



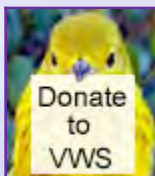
Ventana Wildlife Society BIG SUR ORNITHOLOGY LAB Lab Updates for 2006

Click on small images to see full-size photos.

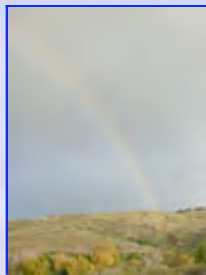


Big Sur Ornithology Lab

- [Home Page](#)
- [About VWS](#)
- [Condors](#)
- [Eagles](#)
- [Education](#)
- [Habitat](#)
- [Ornithology Lab](#)
 - [Lab Update](#)
 - ➔ [2006 Update](#)
 - [2005 Update](#)
 - [2004 Update](#)
 - [2003 Update](#)
 - [2002 Update](#)
 - [2001 Update](#)
 - [Bird Quiz](#)
 - [Pyle Workshop](#)
 - [Featured Birds](#)
 - [Bird-A-Thon](#)
 - [BSOL Totals](#)
 - [Location Map](#)
- [Big Sur Center](#)
- [Join VWS](#)
- [Donate to VWS](#)



BSOL Update, December 2006:



Unlike certain other parts of the country, December arrived in Big Sur with sunshine and mild temperatures. While the nights are cold, the days are pleasant (if windy), and thanks to a few days of much-needed rain, the hills are beginning to flush green once again. The birds of Andrew Molera State Park have settled into their winter routines, foraging busily in the



mornings and maintaining their winter territories. And like them, we have settled into our winter routine, dividing our time between bird banding, Monarch butterfly monitoring, and data entry and office work. At the end of the month we wrapped up another wonderful year of research and monitoring, and our crew dispersed across the country for the winter holidays.

Mist-Netting and Bird Banding at Andrew Molera State Park



This month was one of the "birdiest" Decembers we have ever seen here in Big Sur! This month in 9 days of banding we captured 299 birds of 25 species. That is the highest number of birds and species captured at BSOL in any December since 1994! We had



five days where we banded over 40 birds, and two days where we banded over 50 birds. The number one capture this month was our reigning champion **Ruby-crowned Kinglet**, with 78 birds captured. Our runner-up this month was **Yellow-rumped "Myrtle" Warbler** (46 birds), followed by **Hermit Thrush** (32 birds). We had quite a few

interesting captures, including a **Red-breasted Sapsucker** (an uncommonly-captured winter resident) and a four-year-old male intergrade **Northern Flicker** (the same individual that was captured back in March of this year -- see the [March 2006 update](#) below for a photo and more about this bird). Other interesting captures included two **Lincoln's Sparrows** (which normally don't spend the winter here), a **Lesser Goldfinch**, and 15 **American Goldfinches** (14 of which were all in one net at once). But our most exciting capture this month was a vagrant **White-throated Sparrow** (only our 16th BSOL capture of that species).

This year we banded a total of 3,912 birds of 83 species at BSOL. This is one of the lowest yearly capture totals we've ever had, due to the low numbers of birds captured during spring migration. However, our species diversity was just above average. Among the birds banded this year were 6 species of woodpeckers, 7 species of flycatchers, 7 species of finches, and 20 species of warblers!

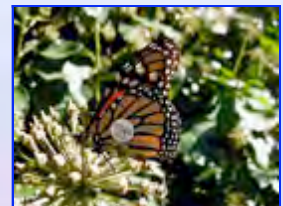
Mist-Netting and Bird Banding at the Carmel River Lagoon



This year we have decided to extend our avian monitoring at the Carmel River Lagoon into the winter months, and this month marked our first day of winter banding at the river mouth. In one day of banding we captured 23 birds of 9 species. Our number one capture was **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** (9 birds), followed by **Townsend's Warbler** (4 birds). But by far the most exciting capture that day -- in fact maybe of the entire year at the lagoon! -- was a hatch year **Blue-winged Warbler**! That same individual had been spotted hanging around the river lagoon since the fall, and in our one day of winter banding, we caught it. It is the first of that species to be banded at that location. Blue-winged Warblers are very rare vagrants to Monterey County, and have occurred here only a handful of times. Only two have ever been banded at Andrew Molera State Park. This particular bird seems content to spend the winter at the Carmel River Lagoon; we hope to see it the next time we're there!

Monarch Butterfly Monitoring

We continued our Monarch Butterfly monitoring, and we visited each of our nine overwintering sites twice this month to count the number of butterflies clustered in the trees. This month the highest combined total of all nine sites was 56,155, which is a small but not significant decrease from last month. We also had some interesting results from our Monarch tagging session last month. In early November we tagged over 1,000 butterflies at the Pacific Grove Monarch Sanctuary with a tiny sticker which bears a unique ID number and a toll-free number in order to learn about inter-site movement and spring dispersal patterns. In the weeks following the tagging, we re-sighted or received calls about tagged



butterflies at George Washington Park (less than a mile away), Point Lobos State Reserve (10 miles south), Natural Bridges State Park (40 miles north), and a private property site on the south coast (40 miles south). Those butterflies really get around! We also attempted to hold another Monarch butterfly tagging session in December in order to tag another group of butterflies. However, we were thwarted twice, once by rain and once by the butterflies themselves, who were not clustering on Sanctuary property. However we were still able to tag a very small cluster for journalists from the Monterey Herald and San Jose Mercury News. We will be holding another tagging session in January; third time's the charm. Wish us luck!

Outreach and Education

We didn't have too many visitors to the lab this month, thanks to the spotty weather and our less frequent banding. But we did welcome a small group of partners in our Natural Resource Recruitment program, who received a banding demo and a tour of the mist-nets as a "thank you" for their participation in the program. At the start of the month we participated in the Monarch Butterfly Symposium held at the Pacific Grove Museum of Natural History and sponsored by Helen Johnson. The symposium was open to the community, and featured a variety of speakers presenting research and information on Monarch butterflies. Around 50 people gathered to hear talks on everything from population dynamics to how to create a successful community butterfly garden. VWS biologist Jessica Griffiths presented findings from this year's butterfly population monitoring and tagging program. The symposium, the afternoon panel, and that evening's reception sparked wonderful conversations and discussions about the future of Monarch butterfly research and conservation. The participants shared their enthusiasm and delight in the amazing and delicate Monarchs, and we're already looking forward to next year's symposium!

Big Sur Christmas Bird Count

BSOL staff and interns participated once again in the annual Big Sur Christmas Bird Count on December 17. This year, our route took us on an 8-mile loop through Andrew Molera State Park, up the Bluff Trail to the Panoramic Trail and back down the Ridge Trail to the Hidden Trail. The weather was rainy, but it was much better than last year's torrential downpour. In between the intermittent showers and occasional burst of hail, the sun peeked through and we were rewarded with spectacular rainbows. When we weren't being dazzled by the beautiful views and ever-changing clouds, we were counting every bird we saw and heard. The most numerous songbird was **Ruby-crowned Kinglet**, which should come as no surprise to those who have been tracking our banding totals. We saw all sorts of fun species, including **Golden-crowned Kinglet**, **Varied Thrush**, **Glaucous-winged Gull**, and **Peregrine Falcon**. We spotted six **California Condors**, and a



vagrant **White-throated Sparrow** (unbanded, which meant it was a different individual than the one we banded earlier this month). But by far the most exciting bird of the count was a vagrant **Eastern Phoebe** at the mouth of the Big Sur River! This bird is native to the eastern U.S. and is a rare visitor to Monterey County. We completed the count tired and damp, but with a renewed sense of appreciation for the beauty and uniqueness of Big Sur.

Welcome!

Due to the unpredictability of winter weather, we will be banding only three to four days a week Mondays through Fridays at Andrew Molera State Park through March. As a result, the lab may not be open on a given day. So, please call or e-mail Wildlife Biologist 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, November 2006:

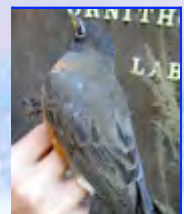


Autumn weather lingers on in the bright sunny days of November, but winter's approach is heralded by cold nights and a glimmering coat of frost on the grass each morning. Fall migration is largely over, with just a few stragglers still making their way south. But the changing of the guard is almost complete as the calls and songs of winter birds fill the air. The bubbling, chattering song of the **Ruby-crowned Kinglet**, the plaintive whistles of the **Golden-crowned Sparrow**, and the "chuck" notes of **Fox Sparrows** and **Hermit Thrushes** greet us as we check our nets. Normally uncommon except in Redwood forests, **Varied Thrushes** and their soft, haunting songs seem to be everywhere this month -- everywhere except in our nets! The Big Sur River remains placid and shallow due to the small amount of November rain, and the **American Dipper** that has set up shop at the river crossing can be seen dunking its head in search of aquatic invertebrates.

