



# Ventana Wildlife Society BIG SUR ORNITHOLOGY LAB

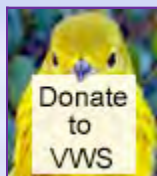
## Lab Updates for 2002



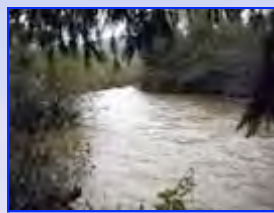
BSOL Field Crew

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### BSOL Update, December 2002:



The month of December has been very wet here at the Big Sur Ornithology Lab (BSOL). We received 12 inches of rain at our Molera study site which brought the river to levels that very few of us had ever seen before. This December was full of excitement such as the enormous swells on the ocean, the high flowing creeks and rivers, heavy winds, the release of seven California Condors in to the wild by the Ventana Wildlife Society, and the Big Sur Christmas Bird Count, in addition to our ongoing research.

### Mist-Netting and Banding

Because of the high river flow and many rainy days we were unable to operate our banding site as often as we desired. We operated the Molera site only 4 days during December yielding 230 captured individuals of 19 species. Similar to November's captures the most abundant species included Myrtle Warbler and Ruby-crowned Kinglet. In fact Myrtle Warbler made up 54%, and Ruby-crowned Kinglet 18% of the total captures for December. Of the 19 species captured there were several common but exciting species. These included: Orange-crowned Warbler (2), Townsend's Warbler (1), American Goldfinch (1), Brown Creeper (4), House Wren (1), and Fox Sparrow (4).

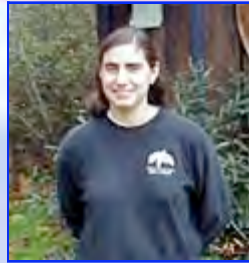
### Project Monarch Alert

This month we tagged over 2000 butterflies in collaboration with Dr. Dennis Frey and Shawna Stevens of California Polytechnic Institute (Cal Poly), and continued population surveys at seven overwintering sites along the central coast from Pacific Grove to Pacific Valley. In an effort to better understand a protozoan parasite -- *Ophryocystis elektroscirrha* -- unique to monarchs and other milkweed butterflies, we sampled scales from the butterflies' abdomens. The parasite is one of the greatest causes of



monarch mortality in the western United States, and the research is aimed at gathering data on the influence of *O. elektroscirra* on monarch migration, overwintering survival, and spring dispersal. Population surveys at the overwintering sites revealed a 66% decline in the numbers of overwintering monarch butterflies in Monterey County, compared to numbers recorded last year during the same time period.

## New Arrivals



Jessica Griffiths joined the BSOL staff in December after a summer working in the San Joaquin Valley for PRBO, where she monitored riparian bird populations by nest-searching and MAPS banding. The previous year she spent six months working on a Neotropical migrant bird study for the Milwaukee Zoo. She is originally from the northern suburbs of Chicago and graduated from Wellesley College in 2000 with a degree in biology. She has worked with birds in New Hampshire, North Dakota, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Mississippi, and is happy to be back in California.

## Christmas Bird Count

Following a raging winter storm the evening before, participants from Monterey County convened in Big Sur to conduct the annual Big Sur Christmas Bird count held on 15 December. The BSOL team met at 0530 to hoot for owls and was graced with a Spotted Owl for the first bird on the list that day. Despite high winds, gigantic crashing waves, and intermittent downpours throughout the



day, the BSOL team recorded 61 bird species along a 2 ½ mile coastal stretch. Highlights included Golden-crowned Kinglet, Varied Thrush, Spotted Sandpiper, Golden Eagle, Great Egret, Black Turnstone, several species of ducks, and dozens of Killdeer and Western Meadowlarks. That evening all the participants gathered at the Carmel Middle School to turn in their team forms and share stories of exciting birds seen that day. Can't wait until next Christmas!

In January we will be banding only two days a week at our Molera study site. Inclement winter weather often causes these days to shift from week to week, so we strongly recommend that you call before visiting. For more information, please feel free to contact Sarah Hamilton (Big Sur Ornithology Lab Coordinator) at 831-624-1202 or e-mail her at [SarahStock@VentanaWS.org](mailto:SarahStock@VentanaWS.org). See you soon and don't forget your binoculars!

**BSOL Update, November 2002:**

November was a month full of transitions. Whether it was the transition from fall to winter, the golden brown hills turning to green, the deciduous vegetation losing its leaves for the winter, the arrival of flocks of Myrtle Warblers, or the suddenly ever-present calling of Red-shafted Northern Flickers, November was a very exciting month for all of us here at the Big Sur Ornithology Lab (BSOL). As winter approaches we continue with our mist-netting and banding at two sites, resume our East Molera Grassland surveys and begin our second year of monarch butterfly research.

## **Mist-Netting and Banding**

Capture rates during the month of November at our Molera study site varied greatly from day to day, ranging from as few as 25 captures to as many as 92 captures. Overwintering species settled in and were largely responsible for the high capture rates for the month. Species such as Myrtle Warbler, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, and Hermit Thrush were filling the nets each day. A total of 553 individual birds of 30 species were captured during November. Uncommon captures included Orange-crowned Warbler (2), Winter Wren (1), Townsend's Warbler (1), Common Yellowthroat (1), Sharp-shinned Hawk (3), and Swamp Sparrow (2).

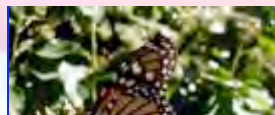


BSOL continued to operate an offsite banding project (in collaboration with Craig Hohenberger) at the Carmel Middle School. The project is designed to provide BSOL with population and diversity data on avian species in the Carmel Middle School area, and to provide students and staff at the school with mist-netting, banding, and color banding / resighting experience according to established MAPS (Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship) protocols. For the two days that we operated the site during November we captured over 50 individuals of primarily Golden-crowned and White-crowned Sparrows. The highlight of the month was a young White-throated Sparrow foraging in the study area with other sparrows.

