



The Kite Call

Ohlone Audubon Society, Inc.

*A chapter of the National Audubon Society
Serving Southern & Eastern Alameda County CA*

*Our Mission: To celebrate and protect birds and their habitats in
Southern and Eastern Alameda County
www.ohloneaudubon.org*

Calendar

April 6 GENERAL MEETING
via Zoom—7:30PM

MAY 4 GENERAL MEETING
VIA ZOOM—7:30PM

**ALL FIELD TRIPS CANCELED AT
THIS TIME. CHECK WEBSITE
FOR UPDATES**

Membership Meetings

**Trial by Fire:
California Condor Recovery
Amid a Turbulent Year on
the Central Coast**

By Mike Stake



“Redwood Queen “

Date: April 6, 2021
Time: 7:30PM(PST)
Location: Online Video
(Details on page 2)
via Zoom

**Golden Eagle Population
Surveys and Territory
Monitoring in the Northern
Diablo Range, California**

By Patrick Kolar

Date: May 4, 2021
Time: 7:30PM(PST)
Location: Online Video
via Zoom
(Details on page 2)



OAS ZOOM Meetings are recorded!

If you missed one of our great meetings, they are recorded. Please check our Membership Meeting page on our website for the link. Zoom recordings are posted, about 1 week after live, on our website:
www.ohloneaudubon.org

SEE ZOOM REGISTRATION DETAILS NEXT PAGE

DO WE HAVE YOUR EMAIL?

We often send out emails regarding meeting reminders, special events, and action alerts. If you would like to share your email to receive these notices please send to pagpeg@aol.com. WE DO NOT SHARE CONTACT INFORMATION Just staying connected!

Follow us on Facebook!



See updates and photos from our activities that you can share with your friends! Find us by doing a Facebook search for Ohlone Audubon Society



IMPORTANT NOTICE REGARDING THE NOVEL CORONAVIRUS & OHLONE AUDUBON ACTIVITIES

Ohlone Audubon has canceled all field trips in the foreseeable future. We hope to be in the field soon!

We are continuing to hold our General Meetings via Zoom. Please connect and tune in! As we continue with our Zoom meetings you will have to register for the 2021 meetings if you have not done so already.

Remember, we are in this together. Please stay safe and remain vigilant about taking safety precautions. Wear the Mask! Practice social distancing. Avoid gatherings. Get your vaccine shots! Getting outdoors is so important for both our mental and physical health and birding just adds to that enjoyment.

Meeting Details

April 6, 2021 Meeting - Condors

The year 2020 started well for condors in central California. The regional population topped 100 for the first time, and a season record of eight breeding pairs tended chicks in active nests. But, fortunes would turn when the Dolan fire ignited in late August 2020, destroying management facilities at the condor sanctuary. Five active nests were also in the path of the wildfire, and nine free-flying condors went missing. Now, ten months have passed, **Mike Stake**, a biologist with Ventana Wildlife Society, will describe the losses of 2020, share an update on rebuilding efforts, and recount stories of survival and human kindness that bring renewed hope for the full recovery of the population.

Mike Stake is a wildlife biologist at Ventana Wildlife Society in Monterey. A San Francisco Bay Area native, Mike became interested in birds when his 6th-grade teacher took the class to a local sewage pond to identify ducks, herons, and kingfishers. Mike left California in 1988 to attend the University of Nebraska. After graduation, he worked with The Nature Conservancy in Texas (Black-capped Vireos and Golden-cheeked Warblers) and Hawks Aloft in New Mexico (Gray Vireos and Mountain Plovers), before getting his Master's Degree at the University of Missouri. Along the way, he assisted with research in the Bahamas, Australia, Peru, and Ecuador, and taught English classes in Russia. Mike has been back home in California since 2009 assisting with California Condor recovery on the central coast.

ZOOM MEETING INSTRUCTIONS:



Due to COVID-19, Ohlone Audubon's membership meetings will continue to be online via Zoom. Registration is needed for OAS's membership meetings in 2021!

As before, you only need to do it once for ALL 2021 meetings.

