

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

Nov 19 FIELD TRIP
Pacific Commons

Nov 27 FIELD TRIP
Yolo Bypass

Dec 1 GENERAL MEETING
(In-person)

Dec 8 FIELD TRIP
Elsie Roemer/Crab Cove

Dec 12 FIELD TRIP
Panoche Valley

Dec 18 CBC East County
Dec 20 CBC Hayward-Fremont

Dec 26 FIELD TRIP
Cosumnes Preserve

Jan 5 GENERAL MEETING
(via zoom)

Jan 6 FIELD TRIP
MLK Shoreline

Jan 16-17 FIELD TRIP
Sacramento Refuges

Next Meeting:

Tuesday Jan 5, 2027 via zoom
ZOOM MEETING INSTRUCTIONS:
https://us06web.zoom.us/meetings/82091982477/invitations?signature=EpuCp6rqjLtJSHTCPhEGSgKnfPvzdX0nHkKHwp1BUAQ

Membership Meeting

Date: Tuesday, December 1, 2026 Time: 7:30 PM

Location: Niles Discovery Church, 36600 Niles Blvd, Fremont.

We will be meeting in the Fellowship Hall, and there are parking lots on both sides of the church.



Member Holiday Cookie Exchange, Photo Share, and Short Films

Come and join us once again for our annual holiday cookie exchange, and photo share. As in previous years, we invite members to bring ten of their favorite photo images/slides to share. There are some great photographers in our group, and we would all love to see your photos. Please bring them on a flash drive to the event. Our annual Cookie Exchange will follow the presentation. If you would like to bring a plate of cookies and copies of your recipe, that would be great. However, all are welcome to attend whether or not you bring cookies. There are always plenty to go around!

***Directions: From the South or West via I-880**, Take Mowry Avenue exit. Follow Mowry across Fremont east, to Mission Blvd, 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 I-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 , you can take I-680 to the first Mission Boulevard 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.*

NEXT MEETING: Tuesday, January 5, 2027 via zoom (See Zoom link on page 1)

Fifteen years of Northwestern Pond Turtle (*Actinemys marmorata*) Mark-Recapture Study in a Livestock Pond Subjected to Drought in Central California.

By Dave Riensche, East Bay Reg Park District

The Northwestern Pond Turtle (***Actinemys marmorata)*** has been declining throughout its range, is listed as a California Species of Special Concern, and a candidate species for listing under the federal Endangered Species Act. From 2011 to the present, EBRPD staff and volunteers have conducted a turtle mark-recapture effort to understand the population's demographics, nest site selection, habitat use, movement patterns, individual growth rates, and drought response in Contra Costa County, California. The findings demonstrate how they respond to a single-season drought, but with the increased frequency and severity of droughts due to climate change, this may have grave consequences for our native California turtles.

Field Trips



All field trips: please register at https://ohloneaudubon.org/upcoming-events/field-trips/

Pacific Commons Linear Park
Thursday, November 19, 10am - 12:30pm
Leader: Bob Toleno & Kathy Robertson

Fremont's Pacific Commons Linear Park is a productive winter birding site. The ponds are excellent for many waterfowl species. Waders such as American Bittern are occasionally seen at the pond edges. The fields can be productive for wintering sparrows. We have a good chance at seeing interesting raptors such as Ferruginous Hawk, Golden and Bald Eagle, and if we're lucky, maybe a Prairie Falcon. Snow, Greater White-fronted, and Cackling Geese often visit this time of year. Bring a scope if you have one. Rain cancels.

Directions: *Exit I-880 in Fremont at Auto Mall Parkway. Go west on Auto Mall Parkway for a mile to a small pull-off area on the left at an entrance sign, and park along the road. No facilities at Pacific Commons, but you pass a Starbucks on the north side of Auto Mall Parkway on your way to the park.*

Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area
Friday, November 27, 8:30 - 11:30am
Leader: David "Doc Quack" Riensche, driensche@ebparks.org

Join "Doc Quack" for some "fowl fun" in the shadow of California's capital city, where over 100,000 waterfowl annually winter! The Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area is an Important Bird Area, supporting globally significant numbers of waterfowl, continentally significant numbers of Least Sandpipers and Northern Pintails, and nationally significant numbers of American White Pelican, Canvasback, and Dunlin. More than 200 bird species have been recorded here, so bring your scope!

Directions: *To reach the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area, located approximately 6 miles east of the cities of Davis and 2 miles west of Sacramento, use Interstate 80 and take the East Chiles Road exit. At East Chiles Road (also known as Road 32B), turn left and travel roughly 0.2 miles (east) to the packed gravel access road and follow it up to the top of the levee berm. Here you will make a left turn through the gate and follow the road into the Wildlife Area. The Auto Tour Route is at the end of East Chiles Road.*

Registration required by November 23. The trip will be canceled if inclement weather is forecast.

