



SONG SPARROW

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Native Plants Support Bugs for Birds!

Spring is just around the corner, and birds are preparing for spring. As migrants return from their wintering grounds, the search is on for territories, nesting sites, and mates.

Humans are also preparing. Aside from pruning and mulching garden beds, now is a great time to add landscaping plants to your yard. Spring planting allows plants to begin establishing roots before summer.

With thousands of plant varieties available at nurseries, the options can be bewildering. But by choosing California's native plants, you will help birds in a way that might surprise you: by helping insects!

Nearly all land birds rear their young on insects, and insects even make up a large part of the diet of birds you wouldn't expect. For example, hummingbirds primarily drink nectar, but they could not survive without protein; small flies, beetles, and ants are common food.

Plant-eating insects are the first link in the food chain for many birds and other animals. The problem is that plant-eating insects typically evolved to eat a specific native plant. Monarch Butterfly caterpillars eat milkweed leaves exclusively, and as its name suggests, the California Oakworm feeds exclusively on oaks and primarily on Coast Live Oak. Adapting to a new plant can take thousands of years, if at all.

Consequently, studies have shown that native plants support larger and more diverse insect communities. Oak trees in California host larger insect communities than Asian Ginko trees.

But, does more insects necessarily mean more birds? Desiree Narango, a Ph.D. Candidate at University of Delaware recently ran a study with the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center's

Neighborhood Nestwatch Program to find out.

She installed nest boxes in many neighborhoods around Washington, D.C., and tracked the behavior and nesting of Carolina Chickadees. She also counted the number of caterpillars in both native and non-native trees around the area.

Her preliminary results indicate that the birds are far more likely to set up territories and nest in yards with lots of trees, dominated by native plants. Yards that contained primarily non-native plants had few, if any, chickadee nests, and chickadees actively avoided foraging in non-native trees. And, those trees hosted fewer caterpillars than native trees.

"As much as feeders are fun to watch, it's really the insects that are supporting most songbird populations," said Ms. Narango.

While providing better habitat for wildlife, native plants are also a better choice for homeowners. Being adapted to local conditions, they don't require fertilizer, pesticides, or regular water (after becoming established). And, replacing lawn with native plants removes the need to mow. This saves time, money, and effort, while improving air and water quality.

But, choosing just any native plant may not work either. In the 1970's, the El Segundo Blue Butterfly became an Endangered Species when landscapers used California buckwheat instead of Dune buckwheat to landscape an area of sand dunes near LAX. When the California buckwheat was removed, the butterfly bounced back. Consider also that Western Redbud grows in the hills around Napa County, but not lower.

Napa-Solano Audubon has created a "Plants for Birds" tool to help you



Doug Tallamy

identify plants for your location. The tool allows you to enter your county, planting conditions like how sunny or dry the site is, and other options. It then shows you native plants that fit these criteria, provides links to more information about each plant, and helps you build a shopping list. A link to the tool can be found on our web site at <http://goo.gl/8r74wP>

Once you've identified the plants you want, find a local grower to ensure the plants are adapted to local conditions. And be sure to give them extra water the first season.

"In addition to landscaping for attractive gardens and ecosystem services, it's important that we start thinking about food web services too," Ms. Narango said, "The decisions you make in your yard can have a lot of impact."

NATIVE PLANT SALE!

Napa's chapter of the California Native Plant Society hosts twice-yearly native plant sales at Skyline Park in Napa. The next sale will be April 7-9.

For more information, see their web site at napavalleycnps.org

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Our flock is growing! I am pleased to announce that, thanks to a grant from Audubon California, there is another addition to the Conservation team! Amy Graves is joining us as a Conservation Advocacy intern.

I first met Amy at the local Meetup Group "Birds and Brews." I quickly understood how passionate Amy is about saving the environment around her, as she spent much of the walk quizzing me about the best way to reach her representatives. So, I am thrilled that she has agreed to join us!

Amy is a student at Solano Community College. She will work with our Conservation team for four months, focusing on developing our local advocacy network. She will also participate in a variety of surveying activities, as well as meeting with state legislators.

At our upcoming events, swing by our Advocacy table and say hi!

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



Welcome Amy Graves!

