

sequoia needles

Bulletin of the Sequoia Audubon Society
San Mateo County Volume 44, No. 9
June, 1995

This Month's Program

Hummingbirds!

Natures extremists, hummingbirds go to excess in all aspects of the business of being a bird. They are the tiniest members of the avian world, one of the most numerous (319+ species), the most fearless, and the most maneuverable. Their dazzling colors and spectacularly ornamented heads and tails make them some of the most attractive birds.

Hummers are masters of the air; their abilities to hover, fly backwards and upside-down ranks them with the best animal athletes. Their long non-stop migrations attest to the remarkable endurance of these little creatures. Their workday habits are fast-paced and frenetic, driven by an exceedingly high metabolism.

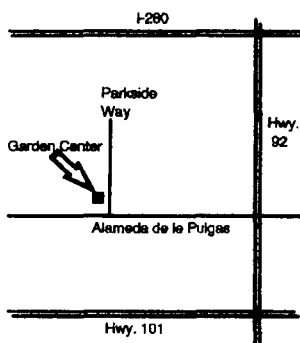
Come to the June Meeting to learn more about these high-energy avian jewels. Meryl Sundove, naturalist and educational coordinator for the Richardson Bay Audubon Center will present the slide program showing us what makes hummers so special, telling us about their biology and like history and giving us clues on attracting our local hummingbirds.



Potluck Time!

This month also brings us to our annual June Potluck Dinner so dust off your favorite show-off recipes.

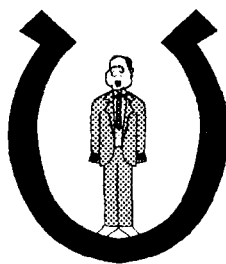
Please remember to bring your own utensils and plates and a paper bag in which to take them home. Those people whose last names begin with the letters **A through F** should bring a **SALAD**; those whose names begin with the letters **G through L**, a **DESSERT** and **M through Z** should provide the **CASSEROLES** or other hot dishes.



From The Editor

Resignations -- *Au Revoir* and Good-By

He had talked to me privately about it and I hadn't taken him seriously. There are times when we all feel burned out and I thought this was just one of those moments. Soon he would recover and be himself again. What! **The Sequoia Board of Directors without Rick Baird? Unthinkable!** A few years back when Rick was about to become President of Audubon Canyon Ranch, the Nominating Committee decided that Rick would be too busy and left him off the slate. Rick showed up at the Board Meetings anyway and the very next year he was back as a Director.



Rick was President when I joined Sequoia and was also the "emergency" Editor of the *Bulletin* as the **NEEDLES** was then called. He was President twice more, has chaired the Finance and Budget Committees (now combined, with Rick as Chairman, of course), Audubon Hosting and Bir-dathon. He has been a member of the Conservation Committee since he first became involved with Sequoia (and we hope he will continue in that capacity).

Rick's contributions to Sequoia have been enormous. The organization as we know it today was resurrected and revitalized under his leadership as President and Director. His resignation, effective after the elections this month, will leave us with some big shoes to fill. Rick, we hope to see you back soon.

Au Revoir, not good-by!

Election of Officers

This month's meeting also includes our annual election of officers. Following is the slate from the Nominating Committee. Members in good standing may also be nominated from the floor with their consent.

President Julia Mandeville
Vice-president Rich Kuehn
Secretary Francis Toldi
Treasurer Debbi Frantz
Directors
Cliff Richer Robin Smith

Remember that the **Potluck Dinner begins at 6:30 PM**, followed by the Election of Officers, the regular meeting and the program.

National Audubon President Peter Berle's resignation takes effect soon. Good-by. ☺



The S A S Calendar

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.

SUNDAY, JULY 23 - OUR ANNUAL PLANNING SESSION is set for 4 PM, Sunday, July 23. Officers and Committee Chairs are expected to attend **but all members are invited.** At Robin Smith's house. Call Robin (325-3306) if you wish to attend.

DATES AND PLACES HAVE NOT AS YET BEEN SET FOR THE FOLLOWING SUMMER MEETINGS. CALL THE SEQUOIA OFFICE FOR THE DATE, TIME AND PLACE IF YOU WISH TO PARTICIPATE IN ANY OR ALL OF THESE.

JULY AND AUGUST BOARD MEETINGS

ANNUAL MEETING OF THE FIELD TRIP COMMITTEE

Have a Great Summer!!