Mist-Netting and Bird Banding at Andrew Molera State Park



This month we switched back to our winter banding schedule, which means we band birds only a few times a week. Yet despite the reduced banding, we still captured quite a few birds thanks



to the influx of winter residents! In just 12 days of banding we captured 385 birds of 27 species. Our number one capture by far was **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** with 153 individuals, the highest number of that species captured in one month since 1998! **Yellow-rumped Warbler** was a distant second with 52 birds, followed by **Hermit Thrush** (39 birds) and **Golden-crowned Sparrow** (35 birds). Our nets were filled with colorful birds such as **Townsend's Warbler** (15 birds), **Purple Finch** (4), and **Orange-crowned Warbler** (1). We had several interesting captures this month, including two more **Sharp-shinned Hawks**, bringing our total this fall to six. We also banded an **American Robin**, only the second one this year. Despite its abundance in Big Sur in the winter, this bird is not often captured in our nets. Our most interesting capture was a late-migrating **Nashville Warbler**, a vagrant species which has been unusually common this fall.



Monarch Butterfly Monitoring

This month kicked off our sixth year of monitoring overwintering Monarch butterflies in Monterey County. Monarchs from all over the Western US come to the coast of California to spend the winter in special groves of trees from San Francisco to San Diego. The butterflies will shelter in these groves from the fierce winter storms until about February, when they will mate with each other and then disperse to find milkweed to lay their eggs on. Here in Monterey County we monitor nine overwintering sites, some with only a few hundred butterflies and some with tens of thousands. VWS biologists visit each site every other week to visually estimate the number of butterflies present. We do this to keep track of the populations over the course of the year and from year to year. This month, the highest population count for all nine sites combined was about 59,960. This is 13,000 butterflies more than 2005's highest total, and 3,000 higher than 2004's highest total.



This year our monitoring has another component aside from counting. We are also tagging the butterflies to track their movement between overwintering sites, and to track their dispersal in the spring. The butterflies are tagged with a tiny sticker bearing a toll-free phone number and a unique ID number. Anyone who finds a tagged butterfly can call the number and report the butterfly's location. We had our first tagging session on November 2 at the Pacific Grove Monarch Sanctuary, and we had a whole host of local Pacific Grove volunteers to help us. Thanks to their quick work, and the help of VWS interns, staff, and board members, we tagged over 1,000 butterflies! Also on hand was a camera crew with the BBC, who were there to film the tagging as part of a ten-part series on California wildlife titled "Wild in California". Courtesy of the BBC, the Monarchs will be gaining a world-wide audience.

Outreach and Education

Visitors continued to flock to the banding lab this month, including groups from the Sierra Club and the Monterey Institute of International Studies. And at the end of the month, we were visited by a PBS film crew interested in filming bird banding, Monarch butterflies, and California Condors.



Producer Brian Wignall and his family, who are filming for the series "Wonders of the West", shot lots of great footage of birds, butterflies, and banding interns. We look forward to seeing the completed show! Also this month, Wildlife Biologist Jessica Griffiths gave a talk on Monarch Butterflies for a group of Elkhorn Slough docents, whose enthusiasm and intelligent questions made the evening a delight.

Monarch Madness. VWS participated once again in the annual Monarch Madness at the Pacific Grove Museum of Natural History, held this year on November 25. Wildlife Biologist Nellie Thorngate manned the table which had information on our butterfly monitoring and a make-your-own-butterfly activity for the kids, and she did a tagging demonstration using captive-reared butterflies. It was lots of fun, and we look forward to returning next year!

Monarch Butterfly Training Workshop. VWS's fourth annual Monarch Butterfly Training Workshop was presented the weekend before Thanksgiving at Andrew Molera State Park. The workshop is designed to train people to visually estimate Monarch butterfly overwintering populations. This year the workshop was attended by docents from Natural Bridges State Park as well as a few interested Monterey Peninsula residents. Jessica led the workshop, showing the attendees how to estimate the size of Monarch clusters, as well as how to estimate their height in the tree and how to measure what direction they were facing. Thank you to the workshop attendees, and we hope you have as much fun monitoring Monarchs as we do!



Welcome!

Due to the unpredictability of winter weather, we will be banding only three to four days a week Mondays through Fridays at Andrew Molera State Park through March. As a result, the lab may not be open on a given day. So, please call or e-mail Wildlife Biologist 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, October 2006:



Fall migration is in full swing this October as thousands of birds pass through Central California on their way south for the winter. Andrew Molera State Park has been inundated with migrants and arriving winter residents, some of whom are passing through, and some of whom will be sticking around for the next six months. The reptilian



residents of Big Sur, such as the snakes and fence lizards, are becoming scarcer as they hole up for the coming winter. Meanwhile, the Monarch Butterflies have returned, and thousands of these orange and black insects are gathering at their traditional overwintering sites.

Mist-Netting and Bird Banding at Andrew Molera State Park



This October we captured a whopping 599 birds of 42 species! This incredible diversity was due to a combination of late migrants traveling south, arriving wintering species, and a wide variety of vagrants. Our most common captures were all species that are here for



the winter. Our number one capture was **Hermit Thrush** (91 individuals), followed closely by **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** (89 individuals) and **Yellow-rumped Warbler** (84 individuals). We captured 46 Townsend's Warblers, the highest number caught in one month in the last 8 years! Uncommon but regular fall captures included **Pine Siskin** (1), **Black-throated Gray Warbler** (2), and **Sharp-shinned Hawk** (2). We were delighted to find that our nets this month were filled with a staggering number of colorful vagrant migrants. Highlights included **Black-and-White Warbler** (1), **Magnolia Warbler** (3), a host of **Nashville Warblers** (8) (the most ever captured in one month during fall migration at BSOL), **Chestnut-sided Warbler** (1) (14th ever BSOL capture), **Blackpoll Warbler** (1) (the first one captured in 6 years), and **Western Palm Warbler** (2) (11th & 12th ever BSOL captures). We also had an unusual visitor in the form of a vagrant variety of **Song Sparrow** -- we captured a bird that was from the Northwest Coastal Pacific subspecies. Since **Song Sparrows** are non-migratory, it is rare to find the various subspecies outside their normal geographic range. But our most exciting capture of the month was a **Great-crested Flycatcher**, the first ever BSOL capture of this species!

Mist-netting and Banding at Carmel River Lagoon

We wrapped up our fall monitoring at the Carmel River Lagoon this month, and in four days of banding we captured 57 birds of 14 species. Just like our site at Andrew Molera State Park, the most common captures were newly-arrived winter residents. Our number one capture was **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** (9 individuals), followed by **Hermit Thrush** (8 individuals). Fun captures included migrating **Townsend's Warblers** (4) and **Yellow Warblers** (2), as well as a resident **Black Phoebe**. Though capture rates were slow, there were plenty of migrants passing through. One of our intrepid volunteers spotted a **Blue-winged Warbler**, a rare vagrant for Monterey County!

Science Education and Avian Monitoring at Carmel Middle School

We continued our educational bird banding at the Carmel Middle School, where this month the students learned all about the scientific method and how we can answer research questions with bird banding, as well as how birds can be used as indicator species for habitat quality. In just two days of banding, we captured 62 birds of 15 species. Our most common capture this month was **Red-winged Blackbird** (13 individuals), followed by **White-crowned Sparrow** (11 individuals) and **Golden-crowned Sparrow** (8 individuals). Interesting captures included a late migrating **Wilson's Warbler** (1), a colorful **Yellow Warbler** (1), and a **Yellow-rumped "Audubon's" Warbler** (1).



Education and Outreach



This month over one hundred people visited the banding lab and had a songbird encounter! Along with the daily walk-in visitors, we were visited by groups from the Big Sur Charter School and Lynn Scott Charter School. We also participated in the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society's Wildlife Education Day. VWS Biologists also attended the 2006 North American Ornithological Conference in Veracruz, Mexico. We presented posters and talks which discussed the results of our long-term banding, on topics such as migration stopover and the effects of supplemental feeding on overwintering birds. It is our goal to participate in as many conferences as possible in order to ensure that the results of our avian monitoring are shared with the rest of the scientific community.

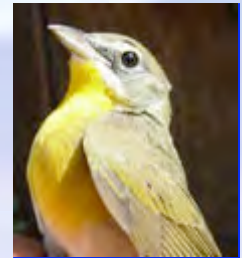
Welcome!

