



# sequoia needles

Bulletin of the

SEQUOIA AUDUBON SOCIETY

San Mateo County, Ca.

September, 1989

Vol. 38, #1

## FROM THE PRESIDENT

### THIS MONTH'S PROGRAM

GAIL SMITHSON

"SHOW AND TELL" NIGHT has become a tradition for our first meeting of the new Audubon year. It has also become one of our most popular programs. Our members bring their own slides and narrate their summer adventures.

Everyone is welcome to bring their slides (up to a maximum of 20) and share their experiences with the rest of the membership.

Just make sure that your slides are in the order you want them and properly oriented. It can be very embarrassing when that one very special slide that you were so proud of is the one that makes everyone tilt their head and start whispering "what is it?".

Meetings are held at the San Mateo Garden Center on the Alameda at Parkside on the second Thursday of every month. The Social Mixer begins at 7:30 P.M. with the General Meeting and Program at 8:00. The public is invited.

### NEXT MONTH'S PROGRAM

Allen Fish, the founder and moving force of the Golden Gate Raptor Observatory will present a program on the MYSTERIES AND ECOLOGY OF THE GOLDEN GATE RAPTOR OBSERVATORY, and will let us know how a former coast artillery base became one of the prime hawk-watching spots in the US. By meeting time, (Thursday, October 12), the 1989 hawk migration will be winding down and Alan can bring us up to date on this year's statistics and sightings.

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WATCH NEXT MONTH'S NEEDLES  
FOR A COMPLETE CALENDAR OF  
THIS YEAR'S FIELD TRIPS

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### NEW DEADLINE DATE

In order for us to be able to get the NEEDLES out to all of you on a timely basis we have had to move our deadline up to the first of the prior month. Next deadline is October 1 for the November newsletter.

Three years ago, when I first began attending Sequoia Audubon's general meetings, I wouldn't have guessed that I would be the President now. In fact, I was drafted onto the board within my first year with SAS and was made Vice President last year. I really have enjoyed my involvement with SAS as it gives me a sense that I am doing some good for the environment, even though it may be in a small way. As a native of San Mateo in my late teens I couldn't help but notice the new developments going on, as my favorite places were being bulldozed and creeks where beautiful wild flowers had grown were concreted over. It was at this time that I decided I wanted to do something about this "cancer" which was taking over the wild lands of my home. I eventually went to Humboldt State University and studied Wildlife Management. This gave me a comprehensive understanding of the facts of nature and management techniques. I did not seriously pursue a job in my field after graduating for numerous reasons.

After living in Humboldt County for 6 years, I moved back to San Mateo County. I was a novice birder at the time, just being bitten by the birding bug and I needed experienced birders to help me learn my birds. Attending SAS field trips helped tremendously in adding to my life list. SAS has given me the opportunity to get involved politically in conservation issues, which has been very satisfying for me. I have also been involved in the education committee, many people feel environmental education is the main avenue to help people to be more aware of how sensitive the environment is to our activities, and how strongly we depend on a healthy environment for our livelihood. My SAS involvement has ultimately led me back to what is most important for me. Today I am a secretary for the Center for Conservation Biology at Stanford and I am slowly but surely finding my way in the conservation biology world.

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### MONO LAKE UPDATE

Because the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power has been slow to respond to court orders requiring minimum flows of water into the lake, National Audubon and the Mono Lake Committee returned to the courts in June to seek a ruling to raise the lake above the 6377 foot level. At 6377 feet (above sea level) the nesting colonies are at close to being exposed to depredation from coyotes and other predators which will be able to reach the nesting islands over exposed land bridges.

LADWP took the offensive by responding with a startling proposal. Since the court order requires that the needs of the City of Los Angeles be balanced against environmental and recreational needs DWP proposes to lower the lake another four to six feet in order to find the exact point at which that balance is achieved! The theory would seem to be that you can't know at what level the lake can be saved until you know when it dies!

