



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

- Jan. 5 GENERAL MEETING
Via Zoom
- Jan. 14 Sound Seminar
(1st of 5) also 1/21,28,
2/4, 2/11
- Feb 2 GENERAL MEETING
Via Zoom

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

Membership Meetings

OMG – Is that a new species? By Alvaro Jaramillo

Date: January 5, 2020
Time: 7:30PM
Location: Online Video
Conference via **Zoom**
(Details on page 2)



The North American Prairies: An Introduction to a Little Known Ecosystem

By Beth Madden

Date: Feb. 2, 2021
Time: 7:30PM
Location: Online Video
Conference via **Zoom**
(Details on page 2)



SEE NEW ZOOM REGISTRATION DETAILS NEXT PAGE

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



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 are disappointed, but doing so
in an abundance of caution.*

*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 upcoming 2021 meetings. See details on next page.*

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

*We hope you are all well, staying safe, and enjoying your
"backyard" birding.*

**And be sure to check our website periodically for updates!
www.ohloneaudubon.org**

MEETINGS DETAILS

January 5, 2021 Meeting

To start the new year, one of our favorite speakers, **Alvaro Jaramillo**, will speak to us about his experience in defining a new bird species, from various "splits" of species to the description of a brand new species.



(See the last issue of the Kite Call for a full program description.)

February 2, 2021 Meeting

Wildlife biologist **Beth Madden** will lead us in an exploration of the history, ecology, plants, and animals of one of North America's most threatened ecosystems. What exactly is native prairie? How does it operate as an ecosystem, and what are our challenges in maintaining it? Learn about the natural disturbance regimes that keep prairies functioning and healthy. Grassland birds will be a special focus, as we examine how different groups of birds adapted to life on the prairies.

Beth Madden is a wildlife biologist with more than 30 years experience, mostly as a federal biologist in Montana and North Dakota with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. She also worked for the US Forest Service, for Montana State University as a research associate studying golden eagles, and more recently as a biological consultant helping energy companies monitor birds and bats at wind farms. She has a BA in Zoology from the University of Montana, and an MS in Biology from Montana State University. Raised in upstate New York, Beth did not come to appreciate the prairies until her graduate research took her to North Dakota to study the importance of fire in maintaining habitat for prairie birds. Her subsequent work on national wildlife refuges focused on improving wildlife habitat by restoring natural disturbance regimes to the prairies.



OAS ZOOM Meetings are recorded!

If you missed our great meetings, here is the URL / link to the Zoom recording of December 1st Show-n-Tell meeting.

<https://tinyurl.com/yy9gfacp>

OAS membership meetings' Zoom recordings are posted, about 1 week after live, on our website:

www.ohloneaudubon.org



ZOOM MEETING INSTRUCTIONS:

Due to COVID-19, Ohlone Audubon's membership meeting 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. **Your old 2020 meeting link will NOT work in 2021!**

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

<https://zoom.us/meeting/register/tJ0ldeyopjoiHdxrTasw95GYo7GazoqhtELu>

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



New meetings in 2021

Starting in 2021, OAS will have an additional membership meeting on the **3rd Saturday** of each month at **2:00pm**, except in July and August.

The goal is to increase exchanges among members in informal virtual meetings. There will be no official presentation but a topic or theme of each meeting will be announced ahead of time. Members can volunteer to share their interest, related or unrelated to birds. It is the place to find out what other members are up to or what's hot in the birding world. Your ideas, suggestion, and participation are needed, send email to programs at ohloneaudubon.org.

We will try a few months to see if such meetings should be continued for this extra monthly membership meeting in the future.

By popular demand—some camera recommendations shared by the wonderful photographers at the December meeting



From Jim Hargrove: I am using a Nikon "Ultrazoom" these days. Much easier to carry into the field with bins and a scope.

From Jerry Ting: Camera used: Nikon D7200 and D7500; Lenses: AFS Nikkor 300mm/f4D EDIF, AFS Nikon 300mm/f4E pf VR, AFS Nikkor 300mm/f2.8D ED IF (non-VR); Teleconverter: TC-14E and TC-17E II (*see his photos on page 7*)

From Harvey Trop: I'm using a Nikon Z6 with a 200-500mm zoom lens. Probably a bit too expensive for someone starting out. Jerry's camera is a good choice.