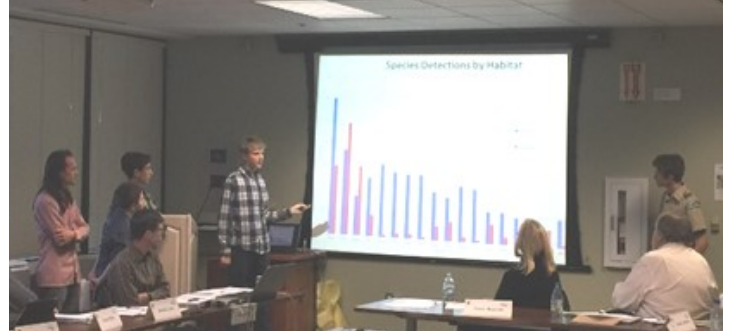
Napa Creek Monitors Present Findings

Alex Greene, NSAS Education Coordinator

After a year of hard work, a group of dedicated student volunteers has successfully completed the Napa Creek Bird Monitoring Project.

These teens braved cold temperatures and very early mornings to visit the Napa Creek 25 times between November 2015 and November 2016. In celebration of this achievement and to get the word out about their accomplishment, the group presented their findings at the January board meeting of the Watershed Information and Conservation Council.

Standing before this group of city council members and prominent local conservation leaders, the Napa Creek Monitors reported 1,727 bird detections representing 77 species. But this project was much more than an



opportunity to gather data about birds: it was a full-bodied experience in the scientific process.

The students described how they built a database and entered their data. They shared graphs of their results, exploring the effects of habitat and seasonality on bird behavior, diversity and abundance. And they talked about the final report they are preparing that will summarize and explain their

findings.

The WICC board was clearly impressed with these intelligent and well-spoken teens. In the bigger picture, this project demonstrated that science does not need to be sacrificed during the process of education.

I hope this excellent work sends ripples of change through the lives of the monitors, the WICC board and the avian community, for a long time to come.

Easy Steps to Advocacy

Nancy A. Piotrowski, Ph.D., NSAS Conservation Chair

Many people are asking how they can to help conservation efforts. While many suggestions abound on the Internet, I offer one small action to start the process.

Simply, consider writing a brief one-page letter to local representatives in support of any parks or preserves—city, county, state, or federal—that you have enjoyed visiting. Expressing

your enthusiasm for the place, wildlife you saw there, and what you did on your trip signals to key decision-makers your presence and interests as a constituent, and encourages them to think about the impact and importance of park and preserve supporters in their region.

Letters to a local recreation district director, county supervisor, state repre-

sentative, or federal legislator all have value. Remember too, this can be in California, or even elsewhere in another state where you had a great experience.

For help writing a letter or tips about advocacy, just email me (napiotrowski@yahoo.com). And if you write a letter, please also send me a copy so we can learn about your experience!

A BIT O' BIOLOGY: THE MISSION BLUE BUTTERFLY

The Mission blue butterfly is an endangered species found only around San Francisco Bay. Female butterflies lay single eggs on, and larvae feed on only three types of native lupine. Larvae hatch in summer, feed for three weeks, then dig into the ground to sleep.

They wake in February, having developed glands that secrete a sugary solution that attracts ants. The ants collect the secretion and protect the larvae until it pupates into a butterfly. By mid-summer, the adult butterfly has laid eggs and dies, and the cycle begins anew.



Thomas Wang

Calendar of Events

PROGRAMS

Programs will be held at the Florence Douglas Senior Center, 333 Amador Street, Vallejo, on the second Tuesday of each month at 7pm (unless noted).

The Accidental Snapper Tuesday, March 14, 7pm

John Comisky will present a photo essay on the birds of New Zealand and Australia as they were encountered at random intersections across a trip that lasted for five weeks, covering 25,000 miles and multiple terrains. He will make comparisons to American subspecies in the Bay Area, when applicable.

John is Vice President and wildlife photographer for Napa Wildlife Rescue.



American Bushtits Tuesday, April 11, 7pm

Learn about the life history of our native bushtits, one of the smallest passerines in North America. With passion and a little humor, Marcia Grefsrud will provide a unique view of a pair of breeding bushtits observed over a six year period.

Marcia is an Environmental Scientist in the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Board of Directors Election, Volunteer Party, and a Goodbye Tuesday, May 9, 7pm

Our monthly programs will break for the summer with the election of our Board of Directors and a celebration of our extraordinary volunteers. We'll have hors d'oeuvres, desserts, wine, and beer.

