

# The Foothill Quail

Yosemite Area Audubon Society



March/April 2009

## Living with the Birds Contributed by Kris Randal

This year, the sudden explosion of fiery-orange poppies saturating the hillsides of the Merced River Canyon alerted us that springtime was finally upon us. Another indicator of this seasonal change that I always look forward to is the return of migrant birds and their species-specific voices that swell the dawn chorus. March seems to be the month when the first migrants show up in the Sierra foothills.

Even though the rufous hummingbird nests as far north as Alaska, it spends some time in our foothill habitats fueling up on our feeders and nectar from the blooms of native gooseberries, manzanitas, redbuds and an array of wildflowers. This year I documented the rufous dominating our feeder on March 14. A few days later, on a late afternoon drive up White Rock Road, 30 or more cliff swallows swirled low over a meandering stream, catching flying insects with each twisting turn. On March 18 and continuing into the following week, a pair of orange-crowned warblers repeatedly visited the pink flowers of two ornamental plum trees in our yard, dipping their bills deeply into the blooms as if

they were sipping nectar (and I believe they may have been). On March 25 I awoke to the vociferous warbling of a house wren. Three days later I spotted a male Bullock's oriole flashing its brilliant orange plumage against the splashy pink blossoms of a redbud as it eyed a nearby hummingbird feeder (which it then visited to sip sugar water). On March 31 I heard the familiar scratchy buzz of a blue-gray gnatcatcher within the foliage of a live oak.

In April, I always look forward to the return of the musical black-headed grosbeaks and put up nesting boxes for ash-throated flycatchers. Once back in their breeding range, the migratory birds join our local resident species to set up territories and raise their young on the abundance of insect species that support these diverse bird populations.

Meanwhile, with each passing day, the growing number of songbird voices can make the early-morning concert a truly awakening experience.

All of this avian celebration is actually the result of pulsating hormones directed by lengthening daylight, which stimulates birds to sing—to announce their ownership of certain territories and to advertise for the perfect mate.

Once bird pairs have bonded and staked out territories, they begin the busy task of finding suitable nest sites, then spending days and sometimes weeks building nests. After hatching, songbird chicks may stay in the nest up to three weeks or so as the stressed parents search feverishly for high-protein insects to feed those hungry mouths—and losing weight themselves in the process.

Nesting is one of the two most stressful activities in a bird's life (the other is migration). Here are some things we can do to help birds survive this crucial time and complete their nesting cycles successfully.

Contd page 2

### Inside this issue:

Page 1 Living with the Birds-Kris Randal

Page 2 Alaska Speaker Program

Page 4 Audubon Adventures

Page 5 Events & Directory of Officers

"To be whole. To be complete. Wildness reminds us what it means to be human, what we are connected to rather than what we are separate from."

- **Terry Tempest Williams**, testimony before the Senate Subcommittee on Forest & Public Lands Management regarding the Utah Public Lands Management Act of 1995. Washington, D.C.

## Living with the Birds

Cont'd from page 1

- Avoid disturbing nesting birds. Getting through the nesting season is hard enough as it is. Stay a reasonable distance from active nests, refrain from excessive noise and sudden movements, and defer pruning shrubs and trees until later in the summer or fall. Take special care not to flush birds from the nest during incubation or to frighten away parent birds bringing food to nestlings.

- If a baby bird falls out of the nest, you can gently pick it up and try to put it back, or if the nest is unreachable, you can put some leaves, grass and shredded tissues in a berry box, margarine tub, etc., and tie it as close to the original nest as possible. Most birds have a weak sense of smell, and contrary to popular belief, the parent birds will *not* abandon a chick after a human has handled it. The parental drive is strong, and the adult birds will continue to care for their offspring.

- Whatever you do, minimize your handling of young birds to avoid injury to them. If a chick persists in leaving its nest after you've rescued it, leave it alone and allow the parents to fend for it.

- Once the young fledge (i.e., leave the nest), by then fully feath-

ered, the dangers increase for the family. Fledglings are weak flyers and spend a lot of their time on the ground and in shrubs, waiting for their parents to bring them food or teach them how to find insects or seeds. The young chirp frequently enough to let their parents know where to find them.

