



White-tailed Kite

NEWSLETTER OF THE ALTACAL AUDUBON SOCIETY

Chapter of the National Audubon Society serving Butte, Glenn, and Tehama Counties of Northern California

December 2024 • January 2025

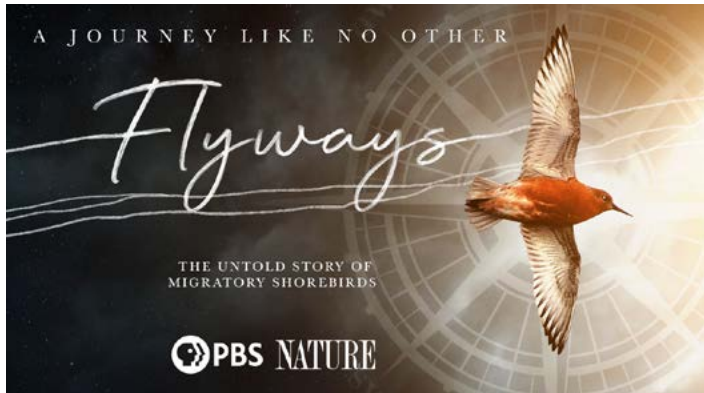
AltaCal Programs

Programs for the general community are normally held on the third Monday of each month at 6:30 p.m.

In December the program is held on the second Monday and in June, July, and August there are no programs.

December Program – Movie Night

Monday, December 9, 2024 at 6:30 p.m.
at Chico Creek Nature Center



“Flyways” PBS Documentary Screening & Christmas Bird Count Updates

Join us for a special documentary screening of the 2024 PBS “Flyways”! This documentary highlights shorebirds and their incredible migrations!

“Shorebirds fly thousands of miles each year along ancient and largely unknown migratory routes called Flyways. Follow a conservation movement of bird-loving experts and citizen scientists as they mobilize to the challenge of understanding and saving shorebirds” PBS.

Also, this evening you’ll hear about the upcoming Christmas Bird Counts in our area and get a preview of the bird count areas in Chico and Oroville.

Christmas Bird Counts, Chico, Saturday, December 14, Marysville Monday, December 23, and Oroville, Saturday, December 28.

January Program

Altacal is having our biggest program of the year!

**25th Snow Goose Festival of the Pacific Flyway,
Thursday – Sunday, January 23 – 26, 2025**

Wings of the Flyway

All sorts of wonders are in store for birders and outdoor enthusiasts of all skills and ages at the 25th Snow Goose Festival of the Pacific Flyway, Thursday -Sunday, January 23 – 26, 2025 headquartered at the Patrick Ranch Museum, Chico-Durham, CA

This action-packed 4-day event celebrates the remarkable journey of millions of waterfowl and raptors along the Pacific Flyway that call Northern Sacramento Valley their home during the winter months.

Events & Features

- Patrick Ranch Museum, Snow Goose Festival Headquarters
Over 50 field trips full of adventures
Workshop presentations, exhibits, and free family nature activities
- Banquet & Keynote Speaker, Benjamin Jacobs-Schwartz, Bird Guide, Photographer
- “Birds, Birds & more Birds” Art Exhibit Museum of Northern California Art (monca)

The festival is a great opportunity to spend the day, or all four days, learning about the natural wonders of the Pacific Flyway and its inhabitants.

Visit our website for program and registration information. And be sure you are on our email list and “like” us on Facebook as that is a great source for instant Festival information and updates.



**SNOW GOOSE
FESTIVAL**



ALTACAL

P.O. Box 3671, Chico, CA 95927-3671

Staff

Executive Director • Jared Geiser
director@altacal.org

Website and Media Editor • Ryan Schwalm

Board of Directors

President • Ken Sobon
altacalpresident@gmail.com

Vice President • John Seid
johnseid@sbcglobal.net

Secretary • Elizabeth Webster

Treasurer • Taunya Shilling
tndshilling@gmail.com

Committee Chairs & Contacts

Conservation Chair • OPEN

Education: Understanding Biodiversity
John Seid
johnseid@sbcglobal.net

Field Trips Chair • Karen L. Smith
birds4ks@gmail.com

Membership Chair • Cathy Carter
(530) 342-9152, scarab4ever@gmail.com

Member at Large • Brita Lundberg

Programs Chair/Snow Goose Festival • Jennifer Patten
jenepatten@gmail.com

Publicity • Wayand Augur
wba@acm.org

Sanctuary/Lands/Refuge • Vacant

Sac NWR Bookstore • Vacant

Neighborhood Habitat • Deborah Halfpenny
neighborhoodhabitat.aas@gmail.com

Newsletter/Publications • Carla Resnick
carlaphoto@gmail.com

Website • Vacant

Dear AltaCal Members,

You may or may not have heard about the controversies that have surfaced about John James Audubon. The continued use of his name as part of the National Audubon Society has become a topic of much conversation. His name has been associated with our society for many years. Audubon was a talented artist and naturalist who made significant contributions to the field of ornithology. He is widely celebrated for his stunning illustrations of birds, and his work has inspired generations of nature enthusiasts and conservationists.

