

The Foothill Quail

Yosemite Area Audubon Society



We Have a Lot of Gall!

Contributed by Kris Randal, President YAAS

September 2009

“Overall, the variety of animals in blue oak savanna and woodland is higher than in adjacent grasslands or coniferous forests.” *Oaks of California*

“Oak woodlands also are among the most biological diverse communities in the state, supporting 5,000 species of insects, more than 330 species of amphibians, reptiles, birds and mammals, and several thousand plant species.” *California Wildlife Conservation Challenges*

Did you know that you live in one of the most biologically diverse habitats in California? Oaks serve as an ecological keystone by supporting a multitude of wildlife that depend upon it for food, shelter and nesting sites. If you have oaks, you are sharing your land with a diverse food web harboring a vast array of important wildlife and plant species that are integral to the continuing health of the ecosystem.

This fall is the perfect time for you to notice some of that diversity by searching for a common occurrence amongst oaks known as oak gall formations.

Galls are harmless swellings or oddly shaped “growths” affecting oak leaves, twigs and branches. Most of these galls are the product of a tiny insect—smaller than a fruit fly—called a **cynipid wasp**, which lays an egg within the top epidermal layer of a leaf bud, leaf or bark. The oak tissue responds to the hatched, feeding larva by developing growing cells—like benign tumors—that create a characteristic shape and color. Over time, the larva will eventually stop feeding and pupate. The resulting adult female wasp will chew her way towards the surface of the gall, waiting for the proper weather conditions before exiting the gall. At this point, it is non-feeding and usually has only a week to repeat the cycle, by laying eggs on appropriate oaks before it is eaten by predators or dies naturally.

In California more than 200 different kinds of galls form on oak species.

More than 85% of all plant galls occur on oaks, with blue oaks (*Quercus douglasii*) supporting the majority of gall diversity. Galls vary in form, mimicking spiny urchins, mushrooms, triangular dunce caps, buttons, cones, balls, fruit and other odd

shapes, with textures that range from warty, hairy, bumpy, with bristles, to smooth. One of the largest and most noticeable is a round-shaped gall. The California gall wasp induces the growth of “oak apples,” most commonly observed on Oregon and valley oaks, which erupt out of the sides of branches like green or red spherical fruits. Over time the galls grow in size and in the fall change to a tan color. If infected by a sooty mold, they become black and eventually—within three or more years—they fall off the tree. Other vertebrates usually share the galls as a food source, or prey on the cynipid wasp larvae or other predators. Sometimes these other gall inhabitants may exist for several years within the galls, long after the adult wasps have pupated and vacated the galls. Birds such as sapsuckers are attracted to this diverse array of insect life and will peck holes deep within a gall’s core to extract invertebrates.

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“We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect.”

Aldo Leopold

We Have a Lot of Gall!

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Galls, therefore, sustain the vast and diverse food webs of oak woodlands as birds, mice and other animals also feed on galls and their inhabitants.

One day I received a call from a friend who owns a bed and breakfast in the Sierra foothills. She reported to me that western bluebirds were busily feasting on the "red berries" that were growing on the blue oaks on her property. When I asked her if she meant that western scrub-jays were feeding on the acorns, she corrected me and said she knew the difference between bluebirds and jays and berries and acorns. After some discussion, we finally realized that the bluebirds were actually consuming the protein-rich larvae of the cynipid wasps embedded within pink-colored, spiny urchin galls that decorate the undersides of oak leaves. Since she knew nothing of galls and I had never witnessed bluebirds consuming insect life within galls, we both learned something new and were happily enlightened. Such is nature, with all of its lessons waiting to be discovered!

I hope you'll be inspired to venture forth amongst your oaks to experience discoveries of your own and celebrate the diversity of life that surrounds all of us fortunate enough to live in the Sierra foothills. We do have a lot of gall, don't we!



Mariposa Agri-Nature Trail's "Weekend in the Country."

If you're interested in learning more about the ecology and care of oak trees, be sure to attend Kris Randal's slide presentation, "Oak Tree Care," during the biannual Mariposa Agri-Nature Trail's "Weekend in the Country." The program will be held at McCay Hall in Cathey's Valley on Sunday, September 27, at 2:00 p.m. On both Saturday and Sunday of that weekend, Len McKenzie, representing Yosemite Area Audubon, will offer birding walks from 9:00-10:30 a.m. at JJ's Breads and Produce located at 6505 Hwy. 49 N. Tickets valid for the entire weekend and a brochure are available in advance at the Mariposa County Visitors Center or at your first stop on the tour. (Kris Randal)

Yosemite Area Audubon Society Field trips 2009 to 2010

September 26 and 27, 2009: Luke Cole Fund Raiser which will cover all of Mariposa County and the Tioga Pass area. Call (209) 966-2574 for more info.

October 17, 2009: Mariposa Creek from Best Western to Fair Grounds. This trip will be a beginners field trip. Meet at Mariposa Art Park in Mariposa at 9:00 a.m.

November 21, 2009: Hornitos Rd. to Merced Falls Reservoir (Mc Swain Forebay). Meet in town at the rest stop by History Museum at 8:00 a.m.

