



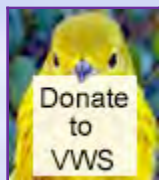
Ventana Wildlife Society  
**BIG SUR ORNITHOLOGY LAB**  
Lab Updates for 2001



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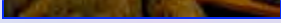
### BSOL Update, December 2001:

The rainy season continues here in Big Sur, Big Time. If you are local and keep up with the news and weather (or just look out the window), you know that the California central coast is well above normal for season and year-to-date precipitation. The Big Sur River is up and down with each rain (mostly up); you can count on one finger the number of days in December when the river was down enough to be "bootable" (i.e., we could cross in our rubber boots rather than use the cable chair to reach the nets). You can almost count on one hand the number of days in December we were able to open the nets and band birds at all! We continue to try to do banding 2 days each week, working around the weather, so we cannot post a daily banding schedule here (sorry). However, visitors always are welcome; please phone Sarah Hamilton at 831-624-1202 or contact us by e-mail at [SarahStock@VentanaWS.org](mailto:SarahStock@VentanaWS.org).

Nevertheless, this month we captured a total of 164 birds of 22 species. The highlight of the month was the relative abundance of Varied Thrushes. We captured five of these delightful creatures during December, compared with a total of only 5 Varied Thrushes captured at BSOL in the entire previous 9 years. The most abundant species in December again were Ruby-crowned Kinglets and Myrtle's Warblers, of which we captured 33 and 30 birds, respectively. Hermit Thrushes continue to be abundant winter residents (23 birds captured). Purple Finches began to show up again in the study area (4 birds banded).



So what, you may ask, are they doing down at that bird lab on all of those rainy days (see photo)? In one word, the answer is "data." We are validating our current-year data in preparation for

 routine annual "uploading" to the MAPS (Monitoring Avian Productivity Survivorship) Program. MAPS is a North American continental avian monitoring scheme whereby adult population and productivity are measured using data provided by nearly 400 constant-effort mist netting and banding stations, of which BSOL is one. At the same time, we (mostly Jason Meyer) are transferring our existing database of approximately 60,000 records accumulated over the last 10 years into the MAPSPROG (© 2000 Institute for Bird Populations) data entry, validation, and analysis software program. As soon as that prodigious effort is completed, we will begin using MAPSPROG for data entry and record query on a daily basis.

The East Molera Grasslands Study is up and running on schedule; results will be reported in February. The objective is to assess a planned grasslands habitat restoration project, using pre- and post-restoration species counts to document the effectiveness of the restoration. Our searches at 6 sites (30-minutes each, morning and afternoon) routinely yield flocks of Golden-crowned Sparrows, American Goldfinches, and House Finches in the study area. Individual Blue-Gray Gnatcatchers and Loggerhead Shrikes also have been observed.



The Monarch Butterfly Project is at full speed now. Sarah Hamilton, Jason Meyer, and Andrea Claassen traveled to Morro Bay on December 21 for a Winter Solstice day of training with Cal Poly State University ecologist Dennis Frey, who specializes in habitat use, mating behavior, and population dynamics of overwintering Monarch butterflies. The purpose of this training at two of Dennis' monitoring sites in San Luis Obispo County was to "calibrate" butterfly counting by Sarah, Jason, and Andrea, using the counting techniques adopted by researchers throughout coastal California. Dennis also trained our crew to properly handle, tag, and identify wing wear, sex, and lipid stores of Monarchs in order to document spring movements, population dynamics, and body condition.

"Conservation Coffee", produced by Uncommon Grounds of

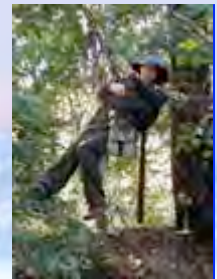
Berkeley for the benefit of BSOL, now is on sale at Whole Foods in Monterey. Quoting directly from the package label, "By buying this coffee you are directly supporting conservation efforts of the Big Sur Ornithology Lab, a program of the Ventana Wildlife Society."

We end this month's update with a sad but hopeful message. Our dear friends and colleagues, Jason Scott (BSOL field assistant) and Marylise Lefevre (Condor Program field assistant), were very badly injured in an automobile collision caused by a drunk driver on Highway 1 in Moss Landing on December 14. The good news is that Jason and Marylise are now both out of the hospital, and restoration of their health is progressing as expected. We send our love and wishes for speedy recovery every day.

