

sequoia needles

Bulletin of the Sequoia Audubon Society
San Mateo County Volume 44, No. 8
May, 1995



This Month's Program

The Galapagos (And a Touch of the Mainland)

Susanne Methvin of Inca Floats, one of the most professional tour companies in the Bay area, will be our presenter for the month of May. Inca Floats is known not only for their tours of Peru, Ecuador and the Galapagos, but for the quality of their presentations as well.

Although she is in the final stages of preparing for their Ultimate Birding Tour, which she is co-leading and on which she will try to see all of the endemic species of the Galapagos, Susanne will take the time to present this program for our benefit.

Susanne is a birder and conservationist and has been involved in nature travel since 1976. She is the co-author of *Nature Travel*, now available through the Nature Company. She invites inquiries about either her new book or the activities of Inca Floats at 510-420-1550.

Monthly meetings are held at the San Matco Garden Center on the Alameda at Parkside, the second Thursday of every month beginning at 7:30 with the actual meeting and program commencing at 8:00.

'95 Slate of Candidates

The following candidates are offered for your consideration by the Nominating Committee for election at our annual general meeting in June. Any other nominations may be made from the floor with the consent of the nominee.

President
Vice-president
Treasurer
Secretary
Directors

Robin Smith

Julia Mandeville
Rich Kuehn
Debbie Frantz
Frances Toldi
Cliff Richer



From The Editor Oops!

Your editor thought he was off the hook with last month's *NEEDLES*, but it now seems you will be stuck with me for this and one more issue. I apologize for my premature advice to my successors given in last month's editorial and hope that it wasn't that advice that scared them off. Nevertheless, it was good advice and it appears that the Board is ready to support the acquisition of whatever hardware may be necessary to keep the *NEEDLES* moving forward.

Fortunately for our budget the price on the necessary equipment and software has continued to drop over the years and it will take a relatively modest expenditure to make our new editor happy (we think).

Nevertheless, any additional expense on our already distended and ailing budget is more than we can afford. This makes this month's Birdathon doubly important. This is one of our principal fund-raisers and we need your help to make it a success.

So, please participate in our Birdathon either as a birder and team member or most importantly as a supporter. Half of the Birdathon funds go to the National and will be designated for support of their "Birds in the Balance" program and its Central Valley work on migratory species. Our half of the funds will remain here and be used for our general operations, including publication of the *NEEDLES*.

Most of the members are aware that the bulk of our operating funds come from the share of your annual dues paid to National Audubon that is then returned to us. This income has steadily shrunk as inflation, questionable accounting and a shrinking membership have impacted us. In the smaller Audubon chapters, the amount received from National Audubon does not even cover the cost of preparing, printing and mailing the newsletter that is required under our charter! We are currently running at about break-even or a little better, thanks to yeoman efforts by former President **Anne Moser** in holding down our printing costs. Nevertheless, the US Postal Service does not offer deals or discounts and our mailing costs have brought us close to the brink.

A few years ago, at the time of the last postal increase, we reduced the number of newsletters from 10 to 9 per year in order to cut our mailing costs. However after reviewing what needs to be done and what the membership needs to be told, the Board decided this is the bare minimum. There is simply no way to justify a reduction to eight issues a year.

So please use the form on Page 7 to contribute to this year's Birdathon!

On a happier note, we're delighted to be able to announce the return of **Peter Metropoulos'** "Sightings" column to the *NEEDLES*. You'll find it on Page 4. Thanks, Peter! We missed you.

---Cliff Richer, Editor (still, but for the time being)



The S A S Calendar

May

THURSDAY, MAY 4 - BOARD MEETING at the Sequoia Audubon Office at 7:30 PM. All members welcome. Please call ahead to be sure there will be room.

SATURDAY, MAY 6 - SAN PEDRO VALLEY COUNTY PARK. This little jewel of a park nestled under Montara Mountain in Pacifica is a favorite with local hikers but its riparian habitat is often overlooked by birders. We will be joined on this spring visit by members of the San Pedro Valley Park Volunteers. With Devil's Slide closed you can't get to Pacifica from Half Moon Bay and you'll have to take Hwy. 1 from its intersection in Daly City to Pacifica. Follow Hwy 1 south to the fourth set of lights at Linda Mar Blvd. (Look for Denny's on the corner.) Take a left on Linda Mar and follow it to its end where you will take a right and another immediate right into the park. If the entry gate is manned, identify yourself as being with Sequoia Audubon Society in order to avoid the \$3 parking fee.

