



SONG SPARROW

Fall 2023 Vol. 53 No. 2
www.napasolanoaudubon.com

FALL 2023 CALENDAR AT A GLANCE

- Sep. 10 Sun. Walks: American Canyon Wetlands
- Sep. 14 Thu. Speaker Series: African Safari
- Sep. 15 Sun. Field Trip: Bolinas Lagoon
- Sep. 24 Sun. Walks: American Canyon Wetlands
- Oct. TBA Field Trip: The Pinnacles National Monument
- Oct. 12 Thu. Speaker Series: Biking for Birds
- Nov. TBA Field Trip: Woodbridge Ecological & Staten Island Crane Preserves
- Nov. 9 Thu. Speaker Series: Raptor Quest: Chasing America's Raptors Across the Lower 48

To sign up for All Weekly Walks & Field Trip Notices: click on the "Subscribe to Email Updates" link on our NSAS Website Homepage.

Health & Safety: *In accordance with our National & Napa-Solano Audubon policy: All participants must sign a Release of Liability Form to participate in our Field Trips.*

For the Health & Safety of Others, we encourage all participants to be vaccinated, and request that all participants, who are feeling signs of illness, to refrain from attending and participating in our activities.



Note: We only mail newsletters to members who specifically request a hard copy. In an effort to conserve paper, we encourage all members to receive our Song Sparrow Newsletter via email. They can also be downloaded directly from our website. If you are currently receiving a hard copy, please help us conserve resources by requesting an email-only version.



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How Did the Song Sparrow Become the NSAS Bird?

By Tom Slyker

The impetus for this article was my curiosity about how the Song Sparrow, a little brown bird, became the bird that is associated with our newsletter and our society. To find an answer I turned to Robin Leong, who is the best source for NSAS historical information. Robin has been with our society since 1978, soon after the group was granted a charter from the National Audubon in 1972, and he maintains a library of almost every "Song Sparrow Newsletter" the society has ever published. From Robin I learned that the NSAS was founded by a group of birders who had split from the Mt. Diablo Audubon society after the Mt. Diablo group had previously split from the GGAS. And, from Robin I learned how the diminutive, little Song Sparrow became our bird.

What do you know about the Song Sparrow? When I started my investigation, I had no idea that it is one of the most familiar of North America Sparrows. This species can be found throughout North America from the Aleutian Islands to Florida and from Newfoundland to central Mexico. I have learned that it is both a very abundant bird, and a famous species in the annals of ornithological history. With regards to abundance, *Melospiza melodia* is one of the most polytypic bird species in North America. Currently, there are 25 subspecies that have been recognized following a systematic morphological review. Of interest is that 6 of these subspecies are residents of northern California. With regards to its fame, in 1937 and 1943 Margaret Morse Nice published her work observing these birds as "Studies in the Life History of the Song Sparrow." Her in-depth monitoring of these sparrows, on her patch of property in Ohio, included banding of the birds to

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President's Corner

By Mark Stephenson, NSAS President



This has been an amazing year for our birders on the West Coast who have experienced one of the best Spring Migrations in 30-40 years.

Point Reyes Peninsula and Bodega Bay are two premier locations to find migrants, and this spring we have been treated to more than 20 Eastern vagrants. Highlights have included Cape May, Magnolia, Yellow-throated, Mourning, Ovenbird, Northern Waterthrush, Black & White, Tennessee, Northern

Parula, Hooded, American and Painted Redstarts, along with our Western breeding Warblers. Summer and Scarlet Tanagers, Indigo Buntings, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, Eastern Kingbirds, Eastern Phoebes, Gray Catbirds and Brown Thrashers have made this Spring even more of a marvelous experience. With Fall migration heating up already, we encourage all of our members to get out and enjoy the thrill of birding! Don't miss out on the shorebird migration happening at American Canyon Wetlands, Cullinan Ranch, and Huichica Marsh or even Point Reyes and Bodega that has already started! Our Weekly Walks and Field Trips begin in September so sign up and stay tuned for our eBlasts.

