



SNOWY EGRET

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The Valley Habitat

January / February 2024

*A joint publication of the Stanislaus Audubon Society
and the Yokuts Group of the Sierra Club*

Walking the Green Path

When reading books for review, I jot down page numbers and note books, websites, quotes and so forth. My last book review, "The Story of Stuff" yielded numerous enticing books and sites. One of the most alluring was www.waterfootprint.org. It's a relatively short questionnaire. In doing said questionnaire, I found myself a little unsure of which answer to select in answering some questions. At the conclusion you are given a total of gallons of water that you use. For me the total was satisfactory. Nonetheless I was thinking "that's a lot of water. Rather than intimidating this was more of an instructional experience that informed me of other things I can do to save water ...

Cont. on page 4

The name "Yokuts Group" honors the Native Peoples who inhabited the area now known as Stanislaus County.

Sierra Club Monthly Programs

Socializing and Snacks: 6:45 PM | Presentation: 7:00 PM to 8:00 PM
College Ave. United Church of Christ, 1341 College Ave., Modesto

SHARE THE SECRETS OF YOUR NATURE AND BIRDING ADVENTURES AND EXPEDITIONS **Speakers: General Membership of the Yokuts Group & Stanislaus Audubon Society** **January 19, 2024**

At this members' slideshow presentation, all Yokuts and Audubon members are invited to share pictures and videos of recent trips.

You can bring your files on a flash drive and limit presentations to 10 minutes.

Community members are welcome to come and take a look to discover more about the Yokuts Group Sierra Club and the Stanislaus Audubon Society.

NATIVE PLANTS FOR OUR HOME LANDSCAPES **Speaker: Rhonda Allen** **February 16, 2024**

Rhonda Allen, developer of the La Loma Native Garden in Modesto at 1805 Encina Avenue, will provide a PowerPoint presentation on which native plants will most benefit wildlife in our home landscapes. Rhonda is a member of the California Native Plant Society- Northern San Joaquin Valley

Chapter and is certified as a California Naturalist and a Stanislaus County Master Gardener. She is a speaker for the master gardeners on local pollinators, pollinator plants, and native gardening for local garden clubs and other groups.



RHONDA ALLEN

She recently led a monarch butterfly workshop for Stanislaus County and coordinated a milkweed seed dispersal program last fall, and the speaker for a UC Master Gardener workshop in October on using native plants in your home landscape. Her work continues at the La Loma Native Garden and consulting on developing new native gardens in Stanislaus County. She is an avid California wildflower photographer working on a wildflower identification book for the Central California region. Her work continues as an advocate to educate our community about the importance of incorporating native plants in our landscapes to support wildlife.

PRETTY BIRD, CITY BIRD!

By Salvatore Salerno

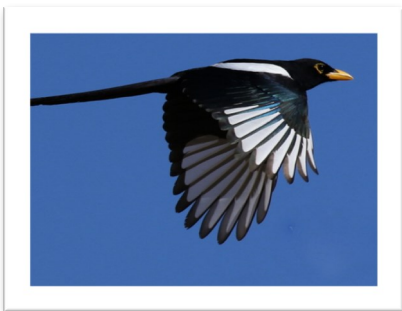
On October 10, 2023, the Modesto City Council voted to designate the Yellow-billed Magpie as the official City Bird of Modesto, after an advocacy campaign from board members of Stanislaus Audubon Society.



YELLOW-BILLED MAGPIE

© Rich Brown

Subsequently, we formed a committee which will be collaborating with the Culture Commission on this important recognition. This designation presents opportunities to engage the community by creating a natural history icon, teaching environmental studies to students, and enhancing local ecotourism.



YELLOW-BILLED MAGPIE

© Rich Brown

This also presents an opportunity for chapter members like yourselves to get involved. We will eventually be producing an online map of the city to record the roosting and breeding sites where flocks of magpies may be observed. If you have any sightings of such flocks, please let any board member know. After viewing those locations, we will consider them for review to put them on the map.