In Case You're Interested --

Some June Items From Elsewhere

June 16-18: The Nature Sounds Society is once again offering its **Field Recording Workshop** at Yuba Pass. The workshop uses the facilities of the Sierra Nevada Field Campus of San Francisco State. Cost is \$150. If you are not a member of NSS it will cost you an additional \$15 for a membership. Call Paul Mazner at the Oakland Museum (1-510-238-7482) for more information or to enroll.

June 17-18 Golden Gate Audubon trip to Yuba Pass. Call Peter Allen 892-8063 for details

June 24-25: Mt. Diablo Audubon's Field Trip to Yuba Pass. Call Elizabeth Dickey (510-254-0486) for details.

Most of the Bay Area Audubon Societies sponsor trips to Yuba Pass and Sierra Valley in June - some annually, and some bi-annually. We were not able to

obtain their dates in time for this edition of the newsletter. Call one of them if you are interested.

Sequoia Audubon Society



News From Your Ranch

Dan Murphy

We continue to need hosts on weekends and holidays until July 16. Join us for a relaxing day at the Ranch. Enjoy yourself and meet some fellow Audubon members as you greet our visitors and introduce them to ACR.

On March 26, Leslie Lethridge, Norma Jellison, Rosilyn and Tom White, Joan and I took our turn at hosting. We arrived at 9:45 after a lazy drive over Mt. Tam. It was a beautiful, sunny day with no wind. For the most part we spend the day greeting people and pointing them to the trail to the Heronry Overlook. One visitor particularly interested me because he had first visited the Ranch with a school group some 15 years before. It never ceases to amaze me that children are so impressed with the Ranch that they remember it for years and eventually return. As usual there were a few visitors who said they had driven by for years and wondered what ACR was. That's when it's fun to point above the buildings and give them a first glimpse of the heronry through their windshields. As usual a number of people stopped by as they were leaving to tell us how much they had enjoyed their visit.

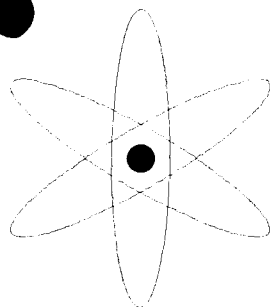
With six of us "working" the reception table, we were all able to take time out to hike to the overlook. Joan and I decided to bike over to Garden Club Canyon from where we could take the cool nature trail to the Griffin Loop Trail and then go on to the overlook. A pair of mallards greeted us by flying up from Parson's Pond when we approached. I noticed that the ceanothus in the canyon was so big that it looked like it was ready to graduate from shrubbery to trees. I only found one banana slug but enjoyed watching him slime around on a piece of glass for a while. The Douglas iris and milkmaids were at their peaks but most of the wildflowers still hadn't made an appearance. At the overlook we found the great blue herons well established but the egrets were just settling in with only eight on their nests. We looked for and couldn't find the dozen snowy egrets that Ray Petersen had told us about. He told us that some were even showing red lores - a condition that only lasts for a few days in breeding season and is rarely seen.

We closed the gate at 4 PM and were on our way home by 4:30. Unfortunately almost everyone else visiting West Marin decided to do the same thing so our return trip was a little more hectic.

Even though Sequoia's turn to host was last month, don't let that stop you. You can host by calling the Ranch directly at 868-9422.

BOUVERIE DOCENT TRAINING BEGINS IN SEPTEMBER. If you have been looking for the perfect volunteer opportunity this may be it. It's the perfect opportunity if you wish to introduce third and fourth grade children to the incredible world of nature. Our next orientation meeting is August 10 and classes start September 7. Call us at 1-707-938-4554 to sign up.

SAS Gives Special Science Awards



Students from 35 schools in San Mateo County participated in the annual Science Fair at Coyote Point Museum this year. Because of SAS's interest in promoting environmental education and awareness, special recognition was given to two students whose projects demonstrated particular attention to this concern.

Colin Trenter, a seventh grader at Cunha School (Cabrillo Unified School District), was recognized for his "**Rain Forest Pharmacy**" project. Colin actually tested the anti-bacterial characteristics of tropical plants in cultures of bacteria he had grown in Petri dishes.

Stephen Imperiale-Hagerman, an eighth grader at La Entrada School (Las Lomitas Elementary School District) earned his award for "**Trash Bashing**". Through his project he demonstrated that he could help four families reduce their trash 50% through a combination of recycling, composting, education and sound purchasing.

Teachers who had helped not only these but all of the student participants at the fair were awarded SAS T-shirts.

Rich Kuehn, Robin Smith and Bob Wilkinson reviewed the projects and presented the awards on behalf of SAS and the Conservation Committee.

