

The Birds of Capay Valley

As featured in the Journals

for *The Greater Capay Valley Historical Society* 2011-2020



RESEARCH, PHOTOGRAPHS AND WRITING BY ELIZABETH MONROE AND JIM HIATT

-- 5th generation pioneer descendants of Capay Valley-Hungry Hollow

The Birds of Capay Valley

Table of Contents

Taken from the Journals & Newsletters of The Greater Capay Valley Historical Society - 2011-2020

Below: Canada Geese on Cache Creek 2014 by Jim Hiatt



Page 1-2 = Black Birds
Page 3 = Blue & Scrub Jays
Page 4-6 = Blue Birds + Finch and Meadowlark
Page 7 = Curlews to Cranes
Page 8-9 = Mallards
Page 10 = Night Heron
Page 11 = Magpie
Page 12 = Red-winged Black Bird
Page 13-15 = Mockingbird
Page 16-17 = Meadowlark
Page 18-20 = Mourning Doves and Dove-weed
Pages 21-23 = Quail
Pages 24-30 = Owls
Page 31 = Hawks
Page 32 = Vultures
Page 33-35 = Western Kingbirds and Bullocks Orioles
Page 36 = Poppies & Lupin
Pages 37-40 = Phoebes & Sparrows & Drought Effects
Page 41-51 = Birds & Bees, Butterflies and native plants
Page 52-57 = Woodpeckers

I wish to thank Jim Hiatt for his wonderful support in my efforts to research and write about the greater Capay Valley from 2011 through 2020. In the course of doing this work, I discovered that Jim was a “hobby ornithologist” and asked him to contribute more pictures, information and personal stories or his 60-plus years watching the birds of this area—and what a treasure I was given! This book is a compilation of all the articles included in the series of Journals I created for *The Greater Capay Valley Historical Society* and our many member-subscribers.

Mostly, the articles are arranged in the order they were presented in the journals, which you can see in their complete form on our website at greatercapayvalley.org or by buying the book: *The History and Stories of the Capay Valley*, a compilation of all 18 journals; purchasing information is on the website.



A Capay Valley Late-Winter and Spring is Filled with the Familiar Squeaky-Wheel Sounds of Black Birds! Millions of Them!!



In addition to all that squawking in the trees this time of year, you will notice swarming clouds of starlings in synchronized spectacles out over the farm fields. According to Professor Yossi Leshem, director of the International Center for the Study of Bird Migration at Tel Aviv University, "The natural phenomenon, called 'murmuration', has become rare as starling populations have declined...the birds' synchronized movements are a way to communicate the location of food sources to other starlings, as well as create a defense mechanism against birds of prey." Watch the interesting videos showing this spectacle at:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/earth/earthvideo/9833647/Synchronised-starlings-create-impressive-spectacle-over-Israel.html>

and

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/earth/earthvideo/8113908/RSPB-guide-to-murmuring-starlings.html>

Our own local Birder, Jim Hiatt tells us about...*two of our most common feathery fellows, the Brewer's Blackbird (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*) and the Bi-Colored Blackbird, or better known to us as the Red-Winged Blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) per The Birds of North America.*

Of these two, the Brewer's is equally at home in the country or the city, particularly towns/cities like Woodland or Davis which have lots of trees and lawns. These are something we'll never run short of, like buzzards. These occur in all but the eastern states, and are entirely people- and civilization-friendly. These are a "walker", like Magpies, Crows, and Ravens, not "hoppers" like Mockingbirds, Scrub Jays, or English Sparrows. Males and females intermingle with Starlings in "working" the freshly-mown ground. Water the mown area brings up more bugs out of the cracks and

Blackbirds, cowbirds, and the starlings are found mostly in fields, like the Red-winged Black Bird sitting on the sunflowers at left in Hungry Hollow, taken by Betsy Monroe. While larger "black birds" like ravens and crows are scavengers, who will feed on carrion and farm crops, the smaller blackbirds, cowbirds and starlings prefer insects and farm crops such as wheat and other cereal types--including, apparently, sunflower seeds!



Above photos and information from:

<http://www.birds-of-north-america.net/black-birds.html>

Continued on Page 23 at bottom



Continued from Jim Hiatt, Page 22: 'if you mow-n-water it, they will come'. These are also found in freshly mown and newly irrigated alfalfa amongst Crows, Ravens, and Starlings. The males have iridescent plumage which may look black, but a close examination shows very shiny dark purple, green, and bluish coloring that, all taken together, give a black appearance, but is very pretty up close. How would I know that??? Same way John James Audubon found out for his illustrations, but I didn't do that for this article. A "big game hunter" 7 year-old with a BB gun learns a great deal... Females are a dullish gray brown.

Their call is mainly a sharp "Chit!" or "Tap!" uttered more rapidly if the nest or fledglings are threatened; an occasional treble-edged wheeze, which is almost liquid in tone; and also an occasionally-uttered very musical double note, which as a youngster I used to think it sounded like, "King Yeeee!" Just how it did(and does) sound to me.

Red-Wings have a wider environment capability yet, and are found in tule ditches, rice fields and riparian areas in general. They are generally not found in towns. In flight, in large groups, these are much like Starlings. Hundreds, sometimes thousands, will fly as a group, all seem to turn on cue at the same time and in the same direction, as though they're all thinking the same thought at the same moment, and tend to bunch tighter with every turn. [This behavior is called murmuring--no one is entirely sure why they do it, but some scientists are working on it. See page 22]

As seen here, their nest is usually done in either a small branch crotch, not terribly high off the ground, which means that things like Lilac bushes can be used, hedges, Elderberry trees. Light sticks in a circle, and lined with softer stuffs, usually grasses are the home and usually 4-6 turquoise-with-buff-brown-blotches are the usual.



The Life Cycle of Black Birds

Jim writes of these photos he shot over time on his Hungry Hollow Farm: "One nest is taken in a small uuuupper crotch of our one lemon tree, and the other in the bottom-most crotch of the "volunteer" Eucalyptus tree by the fig tree. These are easiest nests to find and observe. The others you have to work at a little more. Some of those newborn shots I love, as they got the "living color" just right. In photos: Here he has eggs, to newly hatched, to just feathering out, to fully fledged and ready to take to the air!

These have very high metabolic rates and have heartbeats at 150-200 beats/minute. These are ready to leave the nest in weeks; I'm glad we get to enjoy OUR young longer than that. They are particularly vulnerable right at the point of being almost-but-not-quite-ready-to-FULLY-fly. When their first solo efforts are embarked upon, the typical first run is 10-20 yards, if that far. VERY easy target for kittycats, and you find lots of failed first attempts here and there. During the hatchling-to-nearly-ready-to-leave phase, the "TAP!" that you hear as the single note chirp of the adults that we're all familiar with become rapid-fire and very frantic---the adults are VERY protective, if not able to DO much about it.

We used to take a "toddler" or two home as kids and try to raise them, and usually to no avail. Have since learned that what we were feeding them, bits of bread soaked in milk, were kind of a near-minimum, but way short of the fat and protein requirements needed; hence the parents constantly bringing them insects ALL day. Note, The little ones [as seen fully fledged and ready for flight at bottom left] with first plumage are all gray—they haven't differentiated into male/female coloration early on.

Pests?!



Left, common locally, the Western Scrub Jay; right, less common locally, true Blue Jay. Go to the Cornell Lab site and click on their birdsong audio--you will recognize our local fellow! --but please do not shoot them!!!

[All About Birds, The Cornell Lab of Ornithology](http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/blue_jay/id)

http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/blue_jay/id

As I always maintain, history is all about viewpoint. I was researching the Capay Valley Gladney family in relation to the Full Belly Farm for this volume's feature on organic farming, and I came across an interesting "story" about the first Gladney pioneer to the Capay Valley: S. Gladney [he never used his given name, Shadrack, just "S"].

In a prior issue, I mentioned the importance of our local Western Scrub Jays in spreading the oak tree acorns and how delightful I found their screeching song. But not everyone found them so useful or charming, it seems! Ironically, I had just been listening to Dru Rivers of *Full Belly Farm* talk about the "pests" they deal with on their farm, so this story created even more intrigue.

According to "All About Birds" on the Cornell Lab of Ornithology site, "This common, large songbird is familiar to many people, with its perky crest; blue, white, and black plumage; and noisy calls. Blue Jays are known for their intelligence and complex social systems with tight family bonds. Their fondness for acorns is credited with helping spread oak trees after the last glacial period." This describes both the local Scrub Jay and the other Blue Jays throughout the land, but it does not tell of their "pest" designation.

Apparently, the Almond Growers Association in Capay Valley paid farmers five cents a jay once upon a time to protect the valuable almond crops. Upper Capay Valley's S. Gladney wrote, "I have often lost one half ton of almonds from blue jays in one season, which would be worth from \$125 to \$150." California woodpeckers, the red-shafted flicker, and the crow, often seen as pests, have also been trouble for almond growers, but since they are not as plentiful, they are not the problem the jays are. Some farmers tried mosquito netting, but it was far less practical than just shooting the jays out of the air!

Another beautiful and useful bird, the robin, is a "pest" to the olive growers during migration time...but isn't it as big a sin to kill a robin as a mockingbird?!

Cashmere Colony, a Capay Valley Ghost town.

According to *Ada Merhoff's Capay Valley The Land & The People*, S. Gladney and his wife, Josephine Daly from Antelope, were "the only purchasers of Cashmere Colony Tract land to remain as long-time residents in the area; later associated with the post office, they would be ever-important to the Guinda Community."

Arriving in Capay Valley about 1891, S. brought his new wife to join him in 1895. Their first child, Roy, came in 1899, at which time they purchased the creekside parcel that would become Full Belly Farm.



Migratory Birds Commonly visit the Capay Valley --

some so regularly that they seem to be permanent residents, but truly are just passing through, stopping to feed on our lush farmlands and bugs--like those prolific Capay Valley Crickets! This time, hobby-ornithologist Jim Hiatt brings us Bluebirds!

With our summer ending, fall finds many of our local birds leaving for Central America, such as our Western Kingbirds, but taking their place are Red Shafted Flickers warblers, Juncos, kinglets, and the delightful Meadow Larks coming in behind them during the Fall-into-Spring period. Another, somewhat magical and beautiful bird is the Blue Bird, our blue-feathered focus for this issue. This one is an almost uniquely lovely species that arrives here late fall into winter and stays for a time and we know it as the Mountain Bluebird (*Sialia currocoides*).

We do have Western Bluebirds in mid-California, but they are normally a bird of higher elevation. I've seen them along Cache Creek and Bear Creek above Rumsey, and quite a number live along the Buck Island area there. We don't see these hereabouts, as they're primarily above 500 feet. But the Mountain Bluebird is nature's migratory gift here at somewhat lower elevations--and an extra special visual treat when the sun is just right in relation to them. Whether perched or airborne, they seem like winged jewels--little *winged sapphires*--and are, except for the Scrub Jay, really the only bluish bird we have in Western Yolo. Loveliest of all, they're here now!

I have been "shooting" these with my camera here for about 2 weeks now, having become appreciatively aware of their presence one day while on my way back from our south field. I had been on the dirt roads on a coyote hunt, driving the perimeter of our south field, and slowed down to see how many species of birds I could identify, when I was suddenly overjoyed to see these little beauties by the dozens! Reaction was, "Ohhh, geeeee, I had forgotten to look for these--now I wonder how long they've **been** here!? Let's see how easy these little ones are to get good pix of!!" In three days I snapped hundreds of what turned out to be pictures far better than I was hoping for! This was an unexpected Blessing, and deserves attention as a Christmas Gift to our readers--**Merry Christmas!**

These, surprisingly, are a member of the Robin/Thrush family, or **Turdidae**. And I tend to think of bluebirds as smaller than Robin-sized, but not so from my current experience and education. These have been such a treat to just watch and enjoy and learn from. In spending a goodly number of hours in a small pickup right next to our single Pistachio tree, I've gotten to know these such that it's been a more than rewarding experience. It takes patience; just sit for an hour and take them in...then do it again and again. The photos herein were for the most part taken within 10-15 feet. Staying in my pickup made it ideal, as I could move about in adjusting my position for capturing them with relative ease without disturbing them, as they didn't associate me apart from the vehicle--my own *bird blind*, if you will.

For those readers familiar with the "hover-hunting" method used by Sparrow Hawks (Kestrels), White-Tailed Kites, and even Rough-Legged Hawks, you'll notice right away that these Bluebirds use this as one of their key ways of feeding, as well. In flying across the field, they suddenly veer upward, and flap their wings in such a way as to keep themselves locked in position, whilst scanning the ground underneath and nearby for crickets--and this field is abundant in those this year! The bird may look around for 10 seconds or so, and finding nothing effort-worthy immediately, continue on a couple hundred feet, again "tip-up" and hover--then suddenly drop nearly straight down, and grab one! From there he will fly to a perch for dining, such as a the skeletal stalk of Mustard or another weed stalk--or as seen here, a fence or a tree, like my pistachio.



Crickets, according to good ol' Wikipedia, are: of the family *Gryllidae* (also known as "true crickets"), are insects somewhat related to grasshoppers, and more closely related to katydids or bush crickets (family *Tettigoniidae*)... They have somewhat flattened bodies and long antennae. There are more than 900 species of crickets. They tend to be nocturnal and are often confused with grasshoppers because they have a similar body structure including jumping hind legs. Crickets are harmless to humans--and Blue Birds love 'em!





The cricket is swallowed whole in almost a single convulsive motion. These birds have a peculiar action of seemingly *wiping* their beaks again and again sideways on a tree twig--almost napkin-like. There is often a second bodily convulsion as the cricket is still wiggling and not all the way down, yet. I had to shoot quickly, as these don't work their prey down slowly, as a snake does, but swallow the prey quickly.

As these birds are just passing through, I've learned to make it a point to just sit and watch and learn--and there is much to take in! They are not a shy bird, though they are a bird of the open field primarily, and not as much of your back yard, so not commonly seen--without a worthwhile effort.

The plumage is gorgeous. Males are a gentle sky-blue in the front from the head to the upper abdomen, and then whitish in the lower front. The wing and tail feathers are a deep, shiny-blue, and when seen just right in the sunlight, give a handsomely beautiful look to this bird in an area not normally known for spectacularly colored varieties. The female is just a fainter, somewhat duller-colored version of the male.

The ones I watched were almost uniformly silent for the first two sightings, and were not too interactive with each other. The little Pistachio tree I was positioned by did occasionally have as many as a dozen in it at any one time. Delightfully, my third sighting found them engaged in quiet, but rapid-fire twitterings and chatterings--and frequently chasing one another. And woe unto the one that is *seen* with a fresh *catch* in its mouth, but has not yet downed it! In spite of this, they were also very tolerant of other species engaged in the hunting of the same insects. In this way, I was able to capture a great many very nice photos of House Finches and a Meadowlark on one occasion. Sparrow Hawks were hunting the same field for the same insect-fare, but would only alight in the tree when I was at a distance more comfortable for them. The hawks would hover-hunt in the field for the same crickets, but further out. Their eyesight seems to be noteworthy, as these would suddenly leave the tree and fly out 50-70 feet, and right to a cricket between clods, snatch it up and return to the tree

or the fence-line nearby to *then* swallow it. I'm sure that the cricket's motion was part of the attraction, as I've read that with such avians as high-flying hawks or Buzzards, they actually have two lenses in their eyes, which they can move with respect to each other and thusly have the equivalent of a *zoom lens* feature, so they can cover a great deal of ground from a higher perspective. Perhaps the Bluebirds have something like that, as I watched them do seemingly the same thing, though I have not found confirmation of this observation. I went to my

trusty *Birds of North America** to learn more about their lifestyles, and found this winter visitor on the west side of the valley has a summer range on the western half of North America as far north as Alaska. Nesting is 2 broods per year, 5-6 eggs at a time, from May through July.

I do remember these lovelies from my youth, coming out here to see Grandma each Sunday. Always the birder, I'd see these blue jewels hover-hunting over these same fields. I knew what they were, just didn't pay as much as attention then. It's both amazing and a little humbling to suddenly discover, or in my case, rediscover, beauty that's always been here and is just waiting to be noticed!



