



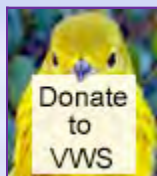
Ventana Wildlife Society
**BIG SUR ORNITHOLOGY
LAB**
Lab Updates for 2003



BSOL Winter Crew

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BSOL Update, December 2003:

Winter is in full swing on the central coast, and the Big Sur River continues to rise as the soggy winter storms feed its riffles and pools. Rubber boots are on the verge of becoming obsolete as the year draws to a close. Winter flocks permeate the yellowing sycamores, and chattering Ruby-crowned Kinglets lighten the spirits. One cannot help but smile as the hills become greener and greener as they are fueled by the winter rains and we all look forward to January 1st when we can wish all birds everywhere a Happy Birthday.

Mist-Netting/Banding at Andrew Molera State Park



In December at Andrew Molera State Park we captured a total of 181 individuals of 24 species, the lowest numbers for the year since last March. Captures will likely remain



low throughout the winter months until spring migration begins in April. This month, the most commonly captured species were Ruby-crowned Kinglet (33 individuals), Yellow-rumped Warbler (31 individuals), Hermit Thrush (18 individuals), and Bushtit (18 individuals). December 12th was the busiest day this winter, with a total of 33 birds captured. This busy December day was much lower than November's big day which included 58 captured birds. Some exciting December captures included a [Northern Pygmy-Owl](#) (only the 6th ever captured) which we recaptured the very next day with a bloodied bill, evidence that it had recently fed, a Lincoln's Sparrow which is only the 2nd individual ever captured in the month of December, and an uncommon subspecies of [Fox Sparrow \(slate-colored\)](#).

Oldies But Goodies. Of note were some spectacular December captures, not because of species, but because of age. These included a 5th year Chestnut-backed Chickadee (originally banded in 1999), a 5th year Hermit Thrush (originally banded in 1999), a 6th year Orange-crowned Warbler (originally banded in 1998), and a 6th year Myrtle Warbler (originally banded in 1998). The crown jewel by far however was a Hermit Thrush

that was banded in 1994. That makes this bird at least a 10th year bird! According to USGS this is a new record for the oldest Hermit Thrush ever recorded!

Mist-Netting/Banding at the Carmel Middle School

We continue to be amazed by the high numbers of birds caught in Sparrow City, CA (aka Carmel Middle School). In December we captured a total of 67 birds of 14 species during two banding days. Golden-crowned and White-crowned Sparrows were by far the most frequent captures at the Carmel Middle School this month. Other birds of note were yet another Sharp-shinned Hawk (these small accipiters frequent the nearby feeders) and a California Thrasher.

Monarch Butterfly Project



Weekly monarch butterfly surveys continued in December at seven different sites up and down the Big Sur coast, from Pacific Grove in the north to Plaskett Creek Campground to the south, which is only 15 miles north of the San Luis Obispo County line. Groups of at least two BSOL biologists surveyed each different monarch butterfly overwintering site, estimating the total number of butterflies at each site. We continue to be astounded at the high numbers of butterflies this year. In our three counts this month we observed quite a bit of fluctuation, likely due to inclement weather, from 71,566 total (this year's high so far), down to 56,496, then back up to 66,901. Of note are our counts at Point Lobos State Reserve, which boasted a high of 7,661 butterflies this month, up from a high of 4,732 in November, all in Monterey Pines.

Welcome!

With the onset of winter and its cold, heavy rains, we have embarked upon our winter schedule and continue to band two days a week at Andrew Molera State Park, weather permitting. As a result, the lab may not be open on a given day. So, please either call us at (831) 624-1202, or e-mail BSOL's Program Coordinator, Sarah Stock, at SarahStock@VentanaWS.org on the day you plan to visit to confirm that we are here to welcome you.

BSOL Update, November 2003:



In November, the winter rains commenced, which finally afforded us time to catch up on office work. The rains have returned with a vengeance, dumping more than three inches of water over the first weekend this month. Now that our seasonal footbridge is gone and the river is slowly rising, it's

only a matter of time before we will no longer be able to trudge back and forth wearing our rubber boots. In the meantime, a dramatic transition has occurred; the air is fresh and brisk, the hills are blanketed in green grass, and the birds are relishing the autumn berries.

Mist-Netting/Banding at Andrew Molera State Park

Birds caught at Andrew Molera State Park in November were all winter visitors from the north or year-round residents. We caught a total of 377 individuals of 28 species. Our most commonly captured species were Myrtle Warbler (92 individuals), Hermit Thrush (75 individuals), Golden-crowned Sparrow (50 individuals), and Ruby-crowned Kinglet (38 individuals). Some exciting November captures at Molera included a Golden-crowned Kinglet (only the 28th ever captured), two White-throated Sparrows (only twelve were previously banded), and another hybrid Northern Flicker (only the 7th ever banded). November 21st was our busiest day this fall, with a total of 58 birds banded. This surpassed the busiest day in October by only one individual.



Mist-Netting/Banding at the Carmel Middle School



We continue to be amazed by the high numbers of birds caught at the Carmel Middle School. In November we captured a total of 83 birds of 17 species during two banding days. Golden-crowned and White-crowned Sparrows and Myrtle Warblers were by far the most frequent captures at the Middle School this month, and our species list was nicely rounded out by a beautiful adult White-throated Sparrow, a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, and another recapture of the Sharp-shinned Hawk that we first banded as an adult bird in 2000.

Monarch Butterfly Project

Monitoring. Weekly monarch butterfly surveys started in earnest in November at seven different sites up and down the Big Sur coast, from Pacific Grove in the north to Plaskett Creek Campground to the south, only 15 miles north of the San Luis Obispo County line. Groups of at least two BSOL biologists surveyed each different monarch butterfly overwintering site, estimating the total number of butterflies at each site. So far this has been a banner year, with each count registering larger and larger numbers. On Monday, 24 November we conducted the Annual Thanksgiving Monarch Butterfly Count and counted a total of 68,979 individual butterflies in Monterey County, the highest count documented since the Thanksgiving counts began in 1997.

Workshop. In preparation for the best



possible monarch butterfly season, we hosted the 2nd Annual Monarch Butterfly Monitoring Workshop at Andrew Molera State Park. This has proven a fantastic way to exchange information and get monarch



biologists enthusiasts from around the state calibrated in their field methods and off on the same foot! At the eucalyptus grove, we focused on several protocols, including collecting data on weather, estimating small and large clusters of butterflies, and estimating the height and aspect of the clusters. After the field sessions, we rendezvoused back at the Research and Education Center to discuss various issues, such as the need for information exchange among western monarch people, e.g., list serve for people actively engaged in monarch conservation and eventually a newsletter that would reach interested people to spread awareness, and the pros and cons of tagging and what information can be gained from varying levels of tagging effort.



Education. On a monthly basis, we have had the great pleasure of sharing the mysteries of monarch and bird migration with a special group of 2nd graders taught by Tod Spedding at the International School of Monterey. These kids fill us with awe and giggles as they enthusiastically answer questions, such as "how do you identify whether or not a monarch butterfly is a male or female"? or "what is the stage between caterpillar and monarch butterfly"?

In November, we practiced counting the number of monarch butterflies in the view seen thru a spotting scope, and then compared those estimates with an actual count accomplished by pulling down the cluster and counting the butterflies one by one. We also practiced filling out a datasheet with information such as weather data and butterfly sex ratio data. We wouldn't be surprised if the entire class turned into A+ scientists!!

Welcome!

With the onset of winter and its cold, heavy rains, we have embarked upon our winter schedule and will be banding only two days a week at Andrew Molera State Park. As a result, the lab may not be open on a given day. So, please either call us at (831) 624-1202 or e-mail BSOL's program coordinator, Sarah Stock, at SarahStock@VentanaWS.org on the day you plan to visit to confirm that we are here to welcome you.

BSOL Update, October 2003:

The spectacular weather typical of fall in Big Sur continued through October. Mornings were cool, but by mid-morning we were stripped down to our shirtsleeves. The trees began to lose their foliage in earnest, filling our nets with bright yellow leaves.



