



# LEAVES

Madrone Audubon Society, Inc., Post Office Box 1911, Santa Rosa, California 95402

VOLUME 56 February/March 2023 Number 4

## West Sonoma County 2022 Christmas Bird Count

by Dr. Stacy Li with Team Leaders

The 56th West Sonoma County Christmas Bird Count occurred on New Year's Day 2023. The North Coast was pummeled by the first wave of an atmospheric river storm series the week prior to the count. Consequently, the Russian River flow was near bankfull with surface velocities in the midchannel exceeding 3.5 feet per second, driving the water birds to the river's edge where bank friction reduced the current or inducing them to seek more placid environments. Estero Americano was flooded, dispersing the water birds and making them more difficult to locate. The weather was foggy and cold (low 40s F) in the early morning, but cleared and warmed to the 60s by midday. Surprise! Few birds were seen despite the warm weather. Wind was generally mild from the northwest, but gusty along the coast. There were 102 participants in the count, identifying 168 species (Seven fewer than last year) and 26,085 individuals (last year, we saw a whopping 133,691 due to catching a massive murre migration). 31 species were observed only in one area; I have labeled these as "unique." In addition, two unidentified species were counted as species because we saw one of them. In our situation, they were dowitcher sp. and murrelet sp.



Savannah Sparrow Courtesy of Kaitlin Magoon

**Area 1 - Jonive Road** - Colin Talcroft (team leader), Jeff Johnstone, Terry Loveton, Jeff Loe, Mark Newhouser, Joan McDonald, Shannon Drew and Genevieve Tarino birded Jonive Road. 53 species were seen, three less than last year. We saw the only Wilson's Snipe on the count.

**Area 2 - Freestone** - A beautiful day enjoyed by our 5 team members: Ken Wilson and Becky Olsen (team leaders), Mary Jo Yung, Denise Herzberg and Mookie Fudemberg. This is a new territory for Becky and me with all new team members, Denise, Mookie and Mary Jo. The territory reaches from Freestone in the south to Monte Rio in the north, for the most-part following  
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**GENERAL MEETING**

*Monday, February 20, 2023, 6:30-8:00 p.m.*


**The Aztec Fascination with Birds**  
Presented by Gene Hunn

Gene Hunn, President of Redwood Region Ornithological Society (RROS), has a book in press on this fascinating topic. We will learn about the role of a Franciscan missionary, Fray Bernardino de Sahagún (who was determined to convert the Aztec people to Christianity). This friar, also a scholar, believed true "conversion" required perfect communication. He learned the Aztec language, Náhuatl. Sahagún organized an ethnographic project which, after a 50-year effort, produced a massive, hand-written and illustrated encyclopedia of all things Aztec, including a large volume describing "Earthly Things." This book included a chapter on "all the birds." Sahagún's manuscript was lost for 300 years, then rediscovered in Florence, Italy. We now have the original Náhuatl text, with Spanish and English translations. A previous attempt to identify the 130+ birds named and described in the bird chapter was clearly wide-of-the-mark. Gene's book updates identifications with the help of Howell and Webb's Mexican field guide.

*Eugene ("Gene") Hunn: is an avid birder and a cultural anthropologist, retired. His specialty was (is) "ethnobiology," the comparative study of natural history, that is, how people wherever (and whenever) they may live appreciate animals, plants, and fungi. Gene has conducted research with Mayan people in Chiapas, Mexico (1972), and Zapotec-speakers in Oaxaca, Mexico (1996...), as well as pursuing long-term studies with Native American communities in the Pacific Northwest (since 1976) and Alaska.*

**Zoom Link**  
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88650507354?pwd=U2d1WG9FYVkwakhWbk9LWEtdjhjQT09>  
Or call: **1-669-900-9128** or **1-669-444-9171**

**Meeting ID:** 886 5050 7354  
**Passcode:** 566730





### CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

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Bohemian Highway. We began the day searching along Dutch Bill Creek for the American Dipper that had been seen and reported twice before the count day. Despite repeated failed attempts, we did find our only **Kingfisher** and **Varied Thrush** as a result of these searches. Our species count resulted in 45, about what was expected, and 5 species more than last year. Nothing unexpected was seen except perhaps a lone **Double-crested Cormorant** winging south over the road. We were grateful to all the property owners along the route who gave us permission to count on their properties, one of whom scattered a large amount of seed amongst which we found our only **Fox, Song and White-throated Sparrows** and attendant **Cooper's Hawk** of the day. On another property in the hills close to Freestone, the owner, Tony, escorted us through many habitats and showed us our highest bird diversity of the day, which provided a couple of lifers for one member of the group, a single **Red-breasted Sapsucker** and a small flock of **Pygmy Nuthatches**. Looking forward to increasing the numbers next year.

**Area 3 - Valley Ford** - In Area 3, Kaitlin Magoon (team leader), Diane Magoon, Scott Campbell, Steve Corey, Greg Jacobs, Kathi Jacobs, and Lisa Vekony tallied 63 species on New Year's Day and two more on the rainy Monday that followed. On January 1, our day began along Bodega Highway near Freestone and in a wooded area south of Salmon Creek. It was a good morning for woodpeckers (Acorn; Downy; Hairy; Nuttall's) and small songbirds, including Pygmy Nuthatches, a Townsend



Pygmy Nuthatch Courtesy of Kaitlin Magoon

Warbler, and a quartet of Brown Creepers foraging together. Thanks to the sharp hearing of Liza Vekony and Scott Campbell, we found several species we missed the previous year: Hermit Thrush; Bewick's Wren; White-breasted Nuthatch; and Hutton's Vireo. The roads between Freestone, Bodega, and Valley Ford are popular hang-outs for raptors, and we had hoped to see them out enjoying the sunshine as much as we were. However, most of our Buteo sightings came late and were concentrated south of the Estero Americano, where nearly a dozen Red-tailed Hawks could be seen hovering over the hills. Early in the day, a Ferruginous-Hawk-colored splotch caught our attention in a distant field, but this soon turned out to be a cleverly disguised farm cat. (We consoled ourselves by watching a coyote that Steve Corey had spotted napping in the sun across from the Watson School.) Further along Bodega Highway is a farm pond that reliably attracts an assortment of ducks to our count area. This year, the usual Buffleheads and Mallards were joined by a

### GENERAL MEETING

Monday, March 20, 2023

#### Birds of Colombia

Presented by Jim Thomason

6:30-8:00 p.m.