- If you come across an "orphaned" young bird, chances are that at least one of the dedicated parents is nearby. If you have the time, watch from a distance for two hours, and if no adult returns within that time, you might want to call a wildlife rehabilitation center, such as Fresno Wildlife Rehabilitation, (559) 298-3276, and for songbirds and hummingbirds call (559) 269-1957 to raise the bird. It is difficult—and illegal—to raise a bird on your own. You would need a special permit and training as *each bird species requires a special diet to survive.*

- It is particularly important to keep cats indoors during this time. Fledglings are especially vulnerable to the hunting prowess of cats. Even experienced adult birds can become easy prey to the natural hunting instincts of cats, as they are preoccupied searching for insect food for the constantly hungry young. If one of the parents dies, it is physically impossible for the other parent to raise the young alone. The sad result is that the rest of the family will succumb as the remaining adult abandons the nestlings and searches for the missing mate.

A friend of mine once mentioned that the sound of birds singing makes him feel as if all is right in the world. Let's do our part for these comforting songsters by giving them a safe and welcoming environment in which to raise their young. Perhaps then, they too will know that all is right in the world.



In every walk with nature one receives far more than he seeks.

John Muir

The idea of wilderness needs no defense, it only needs defenders.

Edward Abbey

## Bird Walk Results

### White Rock Road Trip March 21, 2009

Pied-billed Grebe, Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, Canada Goose, Wood Duck, American Wigeon, Mallard, Turkey Vulture, Osprey, Northern Harrier, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Red-shouldered Hawk, Swainson's Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Greater Yellowlegs, White-breasted Nuthatch, Phainopepla, song sparrow, winter wren

Golden Eagle, American Kestrel, Prairie Falcon, Wild Turkey, Killdeer, Mourning Dove, Barn Owl, Acorn Woodpecker, Lewis's Woodpecker, Downy woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Black Phoebe, Say's Phoebe, , Western Kingbird, Tree Swallow, Violet-green Swallow Northern Rough-winged Swallow, Cliff Swallow, Rock Wren, Canyon Wren, Bewick's Wren, Wrentit, Northern Mockingbird, Western Bluebird, Hermit Thrush, , American

Robin, Oak Titmouse, Loggerhead Shrike, Yellow-billed Magpie, American Crow, Common Raven, European Starling, House Sparrow, Purple Finch, Lawrence's Goldfinch, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Spotted Towhee, California Towhee, Chipping Sparrow, Vesper Sparrow, Lark Sparrow, Bullock's Oriole, House Wren, Orange-crowned sparrow,

European Starling, House Sparrow, Purple Finch, Lawrence's Goldfinch, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Spotted Towhee, California Towhee, Chipping Sparrow, Vesper Sparrow, Lark Sparrow, Savannah Sparrow, Fox Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, Golden-crowned Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Red-winged Blackbird, Tri-colored Blackbird, Brewer's Blackbird, Great-tailed Grackle

Contributed by Len McKenzie

Alaska has been much in the news over the past couple of weeks. The volcanic eruptions of Mount Redoubt after a dormancy of almost 20 years and the recent 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Exxon Valdez oil spill, still an environmental problem, have captured headlines and public interest during this time.

Alaska is the largest of our states, encompassing more than 600,000 square miles of rugged mountains, grinding glaciers, endless tundra, diverse temperate rainforest and winding coast lines. From the spectacled eider and yellow-billed loon in America's Arctic to the black oystercatcher and the marbled godwit on the southern coastline, Alaska's diversity of birdlife is astounding.

Alaska also has an abundance of other iconic wildlife species, including grizzly bears, caribou, bald eagles, humpback whales and wolves, many of which are endangered elsewhere. With the current energy crisis, some members of the U. S. Congress have advocated vastly accelerating the extraction of oil, gas and mineral deposits in this important ecological area. Audubon seeks a balance between resource extraction and protecting internationally critical habitat.