Note: CDFW requires you to carry a Lands Pass. For general information on Lands Passes, go to **https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/licensing/lands-pass.**

To purchase a Lands Pass to print at home, go to **https://www.ca.wildlifelicense.com/InternetSales/.** You can purchase a day pass and print it online.

More Field Trips next page!

Field Trips Continued

Elsie Roemer Bird Sanctuary & Crab Cove
Tuesday, December 8, 9:00 - noon
Leaders: Kathy Robertson & Karen Kramer
katbirdca@aol.com

San Francisco Bay is one of the most important areas for wintering shorebirds on the west coast of North America. Elsie Roemer Bird Sanctuary in Alameda usually provides good views of shorebirds on their wintering grounds. Meet at the Elsie Roemer viewing platform, where Broadway meets Shore Line Drive.

***Directions**: From Hayward or San Leandro, take I-880 to Davis Street; exit west and go to Doolittle Drive. Turn right on Doolittle and continue to the bridge to Alameda, where the street becomes Otis Drive. Turn left on Broadway, drive southwest to Shore Line Drive, and park along the street. Bring binoculars and your scope (if you have one). This is planned as a 3-hour trip. We'll end at the Crab Cove Visitor Center, where facilities are available.*

Panoche Valley
Saturday, December 12 8am to 4pm
Leaders: Bob Toleno & Juli Chamberlin

Nestled in the hills on the western side of the Central Valley, Panoche Valley and the hills surrounding it are fantastic birding spots, especially in winter. We'll start in Tres Pinos, spending the morning in the hills west of the valley, looking for oak savannah specialties, like Phainopepla, Lawrence's Goldfinch, Yellow-billed Magpie, and possibly Bell's Sparrow in the chaparral. We'll work our way east through the hills, maybe spotting a Greater Roadrunner along the road, if we're lucky. Once we reach Panoche Valley in the afternoon, we'll search for the birds that winter there, including Ferruginous Hawk, Prairie Falcon, Mountain Bluebird, and Mountain Plover.

Bring a lunch and plenty of water, as there is no place to buy food on the route. Bring a scope, if you have one. Heavy rain will cancel the trip. There's a bathroom at the park where we start at and a saloon with a restroom in the valley, but otherwise services are very limited. A little walking may be involved, but no serious hiking.

***Directions:** Take I-880 south to I-101 south, and exit at Hwy 25 south. Continue on 25 through Hollister to Tres Pinos. We'll meet at the San Benito County Historical Park just a short distance past Tres Pinos.*



Black Skimmers, Marbled Godwits and more from Elsie Roemer Bird Samctuary10/23/26. Photo by Dave Scandling

Cranes and other Charismatic Critters
Cosumnes River Preserve,
Woodbridge Ecological Reserve
Saturday, December 26, 1:30pm to sunset
Leader: David "Doc Quack" Riensche

Each fall, Sandhill Cranes return to the Central Valley where they feed, socialize, and rest in the fields and then fly to roost overnight in wetlands. Tundra Swans, Cackling Geese, Snow and Ross's Geese, rafts of winter ducks, and other waterfowl and raptors are commonly seen. During this season, more than 200 species of birds may be observed! We'll bird the boardwalk at Cosumnes River Preserve and drive by the Desmond Road ponds, check out Staten Island, and make our way to Woodbridge Ecological Reserve for sunset fly-in (~4:53 pm). The field trip ends at Woodbridge, where you can easily get back on I-5 for the drive home. Wear layers and bring snacks and water. Cosumnes River Preserve is about 70 miles from Livermore.

***Directions:** Take I-580 east to I-205 east to I-5. Take I- 5 north to the Twin Cities Road exit. Go east on Twin Cities Road about 1 mile and turn right on Franklin Blvd. Continue about a mile or so to the visitor center (facilities available). Look for the group in the parking lot or on the boardwalk.*
Registration required by Dec 22. The trip will be canceled if inclement weather is forecast.

And more Field Trips next page!

RAIL-tails - Martin Luther King Regional Shoreline
Wednesday, January 6, 9:00 – 11:00 am
Leaders: David "Doc Quack" Riensche & Maggie Clark

A 7.2' high tide will hit Arrowhead Marsh, offering a chance to see Ridgway's Rails, Virginia Rails, and Soras. Wintering ducks and shorebirds will be plentiful. If time permits, we may use "Doc Quack's" special access code to visit the New Marsh and "peep at" the newly finished "Shorebird Sanctuary" island. Dress in layers. The area is completely paved. This is a wheelchair-accessible field trip.