### BSOL Update, November 2001:



The rainy season has begun here in Big Sur. Migration is over and wintering birds have settled in. Flocks of Myrtle Warblers abound, Hermit Thrushes are



chucking from the golden thickets, Ruby-crowned Kinglets are chattering from the canopy, and Golden-crowned Sparrows are everywhere. The study area seems just as busy and alive as it was in the heart of the breeding season. The rains have raised the river above the tops of our rubber boots, forcing us to use the cable chair to access the nets on the other side.

This month we captured 639 birds of 37 species. Highlights included catching our first ever American Tree Sparrow (since operation began in 1992), a Cassin's Vireo (7th record this year), Oak Titmouse (6th record this year), Western Palm Warbler (8th record for the lab), and White-Throated Sparrow (12th record for the lab). The most abundant species were Myrtle's Warblers and Ruby-crowned Kinglets, of which we banded 155 and 112, respectively. Four Sharp-Shinned Hawks flew into our nets, which is on par with our increased observations of Sharpies in past years in November. We are still catching several jays... any ideas why? A new thought of ours is a possible relationship with

Sudden Oak Death. Also this month, we were pleasantly surprised by the presence of a Black-and-White Warbler and a young male Rose-breasted Grosbeak in the study area.

The East Molera Grasslands Study will be gearing up again next month for another round of area searches for the winter monitoring. Area searches are still being conducted in the riparian study area to monitor species which may not typically be captured in the nets.

The Monarch Butterfly Project is off the ground and running. We started by participating in the Thanksgiving Monarch Count, surveying numerous sites along the Big Sur coast from Pacific Grove to Pacific Valley. We counted a total of 31,200 monarchs, with the largest roost being Pacific Grove's Monarch Grove Sanctuary. We have seven sites to monitor this winter and hope to survey each site once per week.



In a changing of the guard this month, Shannon Farrell finished her internship and departed for some traveling adventure. Meanwhile, Jason Meyer



returned and will be interning with us throughout the winter months. Jason worked on the California Condor Recovery Program for VWS in 1999, and also worked for BSOL periodically last fall. Jason will be filling a lot of shoes while he is here -- bird banding, area searching, conducting monarch butterfly estimates, and assisting with data analysis and manuscript writing. Jason rounds out the rest of our crew nicely, including our volunteers, Erin McDonald, Jonathan Carpenter, John Metusik, and Katherine Anderson, who all deserve a special thanks!

"Conservation Coffee" should be on the shelves by Christmas. This blend of organic, shade-grown, fair-trade coffee is produced by Uncommon Grounds of Berkeley and will be available at Whole Foods in Monterey. A portion of the proceeds will help support our local conservation efforts along the Big Sur Central Coast.

This winter we will be in and out of the lab a lot, though visitors are always welcome! Through the winter we will be

banding two days a week, working around the rains, so we cannot post a schedule here (sorry). For more information contact Sarah Hamilton or Jason Scott at (831) 624-1202 or e-mail us at [SarahStock@VentanaWS.org](mailto:SarahStock@VentanaWS.org).

### BSOL Update, October 2001:

October was an engaging month here at the Big Sur Ornithology Lab (BSOL). Most of the neotropical migrants such as Wilson's Warblers, Warbling Vireos, Pacific-Slope Flycatchers, and Yellow Warblers departed for their wintering grounds in Mexico, Central America, or South America. Meanwhile, many of the winter residents, such as Hermit Thrushes, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Golden-crowned Sparrows, White-crowned Sparrows, Townsend's Warblers, and Yellow-rumped Warblers (both Myrtle's and Audubon's subspecies) have settled in for the winter. Low in the shrubs and on the ground, we are seeing foraging flocks of Golden-crowned and White-crowned Sparrows. Up in the canopy, we are seeing mixed-species foraging flocks containing congregations of Hutton's Vireos, Townsend's Warblers, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, and many Yellow-rumped Warblers, with Chestnut-backed Chickadees acting as the ringleaders.

BSOL field assistant, Jason Scott, has been studying our color-banded population of Chestnut-backed Chickadees to learn more about their winter foraging and flocking ecology. Jason refers to the Chestnut-backed Chickadees as "nuclear species" because the other species in the flocks appear to follow and congregate with them, relying on their keen vigilance and loud alarm calls to warn them of predators. After two years of data collection, Jason is nearing completion of his project which is jointly funded by both the Monterey Peninsula Audubon Society and Ventana Wildlife Society.