LEADER JUDI SPITLER 355-9362

THURSDAY, MAY 11 - GENERAL MEETING. Susanne Methvin of Inca Floats, a tour operator out of Emeryville, will present a program on the **Galapagos, Ecuador and Peru.** At the San Mateo Garden Center on the Alameda at Parkside. Meeting begins at 7:30 PM with the program at 8:00.

SUNDAY, MAY 14 - THE WILLIAMS' SISTERS RANCH. This marvelously tended ranch has been bequeathed to National Audubon and will eventually become one of Audubon's sanctuaries. Just off of Skyline Drive west of San Mateo it has an amazing diversity of habitat. We should find lazuli buntings and other grassland species as well as woodland and riparian species. **Because this is still a working ranch, we must limit the number of participants to 20. Call the office (345-3724) to reserve your space.** Our leader, Dan Keller, has the ranch in one of his Breeding Bird Atlas squares and is extremely familiar with the area. We'll meet at 9 AM in the parking lot of Alice's Restaurant at the intersection of Skyline Boulevard (Hwy 95) and Hwy 84. From there we'll car-pool and caravan to the Ranch.

LEADER DAN KELLER

SATURDAY, MAY 20 - SAN BRUNO MOUNTAIN FIELD TRIP - Mac MacCormack, an accomplished birder with the Golden Gate Audubon Society, the author of the San Bruno Mountain Checklist and of the chapter on San Bruno Mountain in our soon-to-be-published update of *San Francisco Peninsula Birding*, is our leader on this trip. We'll meet in the parking lot of the County Park at 8 AM. If the entry gate is manned, be sure to identify yourself as a participant in the Sequoia Field Trip in order to get the \$3 parking fee waived. To get there take Guadalupe Parkway from either Brisbane (off 101) or Daly City. The entrance to the park is well-marked on the left from Daly City and on the right from Brisbane.

LEADER "MAC" MAC CORMACK 929-9305

(Continued on Page Three)



News From Your Ranch

We regret that the "Ranch" column did not reach us in time for this month's **NEEDLES.**

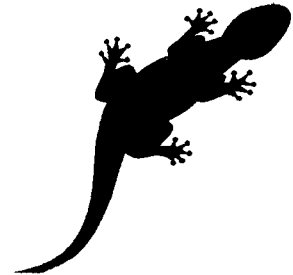
Nevertheless, you are reminded that **this is Sequoia's month to host weekends** at the Bolinas Lagoon Preserve of the Ranch.

Your editor can think of no other Audubon activity that he enjoys more. I only regret that distance and travel time make it difficult to be more active in the Ranch's educational and public programs.

There is no finer environmental education facility in the United States and we should all thank the Ranch for this once-a-year opportunity that they give to us "wannabees" to be part of the operation.

If you've never done it before, do it this year and find out how much you can learn by helping others, how much you can get while giving, and how good a minimal effort can feel!

Call Julia Mandeville (726-1006) or the Sequoia office (345-3724) to sign up to host at ACR. If you can't make it in May, call ACR at 868-9244 to arrange your hosting on a weekend in another month.



Special Concern List In Revision

California's "Bird Species of Special Concern" is being revised by the Kern River Research Center under contract with the California Department of Fish and Game. The Research Center was selected despite its relatively "young" standing because of its solid research credentials in its work on the yellow-billed cuckoo and its monitoring of the Nature Conservancy's restoration work on the upper Kern River.

The Kern River Research Center is now soliciting information on all species, subspecies or distinct populations of birds that might qualify for this list. If you have information on the decline of bird species please send it to KRRC, PO Box 990, Weldon, CA 03283.

Teak Forests Going Fast

Teak, one of the world's most prized hardwoods, is in danger of being eradicated. The great teak forests of India were eliminated in the 19th century to provide decks for British sailing ships. By 1985, most of Thailand's teak had been converted into furniture. By 1988 the forests had been so devastated that Thailand became subject to severe seasonal flooding and logging was prohibited. Now the Burmese teak forests - about 80% of the world's total - are disappearing. A single tree can be sold for as much as \$20,000 and the Burmese rulers are in need of foreign exchange to buy arms. Under the present rate of cutting, some experts are predicting the Burmese teak forest will be gone in five years.