Fellowship Room, United Methodist Church  
1551 Montgomery Dr., Santa Rosa

Colombia is one of the most biodiverse countries in the world. Located in equatorial South America, more bird species (1,950+) have been recorded there than in any other country. At least 84 species are endemic to Colombia and many more exist only in Colombia and surrounding countries. With access to the Pacific Ocean, the Caribbean, the Andes, jungles and plains, cosmopolitan cities and many years of history, Colombia has much to offer for visitors.



Bronzy Inca  
Courtesy of Jim Thomason

*Jim Thomason has been involved in photography for more than 60 years. He and his partner, Linda, were introduced to birding in 1999 during a trip to Venezuela and have made numerous wildlife and birding trips around the world since then. Their 4th trip to Colombia in February-March 2022, was focused on birds of Southwestern Colombia – a prime area for bird watching.*

flock of Ruddy Ducks and four lovely Canvasbacks. At the edge of the pond, we saw a handful of Least Sandpiper and Killdeer, and Greg Jacobs scoped out the count circle's only Green-winged Teal. As our team continued on to Valley Ford, we stopped along the way to investigate fields, barns, and thickets of willow and bramble. Blackbirds were in good supply, but we counted about half our expected number of White-crowned and Golden-crowned Sparrows. The Valley Ford wetland – which had been dry the previous weekend - was flooded, but the heavy rains had come too late to bring in the variety of shorebirds and wading birds we sometimes get. Our team was still able to add Short-billed Gulls, American Wigeon, Western Meadowlarks, Tree Swallows, Song and Savannah Sparrows, and a lone Red Phalarope to our species count. The drive back to Valley Ford also gave us our Count Day raptor highlight - a White-tailed Kite spotted lurking on a wire by several team members. Another five Pygmy Nuthatches provided us with some entertainment during our late lunch in Bodega, but the rest of the afternoon was quiet, with our main species being more Western Bluebirds and American Robins. We were fortunate this year to have an excellent team of eight, which also included Janet Corey, Kathi Jacobs, and our recorder, Diane Magoon. In keeping with our trend of late-showing raptors, Steve has reported that he and his cousin, Janet, caught sight of a Bald Eagle (outside our area) as they were heading back via Sebastopol at the end of

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## CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

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the day, while on the following day I was treated to the sight of a very soggy-looking Merlin trying (and failing) to catch blackbirds near the Valley Ford wetland. Unique species in this area were Green-winged Teal and Canvasback.

**Area 4 - Joy Road** - We had only 3 counters this year, including John Coddling (team leader), John's daughter, Jordan Coddling, and long-time team member Bill Baldewicz. Two late cancellations reduced our team size, and John thinks fewer eyes resulted in fewer birds, as the team's final tally was 46 species when we usually end in the low-mid 50's. Bluebirds were noticeably lacking, and we relied on several single counts of fairly common birds in our last hour to get to the 46. With the break in the weather, John had expected the numbers to be higher. What also brought our number down was 3 completely empty agricultural reservoirs where we can usually count on a couple of ducks, mergansers, grebes or herons. Alas, nary a mallard to be found. Highlights were a Wrentit, a Bobcat and a Coyote, all firsts. In the end, a lovely day spent with my zookeeper daughter and a chance to catch up with an old friend.

**Area 5 - Salmon Creek Road** - The Salmon Creek Road area of the West Sonoma County CBC starts in the town of Bodega and covers about 6 miles of roads and many large ranches. A few weeks prior to the count, Sean Jeane (team leader) writes letters to about a dozen local property owners to remind them which day we'll be out and to obtain their permission to be on their properties.



Hutton's Vireo Courtesy of Kaitlin Magoon

Most are very gracious and grant us access to their properties, some of whom are quite large (Ms. Delia Moon's ranch is over 1,000 acres) and have ponds or other interesting features with good birding opportunities.

Occasionally a property owner will join us for part of the day or will stop to say hi to us during the count day. A week or so after the count, I send a list of the birds we found on count day, which they all tell me they really appreciate.

This year we enjoyed having Sean Jeane, Cynthia Fox, Danny Blackmon, Janet Bosshard, Joe Story, Chris Grabill, June Grabill, Andre Morand, Jay Walsh and Wendy Peterson participate (to cover the large area). Most are regulars who have been counting this area before I took it over from Bill Payne back in 2016, with a few others who have been counting with me for some years prior to then. Everyone who participates regularly are excellent birders. Our average species count for the area has been increasing, I believe due to all the experienced eyes and ears helping to count. One of our regulars is Chris Grabill who is an excellent birder with

## BOARD OPENINGS

### Help our Chapter

We currently have volunteer openings for the *Leaves* Editor and also Publicity Chair. If you'd like to help our members and Sonoma County's birds and wildlife, please contact President Susan Kirks for more information. (707) 241-5548, susankirks@sbcglobal.net. The Editor's role includes about 8 hours a month and Publicity Chair includes 1.5 hours every two months. (Our Board meets virtually via Zoom; attending monthly 1.5 hour Board meetings is convenient from home.)

astounding eyesight! He often sees birds high overhead the rest of us won't see until we get the binocs on them. His 9-year-old daughter, June, has joined us a few times the past couple years, and I believe she was only 5 or 6 the first time she came out for the count. She's enthusiastic, takes notes of the birds she sees, and generally can identify most of them already! She adds a definite spark to our group!

