



White-tailed Kite

NEWSLETTER OF ALTACAL BIRD ALLIANCE

Dedicated to Preserving and Protecting Birds and Their Habitats. Serving Butte, Glenn, and Tehama Counties of Northern California

June • July 2026

When the Moon Wanes, NSWO Reign!

by Dawn Garcia, Consulting Biologist

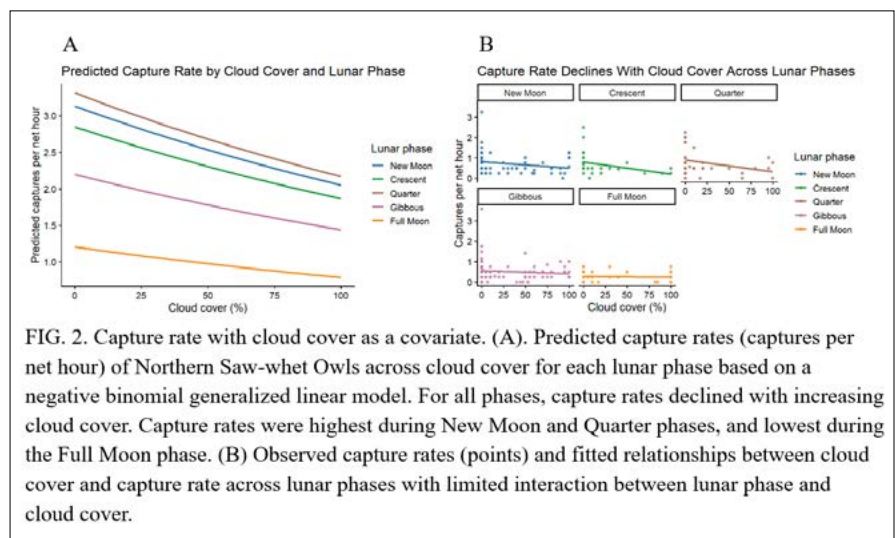


FIG. 2. Capture rate with cloud cover as a covariate. (A). Predicted capture rates (captures per net hour) of Northern Saw-whet Owls across cloud cover for each lunar phase based on a negative binomial generalized linear model. For all phases, capture rates declined with increasing cloud cover. Capture rates were highest during New Moon and Quarter phases, and lowest during the Full Moon phase. (B) Observed capture rates (points) and fitted relationships between cloud cover and capture rate across lunar phases with limited interaction between lunar phase and cloud cover.

With 21 years of saw-whet owl banding data under our belts it is exciting to have the data analyzed by graduate students to answer questions about our population of the owls. Last season project director Ken Sobon mentored CSU, Chico Master's student Tania Aguilar (CSU, Chico) in the field took a subset of data, developed some questions and shares her results in a Master Thesis, 2026. She intends to publish her results in a scientific journal. Congratulations Tania!

Seasonal migration is a key behavioral adaptation exhibited by most populations of Northern Saw-whet Owls (*Aegolius acadicus*). Lunar illumination has been suggested to influence capture rates during fall migration; however, regional studies in the western United States remain limited. I examined the effects of lunar phase, cloud cover, and within-night timing on capture rates of Northern Saw-whet Owls during fall migration at the Big Chico Creek Ecological Reserve, California. Data were collected over seven fall banding seasons (2019 to 2025) and analyzed using both a negative binomial generalized linear model and an analysis of variance (ANOVA). Capture rates varied significantly with lunar phase and declined with increasing cloud cover. Capture rates were highest during the New Moon and Quarter moon phases, and lowest during the Full Moon phase. Within-night timing also influenced capture rates, with the highest captures

peaking approximately two to three hours after sunset. These results suggest that lunar phase and nocturnal light conditions influence migratory movement and behavior in Northern Saw-whet Owls. Reduced capture rates under brighter conditions may reflect predator-prey dynamics, including decreased prey activity and increased predation risk. Additionally, decreased capture rates as cloud cover increases may reflect changes in ambient nocturnal light conditions, as cloud cover can substantially alter sky brightness by amplifying available artificial light, thereby influencing nocturnal behavior and movement of Northern Saw-whet Owls.

