



The Kite Call

Ohlone Audubon Society, Inc.

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

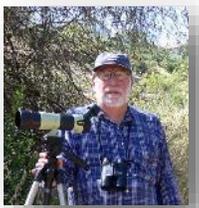
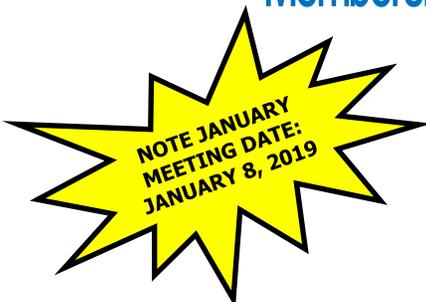
*Our Mission: To celebrate and protect birds and their habitats in
Southern and Eastern Alameda County*

www.ohloneaudubon.org

Calendar

- Jan 1 FIELD TRIP**
Arrowhead Marsh
- Jan 6 FIELD TRIP**
N. Livermore/
Springtown
- Jan 8 GENERAL MEETING**
Fremont
- Jan 19 FIELD TRIP**
Las Gallinas
- Jan 26 FIELD TRIP**
Shadow Cliffs
- Feb 2-3 WEEKEND
FIELD TRIP**
SJ Valley Refuges
- Feb 5 GENERAL MEETING**
Fremont
- Feb 13 FIELD TRIP**
Lake Elizabeth

Membership Meetings



Convincing Details and Other Birding Fiction

Joe Morlan

Date: January 8, 2019
Time: 7:30 PM
Location: Carlton Plaza
3800 Walnut Avenue, Fremont

Many articles have been published detailing how to write convincing bird descriptions, but who are we trying to convince? How many of those details are remembered correctly and how many are a product of wishful embellishment? Are we convincing a records committee, an eBird reviewer, or maybe we are trying to convince ourselves?

Joe Morlan will discuss how to prepare bird descriptions while exploring the importance of integrity in birding. He will include a brief history of scientific and ornithological fraud in what promises to be an informative and entertaining presentation.

(continued on page 2)

Birds and Bees

Debbie Wong

Date: February 5, 2019
Time: 7:30 PM
Location: Niles Discovery Church
36600 Niles Blvd, Fremont, CA 94536
(corner of Nursery Ave. & Niles Blvd.)

February's meeting is all about birds and bees, literally! Okay, it is more about bees.



Considering herself an accidental beekeeper, Debbie, has been keeping bees for 6 years. Her hives have had die outs during winter, disease, zombie bees, etc.

More interesting and rewarding are the daily routines of the waggle dance, the arrival of bees with pollen packages of various colors (and guessing what flowers), and the harsh reality of mortuary bees hauling or dragging unhealthy or aged bees out of the hives, while the "guilty" party is still alive and kicking!

Debbie practices topbar beekeeping, not the common arrangement of bees in a stack of standard boxes. She will share tales of beekeeping and tell how birds react to her hives.

(continued on page 2)



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

January Program (continued)

Joe Morlan has taught field ornithology at City College of San Francisco since 1978. He is the coauthor of **Birds of San Francisco and the Bay Area** and **Birds of Northern California**. He has served as Chair of the California Bird Records Committee and was the recipient of the 2010 Ludlow Griscom Award for contributions to regional ornithology.

Directions: From I-880 :Take I-880 to the Mowry Ave exit in Fremont, then Mowry east (inland) to Fremont Blvd. Turn right on Fremont Blvd., then left on Walnut Avenue . Carlton Plaza is on Walnut between Fremont Blvd. and Paseo Padre Pkwy.

From Mission Blvd., turn west onto Walnut Avenue in Fremont and Carlton Plaza will be on the left, between Paseo Padre and Fremont Blvd.

February Program (continued)

Debbie Wong, besides being your Ohlone program chair and a backyard beekeeper, has been a docent in the Asian Art Museum since 2011 and a bird bander since 2000. She enjoys travel (for birds and culture), gardening, reading, cooking, and attending symphony concerts and operas.

Directions: From the South or West via 880, Take Mowry Avenue exit. Follow Mowry across Fremont (toward the hills) to Mission Boulevard, turn left. You will pass Niles Blvd and the Sullivan Underpass. Turn left at Nursery Ave. Turn left on Niles Blvd. You will see the church just on the left after the turn.

