

## Napa Solano Audubon Society Birding Notes #7

Hello NSAS friends and members –

Happy Holidays! This issue follows the usual format. Then, as indicated in our “*Winter Song Sparrow Newsletter*,” our final Birding Notes for 2020 will be a story about Tricolored Blackbirds and their struggle for survival.

**\*\*Please Note\*\***: It is with disappointment that we need to inform you the 2020 Benicia Christmas Bird Count has been cancelled due to public health concerns related to the new COVID-19 stay-at-home orders. We will have to wait until 2021 to join you in the next Benicia CBC.

**Note #1** – If you look at our calendar on the NSAS website you’ll notice that we will not be having a members (Zoom) meeting in December. However, we have a special treat for you in January with our speaker, **Alvaro Jaramillo**. Alvaro will be presenting to us via Zoom on Thursday, January 14. He lives in Half Moon Bay and is widely respected for his birding knowledge. He is an author of birding books, leads pelagic boating tours, and volunteers to help in many local and international birding activities. He is also an excellent speaker. I was first introduced to him through a series of six webinar presentations he did this year for Coastside Land Trust from June 13 to July 19. These talks focused on birds of Half Moon Bay. It was educational to learn both about identifying birds and how they specialize by habitat through the interesting anecdotes Alvaro provided. Each webinar had a special focus including birds from his backyard, birds from the local harbor, and raptors of the Wavecrest Open Space. Because Alvaro was the presenter, all six webinars were interesting and worth watching. Check them out at <http://www.coastsidelandtrust.org/past-webinars> and **be sure to mark your calendars for Alvaro’s upcoming presentation on January 14.**

**Note #2** – Do you know “*The Vampire Finch?*” Do you listen to Bird Notes? I do and love them. They come as ~ 2-minute snippets about different bird topics, from bird songs to anatomy to migration to interactions, and more. They are widely varied and almost always interesting. I get them as podcasts and accumulate dozens before listening to them while driving, or doing dishes, or ..... The group that produces these Notes creates them for NPR broadcasts and their

website is <https://www.birdnote.org/>. You can sign up for the podcasts there. In addition to their daily shows, the website has interesting information about birds along with more in-depth feature presentations like their current series called *“Threatened.”*

The reason I bring up Bird Notes is that a few days ago, while I was clearing the October and November Notes from my phone, the Halloween podcast especially caught my attention. It was about *“The Vampire Finch.”* Scary thought for Halloween! It’s worth taking a few minutes to listen to the story at <https://www.birdnote.org/listen/shows/vampire-finch>.

**Note #3** – *“46,000 Year-Old Horned Lark Found In Siberian Permafrost”* was the title of the blog Sue Johnson forwarded to me. See this website <https://www.onthewingphotography.com/wings/2020/12/02/46000-year-old-horned-lark-found-in-siberian-permafrost/> for details.

3 photos from Mia McPherson’s website where there are many more.



Sue loves this blog! Its author is Mia McPherson who is a nature lover, wildlife watcher, bird photographer, and storyteller. Her website includes excellent photos and interesting stories about birds, nature, and photographing birds. Based on Sue's recommendation, I've subscribed to receive regular blog postings.

**Note #4** – What's being seen locally –

This week's focus is on East Side Road at Lake Berryessa. Mark Stephenson, our NSAS President, and his son Lucas made a recent trip to this location and Mark described it to me as one of his best birding trips of the year. He's in the field birding almost every day, so this was a special trip. Their complete e-Bird list includes 75 species. See <https://ebird.org/checklist/S76817757> for details. What follows is a description of their excursion.

Upon hearing a report of Mountain Bluebirds seen along East Side Road of Lake Berryessa by Francis Oliver and Linda Pittman, friends from the Central Valley Birders, Lucas and I decided to head out there the next day, as Mountain Bluebirds can disappear as quickly as they appear. Our first stop was at the north end of the lake at Eticuera Creek Day Use Area which is located on Berryessa Knoxville Road just west of the East Side Road turnoff. We had a premonition it was going to be a great day for birding when an immature Bald Eagle landed in a tree right next to us. It may have been eyeing the flock of over 100 Common Mergansers on the Creek.



Bald Eagles at Eticuera Creek Day Use Area – Mark Stephenson

Shortly after we turned onto East Side Road we spotted our first Burrowing Owl sitting on a dirt mound on the East side of the road before the 1st Ranch. Despite Burrowing Owls being regular winter visitors to East Side Road, we have been iced out of seeing them on previous trips. There was a nice Loggerhead Shrike in the trees at the 2nd Ranch and Rock Wrens were calling from rock piles in 2 different locations.



