



# TULARE TAPPINGS

## Tulare County Audubon Society

In the Heart of California's San Joaquin Valley  
Gateway to Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks

OCTOBER 2009

Julie Bergman, past Board Chair and currently an advisory trustee with the Central Asia Institute (CAI), will visit Tulare County to present the amazing tale of the "Three Cups of Tea" novel and speak about her own work and travels with the CAI.

The CAI is a nonprofit organization with the mission to promote and support community based education, especially for girls, in remote regions of Pakistan and Afghanistan. The organization was founded in 1996 by co-founders Dr. Jean Hoeni, a Swiss physicist and Silicon Valley microchip pioneer and Greg Mortenson. The catalyst for the founding came from Mr. Mortenson's travels throughout the regions and specifically his 1993 climb up K2.

The driving philosophy behind CAI is to empower the local people through their own initiative using internal solutions.

As of 2009, CAI has successfully established 130 schools in Pakistan and Afghanistan providing education to over 51,000 students with emphasis on girls education. For more information, visit [www.ikat.org](http://www.ikat.org).

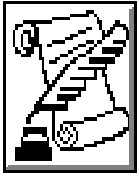
Please join us at the Tulare County Office of Education (at the corner of Woodland and Burrel Avenues in Visalia) on **Friday, October 16<sup>th</sup> at 7:00pm** to learn more about the Central Asia Institute.

### Articles for Tappings

TCAS welcomes submissions of articles on bird sightings, conservation, and environmental issues, book reviews, and whatever else you think may be of interest. Please submit by the 15<sup>th</sup> of each month for the next month's newsletter. Articles in electronic format (disk, CD, or E-mail) are highly encouraged to save time and trees! Send to Jihadda Govan at P.O. Box 670, Delano, CA 93216, or E-mail to [jihadda@earthlink.net](mailto:jihadda@earthlink.net)

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## Monthly Message

### Portrait of a Canyon By: Mary Merriman

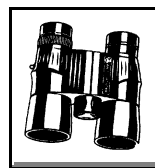
Standing at the brink of the precipice, I gaze upon a scene of unbelievable extravagance. Sheer granite cliffs fall away at my feet to the narrow forest-covered canyon floor, then rise across the abyss even higher- turrets and spires, peaks and buttresses. Massive gray walls, smooth as glass, or torn and rent, cracked in great leaves, scooped out in valleys or piled high in talus, they stretch in every direction as far as the eye can see. Sapphire lakes perch in cliff-hanging basins. Crystal waters gather from snow melt and cascade over the edge, rushing over slick rock, dallying in willow-choked ledges, spilling over terraces of waterfalls and then plunging far below. Remnants of patchy snow cling to high ramparts above. Myriads of wild gardens fill crevices and crannies miniature worlds in a delicate balance of plant and pollinator, honed to perfection over the eons.

Such is the western edge of Dusty Basin as its creek pours into Le Conte Canyon of the mighty Middle Fork of the Kings River. Behind is the eastern rim guarded by Mt. Agassiz, North Palisade and Thunderbolt Peak, rising to 14,000 feet. To the south lie the great gorges of the Kings- Tehipite Valley, the Muro Blanco and Kings Canyon, never anywhere less than 2,000 feet deep. To the west is the Ionian Basin, another vast wilderness of rock and ice.

Butterfly and bird, tree and flower, mammal and reptile are woven here into an intricate tapestry of life, each with a unique niche to fill. Each high pass has its American Pipit. Gray-crowned Rosy-finches flutter among the rocks in small flocks. A Rock Wren bobs on a rock near an alpine meadow. Water Ouzel sings up and down the glacial stream. The raucous call of Clark's Nutcracker shatters the quiet at timberline. Keeping a sharp eye in the following days is rewarded with sightings of the Hermit Thrush, Red-breasted Sapsucker, Brown Creeper, Calliope Hummingbird, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Purple Finch, Williamson's Sapsucker, Townsend Solitaire and more. I awake at midnight one night to the piercing call of the Common Nighthawk as it flies up and down Le Conte Canyon.

