



SONG SPARROW

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FALL 2020 CALENDAR AT A GLANCE

Sep. 10 Thu. Speaker Series/Zoom

Sep. 21 Mon. Board Meeting/Zoom

For more info, to sign up for email alerts,
or to join our chapter, please go to:

<https://napasolanoaudubon.com>



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Board Meetings are open to members.

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DONATIONS APPRECIATED!

Napa-Solano Audubon Society welcomes gifts of funds, stock, or property, and bequests in general, or in honor or memory of a loved one. Gifts may be directed to any NSAS project.

Unspecified gifts will go for Education, Conservation or other projects. Since NSAS is an all-volunteer organization, 100% of your donation goes to this chapter. **All gifts are tax-deductible.**



SABINE'S GULL / MARK STEPHENSON

A Pelagic Experience

By Mark and Lucas Stephenson

It is with some trepidation that I share our recent experiences from Pelagic Trips, as I do not want to encourage others to participate in any behavior that might be deemed risky during our coronavirus epidemic, but rather, so you can enjoy vicariously our trip on the high seas with Alvaro's Adventures, and a second trip with friends to the Farallon Islands.

July – October are prime times for pelagic birding trips. Lucas and I have been going on them for the past 5 years with Redwood Regional Ornithological Society out of Bodega Bay and with Alvaro out of Monterey and Half Moon Bay. Fortunately, this year's trips are going with greatly reduced numbers of birders to allow adequate spacing in the fresh, ocean air. Instead of 40 birders in close quarters, only 15 masked birders participated in our last trip with Alvaro.

Trips are not for the faint of heart or folks who have any hint of sea sickness (we recommend Bonine or the "Patch" for all sea-goers). Thankfully, Lucas and I are not prone to this. Seas are very unpredictable with swells sometimes exceeding 10-12 feet and 20 knot winds close to small craft advisories. Our recent trip from Half Moon Bay was atypical of others we have taken with temperatures in the 70's, winds below 5 knots, no swells, and water temperatures reaching 63 degrees! Near shore, along the breakwater, there were a host of Brown Pelicans, Heermann's Gulls, Black Turnstones, Common Murres, Pigeon Guillemots, and Elegant Terns. Within the next mile of coastline we were treated to delightful views of passing Sooty Shearwaters and a pair of Marbled Murrelets. After a few miles with few birds, a stretch referred to as the "dead zone," we encountered

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President's Corner: Greetings From Our New President

By Mark Stephenson, NSAS President

Let me begin by introducing myself. I grew up birding with my brother Tom in Ithaca, New York. We grew to love birding and were mentored by **Arthur Allen**, founder of Cornell's Laboratory of Ornithology, and many of his colleagues. While at Hampshire College, I worked summers at the Lab, completing bird surveys, taking visitors on guided walks, and helping with trail maintenance. Following college I worked for Massachusetts' Audubon helping Boston's inner-city youth explore the outdoors, and leading teenagers on Natural History summer expeditions throughout New England. When I arrived in California in 1979 I completed my Credential and Masters at St. Mary's College and continued my career teaching at Mary Farmer Elementary and Benicia Middle School in Benicia. In 1991, I became a Principal in Napa Valley serving at El Centro and Vichy Elementary Schools until I retired in 2013. Since that time, I have had the freedom to bird with my youngest son, Lucas, throughout the Bay Area, California, and beyond. I have a passion for photography and am slowly improving my skills. Many of you have been gracious enough to endure our slideshows at NSAS meetings!

It will undoubtedly come with extra challenges to take over the helm during the corona virus pandemic, but with your help I think we can continue our Mission to support birds and the environment. I am sincerely thankful to have **Tom Slyker** as our Vice President as we have known each other for many years, and with his scientific background and newly found passion for birds, he will be a tremendous support to our organization.