Other publications from our NSWO banding data include:

- Garcia, DG. 2016. Central Valley Bird Bulletin (Volume 20/Number 11). *Fall Migration and Other Natural History Observations of the Northern Saw-whet Owl in Northern Interior California, 2005-2015*.
- Shaw, J. (2014). Winter ecology of Northern Saw-whet Owls (*Aegolius acadicus*) in the Sierra Nevada foothills of California (Master's Thesis).
- Woodruff, J. M., Prince, B. A., Bogiatto, R. J., & Hatfield, C. A. 2020. Notes on the fall-winter diet of Northern Saw-whet Owls in northern California. *Western North American Naturalist*, 80(1), 74-75.



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Board Meetings

4 p.m. on the second Wednesday of each month.

AltaCal Members are welcome to attend.

Sightings



Cattle Egret. Photo by Karen White



Black-crowned Night Heron. Photo by Karen White



Great Horned Owl and owlet. Photo by Karen White

Bird Trips

Please note our new field trip registration process is now done through Zeffy. Links for each field trip can be found at altacal.org/calendar

- Pre-registration is required for trips and can be completed by following our registration links to Zeffy.
- Signing an AltaCal Liability Waiver is a requirement to attend all field trips. Completed Liability Waivers are valid until June 30, 2026.
- Carpools are encouraged, but are optional and up to the individual. It is always nice to offer compensation to the driver if you ride in a carpool.

Take a Hike – Birds of a Feather

Saturday, June 13, 8 a.m. (caravan) or 9 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.

Trip Leaders: Ken Sobon (AltaCal Bird Alliance), and Kim Armstrong (NCRLT Staff).

Location: The Deer Creek Trail from Highway 32 to Lower Deer Creek Falls.

Limit 22 participants

This field trip is a Northern California Regional Land Trust (NCRLT)-sponsored event as part of their “Take a Hike” series. This hike will wind into the interior of the Preserve toward the fish ladder before returning along the same route, offering participants the opportunity to hone their bird identification skills as well as beautiful canyon views. Some exciting potential birds to expect include: Sooty Grouse, Pileated Woodpecker, American Dipper, Hermit Warbler, and more! This is a moderate hike of three to four miles, depending on participant interest, with a few fairly strenuous climbs and one stream crossing on boulders that will be navigable for any surefooted hiker. Supportive footwear, light clothing layers, sunscreen, a hat, and ample water and snacks are recommended. There are a few, moderately steep, sections where trekking poles may come in handy for those that like extra stability and support. Binoculars will be available at the trailhead for loan to those who need them.

The group will meet at the Deer Creek Trailhead at 9 a.m. before hitting the trail. The trailhead parking is located roughly 40 miles from the Chico Park & Ride up HWY 32 on the other side of the “red bridge” that crosses Deer Creek. There is a large sign with trail information. Optionally, we will be leading a caravan to the trailhead that will meet at the Chico Park & Ride (East lot, furthest from HWY 99) at 8 a.m., with a departure time of 8:15 a.m. This is recommended for first-time visitors, as there is no cell service after you pass Forest Ranch. Carpooling is strongly encouraged as trailhead parking can be limited on weekends. Expect to be on the trail from roughly 9 a.m. – noon and back to Chico Park & Ride between 1–1:30 p.m.

Map to trailhead parking lot: <https://maps.app.goo.gl/VHFwKhBRCgtMWCgx9>

Register here: <https://landconservation.networkforgood.com/events/101142-take-a-hike-birds-of-a-feather-with-altacal-bird-alliance>

AltaCal Bird Alliance’s scheduled field trips are a great way to experience a variety of birding areas, with an experienced trip leader.

Occasionally “Pop-up” Birding Field Trips, that aren’t listed here, will be posted on the AltaCal Facebook Page (<https://www.facebook.com/altacalaudubon/>) and the AltaCal Bird Alliance webpage (<http://www.altacal.org/calendar>). All field trip registration is done through Zeffy.

