



SONG SPARROW

Winter 2025 Vol. 55 No. 3
www.napasolanobirds.org

WINTER 2025 CALENDAR AT A GLANCE

- Nov. 13 Thu. Speaker Series: A Bird's Rainbow
- Nov. 15 Sat. Field Trip: Abott's Lagoon
- Dec. 05 Fri. 2-Day Field Trip: Sacramento Valley Wildlife Refuges
- Dec. 12 Fri. Field Trip: Pre-Count Benicia CBC
- Dec. 14 Sun. CBC for Kids at American Canyon Wetlands
- Dec. 15 Mon. Benicia CBC
- Jan. 01 Thu. Angwin CBC
- Jan. 08 Thu. Speaker Series: Freeway Birding from San Francisco to Seattle
- Jan. 15 Thu. 5-Day Field Trip: Morro Bay Birding Festival
- Jan. 17 Sat. Field Trip: Consumnes River Preserve and Staten Island Crane Sanctuary
- Jan. 31 Fri. 3-Day Winged Migration Expo on Mare Island
- Feb. 12 Thu. Speaker Series: The Ins and Outs of Vaux's Swifts
- Feb. 22 Sun. Field Trip: Las Gallinas WTP & Hamilton Wetlands
- Mar. 28 Sun. Field Trip: Mines Road
- Ongoing Weekly Bird Walks
- Ongoing Beginner Bird Walks



Be Notified of Bird Walks & Activities

Choose "Activity Signups"
on our website for bird walks
and other activities.

napasolanobirds.org

<https://tinyurl.com/nsas-activities>

SEE YOU ON THE TRAILS!



YELLOW-GREEN VIREO / MARK STEPHENSON

A Memorable Field Trip to Big Sur and Monterey with NSAS

Article and Photos by Mark Stephenson

Fifteen of our intrepid NSAS Members set out to the Monterey Bay Area for our October Field Trip.

One car of early arrivals visited Laguna Grande Park in Seaside on Thursday to scout out possible migrants. Wonderful views of abundant Townsends, 3 or 4 Black-throated Gray, and many Yellow and Orange-crowned Warblers highlighted the first hour. We received word that a Yellow-green Vireo had been spotted earlier in the day. While searching the eucalyptus grove, we heard an unfamiliar Vireo call buried somewhere near the top of the eucs. Before long, it dropped down for wonderful views. This group was indeed fortunate as only one of our birders caught a glimpse of it when we returned on Saturday. A quick trip to Jetty Road hosted the normal migrating shorebirds along with a nice flock of Elegant Terns.

Our entire group convened early Friday morning at Andrew Molera SP and set off on the Creamery Trail. Bruce Thomsen, our trip coordinator, was one of the first park rangers at this state park and knew all of the great locations to bird. Andrew Molera is a haven for indigenous mammals, and on my scouting trip a bobcat walked up to within a few yards of me apparently on a nonchalant photo-shoot! We ambled along this 1.5 mile trail to the beach stopping every 100 yards or so to view small flocks of local and migrating birds. Highlights included Band-tailed Pigeons, Cooper's & Sharp-shinned Hawks, Belted Kingfisher, Hutton's Vireos, Wrentits, CA Thrashers, Spotted Towhees, Orange-crowned and countless

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President's Corner

By Mark Stephenson, NSAS President



Greetings NSAS Members, Families, and Friends. This is the season of thanks, and I want to express my deep gratitude to our dedicated NSAS Board and many volunteers who work tirelessly to help us achieve our mission.

For our new members, that mission is, "to share the joy of birding, promote conservation and scientific understanding of wild birds and their habitats, and provide engaging, science-based education throughout Napa and Solano counties."

We launched our **Annual Fall Fundraising Appeal** in a new format, which you should have recently received. I hope you'll take a few minutes to read through it and consider supporting us—either by donating online through our website: <https://NapaSolanoBirds.org> (via credit card or PayPal), or by mailing a check to NSAS. Every contribution, no matter the size, helps us continue our vital programs in our schools and communities. Thank you in advance for your generosity! As we head into the winter months, there are many exciting birding opportunities that you may participate in. Our **Beginner and Weekly Bird Walks** continue in both counties, and our **Monthly Field Trips** venture farther afield. November's trips to Abbott's Lagoon and our Winter Pelagic out of Bodega Bay are full, but upcoming adventures include:

- Dec 5–6: Central Valley Wildlife Refuge Trip
- Jan 17: Consumnes Preserve & Staten Island Sandhill Crane Refuge
- Jan. 16th - 18th: Join our Members attending the Morro Bay Birding Festival
- Jan 31–Feb 2: Mare Island's Winged Migration Festival

We also invite everyone to join our Christmas Bird Counts (CBCs):

- CBC 4 Kids – Sunday, Dec 14 at 9:00 a.m., American Canyon Wetlands
- Benicia CBC – Monday, Dec 15
- Angwin CBC – Thursday, Jan 1

Each count is led by experienced team leaders, and birders of all levels are welcome—so come join the fun! More details can be found in this newsletter or on our website.

Our **Citizen Science** efforts continue throughout the year with shorebird, waterbird, and climate research, as well as our Bird Seasons and Kestrel and Bluebird box monitoring projects. Meanwhile, our **Conservation Team** is actively working to ensure that local development projects balance growth with the preservation of parks and open spaces that protect vital natural habitats. If you'd like to get involved, please contact Yvonne, Chair of our Conservation Committee, at yvonnebaginski@gmail.com.

Thank you all for your energy, passion, and support for birds and wild places!

**Warm regards,
Mark**



Spread the Word: Birds Are Awesome!

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To contact our Board Members:

<https://napasolanobirds.org/contact-us/>

Board Meetings are open to all members

If you wish to attend, please call:
(707) 246-2795.

DONATIONS APPRECIATED!

Since NSAS consists of many volunteers and a few part-time staff who are working in the field, 100% of your donation goes to support our mission.

All donations are tax-deductible.



Volunteers make the load lighter and are essential to success. Join our efforts today and help protect and preserve wildlife and their habitats.