From Chris Wills: I use a Panasonic Lumix DMC-G85 with a Leica 100-400 mm zoom lens. A relatively long lens for a relatively compact package



Field Trips

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

BIRDING OBSERVATIONS Holidays 2020

By Stephanie Floyd

The 2020 holiday season proved to be terrific for birding! Start with Alvaro Jaramillo's mid-October sighting of a super-rare **Le Conte's Sparrow** in Half Moon Bay - first one sighted in San Mateo County!

During a mid-November shorebird survey, Jim Roeth spotted an **American Golden Plover** at Eden Landing in Hayward. Teale Fristoe found a **Lapland Longspur** at Cesar Chavez park in Berkeley. Coming up on Thanksgiving, an **Eastern Phoebe** turned up at the shoreline in Martinez. A rare **Harris's Sparrow** and uncommon **Loggerhead Shrike** caught birders' attention for days at Pacific Commons in Fremont. December was off to a great start with a rare **Plumbeous Vireo** at Creekside Park in Brentwood. Mid-month Brooke Miller found a rare **Summer Tanager** at the Palo Alto Baylands; one was seen at Claremont Canyon in Berkeley, too.

For my personal enjoyment, a **Townsend's Warbler** frequented my backyard suet feeders for the first time that I know of in 30 years! (ED Note: ours too—see photo below). I'm wishing you all a merry and bright holiday with lots of birding surprises.



Phil Gordon's Townsend's Warbler on suet

Percy and Pete

A bit of whimsy from Susie Claxton
Dec 1, 2020 Ohlone Audubon Holiday Meeting



*Percy and Pete
Are a Pelican pair
They hang out together
Most anywhere*

*They glide on the lake
Wide and blue
They are pals together
Through and through*

*Sometimes Percy goes one way
And Pete goes another
But everyone knows
They call each other "brother"*

*They don't hang with the pelicans
On the beach so much
It's not that they don't like them
They just prefer not to touch.
COVID, YOU KNOW*

*Out in the middle
Of the lake so blue
Swimming round and round
Is what they like to do*

*If Percy gets cold
He stands in the shallow in the sun
Pete hangs with the Cormorants and Coots
Birds of a feather, together as one*

*They don't go up
On the hill with the grasses
They leave that to the Geese
With their waddling as\$3\$*

*If they're not on the lake
They take to the air
They fly in a circle
And land over there*

*Percy and Pete
Are a Pelican pair
They hang out on the lake
Most anywhere*

President's Corner

Feral Cats at Arrowhead Marsh

You may have read recently about the East Bay Regional Park District's efforts to control feral cats at Arrowhead Marsh in Martin Luther King Regional Shoreline. Arrowhead Marsh is one of the most significant wildlife habitats in the San Francisco Bay Area. It is probably the best place in the bay area to see the endangered Ridgeway's Clapper Rail and supports significant populations of the endangered Salt Marsh Harvest Mouse as well as many other species. Unfortunately the area around Arrowhead Marsh is highly urbanized. As in other such areas this led to a significant problem with feral cats. I won't go through all the research on this issue other than to relate the following from the National Audubon Society:

".....free-ranging cats cause substantially greater wildlife mortality than previously thought and are likely the single greatest source of anthropogenic mortality for US birds and mammals."

That one person alone is feeding over 30 cats at Arrowhead Marsh is indicative of a tremendous risk to native wildlife that must be dealt with. After repeated failed attempts to work with the folks feeding the feral cat population, EBRPD has taken the step of shooting feral cats endangering the native wildlife in Arrowhead Marsh. Unfortunately, such strong action is needed. Half-measures such as "trap-neuter-release" (TNR) are often proposed as solutions but they have significant limitations and often are failures at protecting wildlife. There is a growing literature on these efforts. TNR efforts require a

high level of sustained support over decades to have any significant impact. Usually the result isn't the elimination of feral cat populations but the reduction of the population to "sustainable" levels. This is often at 30-70% of pre-TNR levels and only after years of intensive, sustained effort. This is viewed as "success" by TNR supporters. One high intensity effort to reduce feral cats in a two-mile stretch of the Bay Trail in San Mateo claims to have eliminated a population of 258 feral cats, but it took 16 years of sustained effort to achieve this. These claims of success do not discuss the impacts to native wildlife from "sustainable" feral cat populations, or these multi-decade efforts. Other studies found that less intensive efforts were ineffective, with people seeing spayed feral cats in the wild and assuming that it is still ok to feed and abandon cats. These newly abandoned cats and kittens matched those removed.

