

The Foothill Quail

Yosemite Area Audubon



Living Green on a Blue Planet Contributed by Kris Randal



During the Thanksgiving holiday weekend, I visited my family down in Southern California and engaged in birding and strolling along a favorite beach in Malibu. Just like the sanderlings that chase the ebbing and rising tides for morsels of seafood hidden beneath the water's edge, I searched the surf line for scatterings of sea-shell treasures. But to my dismay, I collected mostly plastic bottle caps, bags, toys, fishing line and other plastic trash strewn amongst the seaweed. Unfortunately, many of these items end up killing thousands of birds and other oceanic wildlife when they mistake plastic objects for food or become entangled in fishing line or nets.

A few days later, while enjoying a large diversity of sea birds near the ocean at Marina del Rey, I was disheartened to discover

hundreds of plastic bags floating like jellyfish—and often mistaken for jellyfish by hungry sea turtles and sea birds—drifting out to sea from the harbor channel. I felt sad, angry and helpless, so I called the Los Angeles Audubon Society and the Friends of the Ballona Wetlands to inquire about this plastic pollution problem. Both organizations informed me about the educational programs they regularly offer to the public and schools and were gratified that I was concerned. We discussed the possibility of broadening public awareness of the need to protect our oceans by involving not only the Los Angeles Basin population, but also the Sierra Nevada foothills communities in the annual Coastal Cleanup Day, when we would remove trash from our local waterways and roadsides. After all, we live just upstream from the oceans, and littering adversely impacts all life everywhere. Interestingly enough, President Obama recently asked all Americans to mark Martin Luther King, Jr. Day as a day of service to our communities. A number of Mariposa residents spent part of that morning picking up trash in the downtown area, an activity many

found rewarding. As individuals, we sometimes feel that we don't have the power to make a difference, but each one of us can have a positive impact by "living green," starting in our own backyards. Here are some things you can do:

- Reduce your use of pesticides and herbicides (typically, like plastic, they are mostly petroleum-based products) by planting a native plant garden. Acclimated to the local climate and soils, native vegetation suffers less from pests and disease than introduced garden plants. Native vegetation also enhances wildlife habitat by providing food, shelter and nesting sites. By using local native plants, we not only conserve water and support native pollinators, but we also help sustain wildlife populations such as birds—a great way to feed birds on your land naturally

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Kris Randal

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Did you know?

Pennies for the Planet, a new nationwide Audubon fundraising campaign, will tap into the amazing power of kids to help critical conservation projects. To learn more, read the press release or visit www.penniesfortheplanet.org.

Living Green on a Blue Planet

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- **Recycle and compost.** Large natural areas are continually being converted to landfills that soon overflow with yard debris, kitchen wastes and excess product materials that we could be recycling. Paper, cardboard, plastics, aluminum foil, cans, glass containers, etc., can all be recycled and reused. Instead of taking yard debris to the landfills, or creating air pollution by burning piles of leaves or brush, we can chip and shred them and add them as a protective mulch to the soil, or add them to the compost bin. Most non-animal food waste, as well as leaves and shredded woody materials from our yards, can be converted into natural fertilizers and compost for our gardens. In short, recycling and composting reduce damaging impacts on natural resources, including bird habitats.
- **Reduce and reuse** by taking your own cloth bags to the market and other businesses where you shop. At the market checkout line, when you are asked whether you would prefer paper or plastic, you can say, "Neither," and hand over your cloth bags instead. You will reduce environmental

pollution by not using plastic bags, which are petroleum-based, and help save trees and habitats by eschewing paper. If you need plastic bags to hold small vegetable or fruit items, then put them into your cloth bags to reuse again and again. Most markets will give you financial credit for each cloth bag you bring to the store. It's a win-win for you and the environment!

- **Stop purchasing plastic bottled water** and carry your own water in a stainless steel container. Sales of individual water bottles became the rage when the promise of spring or pure water was advertised. However, the Natural Resources Defense Council has stated that the "bottled water regulations are inadequate to assure consumers of either purity or safety." The major problem, according to the Container Recycling Institute, is that most people don't bother to recycle the plastic bottles, and 8

- **Get your favorite organizations, businesses or neighborhood to participate in roadside litter cleanup days.** If possible, make a list of the types of rubbish collected and note any wildlife fatalities due to encounters with trash so that problematic litter can be addressed in newspaper articles and at schools.

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

John Muir

These are just a few of the many positive steps we can take to make a difference in protecting the environment and serving our communities. Education is the key to changing behaviors, and you can set the example and constantly educate others by carrying cloth shopping bags and metal water containers, growing native plants on your property, etc.

