



Ventana Wildlife Society BIG SUR ORNITHOLOGY LAB Lab Updates for 2005

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Big Sur Ornithology Lab

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BSOL Update, December 2005:



December has been one long vacation for the birds at BSOL. They had to compete with Monarch Butterflies and our many end-of-the-year research reports for our attention, and we were lucky if we could band twice a week. Then a real winter storm hit in the middle of the month, and the gentle Big Sur River was transformed into a raging torrent.

No longer able to wade across in our rubber boots, we turned to our pulley chair, which we use to ferry banders across. But it turned out that the pulley was broken! Unable to band, we instead focused on wrapping up our office work before shutting down the lab for the holidays and enjoying a much needed break. We returned just in time for more stormy weather, so it may be a while before the river is safe enough to fix the pulley. Until then, the birds get an extended vacation!

Mist-Netting and Bird Banding at Andrew Molera State Park

Due to the heavy rains and swollen river, we were able to band only a few days this month, so our capture totals were much less than last month. In four days of banding we captured just 71 birds of 13 species. Our number one capture this month was **Golden-crowned Sparrow** (14 individuals), followed by **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** and **Hermit Thrush** (11 individuals each).



We did have one very interesting capture this month, and that was a "**Western**" **Flycatcher**. The Western Flycatcher complex includes **Pacific-slope** and **Cordilleran Flycatchers**. Pacific-slope Flycatchers are a common summer resident here in Monterey County, and a Neotropical migrant, which means that they should all be hundreds of miles south of here for the winter. For a bird to turn up in mid-December is quite unusual. It is likely that this bird was a Pacific-slope, but since there is no way to tell Pacific-slope and Cordilleran Flycatchers apart in the hand, we can't be

sure. Hopefully this wayward flycatcher either continued south to join the rest of its species, or found a comfortable place to spend the winter!

Mist-netting/Banding and Education at Carmel Middle School



We continued our bird banding at the Carmel Middle School, this month introducing students to the physics of flight. We discussed how the shape of a bird's wing influences the



velocity of air flow and creates differences in pressure which produce lift. The students were able to look at the wing of a live bird and then watch the bird fly, allowing them to see these principles of flight in effect. We banded only one day this month at CMS, but our capture rate was much higher than at Molera! In one day of banding we captured 46 birds of 12 species. Our most common capture was **Golden-crowned Sparrow** (12 individuals), followed by **Bushtit** (8 individuals). Aside from the usual winter residents such as **White-crowned Sparrows**, **Fox Sparrows**, and **Yellow-rumped "Myrtle" Warblers**, we also captured a unique-looking **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** who had a yellow crown instead of a red one.

Monarch Butterfly Monitoring



Our weekly monitoring of the overwintering Monarch Butterflies continued this month, and we noticed that the butterflies appear to be moving around from site to site quite a bit. The number of butterflies at Andrew Molera State Park decreased, while numbers at two other sites in Big Sur increased. By studying the weather, including the microclimate conditions at several overwintering sites, we hope to learn more about what triggers movement between sites, and how the butterflies choose one site over another. The highest total for all nine sites combined this month was 33,840.

Big Sur Christmas Bird Count

The annual Big Sur Christmas Bird Count (CBC) took place on December 18. As fate would have it, a raging winter storm swept in that morning, and only the most dedicated birders braved the weather to count birds throughout Big Sur, including the two BSOL counters who banded along Coast Ridge Road. We saw only 11 species, and when we joined the rest of the birders for a delicious



countdown pizza dinner at the Carmel Middle School courtesy of Craig Hohenberger, it transpired that this year's Big Sur CBC produced the lowest ever species total (less than 90)! Despite that, spirits were high as the birders traded stories of being drenched in pouring rain, buffeted by howling winds, and encountering rockslides and flooded roads. Here's hoping that next year's CBC is a little more clement!

Outreach Activities

Our second nature walk took place on December 17, and an enthusiastic group of people turned out to accompany biologist Nellie Thorngate on a walk to learn about the winter birds of Andrew Molera State Park. Our next walk will be Saturday, January 21. Meet at the picnic tables outside of the banding lab at 9 AM and join BSOL Coordinator Karen Ritchie to take a walk through the park and learn about the mushrooms and fungi of Molera. This is the time of year when lots of mushrooms are sprouting, so come and learn how to recognize the more common varieties.

Comings and Goings

In mid-December we bid farewell to Ian David Crickmore, who finished up his semester-for-credit through UC Santa Cruz. Ian David started his internship here in September with minimal experience in avian research, and did a wonderful job of learning a wide variety of new skills very quickly. He will continue to work on his final research project, which he is putting together using BSOL banding data, examining fat deposition in migrating birds. He was an important part of the BSOL team this fall, and we wish him the best of luck in his future travels!

Welcome!

Due to the onset of winter weather, we will be banding only two days a week at Andrew Molera State Park 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 BSOL Assistant Coordinator Jessica Griffiths at JessicaGriffiths@VentanaWS.org ahead of time to confirm that we are here to welcome you. See you soon, and don't forget your binoculars!

BSOL Update, November 2005:



This year, November brought a wild variety of weather to the Central coast. Frequent cool, clear days were punctuated by soaking



storms early and late in the month, while mid-November treated us to an unprecedented heat wave, reaching record highs for the region. The subdued winter dawn chorus, featuring Golden-crowned and White-crowned Sparrows punctuated by the occasional California Thrasher, greeted BSOL biologists each morning, and flocks of sparrows and Yellow-rumped Warblers created constant movement on the ground and in the treetops. The exuberant chatter of Ruby-crowned Kinglets could be heard throughout Andrew Molera State Park, and splashes of orange glinting through the trees indicated overwintering Monarch butterflies basking in the unusual warmth of the season. BSOL biologists were as busy as ever, banding birds, counting butterflies, hosting a wide variety of outreach activities, and doing the data analysis and interpretation necessary to translate our field work into information that can be used to further wildlife conservation.



Mist-Netting and Bird Banding at Andrew Molera State Park

Now that we have switched over to our winter banding schedule, we are banding fewer days each month. However, our capture rates continued to be above average on most days. During eight days of banding, we captured 215 birds of 23 species. Our most common capture was **Hermit Thrush** (51 individuals), followed by **Fox Sparrow** (37 individuals) and **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** (21 individuals). We captured eight **California Thrashers** this month, which is the highest monthly total for that species since July 1998! We had some interesting captures this month as well, including an **American Robin**, two **Sharp-shinned Hawks**, and a **Northern Flicker "Intergrade"**, a hybrid of the **Red-shafted** and **Yellow-shafted Flicker** subspecies. Our most exciting catches were a **Swamp Sparrow** (the third one this fall) and a **White-throated Sparrow** (only the 15th-ever BSOL capture of that species).



Mist-netting, Banding and Education at Carmel Middle School



Our educational bird banding at the Carmel Middle School continued this month. Students observed the BSOL interns as they banded and collected data from songbirds, enabling the students to see biological field research in action.



With bird banding as a backdrop, a BSOL biologist talked to the students about reasons to practice conservation, how birds reflect the health of their habitats, and how the processes of evolution have shaped bird physiology and ecology. By sparking their interest at an early age, we hope to encourage the students to pursue

careers in the sciences. In two days of banding, we captured 67 birds of 16 species. Our number one capture was **Golden-crowned Sparrow** (24 individuals), followed by **White-crowned Sparrow** (10 individuals). We caught several interesting birds this month, including two **Red-winged Blackbirds**, a **Black-and-white Warbler** (the first ever captured at the Middle School), and a young **White-crowned Sparrow** that displayed some unusual partial albinism.

Monarch Butterfly Monitoring



This month marked the start of our fifth consecutive year of monitoring overwintering Monarch Butterflies in Monterey County. Every winter, thousands of Monarchs return to the California coast to spend the winter clustering in special overwintering groves. We conduct butterfly population counts throughout the winter so that we may better understand the population dynamics and habitat needs of these amazing creatures. Each week from November through March we travel to nine overwintering sites, from the Pacific Grove Monarch Sanctuary in the north to Plaskett Creek in the south. At each site, we estimate how many butterflies are in each cluster and then add all of the clusters together for a grand total. This year's counts were at first a bit higher than last year's, but then leveled off. The combination of very little rain and unusually warm temperatures meant that the butterflies were not clustering as tightly as they normally would, which led to lower count totals. The highest total for all nine sites during the month of November was 43,643 butterflies.