I encourage all members to support our NSAS Mission, to the best of your abilities, even during these difficult corona-virus times. Despite the challenges of the pandemic, we have had a great deal of fun over the spring and summer birding in Napa, Solano, and throughout the Bay Area. Like all of you, I have taken many precautions to insure the safety and good health of our family, including maintaining a safe distance, wearing a mask when encountering others, and religiously cleaning my hands. I believe being outside in parks and open spaces in the fresh air, is not only the safest place, but also nourishing to our spirits and well being! After all, this is why we love birding! There is nothing more rewarding than to discover a warbler in spring plumage singing away at the top of their lungs or standing in the midst of 10,000 Shorebirds in American Canyon Wetlands!

I want to encourage all members to support citizen science by reporting their bird sightings using eBird; whether it be birds at your backyard feeder, on neighborhood walks, or on more extensive birding trips. This data helps to promote a deeper understanding of birds and their behaviors and ultimately leads us to understand conservation measures that help support birds' safety. Many thanks to **Murray Berner** for being our eBird moderator!

Finally, I am calling for all members to find some way they can give back to birds and their environments by participating in any number of our volunteer conservation and education projects:

- 1. Bluebird Box Monitoring at one of our local parks.**
Contact Holly Jessup at hollyjessop14@gmail.com
- 2. Participating in the Bird Seasons Surveys.**
Contact Tom Slyker at SolanoBirder@gmail.com
- 3. Participate in Audubon Climate Research Surveys.**
Contact Mark Stephenson at NapaBirder@gmail.com
- 4. Participate in the Christmas Bird Counts (CBCs).**
Contact Robin Leong for the Benicia CBC, at robin_leong@netzero.net or Murray Berner for the Angwin CBC at vireocity@hotmail.com
- 5. *Beginner Bird Walks.** Contact Holly Jessop at hollyjessop14@gmail.com or Laurie Puzo at ljpuzo@gmail.com
- 6. *Weekend Bird Walks.** Contact Andrew Ford at jurassicboy18@comcast.net
- 7. *Birding Excursions.** Contact Wendy Cole at beehaven2@comcast.net or Bruce Thomsen at brucecthomsen@yahoo.com
- 8. Political action items.** Contact Nancy Piotrowski at napiotrowski@yahoo.com
- 9. Schools Education Programs** Contact Holly Jessop at hollyjessop14@gmail.com or Mark Stephenson at NapaBirder@gmail.com

***Official Walks & Trips will be postponed until after Covid is under control!**

I look forward to meeting and working with all of you in the coming months! I can't wait until we can have regular birding field trips and monthly meetings! *Until then, we intend to have monthly NSAS meetings beginning in September on Zoom — the Link is in our Calendar!*
Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions at NapaBirder@gmail.com. ♦

A Message From Our Past President

By Sally Baumer

My time as your president has come to an end.

I want to thank all the volunteers who have helped with our tabling events, bird box monitoring and maintenance, citizen science projects, Christmas bird counts and so much more. I want to especially thank the past and present Board members who worked to make our chapter the success that it is today and to Andrew Ford who has tirelessly led weekend bird walks. His knowledge of birds, critters and flora and fauna is an incredible asset to our organization. Also thank you to Holly Jessop who has filled the education chair position and will resume the Beginning Bird Walks along with Lauri Puzo once we are allowed.

One citizen science project that I have been involved with and have loved doing is the Lake Dalwigk Survey. Lake Dalwigk is an overflow basin for rainwater runoff and is also fed by a creek. It and the surrounding park area are being restored by the City of Vallejo and Solano Conservation District. They have limbed up old palm trees, removed non-natives and have planted native grasses and plants in and around the lake. A path runs around the lake and they have planted trees all along the path. We have been asked to do a survey over a five year period to gauge the changes the habitat restoration has had on bird populations and other animals. This is done twice a year, in November and May and we are halfway through. I have been amazed at the variety of birds and waterfowl that we have seen and look forward to the changes to come.