Notes from the Conservation Committee

THINK GLOBALLY!



ACT LOCALLY!

House of Representatives Passes "Takings" Bill.

As part of its assault on decades of environmental protection the House passed **HR 925**, the so-called Takings Bill on March 3. This measure requires that private property owners be compensated whenever their property values are reduced as little as 20% through the action of environmental regulations such as those involving wetlands or endangered species.

Representative Lantos voted for this bill and Representative Eshoo voted against it. In fairness to Congressman Lantos, his staff has characterized this vote as a "mistake" and indicate that he plans to reverse his vote when the bill comes back from the Conference Committee. Write your lawmakers to let them know how you feel about their votes on this and other environmental legislation.

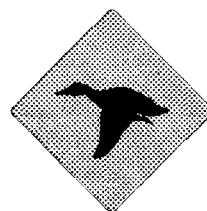
Mountain Lions in California



Since a runner and a birder were killed by mountain lions there has been a rush to enact bills to reinstate trophy hunting of the species and to eliminate the lesser well-known element of Proposition 117 - The Habitat

Conservation Fund. Since 1990, this fund has protected 148,000 acres of land in California. The preservation of these lands has assisted in the recovery of many threatened and endangered species. In San Mateo County these funds have been used to enlarge Pescadero Marsh and the Fitzgerald Marine Reserve and to purchase the Pillar Point Marsh.

Kesterson NWR Returning To Public Use with More Acreage



The 700 acre Blue Goose section of the Kesterson Wildlife Refuge will be open to public hunting next season. Entry will be through the adjoining San Luis Refuge.

This marks the first constructive use of the refuge in many years and indicates that the efforts to seal out the deadly levels of accumulated selenium have been successful.

Kesterson has never been open to the general public during hunting season but provided valuable resources for birds utilizing the entire refuge system north and east of Los Banos.

The US Fish and Wildlife Service has also begun restoring 1000 acres of wetlands on the former Gallo property which adjoins Kesterson. This land will be open to all public uses when restoration is complete in 1997.

Napa Activist Gets Pesticide Banned

In 1991, Steve Lorente, a Napa artist became alarmed at the number of dead red-tailed hawks he was finding near some of the Valley's vineyards. After talking to vineyard workers, environmentalists and pesticide suppliers, Steve became convinced that furadan - a pesticide being employed in an attempt to control the root parasite phylloxera - was affecting the hawks.

Lorente then took some of the dead birds to the California Fish & Game Wildlife Investigation Laboratory in Rancho Cordova.

A necropsy of the birds revealed lethal amounts of furadan in their tissues. As a result the use of furadan was banned by the Napa County Agricultural Commission.

Our congratulations to Steve Lorente and our thanks for once again proving that **one person can make a difference!**

Bird Sightings

March & April 1995

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.

- **Pacific Loon:** 34,000 birds passed Pigeon Point, heading north in six hours (PJM), illustrating how abundant this species can be along our coast in migration.
- **Common Loon:** An impressive 1270 passed Pigeon Point on April 11 (BS)
- **Red-necked Grebe:** A dozen of these normally rare birds were observed from Pigeon Point during the season with a peak count of four birds seen flying north on March 29. (PJM)
- **Black-footed Albatross:** Seven were spotted from Pigeon Point this season, usually following ships. (BS, RSTh)
- **Sooty Shearwater:** 7400 at Pigeon Point on March 6 was a remarkable count so early in the year.
- **Black-vented Shearwater:** 171 at Pigeon Point was the season's high count (PJM) and the numbers dropped sharply thereafter.
- **Fork-tailed Storm Petrel:** The most noteworthy phenomenon was the presence of a number of storm-blown birds, normally found many miles offshore. The first was at Pigeon Point on April 16 (RSTh), followed by another on the next day (PJM). Six enjoyed the calm waters inside Pillar Point Harbor on April 18 (BS). One was even reported on a rain pond at Año Nuevo State Reserve on April 18 (PK).
- **Brant:** Flocks of northbound migrants estimated to be in excess of 21,000 were moving past Pigeon Point on April 11 (BS).
- **Ross' Goose:** A straggler at Pescadero Marsh from March 24 to 26 was unexpected (BMcK, DPo, RSTh).
- **Canada Goose (Aleutian subspecies):** One individual from this endangered form was seen on March 4. (BMcK, DPo, RSTh).
- **Wood Duck:** Twelve along Butano Creek near Pescadero on March 12

(AME) was an encouraging observation. Hopefully some will remain to nest locally.