We will begin with a recap of our April events and Bird-a-thon results. Then, our own Alex Greene will present a retrospective of our education programming before he leaves us for the next chapter in his life.

BEGINNING BIRDING

Walks and workshops aimed at Beginning Birders are held twice a 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.

Birding by Ear Saturday, Mar 4, Newell Canyon Preserve Saturday, Mar 18, Peña Adobe Regional Park

Why do birds sing? How can you tell birds apart by their songs? You will learn to ID five different birds from their song alone, and discuss apps for your smartphone that can help you learn more songs and identify birds in your yard and in the field.

Beginning Bird Identification Saturday, Apr 1, American Canyon Saturday, Apr 29, 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!

Courtship and Nesting Saturday, May 6, Newell Canyon Saturday, May 20, Lynch Canyon

What are the different kinds of nests that birds build? Try your hand at building a nest yourself. Find out about active nests with living birds that you can watch from your computer. Several different types of nests will be available for you to look at up close, and we will watch for more nests on our walk.

Beginning Birding walks are offered all summer. Check our web site for details.

FIELD TRIPS

Note: Most field trips require RSVPs to the trip coordinator. See napasolanoaudubon.com for additional logistics and carpool information.

Las Gallinas Ponds Sunday, Mar 12, 8am Leader: Peter Colasanti, Marin Audubon

The Las Gallinas is the birding community's nickname for the treatment ponds and surrounding agricultural fields and tidal marsh at LGVSD's Wastewater Treatment Reclamation Project. The area includes

Napa-Solano Audubon Presents...
CHIRP!
A FESTIVAL FOR THE BIRDS

JOIN US IN APRIL FOR A MONTH OF FUN ACTIVITIES TO CELEBRATE SPRING AND RAISE MONEY FOR NAPA-SOLANO AUDUBON!

ALL PROCEEDS GO TOWARD NAPA-SOLANO AUDUBON SOCIETY'S EDUCATION AND CONSERVATION EFFORTS, INCLUDING JUNIOR AUDUBON, IN-CLASSROOM TEACHING, HABITAT AND NEST MONITORING, AND MORE!

FOR MORE INFORMATION, GO TO CHIRPFESTIVAL.COM

two wastewater treatment ponds, a freshwater pond with islands for nesting habitat, and several miles of flat levee trails.

It attracts thousands of birds, including waterfowl such as ducks and geese; waders such as herons and egrets; songbirds; as well as varied raptors. This casual walk on two miles of flat trails is fun and informative.

Bring water and snacks, binoculars and spotting scopes. No RSVP needed. Note that this is the first day of Daylight Savings.

Sunrise Bird Walk at Il Fiorello Olive Oil Grove Sunday, Mar 26, 7am Leader: Jane Hicks and Sue Johnson

We had so many happy birders at last fall's walk that we are having another this spring! Join us for a sunrise bird walk with light refreshments at Il Fiorello Olive Oil Company's olive grove located in Suisun Valley west of Fairfield. There is an \$8 fee that includes Il Fiorello's seasonal scones, coffee service, and infused water.

We will walk the perimeter of the property, through the groves, and along

the irrigation canal for approximately two hours. Over fifty species of birds have been seen on the property, including Bald and Golden Eagles and many other species of raptors, water birds, passerines, and owls.



Space is limited to 20 participants, and reservations are required. RSVP to Jane Hicks at hixholtz@earthlink.net or 707-553-8901 by Saturday, Mar 11, to reserve your space.

Pinnacles National Park
Sunday, Apr 8, 9am
Leader: Ranger Nico Ramirez

Located in the Gabilan Range, Pinnacles National Park was formed by volcanic action millions of years ago. Today the area can be hot in the summer, but springtime can be warm with multitudes of wildflowers and an interesting array of birds. There is a release area for captive-raised California Condors that are seen frequently. Other birds of interest are Prairie and Peregrine Falcons, Golden Eagles, Greater Roadrunner, Costa's Hummingbird, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Western Kingbird, Rock Wren, Canyon Wren, and Sage Sparrow. Their bird list

consists of 181 species with many other accidentals.

Entrance per vehicle is \$15.00. Limited to 15 participants. RSVP to Bruce Thomsen at brucecthomsen@yahoo.com, (707) 224-1906 or (209) 728-4631 by April 1.

