

THE HOOT OWL



January / February 2021
Issue 1, Volume 59

San Joaquin Audubon Society
San Joaquin Audubon Society

PROGRAMS

There will be no in-person general membership meetings until Covid-19 pandemic conditions allow. In the interim, we will do our best to offer programs via Zoom or other media.

TUESDAY, February 9, 7:00 p.m.

VIRTUAL MEETING

The February program is yet to be determined at time of publication. Please check our website: www.sanjoaquinaudubon.org for updates.

FIELD TRIPS

(Cancelled until further notice)

All: Due to the ongoing pandemic, all upcoming San Joaquin Audubon Society field trips will remain cancelled. We hope to resume as soon as Covid-19 pandemic conditions allow. Meanwhile, we hope you are all able to bird in the county and beyond, keeping your safety, and the safety of others in mind. Please share your trip information or pictures on one of our many social media outlets.

Great Backyard Bird Count

February 12–15, 2021

Each February, for four days, the world comes together for the love of birds. Over these four days people are invited to spend time in their favorite places watching and counting as many birds as they can find and reporting them. These observations help scientists better understand global bird populations before one of their annual migrations.

Launched in 1998 by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society, the Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) was the first online citizen science project to collect data on wild birds and to display results in near real time. Birds Canada joined the project in 2009 to provide an expanded capacity to support participation in Canada. In 2013, we became a global project when we began entering data into eBird, the world's largest biodiversity-related citizen science (community science) project.

In 2020 the GBBC designed a new website (www.birdcount.org) to help make your 4-day count easy, clear, and inspiring! No matter what corner of the world you live-in or visit, you can share in your joy of birdwatching.

Each year participation grows as more people of all ages around the world spend their weekend counting, learning about, and celebrating birds.

The Great Backyard Bird Count is an inter-organizational effort between the **Cornell Lab of Ornithology, National Audubon Society, and Birds Canada**. We work together to bring the joys of bird watching to our members.

This Winter's Incredible "Superflight" of Hungry Winter Finches

The year 2020 will be remembered for a lot of reasons, but for birders across the country, one of them will actually be good: the biggest irruption of northern finches in recent history. This year has seen huge movements of these birds southward, and many have reached astonishing places far from where you'd expect to find them.

Finch researchers are calling this year a "superflight," where every species of boreal finch is irrupting, or moving southward in search of food. A perfect storm of feast and famine appear to be driving this banner finch year, affecting Common and Hoary Redpolls, Evening Grosbeaks, Pine Grosbeaks, Pine Siskins, Red and White-winged Crossbills, and Purple Finches. Other irruptive passerines, like Blue Jays, Bohemian Waxwings, and Red-breasted Nuthatches, are also on the move. "There's not enough food to support them, so they're just spilling out of the boreal forest," says Matt Young, ornithologist and founder of the Finch Research Network.

Many of North America's finches live in the forests of Canada (and in northern parts and higher elevations of the United States), where they rely on a selection of conifer or other boreal trees for food—especially their fruits and seeds in the winter. However, many of these trees produce food in cycles, supplying an abundance of seeds in "mast years" and very little to no sustenance in other years.

(Continued on page 2)

“Superflight”

(Continued from page 1)

Birds dependent on these trees undergo movements in response to these cycles, staying and breeding in areas where seeds and fruits are plentiful and heading elsewhere when crops fail. In a meager year for seed stocks, birds will dip southward in search of food, and during a widespread crop failure, they venture far into the United States to find sustenance. This is one of those years.

First came the Red-breasted Nuthatches in the summer; this “honorary finch” undergoes similar irruptive behavior, and its early movements can foretell a strong finch flight. Then, the finches began arriving, inundating northern feeders before heading south in a trickle and then a full-blown wave. Purple Finches led the way, followed by enormous flocks of Pine Siskins.

According to Young, this year’s incredible show isn’t just a product of crop failures, but also the result of a hugely successful breeding year driven by spring food surpluses, with large crops of both spruce cones and spruce budworms. The abundance of summertime food was followed by widespread crop failure, which unexpectedly lined up for finches across species and across North America. The food sources that would have held back most of these finches in southern Canada and northern border states were mostly quite poor, so the birds kept moving further south in search of food.

(Continued on page 4)

BIRD SIGHTINGS

October 15, 2020 - December 14, 2020
(All sightings pertain to San Joaquin County)

Submitted by Liz West

On October 23, Rene Reyes first noted a female **Blackpoll Warbler** visiting his bird bath at his Stockton residence. It was present through October 26.

David Yee found a female **Surf Scoter** at Lodi Sewage Ponds, October 26. Along with the Surf Scoter was a female plumaged **Greater Scaup**. The Scoter remained through November 6 and the Scaup through the 29th.

From a restricted area of Staten Island, Konshau Duman reported a **Surf Scoter** in the Mokelumne River on November 10 and 11. On the 11th he also saw a female **Barrow’s Goldeneye** on the river.