## **East Molera Grasslands**

We have been preparing for our second annual winter period of avian community assessment at the East Molera grassland study site in Andrew Molera State Park (in collaboration with California Department of Parks and Recreation). Six study sites within the grasslands are being monitored three times during all four seasons. By monitoring changes in the bird populations we are collecting baseline data to assess the effectiveness of future restoration efforts of the native coastal prairie.

## **Project Monarch Alert**



As the winter months approach we are busy with our second year of monarch butterfly research. This year, in addition to making population



estimations at seven overwintering sites, we are tagging several thousand butterflies in four counties (San Luis Obispo, Monterey, Santa Cruz, and Marin) and monitoring micro-climate variables

at several sites throughout the season.

During the month of November we tagged over 1900 butterflies at two overwintering sites and completed four weeks of population estimates. Some of the most exciting news to come from our tagging efforts was the capture of two butterflies that were tagged by other biologists during late October at a site in Los Gatos, California. Such information may help us to better understand the fall movements of monarch butterflies. Monarch Alert is a collaborative research project between BSOL and California Polytechnic State University. For more information regarding Monarch Alert, please visit the [Monarch Alert website](#).



In December we will be banding only two days a week at our Molera study site. Inclement winter weather often causes these days to shift from week to week, so we strongly recommend that you call before visiting. For more information, please feel free to contact Sarah Hamilton (Big Sur Ornithology Lab Coordinator) at 831-624-1202 or e-mail her at [SarahStock@VentanaWS.org](mailto:SarahStock@VentanaWS.org). See you soon and don't forget your binoculars!

### BSOL Update, October 2002:

Autumn has graced the Big Sur Ornithology Lab (BSOL) with mild weather and a lack of precipitation throughout the month of October. Crisp nights and dew-laden mornings give way to soft sunlit hills of chaparral rolling with golden hues. The leaves of the sycamores and oaks are gradually changing the forest floors and meadow edges to a colorful riot of orange, yellow, and brown. Fall migration and the return of large numbers of Hermit Thrushes, Golden-crowned Sparrows, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, and Myrtle Warblers to Molera for the winter have marked industrious avian activity through the month, and monarch butterflies gather in increasing clusters in the coastal groves of eucalyptus and pine.



The staff of BSOL have likewise been kept busy by ongoing banding projects at five sites along the central coast, area surveys in Creamery Meadow and the East Molera grasslands, and Monarch Alert conference and training sessions in preparation for monarch population monitoring through the winter.

### Mist-Netting and Banding

Capture rates during the month of October varied day to day from average to high net yields, reflecting the movement of fall migrants through the area and the return of winter residents to the Molera study site. Birds mist-netted and banded at Molera during the month of October represented 761 individuals from 45 species. Uncommon vagrants and migrants mist-netted and banded in October included a Chestnut-sided Warbler, a Western Palm Warbler, 2 Nashville Warblers, 3 Blackpoll Warblers, a Common Yellowthroat, a Varied Thrush, and a Golden-crowned Kinglet. Regional raptor species not commonly mist-netted and banded included a Red-shouldered Hawk, a Northern Pygmy-Owl, and 4 Sharp-shinned Hawks.



October also marked the final month of BSOL's operation of the 14 nets in the riparian habitat of the Carmel River Lagoon banding site for this year. Captures in October at the Carmel River Lagoon echoed those at Molera, with greater species diversity and more total birds banded than in September. Seventy-three new birds and 24 recaptures representing 19 species were captured and banded, with Myrtle Warblers accounting for the majority of birds mist-netted and banded. Highlights included a Common Yellowthroat, a Marsh Wren, and a Downy Woodpecker. Increased avian activity in the area due to fall migration and the return of winter residents was also noted in area searches throughout the month, including the observation of 67 species of birds at the Carmel River site on 25 October. Notable species observed included Merlin, 2 Peregrine Falcons, Ferruginous Hawk, Eurasian Widgeon, Green- and Blue-winged Teals, Buffleheads, and Northern Pintails.

In collaboration with Craig Hohenberger, BSOL began banding efforts this month with a new offsite project at Carmel Middle School. The project is designed to provide BSOL with population and diversity information on avian species in the Carmel Middle School area, and to provide students and staff at the school with mist-netting, banding, and color banding / resighting experience according to established MAPS protocols. The first day of banding at the site yielded promising results, with 51 total individuals of 12 species banded at the site. Aside from the usual abundant White-crowned and Golden-crowned Sparrows, a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher sparked some oohs and ahhs from the kids.

### **Sudden Oak Death (*Phytophthora ramorum*)**

BSOL staff continued their efforts to collect preliminary mist-netting data within the San Lorenzo River watershed, to determine whether birds are acting as vectors in the transmission of Sudden Oak Death caused by the pathogen *Phytophthora ramorum*. Currently a protocol is being developed for sampling the birds' feet, feathers, and bills for bioassay. Mist-netting and banding efforts continued from last month at Henry Cowell State Park, and began this month at Pogonip City Park. Captures were high this month, producing 72 birds from 15 species at Pogonip City Park and 70 birds from 17 species at Henry Cowell State Park. The most frequently captured species included Hermit Thrushes (15), Golden-Crowned Sparrows (11), and Ruby-crowned Kinglets (8) at

Henry Cowell State Park, and Bushtits (16), Chestnut-backed Chickadees (14), and Hermit Thrushes (8) at Pogonip City Park.

### **Additions to the BSOL Field Crew**



Brad Zitske joins BSOL after working the past 2 years in Atlantic Canada as crew leader on a Ph.D student's forest songbird project. Previously, Brad spent time studying birds in the White Mountains for the Audubon Society of New Hampshire. He also brings shorebird and water bird experience from Oklahoma and Cape Cod, Massachusetts. Brad was trained as a bird bander at Long Point Bird Observatory in Ontario, but looks forward to his first foray into western species and fall banding.