*Vuilleumier, Francois, Editor, *Birds of North America*, Dorling Kindersley, Ltd, New York, NY, 20009



At left, on the fence & in the tree sit Bluebirds and House Finches, some about to land. Finch close-up below.



Below, even a Meadowlark joins in!



Curlew
Ibis
Herons
Egrets
Cranes

...more birds common to the area: similar Curlew and White-Faced Ibis

Our own amateur 'birder' of Hungry Hollow, Jim Hiatt, shared these pictures, information and stories, too:

"**The Curlew** in these photos are feeding on bugs that come out of our barley ground as it is being irrigated. [See page 222 of *Birds of North America*; the scientific name is *Numenius americanus*]. They are pretty much year-round here, and especially during farming season will follow the irrigation cycles of alfalfa and whatever else is being irrigated. From the air, since they fly high enough to see the 'blue-ness' and 'shimmery-ness' of distant fields under water, they go there until irrigation is done, then go on to the next field. Another species much like them, except for a completely brown and iridescent blackish color, is the 'White-Faced Ibis' [*Plegadis chihi*, page 128 of *Birds of North America*]. They are frequently found together feeding in the same field and are entirely tolerant of each other. The Curlew is a brownish bird that, like the Ibises, has a 'decurved' bill, meaning curving downward, and are pretty much the same size.

Three generations back, Grandpa Chet used to shoot these for the family table. These birds feed very close to each other, and you might be able to 'ground-sluice' them, as the old-timers put it, and harvest 10-15 birds with one shot, thus economizing on shotgun shell cost. This was especially during Depression times. Whatever 'dunderhead' ever thought up the term 'White Faced Ibis' should have had his eyes tested again. There just ain't no white *FACE* [tongue in cheek], just a small white ring around the eye."



Photos here are from herein listed on-line sites: above is non-breeding plumage and to right breeding plumage.

White-faced Ibis: "This species breeds colonially in marshes, usually nesting in bushes or low trees. Its breeding range extends from the western USA south through Mexico," and parts of South America. Its winter range extends from southern California and Louisiana south to include the rest of its breeding range.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White-faced_Ibis

White-faced ibis *Plegadis chihi*

Identification Tips:

Length: 19 inches Wingspan: 37 inches

Sexes similar

Medium-sized long-legged long-necked wader

Bill long, dark gray, and decurved

Holds neck extended in flight

<http://www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov/id/framlst/i1870id.html>

Blue Herons and White Egrets are here all year; **Cranes**, like Sandhill Cranes, are a much rarer site in this area, much more common in the Sacramento Delta—where they are celebrated with their own Festival in Lodi, CA, in early November: with their 7-foot wingspan, they land by the thousands at Cosumnes River Preserve—but about 5 million actually use the Central Valley as a flyway beginning in Early November. NOTE: Whooping Cranes are much more rare with only about 50 left in the world.

These three types of water-loving birds are the three tallest Swan Birds distinguished in this way:

Cranes: tall, heavy bodies, long legs and necks; extend their wings in flight; lay two eggs at a time.

Herons come in two basic colors: Great White and Great Blue Herons are closely related; yellowish bills; fly slowly with heads up and drawn back; hunt with statue-like stillness; *Spirit of the Pond*.

Egrets: fly like herons and have the same yellowish bills but size helps us tell them apart. Egrets are much smaller and come in only white, while our local Herons are mostly Great Blues.



Mallards--Puddling around in our fields and ditches!

The following contribution comes from our local amateur ornithologist, Jim Hiatt. Rather than pick his brain, I asked him to just compose the article himself--complete with great pictures!

The Mallard--Anas platyrhynchos, is likely the most common and well known among ducks in America, and is found pretty much throughout

North America. Even "Daffy Duck" was of this species---although real mallards don't go bouncing around yelling out "Woo-hoo, Woo-hoo, Woo-hoo!!!" Another common cartoon trademark saying of his was, "YOU'RE Despicable!" ...but enough of THAT! "That's all folks..."

They are also known among duck hunters as "Greenheads," though only the male has this feature, along with the white ring about the neck just below the green head and neck.

This is a lovely species, and is one of our larger ducks; the wingspan is some 3 feet. These and Pintails are the most prized among duck hunters--the meat is a little strong, due to the high oil content common for ducks, but making the meat very juicy. They have a greater longevity than is the case for most ducks [Birds of North America, page 62] living for some 25-30 years.

Most Mallards migrate away during the late spring, returning around August, but a fair number remain locally and live in the rice fields; or if in more open country, they live in areas with ditch-irrigation. These pix were taken in an irrigation ditch at just about Rds. 87 and 16. These, who remain locally, share this tendency with Canada Geese—I'm beginning to give some pet names!

These are very omnivorous, and eat pretty much everything that is not a plant while they are in the water; they are commonly found feeding in grain fields, where they will eat insects as well fallen grain. Interestingly, the FEMALE is the one with the characteristic "QUACK-QUACK-QUACK-QUACK" given rapid-fire and usually are given in a series of 4-6 at a time. The male makes a rather "wimpy" sounding "raab--raab--raab-raab", and is usually uttered when an intruder or predator has ventured a bit too close.

The during mating season in early spring, they pair off--after 3-6 males do "Blue Angels" versions of fancy acrobatics in the air, showing off for a single female also in the air. After a fair amount of this, she selects one and



Mallard-pair photo below courtesy of Wikipedia under File: *Anas platyrhynchos male female quadrat.jpg* All other pictures taken locally by Jim Hiatt



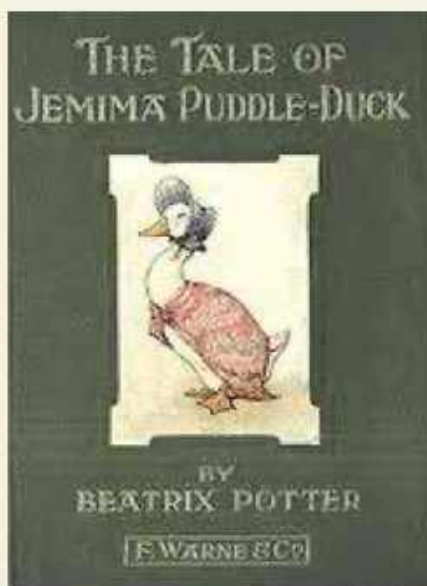
QUACKQUACKQUACK!!!!



they pair off from there. Once mated, she hides a nest site and has anywhere from 6-10 eggs. If you find the nest, she will rise from it, won't fly very far off, but will constantly circle; tipping her hand (or wing!) that you've stumbled across her nest, she is trying to draw you away. Being ground nesters, which are very vulnerable to raccoons after the eggs, while the mother herself is a prime target for coyotes or foxes, which see meat like hers with their infrared night vision. The young are born "precocial", meaning that they're up and about right after hatching and follow Mom to a water source to learn to feed and swim. If you come upon Mom with 6-10 little ones, she'll put on the "broken wing" act in which she feigns a broken wing, and paddles and splashes in circles to draw you away from the little ones. The pix I took involved this very thing in progress. The green head, again, makes this species one of the loveliest, and also has a cobalt-blue rectangular area on the outside edges of the wings.

Old-timers--like Beatrix Potter!--also called them a "puddle" ducks. Like Ms. Potter's Jemima Puddle Duck, they prefer ponds, canals and tule areas, as opposed to the Pintail, which is very much an open-water species. Happily, this mean highly-irrigated areas like ours attract them—lucky us!

Jim



Helen Beatrix Potter was an English author, illustrator, natural scientist and conservationist best known for her imaginative children's books featuring animals such as those in *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, which celebrated the British landscape and country life...

[Wikipedia](#)

Born: July 28, 1866,
Kensington

Died: December 22,
1943, Near Sawrey

Spouse: [William Heelis](#)



Mallard photos courtesy of Jim Hiatt.



<http://en.wikipedia.org>



PAGE 1 -- CONTENTS AND BIBLIOGRAPHICAL CITATIONS

Special thanks to: historians Douglas Nareau and John Gallardo; article-contributor Jim Hiatt; Ernie Lehman--and all the faithful subscribers, donors and advertisers! I couldn't do this without you! And a big thanks to my Printer-Angel, Jane!

Page Cover-1 = *Introduction:*
Elizabeth "Betsy" Monroe,
writer-editor-publisher

Page2 = Contents/Works Cited

Page 3 = Criner's Arena

Page 4-5 = Berryessa and Redbud

Page 6-7 = Bank of Esparto and

Esparto Enterprise Newspaper

Page 8 = Japanese Internment

Page 9-11 = Taber Log

Page 12-13 = Mourning Doves

Page 14-15 = Doveweed, etc.

Page 16 -17 = Sheriff Doings

Pages 18-20 = *Yolo Fliers Club* and
Fliers of Western Yolo

Page 21 = 1970s Survey Map

Page 22-23 = Ernie Lehman
 Remembers a Capay Childhood

Page 24--Subscription Info/Ad



Above: Black-crowned Night-Heron taken by Betsy Monroe at the Capay Dam at dusk in 2012. "Chunky and squat, it is one of the most common and widespread herons in North America and the world...but mainly active at twilight and at night (so) many people have never seen one. However, its distinctive barking call can be heard at night--even at the center of large cities...a loud, distinctive *quark* or *wok*, often given in flight and around colonies. Large stick nests built usually 20-40 feet up in trees; 3-5 eggs; 1 brood; November-August. Feeding primarily on aquatic animals; also eggs and chicks of colonial birds, such as egrets, ibises, and terns," according to *Birds of North America*. Smaller than the more visible blue herons (see lower left) or white egrets we have here, these are about 23-26 inches tall and live up to 21 years. While the male and female are similar coloring, the male's plumage is longer. The juvenile is brown speckled, looking very little like its eventual black top and back with white under carriage.

I asked bird-man Jim Hiatt about it and got this: *These are a common pasture bird, but even more so in riparian areas--areas along a waterway. If you've hunted ducks, you know very well about those times when you are scared half to death on the way to the duck pond way before the sun's come up, and you can still see the stars very well, and it's dead quiet--suddenly you are startled with "KAUUUUGHHHHH!!!" right overhead. Even at 30 yards up it's L-O-U-D!!! It's likely just as startled by seeing you, thus eliciting that outcry--but even THAT'S debatable. Happens even out here in Hungry Hollow during my campfires when I've stayed by the fire until I can see the stars, and one of these herons is heading to roost way up in my eucalyptus trees--but it's waaaay past its bedtime, and it can only just barely see, so my campfire startles it, I guess.*

Left: Blue Heron in Capay Valley English walnut orchard; Betsy Monroe, 2012
We followed a lovely one on Cache Creek in our kayaks--no camera, alas!



Where had all the Magpies gone--West Nile Virus, nearly everyone...but they are back in promising numbers, along with the similarly depleted Red-winged Black Birds, all squawking away making the summers here sound like they used to!

Spotted in and around the many oaks and perched atop grain stalks, they are a welcome sight again--filling the hot air with their old familiar songs!



I was alarmed on my return to the Capay Valley at the suspiciously rare sightings of some of my favorite birds, only to hear their numbers had been severely cut by the recent outbreak of West Nile Virus. Growing up in Hungry Hollow in groves of oaks and eucalyptus, I took the squawking of black birds, scrub jays and magpies for granted. One of my favorite family stories is about Sam, the magpie my mom rescued when we found it fallen from a nest high up in an oak tree. One late afternoon, when family friend Jack MacCullah came to have a beer with my dad, they sat at the kitchen table as Mom cooked and we kids milled about. Suddenly, Sam, who had free run of our house, hopped up on the table and strutted over to Jack's beer and took a long quaff. As the men burst into laughter, I came over to see what was so funny and saw Sam strut over to my dad's glass and repeat the performance--and heard my mom say, "Now, Tom, cut that out, you'll make him drunk." Sam repeated this "dance" once more and he was indeed staggering, and then flopped over in the middle of the table while the men rolled with laughter and even Mom had a poorly concealed smirk on her face. Of course she swooped in and collected Sam and took him away to revive--there may even have been a sip of coffee in the story, but perhaps I am embellishing. Well, Sam survived and Mom let the men live, and the story has stuck with me all these years--much to the delight of my daughter, Sam!

But my family's history of rescue--and possible comic maltreatment--aside, the magpies have always been ubiquitous to this area and were missed. The yellow-billed magpie lives only in California, primarily in the Central Valley and parts of the Coastal Range. They build large nests high in oaks that can be several feet across and 50 feet up. According to The Sacramento Bee, June 3, 2011, "They mate for life, and extended families nest in the same places for decades. Before the West Nile outbreak, the region had colonies of more than a thousand birds roosting together, although groups of 20 or 30 were more common." Their numbers had already been reduced due to habitat loss, but "plummeted" by half during the 2004 outbreak of the virus.

Audubon California shares my concern and has asked the public to help track the yellow-billed magpie. They recently organized a count using a network called *eBird*, allowing birders and laypersons to help with the data collection. The count came in at over 3 million sightings in May--quadrupled since 2007!

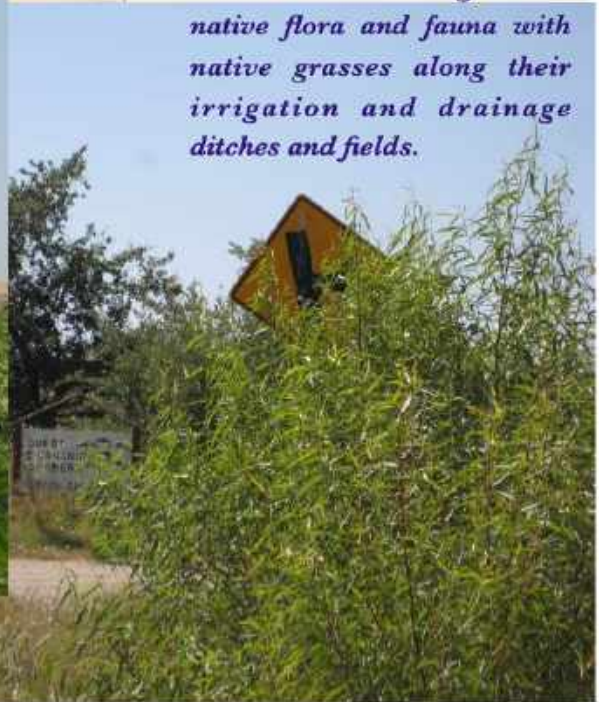
"Apart from its...yellow bill and a yellow streak around the eye," the Yellow-billed Magpie [*Pica nuttalli*] "is virtually identical to the Black-billed Magpie [*Pica hudsonia*] found in much of the rest of North America," according to good ol' Wikipedia--facts double checked with such other sources as www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu

The Yellow-billed Magpie was named Audubon California's 2009 Bird of the Year--and welcome back, Sam!!

Below, right: One Red-winged Blackbird sits atop a sunflower in Hungry Hollow; Dunnigan Hills in background.



Nearby, Durst Organic Growers encourages the native flora and fauna with native grasses along their irrigation and drainage ditches and fields.



Diversity of crops helps habitat:

Below: Alfalfa hay stacks with new almond orchard rear left, olive orchard rear right,

sunflowers near right and Capay Hills in background.



More Restoration information:
EDF Environmental Defense Fund
<http://www.edf.org>
Audubon Restoration
http://audubon-ca.org/LSP/yolo_slough



For Information about habitat restoration programs for farmers: visit Yolo County Resource Conservation District: www.yolorcd.org or the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service: www.nrcs.usda.gov

IT'S A SIN TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD!



...so said author Harper Lee--and Atticus Finch, her ideal father figure: "Mockingbirds don't do one thing but make music for us to enjoy . . . but sing their hearts out for us. That's why it's a sin to kill a mockingbird."