Unfortunately, the only effective, long term solution is a major trapping program that sends them to shelters without re-releasing them back into the wild, or if that proves infeasible, as a last resort, shooting the cats. East Bay Regional Park District states one of its missions is to "preserve critical natural and cultural resources for all to enjoy now and into the future". Those natural resources do not include feral cats. The Ohlone board has written the EBRPD Board of Directors urging strong sustained action to get the feral cat situation at Arrowhead Marsh under control. I urge you to do the same.

-Bill Hoppes



From the American Bird Conservancy:

Domestic cats (Felis catus) can make wonderful pets. But cats that roam outdoors, can have serious consequences.

Across the globe, cats have been introduced into new habitats by people with terrible results. Outdoors, cats are a non-native and invasive species that threaten birds and other wildlife, disrupt ecosystems, and spread diseases.

Now numbering well over 100 million in the United States, cats kill approximately 2.4 billion birds every year in the U.S. alone, making cat predation by far the largest source of direct, human-caused mortality to birds.

Please check out their website: abcbirds.org for more info

These pamphlets can be ordered from The American Bird Conservancy

Conservation



SAVE Tesla Park

Protecting the Tesla Park Land

From Friends of Tesla Park

Please see the Commentary in the **Stockton Record** - An open letter to Gov. Newsom: "Please do not take Tesla Park from Native American people "

<https://www.recordnet.com/story/opinion/columns/guest/2020/12/17/make-tesla-park-cultural-preserve-closed-motor-vehicle-recreation/3935361001/>

In this open letter to the governor, local Native American leader, Katherine Perez, calls on the governor to permanently protect Tesla Park, which holds important Native American features of spiritual, ceremonial and archeological significance. This is on more step to push the Governor to preserve Tesla Park.

In addition, renowned UC professors Dr. Mary Power, Dr. Bruce Baldwin, Dr. Susan Harrison, Dr John Taylor and Dr. David Wake wrote an article that appears in Bay Nature calling on the Governor to permanently protect Tesla Park to prevent a public land stewardship catastrophe. Please read the article at:

<https://baynature.org/2020/12/08/op-ed-save-tesla-park-from-a-stewardship-catastrophe>

These are continuing steps we can take to encourage this governor to make good on his words about preservation and follow the science.

We can all continue to help get this parkland preserved. Please spread the word about why Tesla Park should be preserved. Retweet, follow and share our social media posts on:

Twitter - https://twitter.com/tesla_park and <https://twitter.com/saveteslapark>

Facebook - <https://www.facebook.com/SaveTeslaPark>

Instagram - <https://www.instagram.com/>

Hearings continue on North Livermore Solar Projects

The Alameda County Planning Department postponed hearings on the planned 580 acre Aramis Solar Energy Generation and Storage Project in north Livermore until the first quarter of 2021. In the interim county staff will continue review the Aramis project focusing

North Livermore Solar Projects (continued)

on the appeals received since the East County Board of Zoning Adjustments (BZA) approved the project on 24 November. This approval and the conditions put on the project resulted in four separate appeals to the planning commission including one from the applicant itself. The county plans to consolidate all the appeals in a single hearing before the county Board of Supervisors.

Aramis isn't the last solar project planned for north Livermore. The BZA approved a second project, 59 acre Sunwalker, on December 10. This project is headed for appeals as well.
-Bill Hoppes

Ruby Meadows



The proposed Ruby Street Apartments Project located at Ruby Meadow in Castro Valley was unanimously approved by the Alameda County Board of Supervisors on October 20, 2020 at the public appeal hearing. Seven community organizations, including Ohlone Audubon Society, filed an appeal at every level of the decision-making process. The local Tribe(s) of the Ohlone People, including the Confederated Villages of Lisjan, also spoke at the public hearings in order to protect this sacred site as open space. The Alameda County Board of Supervisors and Planning Department denied the request for a full environmental impact report (EIR) and instead approved the CEQA Community Plan Exemption for the project. The Board of Supervisors added the condition requested by the community to the approval, which states that the trees at the site cannot be removed until all other conditions of approval are met.