Due to the unpredictability of winter weather, we will be banding only

three to four days a week Mondays through Fridays at Andrew Molera State Park through March. As a result, the lab may not be open on a given day. So, please call or e-mail Wildlife Biologist 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, September 2006:

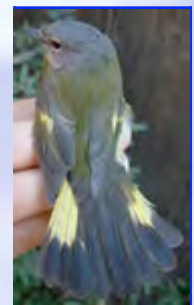
At last the special time has arrived at Andrew Molera State Park that stirs all of us biologists into a wide-eyed and eager state. Yes folks, migration season has once again arrived and though the influx of birds this fall has been slow, it has been a cheerful month nonetheless. As the **Wilson's Warblers**, **Swainson's Thrushes**, **Pacific-slope Flycatchers** and **Warbling Vireos** leave us for the winter, their northern relatives **Townsend's Warblers**, **Hermit Thrushes**, and **Lincoln's**, **Golden-crowned** and **White-crowned Sparrows** are settling in for a warm winter. Aside from the Cassin's Vireos and Yellow Warblers that are traveling through the park this month, we have had a few surprise visits from some very special birds and one particularly unusual bird that had our hearts pumping at the mere sight of it. Read on to find out more!



Mist-Netting and Bird Banding at Andrew Molera State Park



Thanks to arriving fall migrants, we had a very busy September! We captured a total of 455 birds of 45 species. Our most common captures were all Neotropical migrants on their way to their wintering grounds in Mexico and



Central America. Our number one capture was **Pacific-slope Flycatcher** (59 individuals), followed by **Yellow Warbler** (55 individuals) and **Wilson's Warbler** (37 individuals). Uncommon but regular fall visitors that turned up included **Yellow-breasted Chat** (2), **Black-throated Gray Warbler** (1), and **Winter Wren** (2). We had several very exciting fall vagrants turn up in our nets, including **Cassin's Vireo** (6), **Rufous-crowned Sparrow** (1), **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** (1), and **American Redstart** (1). But by far the most interesting bird that we captured was a very unusual hybrid warbler! Nothing like this bird had ever been seen before by any of our banders, who thought at first that it might be a rare Old World or Mexican vagrant. However, we eventually figured out that it

was a hybrid. This bird stumped all our experts, and we're still not entirely sure what the parent species are. Speculation and theorization abound (it seems likely that one parent is a Yellow Warbler), but the mystery remains. We did take a sample of genetic material, which will be sent in for lab analysis. Hopefully this will give us an answer as to the identity of this mystery warbler.

Mist-netting and Banding at Carmel River Lagoon



During 5 days of bird banding at the Carmel River Lagoon, we captured 62 individuals of 17 species, including seven species of migratory songbirds who were either passing through on their way to Mexico and Central America for the winter, or arriving from their breeding grounds in parts north to spend their winter months here with us on the central coast. Our most frequently captured species was the Neotropical migratory **Wilson's Warbler** (11 captures), followed by year-round locals **Bewick's Wren** and **Song Sparrow** (8 captures each). A single **Townsend's Warbler** was the first avian harbinger of winter, and we were delighted by the uncommon appearance of a **Blue-grey Gnatcatcher** in one of our nets. Our most exciting capture of the month was a young female **Sharp-shinned Hawk**, who appeared appalled and outraged at being banded, handled and measured for our records.

Science Education and Avian Monitoring at Carmel Middle School

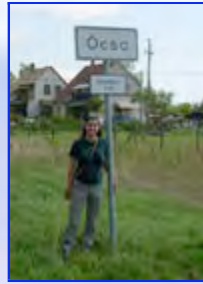
September means the beginning of the school year, and that means another season of science education and avian research at the Carmel Middle School at the mouth of Carmel Valley. Students in 6th through 8th grade come to the outdoor learning facility affectionately known as "The Habitat" to observe bird banding operations and to learn about topics of bird science including bird-habitat interactions, the effects of pollutants on birds, avian anatomy, and the physics of flight. This month 6th grade students got an introduction to the whys and hows of bird banding at the Carmel Middle School, and the Environmental Literacy class led by Craig Hohenberger paid a brief visit to hear about the effects of climate change on bird populations. During our single day of banding, we captured birds such as **Wilson's Warbler**, **White-crowned Sparrow**, **Golden-crowned Sparrow**, and **Chestnut-backed Chickadee**.



Education and Outreach

Over 250 visitors of all ages flocked to the lab this month to observe

songbirds up close and personal. We were visited by a birding tour from the UK and groups from the Santa Cruz Waldorf School and the Widowed Persons Association of California, and we hosted the Community Foundation of Monterey County's Fund for the Environment Day. We also participated in the second annual Monterey Bay Birding Festival, which took place from Sept 22-24. Dozens of birding enthusiasts came down to Andrew Molera State Park for special VWS field trips, which included a bird banding demo, condor tour, and bird walk. The participants enjoyed the beautiful Big Sur scenery while birding in Molera at the peak of fall migration, and everyone was able to spot some amazing birds (including the **California Condors**).



Our staff also did outreach of a different kind, as Wildlife Biologist Jessica Griffiths traveled to Hungary to volunteer at a banding station in Osca where every bird was a lifer! Jessica worked for 10 days with bird banders at a constant-effort mist-netting migration station in what we hope will eventually become a bander exchange program. She learned European banding techniques (such as looking at muscle mass) from the Hungarian biologists, and taught them some North American techniques (such as looking at skull ossification). Though Jessica barely spoke a word of Hungarian, her hosts were very friendly, and she had a wonderful time. Some day we hope to host one of the Hungarian banders here so they can experience Big Sur. By setting up such knowledge exchanges, we hope to improve our data collection while forming connections with scientists in the global community.

Comings and Goings

This month we said farewell to intern Ayla Reith, who is returning to school at UC Santa Barbara. She finished up her internship with a very interesting presentation on the relationship between birdsong, temperature and time of day. We will miss Ayla's smile and her sense of humor, but she has promised to come back and visit us in Big Sur. We hope to see you soon, Ayla!

We also gained an intern this month as we welcomed back globe-trotter Josh Scullen (doesn't he ever stop migrating?). After another summer of banding boreal birds amid swarms of biting insects in Newfoundland, Josh has returned to the mild climate of Big Sur to continue working with BSOL. Josh found a home away from home on the banding crew when he was here in March and April of this year, and is glad to be back with the BSOL family. He looks forward spending the fall and winter catching vagrants, crunching numbers, and fixing mist-nets. Welcome home, Josh!



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 schedule is busy, we recommend that visitors call or e-mail Wildlife Biologist 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 2006:

While folks in other parts of the country continued to cringe under the onslaught of this year's particularly intense summer heat, denizens of Big Sur found the weather rather cool and clammy during the month we affectionately refer to as "Fogust". Near nightly onshore flows pulled the marine layer far out into our coastal valleys, leaving Big Sur and Carmel insulated in a layer of chilly fog most days. Early August was slow and lazy for birds and people, but later in the month we began to see our first fall migrants, and our summer breeding birds were very busy putting on fat in preparation for their annual journeys to parts south.

Mist-Netting and Bird Banding at Andrew Molera State Park



This month, in 22 days of banding, we captured 349 birds of 35 species. Forty-eight % of those birds were neotropical migrants, and of those birds, 37 % had visible fat stores, indicating that they were already prepared to commence their fall migration. Our most commonly captured species this month was




Wilson's Warbler (52 individuals), followed by **Spotted Towhee** (34 individuals) and **Song Sparrow** (33 individuals). Early harbingers of an eventful fall migration season included yet another **Lazuli Bunting**, three **Cassin's Vireos**, a **Hooded Oriole**, and two juvenile **Rufous-crowned Sparrows**.

Mist-netting and Banding on the Carmel River



Carmel River MAPS Stations. In August we completed our final week of MAPS banding for the 2006 MAPS period. As in years past, our last days on the Carmel River were characterized by rather slow capture rates, particularly at Rancho San Carlos, where we captured only 5 individuals



of 4 species (**Orange-crowned Warbler**, **Wilson's Warbler**, **Wrentit** and **Bewick's Wren**) during our single August banding day. At the Schulte Bridge site we captured 15 individuals of 7 species during one day of banding. The most common August capture at that site was **Wilson's Warbler** (4 birds), followed by **Bushtit** (3 birds). At the Red Rock site, we banded 14 individuals of 8 species. Our most frequently captured bird was **Wrentit** (3 individuals).

This was our third year of MAPS banding along the Carmel River, which means that we can now begin to calculate productivity indices, giving us a robust tool for assessing habitat health and trends in avian populations at our study sites.