The Yosemite Area Audubon Society's monthly program, "From the Black Oystercatcher to Black Gold: Challenges and Opportunities in Alaska," to be presented by Audubon Alaska representative Taldi Walter in Oakhurst Thursday, April 9, will feature many of the natural resource issues in Alaska. Beginning at 7:00 p.m., the program will be held at the Oakhurst Senior Center.

Taldi Walter joined the Audubon Alaska staff after working as the Alaska Outreach Coordinator for National Audubon Society's Public Policy Office in Washington, D.C.

Taldi received her master's degree in biology. Her thesis work took her to the Atlantic rainforest of Brazil, where she studied rainforest and invasive species ecology. She will present an informative slide show showcasing some of the important natural areas and brilliant birds found in wild Alaska.

The presentation will explore some of Alaska's natural treasures set aside decades ago for the benefit of wildlife and the American public. Taldi will highlight the imminent and compelling challenges and opportunities facing the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, Tongass National Forest, Chugach National Forest and National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska.

The Tongass National Forest, located in southeast Alaska, is our nation's largest national forest, nearly 17 million acres in size. The Tongass comprises thousands of islands, countless streams, glacial fjords and lush valleys backing into spectacularly rugged mountains and sprawling forests of majestic old-growth cedar, spruce and hemlock trees.



Photo credit: John Schoen

"The most unhappy thing about conservation is that it is never permanent. If we save a priceless Woodland today, it is threatened from another quarter tomorrow."

**Marjory Stoneman Douglas** (1890-1998), quoted in *Facing Florida's Environmental Future*, April 1990.

## Conservation Corner By Joseph Frank

### Audubon Adventures in Schools

Discover what teachers in 150,000 classrooms already know: Audubon Adventures brings science to life for children wherever they live!

AUDUBON ADVENTURES is an environmental education program for children in grades 3 to 5. Developed by professional environmental educators, AUDUBON ADVENTURES presents basic, scientifically accurate facts about birds, wildlife, and their habitats. It comes to you packaged as a Classroom Kit (serving 32 students) or Individual Kit (serving 1 student). The program is used by classroom teachers, after-school program coordinators, special education instructors, language arts teachers, and homeschoolers.

Since its inception in 1984, over 7 million youngsters have participated in the program. Using Audubon Adventures classroom materials is a wonderful way to engage teachers and students, in classrooms, at Audubon Centers, or other youth group settings, in Audubon's mission.

An all-new Audubon Adventures kit will be available in September. The title of this new kit is "Feats of Nature" Audubon Adventures dedicates its newest series to the miracles in nature!

### Feats of Nature

Through the four new exciting topics this year explore amazing topics on the natural abilities of our world's plants and animals. Learn how animals defend themselves, migrate, build and how plants rule the earth!

### *Stink, Bite, Hide, Fight! How Animals Defend Themselves*

Animals of all kinds defend themselves against predators using an array of adaptations

such as quills, camouflage, and other physical attributes as well as behaviors such as hiding and playing dead. Predators, in turn, have strategies for foiling their prey's defenses. This ongoing drama plays out in habitats worldwide.

### *On The Go! Animals That Migrate*

Across North America, the progression of seasons is marked by the travels of migratory animals. These amazing journeys are taken by an equally amazing variety of species, ranging from tiny hummingbirds to mighty gray whales.

### *Plants Rule!*

It's hard to imagine life without plants: these leafy lives able to make their own food using solar energy green every continent except Antarctica. Not only do they feed the world, they house most animals and insects as well. And they supply our oxygen, breathing in the carbon dioxide we exhale and breathing out the oxygen we inhale.

### *Critter Construction: How, What, and Why Animals Build*

All kinds of animals are amazing builders. They construct nests, shelters, and traps of all sorts, shapes, and sizes from wood, mud, spit, silk, and other materials. No matter the creature, the materials, or the structure, all animals build for the same reason-to better survive.

### *National and State Standards Alignment*

The content and activities in Audubon Adventures provide abundant opportunities for students to achieve new understanding and demonstrate their learning and skills in language arts, science, and environmental literacy. Every Audubon Adventures Classroom Resource Manual identifies the national language arts and science standards that can be met as students work with Audubon Adventures.