It has been an honor and privilege being your president and I feel you are in great hands with Mark Stephenson as your new President. ♦

Meet Our Two Scholarship Winners



Grace Gabel is a graduate of Benicia High School and our Solano County winner. She will be attending the University of California Davis, majoring in Wildlife,

Fish & Conservation Biology. An excellent student and valuable volunteer at Lindsey Wildlife Rehabilitation Hospital, the Humane Society of the North Bay and has been an Environmental Intern for a construction company. Through her volunteering at Lindsey she has developed a passion for birds and has become raptor-handling certified. **An excerpt from her essay says it all:** *"I'm driven to explore how we can change the lives of our native wildlife for the better in order to keep biodiversity flourishing and our ecosystems productive, not only to support us but to service our natural wildlife as well".*



Isabel Martin, is a graduate of New Technology High School in Napa and our Napa County winner. She will be attending the University of California Berkeley with a major in Environmental Sciences.

Isabel maintained an excellent grade point average and has been an active volunteer. She worked to establish Schools for Climate Action, worked with Napa County Resource Conservation District, Napa County Land Trust and Connolly Ranch. **Her goals are best summarized by this statement:** *"Ultimately, I aspire to create a career that integrates both my scientific and political interests to protect our environment for generations to come".*



Calendar of Events

Due to the Corona virus, our Fall Speaker Series will be held on Zoom. Look for the Zoom link on our Calendar.

NSAS SPEAKER SERIES ZOOM MEETING: BARN OWLS



Date: Thursday, Sept. 10, 7:00 p.m.

Speaker: Dr. Matt Johnson

Link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84436401939>

Meeting ID: 844 3640 1939

Dr. Matt Johnson, Professor in the Wildlife Department at Humboldt State University, will speak on Barn Owls. His expertise is wildlife habitat ecology, and he's especially interested in studying how agricultural production and wildlife conservation can coexist. He and his graduate students have been studying barn owls in wine-grape vineyards since 2015. He also works with coffee farmers and insect-eating birds in Kenya. His talk will focus on what his students and he have learned about barn owls nesting in boxes on Napa's vineyards. In particular, He'll describe what types of boxes designs, placements, and habitats can best attract barn owls, where they spend most of their time hunting, and how many and what types of rodents they kill. He'll conclude by discussing relations between barn owls and people

NSAS BOARD ZOOM MEETING

Date: Monday, Sept. 21, 7:00 p.m.

Link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86544933130?pwd=dnYvc256bG-JSem5nUzZmUXhxQ0VXUT09>

Meeting ID: 865 4493 3130

NSAS and the CA Bird Seasons Project

By Tom Slyker

My involvement with the CA Bird Seasons project started in March 2018 when Helena Kassel and I responded to a Napa Solano Audubon request for volunteers. We joined a project that CA Audubon had initiated in 2015 and that NSAS joined in March 2016.

Currently there are 5 California Audubon groups involved in this project including Sea and Sage, Yolo, Madrone, Starr Ranch, and us. Data that these sites gather is entered into the Nature's Notebook website which is part of the USA National Phenology Network. This is a database for collecting phenology data for plants, animals, birds, amphibians, and insects and it is available for use in projects like ours or for individual phenology projects by anyone who would like to document seasonal changes of biological systems.

Now, two years later the NSAS team has evolved to include Helena, Betty LaBastida, who has been with the project since it started, Carol Boykin and myself. And, every week we continue to visit 3 specific sites at the American Canyon Wetlands, spending 15 minutes at each site, to monitor for the presence of a select number of bird species like Song Sparrows, Tree Swallows, Western Bluebirds, and Mallards. In total we monitor for the presence or absence of 19 different species. In addition to looking for the birds, we monitor for specific attributes these birds might exhibit including feeding, courtship, nesting, and birth of their young.

The reason we invest our time in this project is to contribute to a national effort to collect information about bird phenology. Our information is being used by researchers

to monitor the effects of climate change on bird populations. In addition to our research contributions having a chance to visit the wetlands on a weekly basis provides an opportunity to observe the changes of the seasons with the arrival and departure of a wide variety of migrating birds. As an example, our data from monitoring White-crowned Sparrows shows that they will begin to appear at the wetlands at the end of September. Every year it is the same time (almost to the specific day) when these birds arrive. And, if this arrival time or their departure time at the start of April began to change significantly it could be an indication of the effects of climate change. Changes in events such as bird migration are among the most sensitive biological responses to climate change and the only way for researchers to have enough information to track these phenological events is through the efforts of projects like CA Bird Seasons.