Outreach Activities

Monterey Bay Birding Festival. The first weekend in November, we were proud to participate in the first annual Monterey Bay Birding Festival. The festival celebrated the amazing bird diversity in and around Monterey Bay, with bird walks, presentations, and tours in a variety of birding hotspots, including the Watsonville Wetlands, Elkhorn Slough, and Andrew Molera State Park. BSOL offered bird banding demos and bird walks, while the California Condor Reintroduction Program staff and interns offered guided condor tours. Almost 100 birding enthusiasts and nature lovers came down to Molera to experience the beauty of Big Sur and its native wildlife, and to share their passion for birds. Everyone who participated had a wonderful time, including the VWS staff and interns. We offer our thanks and congratulations to the hard-working folks in Watsonville who organized the festival, and we're already looking forward to next year!

Monarch Madness. BSOL manned a table at this year's Monarch Madness, an all-day family-friendly event held the Saturday after Thanksgiving and sponsored by the Pacific Grove Museum of Natural History. At the museum, visitors could celebrate Monarch Butterflies while learning all about them. There were games, activities, and live

butterflies on display, along with Monarch-themed music from The 5 M's. At the BSOL table, visitors could learn about our monarch research, including how exactly we count all those butterflies! The event was a huge success, attracting 1,500 people, and we can't wait to go back next fall.

Walks and Talks. This month BSOL kicked off our new monthly nature walks, which will take place on the third Saturday of every month. This month's walk focused on Monarch Butterflies, and though turnout was small, a good time was had by all. Join us for our next walk on December 17 at 9 AM outside the banding lab, to learn about the birds that overwinter at Andrew Molera State Park. Also in November, BSOL Coordinator Karen Ritchie presented BSOL research in a talk to the Monterey Peninsula Audubon Society, and BSOL Assistant Coordinator Jessica Griffiths spoke about fall migration at an evening event at the Wild Bird Center.

Gull Identification Workshop



At the end of the month, BSOL staff were lucky enough to participate in a special day-long Gull Identification Workshop led by PRBO Biologist Ryan DiGaudio. BSOL staff and interns spent the day birding along the coast in and around Moss Landing, learning the differences between first, second, third and fourth-year gulls. As the day went on, we became more skilled at discerning similar-looking species, such as **Herring Gulls** and **Western Gulls**, and how to pick out less common birds, such as **Ring-billed Gulls** and **Glaucous-winged Gulls**. We also got the chance to practice our shorebird ID. After a day under Ryan's skilled tutelage, we all feel more confident about being able to identify most of those tricky gulls cruising up and down the shoreline. Thank you, Ryan!

Welcome!

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BSOL Update, October 2005:



Fall has come to Big Sur, tinting the maples, alders, and poison oak red and gold. There is a definite chill to the



air these mornings as we open our nets, and hats and scarves have been called back into service. The summer fog is finally loosening its grip, though it is lingering late this year. The first hesitant winter rain showers have dampened the earth, though we have yet to experience the first true winter storm. Snakes and lizards are becoming scarcer as they prepare to hunker down for the winter. The Monarch Butterflies have returned to the

Central Coast, beginning to gather in their favorite overwintering spots, fluttering among the fall flowers. And our nets are filled with returning winter residents, some laden with fat and continuing farther south, but many that seem content to end their journey here and spend the winter at Andrew Molera State Park.

Mist-Netting and Bird Banding at Andrew Molera State Park



This was a very busy month as the wave of fall migrants continued. In 19 days of banding, we captured 722 birds of 34 species. Our number one capture by far was **Fox Sparrow**, with 171 individuals. Incredibly, we caught more Fox Sparrows during this one month than we have ever



caught in a year! The highest number of Fox Sparrows caught in one full year at BSOL was 107, in 1998. So far in 2005 we have captured 209. We're not certain why we are catching so many of these birds, but it seems safe to say that this is a good year for Fox Sparrows! Our next most common capture was **Hermit Thrush**, with 141 individuals, followed by **Golden-crowned Sparrow** (94 individuals). We had several interesting captures as well, including **Red-breasted Sapsucker** (1), **Swamp Sparrow** (1), and **Magnolia Warbler** (2).

Mist-netting and Banding at the Carmel River Lagoon

This month marked the end of our avian monitoring at the Carmel River Lagoon. In our final month, we captured 86 birds of 19 species in four days of banding. Interestingly, this is twice as high as our October captures of last fall.

Our most abundant capture this month was **Hermit Thrush** (23 individuals), followed by **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** (15 individuals). We didn't have any truly unusual captures, though we did catch several colorful warblers including **Common Yellowthroat** (4), **Townsend's Warbler** (2), and **Yellow-rumped Warbler** (2). When we weren't processing birds, we were able to bird around the lagoon, spotting birds such as **Greater Yellowlegs**, **Northern Pintail**, **Marsh Wren**, and a hatch-year **Merlin** that hung around long enough for us to get wonderful looks. And so we



bid a fond farewell to the Carmel River Lagoon until next spring!

Mist-netting/Banding and Education at Carmel Middle School



We continued our interpretive bird banding at the Carmel Middle School this month, discussing bird ecology and bird conservation with the attentive students. In two days of banding, we captured 56 birds of 15 species. Our number one capture was **Golden-crowned Sparrow** with 23 individuals, followed by **White-crowned**

Sparrow and **Red-winged Blackbird** with 6 individuals each.

Interesting captures included **Brown-headed Cowbird** and **Brewer's Blackbird**, both of which frequent the platform feeders in the amphitheater area where we do our banding.

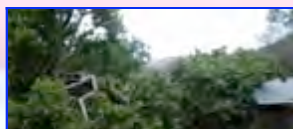
Outreach and Education

Not only were we swamped with birds this month, but human visitors as well! We gave educational interpretive banding demonstrations to several different school groups. A group of kids from the Salinas Boys & Girls Club whose week of Natural Science Discovery Camp was canceled back in August finally paid us a visit, to their delight (and ours!) We also hosted groups from Lindscott Charter School, Sierra Montessori Academy, and an ornithology class from UC Santa Cruz. The students ranged from second grade to college age, but all expressed a keen interest in our research, and a genuine delight in seeing birds up close.

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BSOL Update, September 2005:

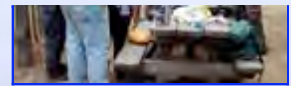


Here at Andrew Molera State Park, the month of September started off with a bang (literally!)





when a large Western Sycamore branch came crashing down on the



roof of our Research and Education Center. Luckily the banding lab was unscathed, though the front door to the lab was blocked by leafy branches. But our intrepid banders were undeterred, and bird banding continued uninterrupted on the picnic tables outside the lab.

Of course, the birds took no notice of our troubles as fall migration kicked into full swing this month. September is an especially diverse month because the last of the summer breeders are finally departing as the bulk of the fall migrants pass through. This fall has already proved to be a remarkable one because most fall migrants arrived earlier than usual. In fact, almost every single returning winter resident broke its early capture record. This may be due to an early onset of breeding this year (thanks to last winter's heavier-than-normal rains), or possibly a sign of long-term climate change. Whatever the reason, this September was a memorable one!



Mist-Netting and Bird Banding at Andrew Molera State Park



This year's early fall migration resulted in very abundant and diverse bird captures this month. During 21 days of banding, we captured 647 birds of 49 species, our highest September capture rate in over five years!



Our most common capture by far was the departing **Pacific-slope Flycatcher**, with 105 individuals.

Migrating **Yellow Warblers** were a distant second with 58 individuals, and newly-arrived **White-crowned Sparrows** were third with 43 individuals. Other new arrivals of over-wintering species included **Golden-crowned Sparrow** (39), **Fox Sparrow** (29), **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** (5), and **Hermit Thrush** (30). This month we were also treated to a dazzling array of rare and unusual captures, including **Black-throated Gray Warbler** (2), **Lark Sparrow** (2), **Swamp Sparrow** (1), **Hammond's Flycatcher** (1), **Nashville Warbler** (1), **Blue-gray Gnatcatcher** (1) (the first capture at Molera since 2001), **Red-eyed Vireo** (1) (the 15th-ever capture), **Chestnut-sided Warbler** (3) (the 10th, 11th, and 12th-ever captures), and most unusual of all, a **Black-throated Green Warbler** (only the 4th-ever capture!)

