ALTACAL Programs

Programs for the general community are normally held on the third Monday of each month at 6:30 p.m., at the Chico Creek Nature Center, 1968 E. 8th St. Chico. In December the program is held on the second Monday and in July and August there are no programs.

February

Monday, February 17, 2014  6:30 p.m.
Chico Creek Nature Center

ISHI SECRETS about the Natural World

Presented by RICHARD BURRILL

Ishi (not his tribal name) was likely the last Yahi speaker when he died in 1916. His band held out for twenty-two years longer than Geronomo’s band of Apaches. Ishi had remarkable skills in “animal talk” and what was ahead on the trail when bow hunting.

Join Richard Burrill to learn more about this last free Yahi-Yana caregiver and woodsman who hid for safety along Deer Creek, Mill Creek, and Big Antelope Creek, with his tiny band of Yahi warriors in the foothill country located just north of Chico along our now familiar Cohasset Road. Also, find out more about this gentle and generous man and two bird species that were special doctor birds for Ishi: Wood Duck and Killdeer. What were these secrets?

(Continued on page 2.)

March

Monday, March 17, 2014  6:30 p.m.
Chico Creek Nature Center

Exploring COSTA RICA

Presented by MIKE FISHER

On September 25, 2013, Mike Fisher set out on what he hoped to be an adventure of a lifetime. His goal seemed simple; to see as much of the small country of Costa Rica as he could in three months. He traveled alone and stayed in motels, hotels, hostels, cabinas, B&Bs, lodges, resorts, and research stations. He was constantly on the move so every meal was either supplied by the place he was staying or eaten in restaurants or on the street. He traveled by air, car, bus, van, boat, taxi, motorcycle and foot. Budget: $50 per day.

(Continued on page 2.)
February (Continued from page 1.)

Richard Burrill (above) is an author and anthropology educator and presenter in Northern California. He is an enthusiastic teacher of American culture and archaeology and has become one of the foremost scholars on Ishi, having published several books on the man which include *Ishi Rediscovered* and *Ishi in His Second World*, and *Ishi’s Return Home: The 1914 Anthropological Expedition Story*.

March (Continued from page 1.)

Join Mike Fisher (below) as he relives this experience through the photos he took and a daily blog he wrote. He will share with you some of his most memorable experiences both good and bad. Marvel at his lucky finds and laugh at his silly mistakes. You will be awed by some of the most amazing birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, insects and breathtaking flora you can imagine. By nights end you will leave with new insights into this small but hugely diverse country and know why it is called; the rich coast, Costa Rica.
Already February and Altacal is geared up for a busy, full adventurous year.

First, a huge THANK YOU to Jennifer Patten, John Merz and Kathy Trevino for organizing another successful Snow Goose Festival, and the rest of the Steering Committee members for another successful SGF. And I know they are the first to thank the Steering Committee members along with every person who helped in any way. It is truly an amazing Festival and group that Jennifer, as coordinator, has put together.

Going forward our priorities this year include continuing the ever popular monthly programs and field trips; expanding our roles with the Sacramento Refuge Complex, the Chico Creek Nature Center and other conservation groups; as well as extending our educational outreach to schools and students. Altacal will also keep you abreast of pertinent conservation issues, both local and national.

It promises to be a year of goals and accomplishments fulfilling Altacal’s mission of improving bird populations and the habitats they live in.

Remember our new membership renewal process starts in March. Watch your mailbox and message box for renewal information as we initiate our new streamlined renewal method. This new system will give us all more time to partake of the activities described above and the important work that remains.

Altacal still has Board positions available. Please consider a full or co-chair position in Field Trips, Membership, Conservation, Education, or President. These positions can be tailored to fit your schedule. The only requirement is a desire and there are many rewards. For more information please contact any Board member.

Wishing everyone a ‘Big Year’ of Birding in 2014

from the (Vice) President

by STEVE OVERLOCK, Vice President / Membership Chair
UPCOMING

Bird Walks and Birding Trips

All of our field trips are open to beginning birders. Anyone with a sense of wonder is welcome to participate.