Sewer Ponds

Good Birding - Deadly Traps

Sewer ponds, considered prime birding sites for gulls and some shorebirds, are turning out to be deadly traps for many species.

In the Los Banos area more than 160,000 ducks concentrate on ponds of treated effluent. To many ducks - primarily shovelers and canvasbacks - this "habitat" seems superior to that on the nearby public and private wetlands. Food is ample and easy to obtain and there are few predators. Snapping turtles are absent and mammalian predators - raccoons, foxes, coyotes, feral cats and hunters are fenced out.

But they pay a heavy price. The combination of crowding and contaminated water has led to outbreaks of avian cholera and botulism. At the Modesto sewage plant there is an annual die-off of between 3000 and 6000 birds involving as many as 27 different species. In 1991 - a relatively "good" year - more than 50 of the endangered Aleutian sub-species of the Canada Goose died. In that same year, 2800 birds died at Modesto and 1688 at the Los Banos sewage ponds. By contrast 257 succumbed to disease at the Los Banos Wildlife Area, 60 on Merced National Wildlife Refuge and 70 on the private duck clubs of the Grasslands District, and all of these were attributed to original infection derived from the sewage ponds.

The US Fish and Wildlife Service is currently negotiating with the various municipalities about steps to be taken to reduce these losses using the same hazing methods as are being used on the deadly irrigation wastewater ponds further south. Should the negotiations fail the USFWS still has the option of taking legal action under the provisions of the Migratory Bird Treaty.



The S A S Calendar

May

(Continued from Page Two)

Be nice to Mac. He's a summer resident of the Sierra City area and we want to approach him to lead or co-lead the Yuba Pass trip for us in the future.
The Editor.)

FRIDAY, MAY 26 through MONDAY, MAY 29 - TIOGA PASS AND THE MONO BASIN. The future of Mono Lake is now assured and the lake has been saved! We'll meet at noon on Friday of this Memorial Day weekend at the beginning of Tioga Pass in Yosemite and proceed across the pass to Lee Vining on Mono Lake. If Tioga Pass is snowed in we'll meet in Lee Vining on Saturday morning. This is a reservations only trip. Contact the leader to reserve your place. The itinerary of the trip will remain flexible until the last minute due to snow conditions in the Sierras and the leader must have your name and phone number in order to advise you of any last minute changes. Contact Cliff Richer (355-4058) for details or to make reservations.

LEADER	CLIFF RICHER	355-4058
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THURSDAY, JUNE 1 - BOARD MEETING at the Sequoia Audubon Office at 7:30 PM. All members welcome. Please call ahead to be sure there will be room.

THURSDAY, JUNE 8 - GENERAL MEETING. ELECTION OF OFFICERS AND POTLUCK DINNER. Potluck begins at 6:30 PM with the elections and program following immediately thereafter. At the San Mateo Garden Center on the Alameda at Parkside. See next month's **NEEDLES** for details.

We also expect to have at least one field trip in June so check next month for details.



Bird Sightings

Winter 1994

Peter Metropulos

These noteworthy bird observations for San Mateo County were gleaned from the *Northern California Birder's Mailbox*. To listen to daily recordings or to leave new sightings, call 510-524-5592.

- **Flesh-footed Shearwater:** One seen from shore at Pigeon Point on Dec. 27 is one of a very few winter records for California. (BS)
- **Cattle Egret:** The only report was of a group of three in Half Moon Bay on Dec. 19 (BS)
- **Tundra Swan:** A group of 8 lingering Fall migrants were in Pescadero Marsh on Dec. 2 and were reported to be still there on Dec. 22 (TO). More out of place was one seen flying north along Hwy 101 in Menlo Park on Feb. 4 (PJM).
- **Greater White-Fronted Goose:** A late migrant was on the Half Moon Bay golf course on Dec. 17. (DPo)
- **Bald Eagle:** An adult was present at Crystal Springs Reservoir all winter. This was possibly the same bird seen flying over El Granada on Jan. 21 (BS)
- **Swainson's Hawk:** An adult was glimpsed along Hwy 101 in Menlo Park on Dec. 22 and then studied well as it hunted along 101 in Millbrae on Christmas Day. (PJM) This species is virtually in winter away from South America with the exception of a unique recently discovered wintering area in the Delta.
- **Black Rail:** One was seen being carried off by a ring-billed gull during very high tides at Cooley Landing in East Palo Alto on Dec. 3 (ADeM). This is our only county record in 20 years!
- **Clapper Rail:** An impressive 44 were counted on the East Palo Alto Marshes during the Jan. 1 high tides! (RSTh).
- **Snowy Plover:** Counts of 33 in Half Moon Bay on Dec. 17 (RSTh) and 28 on Pescadero Beach on Dec. 31 (GH) were good news for this beleaguered beach-lover
- **Common Black-headed Gull:** One was spotted among the concentrations