Registration required by January 4. The trip will be canceled if inclement weather is forecast.

Directions: *From I-880, go west on Hegenberger toward the airport, then turn right on Pardee. Turn left at Swan, then turn right into the entrance to Martin Luther King Regional Shoreline. Follow the entrance road to the end. On the way to the parking lot, drive slowly and watch for Burrowing Owls on the berms to the right.*

Sacramento Valley Refuges
Saturday and Sunday January 16-17, 9:00am- 4+pm (both days)
Sacramento and Colusa NWRs (Sat) Llano Seco NWR and Gray Lodge Wildlife Area (Sun)
Leaders: Pat Gordon & Kathy Robertson pagpeg@aol.com

Join us for our annual and hopefully spectacular weekend of waterfowl in California's Central Valley! We have planned the weekend to include the Sacramento and Colusa NWRs on Saturday, followed on Sunday by visiting the Llano Seco unit of the Sacramento NWR and ending the day at Gray Lodge Wildlife Area, near Gridley, with many hopefully staying for the fly-in (or fly-out?) at sunset. Often on the drive to this unit we see Tundra Swans in the fields, along with Sandhill Cranes.

There should be hundreds of ducks, geese, and swans, along with shorebirds and a host of raptors! Three of the refuges offer auto tour routes, and there will be some walking at Llano Seco, which has a viewing platform that affords great close views of ducks and geese. A short hike at Gray Lodge is also planned.

Saturday – meet at the new Visitor Center at Sacramento Wildlife Refuge.
Sunday - meet at Starbucks in Willows.

Bring lunch both days. Trip will go rain or shine. For those wishing to spend the entire weekend with us, overnight accommodations can be found in Willows or Williams. (Granzellas, Best Western, Holiday Inn, Super 8, Motel 6, etc.). We are tentatively planning a group dinner in Williams on Saturday night.

Note: Sacramento NWR requires a pass, or it is free for seniors, and/or a Federal Duck Stamp (registration at entry kiosk). Gray Lodge Wildlife Area does require a CDFW Lands Pass ($5.97 in 2026), which can be purchased online at **https://wildlife.ca.gov/Licensing/Lands-Pass** or by calling (800) 565-1458.

Directions: Saturday-*To reach Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge headquarters, which is located approximately 90 miles north of Sacramento on Interstate 5 and six miles south of the town of Willows. When traveling north on Interstate 5, pass the town of Maxwell, take exit #595/Road 68, and make a left turn and travel north on County Road 99W for 1.5 miles to reach the refuge entrance. The six-mile Auto Tour Route starts at the Visitor Center. Restrooms and parking spaces are available at the Visitor Center, where we will meet.*

Directions: Sunday–*The Starbucks is located at 505 N. Humboldt Street in Willows. From I–5 in Willows, go east on Hwy 162, turn left on N. Humboldt to the Starbucks. If you wish to go directly to Llano Seco, continue on Hwy 162 through Butte City, left on Road Z, staying on that road, then left on 7 Mile Road to the unit. Restrooms are available. The group should be there about 10 AM.*

Bird Observations—Autumn 2026

By Bob Toleno

Autumn is in full swing, and that means North American migratory birds are heading south. **Golden-crowned**, **Fox,** and **Lincoln's Sparrows** have arrived in the Bay Area and established wintering territories. Winter ducks, like **Bufflehead, Northern Pintail**, and **Green-winged Teal** have started arriving in numbers.

Fall also means it's rare bird season, and this fall has seen some incredible vagrants throughout the Bay Area! The biggest news would definitely be the **Yellow-browed Warbler** that was found in Moss Beach. This was only the third record in the lower 48 states and second in California of this Asian species that, while called a warbler, is not closely related to North American warblers. Hundreds of birders were delighted by this bird for the two days it hung around.

This fall has also seen a major irruption of montane birds into the Bay Area, including **Red Crossbill, Evening Grosbeak, Cassin's Finch, Clark's Nutcracker**, and even a few **Pinyon Jay. Pine Siskin** and **Red-breasted Nuthatch,** while less rare, have been showing in very impressive numbers, too.