This year, we lucked out with a brief break in the weather, which made for a fantastic count day. We had 71 species, a little above our average, particularly good since we missed our normal few ducks and coots even though all the ponds were brimming after the recent rains. (The consensus was the birds had more places to choose from this year...and didn't necessarily elect to stay in our area!) In addition to our normal species, highlights for the day included a pair of Golden Eagles, a very pale Ferruginous Hawk, and a pair of Hooded Mergansers (a first for the Hoodies in this count area – and they were the only ducks).

Looking forward to continuing with this area and the great group of birders who regularly join me. We have all become friends. I particularly look forward to having June join us again in future years, where we'll get to see her growing up and growing in her birding skills! Until next year. Sean's group saw the only Northern Saw-Whet owl in our circle. (Sean Jeane has participated in the CBC for the past 30 years.)

**Area 6A - Estero Lane** - Estero Lane is the land side portion of Area 6. Wow, what a beautiful day for the bird count. Jennifer Michaud (team leader) hopes everyone had a great day with lots of bird finds. Happy New Year's and I hope 2023 is filled with lots of great bird adventures for you all.

Five folks (Jennifer Michaud, Liz Lewis, Celia Chatham, Whitney Mortimer and Shanti Edwards) ventured out to the end of Estero

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Lane to bird on the Sonoma Land Trust property and from our cars on the drive in and out. The SLT property is the only land we have access to in this block. Shanti Edwards with SLT met up with us this year and provided a great overview of the property and land management activities. Shanti and the rest of the SLT staff have been extremely supportive of the bird count and accessing Estero Lane. Madrone Audubon is fortunate to have such a great partnership with this local organization. The Estero Lane property is amazing!



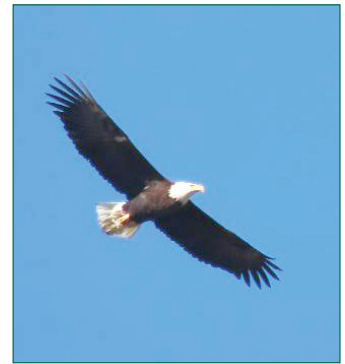
Estero

Courtesy of Jennifer Michaud

The group hiked over grassland, coastal scrub, and along the estuary. To start our day off, we were treated to a beautiful Rough-legged Hawk hanging out in the Monterey Cypress trees just inside the property gate. We had our usual host of characters in the Cypress trees – a few Pygmy Nuthatches, Wrens, Robins, etc. We were treated to several Kestrels, Red-tailed Hawks, and a single, Red-shouldered Hawk early in the day. Lots of Song and Savannah Sparrows in the grasslands, a few Lark Sparrows, but not as many Golden-crowned and White-crowned Sparrows this year. We observed lots of birds in the wetland areas along the northern edge of the property – many Say’s Phoebes, Marsh Wren, Sparrows, a few Yellow Rumps, and Quail. We heard a California Thrasher in the Coyote Brush scrub along the Estero. The bluebirds held out on us until the end of the day, but we were treated to some amazing blue male plumage. We found evidence of American Badger in the upland areas and a fresh deer carcass (the area around the carcass was well-worn and probably a tasty snack for a pack of coyotes). On the drive out, we scored an adult Bald Eagle (that was a real treat). Peter Colasanti birds the Estero via canoe during most years. We didn’t see Peter in the Estero this year, so we added 9 species from the Estero proper to our list so they would not be missed. 46 species and 432 individuals in the Estero block by this team of five, Jennifer’s group was the only team to identify California Thrasher and Lark Sparrow in our circle.

**Area 6B - Estero Americano** - Peter Colasanti covers this area. The Estero Americano was as high as I’d seen it. Despite recent rains, it seemed unaffected by the tide and I assume the berm at the mouth hadn’t yet been breached for the season. So, navigation was easy. Imagine floating across switchbacks. The water birds were absent without exposed mud for shorebirds and mostly just buffleheads for waterfowl, but conditions were exquisite and I hugged the banks, concentrating on land birds. The big payoff was midway on the return when on the Sonoma side, while taking a photo of a distant Ferruginous Hawk, I was startled to see a Short-eared Owl flush, then another, ultimately a third and fourth. Such a distraction, I nearly forgot to photograph the Ferrugie. Closer to the put-in, I had to maneuver to avoid interfering with a rather ornate mouse swimming across the width of the Estero to the Marin side. I saw 51 species, three more than last year. This year’s survey included the only Gadwall (2), Northern Pintail (4) and Short-eared Owls (4).

**Area 7 - Doran Beach** - Dea Fried is the team leader. Our total species were 97, somewhat disappointing but in line with what other areas reported. I was hampered by my bad foot and a few people called in sick whom I couldn’t replace. It was also frustrating that so many people were in Bodega Bay that day. We couldn’t go back to Doran to look for birds in the afternoon because there were no parking spaces. We have photos of the Tennessee Warbler, but it’s on the given species list, so I didn’t attach them. I have a photo of the Bald Eagle on the wooden float at Doran/Bird Walk. I think it was one of the two in the tree, so I left the count at twp. There are no count week birds because I no longer work at Doran and the rain and my work schedule prevented me from going back there. The day I took off from work before the count had rain all day! Unique species to this area are: Black-bellied Plover, Spotted Sandpiper, Whimbrel, Long-billed Curlew, Ruddy Turnstone and Tennessee Warbler. In addition, a dowitcher sp. was seen. Since it was the only dowitcher seen, it counts as a species.



