

Dear all,

I have tried to share some possible explanations to some of the declining and increasing trends for several species with my fairly limited experience on the Springville Count. Please let me know your thoughts and your hypotheses. Thanks. Kim

SPRINGVILLE CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT RESULTS

On December 16th, 2006, **32 volunteers** spent a cloudy, drizzly day counting a total of **64,059 birds** including **143 different species** (the highest ever was 147 in 1998) during the 32nd annual Springville Christmas Bird Count. In addition, **5 other species** were seen during the **count week** for a **grand total of 148 species, which ties our best (148 in 1989)!** Truly amazing especially considering that there was almost no visibility in the Wishon area due to the thick fog, and that we did not cover the Black Mountain area this year due to impassible roads covered deep with snow.

The five species with the **highest totals** this year were American Coots (2,215), Red-winged Blackbirds (2,194), Brewer's Blackbirds (1,366), European Starlings (1,292), and White-crowned Sparrows (1,118).

HIGHLIGHTS:

Undoubtedly, the most exciting sighting this year was a **YELLOW-BREASTED CHAT**, seen eating wild grapes in a dense riparian thicket at the River Island Golf Course by **Clair Owens and Betty Hildebrand!!** In fact, this wonderful sighting will most likely be one of the most special highlights for all of the California Christmas Counts this season! In the 107 year history of the annual Christmas Bird Count, **Yellow-breasted Chats have been recorded only 9 other times in California!** This was of course the first time that a Yellow-breasted Chat has been discovered on the Springville Count, and as far as I know, the only time it has been found in Tulare County during the winter!

Two other species were new to our count this year: a **BARN SWALLOW**, observed by Gary Lindquist and Frank Gibson in a large swallow flock over Lake Success, and an **EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE**, seen by Kim Kuska during count week, perched on a telephone wire on Hwy 190 near Bogart Drive just west of Springville. This will probably not be the last time either of these two species will be seen on this count. Barn Swallows, once virtually unheard of in California during the winter, have become nearly regular the last 5 years, although usually in low numbers, on several counts throughout southern and central California. Likewise, Eurasian Collared-Doves are rapidly invading California, and were recorded on numerous California counts this winter for the first time.

In addition to these three species, several other species deserve to share some of the spotlight: three **SHORT-EARED OWLS**, a species that was only seen once before-in 1979, were sighted by **Tony Kurz** in the Kincaid Cove Unit of the Wildlife Area northwest of Lake Success; a **RED-BREASTED MERGANSER**, only the third time for this count, was picked from a large group of Common Mergansers on Lake Success by **Gary Lindquist**; a **COMMON GOLDENEYE**, only the seventh time on this count, was found in a cat-tail lined pond on Globe Drive by Kim Kuska, an **EURASIAN WIGEON** revealed itself once again at Lake Success, a **WHITE-THROATED SPARROW**, observed at **Myron Giddings** feeders near Success Valley Drive, **2 HORNED GREBES**, discovered by Gary Lindquist on Lake Success, a **RED-NAPED SAPSUCKER**, seen by **Giacomo Catalina** at SCICON, 4 **LAWRENCE'S GOLDFINCHES** also found near the

SCICON area, and a **SLATE-COLORED FORM OF THE DARK-EYED JUNCO**, detected by **Steve and Priscilla Summers** on the Sequoia Ranch on Hwy 190 just east of Springville.

Other notable species that have been missed over half the time include: **HERRING GULL** (7th record) - Lake Success/ Gary Lindquist; **MOUNTAIN QUAIL** (11th record) and **NORTHERN SAW-WHET OWL** (10th record) -Justin Ward & John Lockhart/ Bear Creek Road.

MISSES:

Several species were missed this year on the count day and even during the count week that are usually recorded during most years. The biggest misses this year were **Purple Finch (the 1st time it has been missed!)**, **Orange-crowned Warbler (only the 2nd time it has been missed)**, **Pine Siskin** (6th time missed), **Horned Lark** (7th time missed), **Lesser Scaup** (9th time missed), **Long-billed Dowitcher** (9th time missed), and **Long-billed Curlew** (11th time missed). **Cinnamon Teal** was the only dabbling duck (besides the extreme long-shot of Blue-winged Teal) missed this year, but for some reason it is very difficult to find on this count, missed 17 times, and seen only 2 times in the last 15 years!

SUMMARY: (Birds of special note are **CAPITALIZED**: also **HC= Highest # ever**).

Total Species:143, Total Birds: 64,059 birds, Total Participants: 32, Total Party Hours: 87 hours.