Carmel River Lagoon. Although the capture rates at the Carmel River Lagoon in the summer were low as usual, capture totals began to climb towards the end of the month, as early migrants began moving through the area, and young dispersing birds struck out on their own. Fall was heralded by the arrival of cheeky **Townsend's Warblers**, who love to forage on the late summer foliage of the arroyo willows, along with local **Chestnut-backed Chickadees** and **Bushtits**. This month in three days of banding at the Carmel River Lagoon we captured 39 birds of 13 species. **Bushtit** was the most frequently captured species (11 birds), followed by **Wilson's Warbler** (7 individuals). August was a quiet month for bird banding at the Carmel River Lagoon, but we're keeping our fingers crossed for some interesting vagrants come September!

Avian Monitoring at Camp Roberts

Mist netting and Banding. This month we wrapped up our 2006 MAPS banding season at Camp Roberts. The continued summer heat kept bird activity low, but we began to see early signs of fall, including mixed foraging flocks of **Oak Titmice**, **Chestnut-backed Chickadees**, **Bushtits** and **Wilson's Warblers**. We also captured a few neotropical migrants with visible fat deposits, indicating that they were preparing for their migration to Central America. During our final visit to the Nacimiento site we captured 10 birds of 6 species. The most commonly captured species, as usual, was **Bewick's Wren** (5 birds). Our last banding day at the Salinas site yielded 28 individuals of 10 species. The number one capture was once again **Song Sparrow** (14 birds), followed distantly by **Oak Titmouse** and **House Finch** (3 individuals each). Now that we have three years of MAPS banding data for these sites, we will begin calculating productivity indices, in order to determine the habitat value of each site.

Education and Outreach

In August our lab hosted 245 visitors, including family groups, camp kids, and docents from other organizations. The VWS Natural Science Discovery Camp kids got a healthy dose of conservation research education when they visited us to see bird banding and learn about how the study of birds helps us to conserve not only the birds themselves, but

also the habitats in which they live. Families visiting the area for family reunions had a special treat, viewing wild birds up close and in the hand. A docent group from the Monterey Bay Aquarium got to compare experiences with BSOL biologists as they spent the day observing our research techniques and learning about terrestrial bird studies in Big Sur.

Comings and Goings

In August we said a mournful farewell to Conservation Ecology crew leader Brett Tryon, who has been with us since April 2005. Brett was an outstanding part of our field crew, and devoted huge amounts of time and energy to organize our first annual Big Sur Bird Bash, held in June of this year. Brett will be returning to Ontario, Canada to spend some quality time with her family before journeying on to Georgia to experience winter bird banding in the Southeast, as a member of the MAWS (Monitoring Avian Winter Survival) project run by the Institute for Bird Populations. Good luck, Brett - we'll miss you!



We are delighted to welcome our newest addition to our crew, Jen Olson. Jen is originally from Duluth, Minnesota. She completed her undergraduate degree in Environmental Studies at the University of Minnesota-Duluth in 2003, then spent two seasons doing environmental education at Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory in Duluth. While at Hawk Ridge, she got to spend a lot of time helping out at the passerine and raptor banding stations there, and decided she was hooked on working with birds. Her most recent field job was banding breeding birds in northern Arizona for the University of Montana Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit. She's excited to spend fall migration season in a beautiful place with great birds, and is also excited to spend a winter without shoveling ANY snow! She hopes the BSOL staff doesn't mind if she kisses a Wrentit once in awhile.

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 schedule is busy, we recommend that visitors call or e-mail Wildlife Biologist 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, July 2006:



Summer typically means hot, sunny days in Big Sur, and this July was no exception. While the reptilian denizens of Andrew Molera State Park such as western fence lizards and alligator lizards enjoyed basking in the sunshine, we sought the shade of the Western Sycamores that extend their broad leafy canopies over the trails. As the summer goes on, juvenile birds are leaving their parents and striking out on their own, exploring their new world and very often (to their surprise!) getting caught in our mist-nets.

Mist-Netting and Bird Banding at Andrew Molera State Park



This month, in 22 days of banding, we captured 340 birds of 27 species. A whopping 80% of those birds were juveniles, evidence of another



successful breeding season here at Molera. Our number one capture this month was once again

Wilson's Warbler (63 individuals), followed by **Song Sparrow** (50 individuals) and **Spotted Towhee** (27 individuals). We had a few fun captures, including another **Lazuli Bunting** (bringing this year's capture total to 5) and one lonely juvenile **White-crowned Sparrow**, here at Molera weeks before the other sparrows of its kind. But our most exciting capture this month was a juvenile **Northern Saw-whet Owl** (only the fifth capture ever!)

Mist-netting and Banding on the Carmel River

Carmel River MAPS Stations. Our avian monitoring at our three sites on the lower Carmel River continued this month. Bird abundance was lowest at the Red Rocks site, where in two days of banding we captured 24 birds of 11 species. Our number one capture was **Bewick's Wren** (5 birds), and our most interesting catch at that site was an **American Robin**. At the Schulte Bridge site, in three days of banding we captured 68 birds of 21 species. At this site, **Bushtit** was the most frequent capture (10 birds), followed by **Hutton's Vireo** (7 birds). Fun captures included both **Steller's Jay** and **Western Scrub-Jay**. Bird abundance was highest this month at the Rancho San Carlos site, where in three days of banding we captured 71 birds of 18 species. The most common capture was **Song Sparrow** (18 birds), followed by **Wilson's Warbler** (12 birds). Our most interesting captures at that site (and the most exciting for the month on the Carmel River) were **Western Wood-Pee-wee** (2 birds) and **MacGillivray's Warbler** (2



birds).

Carmel River Lagoon. This month in three days of banding at the Carmel River Lagoon we captured 47 birds of 12 species. The most common capture was **Bewick's Wren** (12 birds), followed by **Wilson's Warbler** (10 birds). There were two very exciting captures at this site this month, both caught on the same day. The first was an **American Redstart**, the first ever banded at Carmel. The second was a **Band-tailed Pigeon**, the first one ever captured by BSOL at any of our banding stations! Band-tailed Pigeons prefer to hang out high in the tops of redwood trees, so to capture one in a net in riparian habitat is very unusual.

Avian Monitoring at Camp Roberts

Mist netting and Banding. July was a very relaxed month in southern Monterey County at the Camp Roberts avian monitoring sites. Bird activity was largely limited to the movements of juvenile **Song Sparrows** and **Bewick's Wrens**, and large foraging flocks of **House Finches** and **Lesser Goldfinches** who found the seeding thistles and ripening elderberries much to their liking. The heat peaked in late July at 102 degrees in the shade, causing both birds and researchers to move slowly if at all. At the Nacimiento site, where changes in the water table cause half of the study area to turn into a boggy patch of green, the air was heavy with evaporating water, and buzzing with the activity of dragonflies, bees and other insects. At the Salinas site, the dust and heat turned everything golden-brown. In three days of banding at the Nacimiento site, we captured 82 birds of 12 species. Our most common capture by far was **Bewick's Wren** (39 birds), followed by **Song Sparrow** (20 birds). Fun captures included a **California Thrasher** and two **Common Yellowthroats**. At the Salinas site in three days of banding we captured 85 birds of 17 species. The number one capture was **Song Sparrow** (32 birds), followed distantly by **Oak Titmouse** (8 birds). We banded a few interesting birds at this site, including two **Ash-throated Flycatchers** and a **White-breasted Nuthatch**.



Point Counts. Our Least Bell's Vireo point count surveys concluded during July, and though we did not detect any of that species during the summer, we did gather important data on the abundance and diversity of other riparian birds. We look forward to continuing these point counts next year in order to further study the long-term population trends of riparian-obligate species at Camp Roberts.

Outreach and Education

July was a busy month for us in terms of human visitors, as we were visited by over 200 people this month. We continue to entertain the weekly groups of VWS's Natural Science Discovery Camp kids. We were also visited by a group from Monterey Park District summer camp,

a group of teens from Harmony at Home, and a class of college students from UCSC. Students of all ages experienced the wonder of seeing songbirds up close, and (we hope) had the seeds of environmental awareness planted in their eager young minds. We hope that seeing conservation in action will lead young people to act responsibly towards wildlife and the environment.

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 schedule is busy, we recommend that visitors call or e-mail Wildlife Biologist 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 2006:

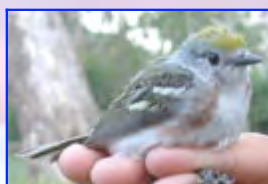


In the month of June, the hills of Big Sur remain covered with late-blooming flowers. Yellow lizard tail, orange sticky monkey flower and California poppy, and red Indian paintbrush provide a



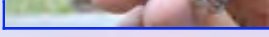
beautiful palette that complements the now golden hills and blue skies. Along with warm temperatures and windy afternoons, June brought us a wave of vagrant migrants and a host of fledgling birds trying out their wings for the first time. Suddenly we are surrounded by coveys of **California Quail** with tiny striped chicks scattering before us like mice, and everywhere we go we hear the plaintive begging of juvenile **Spotted Towhees**, **California Towhees**, **House Wrens**, and **Bewick's Wrens**. Baby ground squirrels and wood rats have also been spotted scampering through the grass. The footbridge across the Big Sur River is now installed, which means no more freezing wet feet in the early mornings! But during the hot afternoons we still dunk our toes in its pleasantly cool waters. Summer is here!