Other rare birds included Alameda County's first and second records of **Prothonotary Warbler**, one at Ardenwood and one in a Union City backyard. A **Northern Waterthrush** showed up at Mills College, **Prairie Warbler** in Point Reyes, **Blackpoll** and **Chestnut-sided Warblers** at Lake Elizabeth, and **Palm Warbler** at Mountain View Cemetery. A **Parasitic Jaeger flew over San Leandro Bay**, and **Lapland Longspurs** reappeared again this year at the Hayward Shoreline! Another incredible sighting was a **Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher** in Golden Gate Park in San Francisco. Autumn is the best time for seeing rare birds. We hope you got out and enjoyed some of these! ***(All incredible photos by Bob Toleno, except Prothonotary Warbler by Juli Chamberlin.)***



Red Crossbill 17 Oct, Tilden Regional Park



Evening Grosbeak 11 Oct, Berkeley Hills



Cassin's Finch, 17 Oct, Tilden RP



Chestnut-sided Warbler, 3 Oct, Gomes Park



Blackpoll Warbler, 2 Oct, Lake Elizabeth



Prothonotary Warbler, 17 Oct, Union City backyard



Northern Waterthrush, Mills College, 17 Sept



Parasitic Jaeger, 2 Oct, San Leandro Bay



Lapland Longspur, 25 Oct, Hayward Regional Shoreline



Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher, 7 Oct, Golden Gate Park



CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Eastern Alameda County Bird Count Friday December 18, 2026

Join the 18th annual **Eastern Alameda County Christmas Bird Count** on **Friday, December 18, 2026**. The 15-mile-diameter count circle is in the vicinity of the towns of Sunol, Pleasanton, and Livermore, and includes five East Bay Regional Parks, significant SFPUC watershed lands, and East Bay birding hotspots such as lower Mines Road, Sunol Wilderness, and Sycamore Grove Park. Birders and volunteers with any level of experience can participate in the Christmas Bird Count.

Please send an email to **eac.cbc@gmail.com** if you're interested in participating!

Hayward-Fremont Christmas Bird Count Sunday December 20, 2026

The Christmas Bird Count has been an annual tradition for 126 years, and is still going strong. Each year, during the period from December 14 through January 5, birders all over the world count birds inside of established 15-mile-diameter circles. Locally, our Hayward-Fremont CBC circle extends from the Pleasanton hills to the San Francisco Bay, from Castro Valley to Mowry Landing. Last year, a great team of almost 100 field counters and feeder watchers detected 179 bird species inside the circle. Teams of counters spread out throughout the area to count birds all day long, then came together at the end for a dinner to report their findings.

This year's CBC will take place on Sunday, December 20. We're looking for volunteers to help out counting birds in the field, or from home at your feeders (contact us to find out if your home is inside the circle). If you'd like to help, register through the link below.
We have been successful in years past and need your help to be successful once more. Community science projects like the CBC benefit from broad participation, consistent coverage from our area leaders, and the work of each field and feeder counter. **https://ohloneaudubon.org/event/3931/**

NEW CBC! Crane Ridge-Corral Hollow Sunday January 3, 2027

This is a new circle for the 2026-7 season, organized by San Joaquin AS and supported by Ohlone. The circle is located SW of Tracy. It is mostly in San Joaquin County but extends some into Alameda County. Parts of Patterson Pass Road, Corral Hollow/Tesla Road and Mines Road are included. Also other areas to be covered are SE Tracy neighborhoods and parks, Tracy Hills, the canal and aqueduct, Carnegie SVRA, Tesla Park, etc.

The count is open to everyone and please help in this new count. These tentative sectors have been described: Sectors are geographic subdivisions of a count circle that help organize the count. Each sector typically has a designated leader who coordinates the counting parties working in that area.

Canal & Aqueduct Carnegie SVRA Corral Hollow Road Deep Gulch & Tracy Golf Club
LLNL Site 300 Mines Road Mines Road Ranches NE Mines Road Ranches SW
Patterson Pass Road Tesla Park Tesla Road Tracy Tracy Hills

View the map and register for this new exciting count at **https://cbc.audubon.org/en/join/circles/CACG**.
For more info contact Henry Koertzen **cacgcbc@gmail.com** or Pat Gordon **pagpeg@aol.com**

President's Corner

by Bill Hoppes

Although my primary interest is birds, I am always alert to news of other wildlife. Two stories recently caught my eye.

Sea Turtles Nest in California



In a historic first, two endangered Olive Ridley Sea Turtles nested on Southern California beaches in September 2026, marking the first confirmed natural sea turtle nesting on the U.S. West Coast. One turtle laid eggs near Seal Beach on September 16, followed by another near Huntington Beach Pier three days later. The discovery has drawn national attention because Olive Ridley turtles typically nest in warmer regions, including Mexico and Central America. Scientists believe unusually warm Pacific Ocean waters associated with a strong El Niño may have encouraged the turtles to travel farther north.

