

SNOWY EGRET

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The Valley Habitat

November/December 2026

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

Walking the Green Path

The Problem with Plastic
By Judith Enck
A Review

If you feel you are aware or largely unaware of the problems with plastics, this book will fill in the blanks and bring you to a much more informed state. It is pretty common knowledge that plastics contain thousands of chemicals, many of them toxic and/or carcinogenic. It is also apparent that plastics are ever-present and difficult to remove from our lifestyles. After reading this book I feel much more empowered and motivated to phase out the use of plastics from my lifestyle. It is a step by step or item by item process. It seems very possible. The author makes it clear that recycling plastics is unsatisfactory.

Continue on p. 5

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
Office of Valley Improvement Projects, 1224 K Street, Modesto

LIFE BETWEEN THE TIDES
Speaker: Emma Stein, MJC Biology Instructor
FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 20

Our presenter, Emma Stein is a self-described "marine ecologist." She attended MJC before transferring to UC Santa Cruz where she earned a degree in Ecology & Evolution. She traveled to Bangor University in Wales to earn a Master's degree in Marine Biology. She has returned to MJC as a biology and ecology professor. She describes a passion for marine invertebrates and algae, and cites bryozoans as her favorite organisms. Join us as we travel to the coast and visit the tides.

Sierra Club Endorses Brandon for State Senate

The Sierra Club has officially endorsed Jaron Brandon for State Senate District 4. Brandon participated in a Zoom interview and filled out a Sierra Club questionnaire. His opponent, Alexandra Duarte, did not respond to our request for an interview.

Jaron Brandon is a local leader who has advocated for thoughtful, collaborative forest management, and protecting wild and scenic rivers.



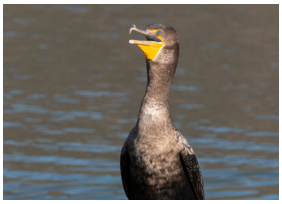
JARON BRANDON

He is able to speak to generational issues like climate change and catastrophic fire from the perspective of a rural advocate...

Cont. on page 3

SPOTLIGHT ON LOCAL BIRDS: DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT

By Jim Gain



Characteristics: The Double-crested cormorant is large with a stocky body, long neck, medium-sized tail, webbed feet, and a medium-sized hooked bill. It has dark-colored plumage with bare supra-loreal skin and gular skin that is yellow or orange. An adult in breeding plumage will be mostly black with the back and coverts being a dark grayish towards the center. A non-breeding adult will lack the crests and have more yellowish skin around the face. After diving, the birds stand with their wings outstretched for a long time for them to dry, as they are not waterproofed fully. Double-crested cormorants swim low down in the water, often just their head and neck showing, and dive from the water's surface. Their feet are used to propel them along.



Diet: Double-crested cormorants are carnivores (piscivores). They primarily eat fish, but also insects, crustaceans, and amphibians.



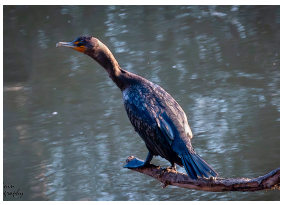
Occurrence & Distribution: The Double-crested Cormorant is a Common Year Round Resident in California's Central Valley and can be found in Freshwater Wetlands and Open Water.



Nesting: These birds make a bulky nest out of sticks and other matter. They frequently collect junk, like rope, fishnet, deflated balloons, and plastic debris, and incorporate this into their nest.



Fun Fact: The Double-crested cormorant's crest is visible only on adults during the breeding season. It is white for cormorants from Alaska, but black for those in other regions.



For more information and photographs, please visit my Double-crested Cormorant webpage.



YOKUTS TABLING VOLUNTEERS WANTED:

STANISLAUS RIVER SALMON FESTIVAL

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 14, 2026

1:00 p.m. - 3:15 p.m.

Please call Milt

(209) 535-1274

The Stanislaus River Salmon Festival is a FREE, fun, family-friendly event focusing on salmon and natural resource education. There will be food and craft items available for purchase for those interested, but the event itself will be free of charge. However, USACE charges a $10 parking fee.

Sierra Club Endorses Brandon for State Senate cont..

... connecting public land stewardship, recreation, water policy, and economic development. Tahoe, Yosemite, Death Valley, our groundwater tables, our national forests -- Jaron understands these issues, he listens, and he is adamant about protecting them.

Alexandra Duarte is a wealthy land owner, steeped in big agri-business. In a debate in downtown Modesto, she offered few concrete ideas, relied on pro-Trump party rhetoric, and failed to stand up for protecting public lands.