Mist-netting and Banding at the Carmel River Lagoon



Capture rates at the Carmel River Lagoon, though nowhere near as high as at Molera,



reflected the influx of fall migrants. This month at the river mouth we captured 63 birds of 23 species in 4 days of banding. Our most abundant capture was **Song Sparrow** with 10 individuals. **Chestnut-backed Chickadee** (7 individuals) and **Bewick's Wren** (7 individuals) were the next most common captures. There were several exciting captures at this site this month, including **Willow Flycatcher**, **Hooded Warbler** (the same individual banded last month), and -- especially thrilling -- a beautiful **Northern Waterthrush** (first-ever Carmel capture!). But the highlight of this month (and probably the highlight of the whole year!) at the Carmel River Lagoon was the capture of a **Lucy's Warbler**, the first of its kind banded at Carmel and only the third-ever capture of that species by BSOL biologists. In between checking our nets, we took time to stroll down the rapidly drying Carmel River bed, checking out the mixed-species foraging flocks for more vagrant warblers.

Mist-netting/Banding and Education at Carmel Middle School

Another sign of fall is the beginning of the school year, and this month marked the beginning of our annual interpretive banding program at the Carmel Middle School in association with Craig Hohenberger. Once or twice a month throughout the school year, BSOL biologists band birds at the CMS Biological Sciences Project (affectionately known as "The Habitat") in order to give students the chance to observe actual biological field research and to learn more about the scientific process, data collection, and the importance of critical thinking. This month in just one day of banding we captured 18 birds of nine species. Our number one capture was **Bewick's Wren** (4 individuals), followed by **Chestnut-backed Chickadee** (3 individuals). We captured a few fun migrants including **Lincoln's Sparrow** (1) and **Yellow Warbler** (2), along with the first of many **White-crowned Sparrows**. We also spotted two exciting fall vagrants near the feeders in the Habitat: a **Clay-colored Sparrow** and a **Bobolink**! These unusual visitors stuck around long enough for everyone to get good long looks at them, providing an unexpected treat for students and biologists alike.

Welcome to New Staff



We are delighted to welcome new intern Ian David Crickmore to the BSOL crew. Ian David is in his senior year at the University of California Santa Cruz where he is majoring in Environmental Studies. He is currently doing a full-time internship with BSOL for university credit. He is also using BSOL data to do his senior exit project on the fat stores and stopover ecology of **Golden-crowned Sparrows**. After his internship with BSOL is over, he hopes to use the skills he's learned to build his experience working in other field and bird jobs before applying to graduate school programs in

ecology or environmental science.

Welcome!

Come join us for some fall 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 email BSOL's Assistant Coordinator, Jessica Griffiths, ahead of time to confirm that we are here to welcome you. Jessica can be reached by phone at (831) 624-1202, or e-mail at JessicaGriffiths@VentanaWS.org. See you soon, and don't forget your binoculars!

BSOL Update, August 2005:

Note: At the beginning of September, when this update would normally have been published, an enormous Sycamore branch fell onto the Research and Education Center at Andrew Molera State Park. Nobody was hurt, but the barn was off-limits for almost two weeks as State Parks removed the limb and assessed the building to make sure it was safe. We were therefore unable to get to our offices inside. As a result, the August update is quite late. We apologize for the long wait!



August is a month of transition in Big Sur. The last of the fledgling birds have left the nest and are foraging independently, preparing to face a life on their own. The breeding season is nearly at an end, and fewer birds are



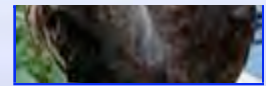
singing to declare their presence. Instead, the birds are beginning to gear up for fall migration, and indeed, this month we see the first signs of the seasonal "changing of the guard". The most gung-ho summer residents, such as **Black-headed Grosbeaks**, have already begun departing for their wintering grounds, and the earliest fall migrants have just begun passing through. Mixed-species foraging flocks, containing a variety of warblers and vireos and led by **Chestnut-backed Chickadees**, are now a common sight in the study area.

Mist-Netting and Bird Banding at Andrew Molera State Park

Despite August's reputation as a slow month, in 22 days of banding we captured 371 birds of 35 species. Our number one capture this month was **Wilson's Warbler** (84 individuals), followed



surprisingly enough by a migrant species, **Yellow Warbler** (42 individuals). **Song Sparrow** (32), **Chestnut-backed Chickadee** (30), and **Bewick's Wren** (25) rounded out the top five. We captured several early fall migrants such as **Townsend's Warbler** (2), **Willow Flycatcher** (2), **Lincoln's Sparrow** (1), and **MacGillivray's Warbler** (1). We also had a couple of unusual captures, including a **Belted Kingfisher** (only our second one this year), and a young male **Cooper's Hawk**, which was the second-ever BSOL capture!



Mist-netting and Banding at the Carmel River Lagoon



Our weekly avian monitoring on the Carmel River continued, and compared to Andrew Molera State Park, the banding pace at the Carmel River Lagoon was downright leisurely. In four days of banding, we captured just 36 birds of 11 species. **Wilson's Warbler** was the top capture with 12 individuals, followed by **Pacific-slope Flycatcher** (5 individuals). Our most exciting catch of the month by far was an adult male **Hooded Warbler**, who was captured two weeks in a row. He did not have any visible body fat, which led us to speculate that he may have spent the summer in the area. The relatively slow banding meant that we had time to go birding along the river, spotting birds like **Least Sandpiper**, **Black-crowned Night Heron**, and a surprisingly brazen **Virginia Rail**.

Mist-netting and Banding at Camp Roberts

This month we concluded our MAPS (Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship) banding at Camp Roberts in the Salinas Valley, with one last day of banding at each site. In two days we banded 53 birds of 16 species. At the Nacimiento River site, we captured 12 birds of 9 species, and at the Salinas site we captured 41 birds of 11 species. The number one capture overall was **Song Sparrow** (12 individuals), followed by **Bewick's Wren** (8) and **Bushtit** (7). We had several interesting birds turn up in our nets, including a **California Thrasher** (1) and a **White-breasted Nuthatch** (1). Our most exciting capture was a juvenile **Lark Sparrow**, one of the many that were flocking in the vicinity of the Nacimiento River banding site. With the conclusion of this season's avian monitoring at Camp Roberts, we now turn our attention to analyzing this year's data and preparing a report on our findings for submission to the California Army National Guard. We enjoyed working with them at the installation, and are already looking forward to next year's monitoring!



Outreach and Education

The end of summer also meant an end to VWS's Natural Science Discovery Camp. We were visited by the last two groups of campers this month. We will miss our weekly visits from these eager youngsters, and we hope that they had as much fun being taught by us as we had teaching them. We're sure that this summer's batch of campers contains several future naturalists, and we wish the kids luck with the upcoming school year.

Comings and Goings



We were greatly saddened to have to say goodbye to our amazing crew leader, Ann Graham. Ann worked at BSOL for nine months, and she became not only an integral part of our team, but a beloved friend. Ann's brilliant smile, wonderful sense of humor, and obvious love for birds and the natural world made her a joy to work with. Ann was also a wonderful photographer, and her excellent bird photos regularly graced our monthly updates. Ann has returned east to spend the fall doing migration banding at Manomet Center for Conservation

Sciences on Cape Cod. We wish her the best of luck & great success at whatever she does in the future. Thank you, Ann!

Welcome!

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BSOL Update, July 2005:



It is high summer in Big Sur, and the golden hills along the south coast are alternately blanketed in fog and shimmering with heat. The trees and shrubs remain green, while the dry grass crunches



under our feet as we walk the paths to our nets. The air is filled with dragonflies and butterflies such as

Lorquin's Admiral, Common Buckeye, and even the occasional Monarch Butterfly. Western Fence Lizards scuttle through the grass and bask in the sun along the trails. The local breeding birds are almost done raising their young, and some intrepid parents are already well into their second brood. The banded pair of **California Towhees** that raised one set of young is now nesting in a clump of sycamores near the lab, and every day we watch the parents scramble to feed their growing nestlings.