December 13, 2009? (date to be confirmed) Yosemite Christmas Bird Count and the Groveland Christmas Bird Count

January 16, 2010: Lake Yosemite and UC Merced area. Meet in town at the rest stop by History Museum at 8:00 a.m.

February 20, 2010: Merced Wild Life Refuge. Meet in town at the rest stop by History Museum at 8:00 a.m.

March 20, 2010: White Rock Road to its end and home via Ben Hur Rd. Meet at the Fairgrounds at 8:00 a.m.

April 17, 2010: Wawona/Bass Lake area. Mariposa people meet at Tip Top Rd. and Hwy. 49 at 8: a.m.

They will meet the Madera people at Sears store parking lot in Oakhurst at 8:45 a.m.

May 15, 2010: Foresta and Big Meadows. Meet at the Midpines Community Center at 8:00 a.m.

Guidelines for all Field Trips:

1. Rain will cancel the trip.
2. Always bring a lunch and drink.
3. The weather can and often changes during our trips, so be prepared for cold or hot weather.
4. Fewer vehicles is always best. Offer the driver some gas money.
5. If you don't have a pair of binoculars, come anyway. We always has an extra pair that you can use.
6. If you have walkie-talkies, please bring them.

Call (209) 966-2547 or (209) 742-5579 for more information.

Bird Walk Results

Birds seen on Curlew Survey 8-7-09

Loggerhead Shrike
Kildeer
Turkey Vulture
Raven
Red-tailed Hawk
American Crow
Red Shouldered Hawk
Mourning Dove
Northern Harrier
Eurasian Collard Dove

Prairie Falcon
Coot,
American Kestrel
Pied-billed Grebe
Meadow Lark
Mockingbird
House Finch
Violet-green Swallow
Savannah Sparrow
Cliff Swallow

Western Kingbird
Burrowing Owl
Cassin's Finch
Black Phoebe
Western Tanager
Rock Dove

Mammals: Coyote, rabbit, squirrel

Observers:
Lowell, Paul, Sue, Jullie,
Joe

Audubon Program for October 'Protecting our Birds' will feature Jordan Wellwood
Central Valley & Sierra Nevada Conservation Coordinator, Audubon California

Poaching in California
Article by Jordan Wellwood



California is experiencing an increase in poaching that led officials to call 2008 'The Year of Extreme Poaching.' Between 2003 and 2007 the number of violations more than doubled, and the rise in extreme poaching (excessive killing of fish and wildlife or repeat offenses) matched that pace. This upswing of violence has been hardest on our waterfowl, including sensitive species of ducks and geese.

Our force of courageous and dedicated fish and game wardens cannot be held responsible for this poaching epidemic. In 2008, California had fewer than 200 active-duty fish and game wardens patrolling the state's 100 million acres. This is the lowest of any state in the nation at one per 185,000 residents, and these men and women work tirelessly to protect our natural resources.

Nor can we blame the hunting community, which has a long tradition of stewardship and conservation in California. Hunters observe bag limits to protect sustainable wildlife populations, support the protection of critical habitat, and pay taxes on ammunition and licenses that support conservation and regulation of their sport.

California's weak poaching laws and the lack of adequate law enforcement are the real causes of the poaching epidemic. Poaching is only ever considered a misdemeanor under state law, and once a hunter has paid his penalty he is once again eligible to receive a hunting license and return to poach again. San Francisco District Attorney Kamala Harris claims that poachers simply build the fines into the cost of doing business.

Assembly Bill 708, authored by Assembly-member Jared Huffman (D-San Rafael),

would take important strides toward ending this epidemic by enacting real deterrents to poachers, especially repeat offenders. It would increase fines and impose mandatory minimum fines so that violators cannot be let off the hook. Additional amendments to the bill will also better incentivize local prosecutions to make sure that violators get what they deserve.

What you can do to help:

Go to www.ca.audubon.org and sign up to receive our action alerts, so that you can participate in this and other important wildlife protection legislation.

Jordan Wellwood (jwellwood@audubon.org)
Reprint of article courtesy of CA Audubon

Late breaking news....

Anti-poaching bill passes State Senate
September 1st, 2009

The anti-poaching bill, Assembly Bill 708, just passed the State Senate by a 35-0 vote. It now moves on to the Governor's desk.

Great news and a victory for CA Audubon and other like minded environmentalists.

Central Valley Birding Symposium

It's party time again! The 13th Annual Central Valley Birding Symposium will be held Nov.19-22 in Stockton, CA., at the Hilton Stockton.

Attend workshops with raptor expert Bill Clark, birding pros Jon Dunn and Joe Morlan, as well as other informative folks. Our evening programs include Murrelet Halterman on Yellow-billed Cuckoos and Stephen Shunk on "The Magic of Birding".

We have drawing and digiscoping workshops, our always popular and informative ID Panel with guest experts, programs for beginning birders, and more. The many Field Trips frequently turn up chasable goodies. The Birder's Market is full of artists and vendors with a wonderful selection of bird and nature related items

For more info, check the website at www.cvbs.org , or contact Frances Oliver at hummer52@sbcglobal.net or (209) 369-2010.