From the North via 880 :Take Alvarado Niles Boulevard

(east): From the freeway exit, turn left to go over the overpass, then in approximately four miles (through Union City and into the Fremont city limits), you will see the church on your left (just after Nursery Ave.).

From Pleasanton or Livermore, or other points to the east of the hills: take 680 to the first Mission Blvd. exit, and turn right onto Mission. Stay on Mission until you get to Nursery Avenue, and turn left. Turn left on Niles Blvd. You will see the church just on the left after the turn.

From the North via Mission Boulevard Turn right on Nursery, and left on Niles Boulevard. You will see the church just on the left after the turn.



Field Trips

Directions: From I-880, go west on Hegenberger towards the airport and turn right on Pardee. Make a left at Swan and turn right into the entrance to Martin Luther King Regional Shoreline. Follow the entrance road all the way to the end. On the way to the parking lot, drive slowly and keep an eye out for Burrowing Owls on the berms to the right.

North Livermore/Springtown
January 6, Sunday 8:30 AM - 11:30 AM
Leaders: Steve Huckabone & Kathy Robertson
fieldtripsATOOhloneAudubon.org

We will walk along the Arroyo where we can expect many wading birds such as stilts, avocets, herons, ducks, teal, and many songbirds. Raptors are around - a Golden Eagle was observed a few years ago. Wide, level trails make walking easy. Pre-registration is not required. Beginners are welcome and encouraged. Bring your scope if you have one.

New Year's at Arrowhead Marsh:
Martin Luther King Regional Shoreline
January 1, Tuesday 8:00 AM - 10:30 AM
Leaders: Stephanie Floyd & Mona Brauer
fieldtrips@ohloneaudubon.org

Directions: Take I-580 east to exit 54 for First Street/Springtown Blvd., turn left onto First Street and continue onto Springtown Blvd. Turn right (east) on Bluebell Dr. and continue about 1-1/2 miles to Marlin A. Pound Park (North Livermore Neighborhood Park). We will meet at the bridge crossing the Arroyo. Park on either side of the road. Heavy rain cancels. No restrooms are on our route, so you may wish to make a pit stop before arriving at the meeting point .

A 7.4' high tide will hit Arrowhead Marsh at 8:35 AM, creating an opportunity to see Ridgway's Rails, Virginia Rails, and Soras. Wintering ducks and shorebirds will be plentiful. The area is completely paved, so if it's raining, we'll still go as rain and high tide are optimum conditions for seeing rails. One year a very rare Yellow Rail was seen here in cold, driving rain! Dress in layers and raingear as needed. This is a wheelchair-accessible bird walk. Pre-registration is not required, and all are welcome.

Field Trips (continued)

Las Gallinas Storage Ponds, San Rafael
January 19, Saturday 9AM-2PM
Leaders: Phil and Pat Gordon
pagpegATAOL.com, 510.538.3550

The Las Gallinas Valley Sanitary District's Wastewater Treatment Reclamation Project provides several miles of even-ground hiking trails, unobstructed views of San Pablo Bay, Mt. Tamalpais, sitting and picnic benches and the opportunity to enjoy dozens of bird species in and around the ponds in the reclamation area, as well as other creatures that call the reclamation area "home". The multi-faceted reclamation project includes a freshwater marsh, irrigated pastures, storage ponds, a saltwater marsh and is a great place for watching ducks and other waterfowl, raptors, and occasional rarities. Dress in layers and plan on a 2 mile walk. Bring your lunch to enjoy after the walk. Rain cancels.

Directions: From Highway 101 North take the Smith Ranch Road exit, then go east on Smith Ranch toward the McInnis Park entrance. Turn left immediately after crossing the railroad tracks, staying on Smith Ranch and go about 0.5 miles to the end of the road to the Las Gallinas Ponds parking lot. Meet the group by the bridge near the parking lot.

