



The *Mountain Quail*

Plumas Audubon Society

Chapter of National Audubon Society

P.O. Box 3877, Quincy, California, 95971

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Newsletter Editor, Harry Reeves

Meetings & Events

(All programs are free and the public is welcome)

Tuesday, December 6, 7:00 PM. Plumas Audubon Annual Meeting and Pre-Christmas Bird Count program. Location Feather River College Science Lab. Darla DeRuiter and Darrel Jury will make use of the county collection of skins and taxidermy specimens to help sharpen our birding ID skills.

Christmas Bird Counts

More than a century ago, when people used to compete to see how many birds they could shoot during the autumn and winter holidays, Frank Chapman and the Audubon Society decided it would be a finer sport to count birds instead of kill them. Did you see the movie “The Big Year?” It is a good natured comedy that pokes fun at birders, not a documentary about birds, but the story is an outgrowth of Chapman’s original idea of a Big Year or a Big Day. Chapman made his appeal in *Bird Lore* magazine, which evolved into *Audubon* magazine. The annual winter count became known as the Christmas Bird Count which has become the longest-running wildlife census and is considered to be the world's most significant citizen-based conservation effort. You can participate in a Big Day this winter by joining the Plumas Audubon Society on one of these local Christmas Bird Counts. You need not be an experienced birder because we need extra eyes and ears to assist those who are experienced at bird identification. Be sure to contact the team leader so that teams can be organized to efficiently canvas their count circle. Dress warmly, bring lunch and water, binoculars and field guide, and prepare to enjoy a most rewarding day.

- Lake Almanor - December 14, Leader, Ryan Burnett.
- Sierra Valley - December 15, Leader, Colin Dillingham.
- American Valley - December 17, Leader Darrel Jury.

See www.plumasaudubon.org, email david@plumasaudubon.org, or call 283-0455 for more information.

Trina Cunningham’s Program in November

We may call it an oak tree, but the Mountain Maidu name translates to acorn tree. In a packed room at the library last month we learned from Trina Cunningham how the native people of California regard the acorn tree as a provider of nutrients for people and for the whole ecosystem. The European culture on the other hand tends to regard the tree mainly as a source of material. Neither view is wrong although

the example indicates differences in perspective. Trina and Darrel Jury explained how, through their collaborative management grant project, they seek to draw on native lore and tradition, in combination with the best of modern science to provide more enlightened management for the Hart K ranch and Genessee Valley.

A Century of Bird Books

A bird walk through a verdant meadow, among our prodigious trees, or down a meandering stream is my favorite way to learn about and enjoy birds. Later at home our bird books and field guides help to elucidate and inform us about questions that arise from a day in the field. As we examine books there is information yet to be discovered. Over the years I have accumulated quite a library of bird-related volumes, and as I peruse their many pages I notice there are distinct variations in the way different writers from different eras present information. Allow me to acquaint you with offerings of four authors, the first from about 90 years ago, the last from this decade, describing our American Robin.

1. "Everybody knows Robin. He is part and parcel of springtime, chief herald, chief poet, and lord high reveler of that joyful season. It is a merry day when the first flock of Robins turns itself loose on the home landscape. There is great bustle and stir of activity. Some scurry about to note the changes wrought by winter, some wrestle with the early and unsophisticated worm, while others voice their gladness from the fence post, the gable, the tree top, anywhere. Everywhere are heard interjections of delight, squeechings and pipings of ardent souls, and no end of congratulations over the home-comings. Robin has cast in his lot with ours, for better or for worse. Our lawns are his lawns, our shade trees were set on purpose to hold his homely mud-cup, and he has undertaken with hearty good will the musical instruction of children. He serves without pay – oh a cherry now and then, but what of that? I wonder how much of life's good cheer and fond enspiriting we own to this familiar bird." The Birds of California, William Leon Dawson, 1921.

2. "Happy is the community where Robins wake a lover of rural sounds with their early morning chorus. This chant is heard only where the soil remains moist enough to breed angleworms for a Robin to tug at and carry squirming to his brood. In the fall Robins appear in California lowlands, particularly in olive orchards and pepper trees; here toward spring they practice somewhat half-heartedly their cheerful song. When a Robin flies over an observer, the white feathers under the tail offer a striking contrast to the darker breast. Just after alighting, a Robin pumps its tail vigorously once or twice." Birds of the Pacific States, Ralph Hoffman, 1927.

3. "One of the most familiar of all birds, easily recognized by its gray back and brick-red breast. In the male, the head and tail are blackish, in the female, paler. The bill is yellow. Young Robins have speckled breasts, but the gray back and rusty under parts identify them. Song a clear whistled caroling, often long continued, made up of short phrases of two to three notes each." A Field Guide to Western Birds, Roger Tory Peterson, 1971.