"Wilderness is not a luxury but a necessity of the human spirit"

Edward Abbey

Although each of these actions may seem small, incorporating them into your daily activities will aim you in the right direction toward living green. Be assured that over time, our green choices collectively will benefit all life on this precious blue planet. **Live green!**

Bird Walk Results

YOSEMITE LAKE TRIP 1-17-09

WESTERN GREBE
CLARK'S GREBE
PIED-BILLED GREBE
EARED GREBE
AM WHITE PELICAN
DOUBLE-CREASTED
CORMORANT
SNOWY EGRET
GREAT EGRET
GREAT BLUE HERON

CANADA GOOSE
CACKLING GOOSE
ROSS'S GOOSE
GR WHITE-FRONTED
GOOSE
AMERICAN COOT
CALIFORNIA GULL
TURKEY VULTURE
RED-SHOULDERED HAWK
RED-TAILED HAWK
GOLDEN EAGLE

BALD EAGLE
OSPREY
AMERICAN KESTREL
SORA
GR YELLOW LEGS
FLICKER
NUTTALL'S WOODPECKER
BLACK PHOEBE
TREE SWALLOW
VIOLET-GREEN SWALLOW
SCRUB JAY

BREWERS SPARROW
YELLOW-BILLED MAGPIE
AMERICAN CROW
COMMON RAVENRUBY-
CROWNED KINGLET
LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE
EUROPEAN STARLING
SAVANNAH SPARROWWESTERN
MEADOWLARK
RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD
BREWER'S SPARROW

Birds of prey, or raptors, have long awed and inspired people, evoking a sense of wonder and admiration for their grace, strength, speed, independence and hunting prowess. The regal bearing of the bald eagle so impressed our founding fathers that they chose it as our country's national symbol. And the peregrine falcon's combination of those traits made it a prized captive, beginning centuries ago, for falconry, the so-called "sport of kings."

Unfortunately, some of those traits have also made raptors vulnerable to human misunderstanding and threats posed by human activities. Perched atop the food chain, birds of prey are indicators of ecosystem health, and public understanding of their important role as predators is crucial to assure their survival and protection of their habitats.

An impressive array of these conspicuous, charismatic birds spends the winter in California's Central Valley and lower foothills. Populations of common resident species such as red-tailed hawks, American kestrels and northern harriers swell during winter and are obvious and abundant almost everywhere. Scarcer species such as ferruginous hawks, rough-legged hawks, prairie falcons, merlins and golden eagles are scattered throughout this area in smaller numbers. In certain areas, it is not uncommon to see 12-15 raptor species in a single day. About twice a month in the winter of 2007-08, volunteers drove 19 prescribed routes in the Central Valley from Shasta County in the north to Kings County in the south, including one route in southwestern Mariposa County and eastern Merced County, to survey raptors. Over the course of three months, 66 "raptor runs" and more than 2000 miles, participants observed more than 6,000 individual raptors. Relying on the concept of citizen science, the project is currently in the middle of its second season. Its main goals are to sample raptor diversity and abundance throughout this bioregion and document the habitats where birds are occurring.

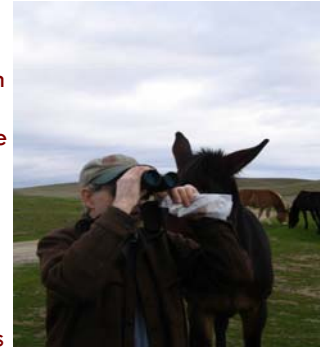
The coordinator of the survey, biologist Zach Smith, will describe the project, the data-collection methods and some results from last winter in a slide program, "In Search of Winter Raptors," Thursday, February 12, beginning at 7:00 p.m. The presentation will illustrate the raptors found in

the Central Valley in winter, and Smith will discuss the project's timeliness, relevance and importance. The program, sponsored by the Yosemite Area Audubon Society, will be held at the Mariposa Methodist Church parish hall on 6th Street between Highway 140 and Bullion Street in downtown Mariposa. Having grown up in San Diego, Smith attended the University of California at Davis where he was introduced to the world of science, particularly raptors. After graduation, he embarked on a "life of vagrancy" as a free-lance field biologist, devoting much of his time to learning about raptor biology. A job as a hawk counter with Hawkwatch International led to an obsession with raptor migration. An internship the following year with the Golden Gate Raptor Observatory in the Bay Area honed his identification and trapping skills.

He has since spent multiple seasons coordinating hawk counts at Veracruz, Derby Hill, Smith Point and Kiptopeke State Park and trapping raptors at Cape May and Kiptopeke. Falcon research expeditions have taken him to Africa, Spain and Chile. He has also studied spotted owls in northern and southern California, monitored snowy plovers in eastern California, banded and monitored songbirds at several California sites and trapped golden eagles on the Channel Islands. For the past couple of years, Smith has been involved in avian and bat carcass surveys at wind energy facilities in San Diego and northern California. He lives in Davis with his wife, Elizabeth, and continues to work as a contract biologist at the Montezuma Hills Wind Resource Area in Solano County and monitors the local burrowing owl population for the California Department of Fish and Game.

Like all Audubon programs, Smith's presentation is open and free to the public, although donations to defray program costs and to support Audubon's local activities are welcome. Refreshments will be available. Call (209) 742-5579 for additional information about the program.

Members of YAAS recently participate in winter Raptor Runs Len and Joe with unexpected team members



Hey, quit hogging the binos!



Where is my sandwich?



Red Tail Hawk-
photo by
Sauer

Conservation Corner By Joseph Frank

What is Project FeederWatch?

<http://www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw/>

Project FeederWatch is operated by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Bird Studies Canada.