Go to the Audubon Adventures website at : <http://www.audubon.org/educate/aa>

### Oakhurst River Parkway:

While GeoCaching recently I came across what, to me, was an unknown jewel in the heart of downtown Oakhurst. I strolled along this trail for some time and saw a number of spring migrants and decided this should be on our birding map.

The Oakhurst River Parkway, in 1992, was a dream of a small group of citizens who wanted to preserve and restore the natural environment and resources of our community. These citizens sought support from the Eastern Madera County Chamber of Commerce and the Madera County Board of Supervisors and have been successful in receiving several grants to develop and construct the Oakhurst River Parkway.

These grants, along with countless hours of work by volunteers, have transformed the dream into a beautiful nature trail in the center of one of the most popular mountain communities in the Sierra Nevada Range - Oakhurst, California. Oakhurst is located at the southern end of the Golden Chain Highway and is near the south gate to Yosemite National Park. Its historical roots go back over 150 years to the 1850's when it was called Fresno Flats. Some gold was found in this area during Gold Rush days, but it was the center for food and lumber used by the miners from 1850 on. A lumber mill once stood at the intersection of Hwys. 41 & 49, which supplied shoring timber and firewood to local miners. By 1912, Fresno Flats was known as Oakhurst.

The River Parkway winds past Fresno Flats Historical Park. This park features life as it was 100 years ago. There are several historical buildings that have been moved from the original townsite near Oakhurst Community Park. Townspeople and visitors alike use the Community Park itself regularly. Outdoor concerts, a playground and horseshoe pits make a perfect setting for picnics and barbecues.

## Yosemite Area Audubon Officers 2008- 09

PRESIDENT	Kris Randal
SECRETARY	Betty Boykin
TREASURER	Joseph Frank
PROGRAMS	Len McKenzie
CONSERVATION	Open
TRIPS	Lowell Young
HOSPITALITY	Jim Spotts
MEMBERSHIP	Shirley Schmelzer
NEWSLETTER	Joseph Frank
Webmaster	Alison Sheehey

### Membership Chairperson

**Shirley Schmelzer**  
4512 Varian Road  
Mariposa, CA 95338

Check our website

[http://mariposa.yosemite.net/  
audubon](http://mariposa.yosemite.net/audubon)

Yosemite Area Audubon is a 501(c3) Corporation

## Calendar April 2009

**April 9, 2009 (Thursday)**

**Pot Luck: Call Joe or Jeanne Frank for directions (in Oakhurst) (559) 683-5398**

**Program 7:00 p.m.** Audubon Alaska representative Taldi Walter will present a slide program, "From the Black Oystercatcher to Black Gold: Challenges and Opportunities in Alaska," at 7:00 p.m. at the Oakhurst Senior Center on Cinder Lane off Road 425B in Oakhurst. Public invited, free, refreshments. Call (209) 742-5579 for more information. To reach the Oakhurst Senior Center, turn onto Road 425B from Road 426, drive about a half mile and turn right on Cinder Lane. Immediately after turning, take the left fork and follow the signs to the Senior Center (past the Oakhurst Community Center) to the end of Cinder Lane.

**Saturday, April 18**

Yosemite Area Audubon Society birding trip down White Rock Road, a repeat of the March trip and perhaps the best birding route in Mariposa County. Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the Mariposa County Fairgrounds to carpool. Suitable for beginners, public welcome, free. Bring binoculars, field guides, lunch and beverages. Call (209) 966-2547 or (209) 742-5579 for more information.

Yosemite Area Audubon Society monthly meetings are held the second Thursday of each month October through May at 7 p.m. Public welcome. Meetings in November and April are held at the Oakhurst Senior Center the second Thursday of the month.

Mariposa Methodist Church  
Parish Hall  
6th St., Mariposa (between Hwy. 140 and Bullion St.)  
Mariposa CA.

There are many who still do not believe that global warming is a problem at all. And it's no wonder: because they are the targets of a massive and well-organized campaign of disinformation lavishly funded by polluters who are determined to prevent any action to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions that cause global warming out of a fear that their profits might be affected if they had to stop dumping so much pollution into the atmosphere.

[Al Gore - Problems - Fear - Determination](#)