4. "Gray-brown above, with darker head and tail; bill yellow; underparts brick red; lower belly white. Common, widespread. Often seen on lawns, head cocks as it searches for earthworms; also eats insects, berries. Nests in shrubs, trees, on sheltered windowsills, eaves. Numbers vary greatly from winter to winter." National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America, Jon L. Dunn editor, 2011.

As times have changed, so have our bird identification guide books. The ornate, effusive imagery of yesteryear has gradually given way to the terse, technically accurate descriptions of present day texts. We have both gained and lost in the transition.

Fortunately, these and other older volumes are still available at Amazon.com, buteobooks.com, and other used book purveyors. A cozy evening in the armchair with William Leon Dawson, Ralph Chapman, or any number of other early American authors can turn a cold winter evening into an enjoyable romp through the personalities and antics of our avian friends. -- Bob Battagin

Plumas County General Plan

The Plumas County Board of Supervisors unanimously adopted the Administrative Draft of the revised county General Plan on Tuesday, November 15. This will now be the basis for development of an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) which will go through steps required by the state to produce a final County General Plan next April or May.

The General Plan revision has been a work in progress for more than two years involving public meetings, workshops, working groups. The Planning Department under director, Randy Wilson, working with

consultant Coleen Shade, produced the draft for the County Planning Commission to discuss, amend and pass on to the Supervisors for approval. I have been attending meetings on behalf of Plumas Audubon.

This has been a very open process and public comments and suggestions have been welcome at every stage. The five members of our Planning Commission have very seriously acted on their charge to produce a high quality document. The result is a general plan that is practical, focuses on preventing sprawl or leapfrog development, seeks to sustain economically viable agriculture, and to protect the environmental character and quality of the region. This document should serve well as a model General Plan for other rural regions.

-- Harry Reeves

Burrowing Owl Nest Tunnels

David Arsenault has applied to both the Plumas County and Sierra County Fish and Game Commissions for a total of \$3000 for the construction of artificial nest tunnels for burrowing owls. David states in the application: *The Sierra Valley Burrowing Owl project will make a significant contribution towards the recovery of the Burrowing Owl population in the Sierra Valley, an Audubon Important Bird Area. The Burrowing Owl is listed by the California Department of Fish and Game as a Species of Special Concern and this species has been nearly extirpated from the Sierra Valley. The primary reason for the decline of owls in the valley is a lack of suitable nesting burrows. The proposed project will install about 50 artificial owl burrows across the valley to help recover the local burrowing owl population. The project has tremendous support from local ranchers, landowners, residents, and visitors and will help promote wildlife conservation in the Sierra Valley and generate local involvement and collaboration with the Plumas Audubon Society.*

The Plumas Birds e-mail list

The Plumas Birds e-mail list is an activity of the Plumas Audubon Society. Primarily the list is used to describe interesting bird sightings in Plumas County. We also appreciate receiving descriptions of bird sightings in areas of adjacent counties that are near to Plumas County. Occasional observations concerning non-bird species and questions about unfamiliar sightings are welcome.

When you send an e-mail to the list you should be aware that it is widely distributed. The list has 97 members currently and in addition your e-mails will be posted on the Plumas County Visitors Bureau and Plumas Audubon Society websites. We are archiving the messages on the Plumas Audubon Society website because they can provide useful information about the birds of Plumas County.

Each month new people have been joining the Plumas Birds e-mail list so when you send an e-mail to the list make sure you reply to the most recent "update e-mail" so that all people on the current list receive your message. I will send update e-mails out whenever new people are added to the list.

Please keep sending e-mails to the Plumas Birds list as you have done in the past I enjoy reading them. E-mail me if you have any questions. <anthonyhall@sbcglobal.net>

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PLUMAS AUDUBON SOCIETY

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Chapter member renewal \$15.00 is due in March

_____ **New member - NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY - \$20.00** payable to **National Audubon Society**. You will receive *Audubon magazine*, as well as be a member of Plumas Audubon Chapter and receive the local newsletter, *the Mountain Quail*. (Do not use this form for renewal of National Audubon membership. You should get a renewal notice directly from National)

- OR -

_____ **Chapter membership - ___new___ renewal - \$15.00** payable to **Plumas Audubon Society** (Includes *the Mountain Quail* newsletter - 6 issues per year).

Mail this completed form with check to:

Plumas Audubon Society, P.O. Box 3877, Quincy, CA 95971

Plumas Audubon does not sell or share the chapter e-mail or mailing list with any other organization or businesses.

Help us reduce expenses, conserve paper and energy. Receive your newsletter promptly by sending your e-mail address to Membership Chair, Darla DeRuiter dderuiter@frc.edu.

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