### **Project Monarch Alert**

Throughout October we have been preparing for our second year of monarch butterfly population monitoring, documentation of micro-climate data, and the addition of tagging efforts at seven over-wintering sites in San Luis Obispo, Monterey, Santa Cruz, and Marin counties. This month BSOL hosted the Project Monarch Alert Workshop at Andrew Molera State Park on 26 October, providing a space in which speakers and resource managers from throughout the region could gather to discuss, plan for, and standardize training and data collection for monarch research in the upcoming winter season. Sarah Hamilton and Jason Scott of BSOL presented general overviews and project goals for the project, and detailed monarch population and micro-climate monitoring methods. Dennis Frey and Shawna Stevens of California Polytechnic State University (Cal Poly) led training sessions on monarch handling, tagging, and determination of individual health and sexual status, as well as presentations on the role of Cal Poly in organizing monarch population data and researching monarch parasites and resulting monarch butterfly survivorship. Thank you to everyone involved who made the workshop a success!



In November we will be banding Monday through Friday and we will be closed on weekends. We are open each morning from approximately 7AM to noon, weather permitting. Visitors are always welcome. For more information, please feel free to phone Sarah Hamilton (Big Sur Ornithology Lab Coordinator) at (831) 624-1202 or e-mail her at [SarahStock@VentanaWS.org](mailto:SarahStock@VentanaWS.org). See you soon and don't forget your binoculars!

**BSOL Update, September 2002:**

September has been an exciting month here at the Big Sur Ornithology Lab (BSOL). With banding projects at four sites along the central coast, grassland surveys in the East Molera Grasslands, micro-climate monitoring at two monarch butterfly over-wintering sites, and the preparation for our second year of monarch butterfly population monitoring we have managed to stay very busy. Away from home, Sarah Hamilton traveled to New Orleans to present her forest owl research at the North American Ornithological Conference, and Jason Scott traveled to the Western Bird Banding Association conference in Bisbee, AZ to present research on population trends from BSOL's banding data.

## Mist-netting and Banding



Capture rates for the month of September varied greatly day to day at our Molera study site. Fall migrants have arrived in high numbers; however our capture rates do not necessarily reflect this. During the fall many of the abundant migrant and resident species such as the warblers and vireos participate in mixed-species foraging flocks led by Chestnut-backed Chickadees. Thus, capture rates of migrants may be



influenced by the movement of chickadees throughout the study area. Captures for September at our Andrew Molera study site included 423 birds representing 39 species. September highlights included the capture of a young Yellow-breasted Chat, a young Blackpoll Warbler, a young male Virginia's Warbler (first ever captured at BSOL), an adult male American Redstart, and a young Cedar Waxwing. Other notable species observed in the study area included Common Raven, Osprey, and a Black-and-White Warbler. Fox Sparrow, Golden-crowned Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Townsend's Warbler, and Hermit Thrush all returned this month to over-winter again here at Molera.

We continue to operate our Carmel River banding site where we operate 14 nets in both restored and mature riparian habitats. Captures at the Carmel River site also were very low this month with only 20 new birds and 15 recaptured birds of 12 species. Highlights included several Yellow Warblers, a Red-winged Blackbird, and a Common Yellowthroat.

## Sudden Oak Death (*Phytophthora ramorum*)

In collaboration with Redwood Sciences Laboratory of the U.S. Forest Service and Humboldt State University (both in Arcata, California), BSOL recently began collecting preliminary mist-netting data at two sites within the San Lorenzo River watershed (Henry Cowell State Park and Pogonip City Park). Aside from inventorying bird abundance and diversity, we will determine whether birds are acting as vectors in the transmission of sudden oak death caused by the pathogen *Phytophthora*

*ramorum*. Currently a protocol is being developed for sampling the birds' feet, feathers, and bill for bioassay. So far, our four visits at Henry Cowell State Park have produced 32 captures of 15 species. The most frequently captured species include Spotted Towhee (six individuals) and Bewick's Wren (five individuals); the most notable species captured includes a Rose-breasted Grosbeak on 5 September. We will begin banding at Pogonip City Park in the first week of October. This research project is projected to continue for the next 3-5 years.

### **East Molera Grasslands**

We have just begun our second annual fall period of avian community assessment at the East Molera grassland study site (in collaboration with California Department of Parks and Recreation) in Andrew Molera State Park. We have six study sites within the grasslands that are being monitored three times during all four seasons. By monitoring changes in the bird populations we are collecting baseline data to assess the effectiveness of future restoration efforts of the native coastal prairie. In the first set this fall, we detected several species, including Grasshopper Sparrows, large numbers of House Finches, a couple of Western Meadowlarks, and a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher.

### **Additions to the BSOL Field Crew**



In mid-September two new field biologists arrived, Gavin Emmons and Cheyenne Laczek-Johnson. Gavin joined the staff after working as a biological science technician at Carlsbad Caverns National Park in southeast New Mexico for two years, searching for and monitoring nests of neotropical migratory birds including Bell's Vireos,

Yellow-billed Cuckoos, and 35 other passerine and raptor species. Gavin is originally from Portland, Oregon and graduated from Lewis & Clark College with a B.A. in Sociology / Anthropology in 1997. As a Lewis & Clark student Gavin studied behavioral ecology of megafauna, coral reef ecology, and rainforest ecology (while overseas for a year in east Africa and Australia). Gavin's work experience has also included cliff-nest monitoring of Peregrine Falcons with Guadalupe Mountains National Park, MAPS (Monitoring Avian Population and Survival) work at Amistad National Recreation Area in Texas, and swift fox ecology research at the Pinon Canyon Maneuvering Site in southern Colorado.

Cheyenne most recently worked with P.R.B.O. (Point Reyes Bird Observatory) on a Snowy Plover project. She has a lot to offer BSOL, given her extensive experience working with sea turtles, corals (graduate work), shorebirds, and Northern Saw-whet Owls over the last several years.

### **Project Monarch Alert**

As the winter months approach we are busy preparing for our second year of monarch butterfly population monitoring. This year, in addition to

making population estimations at seven over-wintering sites we will be tagging several thousand butterflies in four counties (San Luis Obispo, Monterey, Santa Cruz, and Marin) and monitoring micro-climate variables at several sites throughout the course of the over-wintering period. Monarch Alert is a collaborative research project between BSOL and California Polytechnic State University.

In October we are resuming banding six days each week (every day except Monday) for five hours each morning, beginning 15 minutes after sunrise. Visitors are always welcome. For more information please feel free to phone Sarah Hamilton (Big Sur Ornithology Lab Coordinator) at 831-624-1202 or e-mail her at [SarahStock@VentanaWS.org](mailto:SarahStock@VentanaWS.org). See you soon, and don't forget your binoculars!

