

The Foothill Quail

Yosemite Area Audubon



Dec 2007/Jan 2008

Don't Take the Birds for Granted! By Kris Randal, President YAAS



Spotted Owl

The National Audubon Society and the American Bird Conservancy have recently created the 2007 WatchList of bird species in the United States needing conservation help. This national list separates the birds into two color categories: Birds of greatest concern are coded "red," and the "yellow" designation covers birds in serious decline or that are rare. Although most of these listed birds are still fairly common and not on the threatened or endangered species lists (yet!), it's apparent they are vulnerable. By becoming aware of avian population changes early on, we may be able to prevent their sinking to the ranks of endangered species.

Audubon California has made it easier for California birders by separating the WatchList into bird lists by counties. It was surpris-

ing to see the oak titmouse and the Nuttall's woodpecker on the Mariposa County list since they have always occurred regularly in my yard.

I realize that Sudden Oak Death has destroyed vast areas of the moist coastal oak woodlands and that these two bird species have lost precious habitat in those areas. This pathogen, *Pythophthora ramorum*, has yet to reach the foothills of Mariposa, probably because of our dry, hot summers.

However, erratic weather patterns and global warming have affected many food webs, especially those involving plants, insects and birds. For example, this last winter and spring seasons were exceptionally dry, stressing plants and limiting the numbers of wildflowers and grasses and their seed production. In response, many plant-eating insects died out early, affecting breeding birds and other insect-dependent wildlife. In my yard I noticed that ash-throated flycatchers, western bluebirds, house wrens and oak titmice all had first nesting failures. Only the oak titmouse pair tried a second time (they are early

nesters and had more time) but they had only two young, when they normally raise four to five. The western bluebirds also had only two nestlings, but those chicks never fledged. I found them dead, almost fully feathered, in the nest box.

Two other species included on the list, the wren-tit and the California thrasher, are in decline mostly because of habitat loss. They both reside in the deep tangles of dense brush and chaparral. Unfortunately, most Californians view this plant community as dangerous because of its flammability. Many property owners brush and clear these lands extensively in the interest of fire safety, but in doing so, they are diminishing the diversity of flora and fauna, including these two species. It is important to maintain a balance of fire safety and protection of bird habitat.

In Mariposa and other foothill areas, habitat fragmentation is also contributing to bird population declines. As more housing developments occur on five-acre (or less) parcels, the resulting fragmentation of oak woodlands negatively impacts the wildlife that lives there.

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Did you know?

- The Bald Eagle has gone from an all-time low of 417 nesting pairs in 1963 to an estimated high of 9,789 breeding pairs today.
- Over 100 North American bird species supplement their natural diets with birdseed, suet, fruit and nectar obtained from feeders.
- Birding is the number one sport in America. According to US Fish and Wildlife Service there are currently 51.3 million birders in the US alone and this number continues to grow.

WatchList for Mariposa Birds

Red listed: Spotted owl and sooty grouse.

Yellow listed: Mountain quail, Williamson sapsucker, Nuttall's woodpecker, white-headed woodpecker, olive-sided flycatcher, varied thrush, wrentit, California thrasher, hermit warbler, Brewer's sparrow, Clark's grebe, oak titmouse, and the willow flycatcher.

WatchList for Madera Birds

Red listed: Sooty grouse.

Yellow listed: Mountain quail, Williamson sapsucker, Nuttall's woodpecker, white-headed woodpecker, olive-sided flycatcher, wrentit, hermit warbler, Clark's grebe, oak titmouse, and the willow flycatcher.

2007 Yosemite Bird Count

Lowell Young and Len McKenzie were among about 20 participants on the 45th annual Yosemite Christmas Bird Count held in the park December 16. The all-day count netted a total of 64 species and 2,286 individual birds, both numbers higher than in recent years. Acorn woodpeckers narrowly edged out dark-eyed juncos 245-244 for the highest numbers observed. Altogether, counters recorded 10 of 12 possible woodpecker species, including two pileated woodpeckers seen by Len and Lowell's party in Yosemite Valley, two more by another Valley party and a black-backed woodpecker near Badger Pass. Len and Lowell's group also watched an American dipper in the Merced River eating a small fish!

The full count results will soon be available on the park's website,

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Don't Take the Birds for Granted! Continued-

So what can we do to help our feathered friends?