SPECIES LIST: Canada Geese (276), Wood Duck (144), Gadwall (2150), **EURASIAN WIGEON (1)**, American Wigeon (348), Mallard (404), Northern Shoveler (20), Northern Pintail (1), Green-winged Teal (166), Ringed-necked Duck (106), Bufflehead (4), **COMMON GOLDENEYE (1)**, **Hooded Merganser (28)HC**, Common Merganser (238), **RED-BREASTED MERGANSER (1)**, Ruddy Duck (24), Ring-necked Pheasant (5), **Wild Turkey (199)HC**, **MOUNTAIN QUAIL (4)**, California Quail (763), Pied-billed Grebe (38), **HORNED GREBE (2)**, Eared Grebe (539), Western Grebe (70), Clark's Grebe (108), American Pelican (37), Double-crested Cormorant (31), Great Blue Heron (46), Great Egret (50), Snowy Egret (4), Green Heron (3), Black-crowned Night-Heron (4), Turkey Vulture (3), White-tailed Kite (23), Bald Eagle (4), Northern Harrier (6), Sharp-shinned Hawk (6) **Cooper's Hawk (16)HC**, Accipiter sp. (1), Red-shouldered Hawk (27), Red-tailed Hawk (97), Ferruginous Hawk (2), Golden Eagle (5), American Kestrel (66), **MERLIN (4)**, **PEREGRINE FALCON (4)HC**, Virginia Rail (4), **SORA (2)**, Common Moorhen (14), American Coot (2215), Killdeer (40), Spotted Sandpiper (2), Greater Yellowlegs (2), Least Sandpiper (20), Wilson's Snipe (2), Ring-billed Gull (27), California Gull (**506)HC**, Herring Gull (1), Rock Pigeon (48), Band-tailed Pigeon (38), Mourning Dove (434), Barn Owl (13), Western Screech-Owl (22), Great Horned Owl (11), Northern Pygmy-Owl (2), **SHORT-EARED OWL (3)**, **NORTHERN SAW-WHET OWL ((2)**, Anna's Hummingbird (114), Belted Kingfisher (9), Lewis's Woodpecker (**94)HC**, Acorn Woodpecker (300), **RED-NAPED SAPSUCKER (1)**, Red-breasted Sapsucker (10), Nuttall's Woodpecker (31), Downy Woodpecker (9), Hairy Woodpecker (3), White-headed Woodpecker (2), Northern Flicker (170), Black Phoebe (109), Say's Phoebe (28), Loggerhead Shrike (13), **HUTTON'S VIREO (1)**, Steller's Jay (48), Western Scrub-Jay (184), American Crow (91), Common Raven (263), **Tree Swallow (528)HC**, **VIOLET-GREEN SWALLOW (28)**, **BARN SWALLOW (1)**, Mountain Chickadee (22), Oak Titmouse (124), Bushtit (281), Red-breasted Nuthatch (13), White-breasted Nuthatch (58), Brown Creeper (11), Rock Wren (7), Canyon Wren (9), Bewick's Wren (5), House Wren (13), Winter Wren (5), Marsh Wren (6), American Dipper (6), Ruby-crowned Kinglet (195), Golden-crowned

Kinglet (8), **BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER (7)HC**, Western Bluebird (449), **MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD (53)**, Hermit Thrush (12), American Robin (71), **VARIED THRUSH (10)**, Wrentit (10), Northern Mockingbird (46), European Starling (1292), American Pipit (45), Cedar Waxwings (112), Phainopepla (13), Yellow-rumped (Audubon's) Warbler (203), Common Yellowthroat (1), **YELLOW-BREASTED CHAT (1)HC**, Spotted Towhee (135), California Towhee (70), Rufous-crowned Sparrow (12), Chipping Sparrow (4), Vesper Sparrow (6), Lark Sparrow (112), Savannah Sparrow (112), Fox Sparrow (6), Song Sparrow (25), Lincoln's Sparrow (24), **WHITE-THROATED SPARROW (1)**, White-crowned Sparrow (1118), Golden-crowned Sparrow (274), Dark-eyed (Oregon) Junco (597), **DARK-EYED (SLATE-COLORED) JUNCO (1)**, Red-winged Blackbird (2194), Tricolored Blackbird (53), Western Meadowlark (199), Brewer's Blackbird (1366), **GREAT-TAILED GRACKLE (194)HC**, Brown-headed Cowbird (10), blackbird sp. (846), House Finch (415), Lesser Goldfinch (154), **LAWRENCE'S GOLDFINCH (4)**, American Goldfinch (202), and House Sparrow (205).

COUNT WEEK BIRDS

In addition to these 143 species, there were also five birds seen during the count week that were not found on the day of the count: **Prairie Falcon, (only the 3rd time it was missed on count day), Greater Roadrunner, Burrowing Owl, California Thrasher, and EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE** (which was a **new species to this count**), making a **grand total of 148 species!** Maybe next year, if we get more birders, we can finally break that coveted 150 species barrier!

HIGHEST NUMBERS:

Nine species recorded their **highest numbers ever** on the Springville Count: **Hooded Merganser (28 -tied with 2005), Wild Turkey (199- which is 117 more than 2nd highest of 82 in 2002!), Cooper's Hawk (16), Peregrine Falcon (4), California Gull (506- maybe partially due to recent coverage of Success Lake by boat), Lewis's Woodpecker (94- which is 66 more than 2nd highest of 28 in 1999; this year there was a large invasion of Lewis's Woodpeckers at Circle J Ranch), Tree Swallow (328- which is 236 more than the 2nd most of 92 in 1992; up until 1999, Violet-green Swallows were more common and had larger numbers, but it has flip-flopped since then, with Tree Swallows now scoring higher numbers typically), Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (7), and Great-tailed Grackle (194- which is 169 more than 2nd most of 25 in 2005; Great-tailed Grackles are fairly new to this count, having occurred only since 1999- steadily increasing each subsequent year.**

In addition, several birds had their **2nd highest totals this year: Northern Shoveler (20), Clark's Grebe (108), Great Egret (50), Common Moorhen (14), Northern Saw-whet Owl (2), Mountain Bluebird (53), American Crow (91),and Common Raven (263)**. I find it very interesting that these two corvids (American Crow and Common Raven) totaled near record numbers in light of the **spread of the West Nile Virus**. Another corvid, the **Western Scrub-Jay, had its 2nd lowest numbers**, probably due to the effects of this virus.