Cool Birding at Paradise Lake and Merlo Park

Thursday, June 18, 8 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

Leaders: Skip Augur and Joyce Bond

Limit: 12 participants

Join us for birding at Paradise Lake in Magalia and Clotilde Merlo Park in Stirling City. We’ll meet at 8 a.m. at the Chico Park & Ride (end closest to Hwy 99) to carpool. First, we’ll go to Paradise Lake, where we’ll spend some time birding on the lake trail. Bald Eagles and Osprey are frequent sightings. Then we’ll head to Merlo Park, at 3,500 feet in elevation. This picturesque park has well-maintained paths and several ponds. We may see White-headed Woodpeckers, Red-breasted Nuthatches, and other higher-altitude birds. Contact Joyce Bond at chantedor@gmail.com if any questions. To register for this field trip, go to altacal.org/calendar and click on the Zeffy link.

Lassen Volcanic National Park Birds and Plants

June 26 – 28, Friday - Sunday

Trip Leaders: Jennifer Patten, Hilary Locke, John Kelly

Limit: 16 participants

AltaCal Bird Alliance, along with Shasta Birding Society, has enjoyed camping and birding in Lassen VNP over the years. This June, the Mount Lassen Chapter of the California Native Plant Society will join us for the first time at the Lost Creek Group Campground.

Lassen VNP has approximately 216 bird species. The park also boasts a rich diversity of plant life. More than 700 flowering plant species grace the park, including several rare and recently-described species like the Lassen Paintbrush, whose entire range is within the park. This field trip will have an added focus on plants during our hikes while birding the hotspots in LVNP.

Lost Creek Group Campground has primitive facilities, pit toilets, and potable water available. Friday and Saturday nights are potlucks. Please bring something to share. You are responsible for your breakfast and lunch. Bring camp gear, a tent, water bottles, bug spray, sunscreen, a camp chair, sturdy hiking shoes/boots, dress in layers, and prepare for cold weather. Bring firewood if you have some. We can collect wood in the forest too.

Group size is limited to 16. To register for this field trip, go to Altacal.org/calendar and click the Zeffy sign-up link. Note that there is a \$30 park entrance fee, free with a National Park pass.

Contact Jennifer Patten, jenepatten@gmail.com, AltaCal Bird Alliance, for details and questions. Contact John Kelly, jkelly@cnps.org, for details and questions.

Bird Trips

continued

Birding & Wildflowers at Butte & Colby Meadows

Thursday, July 9, 7 a.m. – 2 p.m.

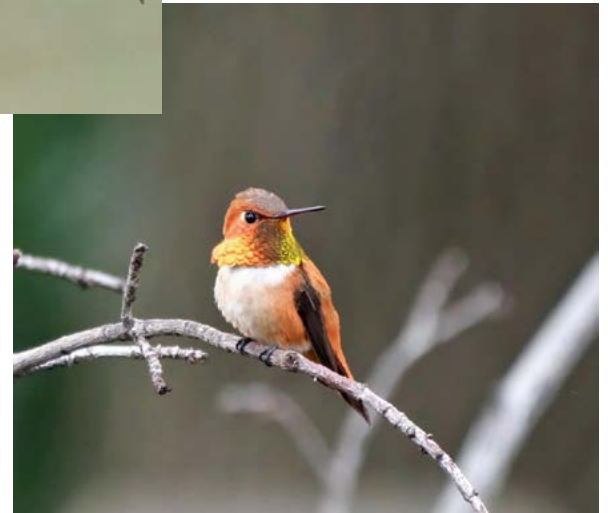
Leaders: Joyce Bond, Karen Smith, and Joan Mitchell

Limit: 12 participants

Enjoy exploring the cooler altitude of Butte and Colby Meadows for mountain birds and wildflowers. Highlights include American Dippers at the creek, a bog of carnivorous pitcher plants and sundews, birds and flowers at Butte Creek House Ecological Reserve and the path at Colby Meadows, and maybe birds at their nests and feeding fledglings. We may see White-headed, Black-backed, and Pileated Woodpeckers, Mountain Chickadee, Green-tailed Towhee, Golden-crowned Kinglet, and more! We'll carpool from Chico at 7 am. Contact Joyce Bond at chantedor@gmail.com if any questions. To register for this field trip, go to Altacal.org/calendar and click on the Zeffy link.



