

Central Valley Bird Club Conservation Award 2019: Steve Simmons

The Central Valley Bird Club awarded its 2019 Conservation Award at the annual Central Valley Bird Symposium in November. The annual award recognizes individuals or organizations that have made a meaningful contribution to bird conservation in the Central Valley.

Steve Simmons was awarded the 2019 Conservation Award for his sustained and significant work in providing nest boxes for cavity-nesting birds. Steve's accomplishments are many, as outlined here.

For over 45 years, Steve has operated a nest box program to enhance breeding opportunities for Wood Ducks, American Kestrels, Western Screech and Barn owls, Western Bluebirds, Tree Swallows, Ash-throated Flycatchers, and a variety of other cavity-nesting birds by installing and maintaining hundreds of nest boxes in vineyards and rangelands of Merced County. His boxes have fledged over 100,000 birds, including 78,000 Wood Ducks.

As a wood-shop teacher at Merced High School, Steve developed a student program to design, manufacture, and sell nest boxes constructed from scrap wood. The program sold over 10,000 Barn Owl boxes to enhance breeding opportunities and introduce vineyard and orchard owners to the biological control benefits provided by foraging Barn Owls. The program also provided scholarships for many students in the program.

Steve initiated the California Wood Duck Program under the auspices of the California Waterfowl Association in 1991. This volunteer-based program has fledged nearly 900,000 Wood Ducks to date. He also has mentored many others who are carrying on his nest box program and others who have established their own nest box and banding programs in California. He has shared his nest box design plans with many other individuals. Steve has banded nearly 40,000 birds, mostly cavity-nesters. In the process, he has developed several ingenious inventions, including a safe and effective way to trap females on their nests.

Steve also has mentored generations of high school, college, and university students to enable them to pursue research on a wide variety of cavity-nesting birds, including graduate students obtaining their masters' and PhDs from universities across the U.S.

Steve has actively participated in Tricolored Blackbird surveys and monitoring efforts and has banded several thousand Tricolors adjacent to their breeding colonies on private lands that were inaccessible to the general public.

Notably, except for his work with Merced High School students, all of Steve's work has been done as a volunteer. Steve is also the recipient of the Chevron Conservation Award, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife's Waterfowl Award, the California Waterfowl Association's Frank C. Bellrose Award, and the Hero of Conservation Award from Field & Stream Magazine.

For all these many accomplishments on behalf of birds in the Central Valley, the Central Valley Bird Club is please to honor Steve Simmons with its 2019 Conservation Award.

Central Valley Bird Club members can nominate individuals or organizations for the 2020 award by contacting club President Pat Bacchetti (bacpab@comcast.net) or Conservation Chair Dan Airola (d.airola@sbcgloblal.net).



Garganey (*Spatula querquedula*). 16 March 2019. West Sacramento, Yolo Co., California.

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