Shadow Cliffs Reg. Rec Area, Pleasanton
January 26, Saturday 8:30 AM- 11:30 AM
Leaders: Steve Huckabone & Kathy Robertson
fieldtripsATOhloneaudubon.org

Join us at Shadow Cliffs Regional Recreation Area to explore the lake, levees, and marsh for wintering waterfowl, Common Gallinules, egrets, herons, and grebes. Osprey are found around the lake and ponds, while the trees hold woodpeckers and nuthatches. Notable sightings in past years included Bald Eagle, Golden Eagle, Great-Tailed Grackles, California Thrasher, Common Loon, Common and Hooded Merganser, Wilson's Snipe, and Peregrine Falcon. Wide, level trails make walking fairly easy except for one short, steep uphill section to get onto the levee. Scopes are helpful.

Directions: From I-580 eastbound, take the Santa Rita Road exit, keep right and follow signs for Downtown to merge onto Santa Rita Road. Turn left on Valley Avenue and left on Stanley Boulevard. And right into the park. Meet in the first parking lot by the swimming beach. \$6 parking fee.



How about a few Geese!!!!—(S.Ferreira) 12/2/18

WEEKEND TRIP
San Joaquin Valley Refuges/Little Panoche Road
Feb. 2-3 Saturday & Sunday 8:30 AM each day
Leaders: Pat & Phil Gordon
fieldtripsATOhloneaudubon.com

We will be making our annual jaunt to the southern refuges. Saturday will be spent at the refuges in the area including Merced NWR and possibly San Luis NWR and Los Banos Wildlife Area. This should be a day of spectacular views of waterfowl: ducks, geese, cranes, and maybe swans. On **Saturday**, we plan to have dinner at Wool Growers Restaurant in Los Banos (Basque), located near the intersection of 6th and H Streets. **Sunday** will be spent driving south to Little Panoche Road and the Panoche Valley. Our plan this year is to turn around at the inn junction after birding in the area and come home via I-5, in contrast to previous years' trips home through Hollister. In Panoche Valley, we will be looking for Mountain Bluebirds, Vesper and Lark Sparrows, chukars, and a good assortment of raptors.

Campers can spend the night at the Basalt Campground or other campgrounds around San Luis Reservoir. Go to the San Luis NWR website for more information, <http://www.parks.ca.gov/?pageid=558>. Lodging suggestions in Santa Nella include Motel 6 (209-827-2700), Quality Inn(209) 826-8282, Best Western Andersen's Inn (800-780-7234), or Hotel Mission De Oro (209-826-4444). There are also several hotels in Los Banos. Meet Saturday and Sunday at 8:30 AM at the O'Neill Forebay Wildlife Area.

Directions: From the Bay Area, take I-580 E, then I-5 S, exit at CA-33 S (Santa Nella Blvd.). Restrooms are located at the nearby McDonald's and Starbucks. Proceed south about 1 mile past Santa Nella on SR-33. The parking area for the wildlife area is just north of the canal and is signed. Drive time is about 1.75 hours.

For more information give Pat or Phil a call at 510-538-3550 or cells 510-364-6472/ 510-690-7613. Trip will go rain or shine. Only heavy flooding will cancel .

Field Trips (continued)

Lake Elizabeth & Gomes Park - Fremont
February 13, Wednesday 9:00 AM - noon
Leaders: Stephanie Floyd &
Park Ranger Sandy Ferreira
fieldtripsATohloneaudubon.org



Red Phalarope (juv) found by Jerry Ting 12/2/18, No Name Trail, Coyote Hills. 1st Fremont Record! (photo V. Robinson)

On this annual field trip to Lake Elizabeth in Fremont's Central Park, we should find newly-arrived Allen's and/or Rufous Hummingbirds, and the soccer fields may be hosting winter geese such as Greater White-Fronted Geese and Cackling Geese. Tree Swallows will be swirling at the lake again, and Ranger Sandy will update us on the successful nest box program. We've added pretty little Gomes Park to our walk where along Mission Creek we may see Pine Siskins, American Goldfinches, and rare sparrows as well as resident Green Heron, woodpeckers, and other songbirds. Plan to walk about 3.0 miles mostly on paved paths. Pre-registration is not required, and all are welcome. Rain cancels.

Directions: From I-880, exit at Stevenson and go east (towards the hills) Turn right at Paseo Padre Parkway and follow the signs for the Aqua Adventure Waterpark. The parking lot for the Waterpark dead ends at the south end of the lake. Meet at the five tall palm trees at the lake end of the parking lot.