Burrowing Owl – Mark Stephenson



Mountain Bluebird – Mark Stephenson

By the time we hit the 3rd Ranch, we were getting nervous that the Mountain Bluebirds had gone on their way. Then, suddenly flying up from the meadow, a flock of 14 appeared lighting on fence lines and foraging along the roadside. Although they were somewhat skittish, we were able to take a few photos when they sat up on posts and even when they flew down to the road. They foraged for 15-20 minutes and then flew down toward the cottonwoods along the lakeshore.



Mountain Bluebirds – Mark Stephenson

After the Bluebirds left us, we continued on our way to the oaks at the 4-mile mark and were treated to 15-20 Lewis's Woodpeckers flying from oak to oak, remaining hidden from sight much of the time and then taking to bickering flight or fly-catching high in the air above the oaks, their cries giving away their location. On occasion they would land at the top of an oak in clear view for great photos! Just past the Woodpeckers we heard several Yellow-billed Magpies chattering on the hillside. We have seen them at this location several times before, foraging underneath the oaks, but today they were hidden from view.



Lewis's Woodpeckers – Mark Stephenson

All along the five-mile length of East Side Road, the usual Savannah, White-crowned, and Golden-crowned Sparrows fed in the fields flying for protection in coyote bushes as we approached. Joining Bushtits, a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher called softly from coyote bushes while foraging on insects and other tiny morsels. As much of the vegetation had been scarred by the recent fire, we did not find any Rufous-crowned Sparrows this trip which are normally plentiful at this time of year. However, we were treated to many American Pipits and a few Horned Larks feeding in the fields as well.

Scanning the lake with our scopes we saw 2 adult Bald Eagles perching high in a pine and along the shores a flock of Canada geese. Amid the flock were 2 white geese, one a small Ross's Goose and the second a much larger Snow Goose, that had been seen by Francis and Linda the day before. On the lake in scope view we found a few Bonaparte's Gulls, American White Pelicans, Horned and Pied-billed Grebes, and distant Western and Clark's Grebes.

Near the end of the Road, there is a pull out and parking area adjacent to a Natural Resource Conservation Service Trailhead that heads down to the Lakeshore. A friendly Ranger warned us of a herd of wild pigs rooting around in the area. Along the trail Lucas spotted a Phainopepla calling from a large, decapitated oak filled with mistletoe, their favorite food. She was calling occasionally and chasing away any intruding yellow-rumps that flew nearby. In the willow patch a Red-breasted Sapsucker flew in to join a Nuttall's hammering away on an oak for insects. All in all, a great Day! See all of our treats on our eBird list at: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S76817757>.



Phainopepla – Mark Stephenson

**Note #5** – Last note for this newsletter is from The Cornell Lab of Ornithology. It's a Thank You Note, and a request for funding. (If your e-mail is like mine it has been filled with dozens of funding requests every day from all kinds of deserving organizations.) What attracted me to this e-mail from Cornell is the 2-minute video that describes what Cornell offers to all the birders who interact with the eBird website to contribute to their database and take advantage of all the wonderful tools they provide to help birders understand more about birds. It also highlights what the Lab of Ornithology has accomplished this year. Did you know that in October the city of Dallas dimmed its lights at night to limit their interference with the Fall migration going on in the skies over the city? It's just one part of the many aspects of bird focused activities that the Lab of Ornithology is involved with. The video is worth watching at [https://give.birds.cornell.edu/page/70957/donate/1?ea.tracking.id=EA\\_04B&supporter.emailAddress=tcslyker%40comcast.net&utm\\_campaign=2020%202011%20Year%20End&utm\\_medium=email&\\_hsmi=100927287&](https://give.birds.cornell.edu/page/70957/donate/1?ea.tracking.id=EA_04B&supporter.emailAddress=tcslyker%40comcast.net&utm_campaign=2020%202011%20Year%20End&utm_medium=email&_hsmi=100927287&)

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- If you have ideas for what can be done to make the NSAS a better birding resource for our community or have Birding Notes and/or Pictures to share with the rest of the NSAS community please send them to Tom Slyker at [SolanoBirder@gmail.com](mailto:SolanoBirder@gmail.com).
- Be sure to check the calendar at the NSAS website (<http://www.napasolanoaudubon.com/>) for meeting announcements and Field Trip updates.
- This is issue number 6 of our biweekly series. Past copies of Birding Notes are posted on the NSAS website at <http://www.napasolanoaudubon.com/>
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