## CALENDAR

September 1989

| Sun | Mon | Tue | Wed | Thu | Fri | Sat |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
|     |     |     |     |     | 1   | 2   |
| 3   | 4   | 5   | 6   | 7   | 8   | 9   |
| 10  | 11  | 12  | 13  | 14  | 15  | 16  |
| 17  | 18  | 19  | 20  | 21  | 22  | 23  |
| 24  | 25  | 26  | 27  | 28  | 29  | 30  |

SEP 2 LABOR DAY WEEKEND TRIP - ??? - As of press time  
SATURDAY neither the destination nor the leader for the  
TO SEP 4 annual Labor Day weekend excursion has been deter-  
MONDAY mined. However, there will be a trip, even if we  
end up looking at birds in the zoo. Please call  
Steve Schafer at 689-0788 if you are interested. By the  
time you read this, he may even know what's planned.

SEP 7 SAS BOARD MEETING. 7:30 PM. Place to be announced.  
THURSDAY ALL MEMBERS ARE WELCOME. Please contact the  
Sequoia Office (593-7368) for details.

SEP 13 FIELD TRIP PLANNING MEETING. ALL MEMBERS WELCOME.  
See the Article on Page Seven for details.

SEP 14 SAS GENERAL MEETING. Our annual "SHOW AND TELL"  
THURSDAY NIGHT in which our members share their 20 (more or  
less) vacation slides. In the past these have  
featured scenery and wildlife from around the world from A to  
Nuevo to Australia. At the San Mateo Garden Center on the  
Alameda at Parkside. Social Mixer at 7:30 PM, General  
Meeting begins at 8:00. See Page One for further details.

SEP 17 POINT REYES FIELD TRIP. A search through the  
SUNDAY "warbler traps" of Point Reyes can yield almost  
anything at this time of year. We'll be looking  
for inland and eastern vagrants but can expect migrants and  
some early arriving winter residents as well. Walking will  
be minimal but sturdy shoes are recommended. Clothing should  
be layered since the weather on Pt. Reyes is extremely  
changeable. We will meet at the new Point Reyes National  
Seashore Headquarters building at 9:00 AM. The trip will  
take place rain or shine. Bring lunch. The trip normally  
lasts until 2 PM.

LEADER; CLIFF RICHER 355-4058

SEP 16 NATIONWIDE COASTWEEKS CELEBRATION - See entry for  
OCT 10 September 23 in this calendar. Also watch your  
local papers for other events.

SEP 23 COASTAL CLEAN-UP DAY. Volunteers will spend about  
SATURDAY 2 - 2 1/2 hours cleaning up Pescadero Beach and the  
areas south of the beach. There will be a short  
field trip into the marsh after lunch. We suggest you wear  
light work gloves for the clean-up activities. Plastic bags  
for trash will be provided. We will meet in the parking lot  
just north of the beach at 9:00 A.M., rain or shine.

BEACH CAPTAIN GAIL SMITHSON 355-4058

SEP 30 YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK. The principal goal of this  
OCT 1 trip is to find a Great Gray Owl. We will plan to  
arrive at the Crane Flat campground Friday evening  
and camp there Friday and Saturday nights. Although we will  
be spending most of our time looking for you-know-what, we  
will also keep an eye out for some of the other high Sierra  
specialties, including Northern Goshawk, Blue Grouse, White-  
headed and Black-backed Woodpeckers, Williamson's Sapsucker,  
Pine Grosbeak, and Rosy Finch, as well as several species of  
migrating hummingbirds and warblers. Camping space may be  
limited, so if you are interested in joining us, please call  
the leader as soon as possible to let him know.

LEADER STEVE SCHAFER 689-0788

(Continued on Page Three)

## NEWS FROM THE RANCH

DAN MURPHY

### FALL SCHOOL PROGRAM BEGINS AT ACR

September will see the beginning of our fall program for school children. This educational experience is geared to 4th and 5th grade students. Directed by our volunteer docents, it is free to participants. Once again we are very pleased to be able to offer free transportation to participating classes which would otherwise be unable to reach our Bolinas Lagoon Preserve. The fall calendar is full, but teachers interested in participating in the spring 1990 program may call ACR (868-9244) in October for information and reservations.

### GUIDED NATURE TALKS AT BOUVERIE

The season is underway at our Bouverie Preserve too. Join one of our docents for a half day walk through the Sonoma hills of the Bouverie Audubon Preserve. These walks are scheduled for Saturdays, September 16, October 21 and November 11. All begin at 9:30 and end around 1:30. Reservations are required. For further information and for reservations call (707) 938-4554.