It's important to take a moment and thank our many volunteers who help make our organization continue to be so vibrant! Special thanks to Tammy Saunders who coordinates our Education Programs in our schools. Kudos to Andrew Ford who leads our Weekly Bird Walks and Carol Boykin, Wendy Cole, and Bruce Thomsen who coordinate our Monthly Field Trips. A shout out to Tom Slyker who coordinates many of our Citizen Science

Projects from the Bird Seasons weekly Point Counts at American Canyon and Benicia Community Park to monitoring nearly 150 Bluebird Boxes with his team of volunteers. Tom also helps us survey Egret, Snowy Plover and Least Tern colonies as well as surveys for National Audubon's Climate Research. Special thanks to Murray Berner and Robin Leong who coordinate our Christmas Bird Counts. Finally, many thanks to our Board Members, who contribute in so many ways: Judy Kahle in Membership, David Kassel our Treasurer, Helena Kassel our Secretary, Barbara Navolanic our Speaker Program Chair, Robin Leong our Conservation Advocacy Chair, and Pam Condos our Director at Large who have all helped leading walks and tabling with many of our Community Events. We also have many other unnamed members who are always willing to lend a hand!

Together, we are a volunteer organization and we invite all members and friends to participate in any of our wonderful activities and to come join us for all of the fun we have in Birding, Education, Citizen Science, and Conservation Advocacy! ♦



CAPE MAY WARBLER / MARK STEPHENSON



Spread the Word: Birds Are Awesome!

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Board Meetings are open to all members.

If you wish to attend, please call:
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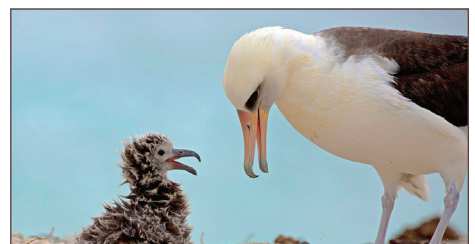
DONATIONS APPRECIATED!

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.**



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Only \$25/single or \$35/family annually
Click [here](#) to join on our website.

Or copy/paste this link:
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Calendar of Events

PROGRAMS

Note: Our Monthly Meetings are held on the second Thursday of the month beginning at 7:00 p.m. This year we're having hybrid meetings both in-person & via Zoom. Locations and Zoom links are sent out via our email update eBlasts. (Click on "Subscribe to Email Updates" on our website).

AFRICAN SAFARI

Thursday, Sept. 14; 7:00 p.m.

Speaker: David & Denise Hamilton

David & Denise visited South Africa in September of 2017, with Rockjumper Birding Tours, a S. A. based eco-tour company. This was a two-and-a-half week tour covering the world-famous Kruger National Park, Sani Pass, Cape Town, and places in between. It was an adventure just getting to Africa, but once there the real adventure began! They birded from the ocean shores (Atlantic and Indian) up to 9,436 ft at the top of Sani Pass, and spent part of one day in the independent mountain-kingdom of Lesotho (Hamilton Lesotho life-list = 14 species). Both Denise and David sighted their 2,000th world bird during the trip on consecutive days (ladies first.) The trip ended with a visit to the Tankwa Karoo, a unique semi-desert natural region east of Cape Town, and a trip list of 439 birds and more than 60 other animal species. *Join us as the Hamiltons share some of their stories and pictures from this amazing adventure!*

BIKING FOR BIRDS

Thursday, Oct. 12; 7:00 p.m.

Speaker: Dorian Anderson

Dorian Anderson boarded his bicycle for what would prove the adventure of a lifetime on January 1st, 2014. His two-wheeled permutation was an eco-friendly twist on the Big Year classic, a year-long project during which a birdwatcher tries to observe as many species as possible. While his predecessors utilized cars, planes, boats, and even helicopters, *Anderson's goal was to replicate their transcontinental efforts without the use of petroleum, a herculean challenge no one before*

him had accepted. He ultimately survived subzero temperatures, many feet of snow, gusting winds, lightning storms, mountainous ascents, dog attacks, crumbling roads, and accidents of various sorts in the process of amassing 18,000 miles and 618 species, totals no one imagined possible when he departed Massachusetts without an ounce of relevant cycling experience. Anderson will speak about the genesis of his bike-birding project, provide a thrilling recount of his travels, highlight the birds he saw, and reveal how his adventure changed his life. His personality and enthusiasm are infectious, and his tales of birding, cycling, and self-discovery will inspire others to venture into the outdoors and take note of the birds around them.



DORI / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

RAPTOR QUEST: Chasing America's Raptors Across the Lower 48

Thursday, Nov. 9; 7:00 p.m.