Fall migration continued unabated, with large numbers of birds passing through daily. The first of our usual winter visitors have returned, while most of our breeding species have passed on to warmer climates. By the end of the month, typical summer species such as Wilson's Warbler, Swainson's Thrush, and Warbling Vireo were all but gone, while Hermit Thrush, Myrtle Warbler, Golden-crowned Sparrow, Townsend's Warbler, and Ruby-crowned Kinglet were back in force.



Mist-Netting/Banding at Andrew Molera State Park



After the excitement and activity of September, October was a bit slower but interesting none-the-less. Although we didn't catch any exciting vagrants, some, including a Rose-breasted Grosbeak, two Clay-colored Sparrows and a Blackpoll Warbler, were sighted in the study area. Another interesting sighting was a group of five endangered California Condors that flew directly over the study area, towards the Big Sur River mouth. This was only the fifth time BSOL Coordinator, Sarah Stock, has seen Condors in Andrew Molera State Park in two and a half years. Exciting captures included a hybrid Northern Flicker, only the fourth such hybrid individual ever caught here, a Marsh Wren, also only the fourth individual of this species ever caught here, a Red-breasted Sapsucker, two California Thrashers, and two Oak Titmice. In all a total of 506 individuals of 37 species were captured during October, a considerably lower number than last month. One aspect of recent captures that has caught the attention of all of us at BSOL is the number of birds that were banded in previous years that were recaptured this year. It never ceases to amaze us that these birds were able to make the long southern journey from their breeding grounds far to the north and end up at Molera, often within days of the anniversary of their original capture dates.

Mist-Netting/Banding on the Carmel River Sites

Carmel River Mouth. The end of October brought the end of banding for the year at the Carmel River Mouth. Banding at this site will start up again on May 1st of next year. In October, we banded a total of 66 individuals of 20 species. No unusual species were captured, although a Downy Woodpecker originally banded at the Carmel River Mouth was recaptured at Molera, and then captured once again at the river mouth. What was this individual of a normally sedentary species doing commuting up and down the coast? Even though no unusual birds were captured in our mist nets at the river mouth, many interesting birds were observed. These included a Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow, only the tenth time this species has ever been seen in Monterey County, an American Redstart, several Northern Waterthrushes, and a flock of Red Crossbills, a species normally seen only in coniferous forest.



Carmel Middle School. October also ushered in the start of the annual

banding program at the Carmel Middle School. This project is a collaborative effort between BSOL and the Carmel Middle School in an effort to introduce students to songbird banding and conservation. Not only are we banding migrant and wintering songbirds, but we have also begun a program of color-banding Golden-crowned Sparrows and White-crowned Sparrows in order to monitor winter survivorship. In our two days of banding at CMS this month, we banded 64 birds of 13 species. One exciting capture included a male Sharp-shinned Hawk first banded in 2000.

Monarch Butterfly Project



We also began our annual monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*) surveys in October at seven locations between Pacific Grove and Pacific Valley in southern Monterey County. The monarchs seem to be back in large numbers this year. Initial observations recorded thousands of butterflies already clustering at several locations, and all indications point to this being a really great year for the monarchs. Regular surveys will start next month and will be performed weekly. Our objective is to collect long-term data that will enable us to better understand population fluctuations and the conservation needs of these fascinating creatures.

Comings and Goings

Intern Eric Miller, who has been with us since April, has departed. His presence will be missed, as will his keen observations and witticisms. Eric will continue to make his home in the Monterey Bay area, so we expect to see more of him. Eric's departure is tempered by the arrival of Chris Tonra.

A transplanted New Yorker, Chris joined BSOL fresh off his second year of working with the Point Reyes Bird Observatory in Mono Lake riparian areas. He completed his pilot year of fieldwork for an upcoming Masters project with Humboldt State University studying host selection by individual female Brown-headed Cowbirds at Mono. Outside a passion for birds (especially when finding Song Sparrow nests) Chris has an overwhelming love for exploring the high Sierras, a borderline obsession with Bob Dylan and the Band, and a ton of excitement about getting to know Big Sur.



Welcome!

With the onset of winter and its cold, heavy rains, starting in November and continuing through April we will be banding only two days a week at Andrew Molera State Park. As a result, the lab may not be open on a

given day. So, please either call us at (831) 624-1202 or e-mail Sarah at SarahStock@VentanaWS.org on the day you plan to visit to confirm that we are here to welcome you.

BSOL Update, September 2003:

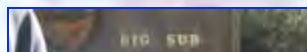
September was a big month at BSOL for travelers -- of both the avian kind and the human kind. Day by day as the month wore on, one species of migrating landbird after another made its welcome appearance, signaling once again that the natural cycle of wild bird life would be renewing itself again. Many of these avian visitors had traveled thousands of miles to get here. Some were stopping over just long enough to refuel before heading out again on the next leg of a much longer and perilous journey. Others had successfully reached their final destination and would be settling in to make Andrew Molera State Park their home for the winter. Many of September's visitors of the human kind also had traveled great distances to get here -- from New York, Massachusetts, Arizona, England. But none had come to refuel or to spend the winter. They came for nourishment of a different kind, and none was disappointed.



Mist-Netting/Banding at Andrew Molera State Park

In 21 days of mist-netting/banding in September at BSOL's Andrew Molera State Park study site, we captured a total of 443 individuals of 51 species. Pacific-slope Flycatcher led the field with 61 captures, followed by Bewick's Wren (37 captures), Song Sparrow and Chestnut-backed Chickadee (36 captures each), Yellow Warbler (34 captures), and Warbling Vireo (32 captures). After a slow start early in the month, species diversity and capture rates increased steadily throughout September, reaching their peak on the last day of the month. On 30 September we captured 37 individuals of 21 species, highlighted by the first captures of the season of Cedar Waxwing and Ruby-crowned Kinglet.

Throughout September, it seemed that each day yielded the first seasonal appearance of yet another migrating species. Among overwintering migrants, we captured the first Lincoln Sparrow on 5 September (a new fall early-arrival record), Townsend's Warbler on 9 September, Fox Sparrow on 16 September, Golden-crowned Sparrow and Puget Sound White-crowned Sparrow on 17 September, and Hermit Thrush (the State Bird of Vermont) on 27 September. September also treated us to several Winter Wrens (9 individuals) and Black-headed Grosbeaks (5 individuals). Some more interesting captures included 1 Marsh Wren, 2 Willow Flycatchers, 3 MacGillivray's Warblers, and 1 Ash-throated Flycatcher (a new fall departure record).



Other welcomed captures in September included



two juvenile female Belted Kingfishers we had been enjoying at almost every Big Sur River crossing for several days. We captured the first of the two on 5 September, and recaptured her again on 25 September along with her cohort. What a rare thrill it was to be in the presence of these magnificent creatures not once, but twice in

the span of just a few weeks!



September was also a great month for rarities! A Bell's Vireo made its first ever appearance in our lab on 9 September. This bird occupies only a tiny percentage of its former breeding range and is federally listed as endangered. The capture of this bird in Big



Sur coincided with the report writing for Least Bell's Vireo surveys that BSOL conducted along the Salinas and Nacimiento River watersheds earlier in the year, in which no Bell's Vireos were documented. You can imagine the excitement to finally see this bird before our very eyes. Other rarities included a Magnolia Warbler on 18 September (14th ever capture) and Least Flycatcher on 13 September (3rd ever capture).

Mist-Netting/Banding on the Carmel River Sites



Carmel River Mouth. In association with California Department of Parks and Recreation, we continued to operate a mist-netting/banding station weekly at the Carmel River Mouth restoration site. The objective of this project is to study long-term population trends in order to better assess the success of the ongoing restoration efforts. The mist-netting effort now is further enhanced by our collaboration with Cal Poly researchers and the addition of nest monitoring and area searches at the same site. During 4 days of mist-netting/banding at this site in September, we captured a total of 25 individuals of 8 species. Chestnut-backed Chickadee was the most frequently captured species in September (8 individuals), followed by Song Sparrow (7 individuals), and Bewick's Wren (4 individuals). On 13 November at the Pacific Grove Museum of Natural History, BSOL biologist Jason Scott will give a presentation on the results of this year's mist-netting/banding and nest-monitoring research at the Carmel River Mouth restoration site.