LOWEST NUMBERS:

No species (except those that were not seen like Purple Finch, Orange-crowned Warbler, Horned Lark, etc..., and those found only during the count week period such as Greater Roadrunner, Prairie Falcon, California Thrasher and Burrowing Owl) scored their lowest numbers this season (mainly because the first year of the Springville Count, 1975, had numerous extremely low numbers, probably due to the birders' unfamiliarity with this new area). However, several species recorded

their **2nd lowest numbers** this year: **Ruddy Duck (only 19** this year- but in 1988, it had a High Count of 183!), **Killdeer (40-** in 1986 HC of 276), **Wilson's Snipe (2-** in 1986 HC of 126), **Western Scrub-Jay (184-** in 2001 HC of 475- its low number this year most likely due to the West Nile Virus), **Bewick's Wren (5-** in 1978 HC of 53), **American Robin (71-** in 2002 HC of 933), and **California Towhee (70-** in 1980 HC of 357).

TRENDS/ ANALYSIS:

The Springville count has been conducted every year since it **started in December 1975**, for a total of **32 years**, and we have **data for 29 of those years** (a few years in the 90's-1993,1995,& 1997, the data was not turned in to the National Office). With 29 years of data. changes can be observed, trends noticed, and hypotheses can be made to explain these changes and trends.

Between 1975 and 1985, an average of **129 species** were seen annually, ranging from **114 (1975) to 144 (1985)**, with an average of **48 participants**, ranging from 21 (1975) to 69 (1983).

Between 1986 and 1996, an average of **139 species** were seen annually, ranging from **132 (1992) to 145 (1986)**, with an average of **41 participants**, ranging from 26 (1996) to 67 (1986).

Between 1998 and 2006, and average of **142 species** were seen annually, ranging from **134 (2004) to 147 (1998)**, with an average of **32 participants**, ranging from 18 (2004) to 44 (2001).

As one can see from these data, **our results this year (143 species/ 32 participants) were nearly identical to our recent average in both number of species and participants**. Also, **the entire 32 year trend shows an increase in the number of species (from 129 to 142) through the years while the participation decreased (48 to 32)!**

Probably the **main reason** for this increase in the number of species is that **several species have recently become regular winter visitors now**, when they were never present in the early years of this count. These species include **American White Pelican** (first showed up in **1998**), **Double-crested Cormorant** (present **only since 1983**), **Black-crowned Night-Heron** (regular **only since 1981**), **Wild Turkey** (regular **only since 1988**), **Great-tailed Grackle** (present **only since 1999**), **Peregrine Falcon** (regular **only since 1999**), **Merlin** (regular **only since 1981**), **Eurasian Wigeon** (nearly regular **since 1998**), **Herring Gull** (first recorded in **2001**), and **Tree Swallow** (fairly regular **since 1981**). **Perhaps, the Eurasian Collared-Dove and Barn Swallow will now join these other ten species** to also be regularly seen on this count. In addition, **the Clark's Grebe was split from the Western Grebe in 1985, adding another species to all of our counts since 1986!**

The increase in swallows during the winter may be connected to global warming, as well as the recent rapid expansion of Great-tailed Grackles, Eurasian Collared-Dove, and possibly also American White Pelicans. Warmer temperatures seem to be expanding the ranges of some of these species.

DECLINING GROUPS

Even though our number of species have been increasing, **5 main groups of birds have recently been showing disturbing drops** in their winter populations. Groups that seem to be declining include **oak woodland birds, rodent-eating birds of prey, grassland birds, shorebirds, and diving ducks and small grebes!** Since so many important groups are all showing declines, **I can't help but wonder if global warming is possibly some how involved in at least some of these declines**. Timing is the key; birds must produce their young when food and resources are plentiful. Climate change can throw off this timing.

I will also present other possible explanations for these declines.

Resident Oak Woodland Species Declines

Many of the resident oak woodland species have shown dramatic drops in just the last few years: **Acorn Woodpeckers** 2006 (300), 2005 (315), 2004 (341), and 2003 (263) are the lowest totals since 1984, and are about half of their immediately preceding years: 2002 (566), 2001 (496), 2000 (687)!

Oak Titmouse 2006 (123- 4th lowest), 2005 (151), 2004 (234), 2003 (423).

Bewick's Wren 2006 (5- 2nd lowest), 2005 (6), 2004 (5), 2003 (13), 2002 (11)

California Towhee 2006 (70- 2nd lowest), 2005 (91), 2004 (94), 2003 (101), 2002 (115) 2001 (221).