of over 1600 Bonaparte's gulls at the Dumbarton Bridge salt ponds on Feb. 17. (RSTh). This is only the second county record of this ultra-rare Eurasian vagrant.

- **Rhinoceros Auklet:** 284 were counted from shore on Feb. 21. (PJM).
- **Long-eared Owl:** Individuals were discovered at El Granada, Half Moon Bay and Whitehouse Creek Road, all during the month of December. (BS, DJK)



- **Short-eared Owl:** A peak winter count of 12 birds was made at Bair Island on Dec. 27. (ADeM).
- **Pileated Woodpecker:** One was seen excavating a hole at Wunderlich Park below Skyline Boulevard on Dec. 19. (GHe, AW). This is one of our rarest resident species.
- **Tropical Kingbird:** Despite the most un-tropical weather conditions, one lingered at Oyster Point from Nov. 24 through Dec. 11. (PJM).
- **Barn Swallow:** One at Millbrae on Jan. 29 (PJM, ADeM) was either an exceptionally early Spring migrant or a bird that had spent the winter locally. They normally arrive the first of March.
- **Townsend's Solitaire:** This rare visitor from the montane regions was seen in El Granada on Dec. 18-19. (BS, RSTh).
- **Wintering Warblers** included two **Tennessees** in Half Moon Bay on Dec. 17 (DJK, RSTh); three **Nashvilles** Dec. 6-17 (AME, DJK, RSTh); one **Yellow** at Higgins Creek Dec. 17 (BMcK); a **Hermit** near Pescadero from October through Dec. 13 (BMcK), a very rare **hybrid Hermit x Townsends** at Pescadero on Dec. 31

(BMcK); nine **Palms**, seen mostly along the edge of the Bay from Dec. 10 through Feb. 5 (PJM, ADeM, MM) and four **Black-and-whites**, one at Pilarcitos Creek Dec. 11-17 (DJK, RSTh) and three in the Pescadero area from Dec. 11 through Jan. 24. (BS, AME, BMcK).

- **Summer Tanager:** A female was found along San Francisquito Creek on the Palo Alto-Menlo Park border on Feb. 15 (DS) and obligingly remained through mid-March to the delight of county "listers" on both sides of the county line.
- **Clay-Colored Sparrow:** One along San Gregorio Rd. on Dec. 23 may have been a late Fall straggler/ (RSTh).
- **Lark Sparrow:** One along San Gregorio Road on Dec. 23 was a winter rarity. (RSTh).
- **Grasshopper Sparrow:** Among the rarest of our wintering sparrows, this one was also found along San Gregorio Road on Dec. 23. (RSTh).
- **Swamp Sparrow:** At least 17 were detected from Dec. 17 through Feb. 12, most of them in flooded fields in the Pescadero area.
- **Orioles:** A **Hooded Oriole** and two **Northern Orioles** frequented a feeder in Half Moon Bay from late November through December (HWH). Three other **Northern Orioles** were found in the flowering eucalyptus in Half Moon Bay from Dec. 10 through Feb. 26. (AME, DJK). All the Northern Orioles were "Bullock's"

OBSERVERS:

Al DeMartini (ADeM)
 Alan M. Eisner (AME)
 Henry W. Hansen (HWH)
 Gloria Heller (GHe), Grant Hoyt (GH)
 Dan J Keller (DJK)
 Bert McKee (BMcK)
 Peter J. Metropulos (PJM)
 Mark Miller (MM), Trent Orr (TO)
 David Powell (DPo), Barry Sauppe (BS)
 Dick Stovel (DS)
 Ron S. Thorn (RSTh)
 Anne Wilson (AW).