Bald Eagle Flyover

Courtesy of Jennifer Michaud

**Area 8 - Bodega Bay** - Gene Hunn (team leader), Nancy Hunn, Brook O’Connor, Orion O’Connor and Cathy Beck birded Bodega Bay and identified 82 species, eight less than last year. Unique species to this area were: Clark’s Grebe, Virginia Rail, and Barn Owl.

**Area 9 - Bodega Head** - Dan Nelson is the team leader. Due to windy conditions, nearly the entire sea-watch period was conducted from car. Pleasant, visually stunning sunny conditions, but cold 50°F along with constant NW wind. This caused the

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detectability of birds on ocean to be challenging, with landbirding only slightly better. Generally low numbers were found today, with presumed misses due to conditions. However, Dan identified a Black-legged Kittiwake, the only one found in our circle.

**Area 10 - Bodega Marine Lab** was surveyed solo by Jackie Sones. We are so lucky to have her because the University has restricted access to the lab to university employees to reduce litigious risk related to COVID. Jackie identified 52 species this year and 59 species last year, Jackie's unique species to our circle were Pomarine Jaeger and Murrelet sp.



Say's Phoebe

Courtesy of Jennifer Mchaud

**Area 11 - Cheney Gulch** - Janeann Erickson (team leader), Carolyn Rich, Michele Lanting, Roy Parkin, Sue Parkin, Michelle Davey, We birded our usual spots - Bodega Bay School, The Inn at the Tides, BPUD ponds, Salmon Creek Ranch and along Bay Hill Road, Working our area, we identified 43 bird species, the same number as last year.

**Area 12 - Chanslor Ranch** – Scott Carey (team leader) reports this area was surveyed by two observers. We identified 53 species, one more than last year. However, we missed Tricolored Blackbird, a species which is usually a given for us. Unique species to the Christmas Bird Count was Common Gallinule.

**Area 13** - There is no Area 13. Historical evidence that somebody in Madrone Audubon was superstitious.

**Area 14 - Highway One** - Lisa Hug (team leader), Ann Dewart and Dan Kirker surveyed the Highway 1 area. Conditions along the coast were tough. We identified 79 species this year. Last year, we found 67 species. We were the only team to spot an Iceland Gull, Glaucous Gull and Brown-headed Cowbird.

**Area 15 - Willow Creek Road** - David Berman (team leader), Jeanna King-Ruppel, Connor Cimmiyotti, Star Justus, Lisa Bilodeau, Jeffer Giang, Ruth Cooper, Marty Hale, and Jim McKerrow met at the southern end of Brookhaven Bridge. Eight of us participated in the day (Jim K. was with us for a few hours). The Russian River was at a very high flow after many days of rain. It was a beautiful sunny day. The early morning fog burned

off quickly. A highlight was 2 Bald Eagles flying north at 9:30 a.m. Jeffer had an amazing camera and we had some amazing pictures via eBird – <https://ebird.org/checklist/S125150227>. We had such a fun team and thoroughly enjoyed the day! Marty Hales recorded the eBird information. Star Justus was our recorder. This team recorded 59 species, 15 more than last year, and contributed 2 species, Blue-Gray Gnatcatcher and American Goldfinch, unique to their area.

**Area 16 - Duncans Mills** - Mike Heffernon (team leader), Kate Gonella, Kurt Heffernon, Tommy Moorman, Lisa Wuennerberg, and Nancy Wecker counted 70 bird species in the Duncans Mills Area, two more than last year. Our unique species was Violet-green Swallow.

**Area 17 – Freezeout Canyon** - Peter Leveque and Giel Witt are team leaders. We had 9 counters and like most teams, we had a marvelous day weatherwise. The number of bird species was rather disappointing, with only 55 species observed. This was most likely the lowest count for this territory. The Russian River was running very high and quite swiftly, resulting in fewer than usual water birds. Only 3 duck species were counted: Mallards, Common Mergansers and Wood Ducks, whereas last year we counted 9 species of ducks. Even Coot numbers were down. A mere 24 and 133 last year. Our thrush and Corvid numbers were about normal as were the woodpeckers with Acorn Woodpeckers topping out at 24. European Starling was our most abundant species with 170, followed by Brewer's Blackbird at 167. No unusual sightings were made, but there were some beautiful observations: A favorite was a group of



A Crisp Sunny Day on Salmon Creek Road

Courtesy of Chris Grabill

Lesser Goldfinches at the top of a 200-foot Redwood tree appearing as the fog lifted, making a beautiful early morning sight. We toasted our co-leader, Giel, with an Irish Coffee on his 68th birthday. We closed the day with a view of a Harbor Seal in the river near the Duncans Mills Bridge.

**Area 18 - Coleman Valley Road** - David Leland is team leader. We had six of us this year – Gay Bishop, Angela Sturr, Tiffany

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### CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

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Erickson, Paula Fleisher, and me, with Phyllis Hughes joining us in the afternoon. Our highlights included 7 species of raptors (including two Ferruginous), both Red Crossbills and Golden-crowned Kinglets wrecking our necks at Star Mountain, what seemed like a lot of Fox Sparrows at 20 or so, and a Kingfisher at Western Hills guarding a tiny pond there. Our total species count was 54, on the low side. However, we were the only ones to see Red Crossbills on the CBC.

**Area 19 - Austin Creek** - Stacy Li and Brock Dolman tag-teamed as team leaders because we are new to the area. Linda Petruvias, Pam Conley, Mary Anne Sobieraj and Teresita Haag surveyed this area with us. What could go wrong? The rookie team leaders lost their guide during the re-parking of the cars. Scrambling, only to find birds in a foreign territory, but where are the birds? We accidently poached a few birds belonging to Duncans Mills. The Russian River was almost devoid of birdlife and the terrestrial birds other than Crows, Ravens and Turkey Vultures came in sputters. We did see a kettle of about 30 vultures circling in what must have been a beauty of a thermal. Count routine returned to normal when we regrouped at noon. Well, we all got good tans. Gave some nice birds to the Duncans Mills team, but surprisingly tallied 46 species, seven more than last year. This team was the only team to spot an Allen's Hummingbird.