Carmel Middle School. MAPS banding resumed on 25 September at Carmel Middle School (CMS) in association with CMS science teacher and BSOL co-founder, Craig Hohenberger. On this first day of the new season, we captured a total of 36 individuals of 13 species. Puget Sound White-crowned Sparrow was the most frequently captured species (6 individuals), followed by Bushtit (4 individuals), and Common Yellowthroat (3 individuals). Captures also included 3 Oak Titmouse; two

each of Yellow Warbler, Bewick's Wren, House Finch, California Towhee, and California Thrasher.

Welcome!

Visitors always are welcome at BSOL. We conduct mist-netting and banding at Andrew Molera State Park every Tuesday through Saturday, for 5 hours each day starting 15 minutes after sunrise (about 7:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.). As a reminder, we'll be switching back to our winter schedule beginning 1 November, when we reduce our banding efforts to 2 days per week (usually Mondays and Tuesdays, weather dependent). For more information, please contact BSOL Coordinator, Sarah Stock, at (831) 624-1202, or by e-mail at SarahStock@VentanaWS.org. Happy Autumn. We look forward to having you with us!



BSOL Update, August 2003:

Long hot days greeted us this month with plenty of things to do despite the lull in bird numbers. Banding continued 5 days a week at Andrew Molera State Park and also at our offsite C-MAPS banding stations along the Carmel River, at the Carmel River Mouth, and at the Carmel Middle School. In addition to banding at Andrew Molera State Park, the staff also took time to reach out to kids from Ventana Wildlife Society's Summer Education Program, sharing with them information about our research and involvement in conservation. Between banding duties and other work, the BSOL crew found time to take a boat trip out into the Monterey Bay to look for cetaceans and seabirds not often seen from shore.

Mist-Netting/Banding at Andrew Molera State Park



The month of August saw reduced capture rates at Andrew Molera State Park, with most of the birds being juveniles in motley assortments of feather replacement. By the end of the month, however, we began finding Yellow Warblers in our nets, a sure sign that fall migration was underway and that we could soon expect a surge in numbers come September. The total number of birds captured for the month was 390 individuals of 34 species. Our most numerous species captured for the month was Song Sparrow at 68 captures.

Despite these low numbers, there still were a few relatively uncommon captures and sightings. These included the arrival of some young Oregon Juncos, one lone Lark Sparrow, and two owls. The first owl, a



Northern Saw-whet Owl, was captured and banded on August 2nd. The other was a brief look at a Northern Pygmy-Owl as it was being mobbed by an assortment of songbirds and some very angry hummingbirds! Other fun birds included an American Dipper often seen just upriver from the bridge, a Brown Creeper, a Hairy Woodpecker, a Winter Wren, and two hatch-year Willow Flycatchers caught and banded. We also again recaptured the infamous [Great Tit](#).



Throughout August the staff at BSOL gave weekly lectures and demonstrations to kids from the Summer Education Program. Kids were shown how we captured and banded birds and, through questions and discussion, we emphasized our research's conservation goals.

Mist-Netting/Banding on the Carmel River

Carmel River MAPS Stations. August was the final month of banding at our MAPS stations in association with the Monterey Peninsula Water Management District. We bid a fond farewell to Red Rocks, All Saints, and Rancho San Carlos as we banded one final time at each location in Carmel Valley. In three days of banding, we captured 40 individuals of 16 species. On the last day of banding All Saints had the most birds captured (16 individuals) and the greatest number of species (9), while Rancho San Carlos had the fewest, with 10 individuals of 8 species. Bewick's Wrens, Pacific-Slope Flycatchers and Song Sparrows were our most commonly captured species. Our most interesting capture was a juvenile Common Yellowthroat, the first of that species to be caught at our MAPS sites. At the completion of the MAPS banding season, we had captured a total of 844 birds of 44 species. It was a productive and enjoyable summer, and we are already looking forward to returning to the Carmel River Valley next summer!



Carmel River Mouth. Weekly banding continued at the Carmel River Mouth, where we have been monitoring birds using standardized MAPS (Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship) protocol since 1999. Half of our nets are in restored willows and the other half are in mature riparian forest. By comparing bird abundance and diversity between the two portions of the study area, we can determine how birds respond to the continued growth in the restoration area. This month we captured a total of 73 birds of 15 species in both the restored and mature habitats combined. The three most abundant species included 20 Wilson's Warblers, 11 Anna's Hummingbirds and 8 Song Sparrows.

Carmel Middle School. This month we rounded out our MAPS banding at the Carmel Middle School (CMS) in association with middle school teacher Craig Hohenberger. We only banded one day, but we captured 18 individuals of 6 species. A flock of Bushtits livened up our last day of summer banding, as did the capture of a Hairy Woodpecker, our only capture of that species at CMS for the season. This month also marked the completion of our year-long contract with CMS. In our 12 months of banding at CMS, we captured 558 individuals of 40 species.

Public Outreach and Education



BSOL Staff Pelagic Trip. On August 24th the BSOL crew braved wind, waves, and seasickness to seek out seabirds and mammals on the Monterey Bay, courtesy of Monterey Bay Whale Watch. As we scanned the sea for signs of life we were rewarded with whale spouts off in the distance. As our boat approached, we were given excellent views of several Blue Whales, one of which gave us an amazing look at its fluke as it surfaced. It was an awesome sight! Other highlights included a Humpback Whale, and a pod of Pacific White-sided Dolphins that rode our bow wake for a time. The BSOL crew also was delighted to see many excellent birds, including an exciting view of a Long-tailed Jaeger, flocks of Red- and Red-necked Phalaropes, Sabine's Gulls, Sooty and Pink-footed Shearwaters, some Rhinoceros Auklets, and a couple of Black-footed Albatross to round out the day.

Uncommon Grounds Coffee. We would like to thank Valerie, James, and Orrel of Uncommon Grounds Gourmet Coffees for visiting us at our Education and Research Center in Andrew Molera State Park and also for the regular donations of fresh, great tasting, fair trade, organic, shade-grown coffee. For two years they have warmed the pre-dawn mornings at the lab. We are proud to know a company with such a commitment to conservation, and we look forward to their next visit!



BSOL Field Crew

Alas, BSOL intern Robin Hunnewell has concluded her summer internship and migrated back east for fall banding at Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences. We miss you, Robin!!



Recently, BSOL has welcomed four additions to add to our flock of faithful volunteers. The volunteers have provided mentor opportunities for full time interns, as well as shared in the lab's daily responsibilities. The identification, handling, and understanding of aviculture are long-term commitments that require sincere investments of caring and time. Our volunteers are conscientious helpers, as well as active (not to mention sharp) birders. Specific help has been provided with the identification of non-captured birds in and around the study area (by sightings, calls and songs), which is listed daily. Help has also been provided with the recording of banding data and data-base entry, as well as with providing educational experiences for visitors. Thanks John Matusik, Spencer Mair, Nelli Thorngate, Matt Brady, and Ryan Terrill.

Welcome!

Visitors are always welcome to BSOL. We band five days a week at Andrew Molera State Park, Tuesdays through Saturdays, beginning fifteen minutes after dawn and closing after five hours. Currently, we run our nets from about 7:00 am to 12:00 pm. For more information, please contact BSOL Coordinator, Sarah Stock, at (831) 624-1202, or by e-mail at SarahStock@VentanaWS.org. We look forward to having you with us!