Introductions and Invasions

In 1989 the US Fish and Wildlife Service gave up its experiment with having sandhill cranes serve as foster parents to young whooping cranes. In recent years it had become obvious that mature whooping cranes raised by sandhills believed that they too were sandhill cranes. They completely ignored other whooping cranes in conducting their breeding rituals and dances and displayed only for the benefit of sandhill cranes.

At least one of them was successful. A hybrid sandhill/whooping crane was found in Colorado last October. It was accompanied by its parents, a male whooping crane and a female sandhill. *(There is no solid proof for the rumor that she was very near-sighted.)*

The Bosque del Apache flock of whooping cranes, all sandhill crane foster children, will most certainly die out. This means the Aransas flock is the only viable population of whooping cranes left in the wild and a single natural or man-made disaster could wipe out the entire population.

In 1982 the USFWS inaugurated another experiment in hope of establishing a separate population. This time Florida was chosen as the site. Florida's sandhill cranes are non-migratory and it was hoped that captive-raised whooping cranes introduced into the state would find the environment equally appealing and become a resident population. So far the 14 introduced adult birds have shown no instinct to migrate, but they have also shown little instinct for avoiding predators. Despite earlier training in avoiding dogs and humans, four of the introduced birds were soon killed by bobcats. This is not an abnormally high percentage - except that the introduction site had been surveyed and a number of bobcats removed before the whooping cranes had been released. It seems the tough little cats may be more adaptable than the cranes and researchers are now trying to teach the next batch of cranes the necessary survival skills.

Brown tree snakes invaded Guam a few years ago and the effect on native birds was catastrophic. The snake has recently

been found in Hawaii and a massive program is underway to eradicate it before it becomes established. The snakes are assumed to have arrived as stowaways aboard cargo planes from Guam or their native New Guinea.

The small zebra mussel, a Eurasian species which inhabits fresh and brackish water, is spreading rapidly through the Great Lakes. Some current theories make it appear to be the ideal diet food. The tough shell contains very little meat and it appears that sculp feeding on them are underweight. Speculation is that the meat contains fewer calories than the birds burn while grinding up the shell in their gizzards.

A flock of Vaux's swifts invaded a chimney in Port Angeles, Washington. Firefighters "rescued" them and released them in the area, whereupon they promptly dived right back into the chimney! After a second rescue, the birds were foiled by a piece of plywood placed over the chimney. Of course, the local news media referred to them as chimney swifts.



Who Gives A Hoot? Owls Do.

Burrowing owls are very tolerant of humans and human machinery - especially automobiles and airplanes. They need three things - open space in which to hunt, a friendly rodent to dig their burrows and freedom from disturbance at the burrow site. So, despite their tolerance of humans and machinery they are threatened by the loss of open space, the eradication of prairie dog colonies, periodic anti-rabies or anti-plague campaigns against ground squirrels, laser-leveling of agricultural land, and the proliferation of free-running domestic pets.

Long-eared owls are among the most widespread (three continents) but least known of the owls. They seldom call,

rarely repeat their calls more than once or twice, rarely respond to taped calls, are almost exclusively nocturnal and roost in the densest foliage. Although they nest in scattered interior locations throughout California we are more likely to see winter visitors or migrants than our resident owls. When we see them here we are most apt to see them roosting in or flying out of dense willow thickets. One of the few studies of long-eared owls found that in Connecticut most of them (39 out of 46) preferred to roost in conifers near the edges of clearings. Are we looking in the wrong places or are the habits of eastern and western long-eareds that different?

One of the less-publicized reasons why the spotted owl is endangered in the Northwest is the incursion of the barred owl into the area. Outside the Northwest, the spotted owl has adapted to second-growth and immature forest areas where it requires larger feeding territories than in its preferred old-growth habitat. But the second-growth areas are the normal habitat of the more aggressive barred owls. Where they come into contact the spotted owls are driven back into the dwindling old-growth areas. Taxonomists have always considered the two species to be closely related and possibly to be capable of inter-breeding. This has now been confirmed. At least four hybrids have been found. Hybrids were described as having plumage and vocalization characteristics of both species. One hybrid mated with a barred owl and produced young in both '90 and '91. This may mean that the spotted and barred owl are, in fact, a single species.