BETTINA ARRIGONI

NSAS Kestrel T-Shirts



This beautiful T-Shirt is perfect to give as a gift or for yourself. Only \$25.00
napasolanobirds.org/for-sale/

ARTWORK: PAM CONDOS



The Birds are Waiting for You
JOIN or RENEW

Visit our website to **JOIN** a world of wonder and **RENEW** your love of the wild.

napasolanobirds.org

BECKY MATSUBARA

Calendar of Events

SPEAKER PROGRAMS

Note: Programs are held on the second Thursday of the month in location and via Zoom. We encourage everyone to attend. You will be sent the meeting details in our regular eBlasts.

BIRDS' RAINBOW

When: Thurs., Nov. 13; 7:00 p.m.

Speaker: Bob Lewis

Location: Napa Valley Lutheran Church & Zoom



BOB LEWIS

Many birds are brightly colored, others use patterned feathers for camouflage. How do these colors originate? What's the difference between colors from pigments and physical colors? From Yellow Warblers to Anna's Hummingbirds, from Snow Geese to Brewer's Blackbirds, each species makes unique use of the feather colors it possesses. What do the colors indicate to other birds? And do birds see the same colors we do? Bob will unravel some of the mysteries of color in birds with a little chemistry, a bit of physics, and a lot of brightly colored slides.

About the Presenter: Bob trained as a chemist and worked in the energy field for 33 years. He's taught birding classes in the Bay Area for over 25 years and served as the chair of Golden Gate Audubon's Adult Education Committee. He's a frequent speaker on birds at libraries and bird groups. Bob was honored with American Birding Association's Chandler Robbins Award for Education and Conservation in 2016, and Golden Gate Audubon's Paul Covell Education Award in 2010 and 2017. He was one of the founders of the Master Birding Class held at the SF Academy of Science. He loves to travel and photograph birds and has chased birds in over 60 countries. His life list is over 5500 species.

FREEWAY BIRDING FROM SAN FRANCISCO TO SEATTLE

When: Thurs., Jan. 08; 7:00 p.m.

Speaker: Harry Fuller

Location: Napa Valley Lutheran Church & Zoom



MARK STEPHENSON

Harry will describe hundreds of birding sites along our freeways from San Francisco to Seattle. He will give you tips on where you can snag a few minutes of birding while you stretch your legs! His route goes from San Francisco to Sacramento and all the way to Seattle, Washington. This talk is taken from his popular book of the same title. Harry will take time to include the highlights of birding Oregon's Great Gray Owls.

THE INS AND OUTS OF VAUX'S SWIFTS

When: Thurs., Feb. 12; 7:00 p.m.

Speaker: Michael Helm

Location: Benicia Public Library & Zoom



STEVE COLWELL

From the Vaux's Swift Project to the Migration Stopover at McNear's Brick Factory, to using Audio Detection to track Swifts, be sure not to miss Michael's exciting presentation on Vaux's Swifts.

MONTHLY FIELD TRIPS

Extended Monthly Field Trips are open first to NSAS Chapter Members. There is often a limit of 12-15 participants and is on a first sign-up, first-served basis. Be on the lookout for Monthly Trip notices, sign-up procedures & be the first to register! **If space is available it will open to non-members shortly before the trip heads out.** We encourage membership so you won't miss out on these exciting Field Trips.

ABBOTT'S LAGOON

When: Sat.; Nov. 15; 6:15PM

Leader: Larry Kent & Bruce Thomsen



FERRUGINOUS HAWK / MARK STEPHENSON

Point Reyes' Abbott's Lagoon Trail is a beautiful walk with chances for observing many land, marsh, and shorebird species as well as views of the ocean birds including possible scope views of Loons, Grebes, and Shearwaters. The walk is approximately 1.5 miles each way. It gently descends through Point Reyes' coastal chaparral to 2 large lagoons, one freshwater and a second that is brackish. The chaparral and surrounding fields have a host of sparrows, towhees, quail as well as hawks including Red-tailed, Harriers, and Ferruginous that often soar overhead. Each Fall, the lagoon hosts a variety of shorebird species including Pectoral, Baird's and Ruffs, and Golden Plovers. Ospreys often visit the Lagoons along with Brown Pelicans and River Otters. In the surrounding dunes one can often find overwintering Snowy Plovers, Lapland Longspurs and Horned Larks. Rarities may include anything from Red-throated Pipits to Mountain Plovers and Buff Breasted Sandpipers!

Calendar of Events cont.

2-DAY SACRAMENTO VALLEY WILDLIFE REFUGES

When: Fri-Sun., Dec. 5-6

Leader: Mark Stephenson, Wendy Cole & Bruce Thomsen

Registration is limited to 20 people

We will meet at the Colusa Parking Lot at 8:00 a.m. This is always our popular winter trip to visit Colusa, Sacramento and Gray Lodge Wildlife Refuges. These are some of the best locations in the entire Sacramento Valley to observe overwintering waterfowl. We will look for Ducks, Geese, Shorebirds as well as Raptors and woodland birds that we encounter on this special trip to the Valley. **Our Registration eBlast has gone out and you may also register on our website.**

BENICIA CBC PRE-COUNT

When: Fri., Dec. 12, 8:30 AM

Leader: Robin Leong & Tom Slyker

This trip will highlight and scout out several locations for the upcoming Benicia Christmas Bird Count. Species observed can be recorded for the count week.



CBC FOR KIDS AT AMERICAN CANYON WETLANDS

When: Sun., Dec. 14, 9:00 AM – 1:00 PM

Leader: Various Audubon & American Foundation Leaders

Children, bring your parents and a brown bag lunch, water bottle, and come join us to look for birds at American Canyon Wetlands! We will meet at 9:00 a.m. near the parking area, review birding strategies, have a quick binocular training, break into small groups, and bird throughout the wetlands. We will reconvene to share bird observations, and hear each teams' highlights. **This half-day CBC4Kids is designed as a fun activity for kids aged 7-16 and modeled after the traditional CBCs geared largely towards adults and birding clubs.** We will introduce students to citizen science

collection techniques and teach them how to use eBird, Cornell Universities' International Database for bird observations. Parents and their children will join birding team leaders in a fun day, celebrating nature in this wonderful wildlife preserve. *Remember to dress in layers and be prepared for the predicted weather.*

5-DAY MORRO BAY BIRDING FESTIVAL

When: Thu-Mon., Jan. 15-19

Leader: Wendy Cole

There are 263 events scheduled during this time. Most are free, some are not, and prices are variable. Only a certain number of participants are allowed for each event (usually about 12-15, but some more). The presentations in the evening are free and can take 200 or more because they are in a large auditorium. We invite all NSAS members to sign up for the events you are interested in, let us know you are planning on attending, and then we will communicate with participants about meeting up, perhaps at the Welcome Reception on Saturday, as well as arranging to meet for dinners. Carefully peruse the website.