February 8, Saturday
SECOND SATURDAY
UPPER BIDWELL PARK

Trip Leaders: Raina King and Steve King

Our Second Saturday field trip in February will be in Upper Bidwell Park. Some of the many birds we see are Western Bluebird, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Golden-crown Sparrow, Oak Titmouse, lots of Acorn Woodpeckers, White-breasted Nuthatch, and Nuttal’s Woodpecker.

After birding Horseshoe Lake and the area around the parking lot, we will head up the canyon to the Yahi Trail head. There, we will follow the Yahi Trail along Big Chico Creek, as far as time permits (2-3 mi round trip). The Christmas Bird Count saw 4 Hooded Mergansers in Big Chico Creek. Maybe the Mergansers will still be there in February! We usually turn around at the Day Camp parking lot and follow the Middle Trail back to the cars. We try to be back to the cars before 12:30 pm.

Let’s meet at 9 am at the parking lot on the left just past the gun club and Horseshoe Lake. Follow Wildwood Ave for 1.75 miles and turn left into the parking area just before the gate. Bring binoculars, water, snacks, walking shoes and proper clothing for the expected weather conditions. Rain cancels. Contact Steve King 530 566-6136.

Over 190 species of birds have been observed here, including Western Bluebird, Green Heron, Yellow-billed Magpie, White-breasted Nuthatch, Black-crowned Night-Herons, Wood Ducks, Swainson’s Hawks, and many different warbler species. Deer, turtles, river otters, and possibly the fabled wild ram may grace us with their presence.

March 8, Saturday
SECOND SATURDAY
CHICO OXIDATION PONDS WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

Trip Leaders: Raina King and Steve King

For the March “Second Saturday”, Steve and his daughter Raina will be at the Chico Oxidation Ponds, behind the Waste Water Treatment Plant. For waterfowl in the winter, and only four miles from Chico, this place is hard to beat. The walk is a little under two miles and lasts a little under three hours. If you prefer to keep the walk shorter, you may leave the group anytime. The walk to the back ponds is about a mile round trip. The full walk is about 2 miles on a good flat path.

Meet at 2 pm, the afternoon keeps the sun at our back and the temperatures warmer. Back to the parking lot before 5 pm. To get to the Oxidation Ponds, go west on W. 5th St from Highway 32 in Chico. Follow W 5th St, which becomes Chico River Rd, for four miles. The wildlife viewing parking area is 300 yards past the main entrance to the water treatment plant, on the Left. Bring binoculars, spotting scopes, water, walking shoes and proper clothing for the expected weather conditions. There is a chemical toilet on the way out to the viewing blind. Rain cancels. Contact Steve King at 530 566-6136.
From February 15 through June 30, additional trails open on the Sacramento and Sutter National Wildlife Refuges (NWR). Access to the Logan Creek Trails on the Sacramento NWR is off of Road 68 approximately 2.5 miles east of 99W and Interstate-5. There are six miles of walking trails and eight in-ground pit blinds.

As water is drawn down in February and March, migrating shorebirds are attracted to the mudflats to feed. Bring your waders and camouflage to the Logan Creek Trails and try your hand at photographing flocks of shorebirds from the blinds. In March and April, this is also a prime spot to see American Bitterns as they croak their breeding calls to each other. All winter visitors ask us where to find the bitterns. This is THE spot! I usually see over a dozen in a 2-3 mile walk.

On Sutter NWR, over six miles of trails open within the Sutter Bypass and it provides fantastic spring birding. This can be accessed from Parking Area B about 1/2 mile north of O'Banion Road. The parking area is on the east side of the Sutter Bypass. See our website and brochure for detailed driving directions.

I birded along the riparian section of the trail at Sutter NWR a couple years ago and spent 2 hours birding in less than a mile! Flycatchers, warblers, swallows, wrens, Great Horned Owls, and even a Phainopepla appeared. It is a great spot in the morning.

For information, brochures, and pictures of these trails, visit our website at: http://www.fws.gov/refuge/Sacramento/visitor_activities/trails.html

American Bittern by Lora Haller

The Conservation Corner

Port-o-potty’s Are Death Traps For Wildlife

The Plumas National Forest recently funded a project that will effectively save many cavity nesting birds from dying needlessly. A simple vent screen over the port-o-potty’s vent stack will prevent birds from using the open pipes as nesting or roosting sites. Altacal Audubon Society, a concerned ally will join the effort volunteering their time to help install the vent screens.