JUNIOR AUDUBON

NSAS continues its kid-friendly birding group, Junior Audubon, for teens and pre-teens and any parents who want to attend. The walks are always on the second Saturday of the month from 8 am to 10 am: March 11, April 8, and May 13. In March, we will visit Westwood Hills Park. Leaders from NSAS will provide binoculars and field guides. Contact Alex Greene for more information at: accidentalshrike@gmail.com

NSAS SCHOLARSHIPS

Napa-Solano Audubon is again offering two \$2,000 scholarships to assist graduating students from a Napa or Solano County high school who will pursue studies in environmental science, environmental law/policy, conservation biology, natural resource management, forestry, zoology, ornithology or other related field at a community college or four year college.

The application deadline is March 31. If you know of a student who might meet this criteria, please let them know about our scholarship or email scholarship@napasolanoaudubon.com for more information.

Board Elections Held in May

Want to learn new skills? Grow a deeper network within our communities? Give back in a meaningful way? We encourage you to help us out by joining our board! Annual elections for board positions will be held during our evening program on May 9th.

The positions up for nomination are President, Vice President, Treasurer, and Secretary. All current officers are offering to mentor newly elected individuals to ease them into their new roles. This year, our current Treasurer, Ken Skolnik, is retiring after two distinguished years of service. We thank Ken for his service, but this means we are in particular need of nominees for

Treasurer.

The Treasurer is primarily responsible for entering income and expenses into Quickbooks, preparing quarterly reports, filing state and federal taxes, and ensuring bills are paid.

To nominate yourself or someone else for these positions, or if you have any questions about the roles or responsibilities, simply email board@napasolanoaudubon.org or bring your nominations to the meeting in May.

All NSAS members are encouraged to attend, as voting may only be done in person.

SPRING 2017 CALENDAR AT A GLANCE



- Sat Mar 4 Beginning Bird Walk
 - Sat Mar 11 Junior Audubon
 - Sun Mar 12 Las Gallinas Ponds Field Trip
 - Tue Mar 14 Program
 - Sat Mar 18 Beginning Bird Walk
 - Sat Mar 18 Native Plant Installation in Am Cyn
 - Sun Mar 26 Il Fiorello Olive Grove Field Trip
 - Sat Apr 1 Beginning Bird Walk
 - Apr 7-9 Native Plant Sale
 - Apr 7-9 Tricolored Blackbird Statewide Survey
 - Sat Apr 8 Junior Audubon
 - Sat Apr 8 Pinnacles National Park Field Trip
 - Tue Apr 11 Program
 - Apr 19-25 Godwit Days Festival
 - Sat Apr 22 Earth Day
 - Sat Apr 29 Beginning Bird Walk
 - Sat Apr 29 Rush Ranch Open House
 - Sat May 6 Beginning Bird Walk
 - Tues May 9 Program
 - Sat May 13 Junior Audubon
 - Sat May 20 Beginning Bird Walk
- Go to napasolanoaudubon.com for more info or to join our email list.



Like us on Facebook!
facebook.com/NapaSolanoAudubon

Godwit Days!

The 22nd annual Godwit Days celebration will be held in Arcata, CA from April 19-25.

Activities includes walks and field trips around the Redwood Coast area, lectures, workshops, and more.

Speakers include Noah Strycker, who did an International Big Year in 2015, and Dr. Bridget Stutchbury, author and expert in bird migration.

Several of the field trips are already sold out, so be sure to register soon!

<http://godwitdays.org>

Christmas Bird Count Shows Trends

The Audubon Christmas Bird Count is one of the longest-running citizen science projects in the world, having now been held for 117 consecutive years. The tallies are in from more than 2,000 counts across the country this year, representing more than 44 million birds.

This data presents a consistently collected set that can be used to look for trends in bird populations over time. The data has been used directly in conservation efforts, such as for the American Black Duck, and was a key component of the Audubon Climate Report that identified more than 300 bird species threatened by climate change.

Napa-Solano Audubon is responsible for two Christmas

Bird Counts, and ours were conducted in Benicia on December 18 and in Angwin on January 1.

In Benicia, 168 species and nearly 97,000 total birds were recorded, while Angwin's count recorded 137 species and more than 26,000 birds. These numbers are considered typical for these count circles.

Within our own data, several long-term trends can be seen. Western Bluebird and even Bald Eagle numbers have generally increased since the '90s, possibly suggesting that measures to protect and support them are succeeding.