Click the URL / link below to register for OAS's 2021 membership meetings:

<https://zoom.us/meeting/register/tJ0ldeyopjoiHdxrlasw95GYo7GazoqhtELu>

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

May 4, 2021 Meeting - Golden Eagles

The northern Diablo Range of west-central California supports one of the largest known breeding populations of Golden Eagles (*Aquila chrysaetos*) in the world. This region includes the Altamont Pass Wind Resource Area (APWRA) where collisions with wind turbines constitute a substantial source of mortality for Golden Eagles and other raptors. From 2014-2020, US Geological Survey, USGS, used a broad-scale survey design to examine spatial patterns in territory occupancy and reproduction by Golden Eagles based on surveys completed across a 5,170 - km² region including the APWRA.

This presentation will provide an overview of population ecology of Golden Eagles in the northern Diablo Range and discuss how findings from USGS's research can help minimize population-level impacts of wind-turbine collisions and other stressors to Golden Eagles.

Patrick Kolar is a wildlife biologist with the U.S. Geological Survey – Forest and Rangeland Ecosystem Science Center (FRESC). He received a Bachelor's degree in Fish and Wildlife Management from Montana State University in 2003 and a Master's degree in Raptor Biology from Boise State University in 2013. Since 2014 he has been studying raptor populations in the Northern Diablo Range Mountains of California.



Happy Spring! Orange-crowned Warbler, (with orange crown!), Del Valle RP Marina 3/7/21 (P. Gordon)



**SPECIAL: MONARCHS SERIES!
BEGINS ON PAGE 6**

Field Trips



From our Field Trip Chairman, Bob Toleno: Our members' safety comes first and if things get worse again, we may need to cancel trips, but we're hopeful that we can resume trips in June!

ALL OAS FIELD TRIPS IN THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE ARE CANCELED. CHECK WEBSITE AND/OR FACEBOOK FOR UPDATES

If there was no Covid-19 and we had field trips this is where we would have gone in April and May . . .

In May:

Vargas Plateau Vargas Plateau rises from the bay plain to an elevation of 1,000 feet, overlooking Niles Canyon, Fremont, Union City, Newark and the San Francisco Bay. A prime location for birdwatching, especially for raptors, such as Golden Eagles , Red-tailed and Red-shouldered hawks, and Yellow-billed Magpies, along with owls, turkeys, and other birds.

Mitchell Canyon : Enjoy an easy to moderate walk on a dirt road for a two to three mile round trip to look for raptors, woodpeckers, thrushes, vireos and warblers.

Lake Chabot Regional Park : a variety of habitats for birdwatching: riparian, grassland, oak savannah, marshy shoreline, and open water, to look for spring migrants and nesting residents. Bald Eagles that have nested at the park in previous years!

(Need directions? send email to pagpeg@aol.com)

In April:

Alameda South Shore: Catch views of shorebirds in breeding plumage before they leave for northern breeding grounds.

Sunol Regional Wilderness: a chance to enjoy spring at one of our great regional parks, Sunol. Look for early nesting activity near the foot bridge and visitor's center.

Swallow walk—Lake Elizabeth and Coyote Hills: view several swallow species: Cliff Swallow, Barn Swallow, and the Tree Swallows in nesting boxes along the Lake and continue to Coyote Hills for more swallows and other birds in the marsh.

Field Observations return in next issue!



Welcome New Members!

Thank you for renewals and donations also!

Barbara Benda, Natalie Brophy, Daniel Brower, Tom Browne, Linda Burns, Stephen Cassidy, Michael Christopherson, Maggie Clark, Patricia Cole, Linda Dalton, Marilyn Davis, Greta De Groat, Diane Grubbe, Rebecca Flanigan, Norma Foss, Anne Marie Gonsalves, Doris Green, Erica Heron, Patricia Joki, Donna Kramer, Samantha Swatling Holcomb, Angela Ippolito, Audrey LaPell, Joan and Harold Lewis, Susan MacClean, Patricia Mann, Kate Marchetti, Madhumita Mitra, Mary Norton, Kathleen O'Sullivan, Jennifer Price, Francine Salvaggio, Brenda Scott, Claudia Schwalm, Christine Smith, Sue and Bill Stanton, Margie Swezey, Thermo Fisher Scientific, Fred & Marge Wood

PLEASE CONSIDER AN ELECTRONIC KITE CALL!

We are urging members to switch over to an electronically issued *Kite Call* (but you don't have to!) The benefits are a cost savings to our chapter, in both printing costs and postage. Other benefits include getting it quicker and it is **much more colorful!!!!!!**

GO GREEN!