As a part of the community's appeal effort, Dr. Shawn Smallwood, Ph.D., conducted a biological assessment and provided expert comments on the proposed project. While visiting the site, he found it rich in bird species. Dr. Smallwood commented that the site is known to support seven special-status species of wildlife, and likely many more due to its role as stop-over habitat and roosting habitat for migratory birds and bats. The community's bat expert, Bethany Schulze, found several special-status species as well; the Western Red Bat was identified in her report. Dr. Smallwood stated that it is a breeding site for more than 200 bird nests. Dr. Smallwood summarized how and why the proposed community plan EIR exemption is

(Continued on page 6)

Conservation continued



Ruby Meadows (continued)

inappropriate and explained why a project-specific EIR needs to be prepared. In his expert opinion, "the project will result in potentially significant adverse biological impacts even with implementation of the proposed mitigation measures."

In response to the Alameda County Board of Supervisors' denial of the community's appeal, the community has filed a CEQA lawsuit with the Superior Court to protect Ruby Meadow, which is along a riparian oak woodland corridor of San Lorenzo Creek Watershed. The community is waiting to hear if the judge accepts it. Ruby Meadow is the last remaining open space of San Lorenzo Creek with a wide enough riparian buffer to support these birds and other animals, allowing them to travel where their survival needs can be met.

For more information on Ruby Meadow, please visit the website: <https://www.saverubymeadow.org>

-Marlina Selva



The Great Backyard Bird Count

February 12 –15, 2021

Every February, count for as little as 15 minutes in your own backyard to help expand our understanding of birds

The Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) is a free, fun, and easy event that engages bird watchers of all ages in counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of bird populations. Participants are asked to count birds for as little as 15 minutes (or as long as they wish) on one or more days of the four-day event and report their sightings online at birdcount.org. Anyone can take part in the Great Backyard Bird Count, from beginning bird watchers to experts, and you can participate from your backyard, or anywhere in the world.

Please visit the official website at birdcount.org for more information



Ken & Linda Back, Jr
 Vinnie Bacon
 Walter Ballard
 Liz & Bob Bathgate
 Bob Battagin
 Rosa Bazzani
 Peter Beiersdorfer
 Allen Bertillion
 Jo Bloom
 Forrest Bottomley
 Roger & Donna Case
 Bill Delemeter
 Mona Brauer
 Bruce Brown
 Malca & Barry Chall
 Nancy Christensen
 Ellen Culver
 Denise Dugas
 Don & Margaret Emery
 Amy Evans
 Beth Farmer
 Judith Felber
 Raymond Fontaine
 Michael Fredrich
 Sara Jane Frisbee
 Jeff & Carol Garberson
 Gatty Gatty
 Ramesh Goplan
 Alan Goggins
 Rashmi & Harish Goli
 Phil & Pat Gordon
 Gerald Green
 Helen Hancock
 Mary Hannon
 Philip Hirschberg
 Tanya & William Hoppes
 Ted Iijima
 Irene Jones
 Bruce & Judy Jund
 Esther & Ed Keller
 Karen Kenney
 Karen Kramer
 Donna Krehbiel
 Sue Krupke
 Craig Lanway
 Don & Roberta Lenkeit
 Jaan Lepson
 Alison & Sherman Lewis
 Patricia Lindsey
 David Lovejoy
 Douglas Lowder
 Carol & Ned Lyke
 Susan MacLean
 Patricia Mahoney
 Sherry Mattson

Susan Mayfield
 Paul McCollom
 Michael J. McDonnell
 John Mena
 Nancy Mendoza
 Kathryn Morimoto
 Marty Morrow
 Hans Mortensen
 Ethel Murphy
 Julie & Hank O'Brien
 Rich Nicholson
 Carolyn Norman
 Donna Nowell
 Wendy Parfrey
 Hans Peeters
 Ana Penny
 Donald & Judy Person
 Stefanie Pruegel
 William Quirk
 Mary Reed
 Bill Rose
 A.C. Riddlebarger
 Steven Rothi
 Marilyn Russell
 Nancie & Derek Ryan
 Gail Ryuji
 John Sack
 Bill Scoggins
 Brenda Senturia
 Steve Shay
 Jan Singer
 Christine Smith
 Pam Smith
 Jean-Marie Spoelman
 Stan & Vicki Stadelman
 Donna Stanley
 Mr. & Mrs. Gail Stanton
 Mary Steel
 Jennifer Steele
 Lynn & Ronnie Stinnett
 Paul Svec
 Steve Taylor
 David Tam
 Susan Teeffy
 Lawrence Thompson
 Suzanna Townsend
 Marilyn & George Trabert
 Marshall Trackman
 Tri-City Ecology
 Martin Vitz
 Holly Walter
 Ken Walters
 Jo Wang
 Robert Wieckowski
 Stan Winteman
 Julice A. Winter
 Shirley Wodtke
 Stephanie Woods
 Andrea Wuenschel
 Faye & Lee Younker
 Esteban Zapiain
 Francisco Zermano