This October we captured 608 birds of 43 species. Although daily capture rates were fairly steady this month, there were some hectic and exciting moments when a large flock would hit the nets. Some of the more



exciting captures included a Philadelphia Vireo (5th record), Red-shouldered Hawk (3rd record), Acorn Woodpecker (6th record), Swamp Sparrow (13th record), Black-and-White Warbler (26th record, 1st record this year), Cedar Waxwing (3rd record this year), and Sharp-Shinned Hawk (4th record this year). Other notable captures included five Nashville Warblers and a Yellow-Breasted Chat. Notable birds observed in the area were a Prothonotary Warbler, a White-throated Sparrow, a Black-throated Gray Warbler, a Clay-colored Sparrow, and Golden-crowned Kinglets.

An unusual phenomenon this month has been the apparent irruption of jays into the study area. This October we captured eight Western Scrub-Jays and twelve Steller's Jays, which is more than in any previous October since 1992. A visitor to the lab postulated that this jay irruption could be indicative of an especially harsh winter ahead and that the jays have moved downslope to seek shelter and to stash away food items.



In addition to our mist netting efforts, we continue to conduct standardized area searches. By using more than one type of censusing technique, we can better estimate the diversity and abundance of birds using the study area. Though the jays may be present in large numbers, they are large and often bounce out of our mist nets before we have a chance to band them. By incorporating the area search data, we obtain a much more complete picture of the number of species and individual birds (e.g., jays) in the study area.

The East Molera Grasslands Study is currently in transition between the fall and winter survey sets. The Grasslands Project is a collaboration between BSOL and State Parks to obtain baseline data prior to a habitat restoration project. Say's Phoebe, Western Meadowlark and Lark Sparrow were some of the new fall arrivals to the East Molera Grasslands. In mid-December we will continue this project with a winter set of searches.

We are currently working on some research proposals for exciting winter projects. Beginning in mid-November, we plan to begin monitoring efforts for Monarch Butterflies. We will be monitoring known overwintering sites, searching for unreported overwintering roost sites, and wing-tagging

individual butterflies. Our goal is to establish a long term monitoring program in order to better understand population fluctuations and movements of Monarch Butterflies that overwinter along the Monterey County coastline. We also plan to conduct Spotted Owl surveys in the Ventana Wilderness. Our objective is to determine breeding densities using methods we can replicate for long-term monitoring purposes.

Meanwhile, back at the lab, we embarked on a major refurbishing project -- painting, installing shelves, putting up new curtains, and adorning the walls with bird photographs. Around the outside of the lab, we built planter boxes and plan to plant a native plant interpretive garden. Come check out our new face! Visitors are always welcome! We continue to band at Andrew Molera State Park between 7:00 am and 12:00 noon, every day except Mondays until the 22nd of November. After the 22nd, we will be banding only two to three days a week. For more information contact Sarah Hamilton or Jason Scott at (831) 624-1202 or e-mail us at [SarahStock@VentanaWS.org](mailto:SarahStock@VentanaWS.org)

### **BSOL Update, September 2001:**

Another fantastic fall migration is upon us and is clearly reflected in our increased capture rates of many migrant species. Earlier in the month, we captured large numbers of migrating neotropical birds such as Yellow Warblers, Pacific-slope Flycatchers and Warbling Vireos. Captures of these species gradually tapered off toward the end of the month as these migrants continued on their southward trip. Another indicator of this migration period is the large fat stores of many migrants such as Swainson's Thrushes.



Along with our first rainstorm, September also brought the arrival of a number of interesting vagrants. This month, captures included a Magnolia Warbler (18th record), a Northern



Waterthrush (13th record), a Tennessee Warbler (8th record), American Redstart (7th record), Painted Bunting (5th record), and captured for only the second time ever at Andrew Molera State Park, a

Worm-eating Warbler. Vagrants observed in the study area also include a Chestnut-sided Warbler, a Rose-breasted Grosbeak and a Virginia's Warbler.

Several wintering species have recently arrived. The first capture dates of these new arrivals include Lincoln's Sparrow on Sept 16, Ruby-crowned Kinglet and Puget Sound White-crowned Sparrow on Sept. 22, Audubon's Warbler, Golden-crowned Sparrow, and Fox Sparrow on Sept. 28, and Hermit Thrush on Sept. 29. Monthly captures totaled 605 birds of 49 species. In addition to our mist-netting efforts along the Big Sur River we have continued banding once a week at the Carmel River, where we are monitoring bird populations in a newly restored floodplain.

BSOL was without its coordinator, Sarah Hamilton, this month. Sarah spent the month in Idaho collecting additional data for her master's thesis, studying Saw-whet and Flammulated Owls. We were fortunate to have Jason Scott fill in as the Interim Coordinator with the needed help of River Gates. River previously worked with the Point Reyes Bird Observatory and has been a great addition to the BSOL crew. Her experience, energy, and hard work were very appreciated and essential while Sarah was away.