When I first got back to live in the Capay Valley, I enjoyed sitting in the warm summer evenings listening to all the various bird songs. One such evening I sat enjoying this with neighbor Jim Hiatt and said, "I love hearing all the different birds we have here--I wish I knew what they all were!" Well, he chuckled and said, "Right now you are hearing only one--a mocking bird!" And then he proceeded to explain--whereupon I came to realize he was actually a hobby ornithologist in disguise! So, since that day, I have not only



learned to tell when I am being "mocked" by a crafty bird, but I have learned a great deal about all the birds we have

here'bouts--and am enjoying sharing Jim's knowledge with my readers. Recently, Jim has been finding baby birds in his ranch nests while doing yard work and

Con't on pages 22 and 23



The Mockingbirds of Capay Valley

Con't from page 21

chores and got busy with his camera in order to better share them with all of us.

To Kill a Mockingbird is one of my favorite books--and movies--so, of course, it gave me a special love for Mockingbirds. And one of my favorite childhood memories was finding a baby bird on the ground and running to Mom with it--she could rescue anything! Soft boiled egg and poached millet or bread soaked in milk pushed down the gullet eventually led to a fully-fledged

bird that would then hop around the house and yard until it took wing one day! Sam, our magpie, was just such a rescued bird--and he never did leave! We had baby owls "only a mother could



Above: Mockingbird nest in the crotch of a Eucalyptus tree in Hungry Hollow. **Bottom left:** baby Mockingbirds just feathering out--fledglings!



love"--ugly that Mom taught us to care for until they became beautiful and free--and back in the barn rafters they had fallen from. And since then, I have rescued many, myself--along with a few opossums and many a near-death feral kitten! It's the family tradition!



Photos and text by Jim Hiatt, bird man of Hungry Hollow:

The Mockingbird, *Mimus polyglottis*, is one of our more common and better known birds.

According to *Birds of North America* (page 519), during the 1700s and 1800s it was such a popular thing to have a caged Mockingbird for the singing, that the Mockingbird wasn't too far from extinction. Thankfully that's behind us.

These are known for being able to imitate--or mock--over 100 different species, insect sounds, such as crickets and frogs, and mechanical sounds, such as a squeaky gate, and so on. What I've found interesting here at the ranch, is that sometimes juveniles-turned adults are heard imitating species that are partially migratory in their traveling habits, and are imitating birds not even in this area at the time--or even imitating birds, such as the Acorn Woodpecker, which are simply not here at all, but are a bird of higher elevations. I've heard them imitate Scrub Jays, which are here "once in a blue moon" and usually on their way elsewhere. Not sure just how they "know" the song of a bird not normally here, or not here at all, during the first year or two of the Mockingbird's life. I've heard new Mockingbirds, hatched just about the time of the Western Kingbird's departure (in late August-early September for Central America and Mexico, and who won't be back until early April), and yet are imitating their calls before their return. 'Tis one of those "sweet mysteries of Avian life."

Mockingbirds have an impressive life-span for a bird of this size, and can live up to 20 years--which does give them an opportunity to "remember" lots of different sounds! The calls can be so accurate that at times a beginning "birder" has trouble telling if they're hearing a Scrub Jay or a Mockingbird imitating one! They do seem to have an "call" of their own, which is most closely described as simply a loud "Chirp!" My mother and Grandmother used to say, "Oh, listen, Jimmy, the Mockingbird is 'blowing you a kiss'"--'cause I guess it did kinda sound like that. I did the same with my own kids and they loved it--especially my girls.

At times, these will call for most of the night, and it's amazing the litany of different sounds you'll hear. One night when I was in college, I was staying the night at Grandma's out here and in the old olive tree just outside the porch window one was singing. I happened to have my old portable reel-to-reel tape recorder with me, and put the microphone on the windowsill with a one-hour tape--got nothing but lovely singing to sleep by. Later, I submitted a copy of the tape to my old Ornithology Professor at CSUS as part of my semester project on "The nocturnal singing behavior of the Mockingbird"--and it was part of what got me an "A" on the project!

Our Mockingbirds don't migrate; they're here year-round. At times they'll be perched atop a high object, and will fly up several feet, and then straight back down to the same perch again, slowly flapping their wings so as to show off the conspicuous white patch on each wing. I believe, though don't know for sure, that this is more of a "territorial" activity, but could also be part of the courtship. Food-wise, they are very omnivorous--insects of all sorts, fruits and berries depending on the seasonality of everything. Another part of the courtship is fun to watch--they'll perch on the ground, facing each other so closely that their beaks nearly touch, and hop up and down either in unison or separately, and just keep doing it for a time, with a flap or two of the wings.

Their nest is in a branch-crotch, as the pix show, and have a stick and twig nest lined with very soft stuffs, holding 3-4 eggs at a time, looking a good deal like Brewer's Blackbird eggs, but are a bit darker aqua-blue, with the same dark brownish spots. They have 2-3 broods during the warmer times of the year.



'Tis a wonderful thing that Nature has done with a bird that is pretty drab in its coloration--as everything about this little friend is varying shades of white-to-gray! Yet for all its lack of "impressiveness" in its plumage, the singing by far makes up for it. The singing itself, and the imitative "mocking" nature of it, may also be a part of its territoriality. Hopefully this little sharing of mine will help the reader love and appreciate these lovely friends of ours just a little more.

Jim



Isn't it a sin to kill a Meadowlark, too!!

...to paraphrase author Harper Lee in her 1960 novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, through the wise words of her protagonist, Atticus Finch, one of literature's great, ideal father figures:

"Mockingbirds don't do one thing but make music for us to enjoy . . . but sing their hearts out for us. That's why it's a sin to kill a..." **Meadowlark!** OK, so the novel's title refers to a crime against mockingbirds, but the sentiment holds true for our lovely late-winter visitors, the meadowlarks, surely. Their varied songs are magical and they do us no harm, but only bring us delight. When my father realized that I shared his love of their songs, he taught me to whistle to them-- and get an answer! And once, in my moody teen years, when I was feeling especially blue and unable to shake it, insisting that I just could not think of one dang thing to be happy about (no doubt there was some boy in the story...) he sat in thought for several minutes and then said, "Think of the Meadowlark's song!" We whistled their song together and the healing began...What blues? What broken heart? HA!

So, I got ahold of my bird man of Hungry Hollow, Jim Hiatt, and asked him what he could tell me about this beloved bird..

Text by Jim Hiatt, bird-man of Hungry Hollow:

*Few folks in the Hungry Hollow or Capay Valley area do not at least have a cursory or subconscious familiarity with our beloved Western Meadowlark, *Sturnella neglecta*. They are about as eternally an avian fixture here as we have, and are as ubiquitous and normal a member of our country fauna as jackrabbits and buzzards.*

In Birds of North America, it is found on page 638. On the other side of the U.S. they are blessed with the Eastern Meadowlark, which are very similar in appearance and song as the Western, but these are distinct species. These lovely things are a bird of the open field, and will perch in deciduous trees during the winter before the leaves reappear, even those around buildings and driveways, and although they don't normally show up in your back yard, their lifestyle and needs are exactly met from farming and ground cultivation, as that's what gives rise to the bugs they eat and the seeds as well. Freshly-mown alfalfa hay gives them a fresh, even though temporary, plate of food with the insects this exposes. Meadowlarks are a walking bird, just like others that frequent these open fields. They, like Brewer's Blackbirds and many others common to us here, are not likely to show up on anyone's "endangered species" listing any time soon, happily.



Western Meadowlark

Not to be confused with the Eastern Meadowlark, a different species, our darling fellow sits out in the middle of fields atop stalks of grain, difficult to photograph well, so I downloaded a nice picture from good ol' Wikipedia, seen above.

When a fence post is not available, they are happy to perch on grain and shrubs to sing--near their food and nesting sites. Common this time of year in western North America, they will partially migrate toward Mexico in the dead of winter. Feeding mostly on insects like beetles and grasshoppers, they are a friend to the farmer--who gets to enjoy their songs of complex babbings and whistlings in descending pitch, a nice accompaniment to their hard labors! So lovely to hear!

They build nests of domed grass cups, hidden in tall grass, and raise their annual brood between March and August. All the singing they do this time of year is the prelude!

Betsy Monroe



Jim Hiatt continues: *Although not normally a bird of upper altitudes, they are found in the hilly areas hereabouts, and I've even seen them as high up as in the cottonwoods on the west side of Fiske Creek Lake, and even in the limited grasslands of the Homestake Lake area. They are pretty strictly a bird of the open country, though they can be found in field areas just outside towns. Not a big city bird. Smart little things.*

They are gregarious in nature and do pretty much keep to flocks most of the time. They are most notably known for their songs, which are unique among our birds and almost beyond lovely. Consummately musical. Some of my own earliest childhood memories are of enjoying the several specific sequences of notes that these lovelies are known for. The songs are normally a series of very distinct groupings of specific note sequences. I know them all, as do many of us who pay appreciative attention to these. The specific sequences are not usually mixed with others, but are repeated again and again from the same perch for a time before they flit off. The sequences are usually 2-3 seconds long, but a very packed 2-3 seconds, like phrases. You have to hear to appreciate, and if you spend any considerable period in the country, you will gradually get to know them all--usually sung out from a perch on a fence post or even power line or tree top, with their beaks open as wide as wide can be. As well as I know them, I'm sure that they're either territorial, mating calls, or a form of saying, in effect, "I am here; you are there; we are all here!" They are all important to each other. That saying was borrowed from my old Ornithology Professor Nicholas Udvardy, one of the best birders in the world in the 1970s, under whom I was privileged to have studied. That was his homespun explanation of the mutual reassurance that these were all together an extended family. Meadowlarks also have an almost equally melodious single "CHIRP!" They can even make a single note musically worth hearing. They also have periods of time, seasonally, like the winter in which they are silent. If only they could tell those of us with a genuine interest what each sequence means, and why they are just as silent at other times...I would love to know!

These lovelies are easily spotted by the brilliant golden yellow breast and face, and a crescent-shaped "bib" on the upper breast. Above they are brown and white in striping and spotting. The male and female are essentially identical in plumage. These are a relatively chunky bird with more short and rounded wings, thus accounting for the rapid wingbeat accompanied with lots of gliding as well. They live an average of 10 years, and have a nesting practice pretty much unique among our valley birds--their nest is literally an "igloo" of grasses mostly; an upside down dome, with an opening on the outside, with one brood a year with 3-7 eggs. In my bird egg collection as a youngster, I had one of their spotted eggs which came out of the first nest I'd seen once while rabbit hunting. The nest looked different from anything around it, and upon checking and keeping one of the eggs, thereafter a visit to my Audubon's Land Bird Guide taught me what I'd just found.

And while I know Betsy will not like this story, one of my childhood memories is of my Grandfather telling me of times when much food was shot for the family table, that he would go out after school with his shotgun and shoot 3 or 4 of these for his school lunch the next day. Those were the times in which the guys shot Canadian Geese along the Arbuckle Hills by the buckboard load in season for the family table, when families of 6-8 kids were the average. Sorry, Betsy! But these beauties are, indeed, a joy to get to know--and are safe from my dining table!



DO NOT TRY THIS AT HOME!! Jim Hiatt, our bird-man of Hungry Hollow, was trimming limbs and found several nests waaaaay up in his Eucalyptus trees and shared his sequence of shots.



Our Mourning Dove, *Zenaida macroura*, is part of what makes the countryside the delight that it is. "Ohhhhh-OOOOOHHH-whoooooo, whooo-whooo!" Likely one of the best known and loved phrases among our Avian family in Hungry Hollow and up the Capay Valley; it would be hard to imagine anyone who has been in this area--even for a few weeks--and listened to the bird calls hereabouts, not recognizing the preceding. It's one of the signature bird calls of our area, and is really country-wide in distribution. They are found in small towns as well, but really only the Pigeon (Rock Dove) is to be found in really urbanized areas.

Besides the ubiquitous call, another sound is made as they lift-off to fly, which is an almost explosive take-off, which is a peculiar, almost whistling sound with their wings sounding somewhat like, "WHE-he-he-he-hu-hu." They make this sound upon alighting, too. These birds are very streamlined for flight, and I have paced them at 60+ mph while driving parallel with them and knew in watching that they were capable of a little more speed, yet, if they had to have it. They have a very straight-lined, but also a darting and even zig-zag flight pattern, making them quite the challenge for dove hunters to hit and other prey to capture.

They are pretty much a grain and seed eater, and if you are a hunter, when cleaning them you can check into the crop [saclike enlargement of a bird's gullet where seed is stored before digestion]and see not just what they've been eating, but what foods tend to be their favorites. You see them along roadsides eating seeds of Turkey Mullein (gray-green, almost fuzzy weeds that grow in patches) as much as anything else, with their tiny, black seeds even smaller than alfalfa seeds. Mullein, Safflower--smaller seeds in general--and even Sunflowers are in their primary diet. They tend to roost in orchards at night, but are aloft before sunrise for the nearest feeding areas.

Birders and hunters are all familiar with this bird's habits: safflower fields, roadsides with abundant weed seeds, and even sunflower fields are among their favorite areas to feed, and preferably near a waterway or watering hole of some kind, especially in our hills we find these birds in profusion. In the summer and fall, Cache Creek is alive with these. I've seen these alight on sunflower heads

YOLO COUNTY VISITORS BUREAU

WWW.YOLOCVB.ORG

(530) 297-1900



COUNTY VISITORS BUREAU

Visit us to learn about things to do in Yolo County.



Yolo County Visitors Bureau
132 E Street, Suite 200, Davis, CA 95616
www.yolocvb.org



and pick the seeds out. They have a habit in flying of following a fence-line, pole-line, tree-line---pretty much anything that runs in a straight line. After the morning feed, they fly back to the orchards to "loaf for the mid-day," as in the earlier generations we used to put it, and then back out to the feeding/watering area in the evening for the final feed for the day. Perhaps the favorite game bird hereabouts, the meat is delicious, with a wild-sweet flavor to it. When I was much younger, the season was the month of September, but in the last couple decades, since there are so many here in the winter as well that they "split" the season to the first half of September, and a couple weeks in December. It was the last FUN thing to do before school began again.

These are a very crude nester, with the chosen spot usually a branch crotch in a tree as we have on the ranch here, but even rain gutters will suffice. Anywhere from sticks alone to sticks lined with finer stuffs for the "Deluxe versions" are made, and nearly always there are two pure white eggs laid. If you see a dove on the ground, they're either feeding or looking for nesting materials. Weaker in the legs than most birds, they walk in short, quick steps on the ground--almost a crawl, and are not a hopper or walker like most of our other local birds.

One to six broods are had each year. The young are fun to watch grow up---this year I was able to get some really nice "progression" shots here from eggs to the ready-to-leave stages. The young feed from the mother's gullet of partially digested food-stuffs from the fields: "dove's milk."



From two eggs to two chicks, closer and closer--oops! They flew the coop, as it were!

Incubation takes two weeks. The hatched young, called squabs, are altricial, being helpless at hatching and covered with down.

Mourning Doves have a familiar brownish-gray-tan coloration, some black spotting on the wings, and the upper breast feathers have an iridescent pinkish-salmon tinge to the feathers themselves, but this can be seen only very close-up--see page 14. It's one of the first things that an observant first-time dove hunter or birder learns about these lovelies. Males and females are colored alike. Young have a darker gray-black down that's white-tipped and then goes more to the brownish color as the feathers come in. Country-life would be somehow just incomplete without these special friends that just help to make our mutual home what it is, and are another facet to our appreciation of things here. Jim Hiatt

parents feed the squabs "dove's milk" for the first 3-4 days. After that, the crop milk is gradually augmented by seeds. Fledging takes place in about 11-15 days, before the squabs are fully grown but after they are capable of digesting adult food.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/>



Left: Tarweed flower.
One problem with moving away from "home" for decades and trusting your memories when you come back--what do they say, "You can't go home again"? Well, you can--but it will surprise you!

Case in point: in Volume 12, I wrote about my love of that pungent smell of Tarweed on the Monroe Ranch--problem was, the pungent plant I was calling Tarweed was actually **Croton setiger**, or *Turkey Mullein* or *Doveweed*. When I found this out I went into research over-drive and the first thing botanist Tim Lowrey said to me--again--is: "That is the problem with using the common names, Betsy, you can easily make mistakes with similar plants." Thing is, we do have both plants on the old ranch and they are hairy and pungent and not so great for livestock-- BUT I STILL LOVE THE SMELL! That part has not changed! Oh, and I have gone back and re-written that feature in Volume 12! My motto: Never stop learning!!

