



Ventana Wildlife Society  
**BIG SUR ORNITHOLOGY  
LAB**  
Lab Updates for 2004



BSOL Winter Crew

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**BSOL Update, December 2004:**



The final month of 2004 was full of crisp, bright days interspersed with a few healthy downpours. The hillsides and meadows of Andrew Molera State Park became a lush and vibrant green, contrasting with the wintry grey of leafless willows and cottonwoods. As the wild denizens of the park settled into familiar winter routines, the BSOL crew began to look forward to a break from routine, migrating to various locations across the country for the winter holidays at the end of the month. First, however, we wrapped up another beautiful and exciting year of songbird research in Big Sur.



As the wild denizens of the park settled into familiar winter routines, the BSOL crew began to look forward to a break from routine, migrating to various locations across the country for the winter holidays at the end of the month. First, however, we wrapped up another beautiful and exciting year of songbird research in Big Sur.

**Mist-Netting and Bird Banding at Andrew Molera State Park**

Winter is always a relatively quiet time for songbird research in the temperate zones of the planet, and December at BSOL was no exception. We captured a total of 210 individuals of 24 species. Our most frequently captured species was **Myrtle Warbler** (66 individuals); other commonly captured species included **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** (43 individuals) and **Hermit Thrush** (34 individuals). Despite our typically low winter capture rates, we weren't without a few exciting and unusual captures, including a **Red-breasted Sapsucker**, a **Sharp-shinned Hawk**, and our prize capture for the month, a **Swamp Sparrow** (17th BSOL capture ever!).



**Mist-netting/Banding at Carmel Middle School (CMS)**

Our monthly two days of avian research and science education at the

Carmel Middle School focused on physics and physiology, as students learned how birds fly and how they cope with aquatic environments. While gulls, hawks and pigeons flew overhead, demonstrating different wing loadings and aspect ratios, songbirds captured in mist nets served as close-up models of wing and feather shape, reduced mass and energy-saving flap-glide patterns of flight. While we discussed the physics of flight with the students, we banded 66 birds of 11 species. The most commonly captured species at the middle school was **Golden-crowned Sparrow** (30 individuals), and our most exciting capture by far was a **Pygmy Nuthatch** -- only our second capture ever at any of our sites!

## Big Sur Christmas Bird Count

The Big Sur Christmas Bird Count was conducted on December 19th, and members of the BSOL crew were happy to participate, searching a roughly 3-mile stretch of coastline from 7:30 in the morning to 3:30 that afternoon. We observed a total of 70 species, including **Golden-crowned Kinglet, Surfbird, Say's Phoebe, Spotted Sandpiper, American Pipit, Myrtle and Audubon's Warbler, Townsend's Warbler, Black Oystercatcher, Eared Grebe, Brown Pelican, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Peregrine Falcon, Sanderling, Ruddy Duck**, and a variety of sparrows, gulls and cormorants.



## Avian Surveys in East Molera Grasslands

BSOL and California State Parks biologists have begun another round of grassland bird surveys in six plots in the East Molera Grasslands as part of a program to evaluate planned native plant restoration efforts. As with our other avian research, these winter surveys yielded relatively low numbers of species and individuals. Birds sighted included **Golden-crowned and White-crowned Sparrows, Loggerhead Shrikes, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Yellow-rumped Warblers, House Finches, Western Scrub-jays, California Thrashers and Blue-grey Gnatcatchers.**

## Monarch Butterfly Monitoring

Monarch numbers continued to increase overall during December. There was an initial decrease after storms swept through Monterey county at the beginning of the month, causing the total number of butterflies at all eight overwintering sites to drop down to around 40,000. This decrease in numbers normally occurs after intense storms, as the high winds and driving rain knock some butterflies from their clusters. But what amazes us time after time is how many butterflies do manage to hang on despite the fury of the elements, and how almost without fail, the butterflies

reform their clusters after a short time. Sure enough, during the second and third weeks of the month, the butterflies rebounded, and at last count (right before Christmas) there were about 57,000 Monarch butterflies at all eight sites combined.

## Outreach and Education



Despite the unpredictable winter weather, school groups continued to visit the Research and Education Center at Andrew Molera State Park. We were delighted to welcome on consecutive days a group of seventh-graders from Salesian Sisters School and a group of fourth-graders from Tularcitos Elementary School. The students joined us as we checked our mist-nets, and crowded into the lab to watch us band the birds we captured. Their wide-eyed wonder and intelligent questions made it clear that there were more than a few budding naturalists in each class!

## Comings and Goings

In mid-December we bid farewell to intern Tara Hall, who returned to Spokane, Washington to spend the holidays with her family. In January she will return to her studies at The Evergreen State College in Olympia, WA, where she will be taking courses in ecology and animal behavior. Tara came to us with absolutely no experience in studying birds, and did an admirable job of learning a wide variety of skills very quickly. She was an asset to our program throughout the fall, and we will miss her. Good luck, Tara!

In the first week of December we were joined by Ann Graham, who will be interning at BSOL through June. Ann is a native of the San Francisco Bay Area and grew up primarily in Oakland. She has one more quarter left to complete a Bachelor's of Science in Biology and Statistics at California State University at



Hayward where her emphasis was on Wildlife Biology. In the summer and fall of 2003, Ann worked on the Channel Island, San Clemente, nest-searching Sage Sparrows as well as monitoring the highly endangered San Clemente Loggerhead Shrike. This past fall she banded songbirds at Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences in the Cape Cod area of Massachusetts. Having enjoyed the experience so much she feels fortunate to be able to get an opportunity to band western song birds here at the Big Sur Ornithology Lab. Welcome, Anne!

## Welcome!

We are continuing our rainy day banding schedule, and will be banding

only two to three 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 email Jessica at [JessicaGriffiths@VentanaWS.org](mailto:JessicaGriffiths@VentanaWS.org) on the day you plan to visit to confirm that we are here to welcome you.

### BSOL Update, November 2004:

Daylight savings time has ended, and the days are getting increasingly chilly as we move towards the shortest day of the year. Frost has begun to grace the ground with sparkling white filigree in the early mornings at Andrew Molera State Park. We see far fewer mammals roaming the park these days, and those we do see are fat and woolly, preparing to pass the winter as warmly and comfortably as possible. All of the fall migrating birds have finished passing through, and our winter residents have settled in.



**Ruby-crowned Kinglets** and **Yellow-rumped Warblers** are abundant, and it is almost impossible to walk anywhere in the park without hearing their chipping calls and burbling chatter. **Pine Siskins** are uncommonly abundant in our study areas this year, and large flocks of them can be seen and heard daily, winging through the tops of the cottonwoods and redwoods. These small seed-eating birds normally prefer higher montane areas, but if the seed crop is poor at higher elevations, they will move in large groups to lowland areas in search of winter food -- a phenomenon referred to as irruption. We have also been lucky to see a **Nashville Warbler**, **White-throated Sparrow**, **California Condor** and a pair of **Golden Eagles** right from the front steps of the lab!

### Mist-Netting and Bird Banding at Andrew Molera State Park



Despite operating the banding lab for only 10 days due to our winter schedule and several stormy days, we still captured 406 birds of 21 species, largely thanks to a 71-bird day in mid-November! **Yellow-rumped Warblers** were the most frequently caught species with 152 banded this month. **Ruby-crowned Kinglets** were a close second, with 104 banded this month. A few members of the large **Pine Siskin** flocks frequenting the study area were also captured; a total of 10 **Pine Siskins** were banded this month, the second highest number banded in a month at BSOL! Other captures of note include the first **American Goldfinch** this year and three **Sharp-shinned Hawks**.

## Mist-netting/Banding at Carmel Middle School (CMS)

BSOL biologists spent two days banding songbirds and teaching research techniques and ecology to students at Carmel Middle School (CMS). During these two days the students were able to observe several varieties of birds and get familiar with the basic principles of our research as we banded 61 birds of 17 species. Our most common captures were **Yellow-rumped Warblers** (11 individuals), followed by **Golden-crowned Sparrows** (9 individuals), and **Bewick's Wrens** (8 individuals). Our most exciting capture at the middle school in November was our fifth ever **Red-breasted Nuthatch** -- the first of that species caught at any of our sites since 2000. Like the Pine Siskin, **Red-breasted Nuthatches** are an irruptive species. They can sometimes appear in our study sites during invasion years, but almost never find their way into our nets. We were also fortunate enough to observe an uncommon **Clay-colored Sparrow**, who spent about twenty minutes foraging in one of the platform feeders at the CMS Habitat amphitheater. Although it didn't fly into any of our nets, we got a good look at it as it joined the throng of **White-crowned** and **Golden-crowned Sparrows** at the feeder.



## Monarch Butterfly Project

The Big Sur Ornithology Lab has begun its fourth year surveying overwintering Monarch butterfly populations and researching the ecology of these fascinating and often mysterious butterflies on their wintering grounds. We monitor eight sites in Monterey County, extending from the Pacific Grove Monarch Sanctuary in the north to Plaskett Creek in the south. In order to cover this wide survey area, the BSOL crew splits into two groups once a week to head to their respective study sites. We arrive at each site early in the morning while temperatures are still cool and the butterflies still clustered, and begin estimating how many butterflies are clustered on each tree. Sometimes this can be a bit overwhelming because there are tens of thousands of Monarchs at some sites! Thanks to last month's Monarch workshop, however, all of our biologists have quickly become accustomed to staring into the trees for three or four hours at a time, counting the butterflies like one estimates jelly beans in a jar. So far our counts are a bit lower than last year's totals, but the numbers are still quite healthy. Our total count of all eight sites for the last week of November (often referred to as the Thanksgiving Count) was 54,481 butterflies.



## Monarch Madness

The Ventana Wildlife Society (VWS) was delighted to be a part of the

first annual Monarch Madness event, which took place at the Pacific Grove Museum of Natural History on Saturday November 27th. Monarch enthusiasts and experts of many sorts were present, providing information on everything from Monarch breeding biology, to planting butterfly-friendly gardens, to Monarch conservation and research. Big Sur Ornithology Lab Assistant Coordinator Nelli Thorngate and intern Tara Hall staffed a table at the event, and were glad to answer questions from festival attendees regarding the Monarch research being conducted by BSOL. The affair was a great success and VWS looks forward to being involved in next year's Monarch celebration as well.

## Welcome!

Due to the onset of winter weather, we will be banding only two days a week at Andrew Molera State Park starting in November and continuing through March. As a result, the lab may not be open on a given day. So, please either call us at (831) 624-1202, or email Jessica Griffiths at [JessicaGriffiths@VentanaWS.org](mailto:JessicaGriffiths@VentanaWS.org) on the day you plan to visit to confirm that we are here to welcome you.