RECENT SIGHTINGS OF RARE OR UNCOMMON BIRDS

*Review Species

STANISLAUS COUNTY

Steven Lima had a CASSIN'S KING-BIRD at the I-5 Westley Rest Area on October 26. Harold Reeve had a COMMON LOON at Woodward Reservoir on October 28. David Yee had a **LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL*** at Gaffery Road by the Recology Center on November 5. At the same location, Jim Gain had an uncommonly large number of sixty-five GLAUCOUS-WINGED GULLS on November 7.



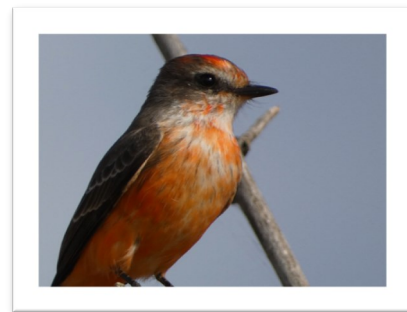
TROPICAL KINGBIRD

© John Harris

Eric Hopson and several participants in the Central Valley Birding Symposium saw nine **SCALY-BREASTED MUINA** at the San Joaquin River N.W.R. on November 17. This introduced species has breeding populations in several counties in California, but there is no proof of breeding in Stanislaus County yet.

MERCED COUNTY

Dale Swanberg saw a female **VERMILION FLYCATCHER** at Merced N.W.R. on October 14.



VERMILION FLYCATCHER

© Garry Hayes

This bird was in the same location as a female Vermilion Flycatcher has been found every winter since October 2019. If this is the same bird, it is an interesting record, for the oldest living individual of that species was 5.5 years old, more typically 4 years old. On October 19, Jeanne MacLean found a male **VERMILION FLYCATCHER** in an area of Merced N.W.R. that has had males of that species in prior winters. Doug Krajnovich found a **TROPICAL KINGBIRD** at Lake Yosemite County Park on November 13. Allison Gong had a WILLET on E. Pacheco Blvd. in Los Banos on November 24.

A NEW YEAR'S OLD QUESTION FOR MEMBERS: BECOME AN ONLINE SUBSCRIBER?

By Salvatore Salerno

We want to remind our 436 Audubon members that the chief operating costs of our chapter's funds are those of printing, labeling, and mailing paper copies of the Valley Habitat six times yearly. This cost would be even more, if it were not for our 30-year collaboration with the Yokuts Group of the Sierra Club (see insert on p. 6). Unlike the Sierra Club, our National Audubon Society does not provide us with all the email addresses of its current members. By choosing to go online, you would not only be saving money for our chapter, but you would also be reducing the number of volunteer hours to process the newsletters. We recognize that

many of you would still like to have the copy in hand, and we will continue to offer that service to you gladly. Others, however, may be ready for this change. The photographs online are more colorful, and you can share such issues with other people more easily. To receive your newsletter online, send your name and email address, with "Online Subscription" in the subject line, to John Harris at jhh.birder@gmail.com. We look forward to keeping you engaged with news of our field trips, programs, surveys, and other conservation efforts. The Board of Directors wishes you a Happy, Birdy New Year!

STANISLAUS AUDUBON FIELD TRIPS

Bay-Delta Remarks

WOODWARD RESERVOIR
14528 26 Mile Road
Leader: John Harris
SUNDAY, JANUARY 14
8:00 a.m. – noon

On this field trip, we'll explore Woodward Reservoir and the surrounding area, looking for waterbirds on the reservoir and birds of open grasslands. A good variety of ducks and geese should be present as well as herons and egrets, grebes and perhaps a loon or two. Nearby grasslands may have raptors such as Merlin, Prairie Falcon, Ferruginous Hawks as well as grassland sparrows, Horned Lark, and if we are lucky, Mountain Bluebird. We'll return to Oakdale by around noon. Meet at the Cost Less Market, 888 N. Yosemite, Oakdale, at 8:00 a.m. There is a Dutch Brothers coffee shop there. Bring your own water and snacks. Please note that there is an entrance fee for Woodward Reservoir of \$20 per vehicle, with a reduced rate for seniors, so car-pooling will be advantageous. For questions John Harris at jhh.birder@gmail.com

SAN JOAQUIN RIVER NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE
Beckwith Road Wildlife Viewing Area
Leader: Eric Hopson
SATURDAY, JANUARY 27
8:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.