Below: Dove-loving Croton setiger -- that's Turkey Mullein or Doveweed to us!

Below: Croton stellate hairs 4.JPG -- greatly magnified from:
<http://malpighiales.myspecies.info/file/1504>

Thanks to my photo-buddy Jim Hiatt, descended from the Capay Valley and Hungry Hollow Goodnow pioneers, and my old EHS buddy Tim Lowrey, descended from the pioneer Rumsey Lowreys, now a botany professor at UNM, I know
 Below:<http://corelectronics.com/DERUFF/Croton%20setiger.htm>

Doveweed from Tarweed!! Thanks, guys! And I have now seen the stellate hairs up close and personal! Doveweed: "The foliage is toxic to animals, and the crushed plants were used by Native Americans to stupefy fish and make them easy to catch. Turkey mullein was smoked to cure sore throats and cough. It can replace a fraction of tobacco. The seeds are very palatable to birds"--especially Mourning Doves!!

Bottom 2 photos: Betsy Monroe and Jim Hiatt took in Hungry Hollow, 2013.



Recently looked up "Common or Great Mullein" when I heard it was used medicinally—not only by our native people, but some herbalists today. According to Wikipedia: Verbascum thapsus, the great mullein or common mullein, is a species of mullein native to Europe, northern Africa, and Asia, and introduced in the Americas and Australia. It is a hairy biennial plant that can grow to 2 m tall or more. I have several different species in my yard—might learn to use them!



California Quail
and Dragonflies!

for The Greater Capay Valley Historical Society



The magic of Quail and Dragonflies still abound in the Greater Capay Valley!

California Quail—alive and well in the area, though many of our bird species are threatened everywhere by Climate Change.

I asked our local bird man, hobby-ornithologist Jim Hiatt, to share with us some photos he has taken recently in Hungry Hollow and to share some of his knowledge and memories of growing up in the area with the many amazing birds of Capay Valley—as we refer to them in the book we created: *The Birds of Capay Valley*. Since the first edition sold out, we are adding to it for a second edition; order at: greatercapayvalley.org.



As seen at left in the text *Birds of North America*, the bird Jim photographed in our area above is a perfect example of a male

Jim writes: “Lots of neat things about this bird, not the least of which is that it happens to be our State Bird, and a lovely choice. *Callipepla californica* is its species or *scientific name*, and is a member of the *Order Galliformes*, which it

shares with chickens, turkeys, pheasants; and other *game birds* like grouse, bobwhite, chukars and so on. Family name is a challenge to pronounce—try *Odontophoridae* on for size.”



It is a bird of the West Coast as high as British Columbia and as far south as Baja. "Birds of North America" does say it was introduced here as a game bird,

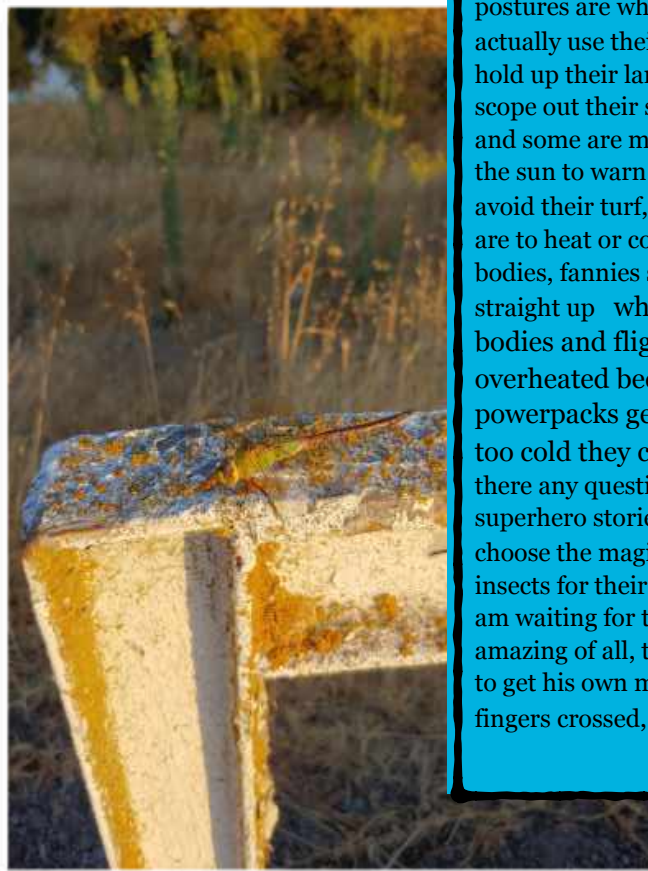


but doesn't note when introduced nor from where. It also lists New Zealand, Australia, Hawaii, and portions of South America, so it's been taken to lots of places.

Both male and female are lovely creatures, with the male a little more

conspicuously so. The male has a face with black and white coloration reminiscent of a feathered raccoon, and with one single black feather coming out of the top of the forehead that slightly overhangs the face, as does the female and is quite the ornament. The male had a little "comb" of short feathering on the forehead right in front of the eyes. The male and female share a tummy and abdomen of feathers resembling scales, and are gray and brown otherwise.

Mosquitoes abound, too, alas—as does West Nile Virus; beware! According to an article by Caroline Ghisolfi in the Sacramento Bee, August 31, 2019, where she quotes the manager of Sacramento-Yolo Mosquito and Vector Control District Gary Goodman, "Heat accelerates the life cycle of a mosquito and populations can increase very rapidly" and as you know this past August was one of our hottest in 40 years. The West Nile Virus season began in Yolo County August 7 and Ghisolfi writes "the season is far from over." They suggest the 3 D's: spray on *DEET*, avoid bare skin at *Dawn and Dusk*, and *Drain* standing water; and go to FighttheBite.net—and encourage those magical superheroes, the Dragonflies!



Dragonflies—who doesn't love them!

Magical and they eat mosquitos!

Due to abundant water, mosquitos abound and thus their predators do too—so the fields and waterways are filled with the sight of these magical beasts. I wrote extensively about them in Journal volume # 4—which you can read on our website greatercapayvalley.org or on pages 78-79 in the book *The History and Stories of the Capay Valley*; but in the Daily Democrat August 31, 2019, there is an interesting article about their odd postures and what they mean—check it out in the *Community* section at dailydemocrat.com. Some postures are when they actually use their front feet to hold up their large heads to scope out their surroundings, and some are males reflecting the sun to warn other males to avoid their turf, while others are to heat or cool their bodies, fannies sticking straight up when their bodies and flight gear overheated because if their powerpacks get too hot or too cold they can't fly. Is there any question why superhero stories often choose the magical powers of insects for their heroes? So I am waiting for the most amazing of all, the dragonfly, to get his own movie—with fingers crossed, stay tuned!

Quail, con't: At our farm in Hungry Hollow, these show up in the Spring; the photos I share here of them I've gotten in April-May-June, when they're nesting here—our farm here is a good habitat for them. Insects and seeds and green plant leaves are their dietary fare; they are fairly omnivorous for small things. Most of their lives are spent on the ground as they are ground-nesters—which presents perils of its own. Ground nesters tend to lay a disproportionately large number of eggs—and for these, 10-15 eggs is the norm, as with turkeys and pheasants. This is *Designed* into them to help offset the danger of the chicks on the ground being easily swallowed up by feral cats, raccoons and skunks, and larger hawks and owls—who will also make quick culinary work of the eggs, should they find a bonanza of eggs in the depression in the grass. The babes are *precocial* when they hatch and are ready to get up and go and follow Mom, where those birds who are born *atricially*—like blackbird or mockingbirds—are helpless for some time.

Their call is a distinctive “Chi-CA-Go! Chi CA Go!” in a series of repetitions. Dad always thought it sounded like “Look right here! Look right here!” --and either is just as good. Also given is a single noted “Wheeeer!” In a group on the ground, they will start twittering like they're blowing kisses to each other. As they are a gregarious type, they live in groups of from a few, as usually happens here, to dozens in a group more in the *wild*, like our hilly Capay Hills to the west.

As a kid, when we'd fish for stripers—and end up getting carp—invariably the quail on the other side would begin calling, and Dad, who was the best whistler I've even known, would imitate them back, and they'd answer! When we'd hunt, Dad would carry an ocharina (ceramic potato) which could remarkably copy their tone and sequence and call them that way.”



While Jim is an avid birder, as is typical in this area he is also a hunter. He shared several hunting stories with me, but one includes my dad, so here goes: “They prefer walking/running, but will fly when in danger, though flying does burn more energy. Quail hunters will tell you what a challenge these darting flyers are to hit in the brushy hills. My Dad would go out with his friend Tommy Monroe hunting in the Capay or Arbuckle hills, and go out with two boxes of shells and come back with one quail in each box!”



The Barn Owl, our local beauty--at risk?

The following contribution comes from our local amateur ornithologist, Jim Hiatt. Of all the local birds, owls are a personal favorite of his. Rather than pick his brain, I asked him to just compose the article himself--complete with great pictures:

Our most common owl in western Yolo County is one that everyone in these parts has seen--or at least heard at night--the Barn Owl. This one and the Great Horned Owl--Bubo virginianus--are worldwide in range and are likely the two best known, though The Great Horned Owl

in North America ranges further into the northern latitudes. Sometimes the Barn Owl was called by earlier generations "The Monkey-Faced Owl." And, interestingly, if you look at a half shell of a local Black Walnut, it looks very much like their 'facial disc'.

According to Birds of North America, page 330, in a number of the midwestern states, farming practices have cut down on their 'rodential' food supply, making them close to endangered in some of those areas. Especially with the reduction of older farm buildings, such as older barns and tank houses, it has made it more difficult to maintain their numbers. Happily, that is not as much the case here; we still co-exist very well with them from Hungry Hollow to Winters and up the Capay Valley--and, happily, we still have many old farm buildings to entice and house them!

Most night predators actually see in the infra-red portion of the spectrum, making hunting much easier for them--the mouse, gopher, vole, etc., is seen by the owl as a 'glowing orb' and thus an easy target. While normally they are primarily nocturnal, when caring for anywhere from 3-6 little ones I have seen them hunting as late as 10 A.M. These lovely creatures have one or two broods a year, and will feed as many of their young as they can find rodents for. Sadly, if food is sparse in a given year, and if they hatch 5-6, they may take 1-3 of them and simply throw them out of the nest. When I was a child, my grandmother would sometimes go by the tank house in the April-May time frame and find one to three little orphaned, white down-covered bodies on the ground. It was a good, though sad, way to gauge the rodent population in the immediate area. The newly fledged young hunt together with 'Mom' for a time to get the feel for it, and then go off on their own. Barn Owls have a frequently-heard 'rasping shriek' that almost sounds like the 'Shhhh!' we would use to ask someone to be



Random local barn photos by Elizabeth Monroe, while running around scouting out olives--both were delightfully abundant!





quiet. Given in flight, it sounds most like 'Shhh-EEK!!!' They also make a loud series of snapping sounds with their beak and even do this in their sleep. This is what got my attention for the owl seen above, asleep in our old-growth olive tree. I 'snapped' its picture in its sleep, rocking back and forth on its feet--pay attention and Mother Nature always has something new to teach you! I have also experienced many times in our tank house, 3-5 little ones, half-grown, with a fair amount of down still on them, trying to keep me 'at bay', by rock back and forth TOGETHER, and giving a slower and more drawn-out version of the hiss/shriek that they do as adults. When you have 5 up there, as we did one year, the 'chorus' can be so loud between the five of them that if you'd taken someone up there to see them as well, you both would have to talk in a very loud voice to hear each other above the 'din' of the 'owl-lets'!

I grew up in Woodland in the 1950s and 60s, when Woodland was more agrarian, and you saw more country-type birds than you would now, as Woodland was closer to a population of 10,000, as opposed to its current 60,000. Barn Owls could be heard at night frequently shrieking and snapping--and even Horned Owls were not uncommon there. Not so in today's world.

These are lovely creatures, with golden-tawny brown coloration on the upper parts, and a white underside, tinged with golden-brown streaks. They are one of the few owls with feathered legs down to the claws. Birds of North America tells us that these can live up to 8 years, have a wingspan of some 3 1/2 feet, and are pretty much solitary after mating.

On a final note, in the early 1980s, on the way home from work, right beside the Clover School I found one standing in the middle of the road with its eyes closed. Suspected that it had been hit and hurt, but not killed, I picked it up at the shoulders such that it couldn't claw me, and brought it home. Kept it on the front porch, and fed it raw hamburger balls the size of large marbles, and actually force-fed it, but it really didn't fight me--sensed I was trying to help it, and the meat likely tasted good anyway. Three weeks later, when it was more alert and



responsive to me, I took it outside, lifted it aloft and it promptly flew head first, right into the house! Tried again, and 'aimed' it at our walnut trees, and this time the 'launch' was successful. Saw it in the evenings for quite some time afterward.



...and then there is the elusive "Booby Owl," seen above...

Just as Jim was finishing up his article on the Barn Owl, he captured rare footage of the Burrowing Owl--or "Booby Owl," as our grandparents' might have called it. Not much bigger than a softball, laying eggs underground, they are unique in many ways--and their behavior may have led to the idiom...?

Continued on next page

The Burrowing or "Booby" Owl of the Capay Valley...



The "Booby Owl," has some more dignified names: *Athene cunicularia* is the scientific name of what's more commonly known as the Burrowing Owl. Earlier generations have also referred to this little fellow as the "Ground Owl," but my grandmother's generation referred to these during her childhood as "Booby Owls"—thus, that's my personal favorite! What gave rise to the term "Booby Owl"??? I wish I knew, but Grandma called them that a century ago when they were much more plentiful than now. I suspect it may have been some of their odd behaviors—

acted like a booby! As in, He escaped from the booby hatch?

*They are the only known species of owl that actually lives underground when not out hunting. It's easiest for them to use an abandoned squirrel hole, or a culvert, or an old pipe or pile of piping, and failing the availability of these, will simply dig their own. I learned from *Birds of North America*, p.343, that they use their beaks to dig a new home if needs be. I didn't know that one. Imagine using your TEETH to dig out a new home for yourself! And worse yet, a broken beak certainly puts them at a disadvantage in dining or in bringing home game for the little ones!*

They do lay 5-10 eggs--quite a few for an owl whose actual body size is no bigger than a softball—Way to go, Mom!! She has these underground, to boot! Their diet is everything from small rodents (mice, voles, gophers, etc.) to insects. They do tend to "pair up" for life, meaning that if you do see one, conspicuously perched upon a fence post or large clod, or on the mound around the hole, it's a good bet there's another either in the hole or very nearby.

One personal observation I've made on my own, in the evenings at dusk, is that these will fly up to a certain height--say, 30' to 50' up, and flap their wings in such a way as to hold them in a stationary position--Sparrow Hawks, White Tailed Kites, and Rough Legged Hawks do the same--while they watch for prey movement. These, like all night predators, do see in the Infra-red portion of the spectrum, which means a mouse will appear as a "glowing orb" to them and, thus, an easy catch. But where I'm going with all this is that, unlike the White-Tailed Kite, which will "drop" in stages, before finally pouncing on the prey, these little fellows don't wait for gravity to get them there, but actually FLY DOWNWARD and basically "slam" upon the "happy (or, perhaps 'unhappy') meal." I learned by watching when I still had my second job at the Landfill in Yolo, where my work adjusting gas wells frequently kept me in the field past sunset, and thereupon was blessed with many a visual treat in observing this.

Greater Capay Valley Historical Society, PO Box 442, Esparto, CA 95627

Barn and "Booby" Owls of Capay Valley, continued...