<https://morrobaybirdfestival.org/event-schedule/>

It is very well organized and should be a great help deciding which events you want to sign up for. **Registration opens November 1, 2025**, and I would encourage you to register right away. *You should also reserve your hotel as soon as possible because they will fill up.*

CONSUMNES RIVER PRESERVE & STATEN ISLAND CRANE SANCTUARY

When: Sat., Jan. 17, 8:30 AM

Leader: Bruce Thomsen & Mark Stephenson

For those unable to attend the Morro Bay Festival, locals will head out to Consumnes River Preserve and Staten Island Sanctuary to look for Waterfowl and Sandhill Cranes. Consumnes will include level trails in the woodlands for overwintering residents and vagrants and Board Walk trails for close-up views of waterfowl with approximately 1.5 miles of easy hiking as well as Birding from



Christmas Bird Count



The 78th Benicia CBC

Monday, December 15th, 2025.

The Benicia Count was founded by Benician Emerson Stoner in 1930; 95 years ago!

This year, Robin Leong and Tom Slyker are organizing this **FUN** event. The Benicia CBC circle includes the communities of Benicia, East Vallejo, Cordelia, West Suisun City, parts of Grizzly Island and all of Grizzly Bay.

We have many teams, with experienced leaders and various levels of hiking & walking involved, so let Tom know what type of surface & walking level might be

best for you and we will match you up with a count team suited to your request.

To join this year's CBC please sign up using our Google Form at <https://bit.ly/3JGFrBf>

You can find a link to this form along with additional CBC information on our website

at <https://napasolanobirds.org/>.

For more info or if you have any problems accessing the form, contact Tom Slyker at tcslyker@comcast.net or 707-771-1918

Compiation Dinner: Mexican food at the Community Center Room of the Church of Latter-day Saints at 1125 Southampton Road, Benicia, CA 94510. **HAPPY BIRDING!**



The 53rd Angwin CBC

Thursday, January 1, 2026

Start the New Year off with a blast by participating in the Angwin CBC!

Birding opportunities are available throughout the count circle including the Napa Valley, Pope Valley, Lakes Berryessa, Hennessey, and Angwin.

We have an excellent crew of experienced area leaders so everyone is encouraged to take part. The count is an important measure of local birdlife, and has gained added importance as a tool to monitor changes in

numbers & distribution of birds in the wildfire burn zone that impacted about forty percent of the count circle in 2020.

Our compilation dinner: 5:00 PM at the Carnegie Building; 1360 Oak Ave.

St. Helena, CA 94574

(corner of Oak Ave & Adams St.)

For details & how to participate, contact Murray Berner: vireocity@hotmail.com

Calendar of Events cont.

our Cars at Staten Island as we search for Cranes, Swans and other waterfowl.

LAS GALLINAS WATER TREATMENT PLANT & HAMILTON WETLANDS

When: Sun., Feb. 22, Time is TBD
Leader: Bruce Thomsen & Mark Stephenson

Details will be found in an upcoming eBlast. Learn more about all field trips by selecting our website's "Activity Sign-up" button and selecting Field Trip Announcements.

EVENTS/ACTIVITIES

2-DAY WINGED MIGRATION EXPO - BUILDING 69 - 1001 WATERFRONT AVE. MARE ISLAND

When: Fri-Sun., Jan. 31 - Feb. 2.
10 AM - 4 PM

Stay tuned for many events, including birding field trips, expert speakers, educational tabling, interactive kids activities, food and drink vendors, area hikes, and historic ship viewing are scheduled for this year's Winged Migration Expo. Many Birding Field Trips will be held throughout the weekend led by experienced Birders. For more information, a complete schedule, and to see how you can support this year's festival visit their website: wingedmigrationexpo.com

WEEKLY BIRD WALKS

Open to everyone, membership not required. Andrew Ford is the Leader/Organizer for all Weekly Walks. **He will send out an email invite via an eBlast each week with locations and details so be sure to sign up for the eBlasts.** When Andrew is unavailable, a NSAS Board Member will often step in to lead the walk. Don't forget to sign up for all Field Trip eBlasts by clicking on the Activity Sign-up Button on our new website! Be on the lookout for Andrew's eBlast with the details of his next walk.

BEGINNER BIRD WALKS

Open to everyone, all levels, all ages. Membership not required, no reservations needed. These NSAS sponsored walks are usually held at the American Canyon Wetlands or Benicia Community Park **twice a month, September - June.** Carol Boykin and Tom Slyker are experienced birders and leaders who will guide you along the way.

If you are dipping a toe into birding, or dusting off a pair of binoculars for the first time in a while, and you want some company as you learn about birding, we'd be delighted to have you join us. **Free, fun, and loaner binoculars are on hand if you need them.**



A Huge THANK YOU to Donald Hazelton and Connie Freed for Your Valuable Donation of Bluebird Boxes!

A special note of appreciation to NSAS Member, Donald Hazelton and his wife, Connie Freed, for building and donating over **35** Bluebird Boxes to NSAS - **WOW!** Bluebirds and other cavity nesters such as Tree Swallows and Oak Titmice use these boxes for nesting in the spring and summer. Many of the current boxes that our volunteers monitor across Napa and Solano counties are in need of replacement.

Thanks to Donald and Connie, we now have a large supply that the birds can use in the coming years.

Beginner Bird Walks at American Canyon Wetlands

By Carol Boykin

Photos by Mark Stephenson



GREATER EGRET

Beginning bird walks are delightful. A merry band of 10-15 or so, optimistically set out, not quite knowing what to expect.