However, it has come to our attention that Audubon's legacy is not without controversy. He was a slave owner, and his treatment of enslaved individuals was often cruel and inhumane. In addition, he has been accused of stealing Native American and slave remains for his scientific studies, and plagiarism in his publications.

Given these revelations, we were faced with an important question: should we continue to honor Audubon by keeping his name associated with our society? National Audubon has decided to continue using the name but has left it up to the individual chapters whether to continue including Audubon's name or not. Many chapters around the country have since changed their name to remove Audubon, most are using Bird Alliance in its place.

After much consideration, the board of directors has decided on the name AltaCal Bird Alliance. By keeping the name AltaCal, we will maintain the essence of who we are without losing our previous recognition in the greater community. Our new name, AltaCal Bird Alliance, very clearly states what we stand for. There is no ambiguity to an outsider who doesn't know about Audubon the organization or the person. We feel that clarity is incredibly important, especially going forward, so we can attract new birders to our organization and grow and support a thriving birding community who cares deeply about birds, their habitats, and protecting them.

We are committed to creating a safe and inclusive community that values diversity and respects the perspectives of all its members.

Please contact me directly at altacalpresident@gmail.com if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Ken Sobon, President

Carla Resnick, Former Secretary

On behalf of the Board of Directors

Board Meetings

Usually at 6 p.m. on the second Wednesday of each month.

AltaCal Members are welcome to attend

AltaCal

You might have noticed our capital C in the name AltaCal. We're using this arrangement to emphasize our name's meaning: Upper California.

From the Director's Desk

by Jared Geiser, Executive Director

It has been a fun and eventful fall at AltaCal with much to celebrate and look forward to with all of our migratory waterfowl and shorebird friends back home for the winter.



We are excited to join the growing number of local chapters around the country that are dropping Audubon from their name and adding Bird Alliance. AltaCal Bird Alliance will continue to be a local chapter of the National Audubon Society, but rather than honoring a white supremacist who died 100 years before the organization was founded, we will

honor the wildlife we love and fight for with our name (See Name Change article in this issue for more context on John James Audubon's racist legacy). In fact, the creation of the Audubon Society was completely unrelated to this well known painter, ornithologist, and slave owner; the organization was created by a group of women who got together to fight to protect the disappearing herons, egrets, and other birds who were being over hunted for their feathers. We will be conscious of our history and honor the legacy of those who came before us by continuing their fight to protect birds and their habitats.

Our **Birds and Biodiversity Education Program** has been busy working with children from all three counties in our service area (Butte, Glenn, and Tehama). From bird lessons in classrooms to field trips to public lands abundant with birds—we are helping schoolchildren access, appreciate, and learn about the wonders of nature we have here in the Sacramento Valley.

The **Butte County Community Climate Action Day** in October was an amazing opportunity to come together with several organizations and hundreds of people in our community to take collective action to address climate change. AltaCal and BEC hosted the Bird Box Build activity putting more than 20 volunteers to work building birdhouses to provide additional nesting habitat for owls and songbirds (see Bird Connection article in this issue for more details).



The Bilingual Birding Trip at Paynes Creek Wetlands hosted by AltaCal, BLM, and Shasta Birding Society this fall.

We are looking forward to two major fun and exciting outdoor opportunities this winter to GO BIRDING TOGETHER - The **Oroville and Chico Christmas Bird Counts (CBC)** and the one and only **Snow Goose Festival of the Pacific Flyway**! The CBC is a great opportunity to go birding with friends new or old while supporting this important and long standing community science project. Last year I covered Lower Park and Chico State with Mauricio Schrader and Katie Zukoski and had a blast observing 45 different bird species including a **Varied Thrush** and **Great-horned Owl** on campus! The Snow Goose Festival has provided people with opportunities to explore and appreciate the wonders of the Pacific Flyway for 25 years come January! I have been working closely with Jennifer Patten to learn the ropes of organizing this large and impactful event. I am so grateful for Jennifer and her decades of service to AltaCal, serving as a board member, Program Chair, and Snow Goose Festival Director. I've been doing the Jr Naturalist Activities at the festival HQ since I was a child, now I am excited to help continue the SGF Legacy!

