

# *The Mountain Quail*

*Newsletter of Plumas Audubon Society*

*Chapter of the National Audubon Society*

*P.O. Box 3877, Quincy, CA 95971*

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## CALENDAR

**Wednesday, December 5, 7:00 PM at the Town Hall Theater.** *Ginny Michaux* will present a special program on *Climate Change at the Poles of the Planet.* *This program is sponsored jointly by Plumas Audubon and FRC Student Environmental Association. PG&E will be giving away energy saving lightbulbs and we will hand out printed information on what you can do to conserve energy and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Books and Plumas Audubon T shirts will be on sale. The new Plumas County Birds checklist will be available.*

Ginny Michaux will share with us her first hand views regarding global warming at the poles of our planet. Ginny has been on both Arctic and Antarctic expeditions where she has reached both the north and south poles to witness the effects of global warming. She works on Al Gore's *The Climate Project*. Invite your friends to join you and attend this event. Become a part of the third wave of environmentalism.

## CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

**Saturday, December 29:** Colin Dillingham, coordinator. The team will meet for breakfast at 6:00 AM at Casa Carmelita in Portola, and then teams will proceed to four assigned sectors in **Sierra Valley**. We always need as many observers as we can get to help with the Christmas count. Be sure to call Colin at 283-1133 to let him know if you will participate.

For more than a century now Audubon Society Christmas counts have become an annual tradition that spread rapidly from America's northeast to popular birding places throughout North America and now even into Pacific islands. Information collected over the years has become increasingly useful to scientists studying population and migration change over time. The seriousness of climate change due to global warming makes all bird population data increasingly important.

We want to put as many expert observers in the field as we can on count day, but we need help from anyone who is interested regardless whether or not they may feel that they are good at bird identification. Extra eyes and ears are very helpful and people are always needed to take notes and help in other ways. The count is a chance to learn from more experienced bird watchers and is just plain fun so please join us.

Be sure to dress warmly, bring water, lunch, a field guide, binoculars, camera and a spotting scope if you have one.

## RARITIES

Would you like to see some birds common to Canada, Arizona, Washington, California's Central Valley, central Nevada, or even Eurasia? Well, you can, without having to leave Plumas County. There is the "armchair birding" method of just looking in a magazine or field guide, of course.

Remarkably though, birds from each of

these distant locations have visited our neck of the woods during the past year.

Take a look at the latest edition of our Audubon chapter *Checklist of Plumas County Bird* (available at the Plumas County Visitors Bureau, Quincy). You will notice that each bird recorded in Plumas County has an associated letter, R, W, M, r or a, indicating the likelihood of its occurrence in our area. The Red-tailed Hawk and American Robin, for example are designated “R”, meaning that they are locally resident and likely to be seen year round. The Hooded Merganser and Ferruginous Hawk, having “W” designations, are usually here in the winter. Then there are the “r” for *rare* and “a” for *accidental* designations. The “rare” birds usually require a particular type of habitat and if passing through make only an occasional pit stop and thus are seldom encountered. The “accidentals”, well, they’re another story altogether.

Once every five to ten years, maybe only once in a lifetime, a really-rare-to-Plumas bird accidentally winds its way into our county and is detected by a birder. As a matter of fact, that just happened. David Arsenault found an immature male Vermilion Flycatcher near the QCSD sewer ponds in Quincy in mid-November. *See: Feather River Bulletin, Wednesday, Nov. 21, front page photo by Colin Dillingham.* That little flycatcher should have been happily winging its way southeast from Arizona to wintering grounds in Mexico or Central America. Instead, its inherent, genetically programmed migratory directional system seems to have erred causing it to fly northwest into California.

The “why” of such disorientation is under study as ornithologists investigate the phenomenon of avian movements. In the early 1970’s Dave DeSante, then a graduate student at Stanford University, researched the mechanism by which wood warblers, figured out which direction to fly during their annual fall migration. In a nutshell, he found that a small number, usually immature wood warblers on their first migration, flew

a route that was directly opposite to their normal migratory trajectory. He called this “mirror image misorientation”. Although he was unable to determine the exact cause of this misorientation, DeSante postulated that it might be because of on-board guidance failure (a genetic problem), physical ailment (perhaps an injured wing or missing feathers), or some environmental factor (a huge storm or strong winds perhaps). This is only one scientist’s explanation of why a small number of birds may end up “out of range”. When it happens a disoriented bird’s misfortune becomes, in a sense, our good fortune.

How exciting it is to observe a rare bird right here in Plumas County. During 2007 local birders have compiled an impressive list of rarities that include, in addition to the Vermilion Flycatcher: Northern Shrike (February in American Valley), Eurasian Collared-Dove (April in American Valley), Black-chinned Hummingbird (this summer in East Quincy), Black-throated Sparrow and a Lawrence’s Goldfinch (along Chandler Road in Quincy during May and June), Yellow-billed Magpie (June in Indian Valley), Phainopepla (along Caribou Road off Highway 70 in the Feather River Canyon in October), Eurasian Widgeon and Surf Scoter (Lake Almanor in the October).

You can learn of unusual sightings by following “Birder’s News” at <http://www.plumascounty.org/Outdoor%20Recreation/Birders%20News.htm>.

Perhaps you will be able to observe a bird firsthand that you only dreamed of watching and thought you would have to travel some

distance to find. Or, just maybe, you will be the one to find a rarity and report it to Birder's News for everyone else to enjoy. (Don't be timid. Even if you do not feel that you are expert enough to be sure you have found a real oddity rare sighting reports will be confirmed by others, who are always anxious to check them out anyway.) Not only are rarities reported to Birder's News, but you are invited to post any birding news you'd like to share with other Plumas birders.

by Bob Battagin

### BOBCAT

Tony Hall writes:

I saw a very large, magnificent bobcat today (November 24) at 3 PM, which for me is an unusual time to see one. It was in a small grass field bounded on the left by the road entering Graeagle and on the far side by the road to Johnsville. It was hunting small critters and I saw it catch and eat two of them. They were small and black, could they have been voles or shrews? It was unconcerned that I was on the side of the field watching it with my binoculars. Since its success in foraging was so good it might return and provide a very good photo opportunity for someone with a lens having at least 8x magnification,

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