Mist-Netting and Bird Banding at Andrew Molera State Park



In what may be a first for BSOL, more birds were captured at Andrew Molera State Park in June than in May. We had high numbers





this month thanks to an influx of late migrants and an explosion of fledgling birds. In 22 days of banding we captured 440 birds of 41 species. Our most frequent capture this month was **Chestnut-backed Chickadee** (85 individuals), followed by **Song Sparrow** (71) and **Wilson's Warbler** (49). We captured several interesting breeding birds, including **Lazuli Bunting** (1), **Violet-green Swallow** (1), and four **Brewer's Blackbirds**, the most captured in one month since 1995! We had several very exciting captures this month, including migrants such as **Hooded Warbler** (1), **Chestnut-sided Warbler** (1) (13th ever BSOL capture), and **American Redstart** (1) (only the 10th ever BSOL capture). One of our more unusual captures was a **Lincoln's Sparrow** caught on June 7, two weeks later than the latest spring Monterey County record. And lastly, in a delightful turn of events, a male **Northern Parula** arrived at the start of the month and set up a territory near the BSOL barn. He was captured three times and was found to be in breeding condition. We were hopeful that a female might turn up and they might attempt to nest, as a pair did back in 2004. However, after weeks of singing his heart out, the Northern Parula gave up and moved on at the end of the month. Better luck next year, little fella!

Mist-netting and Banding on the Carmel River



Carmel River MAPS Stations. This month we resumed our MAPS (Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship) stations along the Carmel River. These stations were operated in 2003 and 2004, but due to a funding shortage were not run last year. This year, thanks to a grant from the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act and in cooperation with the Monterey Peninsula Water Management District, we were able to resume avian monitoring at three sites along the river. At the Red Rocks site, we captured 76 birds of 20 species. The top captures were **Bewick's Wren** (19) and **Bushtit** (13), and the most exciting capture by far was a **Hooded Oriole**! At the Schulte Bridge site, we banded 80 birds of 19 species. At that site, the most common captures were **Chestnut-backed Chickadee** (10) and **Orange-crowned Warbler** (9). Interesting captures included a lively **Red-shafted Flicker**. Lastly, farthest downstream at the Rancho San Carlos site we banded 63 birds of 20 species. The number one capture was **Chestnut-backed Chickadee** (11), followed by **Bewick's Wren** (8). Fun captures included a **Nuttall's Woodpecker** and a **Tree Swallow**.

Carmel River Lagoon. We continued our monitoring at the mouth of the Carmel River, where bird activity continues to be slow. This month in two days of banding we captured just 22 birds of 7 species. Our top capture was **Bewick's Wren** (6), followed by **Song Sparrow** (5) and **Wilson's Warbler** (5). The most exciting capture of the month was an adult male **Sharp-shinned Hawk**. These fierce little raptors are normally caught from fall through early spring, so to band one in the middle of summer is unusual.

Avian Monitoring at Camp Roberts



Mist netting and Banding. We continued our monitoring contract with the California Army National Guard at Camp Roberts this month. During June, summer finally arrived full-force in the Salinas Valley, bringing midday temperatures up into the 90s and 100s. Our banding sites have turned dusty and dry, and the green grasses and hemlock have been replaced by black mustard and wickedly sharp star thistle. Despite the heat, bird activity increased dramatically this month at both sites, with the arrival of many healthy batches of fledglings. During three June MAPS sessions, we captured 99 birds of 15 species at the Nacimiento River banding site. The most commonly captured species was **Song Sparrow** (26 individuals), followed by **Bewick's Wren** (20 individuals). Other common captures included **House Wren** (12 individuals) and **Common Yellowthroat** (11 individuals). Interesting and uncommon captures included one **Yellow Warbler** and a very fat, and very late, migrating **Golden-crowned Sparrow**, only the eighth Monterey County record for the species during the summer months. At the Salinas River site, we banded 186 birds of 15 species. As expected, Song Sparrows far outperformed all other species in terms of captures, with a total of 90 individuals (most of them fledglings). We also had plenty of practice banding **Bushtit** (21 individuals), **Bewick's Wren** (16 individuals) and **House Wren** (14 individuals).

Point Counts. Our Least Bell's Vireo point count surveys continued during June, and we observed many species common to the area, including **Acorn Woodpecker**, **Ash-throated Flycatcher**, **Bewick's Wren**, **Black-headed Grosbeak**, **Bullock's Oriole**, **Common Yellowthroat**, **Lesser Goldfinch**, **Song Sparrow**, **Tree Swallow**, **Western Kingbird**, **White-breasted Nuthatch** and **White-tailed Kite**, as well as the occasional **Pacific-slope Flycatcher** and **Swainson's Thrush**.

Outreach and Education

This month marked the start of VWS's Natural Science Discovery Camp, which takes kids aged 8-12 on a week-long learning adventure, using nature as a classroom. Once a week, 25 bright-eyed youngsters arrive at the banding lab for a morning with the songbirds, and we are consistently amazed by their enthusiasm and perceptive questions. We were also visited this month by a class from Tularcitos Elementary. In addition, one Saturday a group of birders joined Wildlife Biologist Jessica Griffiths for a walk through the park seeking out rare and elusive Molera birds. All in all, over 160 people visited us during the month of June. Every one of our visitors, young and old, gets a chance to see songbirds up close and watch biologists in action. Stop by and see for yourself!

Comings and Goings



This month we welcomed two new interns to the Conservation Ecology crew, bringing our crew to its full complement of five. Oscar Johnson comes to us from southern California. He is an undergraduate at Santa Barbara City College, and after he transfers to a university, he plans to major in biology with an emphasis on ornithology. He has been actively birding since the age of five and has traveled widely and birded in North and Central America with his family on their sailboat. Until recently he has been helping at a banding station near Los Angeles, where he learned to band. Now while banding at Molera he plans to find the best vagrant birds that the park has to offer. His other interests range from sailing and hiking, volleyball and surfing.

Ayla Reith developed an interest in birds when she was five and realized that they came from dinosaurs! Raised in Southern Louisiana, simple nature expeditions inevitably developed into bird-watching adventures. Through school Ayla was always most interested in the natural sciences, leading her to study Biology. She is currently a student at UC Santa Barbara and will be spending this summer interning with VWS, mist-netting and banding passerine birds.



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 schedule is busy, we recommend that visitors call or e-mail Wildlife Biologist 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 2006:



The month of May arrived with warm temperatures, bright blue skies, and plenty of sunshine. Butterflies and bees flutter and hum among the flowers, and the fence lizards bask in the sun. We have had to watch our step along the trails, keeping our eyes peeled for the various snakes that have come out to enjoy the weather, such as rattlesnakes, gopher snakes, racers, and

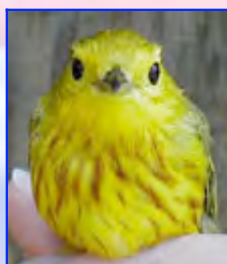


kingsnakes. The birds of Andrew Molera State Park are busily engaged in raising their young, and we have already banded a host of fledglings. Juvenile **Song Sparrows**, **Chestnut-backed Chickadees**, **Orange-crowned Warblers**, **Anna's Hummingbirds**, **Allen's Hummingbirds**, and **Bushtits** have already graced our nets. The early morning air is filled with a veritable symphony of songs as every bird declares its presence to the world.

Mist-Netting and Bird Banding at Andrew Molera State Park



This year's spring migration was one of the most unusual in all the years we've been banding at BSOL. Normally in May, hundreds upon hundreds of migrants pass through Molera on their way north, stopping in the park to rest and refuel. May is usually our peak capture month, with at least one or two days where we catch over 100 birds. However, this spring, the big wave of migrants never materialized. One explanation may be that the migrating birds, delayed by the late spring rains, just kept flying right over their usual stopover locations in order to reach their breeding grounds on time. Another possibility is that they took a different route, or that perhaps the bulk of migrants haven't even reached us yet. Whatever the reason, this month saw our lowest May capture totals and capture rates in all our 14 years of banding. But despite our low numbers, we still captured a high variety of species.