Every sense is fine-tuned in this primordial world, one forgotten by so many -the scent of fir forest, the sound of water gently tumbling over rocks or roaring over cliffs, the feel of alpine air at midnight, the buzz of the cicada, the vermilion sunsets and countless stars at night. Every day here is a celebration of life and creation before the hand of humanity. In this rocky fortress arises the lifeblood of the Central Valley- pure water. No matter how sophisticated we may seem to be, our own survival depends on our ability to preserve and protect the source of our water. Less recognized is the fact that it also depends on our ability to preserve other species of life. Even in the early 1900's the founders of Sequoia Park recognized that a mountain denuded of forest cannot hold back the spring floods, that the intact watershed was crucial to farming.

They preserved the forest for the sake of water. Let us preserve the denizens of the forest, foothill and grassland because now we recognize that each one is an essential thread in a fabric woven before the dawn of humankind. We were not the weavers.... Let us not now destroy the tapestry.



### Field Trip: Merced National Wildlife Refuge, Saturday, October 24, 2009

Spend one long day exploring Merced National Wildlife Refuge. On Saturday, October 24, we will bird a few hot spots along the way to our destination in the hopes of catching glimpses of Barn Owls, California Thrashers, Say's Phoebes, and even Lawrence's Goldfinches. In some areas, we may find Ring-necked Ducks, Redheads, and Canvasbacks, Greater Roadrunners, Rock Wrens, White-throated Swifts, and Common Moorhens. Shotgun Pass often produces Chukars. Throughout the valley, we will be looking for Mountain Bluebirds, Sage Thrashers, Mountain Plovers, Lark Buntings, Lark Sparrows, Vesper Sparrows, Rufous-crowned Sparrows, Cassin's Kingbirds, Longspurs, Horned Larks, Prairie Falcons, Merlins, Ferruginous Hawks, and Rough-legged

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Hawks.

In some years back, this same field trip saw 10,000 white geese fly up, nearly blocking out the sun, an ultimate birding experience! It is like stepping back in time 200 years to witness a hint of what the Tulare Lake Basin was probably like. Very large concentrations of both Snow and Ross's Geese gather at the Merced Wildlife Refuge during the winter.

The Ross's Goose, which was named after Bernard Rogan Ross of the Hudson Bay Company, was shrouded in mystery for a long time. It was only 40 years ago that its breeding grounds were discovered, solving one of North America's last great ornithological unknowns. In 1950, after years of over hunting, the entire population of Ross's Geese numbered only 2,000 birds. Ross's Geese have increased dramatically in recent years, and today's population is over 650,000 birds.

Ross's Geese, like the similar Snow Goose, comes in two forms, a white morph and a rarer blue morph. Curiously, the blue morph of the Ross's Goose is on the rise in frequency. In the chief Ross's Goose wintering areas in the Central Valley of California, the ratio of blue Ross's was 1:30,000 in the 1960s, and 1:10,000 in the 70s. It is estimated that the ratio now is one blue in 2,000 Ross's Geese. I have seen the blue morph of both Snow Geese and Ross's Geese on many of my trips to the Merced Wildlife Refuge, and so we should have an excellent chance to also see the rarer blue morphs.

Throughout the day, field trip participants can carefully observe the roads for Yellow-billed Magpies, Yellow-headed and Tri-colored Blackbirds. After a quick tour of the Los Banos Refuge, looking for American Bitterns, rails, White-faced Ibises, and Common Moorhens, we then travel to the nearby San Luis Wildlife Refuge, looking for Short-eared Owls along the way. Here, we may find Tundra Swans, American Bitterns, Swainson's Hawks, Osprey, White-faced Ibis, and many species of ducks as well as Tule Elk!