On November 17 and 18, Konshau Duman and Lynette Williams viewed a **Pacific Loon** in the north Mokelumne River from a restricted area of Staten Island.

Henry Koertzen, found a **Solitary Sandpiper** at the Tracy Sewage Ponds on November 23.

On a boat trip at Camanche Reservoir on November 24, Aiden Brubaker, found a female **Red-breasted Merganser** and five **Pacific Loons** in the San Joaquin County portion of the lake.

Jim Rowoth spotted a male **Barrow’s Goldeneye** at Riverbank Sewage ponds on November 27. It continued to be seen during the reporting period.

On December 4, David Yee located a **Franklin’s Gull** and a **Black-headed Gull** from the entrance road to the Stockton Sewage Ponds, which haven’t been open to birders for years. Both birds were first winter birds. They continued to be seen through December 13.

On December 5, Pat Paternostro spotted, and Srini Raman photographed, a **Black-and-white Warbler** in the oaks along Laurel Ave. It continued through December 8.

See Page 3 for member photos of some of the rarities seen in San Joaquin County recently.

Member Photos of some recent San Joaquin County Rarities
(See Bird Sightings column on Page 2 for details of these and other recent sightings in San Joaquin County)



Franklin's Gull, Photo by Kasey Foley



Black-headed Gull, Photo by Jim Gain



Black-and-White Warbler, Photo by Kasey Foley



Blackpoll Warbler, Photo by Jim Gain



Surf Scoter, Photo by Liz West



Greater Scaup, Photo by Kasey Foley

“Superflight”

(Continued from page 2)

The West has coincidentally gotten a taste of the finch fun for reasons unrelated to the boreal forests. Southern California–breeding Lawrence’s Goldfinches have poured into Arizona as part of their own food–dependent cyclical movements, and Cassin’s Finches have shown up farther east than usual, perhaps due to their own irruptive cycles aligning with this past summer’s wildfires, says Young.

The Evening Grosbeak showing is perhaps most notable. The striking finches have become increasingly scarce in the eastern U.S., so such a big irruption has been thrilling for birders and experts. While this year’s irruption isn’t record–setting, future irruptions could be, say Young and Hoar. Both point to a budworm outbreak in the 1970s that brought Evening Grosbeaks to feeders across the country in droves. As the current budworm outbreak intensifies in the coming years, it may continue to drive Evening Grosbeaks and even bigger irruptions that could rival those numbers from the 1970s.

Luckily for birders stuck at home during this pandemic–stricken 2020, all of these finches are hungry and showing up anywhere there’s a meal. So if you can do so safely, get outside and try to find some of these winter visitors at your local park. And if you have feeders, be sure to keep them stocked, maybe buy some backup seed, and enjoy the show.

Adapted from:

Bryan F. Mandelbaum, Reporter, Audubon Magazine
 “This Winter Marks an Incredible ‘Superflight’ of Hungry Winter Finches”
 Audubon Magazine, December 11, 2020
www.audubon.org/news/this-winter-marks-incredible-superflight-hungry-winter-finches

San Joaquin Audubon Society

Pat Paternostro	President/Listserves Moderator
Vacant	President–elect
Alan England	Secretary/Membership
Liz West	Treasurer
Susan Schneider	Past President/Education Chair
Srini Raman	Field Trips
Amy Weiser	Director at Large
Jim Rowoth	Director at Large
Rebecca Severin	Director at Large
Donna Marciano	Director at Large
Ernie Maier	Director at Large
Kasey Foley	Website, Programs
Kurt Mize	Newsletter Editor
Dave Fries	Conservation Chair

Website: www.sanjoaquinaudubon.org
 Listserve: <http://groups.io/g/SJBirds>

Other California Birding E-mail Listserves

- <https://groups.io/g/calbirds>
- <https://groups.io/g/centralvalleybirds>
- <https://groups.io/g/StanislausBirds>
- https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/CSAS_Birds/info

Membership

National Membership
 By joining the National Audubon Society you are also a member of the San Joaquin Chapter. This includes subscriptions to the award–winning quarterly *Audubon Magazine* and to the bimonthly chapter newsletter, *The Hoot Owl*. For *national membership*, send check payable to the **National Audubon Society** to the address below.

- National Audubon Membership Rate: \$20

San Joaquin Audubon Society
Attn: Membership (National)
P.O. Box 7755
Stockton, CA 95267

Local–Only Membership
 This includes a subscription to the bimonthly chapter newsletter, *The Hoot Owl*. For *local membership*, send check payable to **San Joaquin Audubon Society** to the address below.

- Chapter Newsletter—electronic copy \$15

San Joaquin Audubon Society
Attn: Membership (Local)
P.O. Box 7755
Stockton, CA 95267

Name _____
 Address _____
 City _____ State _____ Zip _____
 E–mail Address _____

The Hoot Owl is published six times a year by the San Joaquin Audubon Society.