In 22 days of banding this month, we captured 436 birds of 40 species. Our number one capture was the same as every May: **Wilson's Warbler** (91 individuals). **Swainson's Thrushes** were a distant second (58 individuals), followed by **Wrentit** and **Warbling Vireo** (35 individuals each). We found several fun birds in our nets this month, including **Lazuli Bunting** (2), **Violet-green Swallow** (1), **Western Wood-Pewee** (1), and one very disgruntled **American Crow** (only the third-ever BSOL capture!) We also caught quite a few exciting spring migrants, including **Yellow-breasted Chat** (10), **Yellow Warbler** (6), **MacGillivray's Warbler** (4), **Willow Flycatcher** (1), and our two star captures this month, **Dusky Flycatcher** (1) and **Northern Waterthrush** (1).



Mist-netting and Banding at the Carmel River Lagoon



This month we resume our migration and breeding banding at the Carmel River Lagoon for the eighth year in a row in cooperation with the California Department of Parks and Recreation. As part of our long-term

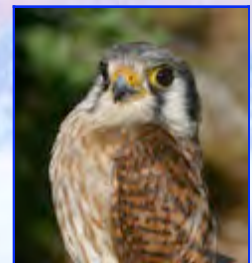


research at this site, we are banding birds in mature riparian forest and a stand of planted willows that is part of a restoration effort. By comparing the differences in bird abundance and diversity in the two habitats, we can better understand how habitat restoration affects bird productivity and survivorship, and evaluate the effectiveness of this particular method of restoration. In three days of banding this month at the Carmel River Lagoon, we captured 43 birds of 13 species. Our most common capture was **Chestnut-backed Chickadee** (11 birds), followed by **Wilson's Warbler** (8 birds). We also captured a few interesting spring migrants such as **Common Yellowthroat** (2) and **Yellow-breasted Chat** (1).

Avian Monitoring at Camp Roberts

In the beginning of May, we began our third year of avian monitoring at the Camp Roberts California Army National Guard facility in southern Monterey County. As in previous years, avian monitoring at Camp Roberts is comprised of three components: Bald Eagle surveys, Point Counts, and MAPS (Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship) banding. The late spring rains ensured that our study sites were lush and green, and the weather during our first month of data collection was mild. As we worked, we enjoyed watching the antics of **Western** and **Cassin's Kingbirds**, the soaring courtships of **Red-tailed Hawks**, and the bold posturing of singing **Willow Flycatchers**.

Mist netting and Banding. During the two May MAPS banding sessions, we captured 51 birds of 13 species at the Nacimiento River banding site. The most commonly captured species was **Bewick's Wren** (19 individuals). Other common captures included **Song Sparrow** (10 individuals) and **Common Yellowthroat** (5 individuals). Although all of our captures were resident species, we detected a few migrants in the study area, including **Yellow Warbler** and **Townsend's Warbler**. At the Salinas River site, we banded 81 birds of 21 species. The most frequently captured species by far was **Song Sparrow** (31 individuals); **Bewick's Wren** and **Common Yellowthroat** were also frequent captures (9 individuals each). The most exciting capture of the month at either site was a female **American Kestrel**, captured at the Salinas River site. Those grassland-loving falcons rarely stray into the riparian areas where we run our nets, and we were terribly excited to have the opportunity to observe one in the hand (only the second VWS record ever!). Although we also captured a **MacGillivray's Warbler** and a **Willow Flycatcher** at the Salinas River site, both sites seemed to be rather short on migrants, perhaps reflecting a late migration influenced by the late, wet spring. We're hoping that June will bring us more Warblers, Grosbeaks and other migrants, but we're also looking forward to the first wave of fledgling Song Sparrows, Bewick's Wrens and other residents.



Point Counts. Our Least Bell's Vireo point count surveys began on May 18. The purpose of the surveys, which have been conducted by VWS

biologists since 2003, is to detect any remaining or returning Least Bell's Vireos in southern Monterey County, and to track long-term population trends of riparian-associated songbirds in the area. During our first few surveys this year, we detected a variety of common neotropical migrants and year-round residents, but no surprises. Species detected during our counts included **Black-headed Grosbeak, Black Phoebe, Bullock's Oriole, Common Yellowthroat, House Wren, Oak Titmouse, Song Sparrow, Tree Swallow, White-breasted Nuthatch** and **Yellow Warbler**, among others.

Bald Eagle Surveys. The pair of Bald Eagles that has chosen to make Camp Roberts their home declined to nest this year, although they are routinely observed on or near the nest that they first built several years ago. The behavior of this eagle pair is still somewhat mysterious to us, as we have expected them to start serious nesting activity for three or more years now, but despite healthy courtship and nest-building behavior each year, they have yet to produce a successful clutch.

Outreach and Education



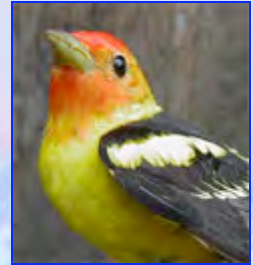
This month, the lab was visited by over 150 students from four different schools. The students ranged in age from second grade to high school, and came from all over California. Each group got the chance to observe bird banding up close, seeing wildlife biologists in action. They also took a tour of the study area and our mist nets, and learned how important birds are to understanding habitat health. To their delight, a lucky few students were able to help us release banded birds from the lab. We were also visited by two service-oriented groups, Wildthings and the Natural Resource Recruitment program. The teens from these two programs learned about bird banding in the morning and then spent the afternoon helping us clear trails, pull non-native plants, and enter data. We hope that the experience the kids had while visiting BSOL will encourage them to act responsibly towards the environment, and possibly pursue a career in the natural sciences.

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 our schedule is busy, we recommend that visitors call or e-mail Wildlife Biologist 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, April 2006:

The winter rains lasted late into April, but by the end of the month, the sun finally managed to break through and warm the hills of Big Sur. Our study area is awash in color thanks to the beautiful blooms of California Poppies, lupines, fiesta flowers, wood mint, and black sage. Spring migration is well underway, and almost all of the summer breeding birds have returned while most of the winter residents have departed. There are definite signs of nesting behavior in several species. The **Violet-green Swallows**, **Tree Swallows**, and **Purple Martins** are defending their usual cavities in the sycamore trees, and **Brewer's Blackbirds**, **American Crows**, **Steller's Jays**, **Bushtits**, and **Chestnut-backed Chickadees** have all been seen carrying nesting material or food for nestlings.



Mist-Netting and Bird Banding at Andrew Molera State Park



Spring migration is happening somewhat later than in other years due to the inclement weather, so many species are arriving later than usual while



winter residents are lingering longer. This meant we had relatively low capture numbers, but high species diversity. In 15 days of banding this month, we captured 368 birds of 41 species. Our number one capture this month was **Orange-crowned Warbler** (56 individuals), followed by migrating **Wilson's Warblers** (45 individuals). We captured lots of interesting birds this month, such as a beautiful male **Brewer's Blackbird**, and a stunning male **Violet-green Swallow**. We caught several migrants, such as **Black-throated Gray Warbler** (1), **Lazuli Bunting** (1), **Yellow-breasted Chat** (1), **Blue-gray Gnatcatcher** (1), **Common Yellowthroat** (6), **Pacific-slope Flycatcher** (5). Our most exciting captures were an adult male **Nashville Warbler** (1), a whole flock of gorgeous male **Western Tanagers** (5), and four **Hammond's Flycatchers**, the most banded in one month since 2000.

Mist-netting/Banding and Education at Carmel Middle School

This month marked the end of our educational banding at the Carmel Middle School (CMS). During our one day there this month, the students learned about how pesticides and toxins affect the environment, and how they accumulate in the tissues of birds and other animals. In one day of banding, we captured 12 birds of seven species. All of the birds we banded were year-round residents such as **Nuttall's Woodpecker**, **California Towhee**, and **Chestnut-backed Chickadee**, or winter residents such as **Golden-crowned** and **White-crowned Sparrows**.

Education and Outreach



The rainy weather put a damper on our usual monthly nature walk at Andrew Molera State Park, and caused a couple of visiting groups to cancel, but we still had quite a few visitors this month to BSOL. We were visited by groups from the PG adult school, Monterey Peninsula Audubon Society, and the Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences (which included filmmaker Wes Craven).

Be sure to join Karen Ritchie for a walk highlighting spring migrants of Andrew Molera State Park on Saturday, May 20. As always, meet at the picnic benches outside the banding lab at 9 AM. And be sure to catch VWS's table at the Monterey Bay Whale Fest on May 27 & 28 at Fisherman's Wharf.