Owls have a reputation for wisdom, but one great horned owl certainly was deficient in this respect. Owls often feed on road kills or on rodents crossing roads - sometimes with disastrous results. A female great horned owl in Ontario was banded and rehabilitated after being hit by a car in 1968. Five months later she was hit by another car, treated and released again. In 1978 she was struck and killed by a car while feeding on the road.

(Note that it took 17 years for someone in the Canadian wildlife service to notice this, proving that the Canadian bureaucracy may be more efficient than ours after all.)

1995 SAS BIRDATHON APPEAL

As many of you know, the Birdathon is SAS's most important fund raising event of the year. This year we hope YOU will help SAS greatly increase the number of participants who will join in on the fun!

WHAT IS THE BIRDATHON?

The Birdathon is a national fund raising event jointly sponsored by the local Audubon Chapter (Sequoia, for instance) and the National Audubon Society. Each spring, between April 15th and May 15th, teams of birdwatchers (from throughout the country and of all skill levels) go out during one 24 hour period and try to find as large a number of bird species as they can in an effort to help raise funds for various Audubon programs. The fund raising comes from the of sponsors who will contribute to Audubon a stated amount for each species found, or a flat amount. For example, if one signs up 10 sponsors who contribute \$.20 per species, and the team finds 100 species, the total contribution would be $10 \times \$.20 \times 100$ or \$200.

WHAT ARE WE SUPPORTING?

One of the great things about this event is that it is mutually beneficial to both our local chapter, Sequoia Audubon Society and National Audubon as each get a 1/2 share of the total contributions taken in.

Furthermore, Sequoia Audubon gets to designate which program of National Audubon where their 1/2 half share is to be used. This year Sequoia's Board has chosen support NAS's BIRD'S IN THE BALANCE program. This is a major program designed to bring about an awareness of the neotropical bird migration by the general public while at the same time develop much needed data on the migration patterns. Sequoia Audubon's share will support our many local programs including AUDUBON ADVENTURES, (an environmental education program for 4th to 8th grade school children), SAN MATEO COUNTY BREEDING BIRD ATLAS (a five year program developing data base information on the birds which breed in San Mateo County), our monthly general membership programs, monthly field trips, our local conservation efforts, etc.

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

You can help in two ways:

- A. PARTICIPATE ON A TEAM WHO COLLECTS PLEDGES FROM SPONSORS for their own team, (You can also collect for a friend's team) and/or
- B. MAKE A PLEDGE based on the total species Sequoia's Official Team sees in a 24 hour period over May 1st and May 2nd.

Last year they saw 204 species. This year they hope to increase it.
This was one of the highest species counts in the USA last year.

Elsewhere in the Needles, you will find a Pledge Card for this year's Birdathon. Send it back today. We really need and appreciate your help.

If you want to participate on a team it's really easy to do (and it's fun too!). Just call the SAS office and tell them you want to help out. We will contact you and get the details worked out. It's just that simple!

THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP!

Birdathon'95!!!! Pledge Form

The BIRDATHON is - after the Christmas Count - the largest participation event sponsored by the National Audubon Society. A number of teams of Sequoia Audubon Society birders will embark on this year's BIRDATHON fundraiser. Whatever their methods, they will try to identify as many different species as possible in a 24 hour period. You can help out by pledging a nominal amount (from 5 cents on up) for each species identified by one of the teams. This year National Audubon is donating its half of the proceeds to the Richardson Bay Education Center. Your contribution will help preserve this invaluable resource.

You can show your commitment to SAS and your confidence in our birders by "pre-paying" your pledge for 150 species. Make all checks payable to **Sequoia Audubon Society** and mail to:

30 West 39th Avenue,
San Mateo, CA 94403

All honored pledges are tax-deductible.

YES, I wish to join in.

I will sign up pledges and conduct my Birdathon on _____

YES, I will support Sequoia Audubon Society with a pledge of _____ per species.

YES, I will pre-pay my pledge based on an estimate of at least 100 or 150 different birds being identified.

My check for \$ _____ is enclosed.

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____

STATE _____ ZIP _____

TELEPHONE _____

THANKS FOR YOUR SUPPORT!!