Western Scrub-Jay 2006 (184-2nd lowest), 2005 (273), 2004 (401), 2003 (335), 2002 (473), 2001 (475).

Fox Sparrow 2006 (6-lowest since 1998), 2005 (10), 2004 (9), 2003 (25), 2002 (49).

Other oak woodland species have also shown declines, but the numbers fluctuate more from year to year:

Lesser Goldfinch 2006 (154- 7th lowest), 2005 (281), 2004 (121- 5th lowest), 2003 (118-4th lowest), 2002 (223), 2001 (181), in contrast to 2000 (445) and 1983 (757 HC), (in the 80's, their numbers were often over 400!).

Bushtit 2006 (281), 2005 (231), 2004 (221) 2003 (671).

White-breasted Nuthatch 2006 (58), 2005 (73), 2004 (80), 2003 (48), 2002 (85).

Phainopepla 2006 (13- lowest since 1999, and 2nd lowest since 1984!), 2005 (35).

With almost all of the oak woodland species showing declines in recent years, **you wonder if these declines are somehow tied together.** Due to the intricate relationships of the web of life, connecting the different species together, a factor affecting one species may cause changes in the population sizes of several other species. I think quite likely, that two of the oak woodland's keystone species, the **Acorn Woodpecker** and the **Western Scrub-Jay**, were affected by two separate factors, that in turn affected the populations of many other oak woodland bird species. Here are some possible explanations to these declines: **1) the removal of the wooden telephone poles that were used by Acorn Woodpeckers as granaries as well as nesting locations and replacing them with plastic poles seemed to have happened around the same time that the Acorn Woodpeckers numbers dropped by half.** If essentially removing their refrigerators and homes for nesting weren't bad enough, the **Acorn Woodpeckers seem to be wasting a lot of their vital energy placing acorns inside the holes of these plastic poles, causing the acorns just to drop through these hollow tubes to the bottom, rendering them impossible to retrieve!**

The removal of the wooden telephone poles which housed countless old nesting cavities made by the Acorn Woodpeckers may help explain the similar decreases in the other cavity nesting oak woodland species like Oak Titmice, White-headed Nuthatches, and Bewick's Wrens, all three of which frequently nest in old woodpecker holes. Interestingly, the non-resident wintering species like Ruby-crowned Kinglets do not show the decreases as the resident oak woodland species. **Lewis's Woodpeckers, which share a similar niche as Acorn Woodpeckers, dramatically increased in 2006 with 94 birds** (the highest count ever by 66 birds!), which most likely is **due to them taking over feeding territories left vacant by the reduced population of Acorn Woodpeckers.** Like Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Lewis's Woodpeckers are just a wintering species, and they do not stay to nest in our oak woodland.

2). The recent decrease in the Western Scrub-Jay numbers is undoubtedly caused by the West Nile Virus. Scrub-Jays act as a noisy Paul Revere, warning all of the other oak woodland birds of impending dangers. With less scrub-jays around to sound their alarm, the

other oak woodland species might now get eaten more often by predators like Cooper's Hawks, which interestingly, had its highest count in 2006 with 16!

The only other oak woodland species that showed a **rare recent increase** were the **California Quail** (2006- 763- 3rd highest total) and the **Wild Turkey** (2006- 199- the highest count by 117!); both of these increases can probably be attributed to supplemental feeding by humans.

Amazingly, the recent declines in most of the oak woodland species happened when we provided better coverage of this habitat! When Gary and I took over the reins to this count a few years back, we felt that our Springville Count circle probably contained more oak woodland than any other count, so we figured that if we covered this area more thoroughly, the Springville Count had the potential of leading the nation with the highest numbers in most of the oak woodland birds. **So it is certainly surprising that even with better coverage, that these oak woodland species continue to drop in numbers.**

Declines In Hawks, Harriers, and Eagles (Rodent-eating Raptors)

Many of our hawks and eagles, especially the rodent-eating raptors, appear to be decreasing in numbers, many now numbering only 1/2, 1/3, or even 1/4 of their past totals. We counted only 6 **Golden Eagles** in 2006 (the 6th lowest ever and the lowest since 1983!), unsettling when you compare it to the recent past: 1999 (13), 2000 (18 -highest count), 2001 (17), and 2002 (11). Other raptors with fairly low totals this year include: **Red-tailed Hawk**- 2006 (96)-less than 1/2 of its highest count in 1984 (210), **Red-shouldered Hawk**- 2006 (27) -compared to its high count of 55 in 2003, and **Northern Harrier**-2006 (6)-which had a HC of 27 in 1995. Even the recent totals of **Bald Eagles** are merely fractions of their former numbers: 2006 (4), 2005 (3), 2004 (only seen during count week), 2003 (2), while between 1984 and 1994, the Bald Eagle totals often hovered around 8, with a high count of 9 in 1984!

Hopefully, many of these fairly low raptor numbers this year can be explained by the cold, drizzly, and sometimes rainy weather on count day, causing a lack of thermals, thus making these birds harder to detect due to a reduced amount of soaring. However, one can't help but wonder if rodent poisoning by local farmers might be involved in these declines.