During this family-friendly "walk with binoculars" we'll be looking and listening for winter resident songbirds and waterbirds. Meet at the San Joaquin River NWR's Beckwith Road Wildlife Viewing Platform (10990 Beckwith Road). Participants of all skill levels are welcome. They should bring their own binoculars, water, snacks and insect repellent. Be aware that NO public restrooms are available during this tour. For more information, please call Eric Hopson at 209-587-5532.

MERCED NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE
7430 West Sandy Mush Road
Leaders: Jody Hallstrom & Ann Kohlhaas
SUNDAY, JANUARY 28
8:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.

Merced National Wildlife Refuge is teeming with waterfowl and other birds in winter. Most of the birds are easily viewed, making for enjoyable and easy

birding. We will meet at the kiosk and viewing platform located at the end of the entry road on the main portion of the Merced NWR. Note that this is an approximately 75 minute drive from Modesto. We will start our birding in the kiosk area and then go on the 5 mile long auto tour loop, stopping frequently to look at birds. We will also take a short walk (optional) at the Bittern Marsh trail. Participants of all skill levels are welcome and should bring their own binoculars, water, snacks, and insect repellent. Be sure to dress for cold weather. Heavy rain will cancel the trip.

SAN LUIS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE
7376 Wolfson Road, Los Banos
Leader: Sal Salerno
Co-leader: TBA
SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 17
9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

This field trip will involve hiking on two trails and driving along the wetlands of this refuge. Meet at the Visitor Center, where participants may carpool along the auto loop. We should see a variety of waterfowl, as well as tule elk. The special attraction will be the flocks of Tundra Swans that overwinter from their breeding grounds in Alaska and northern Canada. Bring water and lunch. RSVP is not required, but encouraged. RSVP may be sent to Sal Salerno at bees2@sbcglobal.net

SAN JOAQUIN RIVER NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE
Pelican Nature Trail
Leader: Eric Hopson
SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 24
8:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.

During this family-friendly "walk with binoculars" we'll be looking and listening for resident songbirds and waterbirds. Meet at the San Joaquin River NWR's Pelican Nature Trail Parking Lot (2714 Dairy Road, Vernalis). Participants of all skill levels are welcome. Participants should bring their own binoculars, water, snacks and insect repellent. Public restrooms are available at the meeting area parking lot. For more information, please call Eric Hopson at 209-587-5532.

As a member of the Yokuts Executive Committee, I appreciate the interface we have with several other environmental and social justice organizations. One of these organizations is Tuolumne River Trust. The executive director of TRT, Peter Drekmeier, recently approached Elaine Gorman and myself to speak to the water board in order to advocate for enough water flow to adequately sustain the rivers that make up the northern Bay-Delta. Below are a synopsis of the remarks I intend to make later this month:

As political chair of the Yokuts group of the Sierra Club, I am speaking on behalf of nearly 900 members in Stanislaus County. We are also part of the Motherlode Chapter of the Sierra Club, based in Sacramento. Our group supports a 75% freshwater flow for the rivers that make up the northern section of the Bay-Delta.

The Bay-Delta provides habitat for more than 500 species of wildlife and serves as a pathway for salmon and other fish traveling to and from their home streams to the Pacific Ocean. In recent years, the number of spawning salmon has plummeted so significantly that the commercial fishing season had to be cancelled this year and likely will be cancelled again next year.. Salmon require an adequate freshwater flow that provides fish the deep, cold water they require. As more than 100 species depend on salmon, this issue is not just about salmon, it's about restoring our salmon-based ecosystem.

When there is inadequate water flow in our rivers, many species are forced into the main channel which increases predation. Reduced water flow has also enabled toxic algae to thrive in the Delta.

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STANISLAUS AUDUBON SOCIETY BOARD OF DIRECTORS, 2023-24

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bees2@sbcglobal.net jhh.birder@gmail.com

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Visit our website at stanislausbirds.org. Like us on Stanislaus Audubon Facebook and Instagram.