### BSOL Update, August 2002:



Summer fog fell heavily on Big Sur Ornithology Lab (BSOL) almost every morning during the last few weeks. Our mist nets often were dripping with cool drops of dew as we opened them for a new day of bird banding. However, within an hour or so, the sizzling summer sun would peek up from behind the eastern ridge and begin its daily work of breaking apart the coastal fog. From then on, the day would be hot and dry, which is typical for our central California summer.

Several changes indicative of migration were occurring all around us. Flocks of Chestnut-backed Chickadees and Bushtits seemed to be getting larger and more active with each passing day. Also, we were beginning to observe early fall migrants flocking with the chickadees. These included Yellow Warbler, Black-throated Gray Warbler, Black-and-White Warbler, Orange-crowned Warbler, and Pacific Slope Flycatcher. The first fall migrant we captured in our mist nets this August was a Yellow Warbler.



### Mist Netting and Banding



Capture rates were low again in August and, as we observed in July, were characterized by low species diversity and a high proportion of recaptured birds. Captures for August at the Andrew Molera State Park study site included 306 banded, recaptured, and unbanded (hummingbirds) birds representing 29 species. Of the captured individuals who could be aged reliably, approximately three times as many were hatch year birds as were adults. August highlights at the Andrew Molera State Park study site included a juvenile Northern Pygmy-Owl;

interestingly, this individual bird was captured twice during the month of August.

The capture rate from weekly mist-netting and banding at the Carmel River mouth site during August consistently surpassed captures at the Molera study site, averaging 24 captures of 9 species on a given morning. August capture highlights at the Carmel River mouth included several Common Yellowthroats throughout the month and 8 Anna's Hummingbirds on 2 August.

### **Study of Sudden Oak Death (*Phytophthora ramorum*)**

Our proposal for collaboration with Redwood Sciences Laboratory of the U.S. Forest Service and Humboldt State University (both of Arcata) to investigate birds as a vector in the transmission of sudden oak death caused by the pathogen, *Phytophthora ramorum*, was approved and funded by U.S. Department of Agriculture in August.



Birds will be captured using standard mist-netting techniques and, in addition to banding the birds, we will be collecting samples from the birds' feet for bioassay. Work already is underway at two riparian study sites along the San Lorenzo River in Santa Cruz County (Henry Cowell State Park and Pogonip).

### **Au Revoir Pascal Cauchois**

Fall is the time for back-to-school migration, and among those returning to their studies is BSOL bird banding Summer Intern, Pascal Cauchois. In addition to day-to-day banding work, Pascal was able to pursue his personal interest in hummingbirds (which do not inhabit his home country, France). Pascal was with us for only three short months, but his friendship and the good cheer he brought to our work will last for a long, long time. Goodbye and good luck, Pascal.



In September we are resuming banding 6 days each week (every day except Monday) for five hours each morning, beginning 15 minutes after sunrise. Visitors are always welcome. For more information please feel free to phone Sarah Hamilton (Big Sur Ornithology Lab Coordinator) at 831-624-1202 or e-mail her at [SarahStock@VentanaWS.org](mailto:SarahStock@VentanaWS.org). See you soon, and don't forget your binoculars!

## BSOL Update, July 2002:

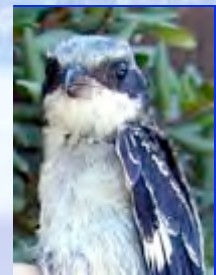
Ah, summer at the Big Sur River mouth, home of BSOL. The days are long and dry. The sun rises dreamlike in slow motion and then, suddenly, it is a hot platinum disc in the cool blue sky. You can feel its warm touch, like fingers of radiant energy performing gentle massage. To the east, white wisps of fog float slowly across the gently sloping golden foothills and the towering, barren face of Pico Blanco. From the west, gentle breezes ruffle the leaves of cottonwood, sycamore, alder, willow, oak, sounding almost like rain at times. And as dry as it has been for months, the river never rests or is silent.



July marks the end of another annual cycle of spring migration and breeding in understated silence, reminiscent of the depth of winter. Oh, the buzzing and cheeping of flocks of chickadees and Bushtits are ever present. The jays are always making a ruckus. And Wrentits are constantly signaling their mates and their young. But the symphony of spring and early-summer singing, calling, and drumming associated with territoriality, mate selection, brooding, and fledging has largely given way to silence. These long summer days are punctuated more by the sounds of the human presence (on the road, in the campground, and on the trails) than by anything else.

### Mist-Netting and Banding

The silence in the field was reflected in low capture rates, low species diversity, and a high proportion of recaptured birds. We have yet to encounter the first fall migrant. Our overall mist-netting capture rate during July at the Andrew Molera State Park study site was 414 captures representing 31 species. Nevertheless, banding and processing birds is never boring and always is a rewarding learning experience. Most of the birds we captured during July were very recently fledged juveniles, which at times challenged our species identification, plumage coding, and skulling skills. Some of the more challenging juvenile birds captured in July were Ash-Throated Flycatcher, California Thrasher, and Lazuli Bunting. The most unusual captures included our second-ever-netted Loggerhead Shrike, and our first Grasshopper Sparrow capture of the year.



The capture rate from weekly mist-netting and banding at the Carmel River mouth site during July consistently surpassed captures at the Molera study site, averaging 36 captures of 21 species on a given morning. July highlights at the Carmel River mouth included juvenile Common Yellowthroat and Red-Shafted Northern Flicker, and a Northern Rough-Winged Swallow. This study is supported by California Department of Parks and Recreation to assess the bird population response to restoration efforts.

## VWS Directors' Visit



BSOL staff and volunteers demonstrated mist-netting, banding, and other avian population survey techniques to Ventana Wildlife Society Directors during an all-day "retreat" on Sunday, July 14. We sincerely thank Board of Directors President, Sal Lucido, and each of the Directors who

attended. It was a wonderful opportunity for us to meet the distinguished leaders of VWS and share our work with them. Thanks also to Christina Westphal and Naomi Polluck of Whole Foods Monterey for providing another spectacular luncheon buffet.

