

The Community VOICE

Rohnert Park, Cotati, & Penngrove

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Bird monitoring - science in your own backyard

By John Dell'Osso
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Over the years, science has played an important role in monitoring the health of our environment. There are numerous issues which biologists and scientists monitor to determine the health of an ecosystem as well as the health of a population of species in a particular area. The best way of doing this is through monitoring over a period of years.

In Cotati, species of birds have been monitored for over 20 years along the southern portion of the Laguna de Santa Rosa, from the area in Rohnert Park near Ladybug Park and along the back of Putnam Park, which eventually flows northwest towards Sebastopol. At least 68 species of birds have been seen in this area over time, and some interesting information can be gleaned from these accounts.

For example, prior to the number of homes developed along Myrtle Avenue, there were nesting loggerhead shrikes, relatively small songbirds with unique characteristics. Since the development of the open fields (early 1990s), this species has not been seen in this location, which leads one to believe that this particular species of bird prefers open space and open fields. Sightings are more common along Petaluma Hill Road.

Monitoring of species of birds can be a systematic way of documenting the quantity and kinds of species in a particular location. There are plans to begin to regularly count the birds along the Laguna de Santa Rosa possibly three times each year (in different seasons) to begin to see how the native vegetation along the riparian corridor may attract species of birds that are not regularly seen. This is an exciting time for birdwatchers to take part in what will be long-term scientific research.

For bird watchers of all interests and skill levels, one such opportunity is Sunday, Jan. 6 beginning at 9 a.m. at La Plaza Park. The Cotati Creek Critters are sponsoring this free event and are looking for people to come and learn about the joys of bird watching and just being out in nature. The walk will take approximately 2 hours but it will not be very strenuous, with frequent stops to identify and learn more about the species of birds along the Laguna.

Rachel Carson, writer, scientist and ecologist, once said, "There is symbolic as well as actual beauty in the migration of the birds... There is something infinitely healing in the repeated refrains of nature - the assurance that dawn comes after night, and spring after the winter..."

Let us not take for granted what is right outside our homes. Any time of year is the right time of year to be out in nature - Yes, even in cities. Wildlife has always been where humans live, and we humans are continually encroaching on their habitat. We should go out and look at wildlife not only for enjoyment but also to marvel at their existence with the many obstacles we have thrown at them.

John Dell'Osso has worked for the National Park Service for over 20 years and is Chief of Interpretation at Point Reyes National Seashore. A long-time resident of Cotati, he has been keeping records of the birds he has spotted along the Laguna in Cotati for years.

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