

Notes from the Editor

June 6, 2024

The second issue of 2024 contains articles on a variety of taxa from marine species like pinnipeds and sharks to freshwater sturgeon and birds.

The first article is a review paper by Dan Airola on survey methods for tricolored blackbirds, a species listed as threatened under the California Endangered Species Act. Surveys for this species have historically been challenging due to their nesting habits, significant flock sizes, and common movements among colonies. Dan presents a standardized approach for monitoring the species in California that can be used for detection, population estimation, and determining nest success, all of which can contribute to conservation efforts for this threatened species.

In the next article, Zachary Schakner and his colleagues from NOAA and CDFW detail trends in pinniped (sea lions and seals) interactions with commercial passenger fisheries vessels over the last several decades—an important topic given the historic conflict between pinnipeds and fisheries. Depredation (in this context, meaning when a pinniped removes or damages a hooked fish) can result in a significant loss of fishing opportunities for those whose livelihood depends on it. Dr. Schakner and his co-authors found that depredation has been decreasing over time and “...is shaped by an interplay of environmental factors, the population dynamics of pinnipeds, and the patterns of fishing activities within the California current ecosystem.”

The third article is by longtime contributing author and former Editor-in-Chief of the Journal, Vern Bleich. The article focuses on a previously unknown abnormal color variation in bighorn sheep called isabelline coloration—a genetic anomaly that results in a lighter, paler pelage. Dr. Bleich’s article is the first to describe this coloration in bighorn sheep.

The fourth article in this issue, authored by several researchers at the Pflieger Institute in Oceanside, evaluates short term movement patterns of Pacific sleeper sharks off the coast of California in an area where the species had never been tracked. The conclusions of their study support previous findings in other areas of the Pacific Ocean that the species has regular vertical oscillation movements, contributing to our understand of the ecology of this vulnerable shark.

Lastly, two CDFW scientists from our Central Region provided a research note detailing the rescue and subsequent monitoring of white sturgeon, a freshwater fish that is a California Species of Special Concern and recently been petitioned for listing under the California Endangered Species Act.

I have two new editors to introduce this issue. Dr. Travis Apgar will be replacing Erica Meyers as one of my fisheries experts. Travis has always had an affinity for nature and being outdoors, which is why he choose to pursue a B.S. degree in Earth Sciences at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo. It was the start of his scientific career and afforded him the opportunity to spend a lot of hands-on time learning about the environmental processes that shape our world. During and after his time as a student at Cal Poly, he worked at the Cal Poly Erosion Control Research Group in collaboration with Caltrans conducting research on roadside fluvial geomorphology and native plant restoration methods. After, he shifted his focus to aquatic ecology, and began working for the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) in Santa Cruz doing

a variety of jobs such as GIS analyses, field surveys at their life-cycle monitoring station, and assisting with hatchery production and tagging of endangered Coho salmon. He earned his Master's and PhD from UC Santa Cruz focusing his research on the life-history evolution of alternative migratory strategies in Pacific salmonids while continuing to work in collaboration with NMFS. He then took a Postdoctoral Scholar position at UC Berkeley for three years, leading two large-scale aquatic research programs in Pinnacles National Park and Sierra National Forest. These programs were funded by the National Science Foundation as part of a multi-university nationwide study focusing on climate change effects on intermittent stream networks and the subsequent changes to their fish and macroinvertebrate communities. At the end of 2023, he accepted a position with CDFW in Water Branch as part of their Water Project Operations team assisting with quantitative analyses for real-time water operations and incidental take permit effect analysis.

My other new editor is joining our (very small) group of botany experts. Dr. Raffica La Rosa is a Senior Environmental Scientist (Specialist) for CDFW's Native Plant Program at headquarters. She is the species recovery coordinator for plants that are listed as endangered or threatened under the California Endangered Species Act. She also monitors listed plants, issues permits to those researching these imperiled species, and writes status reviews of listed species. Before joining CDFW in 2019, Raffica was a post-doctoral researcher and instructor at the University of Colorado Boulder studying population genetics and the restoration and recovery of two listed species of goldfields (*Lasthenia* spp.). Before that, she studied the floral evolution of milkweeds (*Asclepias* spp.) and taught field ecology at the Kellogg Biological Station in Michigan. Raffica has a dual-Ph.D. in Plant Biology and Ecology, Evolution, and Behavior from Michigan State University and a B.S. in Botany from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

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Hope everyone is having a good spring!

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