## East Molera Grassland Surveys

We completed our second annual summer set of avian community assessment at the East Molera grassland study site (in collaboration with California Department of Parks and Recreation). By monitoring changes in the bird populations we are gathering data to assess the effectiveness of restoration efforts of the native coastal prairie. Family groups that included numerous fledglings made up the bulk of the observed birds in the month of July.

## Study of Sudden Oak Death (*Phytophthora ramorum*)

In collaboration with Redwood Sciences Laboratory of the U.S. Forest Service and Humboldt State University (both of Arcata) BSOL recently submitted a proposal to U.S. Department of Agriculture to determine whether birds are a vector in the transmission of sudden oak death caused by the pathogen, *Phytophthora ramorum*. In the last few years, *Phytophthora ramorum* has emerged as a potential major threat to forests of oaks, rhododendrons, and even redwoods in northern California and Oregon. The study involves the development of a *Phytophthora ramorum* bioassay of material adhering to the feet, feathers, and bill. Assuming the proposal will be accepted, birds will be captured using standard mist-netting techniques. Several Northern California sites in areas of high infestation, including Big Sur, will likely be monitored for 3-5 years.

## Project Monarch Alert

Project Monarch Alert is a joint effort between BSOL and Cal Poly State University to study migration patterns and population dynamics of the monarch butterfly in western North America. Funding to support the second year of this ongoing effort (winter 2002-2003) was secured in July. This year, in addition to surveying microclimate conditions and patterns of monarch butterfly abundance at winter habitats throughout San Luis Obispo, Monterey, Alameda, and Marin counties, thousands of butterflies at several locations will be tagged from October through February. The purpose of this tagging is to track fall migration and spring dispersal patterns.

Through August we will continue banding 5 days each week (every day except Monday and Friday) for five hours each morning, beginning 15 minutes after sunrise. Visitors are always welcome. For more information please feel free to phone Sarah Hamilton (Big Sur Ornithology Lab Coordinator) at 831-624-1202 or e-mail her at [SarahStock@VentanaWS.org](mailto:SarahStock@VentanaWS.org). See you soon, and don't forget your binoculars!

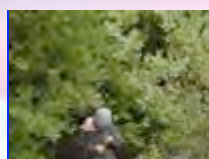
## BSOL Update, June 2002:

June was an unpredictable month at the Big Sur Ornithology Lab. Clear blue skies alternated with fog and mist. Temperatures ranged from 39 to 87 degrees Fahrenheit. And calm at dawn often gave way by mid-morning to winds that rapidly picked up from a light breeze to dust-swirling gusts. Walks through the mist-nets yielding not one captured bird might be followed by 10 or more birds found in the nets on the next walk-thru. In one moment the study area might be calm and tranquil, while in the next moment we couldn't hear one another speak over the raucous begging of newly fledged Warbling Vireos and their scolding parents. The constant flux of the weather and birds created a dynamic atmosphere.



Speaking of dynamic atmosphere, allow us to introduce the newest addition to our research team, Pascal Cauchois. Pascal arrived from France this month to conduct a 3-month BSOL internship, sponsored by the Monterey Peninsula Audubon Society. Pascal studied environmental studies in college and has been interested in birds for the last 4 years. When he's not helping us to mist-net and band birds and record and enter data, he will be studying foraging characteristics of hummingbirds and writing a research paper, a graduation requirement of his degree program in France.

Despite the insurgence of young birds this June, the relative absence of migrants reduced the overall capture rate from 1028 captures in May to 441 captures this month. In addition, species diversity decreased from 49 species in May to 35 species this month. Three notable captures this month included a Grasshopper Sparrow (breeding adult female) on 19 June, a Rose-breasted Grosbeak (adult male) on 22 June, and a late Fox Sparrow belonging to the Coastal Northwest Sooty race on 26 June. Whereas Grasshopper Sparrows are abundant in the east Molera grasslands, we seldom observe them in our riparian study area.



Our breeding bird projects came into full swing this June. The Carmel River site team, Jonathan Carpenter and Rob Fowler, has been carrying out Rapid





## Ornithological Inventories

(ROIs), which fulfill a

monitoring contract with the Monterey Peninsula Water Management District. Total captures at the ROI sites

during June included 256 individuals of 26 species, with Bushtits making up 34% of the total. One of the more unexpected species captured was Lawrence's Goldfinch, two of which were captured, both in breeding condition.



In addition to the ROIs being conducted this year, we resumed weekly mist-netting and banding at the Carmel River mouth as part of an on-going study since 1996. This study is supported by California Department of Parks and Recreation to assess the bird population response to restoration efforts. Total captures during June far surpassed our Molera study site rate, averaging 42 birds of 13 species on a given morning. Highlights at the Carmel River mouth this month were a California Thrasher, and three swallow species (Northern Rough-winged Swallows, Tree Swallows, and Cliff Swallows).

The summer period for conducting the East Molera Grassland surveys (in collaboration with California Department of Parks and Recreation) began in June and will continue through July. In many of the plots, Grasshopper Sparrows were the most abundant species we observed, due to many clutches of recently fledged young.

We continue to band in the mornings at Andrew Molera State Park 5 days per week (daily except Monday and Friday). Visitors are always welcome! Just give us a call and make a reservation and don't forget your binoculars! Please call Sarah Hamilton at 831-624-1202 or e-mail [SarahStock@VentanaWS.org](mailto:SarahStock@VentanaWS.org).

## BSOL Update, May 2002:



May has been an exciting time for all of us at the Big Sur Ornithology Lab. Migration is coming to a close as the last batch of migrants make their way north for the breeding season while local fledglings of a variety of species begin to fill the nets. Our first young birds of the year have been Chestnut-backed Chickadee, Song Sparrow, Orange-crowned Warbler, Black Phoebe, Bushtit, Wrentit, and Wilson's Warbler. We are also

capturing many other species of both neotropical and residential birds in breeding condition (e.g. brood patches and cloacal protuberances.) These include Spotted Towhee, Downy Woodpecker, Nuttall's Woodpecker, House Wren, Lazuli Bunting, Swainson's Thrush, Warbling Vireo, and Pacific Slope Flycatcher.