BIRDING OBSERVATIONS

November 2018
 By Stephanie Floyd

November was an exciting month for birding in the Fremont/Hayward area!

The rarest bird seen was an **American Tree Sparrow** that Derek Heins and Jim Chiropolos found at Gomes Park in Fremont just before Thanksgiving. American Tree Sparrows are common in winter in the more northerly states. Thanks to pop-up field trip leaders Bob Toleno and Juli Chamberlin, a number of us got a life bird from this sighting! Also visiting the park were a rare **Eastern Phoebe**, more than one rare **Swamp Sparrow**, and an introduced **Northern Red Bishop**. The pond at the golf course held **Wilson's Snipe** and a **Redhead**. Just across the R/R tracks, a few **Cackling Geese** and **Greater White-Fronted Geese** spent some time with the Canada Goose "regulars" at Fremont Central Park's ball fields as they do every year.

At our annual field trip to Pacific Commons Linear Park in Fremont, leader Rich Nicholson helped us find an amazing assortment of fall raptors including the often hard-to-find **Prairie Falcon**, **Ferruginous Hawk**, **Golden Eagle** and **Bald Eagle**. On the pond at the park we found a colorful **Wood Duck** and 16 **Redheads** among the more common winter ducks.

Earlier in the month, the San Leandro Marina and bay hosted a rare **Brant**, rare **White-Winged Scoters**, and a rare **Long-Tailed Duck**. Along the Hayward shoreline, one or two rare **Chestnut-sided** and **Lapland Longspurs** showed up as they usually do each year.



Light morph Ferruginous Hawk (J. Ting)

From **Jerry Ting** reporting on the OAS Vargas Plateau field trip 11/27/18:

10 people participated in the OAS trip at Vargas Plateau this morning and we got great results. Highlights include 3 Ferruginous Hawks, 50+ Tricolored Blackbirds, 7 Yellow-billed Magpies, 3 Loggerhead Shrikes, at least 8 American Kestrels and 7 Bison. The 3 Ferruginous Hawks are in different ages with different plumage which include an adult dark-morph bird. It took us a while to figure out its true identity.



Dark morph Ferruginous Hawk (J. Ting)



Light morph Ferruginous Hawk (J. Ting)

Conservation

Ferry Service in San Leandro?

This past Tuesday morning OAS received third hand information regarding an afternoon meeting taking place the *very next day* regarding a non-exclusive license agreement the City of San Leandro was going to be entering with **PropSF** (a private high speed catamaran ferry service) to use the Wes McClure public boat launch at the San Leandro Marina. To their credit, the city council members, rather than voting on what was listed as a non-consent item on their agenda, voted instead to have the proposal discussed at the Facilities and Transportation Committee meeting to enable the public an opportunity to comment on the proposal.

OAS quickly dashed off a comment letter regarding our concerns about the impacts of the high speed ferry service on the San Francisco Bay – South Marine Important Bird Area, the only IBA within San Francisco Bay proper with a global priority designation. The greatest

conservation threat listed for this IBA is boat traffic.

As our readers are well aware, San Francisco Bay is of tremendous importance to Pacific Flyway diving ducks, and in this particular area of the bay, Surf Scoters and Greater and Lesser Scaup. The “global” priority area was assigned because Surf Scoters are present in numbers that are greater than or equal to 1% of their North American population numbers. California Audubon has estimated that 40-50% of the Pacific Flyway’s Surf Scoter population overwinters in San Francisco Bay. Studies have indicated that Surf Scoters show high fidelity for specific areas of San Francisco Bay.

PropSF will be traveling from Genentech in Emeryville to the Wes McClure boat launch for a total of up to eight round trips Monday through Friday- that is up to sixteen transects at high speed through the IBA.

We raised concerns regarding adverse direct impacts to diving ducks through direct impacts (e.g. collisions) and indirect impacts

(decline in body condition due to repeated flushing from the IBA), as

well as potential impacts to the habitat (e.g. disruption of benthic invertebrates. We also mentioned concerns about impacts to other species such as foraging Least Tern in the vicinity of the marina, the Ridgway’s Rail and salt marsh harvest mouse that could be impacted by erosion of tidal marsh due to boat wakes.