Send your request to pagpeg@aol.com

RENEWALS

Look at your mailing label - it will tell you. For example: "Pd Thru 5/21" indicates that you are paid thru MAY 2021. A **"RENEW?"** indicates that this is your last Kite Call! **If you receive your Kite Call electronically**, look for a reminder in your email box. If you see a **"JOIN LOCAL?"** on your label this indicates that you have joined the National Audubon Society, but alas, **not your local Ohlone chapter. We would love to have you join us!**

To **renew** or **join** us please send a \$25 check to Pat Gordon, Membership Chair, 1922 Hillsdale Street, Hayward, CA 94541-5428. Thank you!

President's Corner

Not a good week environment wise. Despite intense local opposition, the Alameda County Board of Supervisors approved a square mile industrial solar facility in North Livermore. The city of Newark seems intent to approve development on more of our bay wetlands and a federal appeals court overturned the conviction of a self-proclaimed "dirt broker" convicted of illegally dumping 1800 truckloads into Mowry Slough.

On the search for some good news, I was birding out at Shadow Cliffs looking for the usually present Osprey and often present Bald Eagle and got to thinking that when I started birding we hardly, if ever, saw these birds. I also recalled how rarely we ever saw a Peregrine Falcon and how often we see them now, to the point where peregrine predation can create problems for endangered species recovery. So I decided to find out how many nesting pairs of these species: Bald Eagle, Osprey, and Peregrine Falcon we had in the Bay Area in the 1970s and how many we have now.

That proved to be not so easy. There are several raptor research centers in the bay area-the Golden Gate Raptor Observatory that manages Hawk Hill in Marin, the Predatory Bird Research Group at U.C. Santa Cruz and the California Raptor Center at U.C. Davis. None of these organizations had the kind of data I was looking for so I had to do more digging.

In the mid-1960's fewer than 30 nesting pairs of Bald Eagles remained in California, all in the northern third of the state. Starting in the mid 1980's, recovery programs started releasing captive reared birds in Big

Sur. Birds repopulating the SF Bay Area come from this release effort and expansion of the natural population in Northern California. As of 2017, nineteen nesting pairs of Bald Eagles have been documented in the eight bay area counties. The statewide breeding population is about 200 pairs and increasing.

Historical records from the early 1900s, as well as surveys from the 1980's, indicate that Ospreys rarely nested on San Francisco Bay. In 2013, surveys found 26 nesting pairs of Ospreys bay-wide. Seventeen of these pairs fledged 44 young. That's the most recent data I could find. I am sure numbers have increased in the past decade.

By 1972, Peregrine Falcon numbers in the Bay Area had dwindled to just two nesting pairs. Now, the Bay Area falcon population consists of breeding resident Peregrine Falcons that found prey in abundant urban birds such as rock doves and individuals en route on their migration through the Pacific Flyway. A 2018 study found 31 Peregrine nest sites in the Bay Area, a remarkable recovery.

That's some good news about birds we almost lost, and pretty much never had in the bay area. It is a credit to all those working on endangered species recovery and the natural resilience of the species themselves.

If you would like to know more about organizations working on birds of prey in the Bay Area, you should look into:



Predatory Bird Research Group UCSC



-Bill Hoppes

Conservation



Work continues on the legislative plan for this current year to preserve Tesla Park. Ohlone has signed onto the letter of support for Senator Glazer’s introduced policy bill SB 799. This bill directs State Parks to permanently preserve the Alameda-Tesla Expansion Area for conservation purposes consistent with PRC Sections 5019.71 and 5019.74, including for non-motorized recreation. To implement preservation of Tesla Park, SB 799 also provides that nine million dollars (\$9M) be transferred to the OHV Trust Fund.

There is still time to contact Governor Newsom, if you have not done so already. Send a simple message requesting that he take administrative action to redesignate Tesla Park for conservation with no motorized recreation. You can do this via Governor Gavin Newsom - website comment function (not email) - <https://govapps.gov.ca.gov/gov40mail/>

Or mail/phone to:
 Governor Gavin Newsom
 1303 10th Street, Suite 1173, Sacramento, CA 95814
 Phone: (916) 445-2841; Fax: (916) 558-3160
www.Gov.ca.gov

Lastly, check out this article: Sierra Club California calls out State Parks abandonment of preservation mission for failure to permanently protect Tesla Park and 2 other important resource areas. Read more at <https://bit.ly/38qmvrt>

More info at <http://www.teslapark.org/>

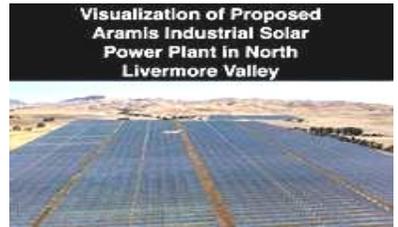


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This 
 or this? 