2024 Christmas Bird Counts

Chico Christmas Bird Count

Saturday, December 14, 2024

Contact Jared Geiser (530) 965-1325 or director@altacal.org if you want to participate.

Marysville Christmas Bird Count

Monday, December 23rd, 2024

Contact Asher Perla for more details: (530) 713-5562 or asher.perla@gmail.com

Oroville Christmas Bird Count

Saturday, December 28, 2024

Contact Karen von Barga (530) 403-0360 or thedollysmama@yahoo.com if you want to participate.



Cooper's Hawk. Photo: Joan Robins

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 Audubon Society Liability Waiver is a requirement to attend all field trips. New Liability Waivers are required July 1, 2024 and are valid through June 30, 2025. **Please Note: One waiver per (fiscal) year is all that is required.**

Beginning Birding at Peregrine Point Disc Golf Course

Thursday, December 5, 9 – 11 a.m.

Leaders: Pamela Waldsmith & Diana Hoffmeister

Join us at a new location for this beginning birding field trip to the Peregrine Point Disc Golf Course, 8715 Deer Creek Hwy, Chico. Meet at the restroom and sign. This field trip is focused on beginning birders but is open to all levels of birding experience. This is a lovely area, with views of Chico and interesting terrain. Birds we may see are Nuttall's Woodpecker, California Scrub-Jay, Dark-eyed Junco, and Lesser Goldfinch. To register for this field trip, go to Altacal.org/calendar and click on the Zeffy sign-up link for this trip.

First Saturday at Llano Seco Unit of the Sacramento NWR

Saturday, December 7, 8:30 – 10:30 a.m.

Trip Leader: Ken Sobon

We will meet at the Llano Seco Unit parking lot and spend some time observing the waterfowl and other birds from the viewing platform, then we'll walk to the back section. This is a good location to see an abundance of wintering waterfowl, shorebirds, and Sandhill Cranes, as well as raptors such as Bald Eagles and Northern Harriers. Other birds may include Long-billed Curlews, Loggerhead Shrikes, and Lawrence's Goldfinches. To register for this field trip, go to Altacal.org/calendar and click on the Zeffy sign-up link for this trip.

Chico Christmas Bird Count

Saturday, December 14, 2024 7:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

Compiler: Jared Geiser

We will meet at the Chico Creek Nature Center at 7:30 a.m. to go over the details and assign any sections that haven't been claimed. All levels of birders are welcome. Beginners will be paired up with experienced birders. You will be assigned an area and spend the day counting birds in this area. Bring warm clothes, hiking shoes, lunch, bird books and binoculars. Compilation dinner will start at 4:30 p.m. (location to be determined). Please contact Jared if you would like to participate in this important community science program. Contact Jared Geiser, 530-965-1325, director@altacal.org.

- 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.

AltaCal Audubon'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 Audubon webpage (<http://www.altacal.org/calendar>). All field trip registration is done through Zeffy.

Oroville Christmas Bird Count

CBC Saturday, December 28, 2024, 7:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

Compiler: Karen von Barga

All levels of birders are welcome. Beginners will be paired up with experienced birders. You will be assigned an area and spend the day counting birds in this area. Bring warm clothes, hiking shoes, lunch, bird books and binoculars. Compilation dinner will start at 4:30 p.m. at the Dunstone Hall (4790 Foothill Blvd, Oroville). To do a half-day, notify Karen ahead of time. Contact Karen von Barga (530) 403-0360 or thedollysmama@yahoo.com.

Birding the Chico Seed Orchard

Wednesday, January 8, 9 – 11 a.m.

Leaders: Karen L Smith & Liz Webster

Chico's "Tree Farm" is a great local birding site where we can find a wide variety of species and sometimes uncommon sightings. Some birds we often see here are Western Bluebirds, Cedar Waxwings, Hermit Thrush, Red-breasted Sapsucker, wrens, kinglets, quail, and various raptors. We'll meet outside the gate at 2741 Cramer Lane at 9 a.m. To register for this field trip, go to Altacal.org/calendar and click on the Zeffy sign-up link for this trip.



Horned Lark. Photo: Joan Robins

Join our Snow Goose Flock!