Hazardous surf and high tides threatened both nests. On September 25, wildlife officials relocated more than 200 eggs to the Aquarium of the Pacific in Long Beach, where specialists are incubating them under controlled conditions. Officials are developing conservation plans in case more turtles nest in California. If the eggs successfully hatch, the plan is to release the young turtles near the original nest sites allowing the young turtles to enter the ocean naturally. The event could signal an important ecological change, although scientists caution that continued monitoring is needed to understand its long-term pattern.

I am always amazed on how nature finds a way. It would be so cool to have sea turtles nesting on our California beaches.

Western Spadefoot Gains New Protection in California

As of October 2026, the Western Spadefoot (***Spea hammondii***) has gained temporary protection under the California Endangered Species Act (CESA). On August 13, 2026, the California Fish and Game Commission designated the species a candidate for listing, triggering a one-year scientific review. The proposal seeks threatened status for northern populations and endangered status for southern populations. Permanent listing has not yet been decided.



For the Livermore area, this development is important because the toad depends on grasslands, suitable underground refuges and seasonal pools formed by winter rains for breeding. Urban development, agricultural conversion, habitat fragmentation, and loss of seasonal wetlands threaten its survival. Local environmental assessments have identified potential habitat and recorded occurrences in the broader area, although presence varies by site. The new candidate status strengthens protections while scientists evaluate the species' future. For Livermore, preserving seasonal ponds, native grasslands, and connections between habitats will be important for the toad's long-term survival.

Good news for sea turtles, not so good news for spadefoot toads. Tesla Park has documented populations of Western Spadefoot, so our work to protect this special area is doing good work. I will track these stories and let you know of any updates.



Be sure to check out our website at
www.ohloneaudubon.org

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

Conservation

Tri-Valley Conservancy Announces Two Acquisitions in North Livermore

Doolan Canyon

Tri-Valley Conservancy (TVC) has protected a new 133-acre conservation easement, adding to more than 1346 acres of ecologically valuable land already protected by TVC in Doolan Canyon. This, added to lands owned by the East Bay Regional Park District and other protected lands, brings total protected lands in Doolan Canyon to 2700 acres. By connecting these properties, the easement helps maintain an important wildlife corridor that allows animals to move between food, water, and shelter. This connectivity is especially important for the California Tiger Salamander and California Red-legged frog, both of which depend on healthy wetlands and surrounding grasslands.

Springtown

At Springtown Preserve, TVC has protected an additional 200 acres, expanding the existing 40-acre preserve and safeguarding some of North Livermore's most distinctive alkali wetlands. This brings the total of 300 acres of protected lands in the preserve. These wetlands support rare plants, including Livermore Tarplant and Palmate-bracted Bird's beak, as well as wildlife such as the California Tiger Salamander, California Red-legged Frog, Western Burrowing Owl, and vernal pool fairy shrimp. Together, these acquisitions represent important progress in protecting North Livermore's unique natural heritage, preserving sensitive habitats, and maintaining connections across the landscape.



Alameda County Abandons Proposed Measure D Ballot Amendment for November 2026

As of October 16, 2026, the Alameda County Board of Supervisors dropped its proposal to place a Measure D amendment on the November 2026 ballot. The decision followed summer polling that indicated substantial voter opposition. Approved by voters in 2000 and amended in 2022, Measure D protects agricultural land and open space in eastern Alameda County. Among its key protections is an urban growth boundary at Greenville Road in the Livermore Valley. The proposed amendment would have allowed the Board of Supervisors, with a four-fifths supermajority vote, to approve technical and administrative amendments to Measure D without returning to voters. After respondents heard arguments both for and against the proposal, 57% opposed it, 40% supported it, and 3% were undecided. Although the proposal was abandoned for November, the Board has not ruled out pursuing changes in the future. ***Conservation advocates and Ohlone members should remain vigilant about renewed efforts to modify Measure D and its protections for agricultural land and open space.*** **-Bill Hoppes**

Conservation *(continued)*

Update on Eden Landing Data Center Near Hayward Shoreline and Moratorium on New Data Centers

The Hayward City Council voted unanimously on October 20, 2026, to enact an immediate moratorium on consideration and approval of new data centers. This does not halt construction or reverse decisions on currently approved projects, such as the data center at Eden Landing near Hayward Shoreline.

The moratorium comes in response to a large number of public comments regarding the lack of transparency on the approval of construction at Eden Landing and concerns about the impact data centers have on the environment due to their high demands for energy and water, as well as the amount of air, land, water, and noise pollution. Ohlone Audubon Society has expressed concerns about the impacts to wildlife, plants, and habitat loss.