**Area 20** - There was no Area 20 when Stacy Li began helping out with the CBC. Evidence that someone was numerically challenged? Stacy assigned this area to the Pelagic boat ride. Did not occur this year. Maybe Stacy will use his boat next year.

**Area 21 - Harrison Grade** - Carolyn Johnson is the team leader. We had a very small party this year with the count falling on New Year's Day. While we normally break the territory into two sections, our team of four drove in one car and covered the whole territory. We were surprised to find that the birds remained hunkered down on this sunny (though cold) day. Our total was 57, below our 12-year average of 66. We had very low numbers of several species, including Yellow-rumped Warbler, Junco, Robin, Lesser Goldfinch, and even Canada Goose. The numerous farm ponds in the territory had below average activity. On a positive note, Hooded Mergansers have joined the territory regularly since 2012. And this year, we had 3 male Common Mergansers, rare to area #21. Common Goldeneye continue as regulars. We were grateful for such a beautiful day, sandwiched between storm fronts.

*(A heartfelt thank you to Dr. Stacy Li, Peter Leveque, all Team Leaders, and all participants in the January 1, 2023, West Sonoma County Christmas Bird Count!)*

### New Members

#### Petaluma

*Anne Taylor*

#### Sebastopol

*Richard Kahn*

*Paul Nicholas*

#### Sonoma

*Amandra Krause*

*Duy Nguyen*

#### Santa Rosa

*Cynthia Fox*

*Nancy Johnson*

*John Kulinski*

*Aspen Mayers*

*Jennie Richards*

*Neila Stewart*



### Donations

#### In Honor of Janet Bosshard

*by Samuel Twobears*

#### In Honor of Diane Hichwa

*by Deidre Harrison & Thomas Crane*

#### In Honor of Nick

*by Robin Jones*

#### In Memory of Sally Jacoby

*by Neila Stewart*

#### In Memory of David Carlyle

*by Jean Martin*

#### In Memory of Harold Belofsky

*by Mireille Belofsky*

#### In Memory of Bryant Hichwa

*by Valerie Hanelt*

#### In Memory of Bryant Hichwa

*by Judith Temko*

#### In Memory of Betty Johnston

*by Cindy Kane*

#### In Memory of Judith Krist

*by Barbara & Bud Gerhardt*

#### In Memory of Michael Martin

*by Laura Holms*

#### In Memory of Alice Rayle Sidbury

*by Mercy Sidbury*



Our Board and Conservation Committee meetings are held virtually. For Board meeting information, contact President Susan Kirks, 707-241-5548, susankirks@sbcglobal.net. For Conservation Committee meetings and information, please contact Diane Hichwa, 707-785-1922, dhichwa@earthlink.net. Also, please visit our website, www.madroneaudubon.org for updates.

## February – March 2023 Outings

Bring binoculars and wear outdoor clothing suitable for the weather forecast. \*\*\*And, please check website of Sonoma County Regional Parks. Parks may be closed due to flooding and/or debris in a park.\*\*\*

### February 9

Thursday 8:30-10:30 a.m.

**West County Trail**, between Graton and Forestville

**Leader:** Janet Bosshard

Traveling north on Highway 116, turn left on Ross Station Rd. Half mile down the road, the parking lot will be on your left. We will walk to the treatment ponds and back on a flat paved trail. Moderate rain will cancel. Information: Please call Janet Bosshard (707) 526-5883.



Adult Trumpeter Swan, Canada Goose, juvenile Trumpeter or Tundra Swan  
Courtesy of Tom Reynolds

### February 23

Thursday 8:30-10:30 a.m.

**Helen Putnam Regional Park**, Petaluma, 411 Chileno Valley Road

**Leader:** Janet Bosshard

Parking permit is required. We will walk the asphalt path to the top of the park. Moderate rain will cancel. Information: Please, call Janet Bosshard (707) 526-5883.

### March 9

Thursday 8:30-10:30 a.m.

**Foothill Regional Park**, 1351 Arata Lane, Windsor

**Leader:** Janet Bosshard

Take Highway 101 to 1351 Arata Lane. Turn right, 1.3 miles, parking lot is on the left or park on the street. Parking permit is required. We will walk around the pond and through the Oak woodlands. Moderate rain will cancel the walk. Information: Please call Janet Bosshard (707) 526-5883.

*Please note: Offering 2 opportunities in March 2023 to enjoy Spring Lake Regional Park*

### March 16

Thursday, 8:30-10:30 a.m.

**Spring Lake Regional Park**, Santa Rosa, Channel Drive main entrance

**Leader:** Linda Fraley

Parking permit is required. Meet in the large parking lot on the right, across from the swimming lagoon. Moderate rain will cancel. Information: Please call Linda Fraley (559) 779-5211.

### March 18

Saturday, 8:30-10:30 a.m.

**Santa Rosa Creek Trail**/west of Willowside Road, Santa Rosa

**Leader:** Linda Fraley

Drive on Willowside Road to the junction with Santa Rosa Creek Trail (just north of the Waldorf School). For parking advice and information: Please call Linda Fraley (559) 779-5211.

### March 23

Thursday 8:30-10:30 a.m.