In addition to the support of Jaron Brandon, the Sierra Club is endorsing Michael Masuda in his race for Congressional District 5 against Tom McClintock, and is urging a No vote on Proposition 45, Prop 45 is a California Chamber of Commerce-sponsored initiative on the November 3rd ballot.

If passed by voters statewide, Prop 45 would destroy key environmental protections, including our state CEQA law, coastal protection, and state Endangered Species Act. It is funded by large land developers, oil companies, and the backers of data centers.

Please vote and get your ballots in the mail at least a week prior to Nov.3.

Thank you.

Kent Mitchell
Yokuts Political Chair

VOLUNTEERS FOR 2026 CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS

Stanislaus Audubon Society is conducting three Christmas Bird Counts again this year. Participants of any skill level are encouraged to help out on this important bird survey, since they will be accompanied by experienced birders. For further information, please contact the following compilers about attending on these dates:

LA GRANGE-WATERFORD CBC
7948 Yosemite Blvd.
SATURDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2026
6:00 a.m.
Compiler: Sierra Nystrom
siera_nystrom@yahoo.com

Meet at the Fruit Yard Restaurant. 6:00 a.m. for breaktbast, 6:30 a.m. for assignment.

LOS BANOS CBC
1491 Hwy. 152 / Hwy. 33
MONDAY, DECEMBER 28, 2026
6:00 a.m.
Compiler: John Fulton
(209) 826-1101
merced_birding@hotmail.com

Meet at 6:00 a.m. at Denny's Restaurant, 1491 Hwy. 152/Hwy 33, also known as Pacheco Blvd., on the southeast corner of Badger Flat Road, near Target and WalMart. Denny's is on the south side of Pacheco Blvd. on the west side of Los Banos.

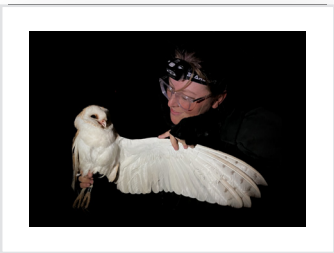
CASWELL-WESTLEY CBC
2052 W. Orangeburg Ave.
SUNDAY, JANUARY 3, 2027
6:00 a.m.
Compiler: Harold Reeve
birder@sbcglobal.net

Meet at the Denny's Restaurant. 6:00 a.m. for breaktbast, 6:30 a.m. for assignment.

STANISLAUS AUDUBON ZOOM PROGRAMS

A FARMER'S FEATHERED FRIEND
Lauren N. Jackson
FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 13

Vineyards can provide habitat for a variety of avian species that help control agricultural pests. Researchers at Cal Poly Humboldt and UC Davis are studying how Barn Owls, Western Bluebirds, and Tree Swallows use nest boxes on vineyard landscapes, and how these birds may contribute to natural pest management.



LAUREN M. JACKSON

Using tools such as GPS tracking, nest cameras, and field monitoring over several years, this research has examined components of owl and songbird movement, breeding behavior, diet, habitat use, and pest removal on agricultural landscapes. This talk will highlight what researchers have learned about these beneficial birds and how nest box programs can support avian conservation, ecologically based pest management, and win-win solutions between local wildlife and farmers.

Lauren is currently a Research Associate in Dr. Matthew Johnson's Habitat Ecology Lab at Cal Poly Humboldt, where she continues working with Barn Owls in California's agricultural landscapes. You are invited to a Zoom meeting.

Register in advance for this meeting: https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/fY74ozM5TOattxnZe1EIKA

VAUX'S HAPPENING: 33 MILLION AND COUNTING
Larry Schwitters
FRIDAY, DECEMBER 11
7:00 p.m.

Larry Schwitters has been totally engrossed with the migration and roosting of Vaux's Swift for their last 38 migrations, documenting over 33 million roosting events. He will share with you information and images found nowhere else. This will be his 115th PowerPoint presentation, with audiences ranging from elementary schools to National and International Swift Conferences.

Larry Schwitters earned his Master of Science from East Texas University. He taught middle school science and served as a coach for thirty years in the Renton Public Schools. After retiring in 1991, he participated in a Black Swift field research project for the American Bird Conservancy. His experiences in this endeavor were the subject of the cover story for the American Birding



LARRY SCHWITTERS

Association Winging It magazine. He has focused on Vaux's Swifts since 2008. Birders World magazine covered his work in an article "46 Minutes of WOW". He recruits volunteers to help collect data on over 200 migration roosts, from the Yukon to Guatemala. Schwitters wrote the most recent update on Vaux's Swift in the Cornell Lab of Ornithology Birds of the World. He is the recipient of the 2023 National Volunteer of the Year Award. You are invited to a Zoom meeting. Register in advance for this meeting: https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/TnGQmWq4R_Sfn-qoSgpU2kA

NOTE: After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.

MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION UPDATE FOR NEW OR RENEWING AUDUBON MEMBERS

Stanislaus Audubon Society memberships are processed by National Audubon Society. If you are a current member, your membership number and expiration date will *no longer* appear on your newsletter label, but on your Audubon Magazine label. You should receive Audubon Magazine quarterly. If you wish to receive Valley Habitat online only, or if you have questions about your membership status, please contact John Harris at jhh.birder@gmail.com If you are *not* a current member, please consider joining during this opportune time to do so.

Membership donations from all new members go directly to your local chapter in your first year of membership. This would help to pay for our chapter's ongoing expenses, such as the Grayson Scholarship, printing of Valley Habitat, tabling events, and presenting Zoom bird programs, among others. Our chapter code is C36. You may join National Audubon Society at this website: https://act.audubon.org/a/chapter-membership

STANISLAUS AUDUBON FIELD TRIPS

CERES RIVER BLUFF REGIONAL PARK
3761 E. Hatch Road, Ceres
SATURDAY, DECEMBER 5
9:00-11:00 a.m.
Leader: Sal Salerno
Co-leader: TBA

This park is set along the Tuolumne River, with a riparian habitat of oak, cottonwood, and sycamore trees. There is also a small pond and trails that were created during a recent renovation. We will be looking for resident passerines and wading birds, as well as waterfowl coming in to overwinter. Great-tailed Grackles and Yellow-billed Magpies are often found there. We will meet at the main parking lot and drive or walk down on the gravel road that ends at the boat dock. Bring water and snacks.

DOS RIOS STATE PARK
3559 Shiloh Road, Modesto
SUNDAY, DECEMBER 13
9:00-12:00 p.m.
Leader: John Harris

Dos Rios State Park (3559 Shiloh Road) is a new state park, having opened officially on June 12, 2024. As of this writing, there is no entrance fee during its initial opening phase. We will meet at the entrance parking lot and bird the Oxbow Pond and a portion of the park's extensive trail system. We should have good opportunities to see herons, egrets, cormorants and other water birds, as well as birds of riparian habitats. There is a restroom and picnic area. For questions, contact John Harris at jhh.birder@gmail.com

Holiday Open House
5424 Nanette Dr., Salida
Friday, December 11
6:00 p.m. - ??

Holiday Greetings!!

Come and join your fellow Yokuts and Audubon members for our Holiday Open House.

It is a fun evening and a great way to visit with your fellow members. The party is casual with everyone contributing with a special snack or dessert to share. There will be coffee, tea and you can bring a bottle of wine or what you would like to drink. We have a raffle of member created special baskets, so get creative and bring a basket to raffle if you like....the more the merrier!

We always have time for Christmas caroling! There is always lots of food, wine and holiday spirit! Please note we're starting at 6pm this year…you don't want to be late! The party is at my house in Salida. Please call for directions: 209-601-8660. Hope to see you all at the party!

HAPPY HOLIDAYS!.....Kathy

Yokuts Outings

Check out the current outings posts at our Meetup page:

http://www.meetup.com/S-M-S-SierraClub

All adults are welcome, including those who are not members of Sierra Club. We generally meet at a designated local parking area and then carpool to the event site. We also have fun off the trail with social events such as dinners, movie nights, Christmas Parties, and potlucks.

Walking the Green Path cont.

Much information is offered on alternatives and means by which you can change. Your motivation is fueled by information regarding oil and petrochemical companies that offer false information or "greenwashing" and a full comprehension of the toxicity of plastics. A number of activists are profiled in places such as "Cancer Alley" in Louisiana.

Many websites are given as sources of guidelines for activism or resources for personal goals. One example is a "household waste audit" consisting of a template for your personal evaluation. The book is not lengthy. I am struck by how much information is offered in a comparatively small book (178 pp.). A section towards the end of the book entitled "Listen to Women for a Change" brings a refreshing piece of inclusiveness. Personally, I purchase organic produce. For salads I normally purchase cherry tomatoes in plastic containers. No more. Now I buy regular tomatoes and use cloth produce bags. Questions and contributions of info. are always welcome.