Speaker: Scott Harris

Scott Harris and his wife Randi retired to South Carolina in March of 2020, something Scott will tell you was one of the best decisions they have made in their 44 years of marriage. It was also when he first started birding — a hobby he never imagined himself participating in, but now can't imagine living without. Scott spent 17 months, chasing 53 Raptors across 34 states, his version of a Raptor Big Year. RaptorQuest is about his adventures, misadventures, successes and failures. From minus 36 degree days, to over 100 degrees, to just getting on the bird just in time, to the frustrations of missing one by minutes. It's about the birds—of course—but it's also about the people he met, the things he learned, and why he's already working on his next adventure.

FIELD TRIPS

Field Trips are open to NSAS Chapter Members only. There will normally be a cap of 12-15 participants and **is on a first to sign up, first-served basis.** *So be on the lookout for Monthly Trip Notices and be the first to sign-up!*

BOLINAS LAGOON

Fri., Sep. 15; 0:00 a.m - 0:00 p.m.???

Leader: Rich Cimino

Bolinas Lagoon is located North of Stinson Beach and stretches nearly 4 miles along Highway 1. It is a tidal estuary and hosts hundreds of migrating shorebirds, numerous waterfowl, herons and egrets. Shorebirds including Marbled Godwits, Long-billed Curlews, Short-billed Dowitchers, Willits, Dunlin, Semipalmated and Black-bellied Plovers, and hundreds of peeps, are sure to be seen along with Elegant, Forster's & Caspian Terns. The nearby riparian preserve along Pine Gulch Creek hosts both resident and migrating passerines. Don't miss out on this fun field trip. *Rich Cimino is a long-time Marin resident and bird guide who will lead our group. Don't miss out on this fun event and sign up for this field trip as soon as you receive an eBlast from Field Trip Coordinator Wendy Cole, with all of the details.*

THE PINNACLES NATIONAL MONUMENT

Oct. Two Day Trip / TBA

Leader: TBA

Home to the California Condor, Pinnacles National Monument hosts many other riparian and chaparral species. The Condors reside on the cliffs along the High Peaks Trail along with Prairie Falcons, Golden Eagles and Canyon Wrens. Birding at Pinnacles National Park likely reaches its peak with a sighting of the endangered California Condor. But with the park's varied habitats of chaparral, oak/pine woodland, riparian, grassland, and scree communities, and its location on the migratory Pacific Flyway, birders can hope to see not just this charismatic, massive, and wide-ranging scavenger, but some of the 181 other species than have been documented in the park. Western Tanagers,

Calendar of Events *continued*

California Quail, Oak Titmice, Northern Flickers and Acorn Woodpeckers favor the pine and oak woodlands in the park, while the dense, low scrub of chaparral that covers most of the park makes a great home for others such as California Thrashers, Spotted Towhees, and Bushtits. House Wrens, Black Phoebes, Yellow Warblers, and Yellow-breasted Chats are among the species seen in shaded riparian areas, along with Belted Kingfishers and a variety of ducks that are seen along the creeks and at the reservoir. *Join us for our fun October 2-day Field Trip!*

Don't Miss Out!



Sign up for all of our Weekly Walk & Field Trip Notices on our NSAS website homepage by clicking on the "Subscribe to Email Updates" link on our website homepage, or click [here](#) to be directed to that page. You can also copy/paste this link into your browser: <http://www.napasolanoaudubon.com/Main/RequestForm>

WOODBIDGE ECOLOGICAL & STATEN ISLAND CRANE PRESERVES

Oct. TBA.
Leader: TBA

Woodbridge Ecological Preserve hosts many wintering migrants: Snow and Cackling Geese, countless ducks, as well as overwintering riparian birds. With the Woodbridge Preserve, Staten Island has been a wintering destination for Sandhill Cranes for more than 40 years. The Nature Conservancy protects the island as a place for wintering birds and wildlife-with bird friendly agriculture. The grain fields are filled with ducks, geese, swans and cranes. One of the many highlights is to view the mating dance ritual of the Sandhill Cranes. *Come join us for this fun-filled day-trip in November.*

REMINDER: If you have forgotten to renew your Napa-Solano Audubon Membership that expired earlier this summer, please visit our website and click on the **JOIN** button!