WE THANK THE ABOVE SUPPORTERS FOR JOINING, RENEWING AND MAKING A DONATION THIS YEAR!

SPECIAL EVENT:



Coming soon to a Zoom virtual meeting in your living room: a seminar with

Nathan Pieplow on Bird Sounds!

In an effort to promote bird knowledge and interest, OAS has partnered with author and bird sound expert **Nathan Pieplow** for a 5-part set of one-hour sessions from mid-January to early February in 2021.

**Schedule
Thursdays, 7-8PM**

- Jan 14** -- A Shared Vocabulary for Bird Sounds, Part I
- Jan 21** -- A Shared Vocabulary for Bird Sounds, Part II
- Jan 28** -- Beyond Beginning Ear Birding, Part I
- Feb 04** -- Beyond Beginning Ear Birding, Part II (group presentations)
- Feb 11** -- How to Record Bird Sounds (With Your Phone)

The cost is \$30 for the seminar (OAS members), \$45 (non-members). If interested, please send a check of \$30 or \$45, including your email address for follow up to:

Ohlone Audubon Society (Bird Sounds Seminar)
1922 Hillsdale St,
Hayward, CA 94541

You can also submit fees via PayPal on our website:

<http://www.ohloneaudubon.org/index.php/upcoming-events/calendar/icalrepeat.detail/2021/01/14/368/-/bird-sounds-seminar-with-nathan-pieplow>

NOTE: Payment amount for Bird Sound Seminar via PayPal is \$30.07 for members and \$45.07 for non-members. Remember to add the \$0.07 amount to indicate your payment is for the seminar. For extra measure, but not mandatory, you can send an email to programs@ohloneaudubon.org after your payment.

Tell your friends! This is a rare opportunity to have the caliber of Nathan Pieplow for an in-depth discussion on how to listen to and decipher bird sounds, using the latest vocabulary and methods described in his recent books: **Peterson's Field Guide to Bird Sounds of Western North America** and **Peterson's Field Guide to Bird Sounds of Eastern North America.**



**Fremont Big Year 2020
By Jerry Ting**



It is December already and I am wrapping up for my Fremont Big year for 2020. Due to the covid-19 pandemic, I have been reducing my outing frequency and only birding places with a few people. The shelter-in-place order surely affected my score during the March to May migrating season. But in late May I decided to ride the bike again after 35 years which surely helps my expedition. I've been able to explore more remote areas, especially those along the bay, that were too far for me to travel by foot with equipment.

Up to the end of November, I have logged **221** species which has already exceeded my 220 goal. Some notable species include **Calliope Hummingbird, Western Screech-Owl, Cassin's Vireo, Pacific Wren, MacGillivray's Warbler, Hermit Warbler, and Lawrence's Goldfinch** from Mill Creek Rd, **Solitary Sandpiper** in Alameda Creek near the Niles Community Park, **Eurasian Wigeon, Black Rail, Semi-palmated Sandpiper, Baird's Sandpiper, Glaucous Gull, Sage Thrasher and Vesper's Sparrow** in Coyote Hills RP, and the most recent star, a **Harris's Sparrow** at Pacific Commons Linear Park. It is also worth mentioning that the eucalyptus grove in Ardenwood Historic Farm hosted the 1st ever nesting **Bald Eagle** in Fremont and they have successfully produced one offspring this year. How exciting! Please practice social distancing and stay safe while you are out there birding with friends. 2020 is almost over and hopefully 2021 will be a better year.