The monthly capture totals for May were 1028 individuals of 49 species. New species captured in May included Yellow Warbler, Western Tanager, Willow Flycatcher, Cassin's Vireo, Western Wood Pewee, Western Bluebird, and Violet-green and Tree Swallow.

Several other fascinating things have been happening in our study area. The grasses in the meadows are turning from their brilliant green to brown and many of the wildflowers are already going to seed. A large swarm of bees has set up residency near the net lanes; reptiles have been appearing all over the place (including a newly born Western Pond Turtle making its way up the trail), and occasionally we have spooked wonderfully spotted fawns from their hiding places in the thick tall grass.



To celebrate the resurgence of migration and breeding activity and International Migratory Bird Day, we recently hosted our Ninth Annual Kowa/Big Sur Ornithology Lab Bird-a-Thon on May 11th at Andrew Molera State Park. This event is our largest public fund-raising event of the year and is structured for birders of all levels. This year was a great success with the grand prize (KOWA scope valued at over \$2000) awarded to team "Ouzel", led by Karinne Bauer.

Monarch butterfly researchers and admirers convened on 27 May for the Monarch Butterfly Festival and monitoring meeting held at Coyote Hills Regional Park in Fremont. Big Sur Ornithology Lab Coordinator, Sarah Hamilton, presented results from our winter 2001-2002 monarch butterfly overwintering study. In addition, Dr. Dennis Frey of California Polytechnic Institute presented preliminary results from our monarch tagging collaborative study and discussed expanding the effort up the coast to the Bay Area next fall to gain a more regional perspective on butterfly movements. The enthusiasm and optimism expressed at this meeting toward working together to standardize monitoring efforts and look at monarch movements on a more regional level was inspiring and exciting.

Busy as always, we are banding 6 days/week, conducting surveys (point counts and area searches) in our study area, carrying out habitat restoration assessment projects by monitoring birds in the East Molera Grasslands and Creamery Meadow in Andrew Molera State Park, collecting micro-climate data at two over-wintering monarch butterfly sites in Monterey County, gearing up for running an off-site MAPS (Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship) station on the Carmel River, and conducting Rapid Ornithological Inventories within the Carmel River watershed.

To help with our busy work schedule we have recently employed Bridget Cummings "B.B.", a former crew member of the California Condor Recovery Program. Bridget graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Madison with a degree in wildlife ecology. She has previous field experience working with the Florida manatee and Eastern timber wolf, and is currently fascinated with hummingbirds.



Bridget will be assisting BSOL with various projects on the Carmel and

Big Sur Rivers during the summer and fall months. Welcome Bridget!!!

We have now (June 1st) switched from our migration schedule to our breeding schedule and have reduced our banding to 5 days/week (every day of the week but Mondays and Fridays) for five hours each morning, beginning 15 minutes after sunrise. Visitors are always welcome. For more information please feel free to phone Sarah Hamilton (Big Sur Ornithology Lab Coordinator) at 831-624-1202 or e-mail her at [SarahStock@VentanaWS.org](mailto:SarahStock@VentanaWS.org). See you soon and don't forget your binoculars!

### BSOL Update, April 2002:

Spring has sprung upon the Big Sur Ornithology Lab with full force. Dazzling green flora and colorful wildflowers such as California poppies and lupines abound in the study area. Keeping the overgrowth of vegetation in the net lanes to tolerable levels has been quite a task! Songs of exuberant spring migrants fill the air as these welcomed visitors point their bills north toward their breeding grounds. Wilson's Warblers, Orange-crowned Warblers, and Common Yellowthroats began to arrive in March and they have since become the most abundant birds filling the nets. The [Monthly Capture Totals](#) for April were 569 individuals of 42 species.

New captures for the year included Warbling Vireo, Black-headed Grosbeak, Yellow-breasted Chat, Lazuli Bunting, Swainson's Thrush, Pacific-slope Flycatcher, MacGillivray's Warbler, Nashville Warbler, and Ash-throated and Dusky Flycatchers. Other exciting birds observed this month included singing Olive-sided Flycatchers, Western Tanagers, and a male Bullock's Oriole. Resident birds, such as Chestnut-backed Chickadees, Song Sparrows, Wrentits, Bushtits, California Towhees, and Spotted Towhees, have been singing up a storm as well. We have observed these residents carrying nesting material and food, and when captured, exhibiting breeding characteristics (e.g. brood patches, cloacal protuberances, and even eggs descending down the oviducts).



One of the more exciting spring returns that has all of us singing jubilantly is the return of field assistant, Jason Scott. Jason and condor crewmember, Marylise Lefevre, were in a dreadful car accident back in December. We are all grateful to have them crutching, caning, and limping around the office and lab. Jason has been studying our color-banded population of Chestnut-backed Chickadees for the past two years, and it won't be long before "Jaybird" is once again running around after the chickadees.

Other exciting news from the Big Sur Ornithology Lab includes the first round of



surveys in the on-going East Molera Grasslands Project. The objective of this bird monitoring is to assess the effectiveness of a habitat restoration project by using birds as indicator species. Up in the grasslands, Lazuli Buntings, Grasshopper Sparrows, and Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, respectively, warble, buzz, and pwee their way through the coyote brush.



In addition to our monitoring efforts we will soon be hosting our Ninth Annual Kowa/Big Sur Ornithology Lab Bird-a-Thon on May 11th at Andrew Molera State Park. This event is our largest public fund raising event of the year and is structured for birders of all levels. Please visit our [Bird-a-Thon Page](#) for more information on this year's event.



We have officially returned to our spring schedule of banding 6 days each week (Tuesday through Sunday) for five hours each morning, beginning 15 minutes after sunrise. Visitors are always welcome. For more information please feel free to

phone Sarah Hamilton (Big Sur Ornithology Lab Coordinator) at 831-624-1202 or e-mail her at [SarahStock@VentanaWS.org](mailto:SarahStock@VentanaWS.org). See you soon and don't forget your binoculars!