Unfortunately, this type of activity, a private ferry service, seems to be flying under the environmental review radar. To invoke California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) review, a proposed activity must be identified as a “project.” The City of San Leandro has stated this non-exclusive license agreement does not represent a “project” as defined by CEQA.

For the moment we seem to have reached a dead end, but when you hit a dead end, you don’t just quit, you need to turn around and look for another way around, which is what we all need to do. - C. High



Tesla Update

Litigation All briefs for our *Ultra Vires* claim challenging the authority of the OHMVR Commission to certify EIRs and approve General Plans. This is the first of three causes of action in our law suit against State Parks and their plans to open Tesla to OHV recreation use. The hearing is set for March 15, 2019 in Sacramento Superior Court, after which the Court will rule.

Legislation We continue to work along all avenues to permanently preserve Tesla’s irreplaceable natural and cultural native landscape. Senator Glazer remains committed and we are working on plans for 2019, including legislation and building support with the new Administration and AD16 Rep. Rebecca Bauer-Kahan.

Additional Land Purchased to Protect Doolan Canyon

The Altamont Landfill Open Space Committee agreed to authorize a grant of \$1 million to acquire 137 acres in Doolan Canyon. The City of Livermore applied for the grant. The complete transaction will cost \$1.815 million. The remainder of the needed funds will come from the City of Livermore Transferable Develop Credits Fund. The land will be purchased by the City of Livermore and managed as open space. The city would continue to allow cattle grazing on the property through a lease agreement. The property can also provide a staging area for future access into the Doolan Canyon Region Preserve, owned and operated by East Bay Regional Park District. In addition, the land is strategically located to secure the greenbelt buffer between the cities of Dublin and Livermore. The property contains potential habitat for a variety of local species including: Congdon’s Tarplant, Callippe Silverspot Butterfly, breeding California Tiger Salamander and California Red-Legged Frog, Golden Eagle, Tricolored Blackbird, Western Burrowing Owl, American Badger, and San Joaquin Kit Fox. - B. Hoppes

President's Corner

Back in 1972 when I was in Howard Cogswell's ornithology class at Cal State Hayward, one of the things he emphasized in identifying birds was to first learn the families. Once you can determine that a bird is a sparrow, or a warbler, or a thrush, or a diving duck or a buteo it becomes much easier to get it down to species. That approach is second nature to me now. When I first spot a bird I try to figure out what family is it.

I just returned from a trip to southern African where we visited South Africa, Zimbabwe, Zambia and Botswana. Some of the bird families were familiar, Kingfishers, cormorants, puddle ducks, egrets and the like. But what on earth were the Phoeniculidae, which includes Wood-hoopoes and Scimitarbills, and the Meropidea, which includes eight species of bee-eaters, or the Lybiidae which includes eight species of barbets, whatever they are or finally the Malaconotidae, which includes such things as the Brubru, Puffback, Tchagra, Boubou and Gonolek. I did learn that latter bird. The Crimson-breasted Gonolek has nearly supplanted the Lilac-Breasted Roller as my favorite African bird.



Lilac-breasted Roller (left) and Crimson-breasted Gonolek (right) - tough for me to choose.

I felt like an absolute beginner, flipping randomly through my field guide looking for something that looked anything like the bird I was watching.

Struggling with all those new birds reaffirmed to me what a fabulous avocation birdwatching is and the fantastic diversity of birdlife that is out there. There is always more to learn and more to see. And you can always get a new nemesis bird. I have been to Africa twice now and the African Hoopoe, which is supposed to be common, has eluded me. I will require a third trip.



African Hoopoe, a new nemesis

-Bill Hoppes

A WARM WELCOME TO OUR NEW AND RENEWING OHLONE MEMBERS!