Burrowing Owl



Red-legged Frog

Alameda Board of Supervisors Approves Livermore Solar Project

At the end of a 10-hour hearing on 4 March the Alameda County Board of Supervisors, unswayed by intense local opposition, approved a solar project proposed by Intersect Power. The solar project, sited on agricultural land in North Livermore along Cayetano Creek, is set to cover 410 acres with solar panels and battery storage. With a final decision on the Intersect project headed for litigation, a second solar plant project, Sunwalker, a 60 acre project, is scheduled before the Board of Supervisors on 22 April.

Be sure to read this article: https://www.independentnews.com/news/alameda-county-board-approves-aramis-solar-project/article_baea7688-8223-11eb-9e18-53bf1ccf55ad.html

Ohlone Audubon did not support this project, joining with Golden Gate Audubon, testifying against it.

Save Newark Wetlands

The latest edition of *Bay Nature* Magazine features a must-read piece about the efforts to protect the former Whistling Wings and Pintail Duck Clubs in Newark from the proposed development of 469 luxury houses. It highlights why protection of this rare mosaic of wetlands and uplands is important for the future of San Francisco Bay's ecosystem.

“If we imagine what 2100 might look like, with and without this development, it may be that it is one of the few places around the South Bay where tidal marshes are able to survive, because there’s space for them to progress.” - Mark Stacey, professor of environmental engineering at UC Berkeley who studies coastal science and policy.

You can view the article at: <https://baynature.org/2021/03/09/city-and-regional-goals-clash-as-newark-pushes-ahead-with-low-density-housing-in-a-bayshore-flood-zone/>



(1st of series)
MONARCH BUTTERFLIES ARE CRITICALLY IMPERILED

THIS IS AN URGENT CALL TO ACTION:

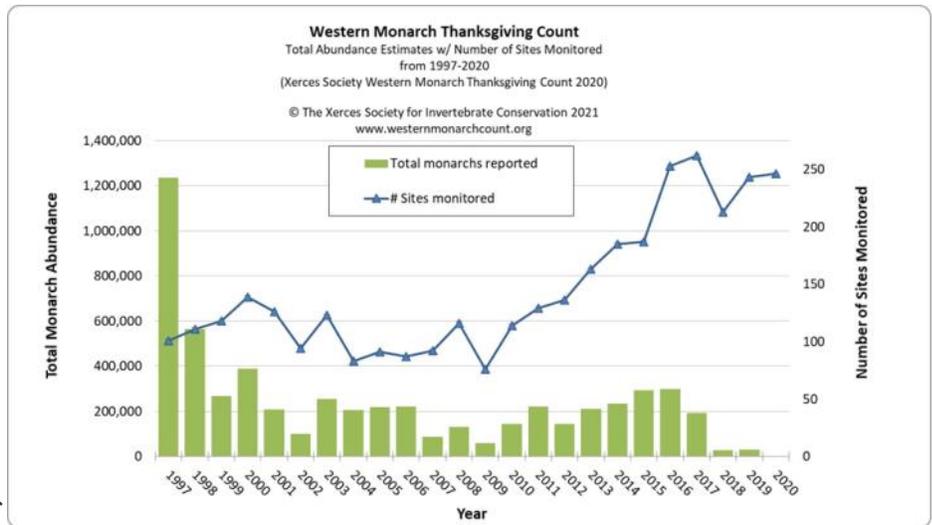
By Terry Preston

The monarch butterfly, perhaps one of the most recognizable and beloved of species, is now at the brink of extinction. Can you imagine a world without monarchs? I cannot.