BSOL Update, July 2003:

High summer settled upon Andrew Molera State Park in July. The steep ridge tops of surrounding Big Sur have become tawny and golden with the disappearance of their mantle of wildflowers. In contrast, the venerable sycamores standing about our field office have put forth their large green leaves and now provide dense shade. Summer fog routinely piles up along the shore here in July, but Molera often remains free of fog - an isolated world of blue amidst a thick blanket that withdraws by late morning. The Big Sur River has dropped considerably, chortling noisily over rocks and stones. As if on cue, the American Dipper has returned to its familiar haunt upstream from the river footbridge, much to the delight of BSOL's field crew who now find it essential on every river crossing to scan the exposed rocks and rushing currents for a glimpse of the elusive Water Ouzel.

The month of July brought visitors of another variety as well: a steady flow of Discovery Campers under the tutelage of VWS' Education Program staff, and State Park visitors from all over the world. Each day was enlivened by the energy of young onlookers to the mist-netting and banding operation of BSOL. Exclamations of amazement and torrents of questions filled the banding shed as campers and visiting families alike were welcomed to have a close-up look at their first wild bird in the hand. Of course the best teachers of all are the birds themselves, who never fail to inspire and enthrall us with their remarkable lives.



Mist-Netting/Banding at Andrew Molera State Park

The month of July capped off our incredible run of spring vagrants, leaving behind the month's chief protagonists, resident birds, hard at work wrapping up the business of breeding. Most noteworthy was a bonanza of young Black-headed Grosbeaks. July also marked the onset of heavy molts for both hatching year and adult birds, making life even more interesting in the banding lab. Whereas young Wilson's Warblers have completed their preformative molt, the worn adults are just beginning their own replacement of feathers in preparation for fall migration. Casual mixed species flocks of Chestnut-backed Chickadees, Bushtits, Warbling

Vireos and others have been observed flitting about the study area. Occasionally, we have re-sighted the Great Tit interloper that we captured and banded last month, foraging with the resident birds.



This July we operated our year-round mist-netting station for 22 days, yielding 596 captured individuals of 33 species. Daily totals hovered around 25 birds and 10 species. Our most frequently captured species was again Wilson's Warbler, comprising a total of 143 individuals, up 30% from last month. Song Sparrows continued to lead the pack of coastal riparian breeders, producing second and perhaps even third clutches for the season. Black-headed Grosbeaks also did very well this breeding season; we banded a total of 98 birds of this species, 95 % of them being hatching year birds. Unusual captures in July included a young Northern Mockingbird, netted and banded on July 29th. It was only the second Northern Mockingbird captured at Molera, after a hiatus of 10 years since the last (and first) one. Another notable capture was a young Brown Creeper banded on July 31st, the first individual of this species captured in calendar year 2003.

Carmel River Projects

Mist-Netting/Banding. July was our third month of banding at our three Carmel River MAPS (Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship) stations in association with the Monterey Peninsula Water Management District. We banded a total of nine days at Red Rocks, All Saints, and Rancho San Carlos. Bird activity slowed as the breeding season began to wind down, which meant slightly lower capture totals than last month. Many birds were starting their fall molts, and toward the end of the month we noticed the formation of early mixed-species foraging flocks as young birds struck out on their own. This month we captured a total of 206 individuals of 29 species. Red Rocks was the most productive site (81 birds), while All Saints had the fewest number of captures (60 birds). Red Rocks also had the most species (19) while Rancho San Carlos had the fewest (17). Bushtits once again were our most frequently captured bird, with 36 individuals, followed by Song Sparrows (21) and Wilson's Warblers (20). Unusual and exciting captures included a breeding male Black-throated Gray Warbler banded at All Saints, and a juvenile Northern Rough-winged Swallow banded at Red Rocks.

Weekly banding continued at the Carmel River Mouth where we have been monitoring birds using standardized MAPS protocol since 1999. Half of our nets are in restored willows and the other half are in mature riparian forest. By comparing bird abundance and diversity between the two portions of the study area we can determine how birds respond to the continued growth in the restoration area. This month we captured a total of 71 birds of 17 species in both the restored and mature habitats combined. The three most abundant species included Wilson's Warbler (18 individuals), Swainson's Thrush (9), and Song Sparrow (8).

Nest Monitoring and Area Searches. BSOL Assistant Coordinator, Jason Scott, wrapped up his nest searching project at the Carmel River

Mouth. Having concluded the fun work, he spent the majority of July documenting the vegetation associated with each of the nests he located.

Carmel Middle School Projects



Mist-Netting/Banding. We continued our MAPS banding at the Carmel Middle School (CMS) in association with Craig Hohenberger. This month's capture totals and species diversity were about the same as last month. In three days of banding we captured 64 individuals of 17 species. Bewick's Wrens and Purple Finches were once again our most frequently captured birds, with 15 and 10 individuals respectively. This month we had several very exciting captures. We banded a juvenile California Thrasher, proof-positive that they are breeding at CMS. We also captured an adult Red-shouldered Hawk (first ever captured at CMS) and a juvenile Pygmy Nuthatch, which is the first capture of that species at any BSOL banding station.

Other Field Projects

Bell's Vireo Project. This July the Bell's Vireo Surveys at Camp Roberts came to a close. After completing six sets of point count surveys, each consisting of 13 points, BSOL biologists could not locate a single Bell's Vireo. This news shouldn't come as a surprise considering extensive degradation of riparian habitat in the Salinas Valley and the fact that Bell's Vireos have been essentially extirpated from Monterey County. In fact there hasn't been a single observation of a Bell's Vireo this decade and the last singing male was observed in 1993 on the Salinas River. Camp Roberts continues to carry out a Brown-headed Cowbird and European Starling removal project in an attempt to improve chances for potential breeding of Bell's Vireos in the future.

East Molera Grasslands Project. This July BSOL biologists, in collaboration with State Park resource ecologist, Jeff Frey, wrapped up the summer session of East Molera Grassland surveys. This is the third consecutive year that we have gathered information on bird diversity and abundance at 6 different sites in the East Molera grasslands prior to restoration efforts. This long-term study uses birds as indicators of the success of specific restoration treatments that will soon be underway in the grasslands.

Public Education and Outreach

A special highlight this July was a trip up the coast for BSOL interns who participated in a day of color banding Caspian Terns on Night Island in San Pablo Bay, northeast of San Francisco. The project is coordinated by Keith



Larson, a former BSOL intern, and is part of an ongoing study funded by Oregon State University. We banded roughly 100 Caspian Tern chicks in two and a half hours in a collaborative effort with about twenty volunteers, all of whom became intimate with the Night Island mud by day's end. Thanks for having us along, Keith!



Visitors are always welcome to BSOL. We band five days a week at Andrew Molera State Park, Tuesdays through Saturdays, beginning fifteen minutes after dawn and closing after five hours. Currently, we run our nets from about 6:30 am to 11:30 am. For more information, please contact BSOL Coordinator, Sarah Stock, at (831) 624 - 1202, or by email at SarahStock@VentanaWS.org. We look forward to having you with us!

BSOL Update, June 2003:

What could be better than June at BSOL. Early sunrise. Long, cool mornings -- maybe foggy today, maybe sunny tomorrow, always perfect for bird lovers. June brings even longer, warm, sun-drenched afternoons and evenings -- maybe a bit windy, but never too hot. Nighttimes are calm and mild, short, but restful. The river footbridges have been re-installed, allowing many thankful visitors unimpeded access to the trails and the beach. Now that school is out for the summer, many of our BSOL visitors are families with children. What a joy it is to witness a child's wonder and excitement in the presence of a wild bird. We offer families a safe, personalized, nature learning experience, and invite all parents to bring your children of all ages for a visit as soon, and as often as possible.

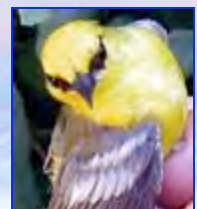
A working visit to BSOL on June 4-5 by Peter Pyle, author of *Identification Guide to North American Birds: Part I*, clearly was the educational and scientific highlight of the month for BSOL staff and guest bird banders from Sequoia National Park and Mexico. Peter gave us a superb workshop on Ageing and Sexing North American Passerines by Plumage, which included an information-packed, 4-hour lecture, and two mornings of practical application of our new knowledge in the lab using just-captured birds. Peter emphasized the importance of primary coverts and molt limits in other contour feathers. Among the latest advances he shared with us was the soon-to-be-introduced re-naming of molt terminology. Thank you Peter!