Volunteers, Field Trip Leaders & Workshop Presenters

For the 25th SNOW GOOSE FESTIVAL of the Pacific Flyway January 23 – 26, 2025

AltaCal plays a huge role in organizing and hosting this wonderful community event. The AltaCal board and several members are involved at all levels. Making a positive difference in our community is what we all strive to do. We are hoping for an even more successful event this 25th year of the Snow Goose Festival! If you are interested in volunteering, leading a field trip to your favorite birding area, or have a workshop / presentation you would like to share about birds or our natural world, please contact Jennifer Patten or Jared Geiser at info@snowgoosefestival.org.

Thank you, Jennifer Patten, Festival Director,
& Jared Geiser, Executive Director, AltaCal.

info@snowgoosefestival.org

530-592-9092



Bird Connection - Climate Action, Habitat Restoration, Bird Boxes

By Jared Geiser, Executive Director

This fall, AltaCal partnered with the Butte Environmental Council (BEC), Butte Fire Safe Council, CA Volunteers, and CA Climate Action Corp on **Butte County Community Climate Action Day**, a county-wide event to engage the community in a day of collective climate action at multiple project sites and to promote the long-term health and resilience of our natural spaces.

While some volunteer crews were planting trees, removing invasive species, or clearing hazardous fuel, AltaCal and BEC facilitated a bird box build to help with habitat restoration in areas affected by recent wildfires. All of the **Northern Saw-whet Owl** boxes we had up at Big Chico Creek Ecological Reserve (BCCER) were lost in the blaze of the Park Fire so we built 15 new owl boxes and 10 songbird boxes to help our feathered friends and the ecosystems they're a part of. Natural solutions to climate change are critical to limit the grave impacts of global warming on the Earth, its ecosystems, and human society. *National's Survival by Degrees: 389 Bird Species on the Brink* report concludes that climate change is the greatest threat to birds today and we need to take bold actions now to reduce carbon levels in the atmosphere to protect our feathered friends.

Habitat restoration is an exciting natural solution to climate change which brings about numerous co-benefits to people, ecosystem health, and environmental quality. By restoring habitat, we're enhancing the capacity of the flora to sequester carbon from the atmosphere through photosynthesis. This can look like riparian restoration projects, which restore the native vegetation along rivers and streams (See Conservation Corner article in Oct/Nov 2024 issue of the WTK), or it can be as simple as putting up bird boxes!

The habitat loss from catastrophic wildfire events is evident when you drive through Berry Creek and observe the widespread



tree mortality and the clearing of dead trees which occurs in communities after a fire (2020 North Complex Fire). Birds help restore habitat by dispersing seeds, promoting plant regeneration, and in some cases birds are even helping with the dispersal of beneficial fungi spores throughout an ecosystem¹. But birds need places to live! Bird boxes provide suitable nesting locations while helping with broader habitat restoration and climate action.

I am grateful for the various community organizations and volunteers who all came together to make this project so successful. Special thanks to Olivia Henderson with BEC, and Calvin Hamilton and Ken Sobon with AltaCal for playing key roles in this wonderful project.

¹ <https://www.audubon.org/news/6-unexpected-ways-birds-are-important-environment-and-people>

Monarchs and Non-native Tropical Milkweed

Why to Not Plant It by Dawn Garcia, Wildlife Biologist

I am not sure how relevant this article will be for the Butte County area, because I have not seen tropical milkweed (*Asclepias curassavica*) where I have lived and explored in Butte County. But it may be something you are familiar with in milder and more coastal CA. So, I wanted to share this info with AltaCal members to pass on to friends around the state who are planting for monarchs. Where I live now in southern CA, non-native tropical milkweed is planted and grows year-round. I don't recall seeing it in this Butte County nurseries but if it is sold, please **DO NOT** plant it. I have read some science regarding this species and how it affects monarchs. In California there are 15 species of native milkweed, and many local nurseries sell narrow-leaved milkweed (*A. fascicularis*) and showy milkweed (*Asclepias speciosa*). Narrow-leaved has profuse delicate pink and white blooms and grew well where I lived in Oroville. Showy has velvety large leaves, a big ball-shaped head of pink blooms, and it was an excellent choice when I lived in Paradise. I was pleasantly surprised when in successive years after planting it would pop up in random places in my yard, from the dispersed seeds that blew from the large alien looking seed pods. **Our native milkweeds die back in the winter and monarch butterflies move on.**

Tropical milkweed has flashy red and yellow blooms and grows well in milder climates. It is often the go-to milkweed sold by nurseries in S. CA, because it is showy, robust, and easy to grow. **It is green year-round or retains leaves longer into the year than the native milkweed, confusing the monarchs into staying and reproducing instead of migrating.**

The monarch butterfly has a natural parasite called OE (*Ophryocystis elektroscirrha*). It is carried on the butterfly abdomen and deposited in microscopic spores on the milkweed plant when an adult lays eggs and feeds on nectar. When larvae hatch, they consume their eggshell, then leaves and the OE spores. It reproduces inside of them. An adult may emerge with a light load of OE and not be badly affected. When the native plant senesces, the OE is eliminated from the area.