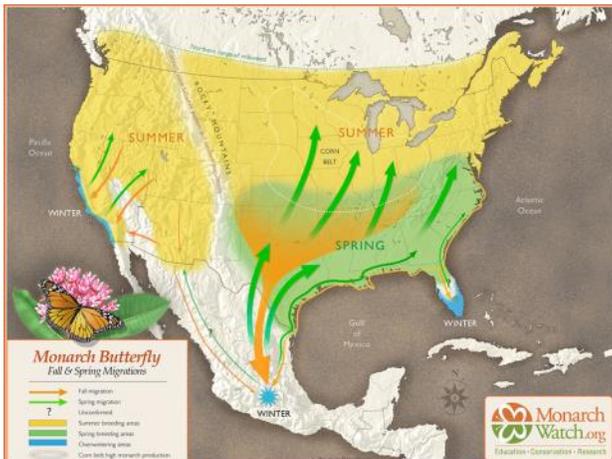
Monarchs are in grave danger of disappearing from our world. There is so much information to share, that for your sake, I will break this down into a series of articles. **The most important information that is being provided today is how we can jumpstart the process of providing critically important new habitat - milkweed for reproduction and nectar plants for adult butterflies, to get them through their entire life cycle. Because this is such a time-sensitive issue, action needs to be taken now.**

BACKGROUND

Like many other species of butterflies and pollinators throughout the world, populations have declined toward the edge of extinction. The numbers are startling. The **2020 annual Western Monarch Thanksgiving Count**, conducted at 246 count sites ranging down the Pacific Coast from northern Mendocino County to northern Baja, **resulted in an abysmal number of 1,914.** Between December 26, 2020, and January 10, 2021, surveys for the Western Monarch New Year's Count tallied a total of only 1,039 monarchs at 149 sites. In comparison, it is estimated that in the 1980's there were **3-10 million monarchs** overwintering in California. This past year there were **less than 2,000** individuals. **Monarch populations have plummeted by over 99% since the 1980's.**



Locally, in 1997, **25,000 monarch butterflies** were counted at **Ardenwood Historic Farm** in Fremont. For those of us who have witnessed the remarkable sound and beauty of thousands upon thousands of monarchs clinging to the trees during past Western Monarch Thanksgiving Counts, it is difficult to accept that only **3 monarchs** were counted here in 2020.



The result of the World Wildlife Fund Monarch Overwintering Count in **Mexico** (where the eastern North American population overwinters) also showed a decline this year. In Mexico, monarchs are counted by the area in which they gather, rather than by the individual numbers counted. During the winter of **2019-2020** monarchs occupied **2.8 hectares** of forest. The **2020-2021** winter count showed a **26% decline** from the previous year, in area occupied by monarchs, at **2.1 hectares**. **The scientific estimate is that at least 6 hectares must be occupied to sustain the population.**

(continued pg 8)

(Monarchs continued)**WHAT YOU CAN DO**

Perhaps the greatest thing you can do today to help prevent the extinction of the monarch species, is to begin to plan how you can create safe, pesticide free, high quality habitat for monarchs in your own yard or property. We've made many mistakes over the years. Planting the wrong kind of milkweed, planting in the wrong area, raising caterpillars on our own, or not providing the proper nectar sources for monarchs are just a few mistakes that we have learned from. When planning, consider taking out all or part of your lawn area and ornamentals and replace them with critical habitat for monarchs and other pollinators. You can also urge your legislators to support new proposed legislation that will provide federal funding for creating habitat and supporting this species (see below).

On March 17, 2021, Congressman Jimmy Panetta (D-Carmel Valley) and Senator Jeff Merkley (D-OR) reintroduced the bipartisan, bicameral Monarch Action, Recovery, and Conservation of Habitat (MONARCH) Act as well as the Monarch and Pollinator Highway Act. Representatives Salud Carbajal (D-CA-24) and Rodney Davis (R-IL-12) co-led introduction of the bipartisan MONARCH Act and Representative Salud Carbajal co-led introduction of the Monarch and Pollinator Highway Act in the House of Representatives. The MONARCH Act would provide urgent protections for the struggling western monarch butterfly, an iconic and important butterfly whose population has dropped by 99% since the 1980s. This legislation would authorize \$62.5 million for projects aimed at conserving the western monarch and an additional \$62.5 million to implement the Western Monarch Butterfly Conservation Plan, which was prepared by the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies in January 2019. The \$62.5 million in funding for each effort would be divided into five annual installments of \$12.5 million.