Peter Pyle Workshop

On April 17-21, we hosted our fifth annual Advanced Aging & Sexing of Landbirds Workshop led by Peter Pyle. Co-hosted by the San Francisco Bird Banding Observatory (SFBBO) and in association with the Institute for Bird Populations (IBP), the workshop drew participants from across the country. The



workshop is designed to teach banders more about how to micro-age birds in the hand using molt characteristics. As always, participants experienced bird banding at a range of locations, from SFBBO's Coyote Creek field station to the Carmel River Lagoon to the banding lab at Andrew Molera State Park. We heard several very informative lectures by Peter Pyle, and were able to apply what we learned to birds in the field. One afternoon we went out tracking **California Condors** with a member of the VWS condor field crew, and were treated to an incredible view of condors on the wing. The workshop culminated in an amazing dinner at Brazil Ranch donated and prepared by Kristina Scrivani of Whole Foods Monterey. All the participants learned a lot about how to age birds more accurately, and everyone had a wonderful time. Thank you to all who attended or contributed, and thank you Peter!

Thirteenth Annual Birdiest County Birdathon



On Saturday April 29, VWS once again joined forces with Monterey Peninsula Audubon Society and the Wild Bird Center of Monterey to organize the annual Birdathon, BSOL's biggest fundraiser. In the last few years, we have participated in (and twice won) the America's Birdiest County

competition, but we decided this year that we would focus on beating our own record of 250 species (set last year). With that challenge set, our birders rose to the occasion! From 4 PM Friday to 4 PM Saturday, dozens of dedicated birders fanned out across Monterey country trying to spot as many bird species as possible. They hiked high and low, far and wide, and even took to the sea in order to find as many birds as they could.

The marathon day of birding resulted in great finds such as **Ancient Murrelet**, **Ashy Storm-Petrel**, **Chipping Sparrow**, **Franklin's Gull**, and the bird voted "Best Bird", a **Gray Flycatcher**. That evening was the countdown dinner at the Wild Bird Center, with a delicious dinner catered by Whole Foods Monterey and prepared by chef extraordinaire Kristina Scrivani. After the dinner we had a raffle and silent auction, and the official countdown emceed by Monterey's own Don Roberson. The countdown revealed that our grand total in 24 hours was a record-breaking **252 species!** Our fundraising total is also the highest ever this year, with over \$15,000 raised to support bird conservation. Many thanks to all the local businesses and individuals who donated to this event and helped make it a success, and a special thank you to all the birders who participated! For a more detailed recap and photos of the Birdathon, check out Don's website at <http://montereybay.com/creagrus/BAT06.html>.

Comings and Goings

This month we bid a fond farewell to Josh Scullen. Though Josh was with BSOL for only two short months, he quickly became an integral part of the team. His skill with birds, sense of humor, and sunny smile will be missed. Josh has returned to run several MAPS stations in Newfoundland for the summer, but we hope he will come back to see us in the fall. Good luck, Josh!



We also welcomed two new interns to the BSOL crew. Ryan Terrill is excited to be working with BSOL after volunteering with us intermittently since August 2003. Ryan is an undergraduate student at UC Santa Cruz, and has just returned from studying demography of Chestnut-Backed Antbirds in Costa Rica. Ryan has also worked with Marbled Murrelets and other seabirds, and recently he worked with Cornell University on the ongoing search for the Ivory-Billed

Woodpecker. Ryan is stoked to be working at his favorite birding spot, before cracking the whip of college again come this fall.

Leanne Ellis is a 5 foot 2 inch enthusiastic little creature that has just flown in from Canada's capital to join us here at VWS's Big Sur Ornithology Lab. An Ecosystem Management Technologist graduate from Sir Sandford Fleming College in Lindsay Ontario, Leanne is most content when she is playing around outdoors and traveling around. Leanne has recently worked with



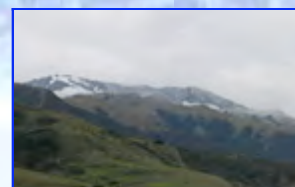
a great group of people at the St. Croix International Waterway Commission (SCIWC) doing trail interpretation work, youth camp education and restoration projects on the St. Croix River in St. Andrews, New Brunswick. Leanne then worked with the National Parks Service in New York City helping Park Rangers at Great Kills National Park keep track of the resident and migratory birds in that habitat. She fell in love with watching birds being them crazy selves at extremely early hours in the morning! This is Leanne's first time visiting the West Coast of North America and she is truly dumbfounded by the beauty of Big Sur. She is looking forward to hiking such beautiful mountains and familiarizing herself with their every aspect!

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 our schedule is busy, we recommend that visitors call or e-mail Wildlife Biologist 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 2006:

The rains started at the end of February, and haven't let up since. Because of this, the river level has remained high throughout March, and we have had to cross the river to our nets using our trusty hanging cable chair. During the first half of the month, a cold weather system moved through, leaving the green hills of Big Sur with fresh white caps of snow! But even though the weather hasn't cooperated, the birds are still sticking to their annual schedule. **Pacific-slope Flycatchers** and **Warbling Vireos** showed up near the end of March, beating out **Wilson's Warblers** in the migration race to Andrew Molera State Park by several days. **Allen's Hummingbirds** also have arrived, dive displaying and defending territories. Other species have continued singing, filling the park with nature's music, and swallows are becoming more numerous, chattering away as they glide through the sky. Spring migration has begun!



Mist-Netting and Bird Banding at Andrew Molera State Park



The late spring rains this month limited our





banding days, but despite the weather we managed to band some fun birds.



Our species diversity

increased slightly thanks to the earliest spring migrants, and in seven days of banding we captured 87 birds of 25 species. Our most numerous capture was **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** (11 individuals), followed by **Wrentit**, **Song Sparrow**, and **Hermit Thrush** (9 individuals each). Interesting captures include a juvenile **Sharp-shinned Hawk** (1) and an intergrade **Northern Flicker**, which is a hybrid of the Red- and Yellow-shafted Flickers. This same Flicker, a four-year-old male, was last captured two years ago, and was featured in our [February 2004 BSOL update](#)! During the last two weeks of the month, we were delighted to band the first few returning migrants. These included three **Orange-crowned Warblers** of the subspecies *lutescens* (the subspecies that breeds in central California), a **Tree Swallow**, and the first two **Wilson's Warblers** of the season.

Mist-netting/Banding and Education at Carmel Middle School

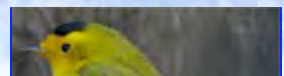
We managed two rain-free banding days at the Carmel Middle School (CMS) this month with educational talks focusing on migration using the sun and stars, as well as stable isotope analysis to determine where a bird has been. The 6th grade class was introduced to the topic of bird banding, why we band, and what it means. Lectures were illustrated with live examples using birds such as **Fox Sparrow**, **Hermit Thrush**, and **California Towhee**. A total of 59 birds of 11 species were captured in those two days, with 30 **Golden-crowned Sparrows** and 17 "**Puget Sound**" **White-Crowned Sparrows** making up 80% of the total number of individuals captured. Other species captured included **Ruby-crowned Kinglet**, **Yellow-rumped "Audubon's" Warbler**, **Song Sparrow**, **Bushtit**, **Anna's Hummingbird**, and **Allen's Hummingbird**.

Monarch Butterfly Monitoring

Our final days of Monarch Butterfly monitoring were in the first week of March, and we said goodbye to the Monarchs for another six months. At the start of the month there were only a few hundred butterflies left at our overwintering sites in Monterey county. Most of the butterflies had dispersed during the previous month due to the warm weather. We wish them luck on their search for milkweed, and look forward to welcoming back their great-great-grandchildren next fall!

Education and Outreach

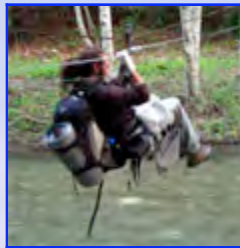
Despite the rainy weather, we welcomed some diverse groups of visitors to the banding lab, from



a group of at-risk Monterey County youths to a dozen alternative spring break students from Stanford University. Wildlife Biologist Jessica Griffiths traveled to Sacramento to speak to the Sacramento Audubon Society about BSOL's songbird research and monitoring, and she will be giving a similar talk right here in Monterey at the Wild Bird Center on Monday April 24 at 7 PM (call 831-373-1000 for details). Next month our nature walks continue as Nellie Thorngate leads a walk on Saturday April 15. Join Nellie at 9 AM at the picnic tables in front of the banding lab for an educational walk on the wildflowers of Andrew Molera State Park.