They like large birds. Birds with beautiful features and color. What's that flying? A white-tailed kite lives up to its name, flapping its wings energetically over one spot looking for breakfast. Zooming over our heads a Kestrel conveniently lands in a tree. Lots of oooooing and ahhhhhing as everyone gets good looks at its distinctive features through our telescope.

We continue to the ponds hoping the tides will smile upon us. Lots of small dark birds probing the mud but more interesting big white egrets. Great with yellow bill and Snowy with golden slippers. Black-necked stilts with their eye catching long pink legs. Another favorite that is easy to spot is the Avocet. Big white and black, long-legged birds gracefully sweeping their bills across the water's surface in search of tiny crustaceans like brine shrimp and other goodies!

Further on to deeper water we find many Ducks!!! Northern Shoveler with green heads, colorful wings and rusty

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Conservation Advocacy

Conservation Concerns Continue to Dominate Our Landscape

By Yvonne Baginski

Solano and Napa Counties are continuing their fast-paced development takeovers of important wildlife habitat and nesting grounds as we face the inevitable decline in not only our bird populations, but the biodiversity we rely on for our quality of life. As members of the Napa Solano Audubon Society, we must increase our activities in not only appreciating our wildlife, but spreading the word and advocating for its protection.

What that can mean is showing up at city council, board of supervisor and planning commission meetings and telling our representatives what we know to be true. It can also mean volunteering, talking to our neighbors and friends and becoming involved. Our stories, and data collection can make a difference.

Most elected and appointed public officials making the land use decisions are under the influence of monied development interests and rarely hear from the people who can impact the decision, perhaps, another way. We've noticed an information gap between environmentalists and public officials.

The Conservation Committee met this past month with Senator Christopher Cabaldon's District Representative, Nicole Cuellar-Nelson. We told her what we knew about the endangered and special status birds needing the critical habitat that will be taken over by the California Forever Project and the subsequent annexation of 400 acres to the City of Suisun. She was awed by our atlas of Breeding Birds of Solano County, and had no idea that this sort of data is collected and organized by the NSAS. This is the type of information that shrinks the divide separating the conflicting interests between conservationists and developers.

We might be unable to stop the annexation process or even the California Forever Project from moving forward on our own, but we can hope that the information we are providing regarding nesting and foraging critical habitat will help carve out land that is desperately needed by the birds.

To this end, **we are also working to save the 157-acres of Green Island Vineyard property in American Canyon where the investor is creating plans for a business park and housing.** This would abut the estuary and have a devastating impact on one of the top birding places in Napa County. American Canyon Wetlands need our attention!

We hope you can join our Conservation Committee in saving lands for the birds. We meet monthly at the Cordelia Library. For information contact: yvonnebaginski@gmail.com ▲

Consider Joining Solano Together and Protect Our Beautiful Region

Since time immemorial, the Patwin and Miwok people stewarded the lands of what is now known as eastern Solano County. This area is blessed with its vibrant agricultural industry, iconic grasslands, sustainable wind power, and unique delta habitats.

Montezuma Hills and surrounding areas have been home to highly productive dryland farms and rare vernal pool habitats for generations. Farmers and ranchers have adapted to worsening drought and innovated with dryland farming and regenerative agriculture practices, even in the face of growing climate hazards.

This special place is now threatened by a proposed sprawl development in the region.

We are a group of concerned residents, leaders, and organizations who came together to form Solano Together, a coalition that envisions a better future for our region that focuses development into existing cities and strengthens our agricultural industry.

Our work is driven by an alternative vision for Solano County in the face of Flannery Associates' claims about California Forever's benefits—our vision is guided by local voices and perspectives.

As a science and fact-based coalition, Solano Together will provide the public, voters, and decision-makers, with accurate information on the impacts of California Forever & unite around a shared vision for the future.

www.solanotogether.org

Show up and speak out. Advocate to save our incredible wildlands and wildlife. Our voices have power. We can do it!

Changing our Name:

A Move Towards Inclusivity and Bird Conservation

By Judy Kahle

Napa Solano Audubon is considering changing its name, and chapter members will be asked to vote. This article explains the reasoning behind a proposed name change.

The Audubon Society was named after John James Audubon. Engravings of the birds he painted were sold by subscription and became a popu-



lar way for Americans to learn about avian life, and were published in his book, *Birds of America*. Audubon's original collection is his most famous work and consisted of 435 hand-illustrated prints, and only 119 copies are known to still exist.

Audubon also recognized the need to protect bird habitat, and advocated for the establishment of bird sanctuaries, as well as the country's first Natural History Museum. His work popularized birds and nature.

Forty-five years after his death, Harriett Hemenway and Minna B. Hall founded the Massachusetts Audubon Society, dedicated to stopping the killing of birds for plumage for women's hats. In 1905 the National Audubon Society was formed. While the name Audubon had been associated with bird conservation in the last century, that association has faded, especially among new and younger birders.

So why does it matter? Why have many chapters changed their name?

Audubon participated in a number of very troubling practices. John James Audubon owned and sold slaves. He was able to finance his collecting and publishing work by selling enslaved people. While traveling to plantations to collect birds and encountering escaped slaves, he returned them to their owners. In a failed business venture, he took a trip from Henderson, Kentucky down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers with two enslaved men. Upon arriving in New Orleans, he sold them, with no regard for the families they left behind in Kentucky.



He wrote to his wife, Lucy Bakewell Audubon, that the British government had "acted imprudently and too precipitously" in emancipating enslaved people in its West Indian possessions. During his travels, he also collected skulls of indigenous people, which became specimens for racist studies equating skull size with intelligence.

The mission of Napa Solano Audubon is to promote the conservation of birds by preserving natural habitat and biodiversity, in addition to providing the opportunity for all members of our community to appreciate and understand birds. Today, birds are threatened and their numbers are declining precipitously due to habitat loss, climate change and urban infrastructure. The current administration and legislature has cut funding for scientific research,

has fired staff in our national forests and public lands, *and is intent on massive deforestation of our public lands*. Environmental regulations and conservation legislation are being rolled back.