- Observe the birds in your yards or on birding trips and record your observations, particularly noting any changes over time. Make your observations known by listing them at eBird.org, where scientists document the information. You can also be involved in the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's citizen-science by participating in Project Feeder Watch, Cornell Nest Box Network or the Great Backyard Bird Count. If you participate in the annual Christmas Bird Count—Yosemite's this year was December 16—you are providing information on wintering birds for the WatchList. You can also share your observations on our local listserv, yosemite_area_birders@yahoo_groups.com.
- In your own backyard one of the most important things you can do is maintain native plants already established on your land as well as plant more natives. Not only do natives provide birds with food and shelter, but

many are drought-resistant and help us conserve water; protect water quality by holding back the soil with their deep root systems, thus preventing soil erosion into our streams; and eliminate the need for fertilizers and pesticides. All of these attributes enhance the wildlife values of our lands, making them more hospitable to birds. Healthy native plant communities support a diversity of life and reduce the likelihood that invasive weeds can gain a monotonous and damaging foothold on the landscape. Ecological balances that sustain birds are disrupted when invasive weeds take over.

- Try to do any brushing or pruning in the fall, when most birds are not nesting.
- Brush or clear with the birds in mind. Leave dense areas of shrubs, mosaics or patches outside your 100-foot defensible space.
- Provide water for birds all year long, especially during times of drought.

Feeding birds during winter is also helpful.

- Keep cats indoors, especially during the nesting season—for most birds, from March to late July.
- Protect local habitat by supporting organizations that work with private landowners to establish conservation easements, such as the Sierra Foothill Conservancy, and other conservation groups, such as local chapters of the California Native Plant Society and Audubon.

The WatchList serves as a reminder that many birds we've probably all taken for granted and assumed would always be here may be more at risk than we thought possible. Let's take notice and start taking actions that could help reverse this troubling trend.

Don't Miss Out Next Year - Central Valley Birding Symposium Report

By Lee Ekland

My first time attending the Central Valley Birding Symposium last month was great fun as well as educational. In its 11th year, the symposium is now held at the Stockton Sheraton in the downtown waterfront area right on the San Joaquin River. Hosted

by the Central Valley Bird Club the four day event offered excellent classes, workshops, field trips, and meals. In addition, a "Birding Nature Fair and Art Show" offered artwork, optics, books, software, jewelry, and clothing.

The highlight of the event was my participation in Keith Hansen's class "Sketching Birds". Standing over 6' with long hair and bare feet Keith mesmerized us with his superb drawing skills and incredible ability to portray and explain avian anatomy.

Central Valley Birding Symposium Report Continued-

I could not resist drawing him instead of the Curlew. I drew him as if I was illustrating a bird, complete with arrows pointing to field marks and a behavior report...he loved it. Next time I'll pay attention to the lesson.

The highlight for my husband David, who says he's not a birder, was looking through all the scopes and binoculars offered by vendors. He enjoyed a class taught by Clay Taylor, "Bird and Nature Digiscoping". He's getting into birding via the toys. David and I have been debating whether to buy a spotting scope for several years. We haven't felt that purchase was justified until we looked through a Swarovski ATS-80 HD scope with an adapter for my cam-

era. I had previously thought that only small, point and shoot style cameras could be attached to a scope. The vendor showed us how easy it is to attach my heavy Fujis2 and make the necessary adjustments when shooting. We have since made that purchase and are very glad we did.

If you have the opportunity to watch Laura Erickson present "Owls: The Inside Story" don't miss it. Some of her experiences as a rehabber are hilarious, and all are informative. Her latest book "101 Ways to Help Birds" discusses practical ways to help birds on both macro and micro levels. One chapter is devoted to helping sick, injured or baby birds, another to fostering a "culture

of conservation". This book has been called "A comprehensive blueprint for actions we can take to help the birds". I recommend "101 Ways to Help Birds" to all. I've only touched on a few of our symposium experiences. Meeting people I've only virtually known through the computer was the most pleasing part of my experience. Listening to a tribute to the late biologist and conservationist Waldo Holt and learning that he was an accomplished artist was deeply moving. Bookmark <http://www.cvbs.org/> for more information and to stay tuned to next year's event. Whether you're a novice or an experienced birder this symposium has something to offer everyone.



Andy Engilis, curator of the UC Davis Museum of Wildlife and Fish Biology offers a close look at Central Valley Birds in his popular "Identification Through Specimen Workshop".