Comings and Goings



A rare vagrant *Internus temporarii scullenicus* (common name: Josh Scullen) has recently arrived for a brief stopover at BSOL. Scientists are still bewildered by the unpredictable migratory pattern of this particular individual: just one year ago Josh turned up on Mauna Kea, Hawai'i, settling in with the social Palila (*Loxioides bailleui*) for four months before taking off and turning up in Newfoundland, Canada (seven-and-a-half time zones away!). Josh spent the summer in the chilly boreal bog with the aptly named Boreal Chickadees (*Poecile hudsonica*) and Three-toed Woodpeckers (*Picoides tridactylus*), then turned up, slightly disoriented, amid a field of Volcano Hummingbirds (*Selasphorus flammula*) on the volcanotops of Costa Rica. The hummers, however, did not take well to having their territories encroached upon, and Josh was sighted bouncing between several different volcanoes, as well as turning up as far south as Bocas del Toro, Panama for three days. Josh is at BSOL now, but for how long? According to the best-fit model, scientists are predicting another migratory leap come May, but only time will tell. Avid birders keep your eyes open, as this species has a tendency to show up in the most unexpected places.

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 e-mail Wildlife Biologist 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 2006:

February brought blue skies and fluffy clouds to Big Sur. Except for a big storm over the last weekend, rain was scarce for most of the month, which meant that the Big Sur River remained low enough for us to easily wade across to our nets. The days were mild, but the nights were frigid and in the mornings we often discovered a shining layer of frost over everything. Despite this reminder of winter, the lengthening days and bright green growth everywhere have prompted some of our resident birds to start singing again. Already we are being serenaded by **Bewick's Wrens**, **Spotted Towhees**, **Song Sparrows**, **Wrentits**, **American Robins**, and **California Thrashers**. Those harbingers of spring, the swallows, have been spotted circling overhead, swooping and twittering and investigating the cavity-filled Western Sycamores in our study area in Andrew Molera State Park. Spring is on its way!



Mist-Netting and Bird Banding at Andrew Molera State Park



Despite banding several times a week, our capture rates were quite low this month, though species diversity was the same as the previous month. In seven days of banding we captured 67 birds of 19 species. Our most frequent capture was **Hermit Thrush** (10 individuals) followed by **Fox**



Sparrow (9), **Bewick's Wren** (8), and **Wrentit** (8). While we didn't band any unusual species, we did capture some fun birds. We caught a young **Sharp-shinned Hawk**, and banded several interesting resident species such as **Black Phoebe** (1), **Purple Finch** (1), and **Steller's Jay** (1).

Mist-netting/Banding and Education at Carmel Middle School

During our educational bird banding program at the Carmel Middle School (CMS) this month, the students learned about bird anatomy and topography. They became familiar with the external structures of a bird and how they differ from other animals, while observing these anatomical features on real birds. They also learned about the internal anatomy of birds, such as the skeletal system and how it is specially adapted for flight. In just two days of banding at CMS we caught nearly as many birds as we did at Molera! We captured 65 birds of 11 species. Our most frequent capture



was **Golden-crowned Sparrow** (29 individuals), followed by **White-crowned Sparrow** (16 individuals). Our most exciting capture of the month was not one but two **Blue-gray Gnatcatchers**. One of these was a recaptured bird that was first caught at CMS in 2002! Special thanks to VWS Species Recovery interns Jim Howard and Ryan Choi for helping to run our banding operation at the Middle School in late February.

Monarch Butterfly Monitoring



Over the course of the month, the number of Monarch Butterflies present at their overwintering sites declined steadily. The warming temperatures and increasing day length signaled to the butterflies that winter is ending and triggered the mating instinct. Everywhere we went this month we saw Monarchs chasing each other and mating, and the overwintering clusters grew smaller and smaller. By the end of the month, sites that had held thousands of butterflies in mid-winter were hosting only a few hundred. At the beginning of the month there were 17,350 butterflies at all nine sites in Monterey County, and by the end of the month there were only 1,810. The majority of the Monarchs have mated and dispersed, and the females are off on their quest for milkweed, the Monarch butterfly's host plant. We wish them luck on their journey!

Outreach Activities



On the weekend before Valentine's Day, we participated once again in the annual Santa Cruz Migration Festival at Natural Bridges State Park. The festival is a celebration honoring all migrating creatures and their incredible journeys. Ventana Wildlife Society was just one of several local organizations with hands-on displays. BSOL biologists also gave talks on songbird migration and our Monarch butterfly research. At the VWS table, visitors could learn about bird and butterfly migration, touch a condor feather, handle bird bands and pliers, and look at colorful photo albums documenting our research projects. Kids could pretend to be a butterfly biologist by estimating the number of candies in a jar in the same way that we estimate the number of butterflies in a cluster. The lucky participant who estimated the closest number won a free VWS membership. Congratulations to the winner, and we'll see you all at the Migration Festival next year!

We also continued our monthly BSOL Nature Walks. Unfortunately, this month's scheduled walk was a washout due to rainy weather! We'll try again next month, when Wildlife Biologist Jessica Griffiths leads a walk on Saturday, March 18. Meet at the picnic tables outside the banding lab at 9 AM and join Jessica for a walk to learn about bird vocalizations. Learning bird songs and calls opens up a whole new world to the

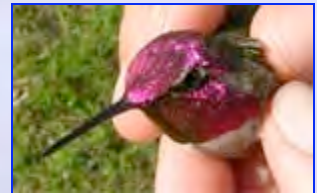
beginning birder--you'll be surprised at how many birds are heard but never seen.

Welcome!

Due to the unpredictability 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 Wildlife Biologist 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, January 2006:

It seems to be a New Year's tradition here in Big Sur that January starts off with a wet and wild winter storm, and this year was no exception. But most of the rest of the month was mild and sunny, which prompted a burst of new growth. The willow catkins are already flowering, and the grass is turning green under the carpet of fallen sycamore leaves. The warm weather has brought the fence lizards out of their winter slumber, and the ground squirrels are beginning to wake up as well. When the Big Sur River returned to its pre-storm water levels, we were finally able to repair our cable chair across the river, which meant that our intrepid banders were able to get to our nets on the other side. The water level has now dropped enough that we are simply wading across in the mornings, a brisk and refreshing start to the day!



Mist-Netting and Bird Banding at Andrew Molera State Park



Our captures this month were more diverse than last month, thanks to the fact that we were able to band a bit more often. This month at Molera, during six days of banding we captured 91 birds of 19 species. Our



most frequent capture was **Ruby-crowned Kinglet**, with 19 individuals. Our next most common capture was **Chestnut-backed Chickadee** (10), followed by **Hermit Thrush** (9). This month we didn't catch any especially unusual birds, but we did have some excitement. We captured three **Sharp-shinned Hawks**, including a 3-year old male bird that was

first banded last spring. We also banded several attractive resident birds, including **Anna's Hummingbird** (5), **Orange-crowned Warbler** (4), **Western Scrub-Jay** (2), **Nuttall's Woodpecker** (1), and **Brown Creeper** (1).

Mist-netting/Banding and Education at Carmel Middle School

We continued our educational bird banding at the Carmel Middle School (CMS) this month. Unfortunately, a winter rain shower cut our day of banding short, so we weren't able to do much outdoor education with the CMS students. In the two hours that we had our nets opened, we managed to capture 14 birds of 6 species. Our most common capture was **Golden-crowned Sparrow** (7 individuals), and we also banded a feisty **Chestnut-backed Chickadee** and a bright-eyed **Ruby-crowned Kinglet**.

Monarch Butterfly Monitoring


The fierce winter storm that swept through around the start of the year had a noticeable impact on the overwintering Monarch Butterflies. The storm scattered many clusters, and the two weeks of warm weather that followed meant that tight clusters were slow to reform. As a result, in the first half of January at many of the sites the butterfly numbers were much lower than they were in December. The butterflies at the Monarch Sanctuary in Pacific Grove began to regroup mid-month, and numbers at that site rose somewhat. We also made an interesting observation at the Monarch Sanctuary: on two separate occasions, after a night of rain, all the butterflies moved from the Eucalyptus to Monterey Pine, Monterey Cypress, and smaller ornamental trees. This is further evidence to suggest that weather affects the butterflies' tree selection. The highest total for all nine sites combined this month was 20,255.



Outreach Activities



The latest in our series of interpretive nature walks took place on January 21. Eight intrepid explorers accompanied Senior Wildlife Biologist Karen Ritchie on a walk to learn about the mushrooms and fungi of Andrew Molera State Park. Thank you to everyone who turned out! Our next walk will be Saturday, February 18. Meet at the picnic tables outside of the banding lab at 9 AM and join Wildlife Biologist Nellie Thorngate to take a walk and learn about the natural history of Andrew Molera State Park. Molera is a unique place with a special story all its own, and this is the perfect time of year to



explore it further.

Welcome!

Due to the unpredictability 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!

Ventana Wildlife Society
19045 Portola Dr. Ste. F-1
Salinas, CA 93908
Phone 831-455-9514
Fax 831-455-2846
E-mail info@ventanaws.org

Illustrations copyright © 2007 Ventana Wildlife Society

Last updated January 6, 2007