### BSOL Update, October 2004:

The autumn equinox has passed us by, and October witnessed the days becoming noticeably shorter and cooler. October graced us with two significant rainstorms, leaving the landscape clean and bright and the river full and fast. Our footbridge was removed for the winter season, so we were back to fording the Big Sur River each time we check our mist-nets -- out came the rubber boots and rain pants (or Texas and shorts)! Young grasses and annual herbs tentatively poked their tips out of the soil, while the deciduous trees along the banks of the river began to shed their golden leaves. The Swallowtail and Lorquin's Admiral butterflies of summer entirely gave way to droves of Monarch Butterflies who began to settle into their nearby overwintering groves.



**White-crowned and Golden-crowned Sparrows, Yellow-rumped Warblers, and Chestnut-backed Chickadees** dominated the avian landscape during October, but we were also treated to a number of exciting vagrants, both around the lab and in our nets. Interesting sightings during October included **Magnolia Warblers, Nashville Warblers, Red-breasted Sapsuckers, Western Tanagers, and Tennessee Warblers**. October was also our final month of full-time banding until next March. Beginning November 1, we reduce our banding frequency to 2 days per week, and begin our Monarch butterfly research.

## Mist-Netting and Bird Banding at Andrew Molera State Park



It was an exciting month to be doing songbird research in Big Sur in October; fall migration didn't let us down this year! Some of our more noteworthy captures included **Magnolia Warbler**, **Nashville Warbler**, **Pine Siskin**, and **Dusky Flycatcher**. We were also given a special treat one morning when we found a **Western Screech Owl** waiting in one of our nets! Because these birds are entirely nocturnal, catching them during songbird mist-netting operations is almost unheard of -- this was a first-ever capture of this species for BSOL!

However, the most exciting capture by far was a tiny visitor from across the Pacific -- a hatch-year **Dusky Warbler**! This little old-world warbler typically spends its summers in East Asia and flies to Southeast Asia to winter. But occasionally they make their way across the Bering Strait and end up in Alaska or, very, very rarely, in California. This was another first for the BSOL database! Our most abundant capture last month was the **Hermit Thrush** (176 individuals), followed closely by **Golden-crowned Sparrow** (110 individuals). Other commonly captured species included **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** (42 individuals), **White-crowned Sparrow** (36 individuals), and **Bewick's Wren** (32 individuals). By the end of October, we had captured and banded 600 individuals of 38 species.



### **Mist-netting/Banding at Carmel Middle School (CMS)**

BSOL biologists spent three days in October at the Carmel Middle School, helping students learn scientific principles by demonstrating our songbird research process. Several students had seen the process before, but for many it was a new experience; regardless, everyone seemed to be fascinated by bird banding. Our most commonly captured species at CMS last month was **Golden-crowned Sparrow** (19 individuals), followed by **Bewick's Wren** (15 individuals), and **White-crowned Sparrow** (12 individuals). Overall, we captured 69 birds of 11 species.

### **Banding at the Carmel River Lagoon**



October was our last month of banding for the season at the Carmel River Lagoon and was par for the course, with the exception of one very unusual capture -- a hatch-year **Palm Warbler**. Aside from that excitement, captures were low and unremarkable. Our most frequently captured species was **Hermit Thrush** (8 individuals). Other commonly captured species were **Yellow-rumped Warbler** (6 individuals) and **Song Sparrow** (5 individuals). Overall, we captured 41 birds of 15 species before saying farewell to our River Lagoon banding site for another year.

## Monarch Butterfly Workshop

In preparation for another winter of Monarch Butterfly monitoring along the central coast of California, BSOL was pleased to host our Third Annual Monarch Butterfly Workshop/Symposium at Andrew Molera State Park in Big Sur. We were joined by a number of scientists and Monarch enthusiasts from around California, plus one participant who traveled all the way from Portland, Oregon for the event! The group was diverse, including several monarch biologists, members of the Xerces society, California State Park employees and volunteers, and docents from several different California Monarch sites. We spent the morning in a Monarch grove at Andrew Molera, teaching protocols for estimating numbers of clustered butterflies, collecting weather data, and measuring other habitat characteristics. A delicious breakfast was provided by Whole Foods of Monterey, with Conservation Coffee donated by Uncommon Grounds. After breakfast and the monitoring workshop, we adjourned to the Ventana Wildlife Society (VWS) field office for presentations and discussions. The initial discussions took place during a fabulous lunch (also provided by Whole Foods), after which we began a series of conversations about how to use the data we learned how to collect earlier in the day. We finished the day with three presentations on Monarchs and their overwintering habitat. Nelli Thorngate of BSOL presented 3 years of data on tree species selection by Monarchs in response to severe weather. Stewart Weiss presented an analysis of microclimate features of two Monterey county Monarch groves, which was used to develop management plans for each of the groves. And Cynthia Brock, Mayor of the new Santa Barbara County city of Goleta and an Ellwood Grove activist, presented an update on the acquisition of property to protect the Ellwood Monarchs and their overwintering groves. We were all inspired by the positive discussion that ensued during the afternoon, and we are eager to take up our respective winter monitoring projects!



## Comings and Goings



This month we said farewell to BSOL Coordinator Sarah Stock, who departed in mid-October, shortly before becoming the proud mom of a beautiful baby girl! Sarah joined VWS as BSOL Coordinator in 2001, and she has made BSOL what it is today. For three years, Sarah welcomed visitors to the lab with a smile, sharing her enthusiasm and sense of wonder with people young and old. She shared her love of birds with visitors, staff, and interns alike, and anyone who listened to her talk came away with a greater appreciation for the natural wonders of our world. Sarah worked hard to create partnerships with local, regional, and state organizations to expand avian monitoring in Monterey County. Not only did she manage

the bird-banding program at Andrew Molera State Park, but she also oversaw research projects on the Carmel River, at Camp Roberts in the Salinas Valley, and at the Carmel Middle School. Sarah's friendliness and intelligence made BSOL a delightful and rewarding place to work, and her tireless devotion to improving the quality of our research has elevated BSOL and VWS to new heights of recognition and respect. We will miss her sorely, but wish her happiness and all the luck in the world!

Jessica Griffiths will be stepping up as interim Coordinator until the new Coordinator can begin work next June. Jessica joined BSOL in December of 2002, after holding a number of ornithology field positions throughout the United States. She has gained a wealth of experience since coming to work in Big Sur, and has been responsible for running all three of our off-site banding projects, as well as overseeing the crew at the field office in Big Sur. Jessica has developed a real passion for the organization and for the area and will make an excellent BSOL Coordinator. Nelli Thorngate will be providing invaluable support in her position of interim Assistant Coordinator. Having been involved with BSOL since December of 2002, Nelli has developed deep ties to the organization, and hopes to do everything she can to enhance the research and conservation activities at BSOL.

## Welcome!

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### BSOL Update, September 2004:



The long, slow days of summer have passed us by, and September brought with it the glorious clear days of autumn on the Central Coast as well as the official beginning of fall. The air is both crisper and quieter as the earth tilts the



Northern hemisphere into shorter, cooler days, and the denizens of Andrew Molera State Park begin the serious business of settling down for the coming winter. Fall migration is now in full swing, and during September the biologists at the Big Sur Ornithology Lab were kept busy with Neotropical migrants working their way south. We watched the passage of a steady stream of **Pacific-slope Flycatchers**, **Yellow Warblers**, **Lincoln's Sparrows** and **Warbling Vireos** making their way to their tropical overwintering grounds, while our summer

regulars like **Wilson's Warblers**, **Orange-crowned Warblers**, **Black-headed Grosbeaks** and **Swainson's Thrushes** had all but disappeared by the end of the month. Although sorry to see our breeding season residents depart, we were delighted to see the return of many winter residents, including **Golden-crowned** and **White-crowned Sparrows**, **Townsend's Warblers**, **Hermit Thrushes** and **Ruby-crowned Kinglets**. Fall was also heralded by the return of the earliest overwintering Monarch butterflies, who have begun to aggregate in their favored groves.

## Mist-Netting and Bird Banding at Andrew Molera State Park

The number of birds captured in September increased from last month to 473 birds of 44 species. Our most frequently captured bird was again the **Pacific-slope Flycatcher** (113 captures). Other frequently captured species included **Bewick's Wren** (54 captures), **Warbling Vireo** (31 captures), **Song Sparrow** (29 captures), **Yellow Warbler** (28 captures) and **Lincoln's Sparrow** (24 captures). Although fall migration doesn't yield the same sort of "Molera Madness" that occurs during the spring, during September BSOL caught and banded several less common migrants including **Clay-colored Sparrow** (7th BSOL record), **Black-throated Grey Warbler**, **Cassin's Vireo**, **Lazuli Bunting**, **Yellow-breasted Chat** and -- most exciting by far -- **Least Flycatcher** (4th BSOL record).



A particularly exciting capture this month was an adult **Red-shouldered Hawk**! It was only the fifth time we've ever caught this magnificent raptor. We also banded a young male **Belted Kingfisher**, the first one captured this year. Based on our captures so far, we're looking forward to an exciting, species-rich autumn!



## Research and Education at the Carmel Middle School



As many of you may remember, September also means the beginning of the school year, so we have resumed our songbird research program at Carmel Middle School. BSOL biologists conduct bird banding at the CMS Biological Sciences Project twice per month, providing the opportunity for middle school students to watch the mist-netting and bird banding process, and learn important scientific skills such as observation, critical thinking, and accurate data collection. During September, we caught 38 birds of 16 species at the Middle School. Our most commonly captured species were **Bewick's Wren** (8 captures), **Yellow Warbler** (7 captures), and **Puget Sound White-crowned Sparrow** (5 captures). The highlight of last month's

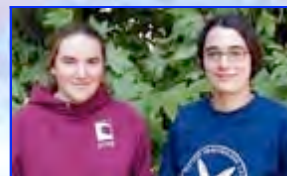
banding at the Middle School came when we captured an immature male **Cooper's Hawk**. Most species captured were newly-arrived winter residents like **Golden-crowned Sparrows** and **Fox Sparrows**, or year-round residents such as **Downy Woodpeckers**, **Song Sparrows** and **Chestnut-backed Chickadees**.