Conservation Corner By Joseph Frank

This is the second installment in our Yosemite Area Audubon Society series on global warming. Global warming, ozone depletion, greenhouse gases, drought, coastal flooding all relate to the same phenomena-our planet is getting hotter and life is beginning to suffer from the inability to cope with the change.

Is it just a normal cycle that earth goes through periodically? Its true there are normal cycles of warming and cooling that our planet has historically gone through so why is this anything to be concerned about? Because this is showing itself to be one of the hottest warming cycles in recorded history and shows no sign of letting up. Species of flora and

fauna are already showing signs of weakening and critical habitat for many species is beginning to die off. As glaciers melt in the arctic ice flows are disappearing and polar bears depend on floating ice flows for their food. Rising water levels in coastal areas worldwide are threatening the habitat and food sources of the species that live there (including humans). It keeps on going. Keep in mind that most things in nature are connected. Nothing happens in a vacuum.

What do we know about the causes of global warming? One of the major causes is carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions commonly known as greenhouse gases. The name comes from the greenhouse

effect the earth provides by its atmosphere keeping heat in. Just like a greenhouse. The heat is generated by the burning of fossil fuels (predominately petroleum and coal-carbon) which produce carbon dioxide in our atmosphere. This gas is being trapped within earth's atmosphere and is causing global heating as it traps the sun's heat within our atmosphere and does not permit normal cooling. It's the same thing that makes a greenhouse grow vegetables in the winter time - the greenhouse traps heat and provides a growing atmosphere for the vegetables. . Except a greenhouse normally has a "venting system" to preclude the heat getting too hot. Earth no longer has sufficient venting due to the CO2 that



NASA Earth

Yosemite Area Audubon Officers 2007- 08

PRESIDENT	Kris Randal
SECRETARY	Betty Boykin
TREASURER	Laura Lee
PROGRAMS	Len McKenzie
CONSERVATION	Joe Frank
TRIPS	Lowell Young
HOSPITALITY	Sharon Dickinson
MEMBERSHIP	Shirley Schmelzer
NEWSLETTER	Joe Frank

Membership Chairperson

Shirley Schmelzer
4512 Varian Road
Mariposa, CA 95338

Check our website

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

Calendar

January

January 10th 2008 (Thursday)

Dinner 5:00 p.m The Happy Burger Highway 140 in Mariposa

Program 7:00 p.m. Katharina Ullman

California Pollinator Conservation Coordinator for the Xerces Society will present on local bees and their tremendous contribution to our natural and farm habitat. Call (209) 742-5579 for more information

January 19, 2008 (Saturday)

Field Trip Yosemite Lake area. Meet in town at the rest stop by History Museum at 8:00 a.m.

Yosemite Area Audubon Society monthly meetings are held the second Thursday of each month October through May at 7 p.m. Public welcome.

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

Conservation Corner Continued-

has built up being too big a load to permit the normal cooling cycle. Population increases and industrial expansion are big factors in the expansion of fossil fuel burning. Trees and plants help to counter the problems of CO₂ as they exchange CO₂ for oxygen but the buildup is too fast for them to be fully effective especially as policies of deforestation are allowing enormous numbers of trees to be cut in important areas like the Amazon basin.

There are other causes of global warming that are significant. One that we are all too familiar with in the foothills is fire. Remember the greenhouse we all live in? Well, if you add heat from inside the greenhouse it raises the temperature if there is inadequate venting to drain it

off. Forest fires have been more frequent and much more severe in recent years. Southern California has experienced fires in the past two years like none in recent memory. The fire this year in the Lake Tahoe area was large and sustained, requiring major resources from many regional fire departments to extinguish. South America and Indonesia have seen large scale fires used to clear land and in some cases these fires have lasted for months causing major air pollution as well as the resultant warming effects. Africa has experienced major deforestation due to trees being cleared and burned for charcoal for cooking and heat.

Drought is more frequent, and made more intense, as a result of the greenhouse effect. Fires contribute to this vicious cycle of global warming >dry weather>dry vegetation>more intense fires>more warming.

Global warming's effect in reducing rainfall is a major contributing factor in drought, exacerbating these cycles. Interesting then that floods are more widespread and severe during these times when drought is such a major problem. In nature everything is connected!

So is there anything we as individuals can do about it? Yes. We'll discuss some ideas in our next newsletter.

Joe
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"It is a wholesome and necessary thing for us to turn again to the earth and in the contemplation of her beauties to know of wonder and humility."
-- Rachel Carson