Ohloné sends a warm welcome and thank you to the following new and renewing chapter members:

Rick Arellano, Janet Armantrout, Ken & Linda Back Jr., Allen & Jackie Bertillion, Forrest Bottomley, Kara Borowski, Cherie Boulton, Mona Brauer, Linda Burns, Larry Danos, Bill Delameter, Alvin Dockter, Denise Dugas, East Bay Nature, Beth Farmer, Anne Marie Gonsalves, Phil & Pat Gordon, Jerry Green, Joyce Gross, Steve Huckabone, Eduardo Kneeler, Don & Roberta Lenkeit, D. Lovejoy, Harry & Lois Lutz, Susan Mayfield, Gerry McChesney, Gary Morse, Ethel Murphy, Stefanie Pruegel, Sanjay & Saritha Reddy, Steven Rothi, A. Riddlebarger, Marilyn Russell, Patricia Scofield, William Scoggins, Paul Smith, Terry Spaggins, Jean-Marie Spoelman, Donna Stanley, Mr. & Mrs. Gail Stanton, Ron & Lynn Stinnett, Karen Swift, Steve Taylor, Susan Townsend, Marilyn & George Trabert, Martin Vitz, Holly Walter, Ken Walters, Margo Watson, Karen White, Steve Wiley, Stephanie Woods, and The Zermano Family

2018-2019 Appeal

We thank the following for their continued and much appreciated support



*Rick Arellano
Janet Armantrout
Ken & Linda Back Jr.
Allen & Jackie Bertillion
Forrest Bottomley
Mona Brauer
Juli Chamberlin
Barbara Correa
Alvin Dockter
East Bay Nature
Beth Farmer
Anne Marie Gonsalves
Phil & Pat Gordon
Jerry Green
Bruce & Judy Jund
Jim Hargrove
Steve Huckabone
Eduardo Kneeler
D. Lovejoy
Harry & Lois Lutz
Susan Mayfield
Paul & Lisa McCollom
Lori Moon
Gary Morse
Ethel Murphy
Judy Ohmott*

*A. Riddlebarger
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Carol Schneider
William Scoggins
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Brenda Senturia
Steve Shay
Paul Smith
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Martin Vitz
Holly Walter
Ken Walters
Steven Wiley
Terri Wills
Stanley Winterman
Stephanie Woods
Faye & Lee Younker*

Announcements

CBC Summary—118th (2017—2018)

As you are reading this issue we most likely are finishing up the 118th Bird Count, that took place on Sunday, December 16, 2018.

The summary from the 118th Count shows that the Hay - Ward-Fremont Count placed 25th out of 2585 total counts, With our 172 species. The Following species in our Area were the High count out of all counts: American Avocet (3867), Black-bellied Plover (6058), Willet(5725), Marbled Godwit (2728), Least Sandpiper (7857), and Western Sandpiper (31,260). We truly live in a rich bird area!



National Audubon also reported that 2673 species were found (about 25% of the world's bird species) and 59,242,067 individuals. For the full summary go to www.audubon.org/news/118th-christmas-bird-count-summary. Many thanks to our participants.



The next GBC is February 15-19, 2019

Launched in 1998 by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society, the Great Backyard Bird Count was the first online citizen-science project to collect data on wild birds and to display results in near real-time.

Now, more than 160,000 people of all ages and walks of life worldwide join the four-day count each February to create an annual snapshot of the distribution and abundance of birds.

We invite you to participate! For at least 15 minutes on one or more days of the count, **February 15-18, 2019**, simply tally the numbers and kinds of birds you see. You can count from any location, anywhere in the world, for as long as you wish!

If you're new to the count, or have not participated since before the 2013 merger with eBird, you must create a free online account to enter your checklists. If you already have an account, just use the same login name and password. If you have already participated in another Cornell Lab citizen-science project, you can use your existing login information, too.

Birding Festival Resource:

THE BIRDERS' DIRECTORY

Destination Tours Festivals

Download it FREE at birdwatchersdigest.com (scroll down to Birding Festivals)

Go to the website gbbc.birdcount.org for information needed to participate. Included are instructions, a video, checklists, and much more.

2018 GBBC Stats

Species: 6,310 Completed Checklists 176,905
Participants 192,456

What happened to that Pleasanton Mountain Lion?

You may recall from last month's *Kite Call* a mountain lion found hanging around the Hopyard Grill in Pleasanton was tranquilized by Cal Fish and Wildlife staff. So what happened to it. The lion was transported and released into Sunol Regional Wilderness where it should find habitat more suited to its needs.