## **Songbird Research at the Carmel River Lagoon**

While captures at our Big Sur and Carmel Middle School sites are on the increase, the numbers of birds captured each banding day at the Carmel River Lagoon continue to stay quite low; in September we captured only 37 birds of 14 species. Our most frequent customers were **Song Sparrow** (10 captures), **Yellow Warbler** (6 captures) and **Bewick's Wren** (4 captures). Since life at the Carmel River Lagoon banding station has been slow, the biologists working that site entertain themselves by birding the mouth of the Carmel River in between checking the nets, where they have caught glimpses of a **Blue Grosbeak**, **Northern Parulas**, **Black-throated Grey Warblers**, and other fall migrants. When not keeping tabs on the transient population of songbirds, we have been observing with great curiosity the unfolding of the new restoration effort on the lagoon -- we anticipate that it will provide improved and diverse habitat for songbirds in coming years.

## **Welcome to New and Returning Staff**

We are happy to welcome two new interns, Monika Parsons and Tara Hall! Tara Hall has come to BSOL from The Evergreen State College in Olympia, WA, where she is in her senior year and on her way to receiving a Bachelor's of Science degree with a focus on Wildlife Biology. Tara has just finished up a summer internship at



Mt. Rainier National Park where she surveyed for the presence or absence of amphibian populations in lakes and streams and welcomes the transition to birds. Although this is Tara's first time working with birds and her first time being involved with mist-netting and banding, she is rapidly learning the many species in the area. She is doing her best to keep up with the data collection process, and is very grateful for the opportunity to get hands-on experience handling these precious animals. After her graduation this spring, Tara has her eyes set on attaining a Master's degree in Teaching from Seattle University and will use her experiences here to teach others the importance of avian research.

We would also like to welcome intern Monika Parsons back to BSOL after a three year absence. Monika is a Pacific Grove native who learned to band as a volunteer at BSOL while still in high school. Monika received her Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Oregon this past June. She double majored in Geography and Biology with an emphasis in Marine Biology. While in Oregon, Monika completed an honors thesis examining the affect of ocean conditions on the breeding success of a colony of Pelagic Cormorants. She comes to us after

spending the summer as a teaching assistant at the Oregon Institute of Marine Biology in Coos Bay.

## Welcome to Visitors

Visitors are always welcome at BSOL. We band 5 days a week at Andrew Molera State Park, Tuesdays through Saturdays, beginning 15 minutes after dawn and continuing for 5 hours. Currently, we operate the nets from about 7:30 am to 12:30 pm. For more information, please contact BSOL Interim Coordinator, Jessica Griffiths, at (831) 624-1202. See you soon, and don't forget your binoculars!

### BSOL Update, August 2004:

In Big Sur, the month of August encompasses the end of the breeding season and the beginning of fall migration. The chorus of bird song that typically ushers in a day at the Big Sur Ornithology Lab becomes quieted, and only a few persistent **Song Sparrows** and **Wrentits** continue to sing. Every now and then, young **Black-headed Grosbeaks**, **Hutton's Vireos**, and **Wilson's Warblers** try their hand at song and serenade us by practicing with their feeble voices. Fall migration is officially underway as summer residents depart and the earliest migrants arrive. **Black-headed Grosbeaks** and **Warbling Vireos** are already leaving to begin their long flights south, while **Townsend's Warblers** move into the area. Mixed-species flocks led by intrepid **Chestnut-backed Chickadees** and accompanied by warblers and vireos are foraging throughout the study area. In a wonderful turn of events, we were delighted to discover proof that the **Hooded Warblers** had nested successfully. A fledgling **Hooded Warbler** was spotted in the very same area where the male had been singing all summer! Most of the birds we captured this month were in various stages of molt and many birds were beginning to put on fat in preparation for their amazing migratory journeys to southern lands.

## Mist-Netting/Bird Banding at Andrew Molera State Park

Capture rates this month rose slightly from the lazy days of July. In August, we captured 331 birds of 35 species. Our most numerous capture by far was **Pacific-slope Flycatcher** (85), all of which were juvenile birds. Other frequent captures included **Wilson's Warbler** (44), **Bewick's Wren** (23), **Black-headed Grosbeak** (21), and **Chestnut-backed Chickadee** (20). We had several uncommon captures as juvenile birds from other habitats dispersed into the study area. The month started off with a treat when we captured a juvenile **Northern Saw-whet Owl** (only the 3rd ever BSOL capture). The little owl stuck around for a week before departing. Other dispersing juvenile birds included **Lazuli Bunting** (2), **Lark Sparrow** (1),



**Cassin's Vireo** (1), **Willow Flycatcher** (1), and **Brown Creeper** (3).



Particularly noteworthy was a juvenile **Black-throated Sparrow**, the first individual of that species ever banded at Molera! We were also lucky enough to catch an adult **Red-eyed Vireo** wandering through on its way south. In another fortunate turn of events, we recaptured both the male and female **Hooded Warblers** who nested successfully; only time will tell if we will capture their offspring.

### **Mist-Netting/Banding on the Carmel River**

The final week of MAPS banding along the Carmel River was dramatically different than the rest of the breeding season -- suddenly, bird movements were almost negligible and our capture rates plummeted. We captured 18 birds all told, and those individuals represented only 10 species. During the final day of banding at Red Rock we captured 8 birds of 5 species; our most frequently captured species was **Oregon Junco** (4). At the Schulte Bridge site, we captured 6 birds of 6 species - 100% diversity! At Rancho San Carlos, our last day of banding was the slowest of any banding day all summer - we captured 4 birds in total: 1 each of **Wrentit**, **Pacific-slope Flycatcher**, **Song Sparrow**, and **Bushtit**.

The songbird research at the Carmel River Lagoon will continue through the end of fall migration, but the breeding bird component of that study ended on August 6, when we captured 11 birds of 7 species. Even though mid-August marked the onset of fall dispersal and migration, captures remained low over the next three weeks, averaging a daily total of 9 birds of 7 species. Migrants began to show up from parts north, heralded by flocks of **Townsend's Warblers**. Hatch-year **Pacific-slope Flycatchers** were on the move, and the **Black-headed Grosbeaks** were almost all gone. Even the year-round residents were gearing up for fall -- **Chestnut-backed Chickadees** began forming large foraging flocks, which will host overwintering birds such as **Yellow-rumped Warblers** when they begin to arrive later in the season.



### **Avian and Vegetation Studies at Camp Roberts (Salinas Valley)**



This month marked the end of our avian monitoring work with the California Army National Guard at Camp Roberts. We were there for only two days at the beginning of the month, banding one last time at each of our stations and capturing 23 individuals of 9 species. The Salinas River site (15 birds of 6 species) was more productive than the Nacimiento River site (8 birds of 5 species), just as it was at the beginning of the season. Our most frequent capture this month

was **Song Sparrow** (8), followed by **Bewick's Wren** (4). Despite the very low bird activity, we did capture an adult and juvenile **Western Wood-Pewee** together on the Salinas River. At the Nacimiento site, we came across a young **Great Horned Owl** calling incessantly from its perch in a cottonwood tree while its parent dozed nearby. Now that we have completed all of our field work at Camp Roberts (bird banding, point counts, vegetation surveys, and **Bald Eagle** monitoring), we are busily negotiating our task list for getting through all the many reports that loom in our midst. While sitting in front of our computers, we tend to daydream about how much fun we had working at Camp Roberts this summer, and we hope that we can work with the California Army National Guard again next year to continue this remarkable study!

## Outreach and Education

Kids of all ages continued to enjoy the wonders of the natural world at Andrew Molera State Park during weekly visits to the BSOL field station by the Ventana Wildlife Society's Discovery Camp. Discovery Camp's summer fun came to an end in August, and so we bade farewell to the kids as they headed back to school. We know that they had as much fun learning about birds as we did teaching them and hope that some of the aspiring naturalists we met will take what they learned with them. We're sure that many a future BSOL intern will come from this summer's campers!

## Comings and Goings

The arrivals and departures in the bird community were mirrored by changes among our field crew this month. It was with a heavy heart that we bade farewell to two of the best interns BSOL has ever had. Alia Mukhida finished her internship on a high note when she banded the juvenile **Northern Saw-whet Owl** that we captured. She then headed back up to Nova Scotia to start medical school. We wish her the best of luck and know that she will conquer whatever challenges lie in her path (and we look forward to the day we can call on Doctor Mukhida!). Intern and birder-extraordinaire Rob Fowler also wrapped up his internship this month. After a birding trip down to Arizona, he returned to Humboldt State University to continue his undergraduate studies. As of this writing, Rob had not decided what facet of avian research to pursue for his senior thesis, but we know that he will succeed in whatever he chooses! Thank you Rob and Alia for a wonderful summer!



Independent contractor, Eric Miller, also finished his summer time with BSOL this month. Eric was instrumental in carrying out our work at Camp Roberts, and it was a pleasure to work with him. He has returned to help us out on several occasions with banding and point counts on the Carmel River, and we hope to see more of him in the future. Eric is the kind of guy you never want to lose from your workforce. Thank you

Eric!



Just as the fall migrants are returning to Molera, so is a certain intern. We are very pleased to welcome Matt Brady back to the BSOL flock. After finishing his fall internship with BSOL last December, Matt spent a good deal of time overseas. He traveled for three months in China and Thailand, where he saw over 500 species of colorful and exotic birds, including many that were new to him. He then returned to California for the spring quarter at UC Santa Cruz. After completing his third year at UCSC, Matt spent the early part of the summer working on a graduate student's thesis project in Mono County, on the eastern side of the Sierras. He also took a birding trip to southeast Arizona earlier this month where he saw many exciting species of birds. Matt rejoined the team in mid-August, and he is very much looking forward to another superb fall season in Big Sur.

## Welcome to Visitors

Visitors are always welcome at BSOL. We band 5 days a week at Andrew Molera State Park, Tuesdays through Saturdays, beginning 15 minutes after dawn and continuing for 5 hours. Currently, we operate the 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](mailto:SarahStock@VentanaWS.org). See you soon, and don't forget your binoculars!

### BSOL Update, July 2004:



The long, lazy days of summer have finally set in at the Big Sur Ornithology Lab. The typical central coast summer weather pattern of clammy fog in the morning followed by gloriously warm and sunny afternoons has become the norm. The air is heavy with the scent of drying vegetation. The proverbial "golden hills of California" brilliantly line the horizon surrounding the lab from north to southeast. The June excitement of frenetic breeding activity and surprise stopover migrants settled into a decidedly more subdued late breeding season routine in July. But the month was not entirely without surprises. The **Hooded Warblers** who dropped in last month decided to stick around; one of the males was heard singing in the study site consistently throughout the month, and it is possible that his mate was nesting somewhere nearby. Another **Hooded Warbler** was located by our miraculous intern, Rob Fowler, in early July, just upriver from the lab. Another fortunate Fowler find, the **Northern Parula** nest that Rob had spotted toward the end of June, was another source of unexpected delight. Sadly, the nest appears to have failed shortly after the chicks

hatched. Other than these anomalies, the last of the avian vagrants appear to have moved on. However, human vagrants -- visitors from all over the country (and the world) -- have increased steadily. Much to our delight (and inspiration), most children and adult visitors find themselves drawn instinctively to the wonder and value of our wildlife research.