For more information about Nature's Notebook and the CA Bird Seasons project visit the Audubon Page on the Nature's Notebook website at <https://www.usanpn.org/nn/Audubon>. Erin Posthumus, who is our contact at Nature's Notebook, produces quarterly newsletters about activities going on at each of the CA Bird Seasons locations and these newsletters are posted on this site. If you want to know when the Tree Swallows will arrive at the wetlands or when the Black-crowned Night Herons will disappear from the ponds or would like more information about this phenology project contact Tom Slyker at SolanoBirder@gmail.com. ♦

A Pelagic Experience

(Continued from page 1)

great rafts of Sooty Shearwaters sprinkled with a number of Pink-footed and a few Buller's Shearwaters. Near the continental shelf, 25-30 miles from shore, we encountered whales (Blue, Fin, and Humpback) accompanied with Ashy and Fork-tailed Storm Petrels, Cassin's and Rhinoceros Auklets, and Black-footed Albatrosses. Along ocean current seams we viewed many Red-necked and Red Phalaropes. As the birding picked up we even had great views of Black Storm Petrels that have moved north with the warmer waters, Northern Fulmars, and all 3 Jaegers (Pomarine, Parasitic, and Long-tailed). The treat of this trip was a Wilson's Storm-Petrel with it's white rump band. On our trip to the Farallons we enjoyed many Tufted Puffins, Brown Boobies, Sabine's Gulls, and the thrill of a passing Leach's Storm-Petrel spotted by Lucas. Later in the season we hope to view South Polar Skuas, Laysan Albatross, that make a 2500 mile flight back and forth from Hawaii, and a few Arctic and Common Terns. *More photos on NSAS Facebook and Webpage!* ♦



MARK STEPHENSON / BULLER'S SHEARWATER

Conservation Advocacy

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

While much has slowed, legislation and other conservation policy has continued to move via Zoom meetings, letter writing, and phone calls.

On June 2, we had Audubon Advocacy Day in California, which involved a pre-training opportunity. Then on advocacy day, state-wide, we contributed 50 virtual meetings with legislators and over 16K letters. The effort yielded \$77M in the state budget supporting water resources for wetlands, air and habitat restoration at the Salton Sea, funds for existing fish and wildlife programs, and support for state parks and outdoor environmental education to under-served populations.

AB3030 (Kalra) also advanced a state goal of conserving 30% of our lands and waters to support natural climate solutions to capture carbon, reduce emissions, and create wildlife habitat. Recently I asked you to help continue moving AB3030 through the California legislature, but as of this writing, it is in a suspense file with Senate Appropriations Committee. So, stay tuned for future steps.

In addition, we continue to work to support Tricolored Blackbirds, mice eradication on the Farallon Islands, and conservation ranching (*see <https://vimeo.com/385581982> for a brief on the latter*).

A great win from July also was a federal ruling (*<https://tinyurl.com/birdswin>*) supporting the Migratory Birds Treaty Act, striking down an opinion that the statute only prohibit intentionally killing migratory birds.

We continue to monitor local projects affecting wildlife areas in Napa and Solano counties, work on Route 37 affecting surrounding habitat, and are gathering information on national advocacy campaigns for birds for the fall. Be in touch with info, questions, or to join our advocacy action list — email: [napiotrowski at yahoo dot com](mailto:napiotrowski@yahoo.com). ♦

Birding During the Coronavirus

By Carol Boykin

Birding field trips were so much fun and they will return some day.

Leisurely looking into a tree, bush or a shoreline while Andrew explained what we saw in detail. For now, we are on our own. So, grab your binoculars and field guide and try to figure out those fast moving little brown or yellow flitterings on your own. Listen to the calls when the bird is identified as much of the time that is the only clue.