WEEKLY WALKS

Weekly Walks are open to *everyone*, members and non-members. Andrew Ford is the Leader/Organizer for all Weekly Walks. **He sends out an email invite via an eBlast each week with locations and details.** When Andrew is unavailable, a NSAS Board Member will be there to lead. **The first Bird Walk of the Fall is planned for September 9th. Be on the lookout for Andrew's eBlast for all of the details.**

BEGINNER BIRD WALKS

Discover the magic of birding on these gentle, yet inspiring walks. **Open to all.**

AMERICAN CANYON WETLANDS

Sunday, Sept. 10; 9:00am-Noon
Leader: Tom Slyker & Carol Boykin

AMERICAN CANYON WETLANDS

Sunday, Sept. 24; 9:00am-Noon
Leader: Tom Slyker & Carol Boykin

Meet Our 2023 Napa Solano Audubon Scholarship Winners



Haley Van Sloten graduated from Rodriguez High School and will be attending classes at UC Davis this fall. She is enrolled in the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences

and her major is in Wildlife, Fish and Conservation Biology with a minor in Avian Sciences. Haley possesses all of the qualities we were searching for in a Scholarship recipient. In addition to being an excellent student, she has been constantly involved in community activities focused on conservation and improving the environment. From participating in community clean ups to a summer internship with Sustainable Solano, she has continuously worked to protect the environment and the species, both plant and animal, that share this planet with us. In October 2021, Haley was just one of two caregivers selected for an internship at the

Herd and Flock Animal Sanctuary. The co-founders, Meghan Dibble & Katie Dwight found Haley to be someone with "enthusiasm, a willingness to learn, and deep curiosity." Haley became "someone we can rely on to work with our over 100 rescued animals, safely and with compassion." We chose Haley as a scholarship recipient because we are confident she will become a lifelong advocate for improving our environment for all.



Robert St. Jacques graduated from Benicia High School this year and will be attending classes at Sonoma State University this fall towards a degree in Environmental Science.

In determining our scholarship winners, the committee prioritizes community "Volunteer Environmental Service" and an applicant's "College/ Major

or Commitment to Conservation." Robert's "passion to protect and conserve resources and nature" was fostered by his parents who focused his childhood on camping, bird watching, and hiking and instilled in him an "appreciation of nature." This upbringing led to many hours of community volunteer work building hiking trails with organizations like Solano Land Trust, East Bay Regional Parks, and the Bay Area Ridge Trail volunteers. He has volunteer hours helping with Earth Day cleanup, Coastal cleanup and many other local clean-up projects. Robert was our top candidate. Robert indicates, he is "hopeful that my studies at Sonoma State University will arm me with knowledge and swell my passion to preserve our local ecology."

We believe his education will do just this and are delighted to be able to help support his future as a protector of our planet and all the species within. ♦

Building Synergy and a Commitment to Conservation in our Community

By Mark Stephenson

Birds come in an amazing array of colors and sizes, and with such fascinating behaviors, it is easy to become a passionate birder. Birding is not only fun, it is thrilling to find, observe, identify and collect information on new species.

Recently, we have had the opportunity to team-up with a number of community organizations in an effort to increase our positive impact on our community and environment. By working together we are hopeful that the added synergy magnifies our efforts in education, citizen science, habitat improvement and preservation.

For example, we are working with **Napa Parks and Recreation** and the **American Canyon Community Foundation** to bring education programs to our schools, summer camps, and to the community. Following up with our school programs, our Education Coordinator, Tammy Saunders and other volunteers are leading community Bird Walks near these schools to encourage these students and their family members to continue hiking, observing birds, collecting data, and appreciating and protecting natural habitats. Working with our youth, we hope to instill a passion for both enjoying birds and improving and protecting the habitats that are so critical for their survival.

This year we have also continued teaming with **Napa Wildlife Rescue** to bring live birds and animals into the school classrooms which are so exciting for students to experience. In addition, we have teamed with the new **Pacific Flyway Center** and **International Bird Rescue** to monitor wetland birds and to take school programs on exciting field trips into the Suisun Marshes. Every year for Earth Day, Napa-Solano Audubon has joined **Napa RCD** (Resource Conservation District) with a Clean-up Project along the Napa River. This brings a great sense of accomplishment to the many volunteers who participate in these habitat improvement projects. **We are hopeful that by joining forces in synergetic relationships with our many Conservation Partners, we will increase our impact on our community and instill a commitment for Birding, Citizen Science, Habitat Conservation and Preservation.**

We encourage all our members to join us in these efforts, any way that you can! ♦

Birding Blog

By Carol Boykin

The not so birdy days of late summer give way at the beginning of August to the hint of Fall migration, and soon to follow, the arrival of Winter residents. First a few, then many Western and Least Sandpipers arrive from their nesting season in Alaska and NW Canada. A long flight for a tiny bird! If you are fortunate to own a kayak and have some good friends, Cuttings Wharf in Napa has a good launch (and the all important porta potty).