Conveniently, the slow pace of the bird banding allows us more time to devote to these many visitors. Having a break from the hectic pace of spring migration also allows the naturalists and biologists at BSOL to turn their attention to the other fascinating animal species that inhabit the park, including dragonflies, butterflies, and on one memorable occasion, a mountain lion!

## Mist-Netting/Bird Banding at Andrew Molera State Park

Our capture rates at Molera decreased markedly this month, with a total of 294 birds of 29 species. Daily captures averaged 13 birds of 7 species, and we had a few days when we captured as few as only 3 birds!

The percentage of young birds skyrocketed to 88% (up from 58% last month), as fledglings of all of our local breeding species began their summer/fall dispersal. Our most frequently captured species was **Black-headed Grosbeak** (61 individuals), followed by **Song Sparrow** (49 individuals), **Wilson's Warbler** (48 individuals), and **Chestnut-backed Chickadee** (22 individuals). Our most exciting capture this month was...? Well, we didn't really have any particularly unusual captures this month, but of course all birds are unique and amazing creatures, and we ornithologists love even the most common ones! During July we delighted in our first captures of juveniles belonging to later breeders, such as **Black-headed Grosbeaks** and **Swainson's Thrushes**, and we marveled at the juvenile **Wilson's Warblers** who are already in their formative (post-juvinal) plumage and are gearing up to begin their first-ever journey to the neotropical south for the winter.



## Mist-Netting/Banding on the Carmel River

**Carmel River MAPS Stations.** While July capture rates slowed considerably at Molera, BSOL's study sites along the Carmel River remained steadily busy throughout the month. The Carmel River captures, akin to those at Molera, included a much higher proportion of young birds than last month, an indication that juvenile dispersal is well under way. Nesting season is coming to a close, and the short-distance and neotropical migrants that breed along the Carmel River are beginning preparations for their fall departure. Thus, the end of July brings us nearly to the end of the MAPS season, which concludes in the first week of August.



The Red Rock site in mid-Carmel Valley has become known affectionately as "the **Bushtit** site" because these tiny, fierce-looking little passerines seem to dominate the avian community there! At Red Rocks in July we captured 54 individuals of



12 species during two banding days. **Bushtit** was the most frequently captured species (14 individuals), with **Wilson's Warbler** coming in a close second (11 individuals). Our other most frequently captured species at Red Rock were **Black-headed Grosbeak** (7 individuals) and **Chestnut-backed Chickadee** (6 individuals).

The Schulte Bridge site continues to be much quieter than we expected based on last year's captures; last month we captured 53 individuals of 16 species. Our most frequently captured species were **Pacific-slope Flycatcher** (11 individuals), **Chestnut-backed Chickadee** (8 individuals), **Wilson's Warbler** (5 individuals) and **Hutton's Vireo** (4 individuals). The most interesting bird captured at the Schulte Bridge site in July was a juvenile female **Western Tanager**, who was likely dispersing from her natal site.

The Rancho San Carlos site has been our most surprising Carmel River site this year. In direct contrast to last year, this site has continued to yield the highest capture rates of any of the MAPS sites. The most memorable July day at Rancho San Carlos was in mid-July, when BSOL biologists captured 41 birds of 12 species; twenty-six of those birds were captured during one 40-minute interval! In three days of banding we captured 93 birds of 18 species. The most frequently captured species were **Song Sparrow** (17 individuals), **Wilson's Warbler** (16 individuals), **Bewick's Wren** (7 individuals), and **Pacific-slope Flycatcher** and **House Finch** (6 individuals each). Although the last July banding day was slower than molasses, we finally managed to catch the **Western Wood-Pewee** that sang directly over our heads all summer. This was our most exciting capture of the month at the Rancho San Carlos site!



**Carmel River Mouth.** The Carmel River Mouth banding site has presented several challenges this year, most notably wild pigs, angry yellow jackets, and howling coyotes. Things seem to be settling down again, and our once-weekly banding sessions proceed more or less without incident. Daily capture rates during four days of banding maintained a steady (if somewhat slow) pace, averaging 18 individuals of 7 species. The most frequently captured species included **Bewick's Wren** and **Pacific-slope Flycatcher** (13 individuals each), **Wilson's Warbler** (12 individuals), **Anna's Hummingbird** (11 individuals), and **Chestnut-backed Chickadee** (9 individuals). Between net runs, we observed fledgling **White-tailed Kites** and **Red-tailed Hawks**, or we ventured to the adjacent lagoon to watch the peeps that are just beginning to arrive as they make their way south.

### **Avian and Vegetation Studies at Camp Roberts (Salinas Valley)**

We continued our monitoring contract with the California Army National Guard at Camp Roberts in the Salinas Valley. Bird activity was much slower than last month, as the birds wrapped up the breeding season and

this year's fledglings dispersed. In six days of banding we captured a total of 72 birds of 18 species. Our most abundant capture by far was **Bewick's Wren** (21 individuals), followed by **Oak Titmouse** (8 individuals). In July, we captured the first **Wilson's Warbler** since May, a juvenile bird dispersing along the Salinas River. We also captured the first and likely only hummingbird of the season, an **Anna's Hummingbird** captured on the Salinas River. For the first time this summer, the Nacimiento River site (46 birds of 13 species) was more productive than the Salinas River site (26 birds of 13 species). This may be because at the Nacimiento site there is a small wetland area with standing water, which may be attractive to birds.



This month we wrapped up our point counts around Camp Roberts and continued monitoring the **Bald Eagles** along the Nacimiento River. While the **Bald Eagles** were not very



active, we did observe two **Golden Eagles** cooperatively hunting a rabbit. They were unsuccessful, but their attempts were amazing to watch. We also conducted the Riparian Habitat Evaluation, which involved identifying the vegetation found at our banding stations and point count locations. We had lots of fun learning about the plants of Camp Roberts, and we couldn't have done it without our local botanical experts (Thank you Mike and Ben!). We also made a new friend while doing habitat evaluation along the Salinas River: Fred the rooster, whom we discovered crowing for company at one of our point count locations. He followed us around happily, busily foraging while we completed our survey, but unfortunately we could not take him with us when we left. Hopefully we'll see you next time, Fred!

## Outreach and Education

The BSOL field station at Andrew Molera State Park continues to play host to many learners of all ages. Each Thursday we spend the morning with groups of kids from the Ventana Wildlife Society's Discovery Camp, showing them the delights of bird research and hopefully inspiring them to explore natural history in greater depth on their own. Each Saturday we also welcome California State Parks activity program participants who come to take part in a "Morning with the Songbirds", a bird banding demonstration and tour of our study area.



## Welcome to Visitors

Come and join us for banding while the juvenile birds are still plentiful! We are open to the public for morning banding demonstrations five days per week, Tuesday through Saturday. Because our summer schedule is busy, we recommend that visitors call or e-mail BSOL's Coordinator,

Sarah Stock, ahead of time to confirm that we are ready to welcome you. Sarah can be reached by phone at (831) 624-1202, or e-mail at [SarahStock@VentanaWS.org](mailto:SarahStock@VentanaWS.org). See you soon, and don't forget your binoculars!

### BSOL Update, June 2004:

Ahh June -- another month of transition here at Big Sur Ornithology Lab (BSOL). The cool breezes and chilly mornings of spring, which were full of migrant bird song, evolved into more temperate breezes and warm mornings of summer, with the resident breeders staking out their territories and working towards perpetuating their genes. Most of the stopover migrant songbirds fueled up and moved out to their more northerly breeding grounds, giving way to the summer and resident breeders. Baby Chestnut-backed Chickadees, Wilson's Warblers, Song Sparrows, Black-headed Grosbeaks, and Nuttall's Woodpeckers were popping up everywhere, including in the mist nets. As we walked the net lanes, above our heads Blue-eyed Darners, Wandering Gliders, and Red Saddlebag Dragonflies hawked the abundant insects of summer. Western and Pale Tiger Swallowtails, Satyr Sommas, Acmon Blues, and Spring Azure Butterflies glided by on the summer vibes. But the most spectacular events of this June were the unprecedented numbers and diversity of eastern vagrant vireos, warblers, grosbeaks, and buntings who made their presence known by their rich and lively singing. It was enough to make any birder feel as though they were spending the spring in the southern and eastern United States!



### "Molera Madness"

June 2004 will go down in the Monterey County history books as being the best spring ever in Monterey County and, quite possibly, one of the best ever witnessed in California. In the beginning of June, **Chestnut-sided Warbler** (2 males this month), **White-eyed, Yellow-throated**, and **Red-eyed Vireos** (2-4 total this spring) joined the singing 2 to 3 **Rose-breasted Grosbeaks** already present from the end of May. On 5 June intern Rob Fowler--with Scott, Linda, and Ryan Terrill and Tim Amaral--found a singing male **Mourning Warbler**, only the 2nd spring record for Andrew Molera State Park and Monterey County. The Mourning Warbler remained until the next day and was seen by many other observers. On 5 June British birder and exchange student at UC Santa Cruz, Jeremy Bird, found the first Monterey County spring record of **Canada Warbler**, a female. Luckily interns Rob and Pascal Cauchois were able to witness this gem later that afternoon. However, the top vagrant highlight of this month was a singing **Yellow-throated Warbler**, found by Scott, Linda, and Matt



Brady on 13 June. This was the first record for Molera and was seen by many on this day only. Also on 13 June Matt and Steve Rovell found the male **Hooded Warbler** that we eventually banded on 15 June and both he and a female (banded also on 15 June) were still present on the 30th, presumably on territory. Also, two separate **Prothonotary Warblers** (3 total this spring) were present during this duration and witnessed by many observers. On 14 June Rob and Matt found a singing **Philadelphia Vireo**, another first spring record for Monterey County. This bird was the 6th species of vireo they managed to observe on that single day in Molera. They also found a second year male **Indigo Bunting** that day. However, these many spectacular bird sightings pale in comparison to finding the first ever nest of **Northern Parulas** in Andrew Molera State Park! Since finding this nest, Rob has been monitoring it regularly and as of this writing the female parula appears to be incubating eggs. Any day now the eggs should be hatching and we at BSOL eagerly await the possibility of seeing fluffy little parula fledglings in the next coming weeks! While monitoring the parula nest Rob has had some great luck with vagrants, seeing 2 **Rose-breasted Grosbeaks** on 27 June and then seeing a **Gray Catbird** (4th Andrew Molera record) meowing away directly behind him in the same elderberry that the grosbeaks were feeding in the previous day, followed by yet another sighting of a male Rose-breasted Grosbeak seen with Sarah Stock on 30 June. Lastly for "Molera Madness", 3-4 **American Redstarts**, 4-5 **Black-and-white Warblers**, and 1 **Summer Tanager**, located by David Vanderpluym and Ryan Terrill on 28 June, rounded out this vagrant phenomenon very nicely for the month.