How is a Booby Owl similar to Curley of "Three Stooges" fame, who, whenever he would run away from something or someone, had the habit of his trademark Woo-boo-boo-boo-boo!? Well, when approached a little too closely, the Booby Owl will jump straight up and fly back a few yards, and utter a "Wheee-blee-blee-blee-blee-blee!!"--in exactly the same manner as Curley! (Must have watched "Training Videos" of the older episodes to pick up the habit!) And from thence, upon re-alighting several yards away, will stand very straightly up, and suddenly take a very deep "bow." What a polite little creature!! This bow is repeated several times, and is actually a warning gesture to keep you safely back--or perhaps scare you away in their own odd, little "booby" manner. The pix that accompany this little missive were taken at the entranceway to our farm in Hungry Hollow in 2012. Came out rather nicely. Jim



Hungry Hollow's own 5th-generation descendant Jim Hiatt is an amateur 'birder' and photographer in the Capay Valley, whose great grandfather named this area Hungry Hollow. Jim shared the pictures, information and stories on these four pages with us.

On-line sources for Owl Information:

www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Barn_Owl

[Barn Owl - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia](http://Barn_Owl_-_Wikipedia,_the_free_encyclopedia)

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barn_Owl

The Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*) is the most widely distributed species of owl, and one of the most widespread of all birds. It is also referred to as Common Barn Owl...

Burrowing Owl

en.wikipedia.org

The Burrowing Owl is a tiny but long-legged owl found throughout open landscapes of North and South America. Burrowing Owls can be found in grasslands, rangelands, agricultural areas, deserts, or any other open dry area with low vegetation... Wikipedia

Scientific name: *Athene cunicularia*

Higher classification: *Athene*

Rank: Species

NOTE: I tried to "Google" them under "Booby Owl," hoping for a lead on the possible idiom about Boobies being crazy, but got some weird sites--use Burrowing Owl!!

YOLO COUNTY VISITORS BUREAU

WWW.YOLOCVB.ORG

(530) 297-1900

YOLO
COUNTY VISITORS BUREAU

Visit us to learn about things to do in Yolo County



Great Horned Owl —*Bubo virginianus*



This being the last issue of this journal—for awhile—a special bird had to be the focal point, one everyone is familiar with but rarely gets to see up close and personal: **the Great Horned Owl**. These are the among largest of our owls (perhaps only the Great Gray Owl is larger, but it's not found around here) and is perhaps the stereotypical owl that first comes to mind when the word "owl" is mentioned; the Barn Owl is perhaps the second best known and was treated in volume 8.

The "Horneds" are mostly a rural owl, though when Woodland was smaller and more of an "agri-town," I sometimes saw these alighting on top of

one of our buildings of antiquity, such as the Opera House. Decoys of these were frequently set atop the four corners of older buildings to keep pigeons—and their associated *calling cards*—away, but it really didn't work. The pigeons just got too used to these things never moving. Woodland had more Barn Owls then, too, often choosing to roost and nest in the palm trees that surrounded the old Hershey Mansion at Walnut and Main.

We have a nesting pair here at the farm in Hungry Hollow and have had since I was a youngster. They, at least out here, have territories of maybe a couple square miles--I hear another pair hoo-ing over at Durst's Organic Farm about 3/4 of a mile away, and in other directions as well. They live some 20-25 years, and mate for life, though they are independent within the pair and don't always hunt together nor set out for hunting at the same time. Though these are night hunters, they can be awake and hooting from mid-afternoon on—but I can't remember ever seeing them hunt in the daytime, hereabouts.

Horned owls are very intense and aggressive hunters. Once leaving our Eucalyptus, one will flap rapidly and intently to gain some height and then will set his wings and glide for hundreds of yards before perching, to begin the hunt. Preferring a high point, he will watch from a perch for game for some time, then move to another spot if nothing shows itself.

Horneds prefer larger prey, and usually go for things large enough to be worthwhile, though they will take smaller prey as well. It's been tougher hunting for them these past few years, as irrigation methods have changed greatly. With drip irrigation becoming more necessary with the drought, there's less standing water around to support the normal prey. When this happens, the you wonder if the ever-



Horneds—and Barn Owls—may raise fewer young, as they will raise only what they can support. Cottontails, jackrabbits, possums, and similarly-sized critters are the normal fare, but pets like cats and small dogs have been known to be taken when times are lean. At night other Owls are sometimes attacked in the air, and larger hawks may be taken as they sleep. Like other nocturnal predators, owls see in the infrared, and make ground-sleepers like pheasants easy prey, as owls see the "heat signature" of their bodies. They are perhaps the only predator known to even take skunks, as well,—which begs the question whether they have a strong sense of smell or whether smell even enters into their picture when food's needed. A falconer I know has told me that Horneds are among those that will sometimes kill just because they have an aggressive nature...*whooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo...*

Horned Owls, continued...

In spite of how often we hear them of a night, Horned Owls don't "hoot" all year-round, but are vocal during breeding and parenting. This cycle in their lives begins around October (Halloween??) and continues through April or so. The female is a little larger than the male and gives the classical 4-note "Hoo-HOO--hoo-hoo" The male has a 5-6 note call, higher in pitch and more urgent in tone "Hoo-hoo HOO—hoo--hoo." Another call they make is one few would recognize unless they lived among them as I do: it is a "HYAAARNK!" —along with barking and screaming sounds...did I mention they are favorite Halloween symbols? Occasionally, I've also heard "hoo-hoo-hoo-hoo-WOO-BOO-WOO-BOO-WOO-BOO!!!" —sounds just like that!

In courtship the male does steep dives and sharp climbs back up into the tree to impress his life-long partner. She sometimes responds with a more muffled series of *hoo-hoo-hoo-hoos* in appreciation. Am not sure where I have them, but I have years ago taken photos of the mating actually taking place—I almost felt embarrassed for "peeking," but it's just nature and a rarity to capture. Frequently here I'll hear the hooting right in the tees outside my bedroom window, and sometimes you wonder if the ever-repeated same notes actually mean something in Owl-ness. Maybe it is the eternally given "I love you"...or am I just a romantic?

Horned Owls usually use the same nest every year: a heavy stick nest, sometimes made by other large birds like crows, into which they raise from 1-5 little ones.

Speaking of which, many who live in this area have stories of finding fledgling owls on the ground—so ugly only a mother owl could love them! If they are all fluff, they fell out—or were pushed for lack of food? If mostly feathered, they may be trying to take wing. Several years ago, I heard a repeated wheezing sound by the *volunteer* Eucalyptus tree behind our barn, and since it didn't sound like anything I was used to hearing, I checking it out. I found a young one on the ditch bank near by, the size of a small chicken, nearly-ready-to-fly-but-not-quite, with some down still on it. I got my camcorder and got some pretty nice footage, some as near as 4 feet from the little one. Mother and Dad were lit on top of the barn and were distinctly displeased, making about every sound that they could make that wasn't a hoot. I watched with concern over my shoulder as I shot video because I knew they might attack—most likely the mother. About 25 years ago I got some lovely photos of a Short-Eared Owl's ground nest of eggs out on a cattle ranch south of Davis when I worked for Mosquito Control. I had seen the nest the day before so I brought my camera to work, and while I shot, the mother dive-bombed and just missed me—all but once! I caught quite a blow on top of the head from the claws and felt the lingering sting for a couple hours afterward. Birding is not for sissies! It didn't happen on this occasion as I watched for diving from Mom and Dad, but it pays to be cautious!

Horned Owls are found from upper Alaska to Tierra del Fuego at Argentina's southern most tip. Most of the owls perennially heard in earlier Disney Movies were these. Sadly, most young folks today get little chance to experience these in the wild any more. Luckily for me, my resident pair are good and natural companions and friends sharing the area with me. Our female knows my presence and I've walked up under her before and complimented her on what a particularly lovely girl she was. Wasn't a bit afraid of me—thus the lovely photos I got!



Though chillin' in my barn,
this is not a Barn Owl

THIS JUST IN: Red-tail Hawks and Golden Eagles!!

Below, 3 photos from center to right are “a couple of Golden Eagles! We usually have them as a Winter visitor, but this time there were two of them on succeeding poles just north of Esparto on Road 87,” stated an excited amateur ornithologist of Hungry Hollow, Jim Hiatt, who shared these pictures, taken December 19, 2011. “These are half again bigger than our more common Red-Tailed Hawk [see his December 2011 picture seen at left]; are the size of a hen turkey and have a wingspan of 6-7 feet; weighing 6-13lbs. As seen in flight, below, they have a light triangular area at the rump which helps distinguish them from other eagles.” Nesting: They have one brood of 1-3 eggs in nests made of piles of sticks and vegetation on cliffs, in trees, and man-made structures during April-August. “They are at the top of the food chain, avian-wise, and live for 20-39 years!”



Cottontail, below:

The genus is widely distributed across America...most (though not all) species live in nests called forms.

Hares and jackrabbits, below left:

Are leporids belonging to the genus *Lepus*.

Considered by farmers to be “pests,” they offer enjoyment and entertainment to those of us content to watch their antics—but a meal to the majestic hawks and eagles!

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki>

And what are these birds-of-prey looking for? Well, in this area, it would likely be jackrabbits or cottontails—the local farm fields are full of them!

“All rabbits (except the cottontail rabbits) live underground in burrows or warrens, while hares and cottontail rabbits live in simple nests above the ground, and usually do not live in groups,” according to Wikipedia. Hares and Cottontails “are adapted to the lack of physical protection, relative to that afforded by a burrow, by being born fully furred and with eyes open...hence able to fend for themselves soon after birth; they are precocial. By contrast, the related rabbits are altricial, having young that are born blind and hairless.”

When driving home on County Road 86 at night, just beside Durst Organic Farms, I have to slow and dodge many cute, little cottontail rabbits. Farther down the road, in front of my house, I am dodging jackrabbits—just like the many I knew growing up out here in the 1950-70s!!



Turkey Vultures or Buzzards

cleaning up after us...



Hungry Hollow's own 5th-generation descendant Jim Hiatt is an amateur 'birder' and photographer in the Capay Valley, whose great grandfather named this area *Hungry Hollow*. Jim shared the pictures, information and stories on the next two pages with us. Recently looking for Redbud to photograph[see page 23], and knowing there was a "Redbud as big as an almond tree just before you get to the Boy Scout Cabin," up the Capay Valley on Cache Creek, he came upon this sight: "There were about 10 or so Turkey Vultures (Buzzards) [Cathartes aura; Page 155 of *Birds of North America*; cited on page 2 of this journal] sitting on fenceposts and one on the ground...There was a roadkill doe, and a fresh one, so they didn't want to move--enough for way more than 10 vultures, as the doe was sizable. They let me drive, slipping the clutch, up to within 30 feet of them before one or two flew a short distance away. With the full 8X snapped away with my camera, I got some lovely ones--keepers, in that normally they just won't let you get this close. Very first couple pix show something they do on colder mornings--they will spread their wings out as shown to soak up more of the sun's warmth."

A common sight in this area, the vulture is harmless, though can look frightening and act intimidating. They do not kill, but are purely *scavengers*, doing an important job of cleaning up the carrion as it begins to rot--they cannot digest it any other way! BUT lore has it, if you upset them in flight, they regurgitate on your head!



And according to good ol' Wikipedia:

The Turkey Vulture is a bird found throughout most of the Americas. It is also known in some North American regions as the turkey buzzard (or just buzzard). It's a scavenger and feeds almost exclusively on carrion, finding its food using its keen eyes and sense of smell, flying low enough to detect the gasses produced by the beginnings of the process of decay in dead animals. In flight, it uses thermals to move through the air, flapping its wings infrequently. It roosts in large community groups. Lacking a syrinx—the vocal organ of birds—its only vocalizations are grunts or low hisses. It nests in caves, hollow trees, or thickets. Each year it generally raises two chicks, which it feeds by regurgitation. It has very few natural predators. In the United States of America, the vulture receives legal protection under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turkey_Vulture



140



Two of Our Most Colorful Warm-Weather Friends:

Western Kingbirds (left)

and

Bullock's Orioles (right)

BY JIM HIATT OF HUNGRY HOLLOW



The Western Kingbird (*Tyrannus verticalis*) and the Bullock's Oriole (*Icterus bullockii*), follow the warm weather north from Mexico and Central America and bring us some early Spring color. Both of these migratory beauties follow the heat, though the Bullock's Oriole usually arrives 2-3 weeks earlier than the Western Kingbird in March and April--you can almost predict them on your calendar!

As our local birder Jim Hiatt tells us, "Neither of these are city-birds, but birds of the open field and of farmyards where there are lots of trees and fence-lines." I asked him to tell us about them both for this Spring-into-Summer issue:

"As the Orioles are usually here marginally first, we'll tell their story first. They are likely the most spectacularly beautiful bird here (seen at right) with one of the loveliest calls--ranking them along with Meadowlarks for beauty and variety of tuning. Somewhat like Finches, they have a longish sentence in a single communicate, and earlier in their season here the call begins with two to four "hmmm-hmmm" notes that sound much like the sound at the lower end of a bass harmonica, and then a rapid staccato of whistles, warbles, twitters leading up to a "Wheee-o" ending.



Another is just a prolonged "hmmm-hummm-hmmm-ing." Later in the summer, this changes somewhat in the order uttered, the "Hm-Hm-s" may come closer to the end--making you wonder what they are communicating differently. The females have a much shorter call of one-two notes and duller in tone. The male also gives one- or two-note whistles to his little bride, as well.

Plumage-wise, they are a most brilliant yellow-orange, but have a black throat, top of the head, back, and tail, with black-n-white wings. As is typical of the female of bird species, the females are a much abbreviated version of the colorful males: in this case, with olive-brown upper parts, a yellowish head and throat, and whitish underparts.



Left: male Bullock's Oriole

Below: female Bullock's Oriole



All photos taken by Jim Hiatt in 2013-14 in Capay Valley and Hungry Hollow

"Birds of North America, The Complete Photographic Guide to Every Species" will add to your enjoyment (see page 625 of that bird bible)

Bullock's Orioles also have the most unique and noteworthy nesting habits of all our local birds. They construct a spherical "globe" of grasses, string, twine, vines, horsehair where available, and even light packing materials. These nests have a hole "sewn" into them towards the tops and the mother enters and lays her eggs at the bottom of this, and the young are raised initially there. These nests are sewn together at the very ends of branches or on side twigs along the branch edges. One Sycamore, as we have here, may have 6-8 of these, although when these birds have left for the season, I've examined the nests, and some are notably more raggedy than others, which makes me suspect that they don't re-use the same nests each year, as many Owls and Hawks do. Worthy of note is that these creations are very durable, as some survive for severak years, weather and all, after they've served their purpose. No other bird here does something like these; it's just "hard-wired" into their little brains to just *know* what to do. They didn't learn from Mom or Dad, nor does anyone offer courses in "Nestology 101 according to Species." They just *know*.



In earlier times when horses were much more in abundance, here, the nests were made of mainly hair from the horse's mane, so earlier generations called these the "Horsehair Oriole."





And of The Western Kingbird

Typically laying 1 brood of
2-7 eggs April-July

JIM HIATT WRITES:

These little chatterboxes are the first to announce the morning, when you have the first glow in the east, and the last to go 'nite-nite' in the evening. Seems that the approaching lower light of the evening has a somewhat alarming effect on them, as it's interrupted their normal day's activities. Almost exclusively an insect eater, they will eat berries as well when available. They're acrobats; you'll occasionally see two in a "tussle" from a hundred or so feet up, kicking, biting, and flapping at each other over and somersaults, but somehow they both know just when they're within about 4 feet of the ground, as they always seem to just avoid crashing. Last year I was able to get pix of one Kingbird nest--while I was doing up the Mourning Dove article; went past it in the crotch of Eucalyptus tree while on the way to the higher crotch of a Mourning Dove nest and eggs. These have a twig base, and an inner-woven cup of grasses and lighter stuffs, and the nest I saw had 4 eggs. These were a pink-white egg with brown to chestnut brown spots--see photo above.



Western Kingbird, one of my favorite warm-weather birds, has some pretty interesting behavior from arrival here in early April, through late August--wherein the last two days they're simply *GONE*. Migration occurs at night, so you don't see hordes of the them traveling southward during the day. They're silent in the latter part of their time here, although their daily hunting habits continue. Once, while

doing a 2-mile walk at precisely this time of the year, maybe 4 years ago, over on the historic Merritt Ranch field, one Kingbird--seemingly to make a point to get my attention--flew a complete circle around me, and then headed south, as though saying: "Good-bye, friend, until next year! I have to go now!"