Project FeederWatch is a winter-long survey of birds that visit feeders at backyards, nature centers, community areas, and other locales in North America. FeederWatchers periodically count the birds they see at their feeders from November through early April and send their counts to Project FeederWatch. FeederWatch data help scientists track broad scale movements of winter bird populations and long-term trends in bird distribution and abundance.

Anyone with an interest in birds may participate in this project! FeederWatch is conducted by people of all skill levels and backgrounds, including children, families, individuals, classrooms, retired persons, youth groups, nature centers, and bird clubs.

What will I do? Count birds that appear in your count site because of something that you have provided (plantings, food, or water). For each species, you will report only the highest number of individuals that you see *in view at one time*. By following this procedure, you are certain to avoid counting the same bird more than once. You will report your bird counts to scientists at the Lab of Ornithology either over our web site or on paper data forms. Learn more about how to [count birds](#) for FeederWatch in the [instructions section](#) of their web site.

Yosemite Area Audubon Society actively supports Operation Feederwatch!

Plumage variations: Albinism or Leucism?

Among the most difficult birds to identify are the birds that have abnormal plumage. They aren't in any field guides, and sometimes the unusual plumage removes key field marks. The most common plumage abnormality reported by FeederWatch participants involves patches of white feathers in unexpected places. There has been some disagreement in the scientific community about what exactly to call birds with white spots. Solid white birds with pink eyes everyone agrees are albinistic, and pale birds with normally colored but pale plumage everyone agrees are leucistic. But birds with white patches intermingled with normal plumage have been described with a variety of terms. Albinism is a genetic mutation that prevents the production of melanin in the body. Leucism is a genetic mutation that prevents melanin from being deposited normally on feathers. Since the white patches on birds have no melanin, birds with these patches have been said to have partial or imperfect albinism.

More recently, however, scientists are clarifying the definitions and pointing out that since birds with white patches do have melanin in the body, therefore the white patches are caused by a defect preventing normal deposition of the melanin. And since leucism is a deposition problem, it makes sense that birds with white patches would be leucistic. Consequently leucism comes in two main varieties — paleness, an equal reduction of melanin in all feathers; and pied, an absence of melanin in some feathers creating white patches. Interestingly, albinism only applies to an absence of melanin. Since some colors come from other pigments, such as carotenoids, it is possible for a bird to be albinistic and still have color. Leucism, on the other hand, applies to all pigments.

It is also possible for a bird to be completely white and still have melanin in the body. In this case the bird would be considered leucistic and would have dark eyes because the mutation only applies to depositing melanin in the feathers. Albinistic birds have pink eyes because without melanin in the body, the only color in the eyes comes from the blood vessels behind the eyes. Leucism is rare in birds, and albinism is extremely rare. From 2000-2006, Project FeederWatch participants reported less than 1000 leucistic birds. Given that participants report about 5.5 million birds each season, the percentage of leucistic birds is very, very small. Typically birds with abnormally white feathers do not survive long because they are so much more visible to predators. Those that do survive may have trouble attracting a mate. Consequently, the mutated genes that cause albinism and leucism are less likely to be passed on to a new generation. If you are ever fortunate enough to see one of these oddly plumaged birds, consider yourself lucky! And if your sighting occurs during the FeederWatch season, report the bird using an Unusual Bird Form online, or send a note to Operation Feederwatch at Cornell Lab of Ornithology with your paper data forms at the end of the season.



Leucistic pale Northern Mockingbird by Clayton Gascoigne, Hendersonville, Tennessee

**Yosemite Area Audubon Officers
2007- 08**

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Shirley Schmelzer
4512 Varian Road
Mariposa, CA 95338

Check our website

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

Calendar

February

February 12, 2008 (Thursday)

Pot Luck: Call Kris or Len for directions (209) 742-5579

Program 7:00 p.m. Davis biologist Zach Smith will present a slide program, "In Search of Winter Raptors," about the Central Valley winter raptor survey
7:00 p.m. at the Mariposa Methodist Church parish hall on 6th St. between Hwy. 140 and Bullion St. Public invited, free, refreshments. Call (209) 742-5579 for more information.

February 21, 2008 (Saturday)

Merced National Wildlife Refuge

Field Trip Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the Mariposa Rest Area adjacent to the history center on Hwy. 140 to carpool. Suitable for beginners, public welcome, free. Dress warmly and bring binoculars, field guides, insect repellent, lunch and beverages
Call (209) 742-5579 or (209) 966-2547 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.

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

So today, we dumped another 70 million tons of global-warming pollution into the thin shell of atmosphere surrounding our planet, as if it were an open sewer. And tomorrow, we will dump a slightly larger amount, with the cumulative concentrations now trapping more and more heat from the sun. As a result, the earth has a fever. And the fever is rising. The experts have told us it is not a passing affliction that will heal by itself. We asked for a second opinion. And a third. And a fourth. And the consistent conclusion, restated with increasing alarm, is that something basic is wrong. We are what is wrong, and we must make it right.

-Al Gore, *Nobel Peace Prize Acceptance Speech*,
Oslo, Norway, 10 Dec 2007