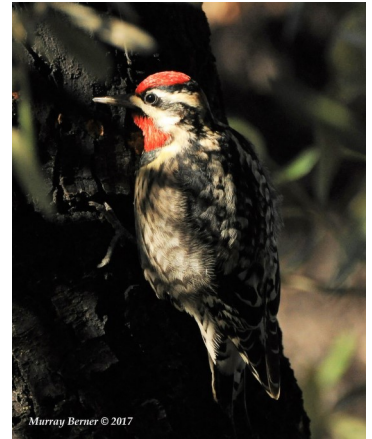
Coinciding with the last four years of drought, Acorn Woodpecker numbers have increased substantially,

although more research is needed to show a connection.

Non-native species like Eurasian Collared-Dove and Mute Swan have gone from non-existent in counts prior to 2006 to having regular and growing populations.

Some changes in numbers, however, are due to improvements in how counts are conducted and more volunteer coverage. For example, thanks to several kayakers, two records were set: 14 Rock Wrens were counted in Angwin, mainly along Putah Canyon, and 28 Black Rails were counted along the Benicia coast.

Full accounts of these reports are available on our web site, napasolanoaudubon.com, under "Citizen Science".



Murray Berner © 2017

Thanks to all the volunteers who helped with this year's counts, by being in the field or providing refreshments afterwards. And, an extra-special "Thank You!" to Murray Berner, coordinator of the Angwin count, and Robin Leong, coordinator of the Benicia count!

Members' Corner: In Memoriam

By Robin Leong

Napa-Solano Audubon Society lost Marge Irwin, one its stalwart birders on January 25, 2017. She was 90 years old.

Marge and her husband Bruce lead and participated in NSAS field trips, especially those to Yuba Pass and Yosemite. One of her best contributions was to keep NSAS in the black by chairing the April Bird-a-thon.

She was the Cordelia team

leader or participant on the Benicia CBC from 1983-2009 and organized the food for its compilation dinner. She also helped David Takeuchi do his area on the Angwin Christmas Bird Count.

Mike Rippey wrote, "Marge was always generous with her sharing of bird information and contributions over the years for my personal projects, for those of NSAS, and for others. She was

one of the best go-to people when data were needed to document bird use on a given site, when commenting on Environmental Impact Reports, or when compiling county lists, and more."

If you are so inclined, the family appreciates donations being made to the NSAS scholarship fund in her memory. Use the form below and note on your check that it is for scholarships.



Support Napa-Solano Audubon!

2016 was busy! We held our first Bird-a-Thon as part of our CHIRP! Festival, reached 775 students during the school year, and awarded \$4,000 in scholarships (our first in several years). Recently, we have increased our efforts in activism by appointing a Conservation Chair to our board, and participating in Audubon California's Advocacy Day in Sacramento. To continue expanding, we need your support! Consider becoming a Chapter Member, buying our *Breeding Birds of Solano County* book, or donating today.

\$25 Individual Membership \$35 Family Membership \$65 *Breeding Birds of Solano County* \$_____ Donation
Membership \$____ + Donation \$____ + ___ Copies of *Breeding Birds of Solano County* \$____ = Total Enclosed \$_____

Name _____ Phone _____ Email _____

Address _____ City State & Zip _____

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/8oj8uw



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

We Need You!

Spring is a busy time for birds, and busy time for Napa-Solano Audubon, too! If you'd like to get out and help birds, there are several ways you can get involved.

NEST MONITORING



Count baby birds!

Our citizen science programs include monitoring Western Bluebird nest boxes, heron and egret nests at local rookeries, and Tricolored Blackbird breeding colonies.

Volunteers check sites regularly, count baby birds, note timing of behaviors, and submit results. Bird ID skills and some walking are required.

EVENTS SUPPORT



Share with our community!

We are holding events in Napa and Solano counties on Earth Day and other weekends in April.

Volunteers are needed to help with setup, talking to attendees about the work we do, and helping kids with arts and crafts activities.

ADVOCACY



Be a voice for birds!

Our Advocacy Team learns about upcoming bills, writes letters to elected officials, and even travels to Sacramento in June to meet with their representatives in person.

We are looking for 300 individuals to help so our voice is loud and clear. Add your voice and join us!

For more information or to express interest, please email napa-solano-birds@outlook.com