### RETURN OF THE EAGLE

The golden eagle which disrupted much of the heronry's early season continued to be a problem. Two eagles were sometimes seen overhead and when one landed, as they did periodically, it would create havoc in the heronry. One egret was killed in mid-July, apparently from a collision with one of the golden eagles. Fortunately the nest activity was almost over at that point and hopes were that the problem would pass with the season.

### COLONIAL BIRD NEST INFORMATION NEEDED

The San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory is interested in hearing from anyone with knowledge of colonial bird nesting sites in the North Bay. The observatory is seeking to expand its colonial nesting surveys currently on-going in the Central and South Bay. If you know of a great blue heronry (even one pair is of interest to the Observatory) or nesting Forster's terns, egrets, etc., they would like to hear from you. These surveys conducted by SFBBO volunteers greatly add to our knowledge of these colonial nesters so that wise management decisions can be made by government agencies. Drop the Observatory a note or give them a call at:

SFBBO  
PO Box 247  
Alviso, CA 95002  
(408) 946-6548

Your information is greatly needed and appreciated.

## FALL BIRDING CLASSES PENINSULA

Sequoia Adult School is offering two classes for persons interested in learning more about birding and sharpening their identification skills. The classes will be taught by Maryann Danielson, biologist, tour leader and bird photographer.

**BIRDING BASICS;** For beginning and intermediate birders. The fall quarter of this lecture/field trip series will concentrate on basic avian biology and identification of common backyard birds and those waterbird families well represented in the fall months. Nine slide lectures and five Sunday field trips starting Wednesday, September 13 at 7:30 PM. Classes will be held at 601 Chestnut Street, San Carlos. Register at the first class. Fee \$40

**BIRDS OF NORTHERN CALIFORNIA;** For intermediate and advanced birders. Major bird groups to be found in Northern California during the autumn months will highlight this fall lecture/field trip series. The identification and natural history of returning shorebirds, waterfowl, warblers, and sparrows will be covered. Nine slide lectures and five Saturday field trips starting Monday, September 11 at 7:30 PM. Classes will be held at Little House, 800 Middle Ave., Menlo Park. Register at the first class. Fee \$45

For more information call  
Maryann Danielson at 369-6089.

## NATURAL COALITION

The two largest private land preservation organizations, Ducks Unlimited and The Nature Conservancy have combined forces to preserve four major wetlands areas.

Three of the areas are Crystal Springs, South Dakota; Bodcau Bayou, Louisiana; and ACE Basin, South Carolina.

The fourth is an expansion of the existing Nature Conservancy Cosumnes River Preserve in the Delta, southwest of Sacramento. The new partnership was kicked off in January 1989 by flooding 163 acres of unused agricultural land, beginning a return to its original state. This expansion of the Preserve was only the first step in a \$7.5 million effort to increase the size of the Preserve from 1400 to 3000 acres.

Although birds began immediately using the newly flooded area, both time and effort will be needed to restore the Preserve to its original state. During June, July and August volunteer workers planted valley oak and cottonwood seedlings, giving Mother Nature a hand in reclaiming the upland and riparian growth that once dominated the area.

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OCT 5 SAS BOARD MEETING. 7:30 PM. Place to be announced.  
THURSDAY ALL MEMBERS ARE WELCOME. Please contact the Sequoia Office (593-7368) for details.

OCT 12 SAS GENERAL MEETING. MYSTERIES AND ECOLOGY OF THE  
THURSDAY GOLDEN GATE RAPTOR OBSERVATORY with Allen Fish. At the San Mateo Garden Center, the Alameda at Parkside. Social Mixer at 7:30 PM, General Meeting at 8:00.

## SAS IN "WILD PLACES" PROGRAM

### CALIFORNIA WILDLIFE AREA PASSES AND NATIVE SPECIES STAMPS

#### NICK COIRO

The California Department of Fish and Game instituted a program called "Save Our Wild Places" in 1989. It is designed to raise funds to protect wildlife areas and ecological reserves and to manage non-game species through the sale of wildlife area passes and stamps. Purchasers of wildlife area passes may also subscribe to the DFG's bi-monthly magazine, "Outdoor California" at a reduced rate.