Besides possibly seeing thousands of Snow and Ross's Geese here, we may also find White-fronted Geese, Bald Eagles, Sand Hill Cranes, Blue-winged Teal, Eurasian Widgeons, Ringed-necked Pheasants, Yellow-headed Blackbirds, several shorebirds, and

possibly Great Horned and Short-eared Owls! After birding the Merced Wildlife Refuge, we will head for home via the Sandy Mush Road, where we will look for raptors like Rough-legged and Ferruginous Hawks, Golden Eagles, Bald Eagles, and Burrowing Owls. This is also an excellent trip for beginning birders and families since almost all of the birds will be well seen through our spotting scopes.

**DIRECTIONS:** We will meet at the Sears parking lot in Visalia (the corner of Mooney and Caldwell) at 7:15 a.m. to carpool on Saturday, October 24<sup>th</sup>. We will leave promptly at 7:30 a.m. Bring family, friends, water, lunch plus snacks, jackets, binoculars, a spotting scope if you have one, a bird book, and other must have gear and join us for this wonderful opportunity for an incredible life-time memory. For more information, contact John Lockhart at [j\\_f\\_lockhart@sbcglobal.net](mailto:j_f_lockhart@sbcglobal.net) or 559-303-9706.



## San Joaquin River Restoration

A conservation victory has begun to unfold in California's Great Central Valley; this year, the San Joaquin River will receive more water than it has since the 1940s when Friant Dam was constructed. In 2012, Chinook salmon will be re-introduced and with any luck will begin their recovery from the brink of extinction.

If you grew up in the San Joaquin Valley before the 1940s, you probably remember an impressive river flowing to the Delta from the mountains beyond Fresno. A river that was as volatile as it was vital. A river that in wet years overflowed its banks and wreaked havoc and at the same time abundance, and in dry years created scarcity and conflict.

If you lived near the river, you may remember the sound of thousands of salmon splashing upstream on their journey to spawn. You may even have spear-fished Chinook salmon in the San Joaquin.

Some things have changed in the Valley since then and others have not. The San Joaquin no longer flows

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from the Sierra to the Delta, and Chinook salmon no longer travel up this river to spawn. We have controlled the movement of water in astounding ways, but have not learned how to create water where there is none.

In a third year of drought and with increasing restrictions on water use, many Californians will find it difficult to see water flowing down the San Joaquin for the first time in over 70 years. For others this process is recognition of the inherent value of a natural river system and the culmination of decades of hard work.

### **For the Birds...**

The vast majority of wetland and riparian habitat that once existed in the San Joaquin Valley has been lost for decades. Birds have been forced onto smaller and increasingly marginal pieces of land, and only those that have adapted to the agriculture-dominated landscape have continued to thrive.

Over 225 species of birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians depend on riparian habitats, and riparian ecosystems harbor the most diverse bird communities in the arid and semiarid regions of the western United States. Riparian areas can harbor individuals during the bird breeding season at densities up to ten times greater than surrounding terrestrial habitats and the San Joaquin River habitat complex hosts a variety of special-status species including Bald Eagle, Greater Sandhill Crane, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Swainson's Hawk, Willow Flycatcher, and Bank Swallow.

As test releases begin in 2009 and federal and state agencies prepare the river for the reintroduction of Chinook in 2012, Audubon California is working to maximize the benefits of the revived river corridor for birds. For more information and to sign on in support of the river restoration, see our website:

[www.ca.audubon.org](http://www.ca.audubon.org).

### **Field Trip: Yokohl Valley Road and Raptors, Saturday, November 21, 2009**

Our annual excursion to Yokohl Valley, a magnificent oak/grassland valley nestled in the foothills east of Exeter, is always one of our most popular trips. The grasslands of Yokohl Valley produce an abundance of weed seeds, supporting many rodents that attract numerous birds of prey: Golden Eagles, Red-tailed and Ferruginous Hawks, White-tailed Kites, Cooper's Hawks, Great Horned Owls, Kestrels, Merlins, and Prairie Falcons. Also, Rough-legged Hawks are a definite possibility this year.