From The President Julia Mandeville

This month it is the opportunity of each Sequoia Audubon member to work as a host at Audubon Canyon Ranch's Bolinas Lagoon Preserve. The Preserve is located adjacent to Bolinas Lagoon on State Highway One, three miles north of Stinson Beach.

As a sponsoring chapter of Audubon Canyon Ranch, on of the most significant contributions we make to the preservation and education efforts of the Ranch is by providing members as hosts. No previous experience is required. A friendly face and a willingness to spend a day (9:00 AM to 4:00 PM) at the Preserve on one or more of the following dates is all that is required.



We are hosting on May 6 and 7, May 13 and 14, May 20 and 21 and on the Memorial Day Weekend, May 27, 28 and 29. **If you are willing to host or would like more information call Terri Simpson at the Sequoia office (345-3724) or Julia Mandeville at 726-1006.**

If you can't make it in May but can help out in June or July give the Ranch a call directly at 868-9244.

And if you can't host this year, at least be one of the 11,000+ annual visitors to this remarkable place. The public season and the nesting of the herons and egrets continues through mid-July.

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"Over the next ten years this state will reinvent itself. I'm a technological optimist. I believe in the ability to harness our collective intelligence and solve problems."

---Martha Davis,
Mono Lake Committee

The Feather Duster Cliff Richer Raptor Miscellany

Raptors are among my favorite birds. They are large (mostly) and conspicuous and if you learn to say "red-tailed hawk" 95% of the time and nothing at all the rest of the time, you'll soon be recognized as a raptor identification expert.

Unfortunately, being at the top of the food chain, raptors have suffered considerably from the accumulation of man-made toxins. DDT, other pesticides, mercury, selenium and lead poisoning have all impacted the raptors.

Bald eagles, one of the species most seriously affected by DDT, have made a good recovery since the pesticide was banned in the US and Canada. The southeastern US populations have made an especially dramatic recovery. In South Carolina the latest survey found 269 eagles, up from 198 in 1991 and 13 in 1977.

On the other hand, sharp-shinned hawk populations appear to be once again in serious decline as we pointed out in last month's **NEEDLES**. Countering this, there has been a dramatic increase in sharp-shin sightings at winter feeders in New England. However it's unlikely that these account for anything but a small number of the missing accipiters.

Swainson's Hawks are insectivorous for a large part of the year, feeding mainly on grasshoppers and large aerial insects. Recently it was discovered that on their wintering grounds they pursue a species of dragonfly (*Aeshna bonariensis*) that, in turn, seems to be pursuing its own prey.

Vera Cruz, Mexico is the new hawk-watching capital of the Western Hemisphere. Biologists and researchers from Hawk Mountain Sanctuary in Pennsylvania recorded 2½ million raptors passing through the Vera Cruz area last fall. Turkey vultures, broad-winged hawks and Swainson's hawks made up more than 90% of the total.

Personally, I find it hard to think of pure carrion-eaters, such as vultures and condors, as raptors. Many taxonomists now agree. DNA typing shows that vultures are not closely related to hawks after all. They will probably end up being classified in the same family as the storks!

Gifts and Bequests

Sequoia Audubon welcomes gifts in general or on behalf of, or in memory of relatives or friends. Such gifts may be designated for education or for the advancement of the objectives of the Society. Please send your gift in the form of a check to the Sequoia Audubon Society, Inc. All gifts, donations and bequests will be acknowledged in the *NEEDLES* and personally on behalf of the Society. All gifts are tax-deductible.

Gift Memberships

From

Elayne Haller

Elizabeth Mc Caughey

To

Heather Haller

Jo Ann Reddy

Sequoia *NEEDLES* is published monthly except in January, July and August. Members are encouraged to submit material to be published in the *NEEDLES*. The deadline for the submission of materials is the first day of the month preceding publication. These may be original articles, original artwork or cartoons, or uncopyrighted material from other sources. Items dealing with conservation issues must be submitted to the Conservation Committee prior to publication.

Information for all officers and chairpersons should be mailed to 30 West 39th Ave., Suite 202, San Mateo, CA 94403-4561.

Please send **RENEWAL MEMBERSHIPS** directly to National Audubon in the envelope accompanying your renewal notice.

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