### BSOL Update, March 2002:

March was an extremely busy month for us at BSOL (Big Sur Ornithology Lab). In addition to our "routine" banding and survey operations, intern training and education programs, and the over-wintering monarch butterfly study, we joined scientists from around the world to take part in the 3rd International Partners in Flight (PIF) conference. This conference, held at the Asilomar Conference Center in Pacific Grove, attracted over 600 participants and spurred several other conferences, including the National Audubon Society's Important Bird Area conference in Big Sur and a North American Banding Council (NABC) conference.

We at BSOL embraced the opportunities to assist, participate, and host many aspects of these meetings. The work began six months ago when we met with Sandy Scoggin and Missy Wipf from Point Reyes Bird Observatory (PRBO) to lay the groundwork for arranging PIF field trips. After many, many phone calls, e-mails, and planning meetings, it was a pleasure to finally observe 17 vans juggling hundreds of eager participants among 17 field trips and workshops all over Monterey County. Monterey County is blessed with a network of amazingly willing, enthusiastic, and expert birders who came together and volunteered as field trip leaders on behalf of BSOL, PRBO, and PIF. Thank you, field trip leaders!



Especially memorable for BSOL staff was



facilitating and hosting two Advanced Landbird Aging and Sexing workshops with Peter Pyle, the internationally esteemed author of the *Identification Guide to North American Birds*, which avian biologists fondly refer to as the "Pyle Guide" or the "banders' bible". After participating in Peter's workshop, we are now much more skillful and confident in our ability to distinguish between birds that are one-year-olds (SY, for "in their second calendar year") versus those that are older (ASY, for "after second-year"). Aging birds to SY and ASY is very important when looking at demographic trends from one year to the next and investigating reasons for declines in songbird populations.

Speaking of songbirds, have you noticed all the singing in the air? Purple Finches, House Wrens, and Song Sparrows dominated the singing perches in our study area last month and filled the air with their melodic songs. The migrants are appearing too; Wilson's Warblers, the breeding race of Orange-crowned Warblers (*Lutescens*), and freshly molted male Common Yellowthroats were new captures for the year. March brought us 118 captures of 29 species, with Purple Finches and Chestnut-backed Chickadees being the most frequently captured birds (see [Bird Banding Totals](#)). Soon we anticipate capturing and banding Warbling Vireos, Black-headed Grosbeaks, Yellow Warblers.... We can't wait until they arrive!



Also noteworthy in the month of March were the successes of BSOL intern, Brook Gamble, at the Carmel Middle School. In addition to teaching the middle school kids about the value of organic gardening, Brook introduced them to songbird study through bi-monthly demonstrations of mist netting and banding there at the school site. All day long, one after another of the middle school science teachers marched their seventh and eighth grade students across the meadow to Brook's banding station. They accompanied her on each "net run" (10 mist nets are placed among oak and pine trees, willows, and coyote bush), and they observed her banding and processing each bird, exactly as it is done at BSOL and hundreds of banding stations throughout North America. What a rich and inspiring experience this is for these impressionable young people.



With the dispersal of the monarch butterflies last month (all of the clusters have broken up, and lone monarchs have been observed flying around in search of milk weed plants to lay their eggs), our over-wintering monarch butterfly project has come to a close and we are currently preparing the final report. Of our seven survey sites spread along the Big Sur coast, including Pacific Grove, Point Lobos, Palo Colorado, Andrew Molera State Park, a site on private property, Prewitt Creek, and Plaskett Creek, three of these sites appeared to be climax sites and the others appeared to be transitional sites. Of the three climax sites, Pacific Grove and the private property site averaged over 10,000 butterflies throughout the winter from late November until mid-February. Plaskett Creek, the other climax site, also retained a stable number of roosting

butterflies throughout the winter but with much smaller numbers, averaging about 2000 butterflies. We identified the remaining four survey sites as transitional sites because we observed monarchs departing at the end of December, having likely moved to their main roosting sites.

Not only did we observe a shift in monarch over-wintering sites in early January, but we also observed a shift in the use of tree species. Interestingly, during the early winter arrival period, monarchs were observed roosting with an equal possibility on Eucalyptus as on other native tree species. During the coldest weather periods of the winter season, the monarchs roosted almost exclusively on native Monterey Pine and Monterey Cypress trees. Results from this pilot study suggest that monarchs prefer the native tree species once winter has set in, likely because the native tree species afford the monarchs a greater wind break against severe weather conditions.

We have accumulated evidence that the Eucalyptus trees threaten the survival of some songbird species that nectar on the Eucalyptus flowers. For example, we have captured over 25 Yellow-rumped Warblers over the last couple of months that have had large balls of gum on the bases of their bills, appearing as if they had horns. The gum clogs their nares and eventually suffocates them, causing them to die.



Between the monarchs and the songbirds, the non-native Eucalyptus trees may be doing more harm than good by acting as a population sink.

As of Monday, April 2, we officially returned to banding 6 days each week (Tuesday through Sunday) for 5 hours, beginning 15 minutes after sunrise. Visitors always are welcome. For more information, please phone Sarah Hamilton at 831-624-1202, or contact her by e-mail at [SarahStock@VentanaWS.org](mailto:SarahStock@VentanaWS.org). See you soon!

### BSOL Update, February 2002:



It appears and feels that spring may be early this year. The trees at Andrew Molera State Park are decorated in a delicate green and the daytime temperatures are often in the comfortable 70s (F). The willows are adorned with fluffy catkins and brand new leaves (unfortunately, so is the poison oak!). The amorously vocal Molera birds are filling the air with sounds of spring. During the last weeks we watched Purple Finches, Song Sparrows, Black Phoebes, and House Wrens claiming their territories with loud and melodic voices. We are seeing increasingly more Violet-green and Tree Swallows and during a routine net-run we even watched a pair of rattlesnakes engaged in a spectacular mating display.