A cavity-nester, such as an owl goes into the open vent pipe that leads to the vaulted toilet looking for a potential cavity, but they can’t get out! The 12” diameter open vent is a trap because it corresponds closely with the cavity size preferred by many cavity–nesting species. Every year thousands of cavity-nesting species, particularly birds become entrapped and die in vaulted toilets across the United States.

The Teton Raptor Center, in Wilson WY initiated the “Port-o-Potty Project” and designed a screen that covers the vent stack and effectively prevents wildlife from entering. The fix is simple and not costly! Hikers can help wildlife species by identifying vaulted toilets in your area that do not already have vent screen coverings and contact the appropriate agency (i.e. City, State, Federal lands) and tell them to cover their vaulted toilet vents! For additional information on ordering screen covers contact the Teton Raptor Center at 307-203-2551 or raptors@tetonraptorcenter.org or http://www.tetonraptorcenter.org/poo-poo-screen-order-form.htm
November 16, 2013
GRAY LODGE WILDLIFE AREA
Trip Leaders: Gaylord Grams and Kathy Trevino

This turned out to be an absolutely beautiful fall day and a great day to see lots of waterfowl and other birds at Gray Lodge. Eighteen people showed up to walk around the ponds and view the large variety of avian species found here. The group included Dave Hall, Jerry Dirnberger, Scott Huber, Steve Overlock, Mike Boyd, Jon Aull, Annette Carey, Nancy Nelson, Ellen Caldwell, Laurel Heath, Janice Newton, Richard Burrill, Margaret Rader, and Steve Crump, as well as Rudy Bustamante and his son, Diego.

With 57 species seen, this was a fun day to be birding. We had many experienced birders along and several scopes, so this helped us find many different species. Highlights included these sightings - **Hooded Merganser**, an immature eagle (species not determined), **Redhead**, blue or dark morph **Snow Geese**, **Greater Scaup**, **Black-necked Stilt**, and hearing **Sandhill Cranes** flying overhead. Another fun thing was Diego getting his first sighting of a **Fox Sparrow**. The numbers of geese and other waterfowl was also impressive.

Gray Lodge has a couple of very nice blinds from which to view the birds on the water. It was while approaching one of these blinds that we had a memorable experience. Something caused lots of geese to lift off the water not far from us, and the sight and especially the sound of all those wings was awe-inspiring. For me, it was a rare and wonderful experience.

Here is the complete list of species seen – **Pied-billed Grebe**, **Double-crested Cormorant**, **Great Blue Heron**, **Great Egret**, **Green Heron**, **Bufflehead**, **Canvasback**, **Ring-necked Duck**, **Ruddy Duck**, **Gadwall**, **American Wigeon**, **Mallard**, **Cinnamon Teal**, **Northern Shoveler**, **Green-winged Teal**, **Canvasback**, **Bufflehead**, **Eared Grebe** and **Pied-billed Grebe** were also in this pond. We heard both **Sora** and **Virginia Rail** but never saw either of these secretive birds. From between the ponds, we walked back to the south end of the sanctuary. We saw **Lesser Goldfinch**, **American Goldfinch**, **California Towhee**, **Yellow-rumped Warbler**, **Red-winged Blackbird** and a **Wilson’s Snipe**.

My checklist showed 37 species of birds but another person keeping tally got 40, so I missed a couple. What a great afternoon! Great group of birders!
**CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT RESULTS**

**CHICO**

December 14, 2013

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

COMPLIER: Mary Muchowski

Forty awesome souls came out to participate in the Chico Christmas Bird Count on Saturday, December 14, 2013. We had BEAUTIFUL weather all day. Some highlights include four White-throated Sparrows (left) and a bobcat (right) seen by Rick Wulbern’s group, a Burrowing Owl seen on Chico-Oro Highway and a California Thrasher seen in Durham. My group, which had the Neal Road Landfill, was surprised to only get a few gulls. We met the falconer who was paid to chase off the gulls with his Aplomado Falcon, Peregrine Falcon and two Harris’ Hawks.