Tropical milkweed does not senesce. And its' winter presence changes the butterfly's behavior, putting them into reproductive mode instead of flying to wintering grounds. Loads of OE (up to 10x) accumulate on the milkweed, and butterflies and larvae can become heavily infected. They can be weak, die within or are unable to break free of their chrysalis to hang and dry, unable to fly, have deformities, die. Research shows that adults that feed on tropical milkweed do not have the fitness for longer flight needed for a migratory butterfly, they have duller orange, thinner and shorter wings.

In 2022, CA Department of Food and Agriculture listed tropical milkweed as a B-rated noxious weed and it has been banned for sale in nurseries in Ventura, Contra Costa, Marin, and San Mateo counties, because of the harm it causes our western population of monarch butterflies.

In my Dana Point neighborhood, I see the tropical milkweed in many gardens with blooms and split pods with seeds blowing



in the wind. They easily germinate in my own garden. Ask your favorite nursery to not sell it. Do your monarch friends a favor. Buy the natives, pull the noxious tropical milkweed. It changes their behavior and biology. The research is there, find it in these links. I like the top two by Andy Davis who summarizes current science in a blog post.

1. The Science of monarch butterflies, A complete summary of the previous and new science on tropical milkweed and monarchs: a blog summarizing the research: <https://www.monarchscience.org/single-post/a-complete-summary-of-the-previous-and-new-science-on-tropical-milkweed-and-monarchs>
2. 10 things you can do to REALLY help monarchs. <https://www.monarchscience.org/single-post/10-things-you-can-do-to-really-save-the-monarchs>
3. Floral Native Nursery: <https://floralnativenursery.com/>
4. Monarch Joint Venture: <https://monarchjointventure.org/>
5. Monarch Watch: <https://monarchwatch.org/>
6. Why we don't want to plant non-native milkweed: <https://www.nativenurseries.com/blog/2020/4/13/why-we-no-longer-carry-non-native-tropical-milkweed>
7. Google: ventura-county-bans-sale-of-tropical-milkweed-to-protect-monarchs
8. NRCS: native CA milkweeds: https://efotg.sc.egov.usda.gov/references/public/CA/TN_Biology_CA-21_CA-milkweed.pdf
9. <https://www.xerces.org/milkweed/milkweed-seed-finder>
10. <https://journeynorth.org/monarchs/featured/monarch-butterfly-distribution-map>

Local Chapter Membership Form

Please join us!

Your membership will help AltaCal Audubon Society continue its important work.

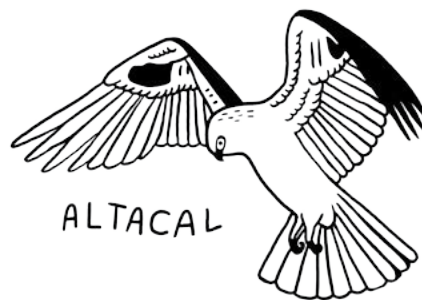
AltaCal Audubon Society (AAS) is a chapter of the National Audubon Society. AAS is a separately incorporated non-profit organization with a local chapter membership. 100% of membership dues goes to support local projects and activities.

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. Reach out to director@altacal.org for more information on how this can be set up.

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 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

AltaCal Audubon Society Membership Form

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Goldfinch \$5 / month or \$60 / year | ☐ Falcon \$20 /month for \$240 /year |
| ☐ Quail \$7 / month or \$84 / year | ☐ Great-horned Owl \$25 /month or \$300 / year |
| ☐ Bluebird \$10 / month or \$120 / year | ☐ Robin Low income\Student \$2-\$3 /month \$24-\$36 /year |
| ☐ Woodpecker \$15 / month or \$180 / year | ☐ Soar Higher \$ _____
with Additional Donation |

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ email _____

☐ Save Paper! Send me an email only

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☐ Gift

☐ email me *AltaCal in Action* Alerts

☐ I would be interested in volunteering to help

Please make check payable to AltaCal Audubon Society, 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 Audubon Society 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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CHICO, CA 95927-3671

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11/28/24–11/30/24
3-Day Window

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Chico, Calif 95927



CURRENT RESIDENT

White-tailed Kite Submission Deadlines

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

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Christmas Bird Count Updates

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Wings of the Flyway



Western Meadowlark. Photo: Karen White