Fortunately, birding has become a pastime for increasing numbers of people all across the country. This is an invaluable and timely opportunity for engaging people of all ages, and ethnicities to appreciate birds and to work towards their conservation. At the same time, the harm against people of color continues and is increasing today. Associating our organization with the name Audubon is hardly welcoming, and may actually have the opposite effect.

The board has carefully considered changing our name, yet the decision is up to our chapter members. As of July, 2025, 50 local chapters of National Audubon had changed or were planning to change their names. Of those, 37 chapters chose the name "Bird Alliance" as it reflects the mission. Some examples are Mount Diablo Bird Alliance, Golden Gate Bird Alliance, NYC Bird Alliance, Yolo Bird Alliance, Northern Virginia Bird Alliance etc. While the National Audubon Society chose to not change their name, changing our chapter name would not affect our affiliation with the national organization.

Please take some time to consider a name change, let us know your thoughts, and stay tuned for future follow-up. ▲

NSAS Big Sur / Monterey Field Trip *Continued from Page 1*



BOBCAT



CALIFORNIA CONDOR



TOWNSEND'S WARBLER

Townsend's Warblers. One thicket produced 2 migrating Warbling Vireos and brief looks at a Tennessee Warbler. Nearing the Coast, a migrating Broad-winged Hawk, the smallest Buteo in the US, popped into view, and shortly after a Golden Eagle soared overhead. After lunch we continued south to Pfeiffer Big Sur SP and walked along the nature trail to look for birds that preferred this park's Redwood habitat. Regulars viewed including many Steller's Jays, Dark-eyed Juncos, Chestnut-backed Chickadees and Brown Creepers were overshadowed by a N. Pygmy-Owl who was calling away from the hillside. A few miles further south we stopped at a pullout along Highway 1 with a clear view of the ridge line hoping for a view of migrating hawks or possibly an eagle. A sin-

gle Red-tailed was the only Buteo spotted. After a few minutes, Pat Mahoney shouted out that a distant speck looked a lot like a Bald Eagle. As the Bird flew closer we realized our group was treated not to an Eagle, but even better yet, a California Condor! It flew down the canyon and finally circled overhead for some nice views and photos. We headed north to the Carmel River mouth where we observed a hovering White-tailed Kite, along with Whimbrels, Brown Pelicans and Heerman's Gulls lined up on the beach.

On Saturday morning's visit to Laguna Grande Park we caught glimpses of a Chestnut-sided and Tennessee Warblers along with numerous regular Western migrants including Yellow, Yellow-rumped, and Townsend's Warblers in the



OUR INTREPID NSAS BIRDERS ON THE FIELD TRIP:

First Row from Left: Pat Mahoney, Kathleen McCreedy, Cindy Lobdell, Misty & James Cain, Mark Stephenson, Judy Kahle
Second Row from Left: Bruce Thomsen, Cora & Mick Loveland

willows lining the lake. An unexpected Tropical Kingbird perched high in a willow on a small island providing nice scope views. Before long, this wonderful park featured another surprise rarity.

Hidden in the willows at the end of the trail was a Bell's Vireo! This bird was a Western subspecies known as a "Least" (pusillus), and was grayer overall, with slight yellow edgings of the wing and tail feathers, and most likely a breeder from Southern California or Baja that made it's way North. The Eastern subspecies (bellii) is much brighter and more colorful with a yellow-green back and brighter yellow wash on the flanks, breast and vent. We observed it feeding in the willow thickets for 20 minutes and it occasionally popped out for wonderful views.

The afternoon was spent enjoying views of the entire peninsula from the top of Jack's Peak where we found many Pygmy Nuthatches, Kinglets and CB Chickadees. A brief visit to Carmelo Cemetery provided nice views of Pine Siskin and Say's Phoebes. Our final stop at Point Pinos offered scope views of migrating Sooty Shearwaters, and closeups of Black Oystercatchers and Black Turnstones. A certain highlight of our trip was enjoying everyones personal adventures and camaraderie at the Crossroads BBQ for dinner.

On Sunday, we returned to Jetty Road. In the morning fog we had nice views of Western, Eared and Horned Grebes. As we rounded the corner there was a large tern flock resting on the beach. We were treated to close views of a Common Tern nestled within a large flock of Elegants. This rarity

tern was tiny in comparison, ID'ed by it's short red legs, black bill, and distinct black shoulder, carpal bar. As we continued down Elkhorn Slough our trip was highlighted by another rarity when Pat, who was meticulously picking through the flock of 50 Semipalmated Plovers, finally uncovered a hidden Common Ringed Plover. There is nothing common about this Eurasian Migrant, as it typically winters in Africa. Found previously in the week by other birders, it presented us with nice views for photos. It's bright yellow legs, solid, wide neck band and bold, black facial pattern that stretched in full width to it's gape at the base of the bill helped us to synch the ID. In contrast, the very similar looking Semipalmated Plover has duller yellow legs, a broken or thinning neck band, with a black facial pattern that pinches upward above the bill. We almost missed a Pacific Golden Plover that was sleeping in the sandy beach with it's head completely tucked in. Finishing up on Jetty Rd., we crossed the dunes to the beach where several pods of Humpback Whales frolicked near the surf for magnificent views as they surfaced and sounded flapping the ocean with their fins and flukes. We ended the trip at Moonglow Dairy which unfortunately is going out of business. Sadly, the shorebird ponds were all dried up. However, the eucalyptus groves produced a variety of woodland birds including a Hermit Thrush and Townsend's, Orange-crowned and Tennessee Warblers for a nice ending to our trip. ***In total, we were able to observe and enjoy 125 species of Monterey Bay/Big Sur resident and migrant birds!*** ▲



BELL'S VIREO



COMMON RINGED PLOVER



COMMON TERN



HUMPBACK WHALE

The Biggest Week in American Birding: A Warbler Wonderland

Article and Photos by Mark Stephenson



PROTHONOTARY WARBLER

The Biggest Week in American Birding is one of the largest and most celebrated birding festivals in the United States. Each May, thousands of birders converge on the southwestern shores of Lake Erie, just east of Toledo, Ohio, to witness one of North America's greatest avian spectacles.