Mist-Netting and Bird Banding at Andrew Molera State Park



In July we captured 450 birds of 33 species. **Wilson's Warblers** continued to outnumber our other captures by at least 2 to 1, with 114 caught last month. **Song Sparrows** were our next most numerous capture (60), followed by **Black-headed Grosbeaks** (35). Despite July's reputation for being a slow month, we were favored with several exciting vagrant captures. We caught two interesting vireos:



Cassin's Vireo and **Red-eyed Vireo** (13th ever capture). We also captured one last lingering **Rose-breasted Grosbeak**, bringing our summer capture total to four, the second-highest in BSOL history. But our most thrilling catch was a **Yellow-billed Cuckoo**, only the second-ever BSOL capture! The cuckoo delighted the crowd of visitors to the lab that day, and was photographed and filmed from every angle.

Mist-netting and Banding at the Carmel River Lagoon

July was a very mellow month for banding at the Carmel River. We captured 39 birds of 10 species. Our most common capture by far for the month was **Wilson's Warbler** (13), with **Chestnut-backed Chickadee** (6) coming in second; tying for third place were **Bewick's Wren** (4), **Song Sparrow** (4), and **Swainson's Thrush** (4). Juveniles made up the majority (67%) of the captures. The slow,

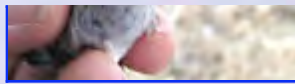


foggy days at the River Lagoon have given us the opportunity to explore the area and to watch the juvenile birds that we would not expect to catch in the mist nets. We pass the time observing the local **Red-shouldered Hawks** and **White-tailed Kites**, to see how they are learning to hunt and fend for themselves.

Avian Monitoring at Camp Roberts



MAPS monitoring continued this month at our Salinas and Nacimiento River study sites at Camp Roberts, and it was very interesting to



experience the dramatic climate and habitat differences between the Salinas River Watershed and the Big Sur Watershed where we spend most of our time. While Big Sur remained relatively fresh and green, the Salinas Valley became quite hot and dry, and everything was covered in a fine coat of dust. The canopy at both the Salinas and Nacimientto study sites, made up of deeply rooted cottonwood, willow and box elder, remained green and vibrant, but the dense thickets of thistle, along with all the other annual plants, were now brown and brittle, creating skeletal forests that still reached 6 or 7 feet in height. Although much of the vegetation had run through its annual cycle, birdlife remained abundant and active, and our capture rates were only slightly lower than in the earlier months of summer. The Nacimientto site remained relatively slow and steady; we captured 46 birds of 11 species over three banding days. The **Bewick's Wren** continued to hold the title of most common capture (14 birds), followed by **Song Sparrow** (8 birds). The Salinas site surprised us by continuing to yield high capture numbers just when we expected a precipitous decline; we captured 122 birds of 19 species over three banding days. **Song Sparrow** remained our most common capture by far (45 birds), but we also caught high numbers of **Common Yellowthroat** (15 birds), Bewick's Wren (11 birds) and **Black-headed Grosbeak** (10 birds). We also netted a few unusual birds at the Salinas site, including a dispersing juvenile **Wilson's Warbler**, a **California Thrasher**, and an adult female **Black-chinned Hummingbird**.

Outreach and Education

The steady stream of visitors continued this month, as adults and children of all ages came to Andrew Molera State Park and got up close and personal with local songbirds. We continued to be visited by groups of enthusiastic young campers enrolled in VWS's [Natural Science Discovery Day Camp](#). Every week, the kids descended on BSOL and were shepherded around to the nets and into the lab to watch bird banding in action. Some children were repeat campers who had visited us before, and to our delight they were able to tell us just where on a bird's body to look for fat, or how to measure a bird's wing. We were also visited by a class from UCSC, who came to learn about natural history research methods. And for two Saturdays in a row, the lab hosted a group of young men who were part of the Natural Resources Recruitment program, which gives at-risk youth a chance to learn about possible careers in conservation and natural resources. The teens learned about BSOL's research, and spent the afternoons on various site-improvement projects. Thanks to them, the lab has a new coat of paint and the net lanes are clear of overhanging branches. We appreciate their hard work, and hope that their visit inspired them to pursue a future in conservation!



Welcome!

Come join us for some 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 email BSOL's Assistant Coordinator, Jessica Griffiths, ahead of time to confirm that we are here to welcome you. Jessica can be reached by phone at (831) 624-1202, or e-mail at JessicaGriffiths@VentanaWS.org. See you soon, and don't forget your binoculars!

BSOL Update, June 2005:



Here at BSOL, June has unfolded like an easy chair. Mornings are quieter now, and it is actually warm enough to wear one sweater instead of four. The sycamores are leafing out, adding a new challenge to birding. Finally, after much anticipation, we put up the footbridge across the Big Sur River, and our blistered feet are thanking us for it. The breeding season is well underway, and like proud parents we watch eagerly as the little ones become stronger and more independent. Everywhere we turn the bushes explode with baby **California Quail**, looking like wind-up toys as they scurry frantically in all directions. We have had some exciting vagrants, including a **Black-and-white Warbler**, **Northern Parula**, **Prothonotary Warbler**, **Hooded Warbler**, **Rose-breasted Grosbeak**, **Baltimore Oriole**, **American Redstart**, and **Palm Warbler**. And now that the summertime is rolling, we are being visited by travelers of the human sort. And as always, we are thrilled to share our passion for bird biology and conservation.

Mist-Netting and Bird Banding at Andrew Molera State Park



Capture rates remained high this month as juvenile birds continued to be caught in large numbers. In 22 days of banding, we captured 587 birds of 38 species. As in May, our number one



capture was **Wilson's Warbler**, with 122 individuals. **Song Sparrows** were a close second with 103 individuals. Other frequently-captured birds were **Chestnut-backed Chickadee** (57) and **Wrentit** (32). Spring migration wound down this month, and we captured the last of the spring migrants, including 10 Willow Flycatchers and two **Yellow-breasted Chats**. We were also lucky enough to capture three species of swallow this month: **Tree Swallow** (2), **Cliff Swallow** (1), and **Barn Swallow** (1). The **Barn**

Swallow was captured in our office and not in our nets, but he received a shiny silver band just like all the other birds. Another interesting capture was a juvenile **White-crowned Sparrow**. This is only the 3rd capture of this species during the summer. But our star birds for the month of June were three **Rose-breasted Grosbeaks** (one male and two females), and a second-year male Hooded Warbler. Interestingly enough, the **Hooded Warbler** was captured in the net nearest to the location where a pair of **Hooded Warblers** nested last year. Will there be another nest? Only time will tell.

Mist-netting and Banding at the Carmel River Lagoon

In the month of June during five days of banding, we captured 72 birds of 17 species. **Song Sparrows** held their title with 15 captures, and **Wilson's Warblers** took a close second with 12 captures. We continue to catch other local breeders such as **Bewick's Wrens**, **Pacific-slope Flycatchers**, **Swainson's Thrushes** and **Chestnut-backed Chickadees**. Some more uncommon captures have been an **American Robin**, **Hairy Woodpecker** and **Brewer's Blackbird**. The Lagoon has slowed down, giving us plenty of time to bird (of course), find Pacific Tree Frogs, destroy invasive plants, and clear the ever-encroaching blackberry from the trails.



Avian Monitoring at Camp Roberts

Mist-netting and Banding. Both birds and biologists have settled into a predictable routine at our MAPS sites on the Camp Roberts National Guard training facility in southern Monterey County. Both sites were dominated by young birds, and we were pleased to see this indication of high productivity for local species. On Thursdays we banded along the Nacimiento River, and each banding day we caught approximately the same number of birds, averaging 26 birds per day over three banding days for a monthly total of 77 birds of 15 species. **Bewick's Wrens** were our most common capture again (38), with **Song Sparrows** coming in second at 10 birds. Our most interesting capture at the Nacimiento site was a breeding female **Northern Rough-winged Swallow**. Fridays were spent on the Salinas River, where our capture rates have been significantly higher since the beginning of the season. June was no exception; after holding steady at around 70 birds per day during all of May and the first two weeks of June, captures at the Salinas site peaked at 80 birds in the third week of June, before dropping to 60 birds last week. At that site in June we banded a total of 214 birds of 20 species. **Song Sparrows** were, as usual, the most commonly captured birds (81 individuals); other high captures included **Bewick's Wrens** (35), **House Wrens** (26) and **Common Yellowthroats** (19). The most interesting species caught at the Salinas site during June included



Bullock's Oriole, Western Wood-Pewee, White-breasted Nuthatch, and Ash-throated Flycatcher.