In contrast, the bird-eating and smaller raptors (that typically hunt from a perch instead of soaring) in general showed healthy populations this year: **Cooper's Hawk** (16-highest total ever), **Peregrine Falcon** (4- also its highest total), **White-tailed Kite** (23- its 3rd highest total), **Merlin** (4- not far off from its highest count of 6 in 1999), and to a slightly lesser extent, **Sharp-shinned Hawk** (6- 3rd highest total in the last 10 years being just one behind 2004 (7) and 1998 (7)). Even the **American Kestrel**, whose numbers have been decreasing the last few years (2003 -66, 2004 -43, 2005 -41), rebounded back this year to 66, but this number is still markedly lower than its 1983 highest count of 136. However, over the 32 years of this count, the American Kestrel population often shows wide fluctuations from year to year.

The only apparent anomaly to this general pattern seems to be the **Prairie Falcon** which has scored below average numbers (or was missing) for the last 6 years: 2006 (only seen during count week), 2005 (2), 2004 (1), 2003 (0), 2002 (2), 2001 (1), while in 2000, there were 5 recorded, and its highest total was 7 in 1986. There are several possible explanations for this decline: 1) Almost all of the grassland birds, representing many of the prey items of the Prairie Falcon, also experienced low counts during this same period; 2) In addition, Prairie Falcons have food habits somewhat similar to Buteos, often taking ground squirrels, which may link their decline with those of the other rodent-eating raptors; 3) **Most likely though, their recent decrease is due to less grassland coverage. Several years ago, we lost access to our largest grassland section which was covered yearly by an extremely keen observer, Bill Davis, who moved away to Ecuador**

around this same time. Not surprisingly, our grassland species numbers have drastically declined since then.

Grassland Species Declines

Most of our grassland species have recorded some of their lowest counts in the last five years, which are far lower than their past highest counts. **Western Meadowlark**, for example, had 5 of their 6 lowest numbers during the last 5 years (the only lower count was during the count's first year, 1975- which counted only 88 meadowlarks): 2006 (199-2nd lowest), 2005 (255), 2004 (288), 2003 (274), 2002 (204). The 6th year was about two times higher, 2001 (492), which is still much lower than its highest count of 2,255 in 1986! Likewise, **Lark Sparrows** had 4 of some of their lower numbers in the last 5 years: 2006 (**295**), 2005 (**218**), 2004 (**157**), 2003 (541), and 2002 (**176**), which is especially shocking when you realize that its highest count was 1,042 in 1991. Similarly, the last 6 years of **American Pipits** totals are all inside its 9 lowest counts: 2006 (45- 6th lowest), 2005 (73- 7th lowest), 2004 (92- 9th lowest), 2003 (37- 5th lowest), 2002 (32- 4th lowest) and 2001 (89- 8th lowest). In contrast, American Pipits highest count was 635 in 1983. In 2006, **Vesper Sparrows** totaled only 6 birds, its lowest since 1986 (compared to a high count of 49 in 2002), while **Savannah Sparrows** only had 112, its 3rd lowest since 1983 (compared to a high count of 1,697 in 1999). **Loggerhead Shrikes** also recorded 3 of its 6 lowest totals all in the last 5 years, 2006 (13-6th lowest), 2005 (17), 2004 (12- 5th lowest), 2003 (23), 2002 (13), which is more meaningful when compared to its 2001 total of 40 and its highest count of 43 in 1994. Furthermore, four grassland species are now either very difficult to find or only rarely encountered on this count: 1) **Horned Lark** 2006- 2005 (0), 2004 (12), 2003 (1), 2002-2001 (0), while having a high count in the past of 448 (1998); 2) **Long-billed Curlew** 2006 (0), 2005 (2), 2004 (1), 2003-2001 (0), with a high count of 227 in 1986; 3) **Burrowing Owl** 2006 (CW), 2005 (0), 2004 (1), 2003- 2001 (0), with a high count of 4 in 1984; and finally 4) **Prairie Falcon** 2006 (CW), 2005 (2), 2004 (1), 2003 (0), 2002 (2), 2001 (1), compared with 5 in 2000, and a high count of 7 in 1986.

Having so many grassland birds exhibiting a similar pattern of having fairly low numbers for the last 5- 6 years seems to support the hypothesis that these declines are mainly caused by the recent lack of access to a major grassland section in our count circle and also to the loss of its exceptionally observant section leader, **Bill Davis**. To halt these recent declines, we plan to pursue gaining access to other prime grassland habitats inside our count circle, and if we have enough birders, create a new section that will hopefully cause a rebound in the totals for many of these species.

Only three grassland species, **interestingly all of which feed by flycatching**, seem to not share these same declines, but instead, have actually recently recorded high numbers: **Say's Phoebe** (2005- 148- its highest count ever by 84 birds!), **Western Bluebird** (2006- 449- 4th highest count), and **Mountain Bluebird** (2006-53- 2nd highest count). Maybe the flycatching feeding habits of these birds of often perching on roadside fence wires, which makes them much more easy to detect than the other grassland species, has contributed to their different results. However, if you take away the one recent high number from both the Say's Phoebe and the Mountain Bluebird, the rest of the last 6 years totals do indicate a recent drop: Say's Phoebe (2006 (**28**), 2005 (148), 2004 (**20**), 2003 (**29**), 2002 (**32**), 2001 (**36**) (with an **average of only 29 birds/ year**), compared to the average from the previous 15 years of data of **38 birds/ year**): **Mountain Bluebird** 2005- 2003 (**0**), 2002 (**3**), 2001 (**4**) (with an average of only about **1 bird/ year**- 10 birds/year if you also include its 2006 high number, compared to the average from the previous 15 years of data of about **15 birds/ year!**). Mountain Bluebirds are a boom or bust species; they can be present in very large numbers during winters when insects are readily available, or otherwise, mostly absent.