NORTHERN OHIO IS OFTEN CALLED THE "WARBLER MIGRATION CAPITAL OF THE WORLD"

Waves of brightly colored migrants pause along the lake to rest and refuel before continuing their long journey north. At the heart of the festival lies the famous *Magee Marsh Boardwalk*, managed by the Black Swamp Bird Observatory. This 2.5-mile trail winds through a dense marsh that, in early May, teems with life. Because of the high water table, most of the trees are stunted, offering unmatched, eye-level views of warblers and other songbirds. The sparse early-spring foliage only adds to the magic—providing clear, unobstructed views of birds rarely seen so close. *Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge, Maumee Bay Lodge, Howard, Metzger, and Sheldon Marshes, Pipe Creek Wildlife Area, and Oak Openings Metropark*, are a few of the nearby hotspots, with miles of trails, that make this region a birder's paradise. This year's nine-day festival drew upwards of 3,000 registered participants, with many more local birders joining in. Collectively, birders tallied 243 species, including 36 North American warblers—an astonishing diversity in such a short span.

MEMORIES AND BEGINNINGS

My first visit to the Biggest Week came in 2018, when my son Lucas and I joined my brother, Tom, author of *The Warbler*

Guide, who has been a keynote speaker at the festival for many years. Birding alongside him between his talks and guided walks made that trip one of our all-time favorites.

This year, I arrived on opening day excited to head out and begin birding. Many birders had been active the previous week, and their reports were promising. I met up with Tom once again, along with Tom Slyker, NSAS's former vice-president, to enjoy this year's festival.

Our first morning on the Magee Marsh Boardwalk did not disappoint. In the parking lot, a **Bald Eagle** guarded its nest, with two fuzzy eaglet heads peeking over the rim. A few steps down the boardwalk, a **Prothonotary Warbler** burst into song, perching boldly on a bare branch in perfect light. Several pairs of this brilliant warbler actually nest within abandoned woodpecker cavities inside the boardwalk's railing—one of the festival's iconic sights.

The day unfolded with a cascade of color: **Red-headed Woodpeckers, Baltimore Orioles, Scarlet Tanagers, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks**, and 16 warbler species, including **Yellow, Chestnut-sided, Blackburnian, Cape May, Bay-breasted, Black-throated Green** and **BT Blue**. Overhead, hundreds of **Blue Jays** streamed north in silent flocks—one of which, astonishingly, contained a **Black-billed Magpie**, a western species!

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THE QUEST FOR A KIRTLAND'S

Midday, word spread that a **Kirtland's Warbler**—one of **North America's rarest**—had been spotted along the nearby Estuary Trail. For me, this was a “bucket-list-lifer”. Lucas and I had narrowly missed one in 2018, when we unfortunately left the day before the only one sighted that year arrived. I was still half a mile from the end of the boardwalk and the Estuary Trail was more than a mile and a half further north! Torn between finishing the boardwalk or doubling back through crowds, I pressed on, then hurried toward the Estuary Trail, delayed only by irresistible new sightings: **Swainson's Thrushes**, **Warbling and Red-eyed Vireos**, all singing and posing for photos. At last, I reached a gathering of birders peering into the vines. A brilliant male **Magnolia Warbler** was posing for point blank photos that I couldn't bring myself to pass up. *Hurrying nearly to the end of the trail, another crowd had assembled —the Kirtland's Warbler had just vanished into the tangles moments before!*

After waiting 20 tense minutes, the bird finally reemerged, its bright yellow breast with thick black flank streaks was beaming through the branches. Its blue-gray back with black lined feathers was equally stunning. For nearly two hours, I observed it, whenever it surfaced while feeding along its circular route, photographing it from all angles and helping newcomers locate this coveted species. **Once reduced to fewer than 400 individuals in the 1970s, Kirtland's Warblers have rebounded to around 1,000 breeding pairs**

thanks to the dedicated, cooperative habitat restoration campaigns of multiple agencies in Michigan's young Jack Pine forests. Seeing one so vividly was a thrilling exclamation point to this conservation story!

1ST DAYS OF EXCITEMENT

I spent my first two days exclusively at Magee Marsh and the Estuary Trail, adding **Black-and-white, Tennessee, and Palm**, bringing my total to 20 warbler species. Both **Northern Waterthrush** and **Ovenbird** called from the wet-test stretches, and **Solitary Sandpipers** fed unconcerned in the marshy sections at close range. On the third day, I explored several nearby hotspots. Early morning along Stange Road's hedgerows and fields, east of the entrance to Ottawa NWR, offered great views of **Brown Thrashers, Savannah, Chipping and Field Sparrows**. In wet areas near the end of the road an array of singing marsh birds: **Common Yellowthroats, Marsh Wrens, and Swamp Sparrows**. **Indigo Buntings** perched on weed stalks with stunning views. In the woodlot with the junction of Krause Rd, a pair of **Baltimore Orioles** popped out of the foliage. One-by-one, more species emerged from the dense undergrowth: a female **Redstart** flashing its yellow shoulder and tail spots, a male **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** so excitedly exposing its red crown, and a **Palm Warbler**, with yellow vent flashing and rapidly pumping tail. Suddenly, a small, yellow-breasted bird,

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BALD EAGLE



BALTIMORE ORIOLE



KIRTLAND'S WARBLER



MAGNOLIA WARBLER



CAPE MAY WARBLER



INDIGO BUNTING

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with a crisp black bib, bright wingbars and short decurved bill flew up into the willows — a **juvenile Orchard Oriole** — what a delightful surprise!

HIGHLIGHTS AND SURPRISES

A group tour to Pipe Creek and Sheldon Marsh added nice views of **Ovenbird**, **Tennessee** and **Wilson's Warblers**, and the unforgettable sight of an **Eastern Screech-Owl** sunning itself in the hollow of a massive aging oak. I returned to Magee to find two new vireos to go along with the more common **Blue-headed**, with **Philadelphia**, and **White-eyed** arriving in tandem for point blank photos. The day ended when we spotted an **Eastern Whip-poor-will**, sitting motionless, perfectly camouflaged in the dark leafy detritus on a branch just inches above the ground.