Kayaking is a fun way to get to the birds you can't find on foot. Every one I go with is in their 70's so don't use age as an excuse. Our favorite spot is Lake Solano. It has a good boat launch and flush toilets with sink (Bonus). It's a bountiful spot with ducks in the winter and warblers and flycatchers in the summer. Did I mention the otters? Families sleekly gliding by. Phainopepla, Woodpeckers and we even were lucky enough to see a bittern. The breeze and moving water make it interesting. Find the little yellow feathered thing moving in the tree above and the breeze pushes the boat around in circles. Or get bumped by a distracted friend. But that's all part of the fun. Social distancing is easy unless someone brings cookies to share.

We always paddle directly across from the launch ramp where we have seen and heard Sora and Virginia Rail in the reeds. Under the bridge in the spring the swallows have mud nests with babies to feed. Going right away there is a slough that is peaceful. Right at the entrance is where we have had the best luck with Phainopepla. Grapevines and elderberries on the banks attract birds. If you don't mind tucking in under branches occasionally it goes in a long way. We bring our lunch and have a favorite spot to pull out where a Western Screech owl is sometime seen poking his face out of a hole in the tree.

So even if you can't do the boat thing get out on your own. Go to the Napa Solano Audubon web site and get Birds of Napa County by Herman Heinzl. Until we get the field trips going again, **keep on birding!** ♦

Help For Suisun Wildlife Center

Suisun Wildlife Center suffered a great loss due to a wildfire that was set from an illegal campsite. Many of the outbuildings and structures were lost as well as some of their ambassador owls. The governing Board of NSAS decided that it is important to help our partner organizations and made a \$1000 donation on behalf of the membership for the reconstruction of the buildings lost. We also offered to help with a work committee in the clean up and rebuild but they have not taken us up on the offer at this time. If they do, we will put out an e-blast for your help.



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Fall Migration is Heating Up

By Mark Stephenson

Fall migration got started with a bang with shorebirds flocking into and throughout the Bay Area. Green Island,

American Canyon Wetlands, Highway 37's San Pablo Bay National Wildlife Refuge, and Huichica Wetlands are having wonderful showings of many shorebirds. The first to arrive, Western and Least Sandpipers, were peppered with a few Semipalmated Sandpipers. Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs have now have been joined by Black-bellied and Semipalmated Plovers. Keep a careful watch as coming soon there may be a Red Knot, a Baird's Sandpiper, a Pacific, or much rarer, American Golden Plover mixed in the flock. In time, Dunlins and Sanderlings will also begin to arrive in larger numbers. This year, we have enjoyed longer trips to Point Reyes' Abbott's Lagoon,

Bodega Bay Estuary, and Valley Ford. We've had the privilege to observe such rarities as Stilt, Pectoral, and Semipalmated Sandpipers, along with Western and Least Sandpipers, Black-necked Stilts, American White Pelicans, Double Crested Cormorants and even a few Virginia Rails. Other locations to check out are the Bolinas Lagoon, Marin's Las Gallinas Water Treatment Plant, Hayward Regional Shoreline and Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge to name a few.

Starting now in mid-August passerines including warblers, vireos, and tanagers will begin arriving. This Spring was one of the best Eastern Warbler migrations since 1992. Along with our local Black-throated Gray, Hermit, Nashville, Yellow, and Wilson's Warblers a number of Eastern vagrants including Hooded,



LUCAS STEPHENSON

Yellow-throated, Kentucky, Magnolia, Black and White, Chestnut sided, and American Redstarts showed up! Be on the lookout and visit your favorite woodland haunts and let's hope the Fall is just as amazing! Other nearby birding locations where passerines stop over on their way South include: Yountville's Napa River Ecological Reserve, Angwin's Las Posadas Preserve, Bothe-Napa Valley State Park, Rockville Hills, Lagoon Valley Regional Parks, Gates or Mix Canyons, Lake Solano County Park, and Solano/Yolo's Putah Creek. ♦