WHIMBREL / MARK STEPHENSON

Catch the receding tide and you will be rewarded with mud flats, that to a hungry bird looks like a banquet of aquatic invertebrates and other

Song Sparrow

(Continued from page 1)

monitor and track the life span of individuals. She was the first ornithologist to identify that both female and male birds are able to sing. Previously it was thought that only the male birds sang. Her work helped shift the methods and focus of modern ornithology. Today one of the most prestigious honors one can achieve in ornithology is the Margaret Morse Nice Medal.

With regards to naming our newsletter the "Song Sparrow" my search was anticlimactic. In the spring of 1972 the NSAS board was searching for a name for the newsletter and a wide variety of names like "Flicker Flyer," "Mockingbird Chatter," "Meadowlark Notes," and "Wise Quacks" were suggested. In the end the board decided to adopt "Song Sparrow" as the name of our bulletin in the hope that it would "carry the Audubon music to many ears." **Editor's Note:** *In particular, the Samuels Song Sparrow subspecies (*Melospiza melodia samuelis*) is an endemic Song Sparrow subspecies confined to the tidal salt marshes fringing the northern reaches of San Pablo Bay located only in Napa, Solano, Sonoma, Marin and Contra Costa Counties. This subspecies favors pickleweed and can be identified by the overall dark facial markings and thick, dark breast streaking. It is estimated that there are only 80-90,000 samuelis in existence.* ♦

assorted crustaceans. Another favorite spot as the month goes on is American Canyon Wetlands Edge Park, located at 2 Eucalyptus Dr. Again check for the receding tide and you will see Dunlin and Dowitchers probing the mud. Keep a look out for the impressive bill of the Marbled Godwit, Long-billed Curlew, and Whimbrel. Get your winter birding skills fine-tuned because, before you know it, next up are our amazingly colorful ducks and geese!

Napa-Solano Audubon Society will be leading Beginning Bird Walks starting in September! ♦

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Importance of Keeping Hummingbird Feeders Clean!

by Pam Condos

Hummingbirds are very fragile and sensitive creatures. Unfortunately, hummingbird feeders are prone to growing mold. Bacteria and mold grow easily in sugar water particularly when outside temperatures are hot, and the sugar ferments. Worst of all sugar water can begin to grow dangerous black mold. This dangerous mold can slowly poison hummingbirds. Mildew can form inside the nectar and infects their tongues, causing their tongues to swell, so they slowly starve to death. This in turn reduces the hummingbird population. Also, bees and other bugs who are attracted to the feeders can become trapped in the nectar making it undrinkable. *Therefore, it is very important to clean your hummingbird feeders regularly!*

Researchers have determined that sugar water should never be left out for more than 2 or 3 days; and changed

daily in very hot weather. Bird lovers should clean their feeders at least once a week with hot water and a bottle brush. Do not use soap or a detergent as it may contaminate the feeder.

1. Empty your feeder and dispose of any leftover nectar.
2. Disassemble your hummingbird feeder and soak any tough to clean feeder parts in hot water.
3. You may use a bleach solution (1 part bleach, 9 parts water) or white vinegar (1 part vinegar, 2 parts water) when dirt and mold build up, just be sure to rinse the feeder thoroughly with hot tap water when finished cleaning.
4. Using a bottle brush or toothbrush, scrub away any nectar residue or mold buildup, and make sure you get all the nooks and crannies with the bristles.
5. Finally, Rinse the hummingbird feeder with cold water and allow it to air dry before refilling.



ANNA'S HUMMINGBIRD MARK STEPHENSON

Please be diligent in keeping your hummer feeders clean, to keep our Hummingbird populations healthy and thriving. It's better for our hummingbirds not to have feeders if you don't have the time to keep them clean.

Note: Pam is our Director at Large and was President of Napa Wildlife Rescue where she spent many hours caring for sick and injured birds including many hummingbirds.

This article has been adapted from the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. ♦