Please contact your federal legislators and urge them to support the Monarch Act. You can also sign on to the Xerces Society letter of support for this legislation here: <https://xerces.org/monarch-act>

We still need to work to convince the Federal and State governments to list the monarch butterfly under the ESA and the CESA. Unfortunately, bureaucracies move very slowly and we cannot wait a day longer for their sluggish wheels to spin. It's up to us. We need to act NOW. If you're concerned about this beloved species, please create a monarch garden or waystation as soon as you can. Spring and the planting season are upon us. The attached links will help guide you through this.

Below are links that will connect you to the best available science on how to create monarch habitat:

<https://xerces.org/milkweed/milkweed-seed-finder-for-locating-milkweed-seed>

<https://xerces.org/publications/guidelines/timing-management-in-monarch-breeding-habitat-for-the-timing-for-creating-monarch-habitat>

<https://monarchjointventure.org/get-involved/study-monarchs-community-science-opportunities-for-getting-involved-in-community-science>

<https://www.monarchmilkweedmapper.org/> for mapping sightings of milkweed

https://acrcd.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/MilkweedGuide_AlamedaCo.pdf for identifying the proper milkweed for Alameda County

<https://www.edf.org/sites/default/files/content/Monarch-Butterfly-Habitat-Creation-in-California-A-Technical-Field-Guide.pdf> for information on creating monarch habitat

<https://xerces.org/publications/fact-sheets/native-milkweed-in-california-planting-and-establishment-for-more-info-on-california-milkweed>

Two Impossible Pairs!

By Bill Hoppes

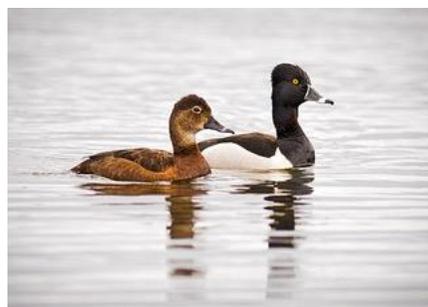
I have written several times on difficult pairs of birds to identify- Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Hairy and Downy Woodpeckers, Clark’s and Western Grebes among others. In addition to these, there are several “impossible” pairs. Birds that it seems you cannot tell apart in the field. Never backing down from a challenge, I decided to take on two of these “impossible pairs” and see if I could find enough field marks so that the average birder could confidently identify, at least, a few individuals and add them to their life list and amaze their birder friends with their ID skills. The two “impossible pairs” we are going to take on are the Greater and Lesser Scaup and the Long-billed and Short-billed Dowitcher. Let’s start with the more possible of the “impossible pairs”.

Greater and Lesser Scaup

Back when I started birding in the 1970s we usually just noted “scaup” in our checklists and didn’t bother. But even then, there were a few clues that we used to try to ID these species. The first thing you need to know, though, is that you have a scaup. Scaup are birds of open water. I don’t think I have ever seen one poking around in the reeds or sitting on the shoreline like a Mallard or a Cinnamon Teal. When we see them here, during migration and winter, scaup form large tight flocks on bays, lakes, and larger wetlands. The way I was taught to ID them was that they were black on both ends and white in the middle. Females are brown with extensive white at the base of the bill. The bird you are most apt to confuse with a scaup is the Ring-necked Duck. The Ring-necked, which often occupies the same habitat, appears black on both ends and white in the middle, but it has that white crescent in the front and white ring around the bill. Female Ring-necks look very similar to female scaup but have less white around the base of the bill and also have that conspicuous white ring around the bill.



Lesser Scaup male (L) and female (R). Note the black bookends on the male and the extensive white around the bill of the female



Male and female Ring-necked Ducks. Note the white scimitar on the male and the white band on the bill of both individuals.

So we know we have scaup, let’s figure out which one. The first clue is where we are. During winter, when we have them here, Greater Scaup tend to choose saltwater bodies, while Lesser Scaup are found in freshwater further inland. So if you looking at scaup at Pillar Point, they are likely Greaters, if you are looking at them at Merced National Wildlife Refuge, they are likely Lessers. That doesn’t help us much here since we have both and you should never conclude an identification just on location. What are some field marks that can help us.

One of the key feature to look for is iridescence on the head. This can be hard to see. Be patient, scaup usually stay put. Eventually, the clouds will clear or the sun will be just right and you will see a sheen of green or purple on the bird’s head. We were always told that Greater Scaup showed green (G for green) and Lesser Scaup showed purple. Well, that’s not totally accurate. Greater Scaup only show green, never purple, but Lesser Scaup can show green or purple. So if you see purple, you have a Lesser Scaup. If you see green, we need more clues. That leads us to head shape.