According to City of Hayward's newsletter publication, **The Stack**, the article "Hayward City Council Enacts Immediate Moratorium on New Data Centers" states:

The moratorium enacted on Tuesday is intended to call a timeout to give City staff time to analyze the cumulative impacts of current and potential future data center development on energy and water supplies, air quality, industrial noise levels, City emergency response capacity and City economic development priorities.

Under State law, it can remain in place for up to two years while the City considers more lasting changes to related land-use and zoning ordinances and regulations.

Data centers are buildings designed and equipped for high-density computing and require dedicated uninterrupted power supplies and cooling systems. The advent and expansion of artificial intelligence is driving development of larger-scale and hyperscale data centers with ever increasing energy demands.

In Hayward, there are four existing and approved data centers near Pacific Gas and Electric Company's Eastern Substation in the southwestern portion of Hayward's industrial crescent on the City of Hayward's westside:

- ***A 24-megawatt (MW) facility called SF09 operating on a 10.9-acre site along Corporate Avenue.***
- ***A 35-MW facility called SF11 operating on a 4.24-acre site also on Corporate Avenue.***
- ***A 49-MW facility called Hayward Exchange @92 operating on 6.57 acres of a larger industrial campus along Clawiter Road near Breakwater Court.***
- ***A 76.6-MW facility called Stack Data Center (SVY03A) under construction on an 11.3-acre site on Eden Landing Road.***

Additionally, the City has been approached by a developer planning to submit applications for two new data centers that would operate each within a half mile of Hayward's existing data centers.

-Marlina Selva



A Warm Welcome to new members and thank you to those renewing and donating to us!

New and Renewing

Stephen Buffi
John Cant
Thomas Delfosse
Michelle Harrison
Yvette MacDonald
Mala Nagarajan
Marjorie Powell
Anne Ronan
John S. Sack
Ed Skedzielewski

Donation

Michelle Harrison

Getting to Know Three Alameda County Sparrows

By Bill Hoppes

Chipping, Lark, and Rufous-crowned Sparrows

Everyone knows our common sparrows, Song, White-crowned, Golden-crowned and perhaps Fox. But our area is an excellent place to learn to identify some of our less common ones. Its combination of grasslands, oak woodlands, chaparral, agricultural fields, suburban parks, and coastal marshes provides habitat for a surprising variety of these birds. Among the species worth learning are the Chipping Sparrow, Lark Sparrow, and Rufous-crowned Sparrow. Although all three belong to the sparrow family, they differ considerably in appearance, behavior, habitat preferences, and the likelihood of encountering them locally.

For birders, these three species offer an especially useful lesson: Identifying sparrows is not just about memorizing colors and markings. It is about combining the bird's face pattern, body shape, behavior, habitat, and geographic setting.

The Chipping Sparrow is a small, tidy-looking bird most often associated with trees and open woodland. The Lark Sparrow is a larger, boldly patterned bird of open country. The Rufous-crowned Sparrow is a ground-dwelling specialist of rocky, brushy hillsides. Learning to recognize these differences will make outings in the East Bay foothills and surrounding lowlands much more rewarding.

CHIPPING SPARROW: The Small, Neat Sparrow with a Rusty Cap
Scientific name: ***Spizella passerina***



Natural history
The Chipping Sparrow is a small, slender sparrow whose simple appearance makes it one of the more approachable species. It occurs across much of North America, favoring open woodlands, woodland edges, parks, and other places where trees are interspersed with open ground and especially lawns. It feeds mainly on seeds outside the breeding season, but insects become important when adults are raising young.

In Alameda County, Chipping Sparrows are worth watching during spring and fall migration, when birds moving between wintering and breeding areas may appear in parks, gardens, and wooded landscapes. They are not a bird to expect in every patch of grassland. Look instead for a combination of trees, shrubs, and open ground. Chipping Sparrows typically forage on the ground, hopping about as they pick up seeds and small food items. When disturbed, they may retreat into shrubs or fly to a nearby tree. They often gather in loose groups outside the breeding season, making it possible to encounter several together. During the breeding season, males deliver a rapid, dry trill, often from an exposed branch near the top of a tree. Learning this sound can help you find a bird before you see it.

How to identify Chipping Sparrows

The adult Chipping Sparrow in breeding plumage has three especially useful features:

- Rusty crown: The top of the head is a rich reddish-brown.
- Dark eyeline: A narrow black stripe runs through the eye, contrasting with the paler face.
- Plain underparts: The breast and belly are generally clean grayish-white, without the heavy streaking found on many other sparrows.