Mist-Netting and Banding



The month of June kept us on our toes with an eye-popping spectacle of vagrants. The bird gods and goddesses indulged us with some most unusual captures, including Great Tit (first ever capture),





Yellow-billed Cuckoo (first ever capture), Blue-winged Warbler (2nd ever capture), Hooded Warbler (9th ever capture), Northern Parula (14th ever capture), and Rose-breasted Grosbeak (26th ever capture). Another exciting capture was a longevity record for Olive-sided Flycatcher: this bird, who is at least 11 years old, was banded initially at BSOL in 1993. The previous longevity record for Olive-sided Flycatcher was 7 years. Another oddity was a spring record capture for Red-breasted Sapsucker on June 5 (all previous captures at BSOL occurred between October and February).



The excitement and suspense of approaching a net with birds, coupled with the pleasure of capturing abundant fledglings, surpassed the disappointment of 50% fewer over-all captures and 25% less diversity compared with last month. We netted and banded birds on 19 days in June, yielding total captures for the month of 419 individuals of 35 species. Daily capture rates in June ranged from 9 to 32 individuals and 4 to 15 species per day. The relative absence of migrants in June reduced captures of Wilson's Warbler from 329 individuals in May to 99 individuals in June, of Swainson's Thrush 59 individuals in May to 5 individuals in June, and of Orange-crowned Warbler from 95 individuals in May to 9 individuals in June. Wilson's Warbler was the most frequently captured species in June, followed by resident breeders, Song Sparrow (66 individuals), and Chestnut-backed Chickadee (53 individuals).

Carmel River Projects

Mist-Netting/Banding. In June, BSOL staff netted and banded birds at four standardized MAPS (Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship) sites along the Carmel River. For a third year in association with the Monterey Peninsula Water Management District, we operated three sites located in stretches of riparian habitat along the Carmel River in Carmel Valley. During the MAPS-prescribed days of banding at these three sites during June, we captured a total of 243 individuals of 31 species. Interesting and uncommon captures of resident birds included House Wren (1), Oregon Junco (1), Red-shafted Flicker (2), Cliff Swallow (2), Bullock's Oriole (4), and Violet-Green Swallow (4). Bushtit was the most frequently captured species in June (40 individuals), followed by Bewick's Wren (35 individuals), and Song Sparrow (28 individuals).

We continued to operate a seasonal mist-netting/banding station weekly at our fourth Carmel River site, which is located near the river mouth and adjacent lagoon. Recognizing the value of this recently restored habitat, BSOL in conjunction with California Department of Parks and Recreation initiated this long-term study in 1998 to investigate population fluctuations of resident and migratory birds in both restored and mature habitats. The mist-netting effort now is further enhanced by our collaboration with Cal Poly researchers and the addition of nest monitoring and area searches in the vicinity (see below). During June, we captured a total of 141 individuals of 19 species. Song Sparrow was the



most frequently captured species in June (25 individuals), followed by Wilson's Warbler (22 individuals), Swainson's Thrush (19 individuals), and Chestnut-backed Chickadee (17 individuals). Among the most noteworthy captures were Common Yellowthroat, a Downy Woodpecker, and Nuttall's Woodpecker.

Nest Monitoring and Area Searches. In June, Jason Scott continued to lead BSOL's collaborative nest monitoring project with California Polytechnic State University, studying the success of a 37-acre riparian restoration effort. In 1996, the California Department of Transportation (CALTRANS) began a restoration project to convert a fallow artichoke field into mixed cottonwood/willow riparian habitat. Seven years later this riparian area is now providing valuable breeding habitat for a wide variety of migratory and resident species. The research goals of the project are to: locate and monitor nests of five Riparian Focal Species (Warbling Vireo, Swainson's Thrush, Wilson's Warbler, Song Sparrow, and Black-headed Grosbeak), collect baseline data on their breeding ecology and habitat use, determine nesting success, and color-band breeding adults in order to determine population size.



Carmel Middle School Projects

Mist-Netting/Banding. MAPS banding continued at Carmel Middle School (CMS) in association with CMS teacher and BSOL co-founder, Craig Hohenberger. In three days of banding we captured a total of 61 birds of 17 species. This month's most frequently captured species differed greatly from those of last month. Species that were most commonly captured at CMS included Bewick's Wren (17 individuals), Purple Finch (14 individuals), and Lesser Goldfinch (11 individuals). Interesting captures included California Quail, House Finch, Oregon Junco, Red-winged Blackbird, and Wilson's Warbler.



Barn Owl Monitoring. Experienced tracker and Condor Program Coordinator, Joe Burnett, came to our aid last month, lending his expertise in mounting transmitters on two of the seven Barn Owl juveniles we have been following all spring. He is returning to the site often to check on the whereabouts of these two chicks. As of last week, one of them had dispersed about one-half mile from the nest site. The other bird is staying close to the nest site and may even be occupying the nest box at times.

Other Field Projects

Bell's Vireo Surveys. In the Salinas Valley on the other side of the Ventana Wilderness from Big Sur, BSOL field crews have been searching for Bell's Vireos (*Vireo bellii*). Formerly a common breeding resident on the Salinas and Nacimiento Rivers, this endangered bird has been essentially extirpated



from Monterey County since 1993. The decline in Bell's Vireo populations is attributed to habitat loss and fragmentation and Brown-headed Cowbird nest parasitism. Over the last several years, Camp Roberts has initiated cowbird and starling removal projects in an attempt to restore Bell's Vireos back to their former breeding areas on the base. In the month of June, BSOL biologists conducted five sets of point count surveys on Camp Roberts, as stipulated in a research contract secured through the National Guard to assess the success of the removal projects. Alas, try as we may, we have not yet located any Bell's Vireos. However, given that inland valley habitat beholds a different suite of birds than the regular coastal riparian birds, we have been treated to regular sightings of Cassin's Kingbirds, Loggerhead Shrikes, Lark Sparrows, Yellow-billed Magpies, and Golden Eagles. With one more set of point count surveys in July, we are keeping our fingers crossed for the "chewedde jechewide, cheedle, jeeew" of the Bell's Vireo.

Public Education and Outreach

On Sunday, June 15, BSOL Assistant Coordinator, Jason Scott, gave a wide-ranging presentation on BSOL's various projects and programs to a very appreciative, packed house at the Pacific Grove Museum of Natural History. The event took place within the surrounds of the "Bringing the Condors Home" exhibit currently showing at the Museum, which could not have been more appropriate. Jason first outlined Ventana Wildlife Society's mission and programs (BSOL, Condors, Education), and then briefly described the full array of BSOL's current ornithological research and participation in Project Monarch Alert in collaboration with California Polytechnic State University.

Visitors always are welcome at BSOL. We conduct mist-netting and banding at Andrew Molera State Park every Tuesday through Saturday, for 5 hours each day starting 15 minutes after sunrise (about 6:15 to 11:15 a.m.). For more information, contact BSOL Coordinator, Sarah Stock, at (831) 624-1202 or e-mail her at SarahStock@VentanaWS.org. Happy Summer. We look forward to seeing you!

BSOL Update, May 2003:

Drama for birds and birders alike marked the beginning of May here at the Big Sur Ornithology Lab (BSOL). Migration was still going strong as evidenced by the cacophony of songs and calls heard during the mornings at our study site at Andrew Molera State Park.

The end of the month saw most of our spring migrants moving on, leaving the local breeders to continue with the singing, nesting and, of course, caring for new fledglings. In between it all we managed to install our seasonal footbridge, continue banding five days a week, participate in the American Bird Association's "America's Birdiest County" contest, and run four offsite MAPS banding stations along the



restored banks of the Carmel River, one at the Carmel River Lagoon, and another at Carmel Middle School. The BSOL crew also continued its monitoring of Barn Owls at the Middle School.