(Continued pg 9)

(Continued) The Great Scaup has a more rounded head-kind of looks like a G. The Lesser scaup has a more oval head with a definite peak towards the back. I can't see this on every bird, but if you look at enough of them, you will definitely see rounded and peaked heads. Remember we aren't trying to identify all 500 of those floating scaup out there, but enough to be confident in our identification of some of them.



Lesser Scaup (left) with purple iridescence on head and Greater Scaup (right) with green. Remember lessers can also show green. Note the “dirty” flanks on the lesser and the “clean” flanks on the Greater more on that later. Finally note the smooth rounded head on the greater and the oval “peaked” head on the lesser.

So, you are at one of the Sacramento refuges and you see scaup. They are likely Lessers. If they have a purple sheen on an oval head you can be pretty sure of your ID. If you are at Eden Landing and can't determine the head shape and see green iridescence, you need more help.

There are also plumage differences. The Greater Scaup has narrower barring on its back, and the barring rarely extends onto its white flanks. The lesser scaup, on the other hand, has heavier barring that frequently extends lower on the white flanks giving it a “dirty” appearance.

Finally there are differences in bill markings. This is more obvious as we get closer to the breeding season. The Greater Scaup has a larger, broader bill, and the black tip is more prominent and wider. The Lesser Scaup's bill is narrower and the black tip is proportionally smaller and thinner. I have had people point this field mark out to me a dozen times and I just cannot see it. Try it though. It is difficult.



Another image of head shape. Smooth rounded head (with green iridescence) on the greater (left) and oval, peaked head (with purple iridescence on the lesser (right)).



A “dirty” Lesser Scaup (bottom) and a “clean” Greater Scaup (top)

Bill marks on Greater and Lesser Scaup. I have never been able to tell the difference in the field, although many other observers can.



If you don't have both species together to compare, but it may work for you. So there are five field marks to use: location, iridescence, head shape, plumage, and bill markings. Be patient, use them all, and you will be able to identify at least several of each species of this first “impossible pair”.

If you thought the scaup were tough, be sure you are sitting down for the dowitchers.

(Continued pg 10)

Long-billed and Short-billed Dowitcher

The first thing we need to be able to do is identify a Dowitcher from all the other small shorebirds out there. Dowitchers are medium sized shorebirds about twice the size of Dunlin and half the size of a Black-bellied Plover. Its bill is twice as long as its head. Dowitchers probe deeply into mud or sand with an up-and-down motion like a sewing machine. They often roost in large flocks on the mudflat where they forage in water less than three inches deep. When they fly, both Dowitchers have a pronounced white streak down the back. So we have a dowitcher, now what.

A series of articles have been published on dowitcher ID. Most of them focus on field marks seen in breeding plumage. So, unless you are up in Alaska or the Yukon during summer, they won't be much help. You might see the marks on birds down here during migration, but we can't count on it. So, I am going to concentrate on field marks you can see in non-breeding plumage, in winter when they are down here. That will make it even harder, but let's see what we can come up with.

Habitat can be a first clue. Short-billed Dowitchers tend to prefer salt water and brackish water and Long-billed Dowitchers tend to prefer fresh water. So, if you see dowitchers up at Consumnes your first thought should be long-billed. Similarly, if you are looking at dowitchers at the shore at Half Moon Bay your first thought should be short-billed. But just as in the scaup, there is a great deal of overlap especially in the Bay Area. So habitat is helpful, but not diagnostic. Something that is diagnostic, is the call note. If you are lucky and you see the dowitchers take flight, the call note of the Short-billed is a rapid fire "tu-tu-tu". The Long-billed gives a higher pitched single note "keek". This note can be repeated, so you may need to hear several individuals to convince yourself.



Dowitcher (top), Dunlin (middle) and Least Sandpiper (bottom). Note relative sizes and long bill of the Dowitcher.

So, habitat and call note, a good start. What about plumage? If you read enough articles on nonbreeding plumage dowitcher ID, you will see references to leg length, tail shape, body shape, shape of the supercilium, posture, whether there is a "kink" in the bill or not, color patterns on the tail feathers and underwing coverts. Most of these articles take one of the following two positions- "Yes you can! No you can't! Yes you can! No you can't!" On and on. I am sure some of these field marks can be useful, but only if you know exactly what you are looking for, studied dowitchers for years, looked at hundred or thousands of photographs, and study skins as well; they are just not useful for those of us who don't want to make dowitcher ID our life's ambition. But, are there any that can give use at least one more clue.