**Spring Lake Regional Park**, Santa Rosa, Channel Drive main entrance.

**Leader:** Janet Bosshard

Parking permit is required. Meet in the large parking lot on the right, across from the swimming lagoon. Moderate rain will cancel. Information: Please call Janet Bosshard (707) 526-5883



Black Skimmer

Courtesy of Tom Reynolds



## 2023 Swallowing Monitoring Starts Soon – Petaluma Wetlands

by Len Nelson

In December 2022, the first of the 2023 Tree Swallows began to appear in our wetlands. Why they come so early is anyone's guess, But, I'd conjecture that it is in anticipation of the flying insect population that develops when our rains begin, and they certainly did this year!. No doubt the early arrivals also use this opportunity to start looking for habitat in which they can nest and once found, it is likely they intend to defend it until a mate arrives with whom they can mate and raise their offspring.

In anticipation of this, the 60 Tree Swallow/Western Bluebird houses located at Shollenberger Park, Ellis Creek and Tolay Lake Regional Park were cleaned out last fall.

Other creatures also find these empty nesting boxes welcoming places to seek shelter for the winter, like Field Mice and Paper Wasps. But, the boxes were built for the Swallows and Bluebirds, so others are evicted starting in late January through March so the swallows are not dissuaded from occupying the boxes themselves.

Also, needed house repairs that were not identified and addressed last fall are addressed now.

2023 will begin the 17th year from which I began monitoring the Tree Swallow houses that our dear friend, the late Andy LaCasse, established in 2006 when he erected 10 in Shollenberger Park. Over that period, I have recorded the fledging of 3,735 Swallows and Western Bluebirds. Each year brings new surprises, and each house that is monitored is like opening a fortune cookie... you just do not know what it is going to hold and reveal. One thing is pretty constant though, the swallows that try to build their nests in mid-April - early May are most often destined to lose their young if they hatch then since the cold and windy weather that generally comes in mid-May stops flying insects from going aloft for the swallows to catch and feed their young, and the cold weather chills the featherless chicks. This combination generally results in a significant die-off. Swallows that can wait until after mid-May for their chicks to hatch though are generally offering their chicks the best of both worlds - a goodly insect population and warm, calm, weather.

*(Len Nelson is the Research Chair for Petaluma Wetlands Alliance.)*

## Climate Crisis – 2022 State of the Birds Report

by Susan Kirks

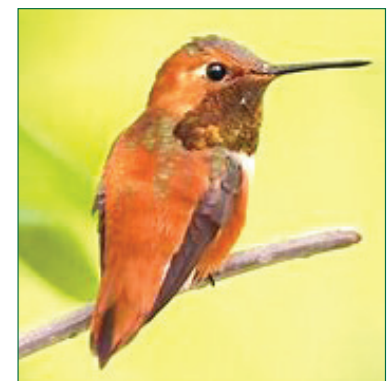
More than half of our U.S. birds are in decline. This is the dire message conveyed in the 2022 report. Described as “teetering on the edge of disaster” are Rufous Hummingbird, Greater Sage Grouse, Pinyon Jay, and 67 other birds – having lost at least half of their populations in the past 50 years. That would be since 1972. The December 2022 report is published by the North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI), a coalition of 33 organizations and agencies. These include the National Audubon Society, with data reviewed from five sources – North American Breeding Survey, the Christmas Bird Count, the Waterfowl Breeding Population and Habitat Survey, International Shorebird Surveys, and the American Woodcock Singing ground Survey.

A last similar report was published in 2019. The 2022 report cites the loss of bird populations across every habitat except wetlands. Many note the concerted effort for wetlands protection and restoration as relevant to the habitats studied. Some of the fastest declining bird populations rely on grassland habitat, which have shown a total 34 percent loss. Lesser Yellowlegs, Whimbrels, and other shorebirds aren't far behind with populations down by 33 percent.

To some, seeing what appear to be abundant populations of ducks, geese and swans skews the fact that over 50% of all U.S. bird species are diminishing. The report emphasizes that restoring ecosystems under stress, with intensified climate natural disasters and human caused habitat loss, is necessary. If we do not protect and restore habitat areas, loss and degradation will continue to worsen.

Learning from the accomplishments of wetland restoration, to save birds and support climate resilience in other ecosystems, is critically important.

“Protecting wildlife and biodiversity is something that everybody should be concerned with,” says Peter Marra, a 2022 State of the Birds science committee member and director of the Earth Commons at Georgetown University Institute for Environment and Sustainability. “Once we save birds, we're going to save a lot of other species that we share the earth with.”



*Rufous Hummingbird  
Courtesy of Cornell Lab of Ornithology*

Data in the 2022 report reflects that birds act as indicators of the overall health of our environment. The 2022 report, building upon the 2019 report, discloses that the United States and Canada have lost more than 3,000,000,000 birds in the past 50 years. “We're basically watching the process of the sixth mass extinction,” says Peter Marra, “Once we save birds, we're going to save a lot of other species that we share the earth with.”

*(Sources: State of the Birds Report 2022, National Audubon Society, Cornell Lab of Ornithology)*





# My Christmas Bird Count Story

by June Zelda Grabill

My name is June Zelda Grabill and I am 9 years old. I love wolves, but I also love birds and all animals. My dad took me on the Christmas Bird Count to Salmon Creek Road because he started doing this bird count when he was exactly the same age as me. My favorite parts of the bird count were searching for the hidden Varied Thrushes in the Redwood forest (I think it is a Fairy Kingdom), and we found 6 thrushes! I also loved going up to the sheep farm at the very top of the mountain and seeing all of the baby lambs. And, when I was walking on the road at the top of the mountain, a very brave Ruby-crowned Kinglet landed in front of my feet and followed me down the hill. It was so close, I could almost reach down and pick it up. I can't wait to do the Bird Count again next year! I hope there are a lot more kids, too!

(Special thanks to Bill Payne, Peter Leveque, and to Joanne Dranginis for getting my dad to do this bird count 30 years ago.)