### Mist-Netting/Bird Banding at Andrew Molera State Park



During the month of June you just don't know what crazy vagrant surprises will appear in the nets. This month the "star" vagrants included 1 second-year female **Indigo Bunting** banded on 3 June (only 5 previous records from BSOL). Then we captured 4 **Hooded Warblers** (21 total BSOL records), including 2 second-year females banded on June 5th and 8th, and a pair captured on 15 June (first located by Matt and Steve on 13 June) and then recaptured twice again over the next two days. One female **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** was captured on 12 June, boosting the total **Rose-breasted Grosbeaks** captured this spring to 4. To round out the month, we captured a **Summer Tanager** (second year male--probably the same one seen on the 28th) on 30 June, a fitting end to such a spectacular month!

Western migrants and resident species were well represented in June but, naturally, total captures were down from the height of spring migration in May. We captured 528 individuals in June, which is a 64% decrease from the May total of 859 birds. **Wilson's Warblers** were best represented with 110 total captures. Seventy of these were new captures, and of those, 77% were hatched this year. **Song Sparrows** came in second with 100 total captures; 47 of these were new captures, and of these, 91% were hatch year birds. Of the 50 **Chestnut-backed Chickadees** captured, 30 were banded and all of these fledged this spring. **Swainson's Thrushes**, which totaled 283 individuals in May, dropped

in captures by 88% to a total of 35 birds.



The western migrant highlight of June occurred on 8 June when we banded a total of 10 **Willow Flycatchers**. This flycatcher phenomenon is a new single-day record for BSOL. Incredibly, the previous single-day record was 5 willows banded on exactly the same date in 1999! In spring of 1999, a total of 29 **Willow**

**Flycatchers** were captured; this spring came in second with a total of 24 Willows netted. Of seasonal interest, we caught 2 **Fox Sparrows** (June 5th and 22nd) of the Sooty *unalaschcensis* race; Rob Fowler also heard another calling on 22 June in a different area. There are only two previous Monterey County June records of this race, which is a rather common race we encounter in winter! As we are talking about sparrows it should be noted that we banded an extremely late **Golden-crowned Sparrow** on 17 June. As with the Fox Sparrow, there were only two previous June records for Monterey County! Geez buddy, Alaska is a little farther north, you know??? This month we also caught a male and a female **MacGillivray's Warbler** in breeding condition; there are no previous confirmed breeding records for this species at Andrew Molera State Park. Other interesting western and resident highlights banded or recaptured in June were **California Thrasher**, 4 **Brown Creepers**, and an **Acorn Woodpecker** (11th ever captured), which we aged to be at least four years old!

## Mist-Netting/Banding on the Carmel River

**Carmel River MAPS Stations.** While the lab at Andrew Molera State Park has been hopping with an amazing variety of vagrants, the biologists at the Carmel River MAPS sites have been kept very busy with promising numbers of young of many different bird species -- it looks like this year will be a high-yield year for local breeders and year-round residents. The most frequently captured species at these sites have been **Bushtit**, **Chestnut-backed Chickadee**, **Bewick's Wren**, and **Song Sparrow**.

At the Red Rocks site, the average number of captures for June included 32 birds of 11 species. All four days of banding combined, BSOL biologists banded a total of 129 birds of 24 species, including the most frequently captured species, **Bushtit** (50 individuals), **Chestnut-backed Chickadee** (12), **Wilson's Warbler** (11), and **Bewick's Wren** (10). The two most unusual Carmel River captures of the month included **Violet-green Swallow** (5) and **Northern Mockingbird** (1).



Farther downstream on the Carmel River is Schulte Bridge which historically had the most abundant and diverse birdlife of the three MAPS sites along the Carmel River, but has fallen below expectation so far this year. In June, BSOL biologists banded a total of 69 birds (average 23) of 20 species (average 12) over three days of banding. The most frequently

captured species banded at the Schulte site in June included **Bewick's Wren** (11), **Pacific-slope Flycatcher** (9), **Song Sparrow** (7), and **Spotted Towhee** (6).

The Rancho San Carlos study site, in contrast, showed somewhat higher abundance and diversity than in past years. During the three days of banding in June, we captured a total of 81 birds (average 27) of 16 species (average 11). The most frequently captured species at the Rancho San Carlos site included **Song Sparrow** (18), **Chestnut-backed Chickadee** (8), **Pacific-slope Flycatcher** (8), and **Wilson's Warbler** (7).

**Carmel River Mouth.** Bird populations at the Carmel River Lagoon are booming, as the nestlings of various songbirds fledge and quickly discover the location of our nets! In June we caught a total of 84 birds of 20 species during four days of banding; our average number of captures was 21 birds of 10 species. The most frequently captured birds at the Carmel River Lagoon during June included **Song Sparrow** (24), **Swainson's Thrush** (10), **Chestnut-backed Chickadee** (9), and **Bewick's Wren** (9). Of special note, on 4 June we captured an unexpected female **Hooded Warbler**.

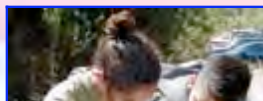
### Avian Studies at Camp Roberts (Salinas Valley)

June was our second month for implementing a monitoring contract with the California Army National Guard. Spring migrants have departed the Salinas Valley, resulting in lower captures at the two banding stations at Camp Roberts. But despite slower activity, there was still quite a bit of excitement thanks to some unusual vagrants.



We were favored with two stunning captures along the Salinas River: an **Ovenbird** and a **White-eyed Vireo**! Both of these birds are very rare visitors to Monterey County. These captures highlight the importance of avian monitoring, for these secretive birds might not have been detected otherwise. Other exciting captures this month included four **Willow Flycatchers** caught along the Salinas River. In six days of banding in June, we captured a grand total of 121 individuals of 24 species (44 birds along the Nacimiento River and 77 along the Salinas River). The most frequently captured birds were **Bewick's Wren** (30), **Song Sparrow** (14), **Common Yellowthroat** (10), **Bushtit** (10), and **House Wren** (10). We continued weekly point counts at Camp Roberts, and continued to monitor the **Bald Eagles** living on the Nacimiento River. We have not observed any further nesting activity, although we did discover a young second year eagle hanging out a few miles downriver. This bird may have dispersed from nearby Lake San Antonio, where **Bald Eagles** breed every year.

### Outreach and Education



Summer time is synonymous with joyful kids enjoying their freedom being out of school. At BSOL we are lucky enough to take part in their



elation every Thursday as 25 kids from the VWS Discovery Camp accompany us on net checks and observe our banding demonstrations. We are inspired at each child's appreciation and awe of nature as they comment on the detailed colors of the feathers, the alert and beady eyes, and the snapping bills of the birds we show them. It's quite possible that a few of these birds may shape the future for some of the kids by putting them on a path to conservation.

## Comings and Goings

Pascal Cauchois, who was a memorable presence on the BSOL team since February of this year, has moved on to the next chapter in his life. Pascal's last day in the field was on 25 June and he is already greatly missed by all of us. Pascal and his wife Robin, who were married in the Sierra Nevada mountains, are expecting their first child this coming fall. It is so assuring in this day and age of troubles and crises around the world to see two such beautiful and unique people bringing a new life into this world. After working, living, and hanging out with Pascal and Robin, we at BSOL know that they will leave a good mark on this world and will make a positive impact with whatever they do. Good luck Cauchois, in Robin's and your new life in France.



## Welcome to Visitors

Come join us for summer banding! We are open to the public for morning banding demonstrations 5 days per week from Tuesdays through Saturdays. Because our summer schedule is busy, we recommend that visitors call or e-mail BSOL's Coordinator, Sarah Stock, ahead of time to confirm that we are here to welcome you. Sarah can be reached by phone at (831) 624-1202, or e-mail at [SarahStock@VentanaWS.org](mailto:SarahStock@VentanaWS.org). See you soon, and don't forget your bird book and binoculars!

### BSOL Update, May 2004:

The gentle winds of May have passed through Molera - sweeping away any traces of the previous winter season and lingering doubts that the summer months are on their way. These warm winds, laden with the sweet scents of dried black sage and foxtail grasses, have carried with them the tides of migratory birds that we have so eagerly been awaiting. Our arrival to the banding station in the early mornings is now greeted by a symphony of songs and calls. We hear the echoing, liquid melody of the Swainson's Thrush, the insistent demand for a malted beverage by the Olive-sided Flycatcher, and the quick sharp squeaks of the Anna's Hummingbird as it glides by nearly noiselessly. The California Quail

continue to loudly proclaim their attachment to Chicago, while their tiny hatchlings trail obediently behind them. Many other species have also made their presence known; lone gopher snakes and rattlesnakes slither soundlessly across net lanes and paths and disappear into the underbrush with a faint rustle of leaves, fence lizards practice their daily physical activities on our doorstep, and solitary monarchs flutter among the tall stalks of wheat grass. An amazing array of species has appeared within the park; banders and visitors alike rejoice in beholding each new sight, smell, and sound.

### **Mist-Netting/Bird Banding at Andrew Molera State Park**

Early every morning, often before the thick fog has lifted (and before our first cup of coffee), we open our nets with great anticipation and guess as to what spectacular species will be caught. Indeed, this year's annual spring passerine migration did not disappoint. In the month of May we captured an impressive 859 individuals of 42 species in 21 days of banding. Swainson's Thrush took the lead with 283 captures followed by Wilson's Warbler (92 individuals), and Warbling Vireo (69 individuals). Yellow Warbler, Pacific-slope Flycatcher, Western Wood-Pewee, Yellow-breasted Chat, and Black-headed Grosbeak have also returned to the central coast of California, either to stay and breed or to stop momentarily before continuing on their journey north.