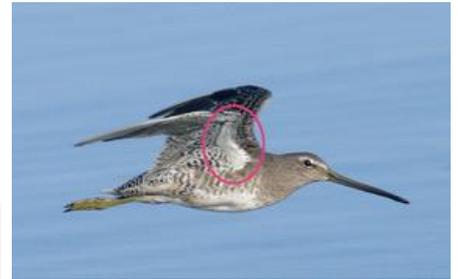
There are two that might be of some help. Both dowitchers have alternative dark and light bars on the tail. In Long-billed Dowitchers the dark bars are wider than the light bars. In the Short-billed Dowitchers the reverse is true. This gives the Long-billed a darker or dusky looking tail. With the Short-billed a whiteish or pale gray tail. Before you get too excited, a study by B. Whan in 2003 found that in the field, observers were only able to use this field mark to successfully identify 45% of birds observed.

Another field mark that can help is the underwing color. In flight, Long-bills have white underwing lesser coverts while Short-bills have barred ones. Thus the underwings of Longbills appear lighter in color than short-bills. Good luck spotting that on flying birds.

That is pretty thin gruel. Your best bet is to start with location. Freshwater for Long-bills and salt water for Short-bills. Then be patient. Eventually, some of them will take flight and you will hear their call note. That should clinch it for you. If you get impressions of the tail and underwings, that confirm the first two clues, you can be confident in your ID. Until future research on some of these other clues makes them more helpful, call note is your best clue.

These two are pretty tough. But stick with it. There are enough field marks to use on the Scaup that you should be able to identify several individuals in a flock. For the Dowitchers, be patient. It may take several tries to hear their call notes, but eventually even this impossible pair will give itself way. *(continued pg 11)*

(Dowitchers continued)



Short-billed on left with white bars wider than dark bars on the tail. Long-billed Dowitcher on right with dark bars wider than white bars. Can you see the difference? If I look long enough I don't know if I can see it

Short-billed on upper photo with barred underwing lesser coverts and Long-billed without barring on photo below.

Announcements



17th Annual Bringing Back the Natives Garden Tour and the First Annual Green Home Tour

Virtual Garden Tour Sundays 10-3
April 25, May 2, 16, 23

Virtual Green Home Tour Sundays 10-2
June 6 & 13

<https://www.bringingbackthenatives.net/register-2021>

Ohlone Member Ivan Parr asked that we announce a class he is coordinating for the Western Section of the Wildlife Society (non-profit).

This is a virtual 2-day workshop **THE BIRD COURSE, A Bird's Eye View of Ornithology**, taught by world renown ornithologists, Dr. David Bird and Dr. Rodger Titman.

Description: A one-of-a-kind opportunity to acquire a great deal of knowledge about birds with no pressure. Two jam-packed Saturdays, a week apart, will delve into everything ornithological, from how feathers work to how birds do it. Participants will come away with a basic understanding of how birds work, behave, and fit into ecology. As best friends for over 35 years, Rodger studies ducks and Dave studies the birds that eat them!

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1HRPs-ulquIHyx51k4fYObgLp78ooyp7sYN7sx2pzN0o/edit>



<https://www.pointreyesbirdingfestival.org/2021-registration-info>

The Festival kicks off on Earth Day, April 22nd through April 25, 2021!

In the spirit of keeping the festive in festival and keeping everyone safe, we are happy to announce the Point Reyes Birding & Nature Festival is going virtual this year! A 4 day speaker series that features 24 classes on hummingbirds, owls, vultures, songbirds, shorebirds, monarchs, foxes, ornithology, the relationship of elephant seals and birds, bird song, river otters, biogeographical timeline of California, mentoring young birders, natural journaling, and more!

Climate change is making California hotter, drier, and harder for people and wildlife. Beaver can help.

Please join on **April 7** (International Beaver Day) and **April 9** for the California Beaver Summit. During two online half-day sessions the summit will explore the many benefits that beavers offer to the ecosystems they occupy. Two online 1/2 day sessions. More info: <https://cabeaversummit.org/>



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