But they are here, now. They show up within a couple weeks one way or

the other, coming back up from Mexico and Central America where they've spent the winter after migrating from here. When they first arrive they are extremely vocal, and are the first to chatter in the morning and the last you'll hear in the evening, and I think that has to do with spending their whole day basically feeding, and perhaps because, like chickens, they having pupils that don't dilate as much as ours

do, so that what seems like sunset to us seems to them like the last of twilight. Therefore, they are alarmed that they are having trouble seeing any more, whereupon when daylight arrives, they can see to resume their normal activities. As the warmer period progresses, they remain very chatty until about mid-July, in which their vocalizing gradually slows until into Mid-August, when they grow altogether silent, like they *know* that the time to leave again is

near at hand. I'm convinced that it's not the warmth itself that makes them "know" it's time to go south again, as they might leave just before Dove Season begins (Sept.1) when the temperatures are over 100F. It more likely has to do with the sun's position in the sky, which is the very same stimulus that brings them back the next spring. I have seen years when they arrive when it is downright cold here. My old Ornithology Prof., at CSUS, Miklos Deserios Francis

Udvardy, who was world-renowned as one of the best in the business, agreed with me on this, and affirmed that the sun's position affects the travels of many others as well.

I've watched and observed birds all my life, and feel a special kinship with this species. One very good reason for this is: they have a sort of "giggling" call, and since my youngest daughter Carrie's giggle sounded just like theirs, I used to call her "My little kingbird."

Not to be confused with the somewhat similarly bright yellow-breasted Western Meadowlark, also abundant this time of year, seen below.



California Natives:

IT'S SPRING AND THE VALLEY IS FULL OF COLOR: POPPIES AND LUPIN ABOUND!

California State Floral Society chose the golden poppy as the state flower in 1890, and the state legislature made it official in 1903. At that time, it became a misdemeanor to cut or remove any plant growing on state or county highways or public lands, unless authorized by the government, when they may be considered *invasive* or may need to be disturbed for construction, etc. The *Eschscholzia californica* is a species of flowering plant native to the US and Mexico, according to wikipedia.org : “It is a perennial or annual growing to 5–60 inches tall, with alternately branching glaucous blue-green foliage. The leaves are ternately divided into round, lobed segments. The flowers are solitary on long stems, silky-textured, with four petals, each petal 0.79 to 2.36 inches long and broad; flower color ranges from yellow to orange, with flowering from February to September. The petals close at night or in cold, windy weather and open again the following morning, although they may remain closed in cloudy weather. The fruit is a slender, dehiscent capsule (.2 to 3.5 inches long, which splits in two to release the numerous small black or dark brown seeds.” These seeds are edible and are often used in cooking. The Native Americans used the leaves medicinally and the pollen cosmetically. According to wikipedia: “An aqueous extract of the plant has sedative and anxiolytic action. The extract acts as a mild sedative when smoked. The effect is far milder than that of opium. California poppy contains a different class of alkaloids.”

Lupinus, commonly known as lupin or lupine in North America, is a genus of flowering plants in the legume family, Fabaceae. The genus includes over 200 species, with centers of diversity in North and South America, where the seeds have been used as a food for over 6000. Smaller centers occur in North Africa and the Mediterranean, where the seeds have been used as a food for over 3000 years, according to wikipedia.org : “Users soaked the seed in running water to remove most of the bitter alkaloids and then cooked or toasted the seeds to make them edible...or else boiled and dried them to make kirku...However, Spanish domination led to a change in the eating habits of the indigenous peoples, and only recently has interest in using lupins as a food been renewed...high in protein, dietary fibre and antioxidants, very low in starch and, like all legumes, are gluten-free. Lupin beans are commonly sold in a salty solution in jars (like olives and pickles) and can be eaten with or without the skin. Lupini dishes are most commonly found in Europe, especially in Portugal, Egypt, Greece, and Italy...In Portugal, Spain, and Spanish Harlem, they are popularly consumed with beer.

Lupins have soft green to grey-green leaves which may be coated in silvery hairs, often densely so. The leaf blades are usually



California natives : Poppy and Lupin, frequently seen together due to similar needs



palmately divided into five to 28 leaflets...The flowers are produced in dense or open whorls on an erect spike, each flower 1–2cm long. The pea-like flowers have an upper standard, or banner, two lateral wings, and two lower petals fused into a keel. The flower shape has inspired common names such as bluebonnets and quaker bonnets. The fruit is a pod containing several seeds.” In California, we typically see purple, white or yellow lupin.

Of Our Year-round Birds

Say's Phoebes & Black Phoebes:



Our two Phoebes are year-round birds, but could be thought of as Winter's answer to our Kingbirds [see volume 16] which fly away in fall and leave us with Say's Phoebes and Black Phoebes—which, other than coloration, are roughly similar in size, habits, flight patterns, and behavior. Phoebes are fundamentally here year-round, but are not as vocal as our Kingbirds, and in general they are not as numerous. We're nearing the end now of our Kingbird time of the year, and they're the most numerous birds we have. During August, they are much quieter vocally than earlier in the year, so if you're as used to the giggling, chuckling calls throughout the day, when you walk outside now,

something seems missing. It's like Kingbirds know their time of leaving until next year is close at hand. When they're gone, they're gone quickly. Holding their niche until early next April or so are the Black Phoebe (*Sayornis nigricans*) and the Say's Phoebe (*Sayornis saya*).



The Black Phoebes on this page were photographed by Jim Hiatt on Cache Creek at Low Water Bridge in the upper Capay Valley in August, 2014.

376



One exception to the similarities between Kingbirds and Phoebes is a similarity Phoebes have with Swallows: mud nests. Phoebes build a nest much like that of a swallow, but in addition to under bridges, against cliffs and rock outcroppings, they also use the underside of a roof of a home, garage, out-building, barn, and so on—see the photos here taken under my house eaves in Hungry Hollow.



Phoebes are an ashy-sooty black on the upper parts, and white on the under-parts. Both Phoebes are very people-tolerant, and will allow a slow and careful approach. Neither is an urban bird, just like their Kingbird counterparts. Both are nearly exclusively insect eaters, though in the winter both will eat berries as well, and according to my “bird bible,” *Birds of North America*, Blacks have been known to dive for small fish, like mosquito fish or minnows (*Gambusia affinis*); I'd love to see this sometime!

They are also the near-opposites of the Kingbirds for vocality. Calls are very infrequent, and quiet and two-or-three-noted with both birds, like "Pee-urrrr," and "Sit-see" and "Tee-hurr" "Si-see" and the like. 3-noted calls can be used during courting or in fending off rivals. They are territorial only to a small degree; unlike Kingbirds, these won't be found chasing hawks, owls, and so on. They're just quiet little "keep to themselves" types. A pleasant surprise to me a week ago was to be up at the Low Water Crossing above Rumsey, when I got pictures of two of the Blacks on the same rock, seen on the opposite page. Good to know they're that far up the Capay Valley—and I saw several while I was there. I also saw Bald Eagles and two Little Green herons in same trip; both are a treat to see.





Left:
*White-crowned Sparrow**



Right: *Yellow-crowned Sparrow, photographed by Jim Hiatt in Capay Valley*


We also have Sparrows in Capay Valley and Hungry Hollow this time of year. I wanted to treat two in particular which involve childhood memories with me: the White-Crowned and Yellow-Crowned Sparrows. We have a number of others, like the English Sparrow and Savannah Sparrow, to name two—perhaps at another time I can do a fuller coverage of these, as they are also trademarks of our area.

As a youngster, I had a fascination for sounds of nature, including the calls of these two little sparrows on cold & foggy evenings at Grandma Goodnow's ranch in Hungry Hollow. As the sun was going down, and as the light was fading, these little birds (large for sparrows) would begin to gather in brushy areas for the night. The callings and twitterings would become more intense as they came together in the evening as one called to many: "PEEP!" or "DINK"--both sharp and loud. Several would form a chorus of sorts in this, calling all their friends in to roost. During the daytime, the calls are somewhat varied, along the line of "Der-dee-DEE-DEE-dur!" or "Dee-dee-DEE-DEE-DEE-dur!" If only you could compose these into music, somehow. Hearing and enjoying enough of these little pronouncements have their way of imprinting themselves on your mental "hard drive of memories" and they're not easily forgotten, if you're a devotee like me: I'd be thinking, "Ohhhh, this was such fun to hear these little ones again, but now I've got to get back to homework. One day, one day..." Well, now I am retired to Grandma's ranch and get to enjoy them at will!

These are a gregarious little lot, and a good translation of these peeps and twitterings would be something like "I am here, you are there; we are all here." That saying came from my old CSUS Ornithology Professor when we talked about it after class one day. His was quite a distinctive name: Miklos Deserios Francis Udvardy was world-renowned. He loved personal anecdotes of these things and it was an effective part of how he taught. Hungarian by origin, he migrated here as the old Soviets were coming in to "liberate his country" in the 1950s.

These two sparrows are not identical all over, as the name should imply. The heads are distinctive in color: the Yellow-Crowned with a yellow stripe on the crown of the head & a black bar below that, across the eye, and then gray below that; where with the White-crowned, a white stripe instead of yellow, then a lower white bar again, and then a black eye bar, the head with these being the more distinctive of the two. Below the head they're similar in size, but the color differs a little more: the WC has a gray and brown breast/abdomen, with white bars and spots on brownish wings. The YC body is pretty much the same but without the white spots on the wings. You can see this in the photo above right—this Yellow-crowned beauty had just survived a near-lethal encounter with a kitty-cat in my yard, and had a damaged wing, which was why I was able to get unusually close for exceptionally good shots. At left, since the White-crowned aren't here currently, *this photo was taken from *Birds of North America*. Before the early 1960s, when Woodland was 1/5 of its current size and a good part of the area west of West Street was tomato fields and general countryside, many more of the *rurally* species could be found there: Acorn woodpeckers abounded, along with Juncos, Creepers, Owls, and even pheasants.

Nesting is usually on or near the ground, made of bowls of coarse materials, with 1-3 broods a year being the norm. Food is a varied plate, with insects, seeds, spiders, berries, and even grass.



Birds and Bunnies in Flux—this drought doesn't help!

It's always something in farming! When I asked a few farmers how they were dealing with the drought in Capay Valley and Hungry Hollow I hear many are putting in drip lines and drilling deeper wells to save and access water. The cost for deeper wells and more high-powered pumps is formidable and the water is finite, of course, so many are turning to drip lines to conserve at the same time. You would think that would be a purely good idea—but there is always something, as I said! For instance, the local birds—not to mention the rodents and insects many of them feed on—have come to depend upon the overflow water from irrigated fields and orchards and the bushy habitat agriculture provides. Change the water delivery system or the water-thirsty crops and you change the habitat and the animals have to adjust. We have already seen the changes to populations like pheasant when someone had the bright idea to introduce wild turkeys from the East, since our indigenous turkeys were all hunted to extinction: the eastern turkeys have flourished in the habitats once used by pheasant, so we have lost one species and gained another—ahem, somewhat less lovely and considerably more destructive, but just as good eating, I hear! And then, of course, farmers have used chemicals for decades and while it is not always provable, the guess is that we have lost other species due to loss of feed-insects and egg shell thinning, etc. Not all farmers would agree with this assessment, of course. Jim Hiatt and I have had this debate on a few occasions and our resident birder has this to say: *"I'm not at all sure why, but some Falconiformes (Hawks, Owls and Eagles) have been in a flux state for some years, now. When I was younger we had Kestrels/Merlins (Sparrow Hawks to 'us'sens', as Mother would say) by the score and everywhere. Then, for a decade or so you rarely saw one. Now, twixt this year and last, they are not only here again but all over the place! Was it pesticides as some claimed? Not too likely, I would think: I worked for Grower's Air two winters in the early 1980s and although we were using some nasty stuff then, like paraquat and so forth, we've used nothing like that in the past 20 years [and the County looks to cite those who do otherwise] but even then, today's stuff is SO much better, biodegrades so much quicker...if insecticides were to blame, we wouldn't have water bugs in our ditches—or skeeters, and Mosquito Control is still in business and we still have WNEE (West Nile Equine Encephalitis) and that's carried by the Culex tarsalis skeeter, and those still abound! I'm just glad these birds are back! White-tailed Kites, sadly, have done the opposite. They were near extinction in California 50 years ago and are now down to 50 pairs. Supposed to be—but never proven—due to DDT and the resultant bug loss and egg-shell thinning, but if that were true, it would have affected all other species that eat bugs, and their numbers didn't dwindle. We haven't used DDT—even for tree-holing (to get Aedes ventrovittis, the tree-hole mosquito, like in olive tree holes and so on)—since 1962. Marsh Hawks (Circus cyaneus) —also called "Marsh Harriers"—have never been in danger in my life time. And all the others---Rough-Leggeds, Prairie Falcons (old-timers called 'em "bullet hawks"), Harris Hawks, and so on have never been in trouble, numbers-wise...wouldn't they have been affected?"*

And of all critters most prone to pesticide effects, the Buzzard (or Turkey Vulture) should have been the MOST vulnerable, as they are the most "end-consumer" we have, since all the carrion they eat would have the poison build-up—and there have been no recent reportings of Vultures "calling in sick" that I know of! Exactly the same holds true for Horned Owls--another end-consumer.

And as for the near extinction of local Jackrabbits, Cottontails and Pheasants, I primarily blame the Coyotes! Seeing in the infra-red at night makes Jacks and Pheasants too easy a prey. And there are fewer sheep in this area any more, so coyotes began depending on the local bunnies and birds. But with no water in the canals or ditches, the rodents and birds diminish and the coyotes come in closer to the farms and ranches in desperation—my barn-cat population has been dwindling as a result!"

It's always something...

Become a Member-Subscriber to
The Greater Capay Valley Historical Society

Send a check payable to TGCVHS for \$60 for to this address:
416 Lincoln Ave., Woodland, CA 95695



Wild California Mustard: at right, the blossoms start low and work up to the top; at left above, as they drop off they leave the seed pod--which can be crushed for spreadable-edible mustard--

today do not bother with this natural source. BUT WE tried it in our marble pestle and enjoyed it on broiled chicken breasts!

CAPAY VALLEY

From Journal Volume Fifteen

California Mustard:

Latin Name *Caulanthus*

lasiophyllus,

Common Names: California

Mustard, Slender-pod Jewelflower

The flowers are on tall, slender, terminal flower spikes. The individual flowers are small and have 4 petals. The flowers are followed by long, slender seedpods that hang downwards on the stems. The leaves are green, broadly lanceolate to oblong, toothed, often sharply-lobed, and mostly found at the base of the plant and on the lower parts of the stems.

In the Brassicaceae Family, blooming between March and June. In the Napa wine region it is encouraged between vines--not only is it lovely against the greenery and gnarled vines, but it serves a "sustainable" purpose--check it out at:

<http://baldacciwineblog.com>

Basically, the mustard helps suppress the harmful Nematode populations when their extra spicy glucosinolate compounds are plowed back into the soil.



Photo at left taken from the website for:

California Native Grasslands Association

Check out greatercapayvalley.org and on FaceBook as: *The Greater Capay Valley Historical Society*

Your annual \$60 Membership-subscription gets you 4 quarterly 12-page Newsletters and a discount on the book, *The History and Stories of the Capay Valley*, Elizabeth "Betsy" Monroe; 440-pages, full-color, in hard cover

The Birds & the Bees Talk...

Special thanks to: my contributing hobby-ornithologist, Jim Hiatt in Hungry Hollow; Botany Professor-Associate Dean Tim Lowrey at UNM (but *from* Rumsey!); and certainly all my faithful subscriber-members, donors and advertisers! I couldn't do this without you! And a big shout-out to my printer-angel, Jane! I also want to thank Carman Nareau for assistance and enthusiasm this quarter, leading her to blog while she was home from college: cosmicsecrecy.wordpress.com -- filled with Capay, gardening, cooking and more!

