The birds will thank you!

Here's a guide to the types of birds that will be attracted to different kinds of food:

Njyer	Suet	Cracked Corn	Nectar	Raw Shelled Peanuts
Goldfinch Chickadee Junco	Woodpecker Nuthatch Chickadee	Sparrow Dove Towhee Quail	Hummingbird Oriole	Jay Nuthatch Chickadee

Source: Feederwatch.org



Bird feeders don't have to be expensive!

Members' Corner

When Alex Greene stopped by Kennedy Park in Napa in September, he hoped to locate a recently reported Chestnut-sided Warbler or some other unusual bird pausing at the park during migration. What he didn't expect to find was a Yellow-throated Warbler, possibly the first ever record for Napa County!

The Yellow-throated Warbler summers in the Eastern half of the United States, and winters in Central America and the Caribbean. Only a handful have ever been reported in California. This bird was seen for a few hours, and then not again.

As the saying goes, you never know what will turn up during migration!

Do you have a story or photo you'd like to share? Email it to napa-solano-birds@outlook.com, and we'll consider it for inclusion in a future newsletter.



Support Napa-Solano Audubon!

In the past year, NSAS has offered more than 50 walks and field trips, hired an Education Coordinator, did classroom visits and programs for kids that reached 400+ students, set up two new Bluebird Box Trails and monitored 40+ boxes, participated in several restoration projects, and more! In 2016, we want to continue growing and have even more impact on our local communities and birds! For us to accomplish all this, however, we need your support. Consider becoming a Chapter Member, buying our new book, or donating today.

\$25 Individual Membership \$35 Family Membership \$65 *Breeding Birds of Solano County*

Membership \$ _____ + Donatation \$ _____ + _____ Copies of *Breeding Birds of Solano County* \$ _____ = Total Enclosed \$ _____

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Send this information and make all checks payable to: Napa-Solano Audubon Society, PO Box 10006, Napa, CA 94581

To join or donate online, go to goo.gl/2oj2uw

INSIDE:
Drought: The Hidden Toll on Birds

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Napa-Solano Audubon Society



Breeding Birds of Solano County is Here!

Napa-Solano Audubon Society is excited to announce that the **SECOND EDITION** of the *Breeding Birds of Solano County* is here and available now for pick-up or delivery!

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.

These books make fantastic holiday gifts for anybody who loves birds!

To order your copy, use the form on the opposite side of this page, or go to our web site at napasolanoaudubon.com.