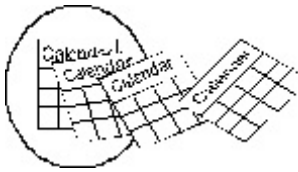
Seed-eating birds such as Vesper, Savannah, Lark, and White-crowned Sparrows, as well as Lesser Goldfinches enjoy the abundance of seeds in the valley's grasslands. Other birds seen on past Yokohl Valley trips include Green Herons, Ring-necked Pheasants, Brown Creepers, Acorn Woodpeckers, and Black-throated Gray and Orange-crowned Warblers.

After lunch at the Milo for those hardy birders who would like to continue, we will travel past the Circle J Ranch ponds, picking up several ducks, grebes, and herons, while traveling to the Balch Park Road. We will end the trip venturing up Mountain Road 276 towards Blue Ridge. The lower section of this road contains a wonderful chaparral where we will look for Wrentits, California Thrashers, Bewick's Wrens, and Spotted Towhees.

In the Black Oak forest beyond the bridge, we may find a Hutton's Vireo and a Cassin's Vireo. Of-course, we will also keep our eyes on the skies in search of a California Condor returning to its old haunts. Those who stayed until evening last year were also treated to the sounds of both Common Poorwills and Western Screech Owls!

Directions: We will meet on the south side of the Sears parking lot in Visalia (corner of Mooney and Caldwell) at 7:15 a.m. and leave promptly at 7:30 a.m. Bring your family, friends, binoculars, bird book, a hat, sun screen, water, and a lunch, and enjoy a day in the fall sunshine with good company as we pursue our favorite pastime. This is an excellent trip for beginners. For further information, please contact John Lockhart at 559-303-9706 or e-mail: [j\\_f\\_lockhart@sbcglobal.net](mailto:j_f_lockhart@sbcglobal.net).





## Calendar of Events

- Oct. 16 Chapter Meeting and Program**  
Julie Bergman, past Board Chair and currently an advisory trustee with the Central Asia Institute.
- Oct. 24 Field Trip**  
Merced National Wildlife Refuge and Nearby Areas. In addition to searching for geese and raptors, Yellow-billed Magpie will be a bird of interest.
- Nov. 20 Chapter Meeting and Program**  
Gary Lindquist, TCAS's own past field trip co-chair, will present his newest photographs and astonish with new facts.
- Nov. 21 Field Trip**  
Yokohl Valley Road. Another local annual favorite for fall birding especially for raptors. Join us and please bring a friend!
- Dec. There will be no Chapter Meeting or Program.** Check the November Tappings for Christmas Bird Survey times and dates!

## Kaweah Land and Arts Festival, November 6-8, 2009

Celebrate the creativity and diversity of the Kaweah watershed-from the peaks of the Sierra Nevada to the valley farms and cities below. This 3-day festival will tell the story, paint the portrait, sing the song, narrate the history, study the science and praise the land that make the Kaweah watershed so unique.

The Kaweah Land and Arts Festival will bring our region's diverse citizenry together to learn about and engage with the natural and cultural virtues of the Kaweah delta and watershed. From Friday, November 6, 2009, through Sunday, November 8, 2009, there will be a series of free storytelling events told through a variety of artistic formats-visual art, poetry, prose, song, folklore, history and music.

Presenter line-up:

Paul Buxman-farmer, painter

John Dofflemyer-cowboy poet

Rob Hansen-biologist, naturalist

Tim Z. Hernandez-poet, performer

Ron Jefferson-California folk musician

Matthew Rangel-artist, printmaker

Sylvia Ross-author, poet, illustrator

John Spivey-author, photographer

William Tweed-author, photographer

Trudy Wischemann-author, musician

And many more talented, local artists and scholars...

For more information on locations of events as well as an accompanying schedule, visit [www.sequoiariverlands.org](http://www.sequoiariverlands.org)