Notes from the Editor

November 4, 2024

The third issue of 2024, which is coming quite a bit late (apologies!) due to me taking a new position as a supervisor, is a diverse one, taxonomically—from shorebirds and songbirds to mammals, fish, and invertebrates.

The issue starts with an article by an East Bay Regional Park District biologist in collaboration with Point Blue Conservation Science on the importance of oyster shells in the breeding success of western snowy plovers (*Anarhynchus nivosus nivosus*)—an ESA-listed subspecies. Their research indicated that western snowy plovers select nest sites with greater numbers of oyster shells—likely as a camouflage mechanism—which correlated positively with both hatching and fledgling success.

The second article, by longtime CDFW engineer (and one of the Journal's Associate Editors), Dr. Mark Gard and his retired colleague from CDFW's Northern Region, Sean Gallagher, analyzed data collected in the 90s on the effects of habitat characteristics on the abundance of young-of-the-year Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha)*. They found that characteristics of the microhabitat scale versus the mesohabitat scale, in particular woody cover, best explained abundance for the species in the Sacramento River.

The next article, a collaboration between the UC Davis, School of Veterinary Medicine, CDFW's Wildlife Health Lab, San Mateo County, ECORP Consulting, and USGS's Western Ecological Research Center, assessed detection methods for the ESA- and CESA-listed Amargosa vole (*Microtus californicus scirpensis*). The researchers found that camera trapping had the highest per session cost and moderate habitat impact, live-trapping had the highest overall cost and highest impact to habitat, and sign surveys had the lowest expense and habitat impact but relatively low yield in data quality.

The issue's fourth article, authored by researchers from the famed Cornell Lab of Ornithology, examined colonization and extinction responses of two songbirds to the 2021 Dixie Fire in California's Sierra Nevada Mountains. The researchers found the site extinction of hermit warblers (*Setophaga occidentalis*) increased in burned areas, particularly those burned at higher severities, while site colonization in unburned habitat was positively associated with canopy cover. However, western bluebirds (*Sialia mexicana*) displayed the exact opposite pattern with increased colonization in areas of high-severity fire and increased extinction in unburned areas with high canopy cover. Their results suggest contrasting trajectories for fire-influenced bird species under modern fire regimes.

The issue's final article by researchers from Cal Poly, Humboldt (which I always have to point out is one of my alma maters—for my master's work and my first teaching position), was a research note focused on the use of empty shells to study Pacific razor clams. Their study was the first on the species in Humboldt County since the 1950s and focused on a new monitoring approach, which while unable to estimate population size, provides insight into length, age, and growth rates of individuals in the population in a low-cost, non-lethal way.

The issue concludes with an *in memoriam* by long-time author and former journal editor, Dr. Vernon Bleich, honoring Steven Keimple a long-time CDFW biologist who passed away earlier this year.

I have three new editors to introduce. Dr. Mike Jenkins holds a PhD in Environmental Studies from the University of California, Santa Cruz, focusing on plant physiological ecology. He also earned M.S. and B.S. degrees in Biology from California State University, Chico. He is part of the Habitat Conservation Planning Branch's Cannabis Permitting Program where he coordinates with CDFW regions and headquarters on the regulation and permitting of cannabis cultivation sites; and works with the California Department of Cannabis Control on implementation of the regulatory framework for commercial cannabis cultivation to ensure protection of natural resources. Before joining CDFW, Dr. Jenkins worked in the private sector as a plant physiologist and opened a plant research and consulting company. His research focuses on understanding how plants respond to changes in climate and how resource limitations affect the function, structure, and dynamics of vegetation under natural conditions.

Dr. Thomas Connor is a quantitative ecologist with experience researching large mammal distributions and populations around the world. After graduating with a B.S. in Natural Resources from Cornell University, he spent three years in various field positions before starting a PhD studying giant panda habitat populations in China at Michigan State University. This project culminated in a landscape genetics study of giant panda gene flow across landscapes of fragmented habitat. After completing his PhD, Dr. Connor began a postdoctoral position at the University of California, Berkeley, studying Roosevelt elk populations along the Klamath on a CDFW-funded project led by the Karuk Tribe. After over three years at UC Berkeley, he accepted a position at CDFW as quantitative ecologist in the science support and big game units, where he helps design sound wildlife surveys, conducts statistical analyses of wildlife data, and prepares publications for scientific and public review.

And lastly, Dr. Ryan Bourbour is a wildlife ecologist and ornithologist from California. He is currently a Senior Environmental Scientist at CDFW's Wildlife Health Lab, where he works on statewide research and monitoring pesticide exposure in California's wildlife. Ryan received a B.S. in Wildlife, Fish & Conservation Biology, an M.S. in Avian Sciences, and a PhD in Ecology from the University of California, Davis. He has worked for various non-profit and government organizations over the last 15 years and is currently a research associate and collaborator with the Belize Bird Conservancy, Golden Gate Raptor Observatory, UC Davis Genomic Variation Laboratory, and other academic groups. In graduate school, Ryan's research involved method development for DNA metabarcoding diet studies, toxicology and ecology of raptors on industrial farms, and migration ecology of birds in North and Central America.

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Hope everyone had a great summer and is adjusting to the cool fall temperatures!

Ange Darnell Baker, PhD
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