Initially nine areas have been designated for limited access. Anyone entering one of these areas must have a valid hunting or fishing license or an annual wildlife area pass in their possession. Special one-day passes will also be available at each of these.

Lake Earl Wildlife Management Area  
Ash Creek Wildlife Management Area  
Gray Lodge Wildlife Management Area  
Grizzly Island Wildlife Management Area  
Los Banos Wildlife Management Area  
Elkhorn Slough Ecological Reserve  
San Jacinto Wildlife Management Area  
Upper Newport Bay Ecological Reserve

The Wister Unit of the Imperial Wildlife Management Area

To aid in the program, and as a service to its members, Sequoia Audubon has become an agency to sell passes and stamps. They will be available at General Meetings and at the office. Unfortunately the necessary forms require your signature so the passes are not available by mail.

#### ANNUAL WILDLIFE AREA PASSES

These will be sold to residents 16 years of age or older and are valid for the remainder of 1989. \$10.50

#### ANNUAL NATIVE SPECIES STAMPS

The 1989 stamp depicts a peregrine falcon. The buyer gets no inherent benefit from the stamp except the knowledge that the funds will be used for the preservation and enhancement of non-game species. They can be purchased separately from the wildlife passes and you may purchase as many stamps as you like. The price of the stamps are tax-deductible. \$8.00

#### "OUTDOOR CALIFORNIA" DISCOUNT SUBSCRIPTION

This is a fine magazine which contains much information on outdoor activities apart from hunting and fishing. Anyone who buys a Wildlife Area Pass can subscribe to the magazine for a reduced rate of \$5.00.

## THE SEARCH FOR REFUGE WATER

On June 24 a conference was held in Reno to examine the problems confronting western wildlife refuges in maintaining quality wetlands habitat. National Audubon and the Lahontan Audubon Society co-hosted the event. Participants came from as far away as New Mexico and Wyoming and included private citizens, environmental professionals and wildlife professionals from Oregon to Wyoming to New Mexico.

Much of the tone of the conference was pessimistic as the problems were explored and enumerated. Only two refuges - the Alturas refuge in Modoc County and another in southern Nevada - had assured water supplies. All of the others had been dependent on agricultural run-off or surplus water. Today, after Kesterson, the use of irrigation wastewater has been discontinued wherever possible and refuge managers throughout the West have resorted to ingenious and expensive alternatives. Deep wells, off-season storage, reduction in refuge size and water-swapping schemes are only some of the methods they have used to cope with the problem.

One note of optimism came from an unexpected source - the Stillwater National Wildlife Refuge. Recently most of the environmental news about Stillwater has been negative. Some articles all but proclaimed the death of the refuge. The reports would seem to be premature. The notorious bird and fish kills have been found to be entirely natural. Wild populations often boom and crash in reaction to naturally occurring changes in the environment. The boom was created when the heavy rains of the El Nino years created a huge shallow lake out of the Carson and Humboldt sinks northeast of Reno. Fish and bird life increased a thousand-fold to utilize this unprecedented habitat expansion. Normal evaporation slowly began to return the lake to the desert. The cutoff of wastewater and the recent drought years accelerated the process. The refuge wetlands returned to their historic size. Bird and fish populations suitable for a desert lake could not be sustained by a desert marsh. They crashed.

Refuge managers knew that without the use of agricultural runoff the refuge would continue to shrink. No fresh water was available. The Newlands water district was already over-committed. Truckee River water was no longer available. It had to be diverted to Pyramid Lake to save the endangered cuiui chub. Predictions of the refuge's doom were common.

Local citizens came to the rescue. A coalition of birders, environmentalists, farmers, fishermen, hunters, lawyers, politicians and wildlife professionals was formed. Everyone who had an interest in Lahontan Valley water was recruited. Most joined. Thousands of hours of legal work, lobbying, letter-writing and biological research were donated. Two million dollars was found by the federal government for immediate use and another \$20 million was appropriated to purchase water rights from willing sellers. Farmers voluntarily agreed to give up 20,000 acre feet of water each year until a permanent water supply could be obtained.

Much work remains to be done to obtain a guaranteed water supply, to fix the final size of the refuge wetlands, to protect other valley marshes and to clarify federal water policy for the twenty-first century but because of the cooperative effort of the Lahontan Valley Wildlife Coalition the refuge has been saved.