We were also very fortunate to capture a number of surprising vagrant species. Incredibly a **Kentucky Warbler** was captured on 15 May and recaptured twice more on 18 and 19 May. This individual made history as the first documented record of Kentucky Warbler in Andrew Molera State Park. In addition, a **Northern Waterthrush** (13 May), a **Yellow-throated Vireo** (20 May), a **Black-and-white Warbler** (22 May), two **Rose-breasted Grosbeaks** (28 May), a **Hooded Warbler** (28 May), and a **Prothonotary Warbler** (29 May) also made unexpected visits to the park. With keen ears and a quick eye, intern Rob Fowler -- returning to join the BSOL crew for another field season -- located a **Cerulean Warbler**, a **Baltimore Oriole**, and a **Summer Tanager** all within his first week.

### **Mist-Netting/Banding on the Carmel River**

**Carmel River MAPS Stations.** The beginning of May meant the beginning of the Carmel River MAPS (Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survival) banding project. The MAPS program is a standardized protocol designed by the Institute for Bird Populations for the purpose of monitoring breeding bird populations throughout North America. We run mist nets every 10 days at three different sites along the Carmel River, from May 1 to August 8. The research is supported by the Monterey Peninsula Water Management District, which has contracted us to monitor bird populations in unmanipulated and restored areas along the river. We have had three MAPS sessions at each site so far, and the breeding birds appear to be doing quite well this year! During our first round, we caught interesting migrant species at each of our three sites: a

pair of Lawrence's Goldfinches at the mid-valley site, a Western Tanager at the site near the Schulte Bridge, and a MacGillivray's Warbler at the site near the Rancho San Carlos reserve. The vast majority of captures, however, have been local breeders such as Wilson's Warbler, Swainson's Thrush, Song Sparrow, Orange-crowned Warbler, Oak Titmouse, Bushtit, and Chestnut-backed Chickadee. Some birds, particularly Song Sparrows and Orange-crowned Warblers, were producing young so early that we caught fledglings during our first sessions. Others, like the Swainson's Thrush, are just now beginning to show breeding condition. Overall, our capture rates have been moderate: during the month of May, we averaged 28 birds of 13 species at the mid-valley site; 26 birds of 12 species at the Schulte Bridge site; and 22 birds of 11 species at the Rancho San Carlos site. As the warm summer weather gets into full swing, we are looking forward to a productive avian breeding season along the Carmel River!



**Carmel River Mouth.** In addition to the three MAPS stations along the Carmel River, we conduct a weekly bird banding operation at the mouth of the Carmel River, under a contract with the Monterey Peninsula Water Management District and California Department of Parks and Recreation. The purpose of this project is to

monitor breeding and fall migrant bird species in mature and restored areas of the Carmel River Lagoon. So far, our banding days there have been busy but not overwhelming: in May we averaged 31 birds of 14 species. Most of the captures, as at the other Carmel River sites, have been local breeders like Wilson's Warblers and Swainson's Thrushes. Because the habitat is somewhat more diverse than at the other sites, we also captured several Red-winged Blackbirds, and have had the delight of handling several Cedar Waxwings. The Carmel River Mouth is known for being an exceptional birding area, and we are looking forward to honing our bird identification skills (and perhaps catching sight of a few late-spring vagrants) in between net runs.

### **Avian and Vegetation Studies at Camp Roberts (Salinas Valley)**

This month marked the start of our monitoring contract with the California Army National Guard. California ground squirrels and even the occasional badger peeped out at us from their burrows as we banded birds at two MAPS stations at Camp Roberts in the Salinas Valley.

One station is located along the Nacimiento River and one along the Salinas River. Both of these

sites boasted an amazing abundance and diversity of birds, especially along the Salinas River. In six days of banding, we captured a combined total of 311 birds of 28 species! Our most abundant captures were Song Sparrow (49), Bewick's Wren (43), and Swainson's Thrush (40).

Interesting captures included a Willow Flycatcher along the Nacimiento River, and two MacGillivray's Warblers and a Bullock's Oriole along the Salinas River. In addition to banding, we also began conducting weekly



point counts around Camp Roberts. We were favored with some incredible sights, such as a Prairie Falcon acrobatically pursuing a Red-winged Blackbird. Another aspect of our work at Camp Roberts is monitoring the Bald Eagles that make their home along the Nacimiento River. Last week, we watched excitedly as the majestic pair brought nesting material to their giant aerie. After last year's failed nesting attempt, will the eagles nest again this season? We'll keep you posted!

## Outreach and Education

**2004 Bird-a-thon.** On 1 May BSOL, along with Monterey Peninsula Audubon Society and Wild Bird Center of Monterey, hosted the 11th annual Bird-a-thon to determine the nation's "Birdiest County". Not only was this a superb way to raise public awareness about the county's abundant bird species diversity but it was also a tremendous fundraising event.



Last year Monterey County was crowned the country's victor with an impressive total of 248 species. This year we felt particularly motivated to defend our title. From 4 PM Friday 30 April to 4 PM Saturday 1 May, birders from across the county participated in the event armed with binoculars, scopes, cameras and an unbeatable sense of adventure and enthusiasm. Many interesting and spectacular birds were identified, such as a Laughing Gull that was spotted by Don Roberson that won him the award "Best Bird". Following the 24-hour birding period a countdown was held at the Wild Bird Center and participants feasted on a well deserved, delicious dinner graciously provided by Whole Foods of Monterey and prepared by Chef Kristina Westphal and VWS Board President, Pete Scrivani. Although we truly made a valiant effort, and matched last year's number of 248 species, we were unable to retain the crown. San Diego received this year's "Birdiest County" title with over 250 bird species identified. However, the event was a great success and much fun was had by all. Many thanks to all Monterey County participants; we look forward to next year!

**Annual Peter Pyle Workshop.** BSOL was pleased to co-host with the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory (SFBBO) an "Advanced Aging and Sexing of Passerines" workshop with Institute for Bird Populations Biologist, Peter Pyle. From 10-14 May, participants



were treated to a highly educational series of presentations, mist-netting sessions at Coyote Creek, the Carmel River Mouth, and Andrew Molera State Park, and a birding fieldtrip to Elkhorn Slough. Peter shared with us the new molt terminology that will be used to help banders micro-age birds to SY/ASY and provided practical demonstrations with both museum specimens and live birds. As with each workshop with Peter, every participant is elevated to a new level of enlightenment and appreciation for the molt and plumage subtleties inherent in each individual bird. And the data keeps getting stronger and more valuable. We and the birds thank you, Peter!

**International School of Monterey.** May 18th marked the last of six visits to the BSOL banding station by Todd Spedding's second grade class from the International School of Monterey. Every month the students arrived eager to learn about mist-netting, banding, and the myriad of passerines that live and pass through the park. They have unfailingly impressed us with their excellent questions, their attentiveness, and progress in identifying many bird species.

That day there was a wonderful diversity of birds that were captured. The students were treated to a viewing of the Kentucky Warbler (certainly a lifer for many present!) as well as a large number of Swainson's Thrushes, Yellow Warblers, Wilson's Warblers, Pacific-slope Flycatchers, and a MacGillivray's Warbler. The students were also fascinated by the tiny size of the three different species of hummingbirds that were extracted from the nets (Rufous, Allen's, and Anna's), and were keen to learn about the careful processing techniques that we use. The students also accompanied us on some of the final net runs of the day and braved the cool river water without hesitation. Following banding, parents of the students treated us all to an enormous delicious lunch.

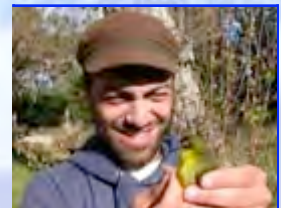


The day ended very bitter-sweetly. While we will miss each one of the students we know that we have been very fortunate to share what we know about birds with such an enthusiastic, intelligent group of children. We will certainly be hearing more about these keen, young biologists in the

future!

## **Welcome to Returning Staff**

Starting on the 18th of this month, new intern Rob Fowler began his summer stint with BSOL, which will last through the beginning of August. Rob, who lived and intensely birded in Monterey County for seven years, has been a resident up in Humboldt County since January 2003 where he is finishing up his degree in Wildlife Management and Conservation at Humboldt State University.



Rob has been interested in birds since age 10 and has birded throughout California, Texas, Arizona, and Ecuador. In relation to Ventana Wildlife Society, Rob was part of the Riparian Habitat Monitoring Project in 1999, and was also part of the Carmel River Avian Monitoring Program in summer 2002. Rob has also worked in Prudoe Bay, Alaska in summer of 2001 as a field biologist banding and nest searching for Spectacled and King Eiders, Long-tailed Ducks, Parasitic Jaegers and Glaucous Gulls. We welcome Rob back as a vital member of the BSOL crew!

## **Welcome to Visitors**

Come join us for some spring and summer banding! We are open to the public for morning banding demonstrations 5 days per week from Tuesdays through Saturdays. Because our summer schedule is busy, we

recommend that visitors call or e-mail BSOL's Coordinator, Sarah Stock, ahead of time to confirm that we are here to welcome you. Sarah can be reached by phone at (831) 624-1202, or e-mail at [SarahStock@VentanaWS.org](mailto:SarahStock@VentanaWS.org). See you soon, and don't forget your bird book and binoculars!

### BSOL Update, April 2004:

How privileged we are month after month to experience the gentle changing of seasons here on the beautiful central coast of California, and to witness with awe the natural cycles of its wildlife. Once again in April, springtime began playing a symphony of colors and sounds in Big Sur. Mother Nature's promises for renewal were being kept and her children, the plants and animals, are her messengers. Western Tiger Swallowtail, Lorquin's Admiral, Sara Orangetip, and other butterflies seemed to appear suddenly from nowhere. Sunbathing Common Kingsnake, California Whipsnake (Striped Racer), and Gopher Snake greeted us around the bends in our trails. Poppies, lupines, vetch, and wood mint came into bloom everywhere in a beautiful palette of colors, which only spring could have created.



April at Andrew Molera State Park also was an exciting turning point in the year for bird numbers. Whereas many winter residents still remained, spring migrants and summer breeders started arriving, significantly increasing the diversity of bird species. Mid-month was intense in terms of daily capture rates and migrant sightings. However, the end of April brought a decrease in avian activity, and as of this writing we are still awaiting the peak of migration. This lull may be a result of the unusually dry air and the heat of the last few days of the month. Clouds and fog have been rare for two months now (maybe too rare), and this early taste of summer may have modified the daily activities of birds. The Sycamore trees, first victims of a water stress, started losing their leaves. The hills of Big Sur already are covered by a golden coat of sun-dried grasses.