Mist-Netting and Banding



Storms greeted us at the beginning of the month, curtailing some of our banding efforts. With the onset of inclement weather, birds saw fit to migrate into Andrew Molera and camp, resulting in 376 captures from May 6th-8th, including over 100 Wilson's Warblers in one day alone! For the month we captured a total of 896 birds comprising 42 species. Some of the more exciting captures included two Northern Waterthrushes, three Western Tanagers, three Lazuli Buntings, and one Louisiana Waterthrush, a first record for Monterey County. The first new batch of spring fledglings also made their appearance, including Orange-crowned Warbler, Wilson's Warbler, Song Sparrow, Downy and Nuttall's Woodpeckers, Bushtit, Bewick's and House Wren, and our favorite, Chestnut-backed Chickadee. Birds captured in large numbers during the month were Wilson's Warbler (329), Chestnut-backed Chickadee (104), and Orange-crowned Warbler (95).

In addition to our numerous banding and monitoring operations, the BSOL staff also participated in the ABA's "America's Birdiest County" contest on May 2nd-3rd. Overall, Monterey birders documented 248 species, including a Black-and-white Warbler, Eurasian Widgeon, Flesh-footed Shearwater, Black Swift, Gray Flycatcher, Willow Flycatcher, and Palm Warbler. Our efforts proved fruitful - unbelievably, Monterey County has been awarded the "Birdiest County" title for 2003! See [Monterey - Birdiest County in 2003](#) on Don Roberson's website for more about the event.

MAPS Banding Stations

This month marked the beginning of our Carmel MAPS (Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship) program in association with the Monterey Peninsula Water Management District. We are banding at three sites in the Carmel Valley: All Saints, Rancho San Carlos, and Red Rocks. These sites are all located in stretches of riparian habitat along the Carmel River, and were surveyed last year using the Rapid Ornithological Inventory method. By converting them to standardized MAPS stations, we will be able to compare our data with other banding stations and better analyze population trends over time. This month in 10 days of banding we captured a total of 349 birds of 36 species. We captured the most birds at All Saints (147), and the fewest at Rancho San Carlos (77). All Saints and Red Rocks tied for highest number of species captured (26) while Rancho San Carlos had the fewest (19). Species that were most commonly captured included Orange-crowned Warbler (37), Chestnut-backed



Chickadee (28), and Bewick's Wren (28). Interesting and uncommon captures included Nashville Warbler (1), Olive-sided Flycatcher (1), Townsend's Warbler (1), Tree Swallow (1), Brewer's Blackbird (2), Red-winged Blackbird (2), Bullock's Oriole (4), and Oregon Junco (4).

BSOL continued banding at Carmel Middle School (CMS) in association with Craig Hohenberger. The CMS site was upgraded to a MAPS station this month, and this summer we will be banding there once every 10 days instead of every two weeks. In three days of banding, we captured a total of 86 birds of 20 species. Species that were most commonly captured included Chestnut-backed Chickadee (12), Yellow Warbler (11), and Wilson's Warbler (10). Interesting captures of resident yet infrequently caught birds included California Thrasher (1), Lesser Goldfinch (1), California Towhee (1), and Brown-headed Cowbird (1).

BSOL continues to operate its MAPS mist-netting/banding station weekly at the Carmel River Mouth restoration site in association with California Department of Parks and Recreation. The objective of this project is to study long-term population trends in order to better assess the success of the ongoing restoration efforts. The mist-netting effort now is further enhanced by our collaboration with Cal Poly researchers and the addition of nest monitoring and area searches at the same site. During the month of May we captured 116 birds of 21 species, including 21 Swainson's Thrushes, 20 Wilson's Warblers, 7 Yellow Warblers, 7 Song Sparrows, and 4 Black-headed Grosbeaks. Highlights included 8 Cedar Waxwings, a Common Yellowthroat, and a Willow Flycatcher.

Carmel River Mouth Nest Monitoring

In 1996, the California Department of Transportation began a restoration project to convert 37 acres of fallow artichoke fields into mixed cottonwood/willow riparian habitat. Since that time, the vegetation has grown substantially and is now providing valuable habitat for a wide variety of breeding birds. BSOL recently embarked on a collaborative research project with California Polytechnic State University researchers, Francis Villablanca and Erica Lindgren, to document the success of these restoration efforts. Nest monitoring is now being carried out in conjunction with focal species color-banding and pre-existing MAPS station mist netting efforts. Our focal species include: Warbling Vireo, Swainson's Thrush, Wilson's Warbler, Song Sparrow, and Black-headed Grosbeak. The combination of data from nest monitoring, mist-netting, and area searches will help us to determine the success of the restoration project.



Barn Owl Project

Barn Owl monitoring continues at the Carmel Middle School. The hatchling owls are growing quickly and have become increasingly disenchanted with our efforts to monitor them, having become quite adept at using their talons and beaks in attempts to remind us of their predatory

nature! Fortunately for the owls (or us!) we have placed radio tracking devices on three of the soon-to-be-fledged owls and will not be handling them any more. Our efforts to monitor them will continue for the next few months as we track their movements until the transmitters fall off (as they are intended to do).

Upcoming Events

The BSOL staff is proud to welcome Peter Pyle, author of the *Identification Guide to North American Birds*. Mr. Pyle will be leading a banding and identification workshop on June 4th. We are all very excited and are bursting with questions to ask!

We have resumed our banding schedule of five days a week at Andrew Molera State Park and our door is always open. We run the nets, weather permitting, for five hours each day beginning fifteen minutes after sunrise, Tuesday through Saturday. Please call ahead before visiting if you plan to bring a group. For more information, feel free to contact Sarah Hamilton (Big Sur Ornithology Lab Coordinator) at (831) 624-1202 or e-mail her at SarahStock@VentanaWS.org. Happy Spring and we look forward to seeing you!

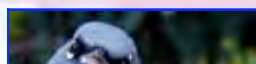
BSOL Update, April 2003:

Spring migration has begun! As Andrew Molera State Park warms up with wildflowers, insects, and birds, each day holds something new for the eyes and ears. California Poppy (*Eschscholzia californica*) and California Bee Plant (*Scrophularia californica*) are growing like gangbusters outside our lab. Butterflies, such as Lorquin's Admiral (*Limenitis lorquini*), Common Buckeye (*Junonia coenia*), and Pacific Orangetip (*Anthocharis sara*), are busy nectaring and mating in the meadows and along the river's edge.

As for birds, the resident breeders are wasting no time. Nests of Wrentit, Bushtit, Nuttall's Woodpecker, Song Sparrow, Western Bluebird, American Robin, and our old friend, Oak Titmouse, are appearing in various niches and crannies of the study area. Wilson's Warblers' songs greet us daily as the birds pair up to breed, joining a chorus with Warbling Vireo, Purple Finch, Black-headed Grosbeak, and Orange-crowned Warbler. High above the lab, Purple Martins give their lilting calls and are often accompanied by Tree, Violet-green, Cliff, and Barn Swallows. The familiar chatter of Bullock's Oriole has also graced us with its presence in the study area.



Mist-Netting and Banding



A few days of protracted rains have prevented us from opening our nets daily, but we banded fairly



steadily in Molera this April. The Big Sur River ran about knee-high for the intrepid banders of the Big Sur Ornithology Lab. In the 15 days of April banding, we caught a total of 606 birds comprising 41 species. Our busiest day was April 23rd when we caught and banded a total of 130 birds of 22 species, the biggest day ever for the lab in April and one of the top ten days in the last ten years. First captures of new spring arrivals included Warbling Vireo, Black-headed Grosbeak, Pacific-slope Flycatcher, MacGillivray's Warbler, Yellow-breasted Chat, and Cassin's Vireo. Our most frequently captured birds were Wilson's and Orange-crowned Warblers, totaling 160 and 134 individuals respectively. Rare captures revealed a Dusky Flycatcher (1 of 11 individuals captured since 1992) and a Hammond's Flycatcher (1 of 20 individuals captured since 1992). Both birds caused quite a stir in the banding lab and filled us with anticipation for what spring migration may continue to bring.