Steve Tomlinson
stomlinson015@gmail.com

STANISLAUS AUDUBON SOCIETY BOARD OF DIRECTORS, 2025-26

President, Newsletter: Salvatore Salerno **Vice President, Field Trips, Membership:** John Harris jhh.birder@gmail.com

Treasurer: Annhenrie Campbell **Secretary:** Daniel Gilman **Conservation:** Jody Hallstrom

Christmas Bird Counts: Harold Reeve, Siera Nystrom , John Fulton **Social Media:** CeCe Hurst

Events, Education, Scholarship, Online Newsletter: David Froba, Chris Magaña, Kathy Rasmussen, Tom Myers, Xavier Sandoval, Ann Kohlhaas, Madeline Yancey, Bella Howell, Jim Ross

Advisory Committee Members: Eric Hopson, Richard Brown **Website Manager:** Jim Gain

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 or renewing members: Use renewal form from National Audubon Society, https://act.audubon.org/a/renew?ms=digital-fund-web-website_nas-redirect-renew. Use Chapter Code C36.
Renewal date of membership is on the label of Audubon Magazine. Memberships are $30 yearly.
Memberships are $30 yearly.
New members: https://act.audubon.org/a/chapter-membership
Renewal members: https://act.audubon.org/a/renew?ms=digital-fund-web-website_nas-redirect-renew

STANISLAUS AUDUBON OUTINGS



VASCHÉ LIBRARY
SEPTEMBER 25, 2026



MERCED N.W.R.
OCTOBER 17, 2026



DOS RIOS STATE PARK
SEPTEMBER 26, 2026

Yokuts Group of the Sierra Club

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
Chair: Steve Tomlinson
stomlinson015@gmail.com
Vice Chair: *Vacant*
Political Chair: Kent Mitchell
Secretary: Jeanne Homsey
Treasurer: Sandy Wilson
Conservation and Sustainability Chair: Milt Trieweiler
Membership Chair: Anita Young
At Large: *Vacant*

SPECIAL / STANDING COMMITTEES
Finance
Sandy Wilson
Steve Tomlinson
Candy Klaschus
Doug Hardie (Calendar Sales)

Outings
Chair: *Vacant*

Communications
Kathy Weise (Mailings)
Vacant (Publicity)
Kevin Augustine (Valley Habitat)
kaugustine@csustan.edu
Jeanne Homsey (Hospitality)
Vacant (Programs)
Jason Tyree (Webmaster)
Vacant (Elections/Nominating)

Recycling
Vacant

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

Yokuts Website **Yokuts MeetUp** **Yokuts Facebook**

SIERRA CLUB
FOUNDED 1892

Sierra Club membership enrollment form

Name: _____
Email: _____
Address: _____
City: _____
State:_____Zip Code: _____
Phone: _____

Individual Membership		**Joint Membership**
___Special Offer	$15	
___Regular	$39	$49
___Supporting	$75	$100
___Contributing	$150	$175
___Life	$1000	$1250
___Student	$25	$35
___Senior	$25	$35
___Limited Income	$25	$35

Contributions, gifts and dues to the Sierra Club are not tax-deductible. Your dues include $7.50 for the subscription to *Sierra* magazine and $1.00 for your chapter newsletter.

Payment Method:Check__Mastercard___VISA___
CardholderName:_____
Card #_____ Exp. Date _____
Enclose payment information and mail to:
Sierra Club
P.O. Box 7059 F94QW09051
Merrifield, VA 22116-7509 Yokuts Group

Yokuts Group
Mother Lode Chapter
Sierra Club
P.O. Box 855
Modesto, CA 95353

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CURRENT RESIDENT OR

2027-2028 YOKUTS ELECTION

Our Yokuts group is governed by an Executive Committee consisting of 6 elected members. The positions are for 2 year terms. This year we have 3 positions up for election and below are the members who have agreed to run for the 2027-2028 Executive Committee. The positions are Chair, Political and Secretary. Our committee also has an 'at large position' which is open. To maintain our level of commitment and action towards the environment we really need your help. Please consider joining our Executive Committee. If interested please contact our Chair, Steve Tomlinson.

SIERRA CLUB
FOUNDED 1892

Please vote for three members:

Steve Tomlinson _____

Kent Mitchell _____

Jeanne Homsey _____

Write in: _____

Please make your selections and mail your ballot to:

Yokuts Group, Sierra Club
P.O. Box 855
Modesto, Calif. 95353

Please mail by Dec. 15, 2026