Bald Eagle Monitoring. In June the **Bald Eagles** nested at Camp Roberts finally abandoned their nest after an unsuccessful attempt to hatch young. The eagles had been working on nest maintenance since February, and the female laid a clutch in late April -- a late clutch for the species. After sitting on the eggs and attending the nest for over 45 days without any hatchlings appearing, the adults have moved off, likely foraging and roosting upstream closer to Lake Nacimiento or Lake San Antonio. We were disappointed by the nest failure, but are hoping that it was simply due to the fact that this is a young pair of birds; perhaps next year will be the year that they nest successfully, and we are looking forward to observing it!

Outreach and Education

This month marked the start of Ventana Wildlife Society's Natural Discovery Day Camp. The kids spend the week learning about the natural world through outdoor games and activities, and then visit BSOL for a morning of learning about songbird research. Every Thursday we find ourselves in the company of a group of energetic day campers eager to learn and ask questions about birds. It's a treat for us to watch the kids' faces light up at the sight of a **Downy Woodpecker** in the hand, or to hear their "oohs" and "aahs" as we pull a bright yellow **Wilson's Warbler** out of a cloth bag like a magician pulling a rabbit out of a hat. We also hosted several other school groups at the lab this month, including a group from Tularcitos Elementary School, and two Girl Scout Troops. We wrapped up the month with a VWS Member Day Bird Walk, where we led a group of 30 members and friends on a walk through Andrew Molera State Park. We saw several nests, including **Vaux's Swift**, **Violet-green Swallow**, and **Cliff Swallow**, and got great looks at birds like **Acorn Woodpecker** and **Red-tailed Hawk**. We saw over 30 species of birds, and thoroughly enjoyed the beautiful weather and gorgeous scenery. We hope everyone had a fun time, and look forward to our next member event!

Comings and Goings

This month marks the beginning of a new era in BSOL history. We are delighted to welcome our new BSOL Coordinator, Karen Ritchie. Karen received her Bachelor's of Science in Biology from Appalachian State University, North Carolina in 1995, and will complete her MS in Biology from that university in December 2005. Karen has over 13 years of field experience in biology and ornithology, including project coordination, development, implementation, and oversight. She has extensive experience with avian point counts and vegetation surveys as well as an understanding of statistical analysis and GIS. Karen has worked with state and federal



agencies, nonprofits, and consulting firms, has authored scientific papers and technical reports, and has presented at scientific conferences. She brings a wonderful energy and enthusiasm to her new role, and we are excited to have her aboard. Welcome, Karen!

Welcome!

Come join us for some 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 email BSOL's Assistant Coordinator, Jessica Griffiths, ahead of time to confirm that we are here to welcome you. Jessica can be reached by phone at (831) 624-1202, or e-mail at JessicaGriffiths@VentanaWS.org. See you soon, and don't forget your binoculars!

BSOL Update, May 2005:

As summer approaches, the fog rolls in with it. The hills are turning golden, and fields of lupine are replaced by the delicate purple flower "Farewell to Spring". The California poppies linger, and one lone yucca is in full bloom in our mini-desert beside the Beach Trail. Every day brings new encounters, whether it is a deer grazing boldly in the meadow, a bobcat reclining in a tree or a rattlesnake coiled on the path. With the passing of May we have experienced the last wave of migrants, and we are still coming down from the rush. The breeders have made themselves at home, and now baby birds are popping out of every nook and cranny. And when we are not busy banding birds, we are watching them. The **Cliff Swallows** spent most of the month building their mud nests under the eaves of the barn, plastering on one tiny pellet at a time. They finished just in time for their favorite mud puddle to dry up, and empty eggshells under the nests point to successful hatching. **Common Mergansers** have begun nesting, and when they aren't bobbing down the river, they are crashing clumsily out of sycamores or squawking loudly as they fly over the lab. And of course there are always the rare vagrants to keep us on our toes. This month we were visited by a few **Black-and-white Warblers** and a singing male **Chestnut-sided Warbler**. And it will keep on getting better!



Mist-Netting and Bird Banding at Andrew Molera State Park



May marked the peak of spring





migration on the Central Coast, and hundreds of brightly-colored migrants passed through Andrew Molera State Park on the way to their northern breeding grounds. In



21 days of banding we captured 790 birds of 44 species, with two 100+ bird days in a row during the second week of May! Our most common capture was the ubiquitous **Wilson's Warbler** (227 individuals), with **Swainson's Thrush** (149 individuals) as a distant second. We captured several delightful migrants, including **Willow Flycatcher** (1), **MacGillivray's Warbler** (1), and **Black-and-white Warbler** (1) (31st ever capture). Some uncommonly-captured over-wintering species ended up in our nets, such as **Townsend's Warbler** (1), **Cedar Waxwing** (1) (29th ever BSOL capture), and **Hermit Warbler** (1) (only the 6th ever capture!). We also caught several interesting birds that breed locally, but are not often captured, such as **Violet-green Swallow** (1), **Lazuli Bunting** (1), **Cliff Swallow** (1) (9th ever BSOL capture), and **Brewer's Blackbird** (2) (10th and 11th captures ever). The **Cliff Swallow** and one of the **Brewer's Blackbirds** were actually captured not in our nets, but in our office! They entered on separate occasions, but both were rescued, banded, and released. We also captured two interesting species that pass through Molera on their way to breed elsewhere in the county: **Western Wood-Pewee** (2) and **Bullock's Oriole** (2) (22nd & 23rd ever BSOL capture).

Avian Monitoring on the Carmel River

Mist-netting and Banding at the Carmel

River Lagoon. We have once again set up a MAPS (Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship) station at the mouth of the Carmel River under a contract with the California Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) to

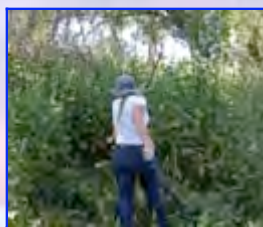


monitor breeding and fall migrant birds in both a restored and mature riparian habitat at the Carmel River Lagoon. This is our sixth year operating at this site, where we will band birds on a weekly basis from May through October. Each week that we were there this month brought with it a fun and interesting mix of local breeders such as **Black-headed Grosbeaks**, **Wilson's Warblers**, and **Song Sparrows**. We have also been capturing some very charming fledglings that have included **Bewick's Wrens**, **Chestnut-backed Chickadees** and **Brewer's Blackbirds**, and thrown in for variety we got a fabulous flock of 10 migrant **Cedar Waxwings** one day. In the month of May during four days of banding we captured 86 birds of 17 species with **Song Sparrows** taking the lead with 15 captures and **Cedar Waxwings** taking a close second with 13 captures. Banding at the river lagoon keeps us busy, but still allows us to appreciate the flora and fauna around us. For example, the restored habitat has begun to establish an understory that includes plants like blackberry bushes which draw birds like **Swainson's Thrushes** to come and eat the berries as they ripen.

Avian Guild Transects. Thanks to a contract with the Monterey Peninsula Water Management District, this spring and summer we will be monitoring birds at nine transects along the Carmel River from De Dampierre Park to Rio Road. A BSOL biologist walks a predetermined route, stopping to do point counts along the way and recording all the birds they see and hear. This project is in its fourteenth year, and is an important long-term study of breeding birds on the Carmel River. The spring set of transects was completed this month, and the data that we collected will help us learn more about how local bird populations have changed over time.

Avian Monitoring at Odello West. This month we started a brand new project in cooperation with DPR to monitor baseline bird populations at the new restoration project at the Odello West property at the Carmel River Lagoon. BSOL is conducting seasonal area searches in the restoration area, which will continue as the restoration progresses. In this way, we can monitor bird response to the various habitat changes taking place, and use this data to evaluate the success of the restoration. It is our hope to continue this project for several years in order to better understand the way bird populations respond to habitat restoration.