The bird's small size, slender bill, and relatively delicate appearance provide additional clues. In good light, the combination of a rusty cap, black eyeline, and unmarked breast is distinctive. ***(continued page 11)***

(continued from page 10)

There is an important complication for some birds: Chipping Sparrows do not look equally colorful throughout the year. Adults in nonbreeding plumage have a duller brown cap and less striking facial markings. Young birds are streakier than adults, particularly on the breast and crown. A bird that looks like a classic Chipping Sparrow in May may seem much less obvious in October.

If you see a small sparrow in a tree-lined park with a dark stripe through its eye and a plain breast, look carefully for a Chipping Sparrow. Do not reject the identification just because the crown is brown rather than bright rusty red.

LARK SPARROW: The Boldly Patterned Sparrow of Open Country

Scientific name: ***Chondestes grammacus***



Natural history

The Lark Sparrow is one of the most distinctive-looking sparrows in western North America. Larger and more robust than the Chipping Sparrow, it inhabits open country, including grasslands, agricultural areas, pastures, and landscapes with scattered trees or shrubs.

Its habitat preferences make it particularly relevant to Alameda County, where broad grasslands and oak-studded hills form an important part of the East Bay landscape. Unlike a sparrow that depends on dense woodland or marsh vegetation, the Lark Sparrow is at home in relatively open terrain. It often forages on the ground, searching for seeds and insects, and may perch on a fence, shrub, or low tree to survey its surroundings.

Lark Sparrows are especially interesting to observe because their conspicuous facial pattern can make an adult easy to recognize once you know what to look for. During the breeding season, males sing from elevated perches. When startled, the birds may fly to nearby vegetation, and their long tails can show conspicuous white corners in flight.

In Alameda County, focus on grassland and oak-grassland mosaics rather than heavily wooded areas or densely vegetated wetland margins. A bird seen walking across bare ground or short grass in open country deserves a closer look, particularly if its head appears unusually patterned.

How to identify Lark Sparrow

The adult Lark Sparrow is a striking bird, with several features that separate it from the other two species:

- Bold facial pattern: Chestnut, white, and dark stripes create a complex pattern across the head.
- Dark mustache stripe: A black mark runs down the side of the throat.
- Chestnut cheek patches: Reddish-brown areas stand out against the pale face.
- Central breast spot: A distinct dark spot is usually visible on the otherwise pale breast.
- Long tail with white corners: These white markings are especially useful when the bird flies away.

The Lark Sparrow is also noticeably larger and heavier-looking than the Chipping Sparrow. Its head markings can appear almost mask-like, while the Chipping Sparrow's face is comparatively simple.

Juvenile Lark Sparrows are less colorful and have streaked breasts. Their facial patterns are present but muted, so young birds can be more challenging to identify. Look for the overall body shape, the developing facial pattern, and the open-country setting rather than relying on chestnut coloration alone.

Learn the Lark Sparrow's face as a single pattern before trying to memorize every individual stripe. A large, pale sparrow with a chestnut-and-white head, dark mustache, and central breast spot is a strong candidate.

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RUFOUS-CROWNED SPARROW: The Elusive Resident of Rocky Hillsides
Scientific name: ***Aimophila ruficeps***

Natural history



The Rufous-crowned Sparrow is the most habitat-specialized of these three species. It favors dry, open hillsides with rocky ground, scattered grasses, and low shrubs. In California, it is associated with coastal scrub, chaparral edges, and foothill habitats, where vegetation provides cover without becoming an impenetrable thicket.

This sparrow is generally a year-round resident rather than a long-distance migrant. That makes it especially interesting to Alameda County birders: finding one can reveal a local breeding-habitat specialist rather than a bird simply passing through on migration.

The East Bay's dry hillsides and rocky, brushy slopes provide the kind of landscape to investigate. Look where patches of exposed soil or rock alternate with grasses and scattered shrubs. The bird may be present without being obvious, spending much of its time close to the ground and slipping into cover when disturbed.

Rufous-crowned Sparrows feed on the ground, taking seeds and insects. They often hop or run between patches of cover instead of making repeated long flights. Males may sing from a shrub or another exposed perch, particularly during the breeding season. Listening carefully in suitable habitat can be more productive than walking quickly along a trail and hoping to see one.

How to identify Rufous-crowned Sparrow

The Rufous-crowned Sparrow has a reddish-brown crown, grayish face and underparts, and a distinctive facial pattern. Look for these features:

- Rufous crown: The reddish-brown cap gives the species its name.
- White eyering: A pale ring around the eye contrasts with the darker facial markings.
- Dark mustache or whisker stripe: A dark mark borders the white stripe along the side of the throat.
- Streaked back: The upperparts have brown and rusty streaks.
- Sturdy bill and relatively long tail: The bird looks somewhat heavier than a Chipping Sparrow.