Works Cited:

The History and Stories of the Capay Valley by Elizabeth Monroe

Vuilleumier, Francois, Editor-in-Chief, *Birds of North America*, Dorling Kindersley Ltd, New York, NY, 2009

Yolo County Archives, 226 Buckeye St., Woodland, CA 95695

<http://hedgerowfarms.com/>
info@hedgerowfarms.com
 530-662-6847



Clockwise, top to bottom: Stork's Bill and its dry-spiraling seed or "fruit"; Wild Radish; California Mustard; and Butterfly Milkweed & our local Milkweed

As kids we learned to use the swords on the Stork's Bill to make scissors or pull the seed pods off and watch them spiral right before our wondering eyes! Cosmic Secrecy of Seed, indeed!



...one man's weed is another's wildflower--and a bee or butterfly's friend! See our exploratory articles!!

The Birds n the Bees Talk...

NO, not *THAT* talk, but it *is* spring, after all, so time to think about such things...! I recently finished reading Barbara Kingsolver's latest book *Flight Behavior*, a novel about the plight of the magical Monarch Butterfly--a *must* read!! I have spent a lot of time reading about the plight of the essential Honey Bee--and now the Monarch Butterfly--and am alarmed enough to be creating bee and butterfly habitats in my garden and encourage others to do so, too!

In case you have been hibernating on planet Mars, something awful has been happening to kill off the Honey Bee (see my article in volume 6 of this journal series) and now there is something destroying millions of Monarch Butterflies as well! The current consensus seems to be our eradication of their food supply--the common *Butterfly Plant*, or Milkweed as we know it locally--a "weed" traditionally and efficiently eradicated by farmers and CalTrans with sprays such as Round-Up. Only recently have we begun to see what *efficiency* can wreak! But what is a farmer to do? Well, UCD is among several agencies and individuals who are trying to answer that question--which I will go into in this issue.

Being a native of the Capay Valley and knowing the dependence we have on pollination of important crops like Almonds—and being a gardener and knowing the importance and joy of the visiting pollinators like bees and butterflies—I am concerned enough to do some research and share it with my readers! During the course of researching, I got even more interested in our local weeds and wildflowers

and the movement to create hedgerows and pollinator habitats on local farms and ranches--and gardens! Then I got interested in the invasive weeds that seem to be proliferating here this drought year--thistles and foxtails and stork's bills, oh my! If not poisons to eradicate them, then what!? A danger to livestock and our pets, they are everywhere this spring!! Last spring I took a foxtail out of one cat's eye and I suspect another foxtail got up another cat's nose! If not removed, they inch their way up toward the brain and...my vet said, short of very expensive surgery, I can only treat the allergic symptoms and wait and pray that his body dissolves it before it does serious harm...And now the Stork's Bills are EVERYwhere! With their seed pods drying and spiraling off into fur-entangling coils--by the billions! Pretty little plants, lovely little purple flowers, fun-to-play-with "scissor" or swords--deadly daggers when dried and coiled! Do the bees or butterflies love or need them? I don't know, yet--but avoiding poisons, I am weed-whacking them down to the ground in the yard as soon as they show up, to try to keep them from reaching the stage where their seed pods swords, become dangerous.



Butterfly-attracting Milkweed - Asclepias

Butterfly-loving Milkweed above is not the local variety--those can be gotten at Hedgerow Farms.



Stork's Bill above: lovely flower and greens--fun "sword" for kids to play--deadly pest for farmers, ranchers and pets!

What is happening to the Monarch Butterfly?

THE MIGRATION BETWEEN MEXICO & CALIFORNIA TAKES 3-5 GENERATIONS TO COMPLETE

[Monarch Butterfly - Butterflies and Moths of North America](#)

www.butterfliesandmoths.org

“Classification

1. Scientific name: *Danaus plexippus*
2. Family: Nymphalidae, Subfamily: Danainae

Average Size

1. Wing Span: 3 3/8 - 4 7/8 inches (8.6 - 12.4 cm)

Where to Find

1. Habitat: Many open habitats including fields, meadows, weedy areas, marshes, and roadsides.”

AND FROM:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monarch_butterfly

“The **Monarch butterfly** (*Danaus plexippus*) is a [milkweed butterfly](#) (subfamily Danainae) in the family [Nymphalidae](#). It may be the best known of all [North American](#) butterflies.

The monarch is famous for its southward late summer/autumn [migration](#) from the United States and southern [Canada](#) to [Mexico](#) and coastal [California](#), and northward return in spring, which occurs over the lifespans of three to four generations of the butterfly” --some authorities claim 5 generations.

While some populations of monarchs have begun to appear in all continents where milkweed is becoming more popular as an ornamental plant, many of these populations do not need to migrate, so my focus is on the magical migration of our own commonly seen Monarchs in the western US--and that which is alarming scientists who study their mysterious journey. According to Wikipedia, “Monarchs migrate over hundreds to thousands of miles to overwintering locations in Mexico” and Pacific Grove, California.

Southward migrations start in August until the first frost. There is a northward migration in the spring...But no individual makes the entire round trip. Female monarchs lay eggs for the next generation during these migrations.”

Seen below are the masses clustering as they overwinter in trees in Angangueno, Michoacan, Mexico; below that, an individual male on milkweed.



...so what's the big deal?

IN THE LAST FEW YEARS, MILLIONS OF BUTTERFLIES HAVE GONE MISSING!

The Monarchs we usually enjoy in Northern California are looking for food in the spring and overwintering in Pacific Grove. According to Wikipedia: "By the end of October, the population east of the Rocky Mountains migrates to the sanctuaries of the Mariposa Monarca Biosphere Reserve within the Trans-Mexican Volcanic Belt pine-oak forests in the Mexican states of Michoacán and México. The western population overwinters in various coastal sites in central and southern California, United States, notably in Pacific Grove, Santa Cruz, and Grover Beach." The problem seems to be that we are being so efficient with eradicating their food source from this area--the milkweed--that the populations, which travel in clusters for safety and to propagate, are scattering in search of food and as individuals they do not survive as well. Seen in the picture at top right is a population clustering as they overwinter in Pacific Grove, California. These clusters are diminishing at an alarming rate.

Their unique migration has

been studied for years because, as Wikipedia explains, "The length of these journeys exceeds the normal lifespan of most

monarchs, which is less than two months for butterflies born in early summer. The last generation of the summer enters into a non-reproductive phase known as *diapause*, which may last seven months or more. During diapause, butterflies fly to one of many overwintering sites. The overwintering generation generally does not reproduce until it leaves the overwintering site sometime in February and March." Many theories abound as to how each generation knows what to do. One popular theory is, "The flight navigational patterns may be



inherited, based on a combination of the position of the sun in the sky, a time-compensated sun compass that depends upon a circadian clock based in their antennae. These populations may use the earth's magnetic field for orientation." But as we have removed their food sources, they have lost their sense of direction due to a disruptive search for food. While there are some other plants they can use, for the most part a Monarch depends on a form of milkweed--so many organizations are now trying to encourage Californians to plant milkweed in their gardens and to discourage milkweed spraying.

Milkweed are not all the same. California Milkweed is *Asclepias californica*...

...MAYBE NOT SO PRETTY AS SOME GARDEN FAVORITES, BUT STILL IMPORTANT!

*California Milkweed is what we are most familiar with-- seen at top right--and if you look specifically for *Asclepias californica**

online you might find that it "is native to California and northern Baja California. It is a flowering perennial with thick, white, woolly stems which bend or run along the ground. The plentiful, hanging flowers are rounded structures with reflexed corollas and starlike arrays of bulbous anthers. The flowers are dull to bright shades of lavender or pink [seen in top right photo].

Asclepias californica is an important and specific Monarch butterfly food plant in nectar and vegetation, and cocoon-habitat plant. The alkaloids they ingest from the plant are retained in the butterfly, making it unpalatable to predators". The plant can be toxic for livestock, but the real reason it is sprayed is to keep it

out of the crops. According to John Anderson of *Hedgerow Farms*, only a small percentage of crops can be weed, so farmers are careful to eradicate weeds near fields. For this reason, it has been eradicated at a very efficient rate. Many decorative varieties are now available from nurseries and you can attract happy and grateful Monarchs to your yard with varieties such as the one seen at bottom right:

Butterfly Milkweed:

<http://www.fireflyforest.com/flowers/199/asclepias-tuberosa-butterfly-milkweed>

The Scientific name is *Asclepias tuberosa*; and common names are Butterfly Milkweed or Pleurisy Root "In addition to being beautiful, Milkweed is a very important plant because it is a host for the beloved MONARCH butterfly. Monarch larvae feed exclusively on Milkweeds. That means if there is no Milkweed, there would be no

Monarchs. It is also an important nectar plant for bees and other insects. The common name Milkweed was given to this plant because of its milky juice. The scientific name comes from Asclepius, the Greek god of healing, because of the many folk-medicinal uses for the milkweed plants."

Hedgerow Farms carries local varieties like the one below as seedlings and plugs.



This attractive plant is a good choice for butterfly and wildflower gardens, and although Butterfly Milkweed does not transplant well, the seeds are widely available. It prefers full sun, well-drained soil, and supplemental water in hot weather.

And what about those other Wildflowers and Weeds so appealing to Bees and Butterflies?

One of my local favorites has always been the delicate looking **Wild Radish**--or *Raphanus raphanistrum*, as my botany buddy from Rumsey in the Capay Valley tells me: that buddy would be long-time PhD Professor of Botany at UNM, now Associate Dean, Tim Lowrey. He says it is a "common weed throughout California"--but to me it is beautiful and attracts numerous butterflies! In mid-March our patch had 6-8 beauties happily feeding: large and black they were, with orange spots under their hind wings and white dots along the edges of their forward wings. Web-search revealed that apparently they were Swallowtails.

***Raphanus raphanistrum*, wild radish or jointed charlock**, is a flowering plant in the family Brassicaceae. It is sometimes claimed to be the ancestor of the edible radish, *Raphanus sativus*. Native to Asia (or, according to some authorities, the Mediterranean), it has been introduced into most parts of the world, and is regarded as a damagingly invasive species in many... It spreads rapidly, and is often found

But, alas, being invasive, it crowds out the native grasses and wildflowers, so even John Anderson of Headgerow Farms suggests spraying or pulling it out...<http://>

growing on roadsides or in other places where the ground has been disturbed. In southeastern USA, the pale yellow form is common, sometimes entirely taking over fields in wintertime. It is often erroneously identified as mustard. It is a significant source of pollen and nectar for a variety of pollinators, especially honey bees during the very early spring starting buildup. Wild radish grows as an annual or biennial plant, with attractive four-petalled flowers 15-20 mm across and varying in color, usually from white to purple but sometimes light orange to yellow, often with color shading within a single petal. It is frost hardy, and even hard freezes only temporarily interrupt bloom. It blooms in early spring to late summer with flowers very similar to those of the searocket, which is found in some of the same regions and is easily distinguished from it by having thinner, non-succulent stems and leaves. It has a single taproot which is similar to that of the cultivated radish but less enlarged.



Spicebush Swallowtail (*Papilio troilus*)
Family: Swallowtail (*Papilionidae*) is a common black swallowtail butterfly found in North

"America, also known as the Green-Clouded butterfly Papilionidae, or swallowtails, include the largest butterflies in the world. "This beautiful black-bodied swallowtail is black with shiny blue or green wings. It has blue between two rows of orange spots on the underside of the hind wings and the colors on the upper side of the hind wings have one row of white spots. These butterflies are a pleasure to watch and a welcome visitor to any garden."





HEDGEROW FARMS

CONSULTING, GROWING, SEED AND PLUG SALES, EQUIPMENT RENTAL

John Anderson founded and now manages Hedgerow Farms south of Madison and Esparto, which, according to their website: "specializes in producing high quality seed of origin-known California native grasses, forbs, sedges and rushes [and offers] single species, custom seed mixes, plug transplants and native grass straw. [They] are currently developing several species mixtures for various applications. [Their] seed and plants are used in habitat

restoration projects, agricultural revegetation projects, for erosion control and urban and rural landscaping.

Tours & Education

Hedgerow Farms offers tours of their seed production fields, habitat areas, facilities, nursery, vegetated swales, canals, hedgerows, and roadsides. They can accommodate small and large groups. Please **contact them** for more information. Every year they partner with the California Native Grasslands

Association (CNGA) for the CNGA Hedgerow Farms Field Day. The Field Day includes extensive tours and much more (see CNGA's [website](#) for more information)-- this year it will be April 25, 2014 at Hedgerow Farms."


Since I am curious about restoring rangeland and creeks and streams, but not knowledgeable about it, I called John Anderson at Hedgerow Farms. I am no fan of herbicides or pesticides, so my first questions were whether we can do without them. The good and bad news is that even he sees the need for them to eradicate invasive weeds and non-native grasses, but he referred me to an article he wrote, which included methods for poison-less management of them. See next page...



Hedgerow Farms native grasses and wildflowers [both photos from their website]



Butterflies love Milkweed!



In “Direct Seeding of California Native Grasses in the Sacramento Valley and Foothills”

by John Anderson, Hedgerow Farms

<http://www.hedgerowfarms.com/pdfs/DirectSeedingofCaliforniaNativeGrasses.pdf>

John Anderson wrote:

“A mature stand of California native grass provides a robust, self-sustaining vegetation system with multiple benefits to the environment and land management. Unfortunately, early attempts to establish native grasses did not succeed, often due to inappropriate species selection and inadequate weed control before and after planting. Because targeted planting areas frequently contain high density weed seed banks, weed control is the major challenge during the first few years...**Herbicides are often part of a successful management strategy. Herbicides provide cost-effective solutions to serious weed problems that often plague a grass stand. Appropriate chemicals, especially when integrated with other advanced technologies, provide important tools in the**

restoration of various altered ecosystems now infested with exotics. If herbicides are considered undesirable, well-timed cultivations before a planting can greatly reduce the weed seedbank, especially if rain or irrigation has caused a good germination. After planting, a grass stand can be mowed when annual grass or broadleaf weeds are flowering but before seeds are mature. This can eliminate this new set of seeds from the weed seedbank and give the perennials a greater competitive advantage...What follows is a summary of techniques to establish native grasses by direct seeding in the Sacramento Valley and foothills north of Winters in Yolo County. Average yearly rainfall is about 17 inches and soil types vary from Class 1 silty clay loam to Class 4 gravelly clay loam with underlying hard-pan. All areas have undergone continuous or

intermittent tillage over the past 20 years.”

To read the whole article, go to the website above, but for my purposes, his solution to poisonless de-weeding (which I highlighted in green); his explanation for the use of herbicides (highlighted in red); and his information about rain and soil in this area were on point. I had written about John Anderson, former veterinarian, in volume 3 of this journal, while writing about the restoration work John Stephens was doing on the Historic Oakdale Ranch with his help. Quoting from an article I had just read I wrote: *according to an article in the Sacramento Bee March 22, 2011, former veterinarian “John Anderson and Yolo County are at the center of a movement to incorporate wildlife habitat into cultivated farms.” As growers and ranchers become increasingly aware that water and air quality are improved by the hedgerows, and that this and the “prevalence of native plants and animals are just as vital to their yields as soil health,” it is obvious hedgerows--filled with game birds, beneficial pollinating insects and bugs--serve an even greater purpose.*

Also check out: Yolo County Resource Conservation District: www.yolorcd.org & the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service: www.nrcs.usda.gov



Almonds abound in the Capay Valley -- these orchards seen on the Taber Ranch



Almond Blossom

BEES--WITHOUT THEM WE HAVE NO ALMONDS! I WROTE ABOUT THE PLIGHT OF THE NON-NATIVE, INTRODUCED HONEY BEE AND CAPAY VALLEY'S HISTORY OF ALMONDS--AND THE SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TWO--IN PRIOR ISSUES, BUT THERE IS ALWAYS SOME CUTTING-EDGE NEWS IN THE FARMING AND SCIENCE FIELDS--AND SOMETIMES IT IS GOOD NEWS!