Skip Augur’s team found three Sora, two Lesser Yellowlegs and one American Bittern at the Chico Oxidation Ponds. We had a great day of birding and counted **17,799 individual birds of 125 species**! I extend a huge thank you to all participants!

**OROVILLE**

December 28, 2013

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

COMPLIER: Gaylord Grams

The Oroville Christmas count was a success with a total **133 species** this year. A few of the highlights were: Long-tailed Duck, Western Tanager, Black-bellied Plover and an ample number of ducks and geese. Thanks to all that helped out.

**Opportunities and Events**

**WINTER WINGS FESTIVAL**

Klamath, OR

February 13 - 16, 2014

Klamath Basin Audubon Society host one of the longest running bird festivals in the nation. A small gathering that began as the Bald Eagle Conference over 30 years ago has now become an incredible event for bird enthusiasts. Enjoy presentations, workshops, field trips, and free family activities. This year the editor of Bird Watcher’s Digest, Bill Thompson III will be there.

The Klamath Basin, located in southern Oregon and northern California, is a major migratory stop on the Pacific Flyway. Over 80% of the birds that use the Flyway stop over in the Klamath Basin. Six national wildlife refuges covering nearly 200,000 acres attract an impressive variety of waterfowl and raptors, many in astounding numbers. More information about the festival can be found at http://www.winterwingsfest.org/

**THE GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT**

February 14 - 17, 2014

The Great Backyard Bird Count is an annual four-day event that engages bird watchers of all ages in counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of where the birds are across the continent. Anyone can participate, beginning birders to experts. It’s free, fun, and it helps the birds. Go to www.birdsource.org/gBBC.

**CALIFORNIA DUCK DAYS**

Davis, CA

February 21 - 22, 2014

California Duck Days is a wetlands festival in the heart of the Pacific Flyway at the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area Headquarters in Davis. The day-long festival will feature field trips, workshops and other activities. Register online at www.yolobasin.org
Gulls are often referred to as "sea gulls" since most people think that is where they live. The sea coast is the predominant home of gulls, but they also make forays inland which is quite apparent when the migratory salmon die in the Feather River each fall.

It seems like gulls have a continental communication system for no sooner does the annual salmon die-off begin than thousands of gulls come streaming in from the coast to clean up an abundant food supply. Gulls literally fly to where food is available, whether it is salmon, garbage dumps, grasshoppers at Salt Lake City, or a bread flinger at some local lake!

While waiting for a connection at Ellis Lake in Marysville, I noticed a cluster of gulls out in the middle, and when I produced a loaf of bread, a chaos of screaming, swarming, snatching flurry of white wings ensued! Just like Lake Merritt in Oakland 40 years ago! The catchers were there, hovering overhead and handily catching a piece of bread with careful timing. I know those were different gulls but their aerial ability and addiction to catching bread looked the same and seems universal. It must be an acquired trick but sometimes you wonder if it’s inherited.

It seems only the Ring-billed Gulls are catchers as I’ve never seen another species involved. Larger Herring, Glaucous-winged, and Western Gulls are apparently too heavy for the hovering maneuvers.

Most of the gulls that come to eat the Oroville river salmon are Ring-billed Gulls, but each year I have noticed a few of the large Herring Gulls arrive early as if to check things out. Four or five species can be seen plying the putrid Pisces during the day, but at night there is a grand exodus to the wide expanses of Lake Oroville, as if the narrow, dark, flowing river is not safe for an overnight. Indeed; the fox, otter, and owl are at large, and keeping your boat steady without an anchor is unnerving, as it must be for the Golden-eye and Bufflehead Ducks. Can there be a moment of total relaxation when you must paddle all night and be alert for danger?

The ring-billed crowd hang around for a month after the salmon are all gone, fleecing local garbage, flocking to OHS football fields if saturated, knowing the night-crawlers will be forced to the surface. (No saturation as of Solstice in 2013!) Most will drift back to the seashore, but the California Gulls will go on to Mono Lake to harvest the brine shrimp and hang around to nest on the island.