You can make a difference!

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Successful politicians are insecure and intimidated men. They advance politically only as they placate, appease, bribe, seduce, bamboozle or otherwise manage to manipulate the demanding and threatening elements in their constituency.

--- Walter Lippmann

## OFF-ROAD USE - OUT OF CONTROL?

CLIFF RICHER

In private conversations this summer, a number of federal wildlife and management professionals expressed a general feeling that the Bureau of Land Management has lost control over off-road vehicle use in southern California.

BLM rangers know that the most blatant offenders are a minority among off-rovers, but not - as their official publicity would have you believe - a tiny minority. From Inyo County to San Diego County there are too few enforcement personnel and those are usually out-powered and often out-gunned by the maverick off-rovers. Signs restricting off-road use are taken down almost as soon as they are put up so that the offenders may claim they were unaware of restricted areas. So far this has proven to be an effective defense. Unless the ranger can produce a witness who saw the signs being removed, the offenders will get off with nothing more than a mild reprimand.

Opinions varied widely on the potential effect of Senator Cranston's Desert Act. Some felt that the Act would be amended into ineffectiveness if it ever reached the House. Even if enacted most felt it would be useless without more enforcement personnel and could be counter-productive unless the Park Service - regarded as innkeepers and tourist guides by BLM and USFWS professionals - "beefed up" its research, environmental and archeological staffs. Virtually the only points of agreement were that two changes were needed regardless of who is responsible for the well-being of the desert: a change in attitude by desert management personnel - at least up to the state level - and a multifold increase in armed ranger patrols.

Even the non-conservationist General Accounting Office entered an official criticism of the BLM's Eastern Mohave management of both off-road vehicles and of cattle grazing. In their official audit they accused the BLM of not monitoring either activity properly and of sponsoring motorcycle and four-wheel drive events that impacted on the habitat of the endangered desert tortoise.

Anyone who has traveled in the southern and eastern deserts of the state has seen what damage is caused by the wilder elements of the off-road clan. There is no doubt - except among those doing the damage - that more controls are needed. There is no agreement as to the best way to achieve this end. Despite any potential drawbacks the SAS-endorsed Desert Protection Act and its counterpart in the House of Representatives offer the best chance to make a change. Write to your representatives and to Senator Wilson. These bills need their help to get out of committee.

## BIRD SEED SALE

If you have bird feeders around your house, or know someone who does, this is your chance to stock up on high quality bird seed at a reasonable price and support the chapter as well. You, the birds, and SAS benefits from the sale of this birds seed. With the money raised we can do more for the birds in our area. The following mixes are available:

**PREMIUM MIX** is custom-blended and was formulated by the staff at the Western Regional Audubon Society in Tiburon. This high protein mix contains red millet, white proso millet, and black oil sunflower seeds, with no inexpensive "fillers." Specially blended to attract songbirds, this seed is not available in supermarket or feed stores - only through the local Audubon Societies.

**WESTERN WILD BIRD MIX** is a classic blend of red millet, white proso millet, sudan grass screenings, and red milo and is priced to compete with supermarket seed, but without waste "filler."

To mix with other seed, or offer alone: **BLACK OIL SUNFLOWER SEED**, high in oil content and nutritive value, this seed appeals to many species. **STRIPED MEDIUM SUNFLOWER SEED**, a slightly less nutritious, but larger seed also attracts many species, and is good for added variety. **THISTLE SEED** is a small seed, rich in oil, that appeals to smaller birds.

**THIS IS A PREPAID SALE.** Your order, including a check payable to Sequoia Audubon Society must be received by **MONDAY, OCTOBER 9.** SAS will have the ordered bird seed available for pick-up in our office in Belmont, between 9:00 and 12:00 Monday through Friday after October 28.