Sage Thrasher



Lawrence's Goldfinch



Solitary Sandpiper



Semi-palmated Sandpiper



Harris Sparrow



Baird's Sandpiper

Geese at the Sacramento Refuges

by Bill Hoppes

Geese at the Sacramento Refuges This is the time of year to visit the wildlife refuges in the Sacramento Valley. The Sacramento NWR consists of seven units including Butte Sink, Sutter, and Colusa. These are in addition to Stones Lake farther south and Gray Lodge Wildlife area managed by the State of California. Over 60% of the waterfowl that use the Pacific Flyway and 20% of all of the waterfowl in North America stop at these refuges. The Butte Sink Wildlife Management Area has the highest concentration of waterfowl per acre in the world. December and January are peak times to head for these refuges to see waterfowl. But before we go, we need to know our geese. We may see seven species or subspecies of geese at the refuges. About half are easy and well known while the rest require some practice.

Let's start with the one that generally gets talked about the least, the Greater White-fronted Goose. The Pacific Flyway population of Greater White-fronted Goose breeds in Alaska and winters primarily in California. Nearly all Pacific white-fronts breed from the Alaska Peninsula north to the Yukon River, with the majority nesting on the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta. The primary wintering areas for Pacific white-fronts are the Sacramento Valley and the Sacramento San Joaquin River Delta. These areas receive the majority of fall migrants, beginning in late September and they peak by early to mid-November. A small percentage of Pacific white-fronts, mostly from Bristol Bay, migrate early through the Klamath Basin in September, overfly the Sacramento Valley, and winter in the northern highlands of Mexico. You can see White-fronted Geese in pretty much any of the Sacramento Valley Refuges.



The White-fronted goose is named for the distinctive white band found at the base of bill. The sexes are similar in appearance, but males typically are larger. The head, neck and Greater White-fronted Goose showing white band at base of the bill and bright orange legs on the left and why it is nick-named "speckle-belly on the right. upper back of white-fronted geese are grayish-brown. The lower back and rump are dark brown, and the tail is dark brown and edged with white. The chest and breast are grayish with dark brown to black blotches and bars on the breast, giving it the nickname "speckle-belly." The belly and upper and lower coverts are white. The bill is pinkish and the legs and feet are orange. The goose is distinctive and the only bird you might confuse them with is the rare "blue-phase" Snow Goose, more on this one below.

Greater White-fronted Goose showing white band at base of the bill and bright orange legs on the left and why it is nick-named "speckle-belly on the right"

Now on to the best known goose, the Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*). Don't get too cocky, although most birders know the Canada Goose (not Canadian Goose) by sight, other species and subspecies that look very similar to the Canada make the situation more complicated. The Canada Goose has a black head with white cheeks and chinstrap, black neck, tan breast, and brown back. The one thing I want you to focus on however is the bill and forehead. See how they slope together nicely, sort of like a canvasback.



This is going to become important in a minute.

Long ago there was just one Canada Goose. But in July 2004, the AOU Committee on Classification and Nomenclature split the Canada Goose into two species, making Cackling Goose into a full species with the scientific name *Branta hutchinsii*. The British Ornithologist' Union followed suit in June 2005. Cackling Geese nest in Alaska and a large portion of their population winters in California, in fact at some locations in the Sacramento Valley, Cackling Geese far outnumber Canada geese so you just can't assume you are seeing a Canada Goose.

One we all know, the Canada goose, but note the sloping forehead

So, what does the Cackling Goose look like? Well, pretty much just like a miniature version of the Canada Goose. Some people describe it as a goose that Walt Disney would design. The first clue is size, the Cackling is about half the size of the Canada. The second clue is the bill and forehead. Whereas the Canada has that smooth transition between bill and forehead, the Cackling has a shorter bill and a more abrupt break between bill and forehead, giving the "Bambi" look.



You will see Cackling geese in large flocks in the Sacramento Valley. In our area, we see them in ones and twos. One thing that I have noticed is that Cackling geese don't seem to hang around with Canada geese. So if you see a flock of Canada geese and one or two of them seem to be off by themselves, look more closely and they may be Cackling. Also by breeding season, all the Cackling geese are in Alaska, so don't be fooled by young Canada geese that are about the same size.