(See Team Leader Sean Jeané's report for Area 5 – Salmon Creek Road – in the West Sonoma County 2022 Christmas Bird Count lead article. Sean has participated in the West County CBC for 30 years and has led Area 5 since 2016.)



Recording Birds  
Courtesy of Chris Grabill



June Grabill on CBC Day  
Courtesy of Chris Grabill

## Santa Rosa and Sonoma Valley 2022 Christmas Bird Counts

by Gene Hunn, President of RRROS & Compiler for Both Counts

### Santa Rosa 62nd Consecutive CBC

Santa Rosa Christmas Bird Count was Thursday, December 18, 2022. The weather was particularly fine this year. Crisp and chill in the early morning, then sunny and still all day long.

We were a bit understaffed in the field this year with 55 observers (plus 4 at feeders). Due to my oversight, Area 4 (Calistoga Road and NE Santa Rosa) was not covered this year. This probably did not affect the total count of species, but reduced numbers of woodland and suburban birds.

Ruthie Rudesill is our master owler. She described her pre-dawn experience as among the best she could recall: Barn (1), Western Screech (11), Great Horned (8), Northern Pygmy (4), Northern Saw-whet (4), plus a bonus pair of Spotted Owls and a rare Long-eared Owl.

The crew in Area 2 (Santa Rosa Creek from Fulton to Delta Ponds), Don Kirker, Brian Webb, Dea Fried, and Rick LeBaudour, as is customary, tallied the largest number of species (105), including staked-out rarities: Pacific-slope Flycatcher and Chipping and Swamp Sparrows, plus our only Gadwalls, Redhead, Lesser Scaup, Black-necked Stilt, Long-billed Dowitcher, Bald Eagle, Ferruginous Hawk, Prairie and Peregrine Falcons, Violet-green Swallow, and Pine Siskin, plus count week Snow Goose, Eurasian Wigeon, and the Black x Red-shouldered Hawk hybrid. Gordon Beebe's feeder added Pygmy Nuthatch and a "Slate-colored" Dark-eyed Junco.

Other unique and/or notable finds included Short-billed Gull, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (cw), and Pacific Wren (Area 1); Lewis's Woodpecker (and many owls, Area 3); Spotted Owl (Area 5); a SRCBC first, 8 Scaly-breasted Munias (Area 6); Cattle Egret and Orange-crowned Warbler (Area 7), Mute Swan, Common Gallinule, Green Heron, Osprey, and Great-tailed Grackle (Area 8); Virginia Rail and Sora and a Western Screech-Owl (Area 9); Ross's Goose and "Thayer's" Iceland Gull (Area 10); Cackling Goose, Red-breasted Nuthatch, and Loggerhead Shrike (Area 11); House Wren and ten Lark Sparrows (Area 12). And every bird counts!

Our species total of 143 is somewhat above average. However, the total of individual birds counted (14,500) was low. It seems that species across the board – water birds (e.g., American Coots, gulls), small forest birds (e.g., Varied Thrush, Pine Siskin, Townsend's Warblers), even European Starlings and House Sparrows -- were rather scarce compared to counts in previous years. I compiled a master list of species counted in 2022 ranked by the ratio of this year's totals to the maximum counts over the previous 61 years. These ratios are rather meaningless for rare species, while other low ratios are skewed by an exceptionally high count in some early year - for example, 528,109 European Starlings (1976) versus just 581 this year; 3600 Northern Pintails (1970) versus just 3 this year; 1577 Short-billed (Mew) Gulls (1978) versus just 49 this year; 2400 Western Meadowlarks (1970) versus 214 this year; 7400 American Robins (1971) versus 721 this year, 9670 Brewer's

Continued on page 10



### SANTA ROSA AND SONOMA VALLEY

Continued from page 9

Blackbirds (1974) versus 362 this year. It does seem as if the Santa Rosa CBC circle has shrunk over the decades as bird habitat. No doubt an unintended consequence of urban development. There are a few more positive trends notable: Lots of Acorn Woodpeckers (441 this year versus an all-time high of 556); all-time high counts of Western Screech-Owls (12), White-breasted Nuthatches (117), and White-throated Sparrows (29) with decent totals for Western Bluebird, Hermit Thrush, Spotted Towhee, Turkey Vulture, Anna's Hummingbird, and Say's Phoebe.

While we recorded a goodly total of 143 species, we might credit that total in part to just plain luck, given that just a single individual was noted for 21 of those species (nearly 15%). I completed a list of this year's species ranked by how many individuals of each were recorded. American Robins (721), White-crowned Sparrows (806), and American Crows (906) were the most numerous this year.

Finally, I compiled a list of this year's species ranked by how frequently they have been recorded over the 62-year history of the SRCBC. Fifty species (35%) have been recorded every year since the inception of the count; and an additional 16 have been missed just once or twice in those 62 years. (For more details and to view lists, contact Gene at emhummm323@comcast.net)

This year's data will be added to the National Audubon CBC master database on the Cornell University website. You might browse that site for all sorts of intriguing details and comparisons. Thanks to you all for your contributions to the RROS Citizen Science program.

#### Sonoma Valley (incl. Petaluma) CBC

Sonoma Valley Christmas Bird Count was Friday, December 30, 2022. Count Day coincided with the arrival of an atmospheric


river, which shrouded the hills in cloud and bespeckled our lenses and made owling nearly impossible. Our dedicated observers persevered in the face of this adversity, blessing the rain nevertheless as somewhat relieving our years of drought. The weather no doubt reduced our species count by discouraging both birds and birders. Still, we tallied a respectable 151 species and just over 50,000 individual birds on count day, with three species that eluded us count day relocated during count week, for a grand total of 154 species. Last year's tallies - with decent weather -- were a more typical 159 and 163 species, respectively. We note also that last year's total of 90 observers was whittled down this year to 72.