SEQUOIA AUDUBON SOCIETY PATCHES ----- \$3.75  
 SAN FRANCISCO PENINSULA BIRDWATCHING \$6.00  
 SAN MATEO COUNTY CHECKLIST .75  
 The Birder's Handbook-Ehrlich, Dobkin & Wheye 17.60  
 Birding Northern California - Jean Richmond 12.00  
 "I'd Rather Be Birding" Bumpersticker 2.00  
 Mono Lake Guidebooks 7.50  
 National Geographic Field Guides-New Edition 17.25  
 Pacific Coast Checklist-in pads of 25 3.50

BIRDING VIDEOTAPES AVAILABLE FOR RENTAL  
**TECHNIQUES OF BIRDING** by Arnold Small - \$2/wk.  
**VIDEO GUIDE TO BIRDS OF NORTH AMERICA** - \$5/wk.  
 (We now have all five volumes available for rent)  
 (The rental price is for each volume.)

All prices include taxes, shipping and handling:  
 Send checks to:  
 Sequoia Audubon Society  
 720 El Camino Real #403  
 Belmont, Ca. 94002

Allow 14-18 days  
for delivery

You can also make special arrangements to pick it up at another time by calling the office (415) 593-7368.

Please use the following form for ordering:

|                              | # Bags | Cost  |
|------------------------------|--------|-------|
| PREMIUM 20lbs @ \$ 8 per bag | _____  | _____ |
| 50lbs @ \$17 per bag         | _____  | _____ |
| WESTERN WILD                 |        |       |
| 20lbs @ \$ 7 per bag         | _____  | _____ |
| 50lbs @ \$15 per bag         | _____  | _____ |
| BLACK OIL SUNFLOWER          |        |       |
| 20lbs @ \$13 per bag         | _____  | _____ |
| 50lbs @ \$30 per bag         | _____  | _____ |
| STRIPED SUNFLOWER            |        |       |
| 20lbs @ \$15 per bag         | _____  | _____ |
| 50lbs @ \$34 per bag         | _____  | _____ |
| THISTLE 5 lbs @ \$10 per bag | _____  | _____ |
| 20lbs @ \$35 per bag         | _____  | _____ |
| Subtotal                     |        | _____ |
| Add 7% Sales Tax             |        | _____ |
| Total                        |        | _____ |

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE \_\_\_\_\_

Please send the order form and your check to Sequoia Audubon Society, 720 El Camino Real, Suite 403, Belmont, CA 94002



**San Francisco  
 Peninsula  
 Birdwatching**

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

CITY ..... STATE ..... ZIP .....

AVAILABLE AT REDUCED PRICE AT THE OFFICE, MEETINGS  
AND SOME FIELD TRIPS

GAIL SMITHSON

CLEAN AIR AND RAIL TRANSPORTATION ACT

As residents of the San Francisco Bay Area we all know how difficult the traffic situation has become in the last ten years not to mention how our air quality has been affected by all those cars. An effective mass transportation system is the only way we are going to get people out of their cars. The state government has been slow in endorsing and financing effective mass transportation. CalTrans' solution to the traffic problem is to build more highways and widen existing highways which often requires destroying sensitive habitats such as wetlands since so many of our Bay Area roads border the Bay marshlands and creeks. There has even been talk of building another bay bridge to connect Burlingame with Alameda. This would greatly impact the Bay wetlands and the migrating and resident birds that depend on them. We must realize it is time to change our lifestyles in order to protect the environment. The Planning and Conservation League is now working on an initiative to provide 1.99 billion in bond funds for capital improvements to passenger rail service throughout California. All types of rail service would be funded including intercity Amtrak service, commuter rail service and urban light rail systems. This would help reduce the impact of automobiles on the greenhouse effect, ozone layer depletion, oil reserves and urban sprawl. Motor vehicles are the largest contributors to each and every type of air pollution in California. In metropolitan areas automobiles contribute 80% of carbon monoxide, (a greenhouse gas) 70% of hydrocarbon levels (primary smog ingredient) and 50 of nitrogen oxides (smog and acid deposition). In addition to degrading our air environment autos are using increasing amounts of petroleum every year. Motor vehicles now account for a larger percentage of our total domestic oil demand than they did at the time of the 1974 oil crisis. The result is that 40% of all U.S. oil is now imported and our domestic reserves will be depleted in approximately twenty years.

The Clean Air and Rail Transportation Bond Act is intended for the June 1990 ballot. 600,000 signatures must be gathered by petition by mid-October in order to qualify it for the ballot. The act would create the Clean Air and Transportation Improvement Fund for the sale of general obligation bonds to fund public transportation projects. Please consider endorsing this act by signing the petition when you have the chance. If you would like to volunteer some time to this cause, please contact David Manhart at the Planning and Conservation League, (916) 448-1786, or Tim Duff at the Peninsula Conservation Center.