Western Bluebird numbers, however, have remained fairly steady throughout, not showing any decline (last 6 years average of **311 birds/ year** compared to the previous 15 years of data of **310 birds/ year**).

Aquatic Insect-eating Grebes and Diving Ducks Declines

Another trend that becomes apparent is the decline over the last 32 years in the numbers of insect-eating smaller grebes and diving ducks, and the increase in the numbers of fish-eating ducks, larger grebes, pelicans, and cormorants. I will present these data by comparing the average numbers for each species for the first 19 years followed by the average number for the last 10 years - then include their highest total and the year of this total.

Diving Ducks Decline: Ruddy Duck- an average of **80 birds/ year** for the first 19 years dropping to an average of only **44 birds** for the last 10 years - highest count of 183 in 1988- its 2006 total of 24 birds was its 2nd lowest; **Ring-necked Duck - 390 birds/ year** for 1st 19 years dropping to **187 birds/ year** for last 10 years- HC of 467 in 1985- its 2006 total of 106 was its 3rd lowest; **Lesser Scaup- 10 birds/ year** for 1st 19 years dropping to **2 birds/ year** for the last 10 years- HC of 20 in 1980- missing on 5 of the last 10 years of this count; **Canvasback- 7 birds/ year** for the 1st 19 years dropping to only **0.3 birds/ years** for the last 10 years- HC of 39 in 1980-missing on 8 of the last 10 years but was almost found on every count until 1998; **Common Goldeneye- 1.4 birds/ year** for the 1st 19 years dropping to **0.2 birds / year** for the last 10 years. **Redhead** has stayed nearly equally rare for both time spans- **0.2 birds/ year** for the 1st 19 years and **0.3 birds/ year** for the last 10 years- HC of 2 in 1987 and 2004.

Insect-eating Grebes Declines: Pied-billed Grebe- 101 birds/ year for the 1st 19 years dropping to only **44 birds/ year** for the last 10 years; **Horned Grebe- 2 birds/ year** in the 1st 19 years dropping to **0.3 bird / year** for the last 10 years, was fairly regularly found on the counts each year until 1988, but have only been found on 2 of the last 10 counts; **Eared Grebe- 555 birds/ year** for the 1st 19 years, with a slight drop to **479 birds/ year** for the last 10 years. **Notice that the biggest drop was for Pied-billed Grebes, which mainly only feed on aquatic insects, much like the diving ducks, while the smaller drops in the Horned and Eared Grebes may be because they will not only eat aquatic insects, but also fish.**

The fish-eating ducks, larger grebes, pelicans, and cormorants all showed substantial increases on average over the last 10 years compared with the 1st 19 years of data. Here are the results: **Bufflehead- 2 birds/ year** for the 1st 19 years increasing to **9 birds/ year** for the last 10 years- HC of 12 in 1979; **Hooded Merganser- 2 birds / year** in the 1st 19 years increasing to **12 birds/ year** in the last 10 years with the last two years (2006 & 2005) tying for the highest count of 28 birds; **Common Merganser- 135 birds/ year** in the first 19 years increasing to **174 birds/ year** for the last 10 years with a HC of 551 in 1987; **Western/ Clark's Grebes- 41 birds/ year** for the 1st 19 years increasing to **89 birds/ year** for the last 10 years (**In addition, the last two years- 2005 and 2006- had an average of 184 birds/ year, a very large increase. This huge increase was probably due to the immigration of these large grebes from nearby Bravo Lake, which was drained for a short time a couple years ago; these large grebes for the most part have still not returned to Bravo Lake.**); **American White Pelicans- 0 birds/ year** for the 1st 19 years increasing to **32 birds/ year** for the last 10 years- these birds were 1st recorded in 1998; **Double-crested Cormorant- 0.5/ year** for the 1st 19 years increasing to **35 birds/ year** in the last 10 years- these birds were 1st recorded in 1987.