NEARBY GEMS

Afternoons often took me to quieter refuges—Ottawa NWR, Howard and Metzger Marshes, and the Barnside Creamery ponds, where waterfowl and shorebirds were present. Highlights included **Trumpeter Swans**, **Hooded Mergansers**, **Common Terns**, **Bonaparte's**, **Herring** and **Lesser Black-backed Gulls**, **Black-necked Stilts** and **Wilson's Phalaropes**.

I returned on another day to the Barnside Creamery Pond. A small flock of **Glossy Ibis** flew overhead, the only ones seen during the week. As I asked a fellow birder if I could look through his spotting scope to view **Semipalmated Sandpipers** and **Wilson's Phalaropes**, a familiar voice called out my name. To my complete surprise, Steve Abbott, a Bay Area birder whom I birded with before, asked if I had heard about the Connecticut Warbler sighting at the *Catawba Island Nature Preserve* located just east of Port Clinton. He said he was headed out shortly to see if he could relocate it. Needless to say, it was my 2nd “lifer” of the trip, and we headed out in the gentle rain as darkness was approaching. Fortunately, Steve had been given perfect directions on the Connecticut's location. With a couple of “pishes”, sure enough, the **Connecticut Warbler** walked out of the tangles onto a low branch and gave us spectacular views.

*Oak Openings Metropark located southwest of Toledo offered a nice change of habitat—mature hardwood forests, open oak savannas, and shrub-studded fields, about 45 minutes from Magee. Here, **Blue-winged Warblers** buzzed from grassy clearings, **Yellow-throated Vireos** called in towering Oaks, and **Hooded Warblers** sang from dense, shaded woods. I was fortunate to spot a single **Golden-winged Warbler** and*

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BLACKBURNIAN WARBLER



PHILADELPHIA VIREO



EASTERN SCREECH OWL



PINE WARBLER



BLUE-WINGED WARBLER



CONNECTICUT WARBLER

a pair of **Yellow-breasted Chats** in the brushy meadows as well as a number other species less common at Magee.

At the Buehner Visitor Center, with floor to ceiling windows overlooking their feeding stations, besides a variety of woodland species, I was astonished to find a **Pine Warbler dining on peanuts!** I later learned, this adaptation was typical for this species. *By transforming and thickening the walls of its gizzard and intestinal tract during winter months when insects are less abundant, Pine Warblers were able to survive by digesting the hard shells and proteins of seeds and nuts.*

By midweek, the migration had reached full force. We had a brief view of a **Mourning Warbler** deep in the grapevine tangles at Magee, but fortunately the next day, I found a male singing at Oak Openings that emerged from the forest, within a few feet for stunning views. This bird brought my total of observed warblers to 30 species!

On my last day at Oak Openings I met a birder who had heard that Sedge Wrens had been seen at the Irwin Prairie Nature Preserve. In my youth, Sedge Wrens were called Short-billed Marsh Wrens to differentiate them from the more numerous Long-billed Marsh Wrens. In the 80's, both were renamed to better reflect their specialized habitats. Fortunately, I just enough daylight remaining to make it and headed north to this wonderful, newly discovered hotspot. The Preserve has 2-3 miles of Boardwalk that wind across wet, sedge-filled meadows and into the woods. A short distance down the path a **Least Flycatcher** was calling from

a grove of trees and peaked out for my best views of the trip. A little further, **my second Orchard Oriole** came into view. Finally, I spotted a small brown marsh bird jet into a clump of sedges. Once again, "pishing" brought the tiny wren out into clear view. Its small size, pale brown coloration, streaked back and buffy supercilium easily identified this as a **Sedge Wren**. A wonderful bird to conclude my stay in northern Ohio.

OUR SEARCH FOR SOUTHERN SPECIES

After an incredible week around Lake Erie, I teamed up with birders I'd met at the festival and headed 200 miles south. Central Ohio provided the opportunity to observe southern species that don't make it as far north as McGee. My new friends lived in the rolling hills and Amish Country near Cadiz, Ohio, located along the Pennsylvania border not far from Pittsburgh. En route, I stopped at the Wilderness Center, one of my favorite stops in 2018, and had stunning views of **Acadian Flycatchers** and several singing **Cerulean Warblers**, "species of concern", who descended from the tree tops and put on a spectacular show!

In Cadiz, we birded riparian corridors rich with southern species: **White-eyed Vireos**, **Louisiana Waterthrush**, **Hooded**, **Cerulean**, and **Yellow-throated Warblers**. At Busby Road, we entered miles of grasslands stretching through the rolling hills. Here we found four of our target

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MOURNING WARBLER / ANDRE LANUETTE



SEEDGE WREN



CERULEAN WARBLER



UPLAND SANDPIPER



BOBOLINK



LOUISIANA WATERTHRUSH

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species: Upland Sandpipers — several adults and juveniles flushed from the roadside edges quickly vanishing into surrounding grasslands; **Bobolinks** — hovered in the sky and perched on fenceposts as they sang their intricate bubbly songs; **Henslow's Sparrows** — located by tracking down their distinctive “tsillik” calls. This sulky species required us to hike miles across the hillsides as they seldom showed anything except for the crown of their heads poking from clumps of bunch grass. Lucas and I spotted a couple at Oak Openings 8 years ago, but the fields were now meticulously cut short for a development project. Previously, I had not seen this “at-risk” and vulnerable species since my youth in the grasslands of upstate New York. As a reward for our troubles, the less timid **Grasshopper Sparrows** emerged in plain view and sang from their perches along the roadside.

MOHICAN STATE PARK AND THE JOURNEY NORTH

Saying good-bye to my new friends, I headed back north to Mohican State Park near Loudonville. This park's lush forests echoed with **Wood Thrush**, **Veery**, and **Ovenbird's melodious songs**. Along the Black Fork of the Mohican River, I watched a **Louisiana Waterthrush** hunt mayflies just feet away.