BIRDING CLASSES--SAN FRANCISCO

Evening birding classes taught by Joe Morlan will be starting September 5, 6, and 7. All classes meet 7-9:30 PM in Room 222 at the Marina Middle School, Fillmore St. at Bay in San Francisco. Free parking in the school lot on the east side. Slides illustrate all classes and the text for all classes is the *Field Guide to the Birds of North America* by the National Geographic Society.

FIELD ORNITHOLOGY I - Tuesdays. An introduction to birds and birding, combining field skills, bird ecology, biology and behavior. Part A starts 9/5 and ends 10/24. Part B starts 10/31, ends 12/12.

BAIR ISLAND IN JEOPARDY

Bair Island has been sold to a Canadian development company. Purchase includes Bair Island and Redwood Peninsula. This is the area at the east end of Whipple Avenue in Redwood City. Currently it is open space utilized by bike riders, joggers, dog walkers, fishermen, and birders. Burrowing owls have been seen in this area, as well as a wintering immature golden eagle last year. Bair Island has been a valuable breeding and resting area for Bay dependent birds. Great blue herons have been nesting there regularly. Half of Bair Island is wetlands. SAS is keeping a close watch on developments there and will do our best to make sure sensitive habitat is preserved and if development occurs that it includes mitigation and is done in such a way as to have the least impact on the environment. We may be calling on members to support us financially on this issue if any legal action needs to be taken.

NEW MARSH IN PALO ALTO

I recently attended a Palo Alto City Council meeting where the fate of a plan to create a new freshwater marsh and enhance existing degraded salt marsh where the endangered salt marsh harvest mouse now exists in the Palo Alto Baylands was decided. They plan to use treated effluent from the sewage treatment plant to create the freshwater marsh. The City was wavering on the issue of whether it was financially feasible for them to go ahead with the project.

I spoke representing SAS and emphasized how important it is to include enhancement of the salt marsh in the project as endangered species such as the salt marsh harvest mouse and the clapper rail are dependent on that habitat. (There had been some talk of taking the salt marsh enhancement out of the plan.) I also mentioned how SAS has enjoyed many field trips over the years to Palo Alto Baylands because the combination of freshwater ponds and salt marsh attracting a variety of birds makes it an ideal area to bird and that creation of additional freshwater marsh and enhancement of salt marsh would be greatly appreciated by birders and hikers.

After ten people spoke their views, all in favor of the marsh, the city council voted to go ahead with the plan. The California Coastal Conservancy has promised to consider a \$1.2 million grant to help fund the project. It is satisfying that another approximately 50 acres of our Bay Area marshlands will be preserved.

FIELD ORNITHOLOGY II - Wednesdays. A continuing study of the identification of American birds, including terns, alcids & vultures. Part A starts 9/6, ends 10/25. Part B starts 11/1, ends 12/20.

FIELD ORNITHOLOGY III-Thursdays-Continuing study of land birds incl. warblers&sparrows. Part A starts 9/7, ends 10/26. Part B starts 11/2, ends 12/21.

Optional field trips on weekends may be arranged. Preregistration recommended. Fees: \$45 for Part A (8 wks) & \$45 for part B (7 wks). For more information call the SF Community College at 776-8247.

## LUMPS AND SPLITS

STEVE SCHAFFER

(Despite the title, this column is nonviolent.)

Every ten or fifteen years, the American Ornithological Union gets together and revises their *Check-list of North American Birds*. The most recent edition, the 6th, was published in 1983. It is considered to be the authority on the status of each of the approximately 1900 species of birds that inhabit North and Central America, the West Indies, and Hawaii. Between these monumental major revisions, the A.O.U. publishes supplements at approximately annual intervals.

When any of these revised *Check-lists* or supplements appears, there is the possibility that some of the recognized species relationships may have changed. Of course, the birds themselves don't suddenly change just because somebody publishes something, only our understanding of them changes. When birds that were formerly considered to be two or more distinct species are reclassified as a single species, we are faced with a 'lump'. This is what happened to Bullock's and Baltimore Orioles, which are now lumped together as Northern Oriole. On the other hand, when the opposite occurs, and what was formerly a single species is reclassified as two or more, we have a 'split'. For example, the two forms of Boat-tailed Grackle were split a few years ago into Boat-tailed Grackle and Great-tailed Grackle.