The economy may be down, but the birds are still here to lift you up with their wings. Come and enjoy them with us. See you there!

Cheri Pillsbury
Central Valley Birding Symposium

The well rising without sound,
the spring on a hillside,
the plowshare brimming
through the deep ground
everywhere in the field
—

The sharp swallows in
their swerve
flaring and hesitating
hunting for the final curve
coming closer and closer
—

The swallow heart from
wing beat to wing beat
counseling decision, deci-
sion:
thunderous examples. I
place my feet
with care in such a world.

'The Well Rising'
by William Stafford

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Haiku.....

Birds chirping a lot

People singing all the
time

Birds are going south

Conservation Corner *By Joseph Frank*

Code of Birding Ethics

Reprinted with permission "American Birding Association". The ABA has developed and actively promotes this code. For further info visit <http://www.aba.org>

1. Promote the welfare of birds and their environment.

1(a) Support the protection of important bird habitat.

1(b) To avoid stressing birds or exposing them to danger, exercise restraint and caution during observation, photography, sound recording, or filming. Limit the use of recordings and other methods of attracting birds, and never use such methods in heavily birded areas, or for attracting any species that is Threatened, Endangered, or of Special Concern, or is rare in your local area. Keep well back from nests and nesting colonies, roosts, display areas, and important feeding sites. In such sensitive areas, if there is a need for extended observation, photography, filming, or recording, try to use a blind or hide, and take advantage of natural cover. Use artificial light sparingly for filming or photography, especially for close-ups.

1(c) Before advertising the presence of a rare bird, evaluate the potential for disturbance to the bird, its surroundings, and other people in the area, and proceed only if access can be controlled, disturbance minimized, and permission has been obtained from private landowners.

The sites of rare nesting birds should be divulged only to the proper conservation authorities.

1(d) Stay on roads, trails, and paths where they exist; otherwise keep habitat disturbance to a minimum.

2. Respect the law, and the rights of others.

2(a) Do not enter private property without the owner's explicit permission.

2(b) Follow all laws, rules, and regulations governing use of roads and public areas, both at home and abroad.

2(c) Practice common courtesy in contacts with other people. Your exemplary behavior will generate goodwill with birders and non-birders alike.

3. Ensure that feeders, nest structures, and other artificial bird environments are safe.

3(a) Keep dispensers, water, and food clean, and free of decay or disease. It is important to feed birds continually during harsh weather.

3(b) Maintain and clean nest structures regularly.

3(c) If you are attracting birds to an area, ensure the birds are not exposed to predation from cats and other domestic animals, or dangers posed by artificial hazards.

4. Group birding, whether organized or impromptu, requires special care.

Each individual in the group, in addition to the obligations spelled out in Items #1 and #2, has responsibilities as a Group Member.

4(a) Respect the interests, rights, and skills of fellow birders, as well as people participating in other legitimate outdoor activities. Freely share your knowledge and experience, except where code 1(c) applies. Be especially helpful to beginning birders.

4(b) If you witness unethical birding behavior, assess the situation, and intervene if you think it prudent. When intervening, inform the person(s) of the inappropriate action, and attempt, within reason, to have it stopped. If the behavior continues, document it, and notify appropriate individuals or organizations.

Group Leader Responsibilities [amateur and professional trips and tours]:

4(c) Be an exemplary ethical role model for the group. Teach through word and example.

4(d) Keep groups to a size that limits impact on the environment, and does not interfere with others using the same area.

4(e) Ensure everyone in the group knows of and practices this code.

4(f) Learn and inform the group of any special circumstances applicable to the areas being visited (e.g. no tape recorders allowed).

4(g) Acknowledge that professional tour companies bear a special responsibility to place the welfare of birds and the benefits of public knowledge ahead of the company's commercial interests. Ideally, leaders should keep track of tour sightings, document unusual occurrences, and submit records to appropriate organizations.

Young birders from the neighborhood around the Audubon Center at Debs Park learn about local birds.



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
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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

October 8, 2009 (Thursday)

October 8 Pot Luck, Mariposa: Kris and Len. Call (209) 742-5579
Program 7:00 p.m.

Jordan Wellwood of California Audubon will be our guest speaker and Protecting California's birds will be her theme. We will meet at 7:00 p.m. at the Mariposa Methodist Church Parish Hall. Public invited, free, refreshments. Call (209) 742-5579 for more information.

November 12, 2009 (Thursday)

November 12 Potluck, Oakhurst: Joe and Jeanne Frank call (559) 683-5398

Program 7:00 p.m. To be announced

Field Trips

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Luke Cole Fund Raiser which will cover all of Mariposa County and the Tioga Pass area

October 17, 2009: Mariposa Creek from Best Western to Fair Grounds. This trip will be a beginners field trip. Meet at Mariposa Art Park in Mariposa at 9:00 a.m.

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.

If you are thinking of leaving a legacy to local conservation of birds and their habitat, consider discussing a bequest to Yosemite Area Audubon Society with your attorney or financial advisor in your next planned giving discussion. For more details contact a YAAS Director.