Current Projects



BSOL continues its off-site banding project with the Carmel Middle School in collaboration with Craig Hohenberger, operating the mist-nets twice a month during spring, fall, and winter, and once every 10 days as a MAPS (Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship) station during summer months. In the 2 days of April banding, we caught a total of 19 birds comprising 10 species. In addition, we are monitoring seven Barn Owl boxes placed at the Middle School, one of which currently contains an active nest with seven growing young owls. We banded all seven young from that clutch and continue to monitor the nest as part of further investigation into their breeding ecology.



The nesting season is especially apparent at the Carmel River Lagoon where we have embarked on a collaborative research project with California Polytechnic State University researchers, Dr. Francis Villablanca and Erica Lindgren, to study the demographics of riparian habitat focal species. Data combined from nest monitoring, mist-netting, and surveys (area searches) will help us to determine the success of restoration efforts being carried out by Caltrans. Assistant BSOL Coordinator, Jason Scott, is our star nest searcher, and has located several nests already, including Song Sparrows, Warbling Vireos, and Black-headed Grosbeaks.

Upcoming Events and Projects

This year the American Birding Association (ABA) is challenging counties across the nation to tally as many bird species as possible in a 24-hour period. The Big Sur Ornithology Lab, the Monterey Peninsula Audubon Society, and the Wild Bird Center of Monterey have joined

forces to meet this challenge. We invite your participation in our Tenth Annual Bird-A-Thon to make Monterey County famous as "America's Birdiest County" and to support BSOL's important bird conservation efforts. In hopes of recruiting as many observers as possible to see the most species, we selected the 24-hour count period beginning Friday May 2nd at 4 p.m. and ending Saturday May 3rd at 4 p.m.

We're very excited to begin five new MAPS stations this breeding season along the Carmel River from May 1st through August 8th. Sites include the Carmel River Lagoon, Carmel Middle School, and three riparian sites within the Carmel River Watershed. In addition, we will begin our spring bird surveys in the East Molera Grasslands to continue collecting baseline data prior to grasslands restoration.

New Arrivals: BSOL staff

Welcome to interns, Mark Fogg and Eric Miller! Mark joined BSOL for spring migration and has tallied life-species, such as Nuttall's Woodpecker, Pacific-Coast Flycatcher, and Allen's Hummingbird, almost daily. Mark finished his B.S. in applied ecology from Michigan Technological University last May. His final semester was spent studying oceanography on the Pacific coast of Vancouver, Canada. Returning to the great lakes, Mark spent a second summer helping a PhD candidate with an avian demographics project among islands off the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore in Michigan. As an undergrad, Mark enjoyed countless hours in the field through laboratory and research involvements. Though Mark is fascinated by most all natural sciences, he admits ornithology, specifically the near-passerine, is his taxonomic bias.



Eric Miller joins the BSOL crew this month fresh from completing a bachelor's degree in Environmental Studies at the University of California, Santa Cruz. A California native, Eric has also lived in American Samoa and Guam, but most recently hails from Santa Cruz. A lifelong student of the natural world, he is excited to be working at his first "real" job here in Big Sur and hopes that it will lead to other exciting adventures in the future. Eric is a blossoming ornithologist and we're lucky to have him on our crew this summer.

Visit Us!

We have resumed our banding schedule of five days a week at Andrew Molera State Park and our door is always open. We run the nets, weather permitting, for five hours each day beginning fifteen minutes after sunrise, Tuesday through Saturday. (Note: the lab will be closed on Saturday, May 10th.) Please call ahead before visiting if the skies threaten rain. For more information, feel free to contact Sarah Hamilton (Big Sur Ornithology Lab Coordinator) at 831-624-1202 or e-mail her at SarahStock@VentanaWS.org. Happy Spring and we look forward to seeing you!

BSOL Update, March 2003:

March was a month of many beginnings and endings. Spring began on March 21 (according to the calendar). Winter rains are probably over and the river won't rise again (not too much, that is). The first Wilson's Warblers began arriving, and the Hermit Thrushes, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, and Myrtle Warblers are gearing up for northern flights. Violet-green Swallows and Tree Swallows have returned and are circling over the lab most of the day. Breeding morphology (cloacal protuberances and brood patches) is beginning to show itself almost daily, however, nest-building has been going on in earnest all month, accompanied by much melodious singing by House Wrens, Purple Finches, Wrentits, Song Sparrows, Wilson's Warblers, and Orange-crowned Warblers.



Except for a few straggling "flyers" the monarch butterflies have left their central California coast overwintering grounds (we are left with the winter's data to analyze). They have been replaced by a multitude of orange-tips, blues, whites, elfins, swallowtails, admirals, skippers, and duskywings. California poppies are "popping" out everywhere. Western fence lizards are doing their push-ups on the ground and up the walls. Northward migrating gray whales may still be seen spouting water off Molera Point. Summer fog is just beginning.

Mist-Netting and Banding



We had a total of 8 banding days in March, totaling 88 captures (26 species, up from each of the last 2 months) for an average daily census of 11 captures. Hermit Thrush was the most frequent species in our nets (20 captures), followed by Ruby-crowned Kinglet (10 captures, all females), Chestnut-backed Chickadee (8), Wilson's Warbler (6, all males), and Myrtle Warbler (5). On March 25, we banded our first Common

Yellowthroat of the season, a very colorful adult male. We hadn't captured another Common Yellowthroat at the Andrew Molera State Park site since last November 4.

We are pleased to note the observation of breeding morphology in a California Thrasher male, two Chestnut-backed Chickadee females, and two Spotted Towhee males. One of the Chestnut-backed Chickadees was a recaptured female first banded here at BSOL last March 30: she also showed a brood patch at the time of banding. Please note that last month we may have missed reporting the momentous occasion of our very first observation of the year of breeding morphology in a captured bird: on February 25, we captured an adult female Bushtit with a brood patch.

Our first captures of Wilson's Warblers for the year were two birds on March 18, and another four birds on March 24, all males. One of the

Wilson's Warblers captured on March 24 was a recaptured bird first banded here at BSOL in August of 2001. Also in March, we captured three Orange-crowned Warblers and three female Allen's Hummingbirds. Of note was the recapture on March 25 of a 5-year-old (or older) Golden-crowned Sparrow first banded here at BSOL in October 1998.

BSOL Staff

BSOL says hello and welcome to intern Robin Hunnewell. Robin joined the BSOL field crew in mid-month. Before coming to Big Sur, she worked as a MAPS bander for Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences in southeastern Massachusetts, mist-netting neotropical migrants during Spring and Fall. Robin is from Massachusetts, a graduate of Bowdoin College in Maine, and holds a Master's Degree in anthropology from Australian National University in Canberra. A life-long interest in animal behavior led Robin to enter the field of ornithology, but her varied background also includes experience as an assistant producer for National Public Radio in Boston and a researcher for a liaison organization on Indigenous Rights to the United Nations in New York. Robin hopes to one day be a responsible adult, and she strives daily for this purpose. Good luck on your quest, Robin!

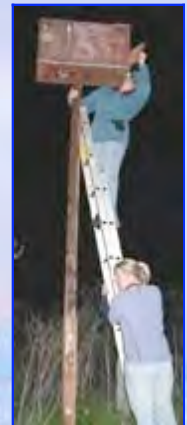


We are deeply saddened by the death of our dear friend George Kuska of Salinas last on March 25. His cheerful presence will be sorely missed. George joined us at the study site in Andrew Molera State Park on most Thursdays, taking photos of birds in the lab, chatting with visitors and school children, and occasionally trekking out to the nets with us to photograph the action and help carry birds back for banding. We had the enormous pleasure of sharing with George his love for nature, and we pledge to continue on his behalf to work toward more understanding and protection of the natural resources of Monterey Bay and the entire central California coast. A retired architect from Porterville, George was 81 years old.