Western Gulls also scout the shores of Mono Lake and hunt the tributaries. I was camping on Lundy Creek once, and a gang of Western Gulls were poking around the streamside, large white bodies and ramrod legs appearing like gleaming monsters, which they surely were for any aquatic life in the vicinity, and even rodents and small birds were imperiled! Gulls will eat not only breaded pastries, but anything vaguely resembling meat. Gulls are “protected for their scavenger-clean-up habits.”

The coming of the white feathered gulls during the somber tones of winter is an uplifting inspiration, just as the winter-time occupancy of bufflehead, golden-eye, and merganser waterfowl on the Feather River is a thing of joy. White egrets and snowgeese are part of that winter white wonder time, too. Birds of all kinds generally generate goodwill and a quality to life in all parts of the world.

The flight of a gull is poetry in motion. Some have said there is poetry in my words about nature, but if there is, it is not because I deliberately put it there, but because no one could write truthfully about nature and leave out the poetry.

**SEA GULLS INLAND**

_A flash of silver wings in the sun,_

_And I see, with divine surprise,_

_Here in the inlands quiet and dun--_

_Sea gulls up in the skies._

_Sea gulls! I am content no more_

_With tame little fields and woods:_

_My thoughts are set to rock-bound shore,_

_The sea, and the sea’s wild moods._  - Teresa Hooley

Local Chapter
Membership Application

Please join us!

YOUR MEMBERSHIP WILL HELP
ALTACAL AUDUBON SOCIETY
CONTINUE ITS IMPORTANT WORK.

Altacal Audubon Society (AAS) is a chapter of the National Audubon Society. AAS is a separately incorporated non-profit organization with a local chapter membership. 100% of membership dues goes to support local projects and activities. AAS is an all-volunteer organization that conducts all of its programs with unpaid staff.

We offer regularly scheduled field trips that focus on birds and bird habitats; membership programs with media presentations on birds and related topics; a bi-monthly newsletter, the White-tailed Kite; website www.altacal.org; and advocacy to protect and conserve local habitats as well as special projects and programs.

Submission of Articles to the White-tailed Kite

Articles for publication should be sent to Denise Devine by email to dsrdevine@hotmail.com on the first of the month, prior to the next issue.

THANKS to all of you who contribute regularly by sending in reports, articles and photos for the White-tailed Kite – Denise, Editor.

OTHER ALTACAL ACTIVITIES

Major sponsor, participant and fiscal agent for the annual SNOW GOOSE FESTIVAL

Founder and ongoing supporter of the CHICO CREEK NATURE CENTER

Sponsor of the City of Chico OXIDATION PONDS WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

Leading annual CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS in Chico and Oroville for over 55 years

Focusing on our YOUTH through SCHOLARSHIPS and ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

Advocating for BIRDS and WILDLIFE when they are threatened

Conducting surveys and participating in AVIAN RESEARCH PROJECTS

ALTACAL AUDUBON SOCIETY
MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

☐ $20 Basic Membership     ☐ $50 Sponsor     ☐ $500 Patron
☐ $35 Family     ☐ $100 Sustaining     ☐ $1000 Benefactor
☐ $10 Low Income / Student / Retired

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☐ Cash     ☐ Check     Date __________

IMPORTANT: Membership in Altacal Audubon Society does not include membership in the National Audubon Society. We encourage you to also support National Audubon in their important education and lobbying efforts. To join the National Audubon Society contact them at their website www.audubon.org/

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ALTACAL
Mission: To promote the awareness, appreciation and protection of native birds and their habitats through education, research and environmental activities.

ALTACAL Programs

February 17
Ishi Secrets

March 17
Mike in Costa Rica

White-tailed Kite
FEBRUARY / MARCH 2014

DATES TO REMEMBER

Feb  8  2nd Sat, Upper Bidwell Park
Feb 17 Program - Ishi Secrets
Mar  1 Bobelaine Audubon Sanctuary
Mar  8  2nd Sat, Chico Oxidation Ponds
Mar 17 Program - Costa Rica

For updated information check the Altacal website
www.altacal.org
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