With the populations of the insect-eating waterfowl decreasing at the same time that the fish-eating waterfowl numbers were increasing, I do think their results are indirectly related even though they occupy two different food niches. **I believe that the increase in the fish-eating waterfowl**

numbers might be largely due to the frequent fish planting at Lake Success, where a large majority of these fish-eating waterfowl occur. The dramatic increases in the **Great Egret** population (an average of **16 birds/ year** for the 1st 19 years increasing to **42 birds/ year** for the last 10 years) and **Snowy Egret** population (**2 birds/ year** for the 1st 19 years increasing to **12 birds/ year** for the last 10 years), are also probably tied to the fish planting at Lake Success. **Great Blue Heron** numbers, however, do not follow this same pattern, but instead showed a fairly sharp decline in their numbers starting around 1990 that just began to improve this past year (2006) with 46 birds, which was its highest total since 1989! For the 1st 19 years, **Great Blue Herons** averaged **75 birds/ year** which dropped to an average of only **26 birds/ year** for the last 10 years and a HC of 149 in 1984! Great Blue Herons seem to feed on rodents nearly as often as they do fish, and maybe their decline can be linked with the decline of the rodent-eating raptors, which may be caused by possible rodent poisoning by local ranchers. Also, the nearby Great Blue Heron preserve near the Porterville Developmental Center currently has nesting Great Blue Herons on only one very large tree, and this seems to have been the case for at least the past ten years. From the large size of this preserve and from the past evidence of old nests on several other trees, this has not always been the case; probably this rookery was once much more extensive. The cause in the reduction of this rookery may also be the cause of the sharp decrease in its numbers on the Springville Count starting around 1990 .

Also, the increase in the Hooded Merganser numbers, a fish-eating species that is only rarely seen on Lake Success, but instead frequents the Tule River as well as the smaller ponds on Globe Drive and near Springville, is probably not related to the fish planting at Lake Success. **Some years, the Mosquito Abatement Program plants mosquito fish in some of the small ponds to control the mosquitoes, and this planting in turns has attracted groups of Hooded Mergansers during the winter. Maybe this program has increased recently in order to control the spread of West Nile Virus, which is carried by mosquitoes. As noted earlier, the highest counts for Hooded Merganser has happened in the last two years, with a total of 28 birds for both 2005 and 2006.**

The insect-eating waterfowl, especially in the first 19 years of this count, were mainly found on Lake Success. **I feel that the frequent planting of insect-eating fish into Lake Success might have caused less insects in the lake, therefore resulting in a reduction of the insect-eating waterfowl. Others feel that the decrease in the lake's insect population, and thus also the insect-eating waterfowl, is probably due to the natural succession caused by the building of the dam 44 years ago. They reason that the flooding of the vegetation at the dam's inception resulted at first in plenty of food and cover for numerous aquatic insects. As the years passed and this vegetation decomposed and disappeared, the insect population also largely disappeared, causing the insect-eating waterfowl to follow suit. Many of the insect-eating waterfowl found on this count in the past ten years have not come from Lake Success, but from the Norris Ranch pond (Circle J Ranch) and ponds along Globe Drive.**

SHOREBIRD DECLINES

Shorebirds, which also occupy a food niche somewhat similar to the diving ducks, specializing on eating aquatic insects, crustaceans and other invertebrates, have also declined in numbers over the past 32 years. Most of these are also mainly found on Lake Success, and therefore may be decreasing for the same reasons as the insect - eating grebes and diving ducks. Here are the shorebird results : Killdeer- an average of 151 birds/ year for the 1st 19 years dropping to an average of only 69 birds/ year for the last 10 years,- with 2006 scoring its 2nd lowest total of only 40 birds- its highest count was 276 in 1986; Least Sandpiper- 152 birds/ year

for the 1st 19 years dropping to only **66 birds/ year** for the last 10 years- with a HC of 680 in 1986- having its 5th lowest total of only 20 in 2006; **Wilson's Snipe- 37 birds/ year** dropping to only **7 birds/ year** in the last 10 years-with a HC of 126 in 1986; **Long-billed Curlew- 31 birds/ year** in the 1st 19 years dropping to only **10 birds/ year** for the last 10 years- with a HC of 227 in 1986; **Long-billed Dowitcher- 13 birds/ year** for the 1st 19 years dropping to only **6 birds/ year** for the last 10 years- with a HC of 51 in 1990; **Spotted Sandpiper- 2.6 birds/ year** for the 1st 19 years dropping to only **1.3 birds/ year** for the last ten years- with a HC of 9 in 1976; **Dunlin- 1 bird/ year** in the 1st 19 years dropping to only **0.1 bird/ year** for the last 10 years- with the last record being in 1998; **Western Sandpiper- 2 birds/ year** for the 1st 19 years dropping to only **0.2 bird/ year** for the last 10 years; and **American Avocet- 0.1 bird/ year** for the 1st 19 years dropping to **0 birds/ year** for the last 10 years- American Avocets have not been recorded on this count since 1988, and have been recorded only twice (1985 & 1988). Only two shorebirds, both quite rare on this count, have not showed a decline (with their limited data), but have stayed nearly the same for both time periods: **Black-necked Stilt- 0.05 bird/ year** for the 1st 19 years and **0.1 bird/ year** for the last 10 years- Black-necked Stilts have been recorded only twice on this count (1979 & 1998); and **Greater Yellowlegs- 1.5 birds/ year** for the 1st 19 years and **1.6 birds/ year** for the last 10 years- with a HC of 13 in 1991.

INCREASING GROUPS

A few groups have shown a trend of increasing, at least recently: Human Adapted Species (American Crow, Common Raven, Great-tailed Grackle, California Quail, and Wild Turkey), Birding-eating Raptors (Accipters, Kites, and most Falcons), Fish-eating Waterfowl, and Dabbling Ducks and Geese. I have already discussed each one of these groups except for dabbling ducks and geese.