Avian Monitoring at Camp Roberts



Mist-netting and Banding. Another MAPS season began on the First of May, and we have returned to Camp Roberts for a second year of avian monitoring in cooperation with the California Army National Guard. This project features two MAPS stations: one on the Nacimiento River, and one on the Salinas River. The sites were chosen to represent healthy and degraded riparian habitats, respectively. The Nacimiento site is characterized by a high diversity of native vegetation, high structural diversity, and infrequent use by humans. The Salinas site, by contrast, is characterized by predominantly non-native vegetation and the regular presence of cattle. While the Nacimiento site looks much the same this year as it did last year, the Salinas site gave us a big surprise when we arrived to set up our field sites--the area is now covered with dense stands of milk thistle, some patches reaching almost 8 feet in height, turning the site into an almost completely unrecognizable jungle. Despite our inherent dislike of nonnative invasive plants, not to mention sharp pokey things, we are learning that these exotic thistles and the Painted Lady butterflies laying eggs on them may be playing an important role for many bird species at the site, particularly the **Tricolored Blackbird**, a California Species of Special Concern.

Contrary to expectations, the Salinas site had a much higher abundance and diversity of birds than the apparently healthier Nacimiento site. In three days of banding at each site, the number of birds captured at the Salinas site was more than twice the number of captures at the Nacimiento site (185 birds vs. 82 birds). The



Salinas site also had almost twice the number of species (13 species) as the Nacimiento site (24 species). Our most common capture at the Nacimiento site was



Bewick's Wren (36 individuals), followed closely by **Song Sparrow** and **Swainson's Thrush** (11 individuals each). Two of these species were also the most common species captured at the Salinas site, where we caught 90 **Song Sparrows** and 34 **Bewick's Wrens**. Species captured at the Nacimiento site have been confined to common native residents, including **Common Yellowthroats** (6 individuals), **Wilson's Warblers** (3 individuals) and a variety of other riparian residents. The species spread at the Salinas site has been much more diverse, with the most exciting capture so far being that of five **Tricolored Blackbirds**. Other interesting captures at the Salinas site in May included **Western Bluebird**, **White-breasted Nuthatch**, **Tree Swallow**, and **Indigo Bunting**.

Bald Eagle Monitoring. We have been increasingly puzzled by the behavior of the nesting **Bald Eagles** on the Camp Roberts base. The female, after sitting on what we assume were eggs for about 35 days, began to exhibit more restless behavior, including much peering down into the bowl of the nest, and shifting positions in the nest. Despite this optimistic indication that the egg had hatched, however, she never began exhibiting true brooding behavior, the sort of behavior we would expect if there were in fact live young in the nest. She continued to sit in restless incubation throughout May, showing no signs of giving up, but also no signs of raising actual young. Our current conclusion is that the eggs were likely laid but were infertile, or were damaged at some point in the incubation process. We will continue to observe the nest through June, to see if her behavior gives us any further clues about the fate of her nest.

Outreach and Education



This month we welcomed several school groups to the lab for fun and educational bird banding programs. We were visited by groups from the Salinas Boys & Girls Club, Aliso Niguel High School, and All Saints Day School. While the ages of our visiting students varied widely, they were all equally enraptured by the tiny songbirds being banded before their eyes. Hopefully their experiences at the lab will encourage some of them to learn more about science and natural history, and will give them a greater appreciation for the world around them.

Comings and Goings

This month marked the end of a remarkable chapter in BSOL history. We are bidding a fond farewell to a special volunteer who has meant a lot to us over the years. John Matusik started volunteering at BSOL over three years ago, and



has been an important member of our team ever since. John's passion for birds and the natural world, combined with his kind and gentle nature (and his talent for thinking up bird riddles!) made him an indispensable part of our crew. John started off as the greenest of novices, but he quickly learned the ins and outs of extracting birds from mist-nets, and soon learned how to band birds. He was equally skilled at counting Monarch Butterflies as part of our over-wintering Monarch Butterfly monitoring. John's warm smile and wonderful sense of humor earned him a special place in our hearts. He is moving up to the San Jose area to begin a new job, so he will not be able to volunteer regularly anymore. However, he has promised to visit frequently! Thanks for everything, John, and we hope to see you soon!

Welcome!

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BSOL Update, April 2005:



The continued rainfall has kept the grass green and the wildflowers blooming. One does not have to venture far from the lab to witness nature at its finest. We enjoy watching the **Cliff Swallows** swoop down to gather mud from the HUGE puddle in the parking lot to build their nests. The **Purple Martins** have made themselves at home in the cavity of the Sycamore above the barn, and the **Anna's Hummingbirds** feed on the nectar of the Figwort growing outside the lab. **Vaux's Swifts** regularly flit overhead amongst the **Tree, Violet-green, Cliff and Barn Swallows**. There have also been some interesting sightings, including a **Black-and-White Warbler**, a **Hermit Warbler** and a **Merlin**. And this month we spotted the surest sign of spring: baby birds! We've already captured fledglings of our resident breeding birds, including **Chestnut-backed Chickadee, Oak Titmouse, Song Sparrow, and Bushtit**.

Mist-Netting and Bird Banding at Andrew Molera State Park

With all of this spring's rainfall, the river raged well into April, which meant our interns got to enjoy the bouncy cable chair ride across the river later in the season than usual. Finally it subsided, and now we can enjoy wading across refreshingly cool water. Thanks to the influx of migrants and a few lingering winter residents, we captured 606



birds of 39 species. The star of April has been the **Orange-crowned Warbler**, with a total of 229 captures! **Wilson's Warbler** was a distant second, with 97 captures. A whole host of colorful spring migrants ended up in our nets this month, including **Yellow Warbler** (3), **Yellow-breasted Chat** (12), **Nashville Warbler** (3), and **MacGillivray's Warbler** (1). We also banded the first batch of returning summer residents including **Black-headed Grosbeak** (10), **Pacific-slope Flycatcher** (10), and **Swainson's Thrush** (11). We also caught two birds that breed here but are seldom captured: a **Bullock's Oriole** (the first of that species to be captured at Andrew Molera State Park since 1999) and a **Violet-green Swallow**. Our most unusual capture this month was a **Hammond's Flycatcher** (29th ever capture).

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

This month marked the end of our educational banding program at the Carmel Middle School (CMS). We captured 46 birds of 19 species, and the most abundant capture was **Song Sparrow** (10 individuals). The



Golden-crowned and White-crowned Sparrows that were such a familiar sight at the feeders have departed for their northern breeding grounds, and in their place we captured returning breeders such as **Common Yellowthroat**, **Wilson's Warbler**, and **Warbling Vireo**. During these last two days of interpretive bird-banding, CMS students learned about the relationship between birds and habitat and why healthy habitat is important. They also discussed human impacts on habitat such as overdevelopment and invasive species, and ended by talking about ways we can conserve resources and ensure that there is enough healthy habitat for all birds. We had a wonderful time interacting with the CMS students this year, and we're already looking forward to coming back to school in the fall!

Bald Eagle Monitoring at Camp Roberts

The **Bald Eagles** at Camp Roberts continued to incubate their eggs through rain and shine this month. The male was seen relieving the female from nest duty a few times, allowing her to stretch her legs and wings. **Bald Eagles** typically incubate their eggs for about 35 days, and the 35-day mark fell in mid-April. Sure enough, during our mid-month visit to the eagles, we observed behavior that seemed to indicate that the eggs had hatched. Previously, while the female was incubating, she

would sit relatively still on the nest, gazing into the distance. However, this time, she seemed restless, and continuously ducked her head down to look at something in the nest. She has exhibited this behavior during every subsequent visit, so it seems very likely that there is a new addition to the **Bald Eagle** family! We will be watching closely for any feeding behavior, and eagerly await the day when we see a little head peeking over the rim of the nest!