Look at your mailing label - it will tell you. For example: "Pd Thru 2/19" indicates that you are paid thru FEBRUARY 2019. 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.



Is it time to renew?



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 pagepeg@aol.com

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!

Three Streaked Sparrows

by Bill Hoppes

When beginning birders start to learn sparrows one of the first questions they are told to ask is whether the breast was streaked or un-streaked. If the breast is streaked that can lead birders to try and figure out which of three fairly common species that they are looking at: the Lincoln's Sparrow, Song Sparrow, or Savannah Sparrow. All three of these species are common in our area. Superficially they all appear similar, little brown jobs with streaked breasts. If you look at them carefully and study their habits, they are easier to tell apart.

Lincoln's Sparrow

Lincoln's Sparrow is the hardest to get a handle on. It took me years of birding before I ever saw one. Lincoln Sparrows are usually solitary, skulking around in low dense cover. They will often be around and you won't notice or see them. They often dart to a perch and then just as quickly duck back down into cover giving you only a few seconds of a look. So when you do get a quick look at a streaked sparrow hiding in the underbrush, what do you need to look for.

The first impression I get of a Lincoln's Sparrow is that it is small and overall pale in color. The breast has a light buffy wash and the breast streaks are very fine and do not extend to the belly, which is white. So that is what I look for. A small, sneaky little sparrow with a buffy wash across the upper breast and fine breast streaks that do not extend to the belly. There are other field marks people use, such as streaking on the head and a buffy eye ring. Lincoln's Sparrows have a distinctive call note that some folks recognize but I can't and I have never heard one sing.



Lincoln Sparrow-note the fine streaking on the breast combined with the buffy wash

Song Sparrow

Song Sparrows are show offs. Of the three this is the one you are most likely to see. Song Sparrows are large sparrows, streaky and brown with thick streaks on the chest extending down the flanks. Compare this to the Lincoln's Sparrow with thin streaks on the upper breast only. The streaks on the breast often converge into a prominent central breast spot. Lincoln's and especially Savannah Sparrow often also have a central spot so you can't depend on that field mark 100% of the time. The best thing about Song Sparrows is that they are not shy. While Lincoln's Sparrows are usually sneaking around in the underbrush, Song Sparrows are often found sitting on a prominent perch surveying their domain and singing their heart out. The Song Sparrow Song is usually one of the first songs beginning birders learn. Learn it and it will be a great help in identifying this one



Song Sparrow- note the heavy streaking and the central spot.



Lincoln's Sparrow (left) and Song Sparrow (right). Note differences in thickness of breast streaks and buffy wash on Lincoln's Sparrow.

(Continued from page 7)

Savannah Sparrow

This leaves the Savannah Sparrow, The underside of this sparrow is streaked with buff and brown across the breast. These streaks are intermediate in thickness between the Lincoln's and Song Sparrow. The breast streaks may converge into a central spot. So at first glance the Savannah can look very much like a Song Sparrow. The mark I look for is on the head. The Savannah has a light yellow wash around the eye. It isn't YELLOW so look closely. It takes some practice. Another big help is behavior. Savannah Sparrows eat seeds on or near the ground, alone or in small flocks. When flushed, they usually fly up, and circle around to land a few yards ahead. If you are walking down a dirt road you may chase the same dozen Savannah Sparrows in front of you quite some distance. Savannah Sparrows have a song, but I have never heard it.



Savannah Sparrow. The streaking is intermediate between Lincoln's and Song. Can you see the Yellow wash around the eye?



A closer look at the yellow wash around the eye of the Savannah Sparrow.

(NOTE: the amount of yellow wash varies among different locations of the Savannah)

So when I see a streaked sparrow the first thing I look for is what it is doing.

Is it skulking around in the underbrush?

Is it sitting proudly on a prominent perch singing away, or is it skittering before me in a small flock as I walk down the trail?

Then I look for a couple of field marks.

Are the streaks fine and only on the upper breast or do they extend down to the flanks?

If they are only on the upper breast are they covered with a light buffy wash?

If they are thick and extend down the flanks, is there a light yellow wash around the eye?

There are other field marks to use so study your field guides. With practice you will get these three streaked sparrows down.



IT'S NOT TOO LATE TO DONATE!
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