In a recent issue of "The Progressive Farmer," Winter Issue, 2013, Bill Hairston of Bayer Crop Science says "Honeybees are getting a break. A new technology designed to lower

planting dust is showing promise limiting pollinator exposure...The use of lubricants, such as talc or graphite, is standard recommendation by planter equipment manufacturers to help reduce friction and improve planting uniformity. However, dust emissions during planting of seed treatment with insecticides and fungicides have been implicated in honeybee death and decline...but a new lubricant is made from a type of polyethylene wax...a dry powder, but unlike talc, it has a waxy nature that causes it to adhere to the seed"--not the important foraging, pollinating BEES! Tests are now being conducted on other crops, like cotton and soy--all three are huge, monocrops, to be sure, but one can hope that whatever the farmers and chemists can come up with to reduce the harm to BEES will lead us all to more sustainability...

"More than 80% of the world's almonds are grown in California and, to pollinate them, the 7,000 or so growers hire about 1.4m of America's 2.3m commercial hives. Thousands of trucks deliver the hives in February—from Maine, Florida, the Carolinas and elsewhere—and will soon pick them up again. The bees' job is to flit from one blossom to the next, gorging themselves and in the process spreading the trees' sexual dust. Farmers growing fruit trees, sunflowers, almonds (unlike many other nut trees, such as walnuts) and other crops needing pollination, now pay about \$150 to rent a hive, needing 1-2 hives per acre for almonds.

Some bee-men are local— see next page.

Capay Valley has a long history of Almonds--and Honey Bees!

WE WON'T HAVE ONE WITHOUT THE OTHER



Bees & Honey: the bees are just trying to make honey for their hive and its existence, but according to Susan Brackney's book, *Plan Bee, Everything you Ever Wanted to Know About the Hardest-Working Creatures on the Planet*, "honey is mankind's oldest sweetener. Honey is manufactured in nature's most efficient factory - the beehive. Bees make honey from the nectar of flowers and they will travel as far as 40,000 miles and visit over 2 million flowers to produce one pound of honey. Honeybees have been in

Europe and Asia for hundreds of thousands of years. It was not until the late 1600's that the bee was brought to this country by Europeans. Approximately one half of the human diet is derived directly or indirectly from crops pollinated by bees. Today honeybees are an essential part of a healthy agriculture economy."

Almonds: So, in addition to the great honey they give us, they make it possible for us to produce *almonds*--and so much more! As I wrote in prior volumes, "In 1887 several San

Francisco investors incorporated the Capay Valley Land Company, composed mainly of officers of the Southern Pacific Railroad. The company planned to divide several large land holdings into 10- to 40-acre parcels for fruit and nut farming and to establish town sites along the length of the coming railroad"--including the length of the Capay Valley! In the next issue I will be writing about orchardmen and nurserymen who helped create the tradition of Almonds in our special valley!



Visit bz-bee.com johnfoster@bz-bee.com or call (530) 787-3044

Now, about those Birds--pest or friend, our local Woodpeckers are interesting! Flickers, Acorns and Nuttall's Woodpeckers abound here!

BY JIM HIATT OF HUNGRY HOLLOW



Acorn Woodpecker on power lines and tree branches in Capay Valley...

...and his handiwork: stowing acorns in tree

Capay Valley is a natural home for the several species of woodpeckers that thrive here, due to our hilly areas with lots of oaks in the lower realms and pines in the higher areas. Where I live in the Hungry Hollow, then over the Capay hills and up the Valley, we have species that are in the hills and valley year-round, like the Flickers and Acorn Woodpeckers and the uniquely-striped Nuttall's Woodpeckers—as well as a couple of others less frequently seen.

The Flickers are partially migratory hereabouts, coming down into the "flatlands" for mid-fall into early spring, and then matriculating back into the hilly areas. They sort of "trade places" with the Kingbirds, who usually leave here about the beginning of Dove season (Sept. 1, give or take), and return, depending on the onset of warmth, from mid-March to mid-April. The page references given for all birds are from *Birds of North America*.

The Acorn Woodpecker (seen in above photos and on page 383 of *Birds of North America*), *Melanerpes formicivorus* is one of the 3 most common Oak woodpeckers of these parts. These are very social and perhaps seen most often in these groves. We used to have these in Woodland as well—when Woodland was closer to 10,000 in population, more of a *large farm town*, and used to have many more Valley Oaks and Walnut trees than at present. They have basically two calls--one is a series of "Crack-it! Crack-it! Crack-it! Crack-it," usually 3 to 5 at a time. Davy Crockett had a rare sense of humor, and he, as in touch with nature as he was, when running for election, would have said--"Listen, friend, even the WOODPECKERS want me to win--just listen to 'em calling out "Crockett!, Crockett!, Crockett!, Crockett!" They also have a slightly slower single "Crrrrack!! Crrrraccck-itttt!!!" rolling their R's nicely, and giving

one at a time several times in a series.

They are very industrious about laying up a store of acorns for later needs, and drill holes in preferably dead-wood (seen above, right), as it's softer, and drills out easier, and they then hide these acorns by the score to be had in non-yielding times. Oaks are not the only trees that these are hidden in; just about anything that's high and has a cavity of sorts---even power pole insulators with a hollow in the top (see photo top left) are storage containers for these. The hole is already drilled out, and with a hollow in the top it saves such wear and tear on their beaks with those ceramic contraptions. Insects and fruits are also dined upon. One may perch at the top of a pole or high branch, peer about, and upon seeing a bug in the air, display aeronautics not unlike Kingbirds or Phobes in skillfully twisting and turning to capture a part of a meal.



Above: yellow shafted female Flicker in Hungry Hollow, Nov. 2013



In center: Red shafted male, Nov 2013.

Above: a page on our Flickers in *Birds of North America*

All photos taken in Capay Valley by Jim Hiatt

There are a couple of incredible mechanical features in these creatures not found among others birds. In pecking on trees or under bark, woodpeckers fall into the category of "drummers," making a very rapid fire staccato-like banging, at maybe half a dozen to a dozen strokes a second. As a child I used to wonder how they kept from jarring their little brains into early senility in this process, as each stroke is a "hammer-strike" into solid wood. Turns out that they have a "shock-absorber" built into the base of their skulls that are layers of cartilage which "squish" to absorb the impact, so for them it's all pretty stress free. In addition to drumming, "pecking" at loose bark is another method of rounding up a meal, and Flickers are more ones to poke and pry at loose bark sheets and strips off the sides of Eucalyptus trunks (see photo on page 14). These also have, as do other woodpeckers, a shorter and much stiffer tail than birds in general, which acts as a "brace" that can be leaned back on when climbing and working on the edges of branches. The two toes forward and two backward are also useful for a strong grip as it carries

on its tree activities.

The Northern Flicker, *Colates auratus* (above, and on page 400 in *Birds of North America*) is another such feathered neighbor. This used to be called either the Red-shafted Flicker, or the Yellow-shafted Flicker when I was much younger, and refers to the coloration of the undersides of the wing and tail feathers; either a salmon-orange color or a very golden yellow coloration. Later they were "lumped" into the same species name. These may or may not have a "mustache" just in from both sides of the beak. (See the top right photo from BONA showing this.) The Red-Shafteds have a red one in both male and female, whereas with the Yellows, the male has a black mustache and a red crescent on the back of the base of the head, while the female has neither. It's also one of the few woodpeckers that also forages on the ground for food. They have a long, round, sticky 4-inch tongue that they sweep around under bark or into dead wood, and then withdraw the tongue with a variety of appetizers "stuck" to it.

Upon alighting, a call is

issued. Along with a few very rapidly jerking down-and-up deep "bows" is a loud, whining "EEEEEE-RRRR!" repeated a number of times. This is saying: "I am here; this is now my area! Stay away!!" It also has a softer "wicker, wicker wicker, wicker" call given when it's hard at work and likely has found enough food-fare to justify its staying a while. Another call is given either as it's nearing its tree or as it's just about to land—it is hard-to-describe unless you just hear it: whiffling or ruffling, "wa-ha-ha-how-how-ho!" You'd know it if you heard it. It is given in flight as it nears where it's going to land, and sometimes as it nears a perch but at the last second changes its mind on that one and goes on to another, hence hearing this same sound intermittently as it nears where it wants to go means: "I'm about to land, and whether I stay or not, just know that I'm coming in and I don't want company! I'm gonna be not-so-easy-to-get-along-with once I arrive!" Food is pretty much insects and spiders found under bark or on the ground. The Northern Flicker isn't as much into seeds or acorns

Continue on page 14

Continued: Woodpeckers, Flickers & Sapsuckers are in the family *Picidae*.



A Capay Valley regular: Nuttall's Woodpecker among the oak balls in Nov. 2014; photos by Jim Hiatt

con't from page 13: The eucalyptus are a favorite tree to forage in, as they usually have a bark type that peels off continually in the life of the tree.

NOTE: Flickers usually nest in dead wood, laying 1 brood of 6-8 eggs in May-June. The parents take turns incubating the eggs. They feed mainly on ants in breeding season--often feeding on the ground; and also fruits in winter.

Another medium-sized one that is indigenous hereabouts is the Nuttall's Woodpecker (seen above and on page 392 of BONA), Picoides nutalli, having a black and white striped back and red upper back of the head. This is one of the few woodpeckers that creeps and works away along the underside of branches with their unique gripping ability. The Nuttall is primarily an insect eater, but also sometimes enjoys fruits and berries. Its call is a loud "Chink!" or "Pink!" given singly, or in a rapid-fire series, descending at the end in volume when in flight from one tree to another. It just means: "Careful, this spot's already taken!"

On rare occasions a Lewis Woodpecker, Melanerpes lewis (page 381 in BONA) can be seen

hereabouts. Named after Meriwether Lewis, the early American explorer and William Clark's companion. [NOTE: William Clark was also blessed with having a bird named after him, the Clark's Nutcracker--very colorful, but not often seen here.] The Lewis has iridescent-green upper parts and a sort of mauve-maroon coloration on its breast, abdomen and face, as well. It has a slow but steady wing-beat, and is considered rather large. I've seen these just south of Madison many years ago.

Higher up in elevation, on occasion, a Pileated Woodpecker, Dryocopus pileatus, (page 402 in BONA) may be seen. This very large, crow-sized woodpecker is quite a beautiful bird--and the only one featured in *Birds of North America*, other than the Ivory Billed, which may or may not be extinct, and was larger, yet--with a crest, an upturn of feathers at the back of the head. I've seen these along Rayhouse Road, and you're first struck by the size and the lovely red head crest and "moustache," or cheek patch.



Above: Jim pulls away some eucalyptus bark to reveal a Northern Flicker's delight--bugs!

A Northern Flicker Woodpecker, up close and personal...

Jim assured me he did not shoot this one--his feral cats dispatched him! And while the little fella was still in good shape, Jim was able to pick him up and photograph his interesting features for this article. The following text from Jim Hiatt explains the related photos he sent --

Northern Flicker: the Red-shafted and Yellow-Shafted were originally considered different species, as their wing undersides were either a golden yellow or a salmon-reddish--like this one pictured here. I suppose even birders have their reasons for "splitting" species, depending on whether they interbreed and so on. We have both kinds here--and always have had. I used to shoot them for Grandma Goodnow in Hungry Hollow, as they pecked holes in the sides of the house, garage and barn. The old north side of the garage, along the upper gabled part of the wall next to the roof, was a smattering of tin can lids nailed up there, each to cover a Flicker hole. It's how I came to know the difference in plumage, like which ones had a "moustache" on either cheek, and whether it was a dark gray one, a red one, and so on. I learned so much doing things for Grandma like this—clever ol' bird that she was!

These, like so many other woodpeckers, have a "shock-absorber" mechanism built into the back of the base of their skulls so they don't rattle

their brains loose in pecking. A verry long stick-like tongue for sneaking waaay under bark to catch and drag out the bugs that got caught on it, seen below. Note, also, the red "mustache," indicating this one is male, females have no mustache.



The long tail is designed for anchoring the bird to the tree-side whilst working.



The Flickers move more into the valley areas from the Coast Range Hills around late Sept/early Oct, moving in right around when the Kingbirds leave for down south. Thereafter, they'll be here through the winter until pretty close to the time of arrival of our

Kingbirds again. This is called "partially migratory," meaning on a more localized level, as opposed to "migratory," meaning to go to a different part of the world for a time.

Below, notice the Flicker foot: two toes in front and two in back make it possible to climb on vertical surfaces. But Northern Flickers also hop along the ground, which is unusual for most woodpeckers--and in this fella's case, it was his un-doing!



At left, look at the lovely, colorful salmon-orange undersides of the wings. Yellow-shafted ones have a beautiful golden color here. When I was a kid all bird books considered these as different species, with the yellows being outnumbered considerably. When I used to shoot these for Grandma, I found maybe 1 yellow for every 7 reds that I "harvested." Now they're both "lumped" as *Northern Flickers*, due to interbreeding betwixt these two in mid-west regions.

Asked about the *California Acorn Woodpecker* and his interest in our local birds, Jim Hiatt sent this with these new photos:

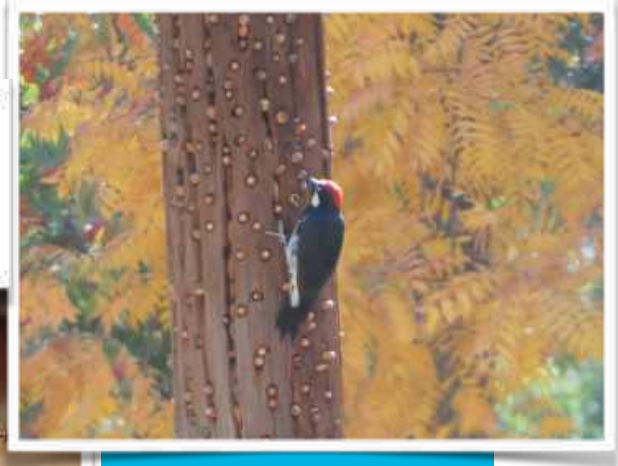
I still remember from my 1976 class in Ornithology, taught by Miklos Deserios Francis Udvardy, born in Hungary, and who emigrated to America when their neighbor to the north—Russia—came down to "liberate" them. He learned English upon arriving... lots of humorous things about him, including mispronunciation of English words that were so cute. As they don't accent syllables in Slavic languages, the word peripheries ended up as "Perri-ferries,"--and 44 years later I still remember those things with a chuckle. He was likely my favorite professor; and of all I had, one of perhaps the two or three best Bird Professors in the world.

'Twas either my 2nd or 3rd midterm when I had a question on the Social Habits and Interrelationships of the Acorn Woodpecker, as he'd spent some time on that matter...It's the California Acorn Woodpecker we're speaking of here, and 'tis a worthy subject to learn from.

Below, Jim sends another photo—of his first Western Bluebird of the season: "Saw my first Western Bluebirds in the orchard next to us on the east side this early-November morning"; adding, "our Mountain Bluebirds usually show up near the end of November."



Acorn Woodpecker at work



Above, three shots taken by our Capay Valley Birdman, Jim Hiatt, of an Acorn Woodpecker and the iconic post at the western end of the historic Capay Cemetery where thousands of acorns have been stashed for who knows how long.



Above and to left is a pine full of holes for acorns made by the local Acorn Woodpecker at the Cache Creek Regional Park up in Rumsey Canyon.

Cache Creek is an important part of the Sacramento River Watershed—and a great place to see the birds of Capay Valley, of course. “Cache” is a French word for stash—these birds, like the early 1800 French beaver and otter trappers who dubbed it this, as well as the native Hill Patwin tribe, would find places to stash valuables along this fruitful creek, thus its name.

Photos by Elizabeth Monroe, January 2020.





Above: Pheasant rooster and a pair photographed in Hungry Hollow by Jim Hiatt 2014



Above: Cormorants on Cache Creek photographed by Jim Hiatt 2014



Above: Buffleheads on Putah Creek below Montecello-Berryessa Dam photographed by Jim Hiatt 2014

What an amazing birders' paradise we live in—let's protect and celebrate it!