### Mist-Netting/Banding at Andrew Molera State Park



Despite these unusual climatic conditions, spring migrants kept on arriving, bringing with them the first signs of summer. Swallows and swifts now fly in large numbers above our heads and execute some incredible aerobatic displays every day. Among the exciting migrant birds we captured who returned once again to Big Sur in April were Swainson's Thrush (who had to share its space with its still-present cousin, Hermit Thrush), Ash-throated Flycatcher, Black-and-white Warbler, Black-headed Grosbeak, Cassin's Vireo, Lazuli Bunting, and Yellow-breasted Chat. A total of 629 individuals of 37 species were captured in our nets, including

158 Orange-crowned Warblers and 155 Wilson's Warblers. One second-year male Sharp-shinned Hawk also managed to get himself captured. Included in the total number of captures were a large number of individuals who had already been banded in previous years. It is always amazing to see 6-year-old (or even older) birds coming back year after year to the same stopover or breeding grounds and being captured in the same nets, at the same time of the day.

### **Mist-Netting/Banding at the Carmel Middle School**

The end of April brought an end to our most recent contract with Carmel Middle School, where we had been mist-netting/banding birds two days per month since last September. In two days of April banding, we captured 15 individuals of 10 species. Among the particularly noteworthy captures were Western Bluebird and White-throated Sparrow.



After this great season, we want to express our sincere thanks to Craig Hohenberger for his collaboration with us and to the many Carmel Middle School students for their enthusiasm for wildlife study. We are looking forward to future collaboration with Carmel Middle School and the opportunity to once again share with them our passion for birds.

### **Mist-netting/Bird Banding at Carmel River Sites**

The month of April also was time for us to prepare for mist-netting and banding operations at our summer study areas on the Carmel River. In collaboration with the Monterey Peninsula Water Management District and California Polytechnic State University, from May through August BSOL biologists will study bird populations at four sites along 16 miles of the Carmel River. Throughout the summer, more than 40 mist-nets will be operated every ten days at the Carmel River Lagoon and at Carmel River sites at Rancho Saint Carlos, Schulte Road, and Red Rocks. This effort is an important source of data for comparisons between restored and mature riparian habitats, comparisons between areas dominated by native plants and others containing exotic and invasive plants, and to identify potential new threats to preserved, restored, and disturbed ecosystems.

### **Avian and Vegetation Studies at Camp Roberts (Salinas Valley)**

In collaboration with the California National Guard, BSOL biologists also recently made preparations for mist-netting and banding operations at summer study areas at Camp Roberts in the Salinas Valley. Two study sites, each composed of 10 mist-nets, will be operated every 10 days from May through August. The



study also includes conducting point counts, writing a Bald Eagle management plan, overseeing the implementation of power line diverters, and carrying out a comprehensive vegetation assessment. Key objectives of this effort include documenting the current status of the Bald Eagle and Least Bell's Vireo, both of which are protected species and appear to be sensitive to the disappearance of their critical habitat.

## **International School of Monterey**



Despite the heat of the April afternoons, the mornings were often chilly. However, this did not deter the intrepid second-graders of International School of Monterey, their dedicated teacher, Todd Spedding, and the many parents who shuttled the kids from school to Andrew Molera State Park for a day of field work on 6 April. With good cheer and determination, they braved the cold to accompany us on early-morning net runs. With interest and enthusiasm, they patiently looked and listened as we demonstrated all phases of mist-netting and banding birds, and discussed bird biology and migration. Among the most popular captures that day were Common Yellowthroat, Anna's Hummingbird, Wilson's Warbler, and Spotted Towhee. If the insightful questions posed by these youngsters are any measures, the future of ornithology is very bright!

## **Welcome to New and Returning Staff**

BSOL is happy to welcome Intern, Alia Mukhida, who comes to Big Sur from Canada. Alia received her Bachelor of Science (combined Honors in Biology and Spanish) in 2003 from Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, and is planning to pursue a Masters in Science in the near future. At the Dalhousie School for Resource and Environmental Studies in 2001, Alia developed



"Identification Guide to Nova Scotia's Deep-Sea Corals", a conservation-oriented guidebook in the form of an easily-understood identification key for use by a wide variety of interest groups. Alia's Honors Project in 2003-04 involved field and laboratory behavioral experiments on errors in the communication system of Tree Swallow nestlings. We can't wait for her to give us demonstrations of flamenco dance, one of her hobbies.

We are also very happy to welcome Eric Miller back to full-time duty. Eric joined BSOL in April 2003 for an internship after completing his Bachelor of Science in Environmental Studies at UC Santa Cruz. Post-intern Eric has served BSOL ad hoc on numerous occasions over the last several months and is currently working under the title Independent Contractor.

## **Welcome to Visitors**

Come join us for some spring banding! We are open to the public for morning banding demonstrations 5 days per week from Tuesdays through Saturdays. Because the banding days remain weather dependent, we recommend that visitors call or email BSOL's Program Coordinator, Sarah Stock, ahead of time to confirm that we are here to welcome you. Sarah can be reached by phone at (831) 624-1202, or e-mail at [SarahStock@VentanaWS.org](mailto:SarahStock@VentanaWS.org). See you soon, and don't forget your binoculars!

### BSOL Update, March 2004:

Happy Spring! This year, March brought an unusual bout of warm, dry weather, which seems to be accelerating all the processes of spring. The hills of Big Sur are brilliantly green and dotted with colorful spots of blooming *ceanothus*, buttercups, and other wildflowers and shrubs. The local breeding birds along the Big Sur and Carmel Rivers are pairing off and vigorously defending their territories, and the earliest of the spring migrants and breeders have arrived, including Purple Martin, Rufous Hummingbird, Wilson's Warbler, Warbling Vireo, Lincoln's Sparrow, and Pacific-slope Flycatcher. The warm air is full of the hum of insects busily gathering pollen and nectar, and bright flashes of breeding butterflies flutter all around. The end of March also signals the end of our winter schedule, so we have all been rushing to finish up reports, papers, and other office work that needs to get done before the onslaught of spring migration keeps us too busy to sit down! We have also taken advantage of the gorgeous weather to go on occasional morning bird walks, practice song and call identifications, and keep an eye out for early arrivals.

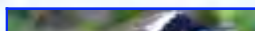


### Mist-Netting/Banding at Andrew Molera State Park



As noted earlier, spring migrants have begun to arrive, boosting our monthly species diversity to 23 species, and our overall captures inched ever so slightly upward this month to 147 birds. Although we haven't yet caught any vagrants, we did capture the first Wilson's Warbler, *lutescens* Orange-crowned Warbler, Lincoln's Sparrow, and Common Yellowthroat of the season. The yellowthroat was our most exciting capture, as he was a particularly handsome lad, and we don't often find the males in our nets. Our most frequent captures this month were Wilson's Warbler (16 individuals), Bushtit (15 individuals), and Hermit Thrush (13 individuals).

### Mist-Netting/Banding at the Carmel Middle School



The White-crowned and Golden-crowned Sparrows



that kept us busy all winter at the CMS Habitat have begun their long journey home for the summer, resulting in low capture rates. We caught 33 birds of 11 species during our two March banding days. The 7th grade students in Mrs. Bradley's second period class were lucky enough to see our most exciting bird of the month, an adult male Common Yellowthroat!

## Monarch Butterfly Project

By the end of the first week in March, the local monarch butterflies of Monterey County, who spent the winter snuggled into dense aggregations in local pines, cypress, and eucalyptus trees, were beginning to disperse east and north in search of milkweed plants on which to lay their eggs. Our last week of counting was very challenging, as many of the monarchs were gone, and those that remained were very active, participating in the annual mating frenzy that precedes their spring migration. The monarchs that remain are almost entirely males, who will not make the migratory journey, but rather, having hopefully mated with at least one female, will live out the rest of their (short) lives nectaring on local flowers.

## Education

The outrageously gorgeous weather made a beautiful backdrop for another nature walk with Todd Spedding's second grade class from the International School of Monterey. This time we talked about spring - why it happens, and what signals the arrival of spring sends to plants, insects, herpetiles, birds, and mammals. We took a lovely walk from the Cooper Cabin out to the Headlands at Andrew Molera State Park, stopping along the way to look at (or listen to) signs of spring, which included a variety of butterflies, blooming wildflowers, basking lizards, and several species of birds singing on territory. The kids were fabulous learners as usual, and asked us many excellent questions.



## Flammulated Owl Nest Boxes in the Los Padres National Forest



Because all of us at BSOL are by nature endlessly curious about the bird life in our area, when the opportunity came to set up Flammulated Owl nest boxes on Chew's Ridge in the Los Padres National Forest, we couldn't resist! The Flammulated Owl is a small migratory owl that has been heard calling "on territory" in the Chew's Ridge area, but has never been documented

breeding in Monterey County. We put up seven owl boxes at various locations in the Chew's Ridge area on 19 March. Our hope is that Flammulated Owls that may search for nesting spots in the Los Padres will find and use the nest boxes, so that we can document them as breeders, and potentially conduct a more thorough study of Flammulated Owl breeding characteristics in Monterey County.

## Welcome!

In celebration of the spring influx of birds, we are open to the public for morning banding demonstrations 5 days per week from Tuesdays through Saturdays. Because the banding days remain weather dependent, we recommend that visitors call or email BSOL's Program Coordinator Sarah Stock ahead of time to confirm that we are here to welcome you. Sarah can be reached by phone at (831) 624-1202, or e-mail at [SarahStock@VentanaWS.org](mailto:SarahStock@VentanaWS.org). See you soon, and don't forget your binoculars!

### BSOL Update, February 2004:



February has brought lots of rain to Big Sur, resulting in countless signs of spring. The California poppies have begun to bloom, and the California wild lilac bushes and bay laurel trees are covered in blossoms. White-throated Swifts have been swooping over Andrew Molera State Park, and the Black Phoebes are investigating potential nest sites under the eaves of the VWS barn. The air is filled with the rhythmic territorial drumming of Downy and Nuttall's Woodpeckers as they search for the perfect spot to excavate nest cavities. The ground squirrels have awakened from their winter naps and are scurrying hither and thither, while the western fence lizards and alligator lizards bask in the sun. Amidst all this activity, we are continuing our numerous monitoring projects.