Left American Pipit
Below, Rufous Hummingbird
Photos by Karen White



**It's not too late,
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membership
today!**

**Your membership helps
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AltaCal programs and more!**

Go to altacal.org and click on

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AltaCal Bird Alliance

Humboldt County Birding Camping Trip – Save the Date!

Join us for our annual fall camping trip to Humboldt County from October 7 – 11, 2026. This year, we're excited to explore the diverse birding opportunities and rare bird sightings that Humboldt County has to offer. This trip replaces our annual trip to Pt. Reyes.

Humboldt County boasts a wealth of birding locations, each with its own unique charm. Here are a few highlights:

- **Arcata Marsh & Wildlife Sanctuary:** Renowned as a premier birding spot, this sanctuary features a mix of freshwater and saltwater marshes, mudflats, and estuaries that attract shorebirds, waders, and waterfowl throughout the year.
- **Bald Hills Road Area:** Our search for condors will take us to this area, particularly near the Redwood Creek watershed, where these **majestic birds are often spotted**.
- **Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge:** This refuge serves as a crucial stopover for migratory birds, including thousands of shorebirds and raptors.
- **South Spit & North Jetty (Humboldt Bay):** Ideal for spotting sea-dwelling birds like wandering tattlers, black turnstones, surf scoters, and grebes.
- **Humboldt Lagoons (Big, Dry, Stone, and Freshwater):** These lagoons provide a vital habitat for loons, herons, and wintering waterfowl.
- **Southern Humboldt Community Park:** This park offers a diverse habitat for land birds, including raptors and migratory songbirds.
- **Eureka Waterfront Trail & Woodley Island:** Conveniently located, these spots provide easy access to viewing bay mudflats.



California Condor. Photo by Ken Sobon

Accommodations: We will be camping at Elk Country RV Resort.

You can find more information here: <https://www.elkcountrysrvresort.com/>

Two to three tent camping sites will be reserved near the lake at Elk Country RV Resort. If you have a trailer or RV, there are many partial and full hookup spaces available. (You will need to reserve your own space.) Ken Sobon, Field Trip Leader, will arrive on Wednesday afternoon, October 7th.

Ken plans to spend a full day birding on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. Thursday and Friday will be dedicated to pursuing rare birds. You're welcome to join him early or arrive on Friday night. Please let Ken know when you plan to come so he can make the necessary arrangements.

If you're not a camper, Trinidad is only 15 minutes south. Trinidad, CA, has many VRBO's, Airbnb's, and inns that you can reserve.

If you're interested, please send Ken an email at altacalpresident@gmail.com. Zeffy registration and liability waiver forms for this field trip will begin in August. Please let Ken know when you would like to arrive and where you would like to stay.

AltaCal Bird Alliance is looking forward to a great birding weekend!

Trip Report: Citrus Elementary School Students at Horseshoe Lake By Karen L. Smith

On March 27, 2026 twenty-nine 5th grade students from Citrus Elementary School, led by their teacher Nathaniel Wion, pedaled across Chico to Upper Bidwell Park to join AltaCal Bird Alliance in an annual field trip. All the students brought bird books they made in class featuring various birds they wanted to see. AltaCal supplied the binoculars. The field trip began with Mary Muchowski demonstrating to the students how to use and care for binoculars and students were provided binoculars for the field trip. Volunteers Mary Muchowski, Grant Heath, Karen White, Mary Wyrinski, and Karen Smith from AltaCal Bird Alliance lead small groups of students around Horseshoe Lake to identify and find birds in their books. Volunteer Calvin Hamilton, with scope set up, waited along the lake for each group to arrive to get close up views of the various birds in the lake. The **Great Blue Heron** was of special interest. At the completion of the field trip, each student shook hands and thanked each of the field trip leaders. Once again, they were on their way pedaling back to school. AltaCal Bird Alliance and Citrus Elementary School have been meeting once a year for many years for this special field trip. Thank you to the AltaCal volunteers and to Nathaniel Wion.