Dabbling Ducks and Geese Increases

Success dam can hold 85,000 acre-feet of water, but is being **currently kept at 29,000 acre-feet due to safety concerns**. A moderate earthquake could cause the dam to fail, possibly affecting and flooding 75,000 people from Porterville to Corcoran. **The current 1/3 levels has caused a boom in our dabbling ducks, which have been posting some of their highest numbers on the last few Springville Christmas Bird Counts. Almost all of the dabbling ducks have shown these recent increases: Gadwall- an average of 46 birds/ year for the 1st 19 years increasing to 179 birds/ year for the last 10 years- with its highest count of 354 in 2001, its 2nd highest of 228 in 2005, and its 3rd most of 215 in 2006; American Wigeon- 71 birds/ year for the 1st 19 years increasing to 281 birds/ year for the last 10 years- with a HC of 498 in 2001, 2nd HC of 351 in 2004, and 3rd HC of 348 in 2006; Mallard- 236 birds/ year for the 1st 19 years increasing to 354 birds/ year- with a HC of 573 in 1987 and its 5th HC of 404 in 2006; Green-winged Teal- 66 birds/ year for the 1st 19 years increasing to 167 birds/ year in the last 10 years- with a HC of 457 in 2005 and a 2nd HC of 392 in 2004; Wood Duck- 36 birds/ year for the 1st 19 years increasing to 53 birds/ year for the last 10 years- with a HC of 156 in 2004 and a 3rd HC of 144 in 2006; Northern Shoveler- 1.5 birds/ year for the 1st 19 years increasing to 11 birds/ year for the last 10 years- with a HC 39 in 2005 and a 2nd HC of 20 in 2006; Northern Pintail- 3 birds/ year for the 1st 19 years increasing to 5 birds/ year for the last 10 years- with a HC 23 in 1999, and a 2nd HC of 13 in 2005; Eurasian Wigeon- 0.2 birds/ year for the 1st 19 years increasing to 0.8 birds/ year for the last 10 years- with a HC of 2 in 2003; Blue-winged Teal- 0.05 birds/ year for the 1st 19 years increasing to 0.3 birds/ year for the last 10 years- with a HC of 3 in 1998; Canada Goose- 105 birds/ year for the 1st 19 years increasing to 194 birds/ year for the last 10 years- with a HC of 587 in 2005 and its 4th HC of 276 in 2006; Greater White-fronted Goose- 0.05 birds/ year for the 1st 19 years increasing to**

0.1 birds/ year for the last 10 years; **Ross's Goose- 0 birds/ year** for the 1st 19 years increasing to **0.1 birds/ year** for the last 10 years; and finally **Tundra Swan- 0 birds/ year** for the 1st 19 years increasing to **0.1 bird/ year** for the last 10 years. Only two very rare dabblers did not show an increase: **Cinnamon Teal- 0.89 bird/ year** for the 1st 19 years and **0.5 bird/ year** for the last 10 years; and **Snow Goose- 0.2 bird/ year** for the 1st 19 years and **0.1 bird/ year** for the last 10 years; but both of these have very limited data.

The recent increase in the Wood Duck numbers is probably not due to this lowering by 1/3 of Success Lake since Wood Ducks very rarely are found on Success Lake. Instead, their increase can be mainly attributed to finding their night-time resting spot on a cat-tailed lined pond on Globe Drive. For the last few years, we have been counting nearly 100 of these shy ducks as they fly off of this pond at dawn to their secluded feeding sites along the Tule River. Furthermore, numerous Wood Ducks were found on Norris Pond last year, while the Springville counters discovered a feeding location along the Tule River in 2005.

FUTURE GOALS: Construction of the new Success Dam is planned to begin in Jan/ Feb. 2009, and will take about 5 years to complete. During that time, **the entire west side of the lake will be closed as well as the Marina, so there will be no boating** (we have had higher and more accurate counts on gulls and grebes the last few years on the Springville Count because Gary could census the lake from a boat, which will not be possible to do from 2009- 2014). The dam can hold 85,000 acre-feet of water, but is being currently kept at 29,000 acre-feet due to safety concerns. **During these 5 years of construction (2009-2014), the water level will only be at 7,700 acre-feet!** The construction, which will be **24/7 for 5 years, will produce a lot of noise, dust, and carcinogen- filled diesel fumes (which is why all of the nearby residences must relocate).** I can only guess what all of this including the tremendous lowering of the water level will do to the Bald Eagles and the other bird populations that currently inhabit the lake (gulls, grebes, ducks, pelicans, falcons, owls, etc...), but I bet the results won't be positive.

This year, we totaled 143 species on the Springville Count plus 5 more found during count week, for a grand total of 148 species, tying our all time record! This was done with only 33 participants. Between 1976- 1996, the Springville Count average about 50 participants each year, with a high of 69 volunteers in 1983. If we are to ever break the coveted 150 species mark, I figure we need to do it in 2007 and 2008, before the construction begins. It would be great if we make a big push these next two years to get as many participants as possible, and try to break the 150 species barrier and even surpass the 69 participants mark at the same time. So our goals are to go over 150 (species) and 70 (participants) for both 2007 and 2008!

PARTICIPANTS:

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