As usual, the Petaluma area had the highest count day total, 116 species, thanks to the inclusion there of the wetlands of Shollenberger Park, Ellis Creek, the Petaluma sewage lagoons (available by special permission for the count), and Tolay Lake Regional Park. The Wingo area also recorded over 100 species (103), again thanks to the extensive wetlands along the lower reaches of Tolay and Sonoma Creeks. Many wetland species are regularly found only in those areas. However, our urban and upland areas helped round out a diverse inventory. Notable finds include Green Heron and Varied Thrush (Sonoma area), Western Screech-Owl and Hutton's Vireo (Highlands area), Merlin and Purple Finch (Schellville area), Golden Eagle and Ferruginous Hawk (Adobe area), Osprey and Pileated Woodpecker (Glen Ellen Area), Golden-crowned Kinglet, Pacific Wren, and Townsend's Solitaire (Trinity area), and California Thrasher and Lark Sparrow (Napa Ridge). These are just a sampling of species recorded this year in low numbers. Thanks to all for a solid effort, despite the nasty weather.

**For planting and habitat consideration, see our Tree & Vegetation Planting Guide**

[https://madroneaudubon.org/pdf/Tree and Plant List.pdf](https://madroneaudubon.org/pdf/Tree%20and%20Plant%20List.pdf)

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## Sonoma Valley (incl. Petaluma) 2022 Christmas Bird Count Totals

Total number of species noted on Count Day = 151; plus 3 added count week = 154

Total number of individual birds counted on Count Day = 50,061

Total number of observers = 72    Weather: NASTY

Snow Goose 9	Bonaparte's Gull 10	Oak Titmouse 213
Greater White-fronted Goose 92	Short-billed (Mew) Gull 124	Horned Lark 1
Cackling Goose 8	Ring-billed Gull 1605	Tree Swallow 95
Canada Goose 1276	Western Gull 836	Violet-green Swallow 12
Mute Swan 125	California Gull 404	Barn Swallow 4
Mandarin Duck 12	Herring Gull 59	Bushtit 209
Wood Duck 30	Iceland (Thayer's) Gull 40	Wrentit 2
Blue-winged Teal 4	Glaucous-winged Gull 1092	Golden-crowned Kinglet 1
Cinnamon Teal 27	Double-crested Cormorant 27	Ruby-crowned Kinglet 57
Northern Shoveler 167	American White Pelican 25	White-breasted Nuthatch 70
Gadwall 405	American Bittern 4	Brown Creeper 11
Eurasian Wigeon cw	Least Bittern cw	House Wren 2
American Wigeon 330	Great-blue Heron 18	Pacific Wren 1
Mallard 444	Great Egret 46	Marsh Wren 35
Northern Pintail 524	Snowy Egret 39	Bewick's Wren 33
Green-winged Teal 409	Green Heron 2	European Starling 3333
Canvasback 143	Black-crowned Night Heron 20	California Thrasher 1
Redhead 2	Turkey Vulture 325	Northern Mockingbird 65
Ring-necked Duck 184	Osprey 1	Western Bluebird 801
Greater Scaup 10	White-tailed Kite 21	Townsend's Solitaire 3
Lesser Scaup 119	Golden Eagle 1	Varied Thrush 7
Bufflehead 761	Northern Harrier 25	Hermit Thrush 89
Common Goldeneye 52	Sharp-shinned Hawk 5	American Robin 5009
Hooded Merganser 66	Cooper's Hawk 4	Cedar Waxwing 103
Common Merganser 39	Bald Eagle 4	House Sparrow 124
Ruddy Duck 412	Red-shouldered Hawk 49	American Pipit 38
California Quail 502	Red-tailed Hawk 113	House Finch 1789
Wild Turkey 397	Ferruginous Hawk 3	Purple Finch 3
Pied-billed Grebe 46	Barn Owl 4	Pine Siskin 1
Eared Grebe 5	Western Screech Owl 1	Lesser Goldfinch 362
Clark's Grebe 1	Great Horned Owl 9	American Goldfinch 303
Rock Pigeon 251	Burrowing Owl cw	Lark Sparrow 4
Band-tailed Pigeon 16	Belted Kingfisher 5	Fox Sparrow 76
Eurasian Collared- Dove 180	Red-breasted Sapsucker 8	Dark-eyed Junco 1193
Mourning Dove 249	Acorn Woodpecker 274	White-crowned Sparrow 1081
Anna's Hummingbird 147	Downy Woodpecker 14	Golden-crowned Sparrow 1230
Virginia Rail 1	Nuttall's Woodpecker 62	White-throated Sparrow 12
Sora 5	Hairy Woodpecker 4	Savannah Sparrow 300
Common Gallinule 1	Pileated Woodpecker 2	Song Sparrow 168
American Coot 395	Northern Flicker 205	Lincoln's Sparrow 18
Black-necked Stilt 65	American Kestrel 44	California Towhee 310
American Avocet 880,	Merlin 4	Spotted Towhee 109
Semipalmated Plover 11	Peregrine Falcon 2	Western Meadowlark 584
Killdeer 125	Black Phoebe 118	Red-winged Blackbird 4855
Long-billed Curlew 20	Say's Phoebe 61	Brown-headed Cowbird 77
Dunlin 1802	Hutton's Vireo 2	Brewer's Blackbird 1441
Least Sandpiper 337	Loggerhead Shrike 7	Orange-crowned Warbler 1
Western Sandpiper 1975	Steller's Jay 81	Common Yellowthroat 6
Long-billed Dowitcher 103	California Scrub-Jay 205	Yellow-rumped Warbler 626
Wilson's Snipe 3	American Crow 467	Townsend's Warbler 3.
Greater Yellowlegs 39	Common Raven 201	
Willet 14	Chestnut-backed Chickadee 46	



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