The month of September has been another productive month for Jason and his Chestnut-backed Chickadee research. Jason continues to follow our color-banded population, making important foraging and flock observations within the Big Sur River riparian habitat. This research is jointly funded by the Monterey Peninsula Audubon Society and the Ventana Wildlife Society.



Other exciting news is that we have received additional funding to continue the East Molera Grasslands Project. This collaborative project between California State Parks and BSOL began in the spring and summer and will now continue through fall and winter. The focus of this work is to collect year-round baseline data prior to initiating native plant restoration efforts.

We have an active and growing volunteer program at BSOL, which offers volunteers the opportunity to learn the different field techniques employed at BSOL, and to be part of the


various workings of the lab. We'd like to thank volunteers John Matusic, Katherine Anderson, and "Dee", who have worked closely with us this month, assisting during the busy migratory season. They have been a fun and helpful addition to the BSOL crew. Please contact Sarah Hamilton or Jason Scott at our field office (831-624-1202 or [SarahStock@VentanaWS.org](mailto:SarahStock@VentanaWS.org)) for more information on how you can get involved! We are open everyday except Monday, and visitors are always welcome.

### **BSOL Update, August 2001:**

August 2001 has been another exciting month here at the Big Sur Ornithology Lab (BSOL). Another breeding season has come and gone and fall migration is here again! After a lull in capture rates at the beginning of the month, we have begun to see the first signs of fall migration. Birds have been congregating in mixed-species foraging flocks and there has been an increase in the amount of fat stores seen on captured birds as they prepare for their long journeys south. The second half of August has brought an influx of Yellow Warblers and a smattering of other long-distance migrants, notably a MacGillivray's Warbler, a Yellow-breasted Chat, a Black-throated Gray Warbler, two Willow Flycatchers, and a Northern Waterthrush (only the 12th ever captured at BSOL). Other interesting birds captured this month included a Belted Kingfisher and a Sharp-shinned Hawk.

Due to the mixed-species flocking, captures tended to be hit or miss. Captures ranged from 12 to 44 birds per day, with an average of 21 birds per day. A total of 577 birds of 41 different species were captured this month, for a capture rate of 23.7 birds per 100 net hours. In comparison, last year's captures for the month of August totaled 569 birds of 36 species, for a capture rate of 18.8 birds per 100 net hours.

Banding at the Carmel River site continues and shows similar trends to the Andrew Molera banding site. Birds are congregating in mixed species flocks and numbers of migrants, such as Yellow Warblers, Wilson's Warblers, Pacific-slope Flycatchers and Warbling Vireos, are increasing.




We are conducting area searches at both the Andrew Molera and Carmel River banding sites. The area searches supplement our banding efforts, since not all bird species tend to get caught in our nets.

Jason Scott, BSOL Field Assistant, continues his work on Chestnut-backed Chickadee foraging ecology. He is currently following several flocks in the riparian corridor of Andrew Molera State Park, addressing questions pertaining to their winter foraging and flocking behaviors.

The spring and summer area searches for the East Molera Grassland Project, a collaboration between BSOL and California State Parks, have been completed and a report has been submitted. The data collected will be used to evaluate native plant restoration efforts for the area. If additional funding can be obtained, area searches in the grasslands will continue during the fall and winter.

Along with the changing season comes a change of interns to BSOL. Interns Mason Adams and Frank Mayer, have moved on to new projects. Mason has gone to Colorado to pursue his interest in environmental journalism as an intern for High Country News. Frank is headed to Idaho where he will first spend a month assisting BSOL coordinator Sarah Hamilton with her masters thesis work on Flammulated and Northern Saw-whet Owls, before hawk watching at Idaho Bird Observatory. We thank them for their hard work and give a warm welcome to our two new interns, Andrea Claassen and Shannon Farrell. Andrea is from Santa Cruz, California and has been enjoying travels around North America and SE Asia. Her previous fieldwork has primarily involved nest searching of grassland bird species. Shannon Farrell, from Springfield, New Jersey, was working on a tidal marsh nest-monitoring project at Point Reyes Bird Observatory prior to joining us at BSOL.

September promises to be an exciting month as more migrants continue to come through. As always, visitors are welcome to drop by the Lab at Andrew Molera State Park any time. We band from about 7 am to noon every day except Monday. You can contact us at (831) 624-1202, or at [SarahStock@VentanaWS.org](mailto:SarahStock@VentanaWS.org).



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