(continued pg 9)

Size comparison of Canada (r) and Cackling Goose (l). Also see the difference in bill length and shape of forehead

(Geese continued) We are not done with the “Canada” geese as there is a subspecies of the Cackling Goose that occurs in our area that you can identify. The Aleutian Cackling Goose (*Branta hutchinsii leucopareia*) is one of five subspecies of the Cackling Goose. Aleutian Cackling geese nest in the Aleutians Islands of Alaska and primarily migrate along the Oregon Coast to wintering grounds in the Sacramento Valley. The population of these small (4-6 pounds) geese has made one of the most astounding recoveries in the history of wildlife management. The population has soared from <800 individual birds in 1974 to nearly 200,000 today. The primary reason for their decline was the introduction of non-native arctic foxes to their Aleutian Island breeding grounds for the purpose of developing a fur industry. Over time, conservation initiatives from the Aleutian Canada Goose Recovery Program were instituted. These included removal of foxes from nesting islands, closing of Canada/cackling goose wintering and migration areas to hunting, translocation of wild geese caught in the Aleutians to other islands where foxes had been removed, and habitat conservation. As a result of such management actions, the Aleutian goose population began a steady recovery and the subspecies was reclassified as threatened on December 12, 1990. The goose was removed from the list of ESA listed threatened and endangered species on March 20, 2001.

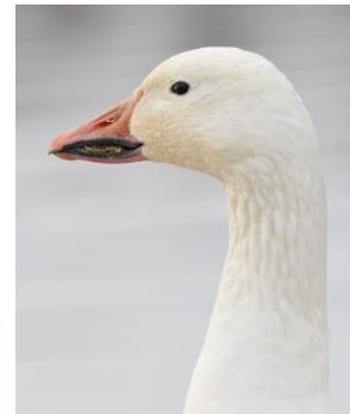
To identify an Aleutian, look at the neck. On Cackling Geese (*hutchinsii*) there may be a bit of white at the neck. However in an Aleutian, the white collar is complete, thick and prominent. So if you see a flock or group of Cackling Geese look closely. If you see some with a thick, wide, white collar, you are looking at an example of one of our most successful endangered species recovery programs .



Aleutian Cackling Goose (*Branta hutchinsii leucopareia*) showing its distinctive white collar

Now we leave the Canada Goose “complex” and head over to the geese that produce, probably the most spectacular sights in the Sacramento Valley. When the fields and skies are filled with Snow geese, it is one of the most amazing sights in nature. Snow geese present a very similar identification challenge to the Canada Goose. One large, well known species, and a second, smaller species designed again by Walt Disney.

Snow Geese are unmistakable. They are a large, all white goose with black flight feathers, pink bill, with a prominent black “grin” patch (I can’t always see this) and pink legs. The only bird you might confuse them with is the American White Pelican, another large white bird with black flight feathers. However the pelican is a much larger bird with a much broader wingspan and when you see it fly, it is usually soaring compared to the rapid directional flight of Snow geese.



Snow goose and head with grin patch (something I can’t always see) and in flight showing prominent black flight feathers.



Ross’s Goose (left) note short bill and lack of smooth transition from forehead to bill, just as in Cackling Goose. On right, Snow Goose (front) and Ross’s Goose behind showing size difference

Just as the Canada Goose has the Cackling Goose, the Snow Goose has the Ross’s Goose. The Ross’s Goose is a smaller version of the Snow Goose, a white body with black flight feathers. The clues you used to identify the Cackling Goose are the same ones to use to identify the Ross’s Goose, small size and short bill.

We are almost done. There is one more “type” of Snow Goose out there. Back when I started birding, there was the Snow Goose in the west and the Blue Goose in the east. In 1983, the Blue Goose was considered a color morph of the Snow Goose and AOU merged the two and everyone went minus one on their life list. Color morphs like the “Blue Goose” are controlled by a single

gene locus where the dark allele is incompletely dominant to the light. The distribution of color morphs is unequal in the Snow Geese with the maximum number of blue-morph geese occurring in the east. Occasionally, “Blue” geese show up in Snow Goose flocks in the Sacramento Valley. So be alert for them as you are scanning those thousands of Snow geese.



Head up to the Sacramento Refuges and see how many of these seven geese you can spot. Even if you don’t see them all, you will have a fantastic day of birding.

Blue-phase Snow Goose. Forty years ago, you would have had a new life bird.

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