The decision to lump or split is based on a variety of different considerations, including field observation and in-hand measurements of individuals from different populations of the species in question. Recently, genetic studies have proven to be a useful tool in determining just how closely two species or subspecies are related. Unfortunately, there are as yet no absolutely definitive techniques, so all lump/split decisions are judgment calls.

Birders rejoice when a split is announced, because it gives them at least one more additional species to add to their lists. Conversely, they tend to grumble when species are lumped, their precious lists decreasing by one or more hard-won ticks. (Some birders react in the opposite way, despondent that they will need to learn yet another impossible-to-see field mark in the former case, and relieved that they won't have to in the latter.)

The AOU recently published their 37th Supplement to the *Check-list*, and (rejoice!) it contains four splits and no lumps, as far as North American birders are concerned. One of the splits is of the Cuban Emerald, into Brace's and Cuban Emeralds, but since this bird has only been seen a dozen or so times in Florida, it is unlikely that anyone reading this is affected by the split. The other three splits are of more interest:

Western Flycatcher has been split into two species, Pacific-slope Flycatcher, which primarily inhabits the area west of the Cascade and Sierra Nevada ranges, and Cordilleran Flycatcher, which inhabits the Great Basin and Rocky Mountain areas. (I don't know who came up with the new names; it was probably some Eastern ornithologist's idea of a good joke.) The two species are separable in the field only by a small (but noticeable) difference in one of the calls of the male.

Black-tailed Gnatcatcher has also been split, the dark coastal form being renamed to California Gnatcatcher, and the desert form retaining the original name. The habitat of the California Gnatcatcher unfortunately coincides with areas that people like to build condominiums on, and so it may be listed as a threatened species before too long.

Last but not least, the Brown Towhees that we often see in our back yards have been transformed overnight into California Towhees, while those that inhabit the Southwest deserts have become Canyon Towhees. Of the three splits, the Towhees earn the distinction of being the easiest to separate in the field.

The different forms of the Gnatcatcher and Towhee are illustrated in the National Geographic Society's guide. The Flycatchers are not, of course. (Since they look alike, there wouldn't be much point, would there?)

In addition to the three splits, there are a few name changes that will affect birders to a greater or lesser degree, depending on where they have birded. Common Barn-Owl is now just plain Barn Owl, and Common Pauraque is now Pauraque. In these cases, the prefix 'Common' was considered to be redundant, since these are the only species of Barn Owls and Paurques around. Our familiar Water Pipit has become American Pipit, as the result of an intercontinental split from the Old World form. Northern Hawk-Owl has become Northern Hawk Owl, for reasons that entirely escape me. And, of course, Eye-browed Thrush is now Eyebrowed Thrush. Since Eyebrowed Thrushes are only seen in the Aleutians, I expect that this last change will have about as much impact as the Cuban Emerald split.

That's about it for the 37th Supplement. There are, however, some other proposed changes that may be forthcoming in future Supplements. Among these are the potential lumping of Common and Hoary Redpolls. The Redpolls pose an interesting problem, as they seem to be more closely related than any other pair of distinct species, yet more distantly related than any known pair of subspecies. They firmly straddle the fine line between species and subspecies. The implications of this are that as we refine our techniques for determining the relatedness of different organisms, we may eventually also need to refine our entire classification structure. Also forthcoming is the probable split of Red Crossbill into three or possibly even four distinct species, distinguishable in the field (probably) only by voice. I can hear birders cringing in horror right now. Then, of course, there is the matter of all these gulls...

## FIELD TRIP PLANNING

At 7:30 pm on Wednesday, the September 13, there will be a Field Trip Organization meeting, the purpose of which is to set the field trip schedule for the remainder of the year. The meeting will be held at the SAS office (call the office for directions), and is open to any interested persons. Your input is welcome, appreciated, and greatly desired. Please call Steve Schaffer at 689-0788 if you have any questions.

## SPONSORS SOUGHT FOR AUDUBON ADVENTURES

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