The facial markings are particularly important. Both the Rufous-crowned Sparrow and the Lark Sparrow have a dark mustache-like mark, but their overall patterns differ. The Lark Sparrow has a much more elaborate chestnut-and-white head pattern and a conspicuous central breast spot. The Rufous-crowned Sparrow has a more subdued gray face, a prominent white eyering, and a rusty crown.

Compared with a Chipping Sparrow, the Rufous-crowned Sparrow is generally bulkier and has a stronger bill. Most importantly, it has a white eye ring and dark whisker marking, rather than the Chipping Sparrow's simpler dark eyeline.

In dry, rocky East Bay foothills, pay attention to a sparrow that keeps disappearing into low brush. If it has a rusty cap, white eye ring, and a dark whisker stripe, the Rufous-crowned Sparrow should be high on your list.

Comparing the Three Species in the Field

The easiest way to remember these birds is to think of their most conspicuous features and the environments in which you are likely to find them .

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Feature	Chipping Sparrow	Lark Sparrow	Rufous-crowned Sparrow
Overall appearance	Small and slender	Larger, long-tailed	Sturdy, long-tailed
Head pattern	Rusty cap and dark eye line in breeding plumage	Bold chestnut, white, and black pattern	Rusty cap, white eye ring, dark whisker stripe
Breast	Usually plain in adults	Pale with central dark spot	Grayish; lacks Lark Sparrow's central spot
Preferred habitat	Open woodland, parks, tree edges	Grassland, farmland, open country	Dry, rocky, brushy slopes
Typical behavior	Ground-feeding; often uses trees	Ground-feeding in open country	Ground-feeding close to cover
Local search strategy	Wooded parks and migration stopovers	Open grasslands and oak-grassland	Rocky, sparsely vegetated foothills

The key is to avoid using just one feature. A rusty crown, for example, is not enough by itself to identify a sparrow. Instead, ask yourself three questions:

1. What does the face look like? Is there a simple dark eyeline, an elaborate striped pattern, or a white eye ring with a dark whisker mark?
2. What does the breast look like? Is it plain, marked with a central spot, or grayish?
3. What is the bird doing, and where? Is it near trees, walking across open grassland, or staying close to cover on a rocky hillside?

These questions will usually narrow the possibilities quickly.

Where to Look in Alameda County

These parks offer useful opportunities to explore the different habitats associated with these sparrows. They are habitat-based suggestions, not guarantees that any particular species will be present on a given day.

Brushy Peak Regional Preserve — Livermore area

Its broad grasslands and open hills make this a promising place to look for Lark Sparrows. Scan the ground, fence lines, scattered shrubs, and grassland edges. Search rocky or brushy patches nearby for other sparrows, too.

Del Valle Regional Park — south of Livermore

The mix of oak-covered hills, open slopes, and grassland makes Del Valle a useful place to practice distinguishing habitat types. Look for Chipping Sparrows around wooded edges when seasonal movements bring them through, and scan open country for Lark Sparrows.

Sibley Volcanic Regional Preserve — Oakland–Orinda hills

The dry hillsides and open scrub provide the kind of habitat in which to search for Rufous-crowned Sparrows. Move slowly, listen for song, and inspect low shrubs and rocky patches. Do not assume that every rusty-capped sparrow is this species.

When you find a sparrow you cannot immediately identify, resist the urge to make a quick guess. Watch it for another 30 seconds. Note its size, bill, tail, face, breast, and behavior. If possible, take a photograph that shows the head and body clearly. A poor photograph of several useful features may be more valuable than a close-up that shows only the crown.

Conclusion: Three Sparrows, Three Different Stories

The Chipping Sparrow, Lark Sparrow, and Rufous-crowned Sparrow are excellent birds for birders because they teach three complementary identification skills. Remember the Chipping Sparrow as the small, neat sparrow with a rusty cap and dark eyeline. Remember the Lark Sparrow as the boldly patterned, open-country sparrow with a dark breast spot. And remember the Rufous-crowned Sparrow as the rocky-hillside specialist with a rusty crown, white eye ring, and dark whisker stripe.

The next time you visit an Alameda County park, begin with the habitat. Then study the bird's face, breast, and shape. With repeated observation, these three sparrows will become familiar, and the same approach will help you identify the many other sparrows that make birding in the East Bay so rewarding.

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