## Mist-Netting/Banding at Andrew Molera State Park



Due to inclement weather, we were able to band only five days this month. As a result, our capture totals and species diversity were relatively low. We banded a total of 51 birds of 17 species. But what we lacked in quantity, we made up in diversity! We banded two birds of prey: a Sharp-shinned Hawk and a Northern Pygmy-owl, both on the same day, and in fact, at the same time! We also captured our first spring migrant, an Orange-crowned Warbler of the subspecies *lutescens*. This is the subspecies that breeds in central California, and the bird was a recapture, previously banded as a breeding male last summer. We also captured an intergrade Northern Flicker, which is a hybrid cross between Red- and Yellow-shafted Flickers. Surprisingly, our most frequently captured species this month was

Spotted Towhee, with 11 captures. Hermit Thrush (6), Fox Sparrow (5), and Chestnut-backed Chickadee (5) were other frequent captures.

### **Mist-Netting/Banding at the Carmel Middle School**

Due also to inclement weather, we were able to band only one day this month at the Carmel Middle School (CMS). In that one day of banding, we captured 11 birds of 7 species. Of note, we also spotted a White-throated Sparrow in amongst the numerous birds under the feeders. And re-sightings of color-banded White-crowned and Golden-crowned Sparrows continued, adding to our potential understanding of overwintering survival rates.

### **Monarch Butterfly Project**

With the approach of spring, the monarch butterflies have begun dispersing from their tightly-packed clusters. As the days grow longer and the temperatures climb, the butterflies are becoming more active. Lately, in fact, the overwintering sites have been a frenzy of activity. During our visits to each site this month, we have noticed butterflies chasing each other and mating. Once the butterflies have mated, the females disperse far and wide in search of milkweed plants upon which to lay their eggs. This gradual dispersal means that weekly population numbers have been declining steadily all month. Our last weekly count totalled only 19,000 monarch butterflies (compared with a peak of 75,000 butterflies in December). We expect that most butterflies will depart within the next week or two, and we wish them luck on their milkweed search!



### **Comings and Goings**



BSOL is happy to welcome the return of Pascal Cauchois, who hails from the south of France. During summer of 2002, Pascal volunteered at the lab while conducting an independent research project that focused on habitat usage and population dynamics of Anna's and Allen's Hummingbirds. Following his summer at Andrew Molera State Park, Pascal finished his studies in Jura, France in June 2003 and received a degree in environmental studies. After completing school, he traveled to Morocco for a month and a half. Aside from bird watching, Pascal is especially interested in botany and is looking forward to learning more about the native plant communities on the central coast. He enjoys playing guitar and oud, an Arabic instrument from Morocco. Welcome back, Pascal!

We are saddened to announce that Jason Scott, BSOL Assistant Coordinator, will be leaving us



and moving on to pursue further education and career opportunities. Jason has been a vital part of the BSOL staff for four years, and his enthusiasm, intelligence, curiosity, and sense of wonder made BSOL a fun and rewarding place both to work and to visit. His research on Chestnut-backed Chickadees has gathered volumes of data on their flock structure and foraging habits. His experience in monitoring bird populations at riparian restoration sites has convinced him that effective habitat restoration is the key to effective conservation. With this in mind, Jason has decided to return to school in order to learn more about using landscape design to create much-needed natural habitats for native wildlife. We know that Jason will do great work in his new field, and that with his love of learning and of California's native plants and animals, he will make an important difference to the people and wildlife of the central coast. He will definitely be missed by all. Good luck, Jason!



With Jason's departure, Crew Leader Jessica Griffiths has stepped up to replace him as Assistant Coordinator -- congratulations, Jessica! Jessica joined BSOL in December, 2002 and became Crew Leader in April, 2003. She has been a key participant in the full range of BSOL's research and education projects, and has had leadership responsibility for MAPS banding at Carmel Middle School and at Carmel River habitat restoration monitoring sites under contract with Monterey Peninsula Water Management District. This summer, Jessica will add MAPS banding at Camp Roberts to her project leadership responsibilities. In her role as Assistant Coordinator, Jessica will also have overall responsibility for project data systems, processing, and management.

### **Outreach Activities**

On Valentine's Day, Ventana Wildlife Society participated in the 17th Annual Migration Festival at Natural Bridges State Park in Santa Cruz. The Migration Festival is a celebration of the amazing journeys of migrating creatures. Visitors learned all about the incredible feats performed by migrating birds and butterflies, as well as whales, newts, and elephant seals. We were one of many local organizations that presented booths and hands-on displays. Visitors to the VWS table learned all about BSOL's research with migratory birds and monarch butterflies, and the Condor Restoration Program's work with the California Condor. Kids could draw a butterfly, see bird bands and find out what size band they would wear if they were a bird, and touch a giant condor feather. Fun was had by folks on both sides of the table, and we hope to return to the festival next year.



### **Welcome!**

We will be conducting mist-netting/banding operations at Andrew Molera State Park according to our winter schedule for one more month (March). That is, we mist-net and band birds, weather permitting, only two days each week. Because our 2 days of banding are entirely

weather-dependent, we recommend that visitors call or email BSOL's Program Coordinator Sarah Stock ahead of time to confirm that we are here to welcome you. Sarah can be reached by phone at (831) 624-1202, or e-mail at [SarahStock@VentanaWS.org](mailto:SarahStock@VentanaWS.org). See you soon, and don't forget your binoculars!

### BSOL Update, January 2004:

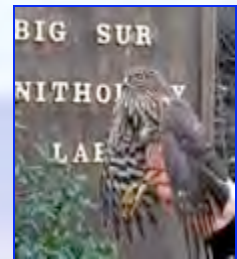


After dispersing to locations across the continent for winter holidays, the BSOL crew has returned to lush and lovely Big Sur, where we have quickly settled into a new year of exciting and fascinating research on birds and butterflies. We have all been enjoying this typically Californian January, with its alternating days of refreshing rains and brilliant sunshine. The river rose conspicuously during the first two weeks of the new year, and most of us were forced to use the hoist to get ourselves across the river (always an interesting spectacle), while our intrepid lab coordinator opted to kayak across! The river has since receded, enough that we have pulled our rubber boots out of their early retirement.

The first few months of the year are typically slow in terms of bird activity, and the weather changes daily if not hourly. We are currently banding only two days per week, and balancing the rest of our time analyzing and reporting the data we have collected throughout the year, reading up on and discussing new research, and continuing our monarch butterfly surveys up and down the coast of Monterey county.

### Mist-Netting/Banding at Andrew Molera State Park

Things have slowed down considerably here at the lab: our average daily capture rate for January was 14 birds - all of them winter or year-round residents such as Hermit Thrush, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Wrentit, and Chestnut-backed Chickadee. Our January monthly total was 111 birds of 21 species over 8 days of banding - not our lowest count ever, but certainly down there! The most interesting birds caught this month included a Sharp-shinned Hawk, a Hairy Woodpecker, and a California Thrasher. The most frequently captured species was Ruby-crowned Kinglet (16 individuals), followed closely by the Hermit Thrush (13 individuals). Although remarkable captures were at a minimum this month, many exciting things occurred in the bird world at large at Andrew Molera State Park. We saw a Black-and-white Warbler on one of our area searches, witnessed the first Allen's Hummingbird, watched Anna's Hummingbirds gather nesting material, and were awed by courtship flights of pairs of Red-shouldered Hawks and White-tailed Kites. Despite the relatively high flow of the river, the American Dipper continues to make periodic appearances in the riffles near the river crossing, and the Violet-green Swallows have returned to



sweep insects from the sky over the Research and Education Center.

## **Mist-Netting/Banding at the Carmel Middle School**

In marked contrast to our banding operation at Andrew Molera State Park, our twice-monthly banding days at the Carmel Middle School (CMS) are still yielding relatively high numbers of birds. During the month of January, we captured 63 birds of 11 species during two banding days; again, all were winter or year-round residents. Our most abundant captures included Golden-crowned Sparrows, White-crowned Sparrows, Bushtits, and Ruby-crowned Kinglets, but we also caught House Finches, Chestnut-backed Chickadees, Song Sparrows, Nuttall's Woodpeckers, Hermit Thrushes, Anna's Hummingbirds, and Myrtle Warblers. In addition, we caught glimpses of a White-throated Sparrow or two joining the more common sparrows at the platform feeders in the CMS Habitat amphitheater.

## **Monarch Butterfly Project**



The Monarch butterfly populations in the groves that we monitor seem to have regrouped from the storms in mid- and late December; our most recent count yielded 56,658 butterflies, up from 45,772 in the first week of the month. In our earlier January counts, we found a number of tunnels and nests where small mammals had made caches of butterfly wings. It is likely that the mammals caught and ate the monarchs after they were knocked to the ground during the high winds from the end-of-year storms. During January, we observed that in monarch groves with more than one species of tree, the butterflies seem to have shifted from using exclusively or mostly eucalyptus trees and are moving to native pine and cypress species. The clusters are also beginning to spread out in general, and we have already seen two copulations, which suggest that the beginning of their annual spring migration can't be too far off.

## **Education**

This month, we took our class of second graders from the International School of Monterey on a nature walk around Andrew Molera State Park. The kids learned to identify several common native plant species, as well as many resident birds. When observing a large oak tree, we were treated to the welcomed arrival of a mixed species flock of Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Brown Creepers, Chestnut-backed Chickadees, Downy Woodpeckers, and Bushtits. We also practiced using our ears to find and identify birds, and heard a Wrentit, some Western Scrub-Jays, and a Spotted Towhee. As always, the unbounded enthusiasm of the kids and the parents remind us how lucky



we are to live and work in such an incredible natural environment!

## Comings and Goings

Chris Tonra, who has been with us since October, has departed to begin graduate study at Humboldt State University. Chris's Masters project revolves around Brown-headed Cowbird host selection in Mono Lake basin. In the meantime, we are holding him to his promise to visit frequently; we miss you Chris!



We welcome Nelli Thorngate as our newest edition to our ever-evolving field staff. Nelli has been volunteering with us for the last 6 months and we have finally managed to snatch her up for good. Nelli completed her B.S. degree in Wildlife Biology at Humboldt State University and is currently working on her M.S. degree in Biology at San Jose State University where she is investigating the diversity and abundance of songbirds in urban and rural Monterey pine forests. One of Nelli's favorite things to do is watch the social behavior of Acorn Woodpeckers, an endless source of fascination for her. Nelli is currently playing a crucial role at the Big Sur Ornithology Lab, assisting with data collection in the field, as well as data analysis and report and manuscript preparation.

## Welcome!

We are still engaged in our winter rainy-day schedule and are 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](mailto:SarahStock@VentanaWS.org) on the day you plan to visit to confirm that we are here to welcome you.

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