Bird trip with 5th grade students from Citrus Elementary School

Bird Spotlight: Nuttall's Woodpecker

Small woodpecker almost entirely restricted to the state of California (barely entering northern Baja). Look for black-and-white barring on the back and patterned flanks. Males have a red cap, often raised and fluffy-looking. Occurs in oak woodlands and riparian areas, sometimes visiting bird feeders. Most similar to Ladder-backed Woodpecker, but range barely overlaps. Also compare with Downy Woodpecker, which has clean flanks and lacks bars on the back.



This woodpecker named in 1843 by William Gambel for his mentor, the famous British naturalist Thomas Nuttall, is closely associated with the oak woodlands of California. Its distribution extends from the northernmost reaches of California south to northern Baja California. A small black-and-white woodpecker with a barred back, the Nuttall's Woodpecker is quite similar in overall appearance to the Ladder-backed Woodpecker (*Dryobates scalaris*). For the most part, however, the ranges of the two species do not overlap.

Lowther, P. E., P. Pyle, and M. A. Patten (2020). Nuttall's Woodpecker (*Dryobates nuttallii*), version 1.0. In *Birds of the World* (P. G. Rodewald, Editor). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY, USA. <https://doi.org/10.2173/bow.nutwoo.01>



Nuttall's Woodpeckers. Photos by Karen White

Local Chapter Membership Form

Please join us!

Your membership will help AltaCal Bird Alliance continue its important work.

AltaCal Bird Alliance dedicated to Preserving and Protecting Birds and Their Habitats. AltaCal is a non-profit organization with a local chapter membership. 100% of membership dues goes to support local projects and activities.

We offer regularly scheduled **field trips** that focus on birds and bird habitats; membership **programs** with media presentations on birds and related topics; a bi-monthly **newsletter**, the **White-tailed Kite**; **website** www.AltaCal.org; and **advocacy** to protect and conserve local habitats as well as special programs.

Leave a legacy for your grandchildren by writing AltaCal into your will or trust.



AltaCal Programs & Projects

Major sponsor, participant and fiscal agent for the annual **Snow Goose Festival**

Founder of the **Chico Creek Nature Center**

Sponsor of the City of Chico **Oxidation Ponds Wildlife Sanctuary**

Leading annual Christmas Bird Counts **in Chico and Oroville for more than 65 years**

Focusing on our Youth through **Scholarships and Environmental Education**

Advocating for Birds & Wildlife **when they are threatened**

Conducting surveys and participating in **Avian Research Projects**

Promoting bird-friendly yards through the **Neighborhood Habitat Certification Program**

White-tailed Kite Submissions

Articles, reports, sightings, and photos for publication should be sent by email to: Carla Resnick at carlaphoto@gmail.com, on the first of the month, prior to the next issue. For best results please send images as high resolution attachments.

AltaCal Bird Alliance Membership Form

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Goldfinch \$5 / month or \$60 / year | <input type="checkbox"/> Falcon \$20 /month for \$240 /year |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Quail \$7 / month or \$84 / year | <input type="checkbox"/> Great-horned Owl \$25 /month or \$300 / year |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> I would be interested in volunteering to help | | | |

Please make check payable to AltaCal Bird Alliance, P.O. Box 3671, Chico, CA 95927
To pay using credit card or PayPal, please go to: AltaCal.org and click on **Join/Donate**

IMPORTANT: Membership in AltaCal Bird Alliance does not include membership in the National Audubon Society. We encourage you to also support National Audubon in their important education and lobbying efforts. To join the National Audubon Society, visit their website www.audubon.org

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CURRENT RESIDENT

White-tailed Kite Submission Deadlines

Issue	Due Date
August/Sept	July 1
August/Sept	July 1
Oct/Nov	Sept 1
Dec/Jan	Nov 1
Feb/Mar	Jan 1
April/May	Mar 1
June/July	May 1



California Quail. Photo by Karen White