However, our [monthly banding summary](#) still reflects the grip of winter with small capture rates and low species diversity. We caught a total of

112 birds of 24 species in this short month of February, with 14 Spotted Towhees, 11 Hermit Thrushes, and 11 Bushtits, being the most frequently captured birds. The abundance of Hermit Thrushes, Fox Sparrows, and White-crowned Sparrows in our banding records still reflects a wintering bird community. A highlight was the capture of an unusual reddish Fox Sparrow. The typical subspecies at Molera is the drabber Sooty Fox Sparrow (*Passerella iliaca unalaschensis*). This individual, however, fit the description of the Northern Red Fox Sparrow (*Passerella iliaca iliaca*), displaying bright, reddish-brown colors.

With the approaching spring, our demographic study of the wintering monarch butterflies is coming to a closure. In March we will work on the final report and by next month's update we anticipate to post the highlights of our pilot study. During January and February we observed a significant decline in the wintering monarch populations at our study sites. By the end of February only two sites remained with notable amounts of monarchs, Pacific Grove being one of the key sites. However, Pacific Grove's numbers dropped from a season high of 25,000 to last week's low count of 3,000 individual monarch butterflies.

The monarch butterfly identification tags that had been expected with great anticipation finally arrived! By the crack of dawn a highly motivated crew of ten arrived at Plaskett Creek, armed with butterfly nets, paper bags, and tags. We captured the remaining population of monarchs and affixed the self-stick tags on their wings, identifying them by sex, mating status and amount of fat storage.



Obstacles, such as butterfly clusters 50 ft high up in the trees, were overcome with great creativity (see picture)! Even though the tags are only the size of a hole punch, the identification number and report hotline are easily legible. If you find a tagged monarch, please call the free hotline (1-877-897-7740) and report the butterfly ID#, date, and location of the find. Next season we anticipate tagging several thousand individuals.

Special thanks to our volunteers John Matusik, Chris Tenney, Jonathan Carpenter, and Erin McDonald who helped with counting and/or tagging the monarchs. Unfortunately due to a broken arm, Helen Johnson was unable to assist this year, though next year she will get a seat of honor in the tagging circle.



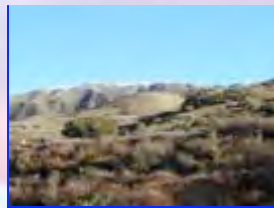
We completed the first year of a baseline avian community assessment at the East Molera grassland sites. By monitoring changes in the bird populations we are gathering baseline data to assess the effectiveness of restoration efforts of the native coastal prairie. Our first year report indicates that plots containing mostly non-native vegetation have greatest bird species richness and abundance. Unfortunately, many of these species were not the desirable typical grassland birds. The plots with mostly native

prairie vegetation, however, featured grassland birds such as Grasshopper and Lark Sparrows. We hope to extend our contract and collect one more year of baseline data on the avian use of the study sites prior to restoration. We believe our findings will aid in better evaluating the effects of future habitat restoration efforts on the grassland bird communities.

We continue to band two 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).

### BSOL Update, January 2002:

As the daylight hours grow longer, our morning routine of recording the weather, fording the river, and opening the mist-nets begins earlier and earlier. We are not the only ones responding to the lengthening photoperiod. This month we watched as a begging Chestnut-backed Chickadee received food from her mate and we listened as Northern Saw-whet and Spotted Owls hooted far into the night, including several hooting and squealing bouts back and forth between mates. These early signs of pair bonding fill us with anticipation for the breeding season.



However, snow lines the East Molera ridgelines and mist-netting data reflects low capture rates, low species diversity, and a high proportion of recaptured birds. These winter reminders indicate that the winter residents reside and the bulk of the breeding season and spring migration is still yet to come.

Nevertheless, this month of January we caught 257 birds of 19 species, more birds than we did in December. Surprisingly, eight of the captures this January were Varied Thrushes. Previously, only 12 Varied Thrushes had ever been caught at this lab (since 1992). A high proportion of the captures were woodpeckers, including 11 captures of 5 species. Most notable were two Acorn Woodpeckers, a relatively unusual species caught at the lab, as only 6 individuals had previously been captured. Hermit Thrushes (37 captures), Ruby-crowned Kinglets (35 captures), and Purple Finches (28) were the most abundant birds in the nets.

We completed our January set of area searches in our main study area at Andrew Molera State Park and we continue to survey each week in Creamery Meadow using line transects. For the East Molera Grassland Study, we completed the last of the area searches for the winter period and are presently compiling the report that encompasses 4 sets of surveys over the annual cycle from Spring 1999 to Winter 2000. We hope to continue surveys for another year so that we have a more comprehensive data set documenting bird use prior to restoration efforts.

Numbers of monarch butterflies have fluctuated between over-wintering sites. The large clusters of thousands of monarch butterflies observed in

November at the Cooper Cabin grove at Andrew Molera State Park has since dwindled to fewer than 50 butterflies, while other sites such as Pacific Grove have remained fairly steady with strongholds of well over 15,000 butterflies. Soon, we expect to see an increase in mating between butterflies, followed by an exodus of females as they begin their movements out of the groves in search for milkweed patches where they can lay their eggs.

Join us in wishing Andrea Claassen the best of luck on her life path of traveling and continuing fieldwork with birds. Andrea interned with BSOL for 6 months and, during her internship, contributed countless hours both in the field and in the office. Not only did Andrea learn to be an accomplished bander, but she proved invaluable in training volunteers and managing all of the banding data.

Taking Andrea's place, we welcome Maria Mayrhofer from Germany. Maria has worked several field positions in the last couple of years, including internships at the Point Reyes Bird Observatory and the Redwood Science Lab in Oregon and a managerial position at the Hakalau field station in Hawaii.



Another new arrival, Brook Gamble, is no stranger to the lab, having interned here in the summer of 1999. Since that time, the bulk of Brook's experience has mostly included working with seabirds and waterfowl, including positions with USGS in Alaska and with USFWS on Midway Atoll. Brook's position is unique in that she is splitting her time with BSOL and the Carmel Middle School (CMS). Brook will be assisting BSOL with bird fieldwork and assisting the

CMS with their organic gardening project.

We continue to band two days each week, working around the weather, so we cannot post a daily banding schedule. However, as always, visitors are always welcome. Please call Sarah Hamilton at (831) 624-1202 or contact us by email at [SarahStock@VentanaWS.org](mailto:SarahStock@VentanaWS.org) for further information.

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