Fourth Annual Peter Pyle Workshop



From April 18-22, BSOL co-hosted with the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory (SFBBO) our fourth annual "Advanced Ageing and Sexing Workshop" with renowned Institute for Bird Populations biologist Peter Pyle. Workshop attendees from across the country gathered on the central coast to learn more about micro-aging birds in the hand. Participants enjoyed four days of banding at Coyote Creek Field Station, the Carmel River Lagoon, and Andrew Molera State Park. We examined specimens at the UCSC Museum of Natural History, and enjoyed several informative presentations by Peter Pyle. We also went out tracking **California Condors** with a VWS Condor Program intern. From our vantage point along Highway 1, we spotted six condors flying over a ridgetop, and then turned 180 degrees to watch Gray Whales and Sea Otters frolicking in the waves. The workshop culminated in a delicious dinner donated and prepared by Kristina Westphal of Whole Foods Monterey, hosted at Brazil Ranch. As always, our participation in this annual workshop allows us to better understand the plumage characteristics of every bird that we catch, and only increases the strength of our data. Thank you to everyone who attended, and thank you, Peter!

Twelfth Annual Bird-a-thon

On April 30, birders and bird lovers from all over Monterey County joined together to participate in the 12th annual BSOL Bird-a-thon to reclaim our title of "America's Birdiest County". Co-organized by the Monterey Peninsula Audubon Society (MPAS) and the Wild Bird Center of Monterey, the Bird-a-thon is the major annual fundraiser for BSOL and an opportunity to appreciate our county's amazing bird diversity. Last year, Monterey County came in second place in the Birdiest County contest, with an impressive total of 248 species. This year we were determined to win, and our birders rose to the challenge! From 4 PM Friday April 29 to 4 PM Saturday April 30, dozens of dedicated individuals fanned out across the county, combing beaches, hiking through forests, scanning the ocean, and climbing mountains to find as many bird species as possible.

There were some amazing sightings, including a **Sooty Tern**, **Glaucous Gull**, and the "bird of the count", a **Tufted Puffin**. Saturday evening, a



countdown dinner was held at the Wild Bird Center, and participants were treated to a wonderful meal catered by Whole Foods of Monterey and prepared by Kristina Westphal. After the dinner, there was a silent auction and raffle, and the official countdown emceed by Monterey's own Don Roberson. And since the official count period lasted until Sunday 4 PM, a second wave of birders went out the next day to try and turn up the more elusive species. They were successful in locating three more: **Cattle Egret**, **Rose-breasted Grosbeak**, and **Nashville Warbler**. When all was said and done, our grand total was 250 species! Based on the info we have from other competing counties, it looks like we'll be crowned America's Birdiest County once again! Many thanks to all the local business and individuals who donated to this event and helped make it a success, and a special thank you to all the birders who participated. We're already looking forward to next year! For a more detailed recap and photos of the Bird-a-thon, check out Don's website at <http://montereybay.com/creagrus/ABC05.html>.



Comings and Goings

Just as the winter birds are leaving and the summer birds are arriving, so it is with our crew. This month we said farewell to intern Monika Parsons, who was a valued part of our winter crew. Monika will be going on to work with terns in Cape Cod this summer. We wish her the best of luck at her new job!

BSOL is pleased to welcome two new interns to our field crew, Brett Tryon and Mike Tyner. Mike Tyner recently graduated from California Polytechnic State University San Luis Obispo where he earned a B.S. degree in Ecology and Systematic Biology with a concentration in Wildlife Biology. Last fall he helped out as an intern with the VWS California Condor Reintroduction Program, but now he has joined the BSOL ranks. He has been seriously birding for about four years now, influenced by his teachers and peers at Cal Poly and throughout the Central Coast. Mike hopes that time spent at BSOL this spring and fall will provide him a strong bird banding foundation and also produce some interesting vagrants that make the Big Sur river mouth so exciting.



Brett Tryon graduated in April 2004 from Sir Sandford Fleming College in Lindsay, Ontario (Canada, eh) where she took Ecosystem Management. After spending the summer working for a nest predation study in southeastern Arizona, she took a road trip to Big Sur and fell instantly in love. When she saw the BSOL job posting, she knew it was meant to be. Not only could she pursue her passion for birds, but she could live in the most beautiful place in the world. And here she is, excited to go to work each day and learn from the best.

Welcome!

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, Jessica Griffiths, ahead of time to confirm that we are here to welcome you. Jessica can be reached by phone at (831) 624-1202, or e-mail at JessicaGriffiths@VentanaWS.org. See you soon, and don't forget your binoculars!

BSOL Update, March 2005:



Spring has sprung! Here at Andrew Molera State Park, the heavy winter rains have triggered a glorious display of wildflowers. The fields are blanketed with purple lupine, and everywhere we



walk we see blooming sticky monkey flower, lizard tail, filaree, wild cucumber, and wild lilac. Spring migration has officially begun, and we are delighted to welcome back our earliest spring arrivals, including the cheery **Wilson's Warblers**, who now serenade us daily. The **Purple Martins** have returned to perch and chatter in the sycamore over the lab, and a host of other swallows now swoop and twitter over the study area. Our resident bird species have already paired off, and we have already seen signs of breeding in **Song Sparrows**, **Chestnut-backed Chickadees**, **Anna's Hummingbirds**, and **Spotted Towhees**. This month also marked the end of our winter banding schedule, just in time for the influx of spring migrants!

Mist-Netting and Bird Banding at Andrew Molera State Park

March got off to a slow start, but by the end of the month our nets were full of returning migrants. This month we captured 229 birds of 29 species, which is the highest March total in five years. Winter residents have not yet departed for their breeding grounds, which meant that this month we had an interesting mix of species. Our top capture was **Yellow-rumped Warbler** (37 individuals), followed by **Wilson's Warbler** (28 individuals) and **Golden-crowned Sparrow** (28



individuals). During the last week of March there were several fun captures, including the first returning **Common Yellowthroat**, **Pacific-slope Flycatcher**, and **Lincoln's Sparrow**. But the highlight of March came on the last day of the month, when we captured an adult female **Hooded Oriole**! This is only the seventh BSOL capture of this species, and was quite a treat for us.

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

In March we began our third set of banding days at the Carmel Middle School; the themes this month focused on the relationship between chemistry and bird research and conservation, so we discussed the effects of pesticides on bird populations, and the use of stable isotope analysis to track migration patterns. We also demonstrated bird banding throughout the day, capturing large numbers of **Golden-crowned Sparrows** (27) and **White-crowned Sparrows** (10), as well as several other winter residents. As at Molera, the birds at the Middle School were getting into the swing of spring, and we caught several birds with breeding condition in the later part of the month. Our most exciting capture was a female **Rufous Hummingbird**, and our most exciting moment overall was the sighting of a second-year male **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** on one of the feeders! It is likely that he overwintered there, and will be attempting to migrate to his breeding grounds soon.

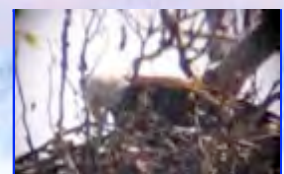


Monarch Butterfly Monitoring

Our very last week of Monarch Butterfly monitoring was this month, and we bid a fond farewell to our orange and black friends as they dispersed. We look forward to seeing their great-great-grandchildren next fall! But even though the butterflies were departing, that didn't keep Monarch Butterfly biologists and enthusiasts from gathering at Asilomar conference grounds for a symposium on Biology and Conservation of the Monarch Butterfly, hosted by the Pacific Branch of the Entomological Society of North America. VWS co-hosted a reception with the Xerces Society at the Pacific Grove Museum of Natural History, and at the symposium BSOL Assistant Coordinator Nellie Thorngate presented findings from our four years of butterfly monitoring. We had the chance to hob-knob with some of the top butterfly biologists in the country, and we can't wait to participate in future symposiums.

Camp Roberts Bald Eagle Monitoring

In March the Bald Eagle pair frequenting Camp Roberts finally committed to nesting in their usual spot, and the female has been incubating the eggs since approximately the fifth of March. That meant that their activity slowed down considerably: the



female sat on the nest almost nonstop, getting up only occasionally to stretch or shift positions, and the male spent his time perched on a tree just adjacent to the nest, glaring at passing trucks and preening his feathers. We are waiting with bated breath for the egg(s) to hatch, which will likely occur sometime in early to mid-April.