Other Ornithology Projects

BSOL continued its twice-a-month offsite banding project at the Carmel Middle School (CMS) in collaboration with Craig Hohenberger. Species captured consisted mostly of Golden-crowned and White-crowned Sparrows; the highlight was several Song Sparrows in full breeding condition. In addition to the routine mist-netting and banding, we checked Barn Owl nest boxes for owls/eggs and were rewarded with two clutches of eggs and one little nestling!

A final report of our second annual avian community assessment at the East Molera grassland study site in Andrew Molera State Park (in collaboration with California Department of Parks and Recreation) has been submitted to CDPR for review and comment. Six study sites within the



grasslands were 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. We hope to continue monitoring the East Molera Grasslands for many years to come.

Project Monarch Alert

The monarch butterfly tagging is finished. Now, we wait for the phone calls. We have received some already, but more help is needed for the next several weeks. So, keep your eyes open for the tagged monarchs. If you see a tagged butterfly, call the toll free number (1-877-897-7740) and report the 5-digit number, sighting location, and your contact information. Your information can help us figure out the missing pieces to the monarch butterfly migration puzzle.

Big Sur Ornithology Lab Schedule

In April we are resuming banding 5 days each week (every day except Sunday and 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. See you soon and don't forget your binoculars!

BSOL Update, February 2003:

Mild weather consisting of lots of sun and little rain this month enabled banders at the Big Sur Ornithology Lab (BSOL) to cross the Big Sur River without the help of the famous [chair and pulley system](#)! Each morning two people pulled up their pant legs, put on their sandals, and hoped that the water wasn't too cold, or too high, to cross by foot. Despite the chill and the rapid waters, each crossing was completed successfully!

Mist-Netting and Banding



Although we kept up with the schedule and mist-netted two days per week this month, several banding hours were lost due to gusting wind and intermittent rain at the Molera study site. In eight days of banding, we captured 173 individuals of 21 species. For comparison, last February 2002, we captured 112 individuals of 23 species. As with the past few months, the "Most Frequently Captured Bird Award" goes to the Myrtle Warbler, with 83 individuals captured. Ruby-crowned Kinglets were a distant second with 14 captures! Other frequent captures included Wrentits (8), Spotted Towhees (7), Fox Sparrows and Golden-crowned Sparrows (6 each), and Song Sparrows (7).

Carmel Middle School

BSOL continued its offsite banding project at the Carmel Middle School (CMS) in collaboration with Craig Hohenberger. Species captured consisted mostly of White-crowned and Golden-crowned Sparrows; the highlight was a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher. In addition to the routine mist-netting and banding, we spent one day resighting color banded sparrows and maintaining the study area, which entailed clearing vegetation and stabilizing guy lines. Meanwhile, BSOL is gearing up for a Barn Owl study with CMS and spent one night this month checking nest boxes for owls/eggs. To our surprise, egg laying had already begun in one of the nest boxes!



Project Monarch Alert



With spring approaching and the numbers of over-wintering monarch butterflies diminishing, weekly surveys are coming to an end. While there were over 3,000 butterflies surveyed in Pacific Grove during December and January, the last survey of February uncovered only 10 butterflies. The butterflies are clearly on the move, so be sure to keep your eyes open for the tagged monarchs. If you see a tagged butterfly, call the toll free number (1-877-897-7740) and report the 5-digit number, sighting location, and your contact information. Your information can help us figure out the missing pieces to the monarch butterfly migration puzzle. (See the [November 2002 Lab Update](#) for a photograph of a tagged butterfly.)

Snowy Plovers

Joining the Monterey Bay Snowy Plover Conservation Project headed up by Point Reyes Bird Observatory (P.R.B.O.), BSOL biologists began scouring the Monterey Bay beaches for snowy plovers in an on-going study to monitor their local populations. Because of increased human pressures, particularly walkers, joggers, and their dogs, we weren't surprised when we didn't observe any snowy plovers. We will be assisting this monitoring project through May.



Other Activities

Field ornithology often involves patient waiting. And although we are dedicated scientists and naturalists, trying to make the best use of such downtime by studying our reference books, cleaning up our field notebooks, repairing various gear, etc., etc., etc., our minds do wander. During February, some of us found our minds wandering into some strange territory --- silly little riddles began popping into our heads. It has

been entertaining, and we thought some of you might like to join the fun. A few of our clever little "gems" are presented below. We will provide answers next month. In the meantime, feel free to send us whatever you can come up with, and we will share the best ones with our readers of next month's update.

1. What species would be helpful in cleaning up a big mess in the kitchen?
2. What species can never remember the words to a song?
3. What species (other than Steller's Jay and European Starling) might you expect to encounter at the planetarium?
4. What species is like a "candle in the wind"?

In March we will continue banding at Andrew Molera State Park two days a week. Unpredictable weather often causes last-minute schedule changes, so please call ahead before visiting. For more information, feel free to contact Sarah Hamilton (BSOL Coordinator) at 831-624-1202 or e-mail her at SarahStock@VentanaWS.org. See you soon and don't forget your binoculars!

BSOL Update, January 2003:



The month of January has brought mild temperatures and lots of sun to Big Sur. Wildflowers are blooming and the Spotted Towhees and Song Sparrows have started singing. Allen's Hummingbirds have arrived and are displaying vigorously. Here at the Big Sur Ornithology Lab (BSOL) we took advantage of the beautiful weather and didn't miss a day of banding, despite the fact that the December rains made crossing the Big Sur River a challenge.

Mist-Netting and Banding

Thanks to the agreeable weather, we were able to band birds every week this month at our Molera study site. In 10 days of January banding, we caught a total of 260 individuals of 23 species. As in November and December, the most frequently captured species were Myrtle Warbler and Ruby-crowned Kinglet. Uncommon captures included Sharp-shinned Hawk (2), Red-breasted Sapsucker (4), Steller's Jay (1), Winter Wren (1), Orange-crowned Warbler (3), Spotted Towhee (1), and Lesser Goldfinch (1).



The BSOL continued its offsite banding project at Carmel Middle School (CMS), in collaboration with Craig Hohenberger. During the three days of banding at CMS, a total of 77 individuals of 17 species were captured. We continued our color-banding/resighting study by color-banding Golden-crowned Sparrows, White-crowned Sparrows, and Song Sparrows. The middle school students will be resighting color-banded sparrows to gather data on longevity.

Project Monarch Alert



This month, in collaboration with Dr. Dennis Frey and Shawna Stevens of California Polytechnic Institute, we tagged over 700 monarch butterflies in one day, bringing the total number of tagged butterflies this winter to 4,500 in Monterey County. We continued our weekly surveys of butterfly populations at seven overwintering sites up and down the California coast from Pacific Grove to Pacific Valley. BSOL biologists observed monarchs mating at several sites, indicating that the butterflies may be gearing up to disperse for the season.

You can help in the quest to learn more about monarch butterfly migration pathways, as well as movements among habitats. It's simple; all you have to do is look a little more closely at the next monarch butterfly you see fluttering beautifully in the breeze. If it has a tag on its hind wing, please call the toll-free phone number on the tag (1-877-897-7740) and report the 5-digit number, location of the butterfly sighting, and your contact information. With the assistance of observant and caring people such as you, we can figure out the missing pieces to the monarch butterfly migration puzzle. Visit our Monarch Alert website for more information: <http://www.bio.calpoly.edu/BioSci/Monarchs/>.

New Arrivals

Becky Imdieke arrived in Big Sur in mid-January from Hawaii where she worked on an avian malaria project. While in Hawaii, her job duties included mist-netting and banding Hawaiian forest birds, as well as mosquito collection. The job in Hawaii was Becky's first introduction to ornithology, and working at BSOL will be a great introduction to Western birds. Becky grew up in Minnesota and earned a B.S. in Biology and Geology from the University of Wisconsin - Eau Claire. Welcome Becky!



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