

Announcements

The development of an archive for Central Valley bird records and specimens

With each passing year, more and more birders are actively out in their favorite haunts, assembling a wealth of knowledge about the distribution of California's birds. Much of this data forms the foundation for the numerous county/regional bird checklists and other such publications. Presently the most centralized location for some of this data are the notebooks of the Regional Editors for the journal *North American Birds* and its predecessors *Field Notes* and *American Birds*. Indeed, the reports in *North American Birds*, dating back many decades, have become an invaluable tool for understanding bird distribution across the continent. Away from these journals and their databases, some of this information has been disseminated through local National Audubon Society newsletters, listserves, meetings, gatherings, and more recently, within the Central Valley, in the pages of the *CVBC Bulletin*. A more formalized effort to centralize all of this information as a means of increasing our understanding of the distribution of Central Valley birds would be very desirable.

We propose to develop a centralized archive for data on Central Valley birds at the Museum of Wildlife and Fish Biology (MWFB) at the University of California, Davis. The MWFB, established in 1972, is UC Davis's main repository for collections of birds, mammals and fish, with an inventory of over 15,500 specimens. Some specimens from the Central Valley date back to the 1920s, providing a unique historical perspective.

Understanding and formalizing the role of the MWFB is not an easy task, as we must face the scrutiny of administrators and budgetary restrictions inherent with all vertebrate museums. Although two other research museums – The California Academy of Sciences and the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology at the University of California, Berkeley — are located within 90 miles of the MWFB, neither have a mission that focuses on the birds of the Central Valley and interior California.

Being situated in the heart of the Central Valley, the MWFB is uniquely situated to serve as a specimen repository for the region. Beyond specimens, our broader objective is to create a Central Valley Bird Archive of bird observational records and photographs from the region. The goals of integrating specimens with these other forms of data would be to assist in understanding modern distribution of birds in the region, help with consensus building on land use decisions (urbanization, refuge establishment, etc.), and to provide an invaluable and unmatched educational resource.

Obtaining specimens from the region requires coordination with wildlife agencies, parks, and other public lands. We have already begun developing these ties, but will attempt to formalize our affiliation through higher channels in California Department of Fish and Game and U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The accumulation of sight records is more daunting as there are many individuals birding the Central Valley. A prime opportunity exists however to facilitate gathering these data, through coordination with members of the Central Valley Bird Club and local Audubon Societies.

There are two types of records to obtain, those of the past and those of the future. Those of the past are of greatest concern. As birders pass on, their families often must make decisions as to what to do with personal field notes. A few are passed on to interested parties or family members; others are tossed, lost forever. We encourage donation of such records to the MWFB and have assembled some important regional contributions. The original Sacramento Checklist Area records, assembled by Betty Kimball and others from the 1950s-1980s, now reside at the MWFB, donated by her family. In addition, field notes from the Cosumnes River Preserve and Sacramento Bird Records Committee now reside in the MWFB. These data sets serve as a starting point for the development of the archive. In addition, North American Bird reports, Christmas Bird Count results, Breeding Bird Surveys, and other more formal studies can be included.

We are now developing a database structure. The entry of the data will take time and be challenging, due to the fact that not all records are written in a standardized format. Fortunately, the MWFB has at its disposal an inexhaustible resource — students. The MWFB annually trains students, who will provide the primary work force for building the database, in data entry and curatorial duties. Once the data and specimens become centralized, we hope to make them accessible to (1) visiting researchers and (2) through development of a digital database that can be accessed via the Internet or on-site.

It will take time to realize this archive's fullest potential. We must start by spreading the word and gaining consensus on how we can make this work. This will require the cooperation of many. Primarily we need to start by getting older records and field notebooks deposited into the museum. Word of mouth is the best means to accomplish this task. Through the Central Valley Bird Club we would like to generate a field report form that could be accessed via websites. These forms could be electronically submitted to the MWFB. Funds are needed to support the development of the database, pay students for data entry, or help with the curation of materials and specimens. Helping to identify sources of funds, through grants and donations is needed. We hope that, with the help of CVBC members and other interested parties, we can realize the vision of a usable archive.

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