VWS Staff Conference



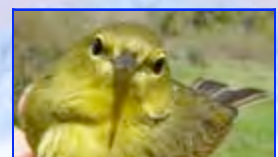
The first-ever VWS Staff Conference was this month, and it was a rousing success! Staff and interns from all three VWS programs gathered to give talks and present research findings. We heard interesting and informative presentations from the California Condor Reintroduction Program interns, and a talk by Executive Director Kelly Sorenson on the VWS Bald Eagle reintroductions from days gone by. Jessica Griffiths summarized BSOL's Monarch Butterfly research, and BSOL interns Monika Parsons and Ann Graham each gave a presentation. Monika talked about the fact that in the winter BSOL captures more female Ruby-crowned Kinglets than males, and that this may be due to the fact that males and females have different winter ranges. Ann presented the results of her analysis of Hermit Thrush overwintering site fidelity, revealing that Hermit Thrushes often return to the same winter territory year after year. Nellie Thorngate took the opportunity to present her thesis work on songbird abundance and diversity in Monterey pine forests. The conference was lots of fun, and we're already looking forward to the next one!

Welcome!

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, Jessica Griffiths, ahead of time to confirm that we are here to welcome you. Jessica can be reached by phone at (831) 624-1202, or e-mail at JessicaGriffiths@VentanaWS.org. See you soon, and don't forget your binoculars!

BSOL Update, February 2005:

February in Big Sur was a month of contrasts as intense rainstorms alternated with days of gorgeous sunny weather. Every plant in Andrew Molera State Park is bursting with new growth, and the first spring flowers are in bloom. Bright



orange poppies nod their heads at us as we walk the trails to our nets, and the willow trees hum with bees gathering pollen. Flitting among the early blooms are a variety of butterflies, including Common Buckeyes, Sara Orangetips, and Spring Azures. Many of our resident birds are singing in earnest now, and we are daily serenaded by the bubbling song of the **House Wren**, the chattering warble of the **Purple Finch**, and the rapid trill of the **Orange-crowned Warbler**.



Mist-Netting and Bird Banding at Andrew Molera State Park



In between the downpours we managed to fit in nine days of banding. Each morning, two BSOL crew members were hoisted across the Big Sur River in a hanging chair to run the nets on the other side. This allowed us to continue operating all of our nets no matter how high the river rose. This month we captured 218 birds of 21 species.

Our most frequent capture by far was

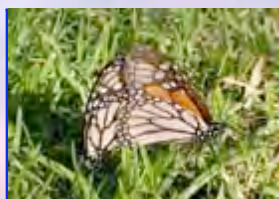
Yellow-rumped "Myrtle" Warbler (104 individuals). Other common captures were **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** (27 individuals) and **Golden-crowned Sparrow** (13 individuals). Interesting captures included a beautiful **Red-breasted Sapsucker**, and two **Allen's Hummingbirds**, the first of the season.

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

We were only able to complete one day of banding at the Carmel Middle School, but what a day it was! We captured 41 birds of 14 species, which is excellent diversity for this time of year. Our most common captures were **White-crowned Sparrow** (13 individuals) and **Golden-crowned Sparrow** (12 individuals), followed by **Anna's Hummingbird** (4 individuals). Other fun captures included a **Pine Siskin**, an **Oregon Junco**, and a gorgeous adult male **Allen's Hummingbird**.



Monarch Butterfly Monitoring



February marked the end of the overwintering season for the Monarch Butterflies. The warming temperatures and increasing day length have triggered a frenzy of activity at our overwintering sites. This month the butterflies dispersed from their tightly packed clusters and spent their days chasing each other and mating. Once they have mated, the female butterflies will leave the overwintering sites and search

far and wide for milkweed plants on which to lay their eggs. Most butterflies have already left the groves where they sheltered for the winter, a change reflected in our weekly population counts. At the start of the month we had 16,732 butterflies at our eight sites, and by the last week of February there were only 3,702 butterflies remaining. The last few butterflies will disperse within the next two weeks or so, and we wish them luck on their quest for milkweed!

Camp Roberts Bald Eagle Monitoring

Love was in the air during the week of Valentine's Day down at Camp Roberts, as our nesting pair of Bald Eagles took time off from nest building to copulate - we were delighted by this promising sign that they are serious about laying eggs this year! Both adults have been fussing and fretting over the placement of sticks in the nest and the removal of branches obstructing the nest bowl since late January, and three copulations have been observed since mid-February. The male and female seem to participate about equally in the nest-building phase, although the female will be the one doing most of the incubating when her eggs are laid. We are now eagerly awaiting the hoped-for clutch, which should be laid sometime in March.

Outreach Activities

On Valentine's Day weekend, Ventana Wildlife Society participated in the 18th Annual Migration Festival at Natural Bridges State Park in Santa Cruz. The Migration Festival is a celebration of the amazing journeys of migrating creatures. 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. There was a colorful map marking the distances traveled by birds banded at the lab, a bird banding photo album, and a photo album documenting our Monarch Butterfly monitoring. Kids could pretend to be a butterfly counter by estimating the number of jellybeans in a jar in the same way that we estimate the number of butterflies in a cluster. Two lucky participants estimated the exact number of jellybeans, and were each awarded a free VWS membership. Congratulations to the winners, and we'll see you all at the Migration Festival next year!

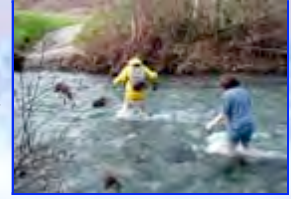


Welcome!

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 on the day you plan to visit to confirm that we are here to welcome you.

BSOL Update, January 2005:

The New Year started off with a bang here at BSOL, as Big Sur was buffeted by intense winter storms. However, the latter half of the month featured delightfully warm, sunny, and spring-like weather. The poison oak and willows have begun sprouting new leaves and the grass is a lush green underneath the nets. Large flocks of American Robins--notably absent in December--have arrived. The Robins, along with newly arrived Cedar Waxwings, can be seen daily feasting on the ripe toyon berries throughout Andrew Molera State Park. The warm weather has encouraged some birds to start singing early, and we have already heard the first cheery trills of Bewick's Wrens and Spotted Towhees.



Mist-Netting and Bird Banding at Andrew Molera State Park



Despite the challenge of crossing the rain-swollen Big Sur River, we were able to complete ten days of banding this month. We captured 204 individuals of 24 species. Our most frequent captures were Myrtle Warbler (66 individuals) and Ruby-crowned Kinglet (36 individuals). We were delighted to recapture a young Belted Kingfisher that we banded last September, and we also recaptured the Swamp Sparrow that was caught last month. Other interesting captures included a flock of American Goldfinch (16 individuals), a beautiful adult male Lesser Goldfinch, and, in a repeat of last month, a gorgeous Red-breasted Sapsucker and a feisty young Sharp-shinned Hawk.

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

BSOL biologists spent two days in January at the Carmel Middle School conducting research and continuing to lecture on avian form and function and ecology. Capture rates at the middle school remained high thanks to the large numbers of White-crowned Sparrows (20 individuals) and Golden-crowned Sparrows (27 individuals) in the nets. In just two days we captured 77 birds of 11 species. In addition to the sparrows, we caught 3 Pine Siskins, the first banded at the middle school since 2000. And in an exciting turn of events, we recaptured a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher that was first banded at the school in



2002!

Monarch Butterfly Monitoring



Monarch Butterfly monitoring continued this month despite some challenging weather and the closure of Highway 1 south of Big Sur for two weeks, preventing monitoring of Plaskett Creek campground. January brought high winds and storms to the central coast and the butterfly populations have subsequently declined. Our most recent count found a total 23,964 butterflies at our eight sites in Monterey County, compared with 38,763 at the start of the month. However, numbers have been increasing with the recent calm weather, as individual butterflies that had been scattered to the four winds during the storms rejoin the larger clusters.

Camp Roberts Bald Eagle Monitoring

This month marked the resumption of our Bald Eagle monitoring for the California Army National Guard at Camp Roberts in the Salinas Valley. Each week, BSOL biologists visit Camp Roberts to observe the pair of Bald Eagles that make their home along the Nacimiento River. We are trying to determine whether the eagles will make a nesting attempt after last year's inactivity. We are happy to report that things look very promising so far! On multiple occasions we watched the eagles bring sticks and branches to their large nest, fussing with each stick to place it just right. Consistent nest maintenance at this time of year indicates that the eagles are getting into the proper domestic spirit. Will the female eagle lay an egg this year? Only time will tell!

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