The next morning, after heading into the park, I hiked along an abandoned road into the dense woods, sitting quietly every hundred yards or so. Using this strategy I encountered several new warblers along the way. First, a **Kentucky**, head thrown back and singling loudly from eye level, proudly sitting on a horizontal branch. An **Ovenbird** walked unafraid onto a fallen log with its penetrating “Teacher-Teacher” Song. Overhead, a small feeding flock of familiar warblers containing **Hooded**, **Bay-breasted** and **Magnolia** were hunting for insects in the foliage.

Finally, I heard the tight trill of a **Worm-eating Warbler**. Waiting patiently, it miraculously perched in full view. This bird seldom ventures further north than central Ohio. Heading further into the park, I located the Lyon's Falls Trail, adjacent the park's historic covered bridge. I was treated to



KIRTLAND'S WARBLER

numerous riparian species along with my first **Ruby-throated Hummingbird** and a stunning **Canada Warbler** that followed me along the trail.

Reluctantly, I began the long drive north—*determined to finally experience Northern Michigan's Jack Pine Forests that are the breeding grounds of the Kirtland's Warbler*, before flying out of Detroit. During my visit, **I was thrilled to have observed 36 warblers** with a total of 204 Ohio species including **6 vireos**, **7 flycatchers** and **12 sparrows** as well as many other coveted eastern birds!

MIO, MICHIGAN: A JOURNEY NORTH FOR A FITTING FINALE

The small town of Mio, Michigan, lies about 375 miles north of Mohican SP. I arrived early the next day and drove to the low Jack Pine habitat that Kirtland's require. Within minutes,

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KENTUCKY WARBLER



WORM-EATING WARBLER



CANADA WARBLER

despite a cold northern wind, **Nashville Warblers** began singing. As I learned, *Nashvilles almost always associate with Kirtland's in this unique habitat*. Before long, a number of **Kirtland's Warblers** began to join in with their distinctive song—clear and ringing—from deep within the Jack Pines. As the wind continued, I managed a number of brief but satisfying views of a breeding pair.

Incredibly, two researchers emerged from the forest who were conducting field surveys, who turned out to be the very individuals who had banded the bird I'd photographed earlier in the week at Magee Marsh! They were excited to see my pictures of this individual! Later, following another birder's tip, I relocated multiple singing males along nearby Hunt Road, one of which perched perfectly in the open, its bright, yellow breast and black, streaked flanks vividly contrasting against the gray sky.

It was a spectacular end to an unforgettable trip—one that traced the Kirtland's journey from its migratory stopover on Lake Erie to its breeding grounds hundreds of miles to the north. As I headed back toward Detroit to catch my flight home, I couldn't help but marvel at the resilience of these tiny travelers—and at the devoted birding community that gathers each year to celebrate them! ▲

Beginner Bird Walks at American Canyon Wetlands

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flanks, and distinctive, massive bill is a favorite. The Cinnamon Teal with its feathers like its name and rusty eyes gets more happy looks.

But don't forget the grasslands. Killdeer, their distinctive call and beautifully striped face, Meadowlarks when they turn so we can see their beautiful yellow breast and black necklace are another surprise. The list goes on and on.

A weary but happy group makes its way back to the parking lot repeating they had no idea all those wonderful birds were there! ▲



Napa-Solano Audubon along with other Napa County environmental groups have formed a Wildlife Habitat Conservation Coalition as an ad hoc group to advocate for Napa County officials to create a local conservation plan for the county.

The Coalition, now celebrating its first anniversary, includes volunteer activists, non-profits, government agencies, and others asking for a dedicated plan banning certain development in critical habitat areas, protecting wildlife corridors and saving land for conservation.

The Coalition meets monthly at:

The Gasser Foundation
433 Soscol Ave. Napa, CA.

Website: <https://napaconservation.org>

For more info, contact Yvonne:
<https://napasolanobirds.org/contact-us/>



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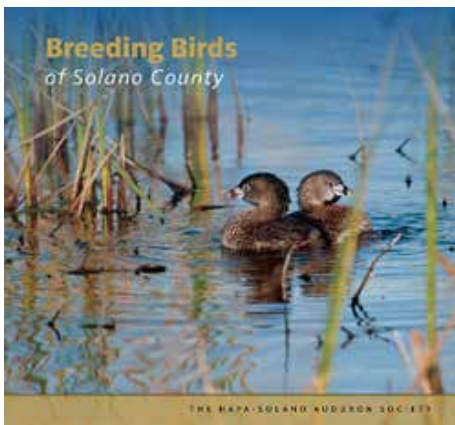
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Napa Solano Audubon's mission is to share the joy of birding,
promote conservation and scientific understanding of wild birds and their habitats,
and provide engaging, science-based education throughout Napa and Solano counties.

NSAS Gift Guide

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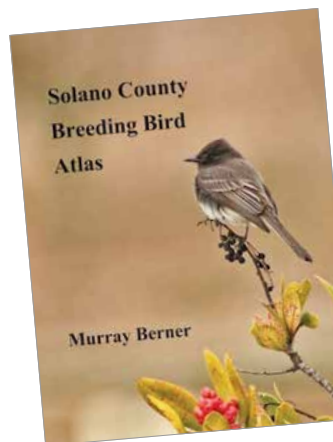


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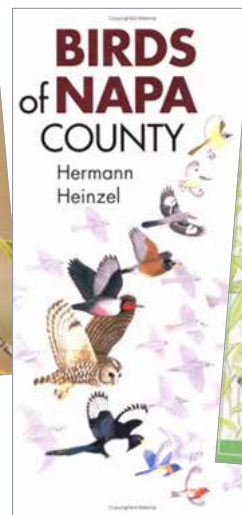
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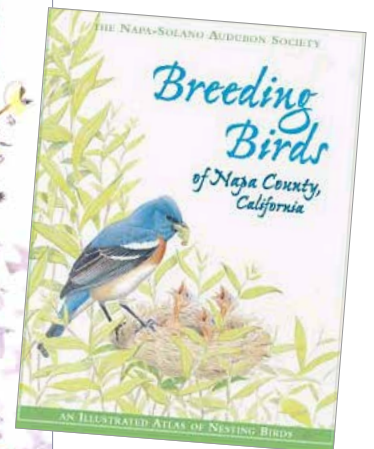


Solano County Breeding Bird Atlas

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Birds of Napa County



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