Those who wish to receive Valley Habitat online, please contact John Harris.

New members: Use renewal form from National Audubon Society, <http://www.audubon.org/renew>.

Use Chapter Code C36. Renewing members, use the same link. Renewal date is on newsletter label.

New and renewal memberships are \$20 yearly.

Bay-Delta Remarks cont.

These algae produce toxins that can make people sick, and kill pets and wildlife.

Two thirds of California's developed water, water that is controlled and managed for a variety of uses, comes from one source - the Bay-Delta. 80% of that water is consumed by agriculture, despite agriculture being only 2% of the state economy. 26% of these crops are exported overseas. We need to use more drip irrigation and incentivize shifting to lower water use crops.

A lack of planning and vision for the future has led us on a path that is unsustainable. There are just too many demands on our rivers, too many diversions, too many almond trees... Without adequate vision and intervention, I am afraid the rivers that make flow into the Bay-Delta could look like the Colorado River someday.

Voluntary Agreements are a failure. Environmental organizations

ceased participating in them out of frustration. They are too much like a backroom deal made by special interests.

It is an honor speaking before you today, as you have a great responsibility. Board members are required to protect the public trust, which includes stewardship of our rivers for future generations. I implore you to rely on the experts who care deeply about our waters - Peter Dreke-meier of TRT, Jon Rosenfield, Baykeeper senior scientist, and others who state that a 75% freshwater flow is necessary for the health of our northern Bay-Delta rivers. We must take adequate care of our rivers so that they can sustain us. Thank you.

Kent Mitchell
Political Chair

Walking the Green Path cont.

... as a renter or perhaps persuade the property owner to do other things since we *all* pay for

our water. Another discovery from "The Story of Stuff" is the on-line magazine "Treehugger". It provides lots of information on environmentally friendly or low impact products. I browsed the site a bit during Xmas time. Still another site gleaned from "Stuff" is Freecycle. It is "an online network of people who post stuff-and get stuff-for free in order to reduce waste". I look forward to a cultural enhancement of sorts in my neighborhood. A bookstore will be opening in Roseburg Square about springtime. They will be selling new and used books. This adds variety and quality to a location where multiple needs can be met without traveling a great distance. I look forward to this. "Excess and deficiency are equally at fault." (Confucious, XI.15). Questions and contributions of information are welcome.

Steve Tomlinson
stomlinson015@gmail.com

Yokuts Group of the Sierra Club

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cklaschus@gmail.com

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*Executive Committee officers are elected by the general membership and are appointed by the Executive Committee for two-year terms.

Yokuts website:

Sierraclub.org/mother-lode/yokuts



[@YokutsSierraClub](https://www.instagram.com/YokutsSierraClub)



[Yokuts Group Sierra Club](https://www.facebook.com/YokutsGroupSierraClub)



Sierra Club membership enrollment form

Name: _____

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City: _____

State: _____ Zip Code: _____

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Individual Membership Joint Membership

| | | |
|-------------------|--------|--------|
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| ___Life | \$1000 | \$1250 |
| ___Student | \$25 | \$35 |
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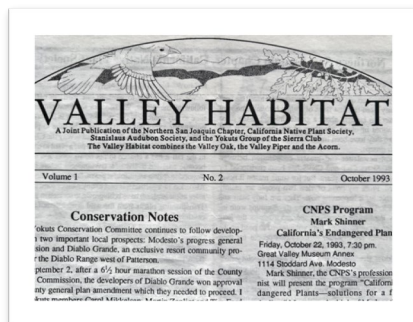
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**30-Years of Collaboration:
The Yokuts Group of the
Sierra Club &
Stanislaus
Audubon Society**



**SIERRA
CLUB**
FOUNDED 1892

Thanks to all who came to the
Holiday Party this year!

We had wonderful food, amazing
caroling and an evening in the
company of our friends!

Sounded like Happy Holidays to
me!

Thanks also, to the members who
brought raffle baskets and con-
grats to the winners!!

Best wishes for a great 2024!!

Kathy