- **Blue-winged Teal:** Always a treat to see, a drake was at Pescadero Marsh on March 24 (RSTh)
- **Tufted Duck x Scaup Hybrid:** This fouled-up fowl caused some initial confusion. When it was found on the Bay near Oyster Point (DH), it was first thought to be a male tufted duck. However, a closer scrutiny the following day proved it to be a hybrid with a scaup (RSTh). This extremely rare hybrid has been observed previously in the state.
- **Oldsquaw:** Four wintering birds were still in the Pillar Point Harbor on March 21 (RSTh) with two lingering on at least until April 30 (JHu, BMcK, DPo)
- **Surf Scoter:** A major migratory movement passed Pigeon Point on March 19 (RSTh). An estimated 5600 flew by in less than four minutes! 35,000 birds were tallied before the flock passed.
- **Black Scoter:** Twenty four of this least common scoter were seen at Pacifica on March 13 (DSi).
- **Bald Eagle:** An adult at Crystal Springs Reservoir on March 3 (MP) was about as late as our wintering bird normally stays.
- **Wild Turkey:** Birds released in our county years ago are apparently prospering in our woodlands. Birds were seen along Highway 84 in La Honda and at Butano Park this season. (BMcK). *(These should now be "countable" as they seem to have become well established, especially at Filoli and on the Watershed. Ed.)*
- **Golden Plover:** An individual which eluded specific identification as to Pacific or American was briefly spotted flying over the plowed fields at Pigeon Point on April 20 (PJM).
- **Solitary Sandpiper:** Rare in any season, one was at Bean Hollow Lake on April 24 (BA).
- **Wilson's Phalarope:** One at the Dumbarton Bridge saltponds near

Menlo Park on March 5 (RSTh) was remarkable for this season.

- **Red Phalarope:** Small numbers of these pelagic shorebirds were blown onshore by high winds. Most noteworthy were two on the Bay at Foster City on March 25 (AW) and one at the Dumbarton Bridge saltponds on March 23 (RSTh).
- **Franklin's Gull:** One in handsome breeding plumage was foraging in plowed fields at Pigeon Point from April 30 to May 2 (RSTh, FT, DPo, BMcK).
- **Little Gull:** This Eurasian vagrant was seen flying past Pigeon Point on April 11 (BS) for one of very few county records.
- **Heermann's Gull:** An adult defending a nest site on Año Nuevo Island on March 11 (TS) was undoubtedly the same bird that tried, unsuccessfully, to nest there last year. *for only the third North American nesting record!*
- **Glaucous Gull:** Five of these "great white gulls of the North" were found along the coast from March 6 to 26.
- **Black-legged Kittiwake:** A peak count of 12 was made on Pigeon Point on March 4 (RSTh).
- **Elegant Tern:** A pair in breeding plumage were seen at Pescadero Creek mouth on April 30. (JH, BMcK, DPo). Despite a very few previous spring records, this bird is normally a late summer and early fall arrival.
- **Least Tern:** Three of these tiny endangered beach birds winged past Pigeon Point on April 11 (BS).
- **Marbled Murrelet:** Pigeon Point Counts of 77 on April 11 (BS) and 58 on April 17 (PJM) were significant.
- **Ancient Murrelet:** The high count was eight at Pigeon Point on March 27 (PJM).
- **Tufted Puffin:** One was seen on March 4 (DPo, BMcK, RSTh) and a pair was spotted on April 24 (BS), both at Pigeon Point

(Continued on Page Six)

Elkhorn Slough

Alan Baldridge, John Warriner and
Mark Silberstein

Elkhorn Slough, in the central Monterey Bay area, has long been known as a birding "hot spot" with diverse terrain and a juxtaposition of many habitats. The annual Moss Landing Christmas Count is an index of the tremendous diversity of species utilizing this protected area. In 1994 this count ranked first in the nation with 214 species. *(It should also be noted that this count has become an informal rendezvous for all of Northern California's "industrial strength" birders. Our Crystal Springs Count is usually the most productive in terms of species seen as compared to number of participants. In short, get out there and participate in our Christmas Counts! ...The Editor)*

Since the first conservation land acquisitions in the '70's, the protected holdings have expanded to 4000 acres. In the Reserve's North Marsh, restoration and a recent acquisition have increased the foraging and roosting habitat of water-associated birds by 125 acres. This area is becoming increasingly important as other habitats in the slough are modified by tidal scour and seismic subsidence.

The great egret and great blue heron colony on the Reserve has grown to 90 active nests. Nesting sites are monitored with the use of a tethered helium balloon and camera system. The colony began in 1985 with a single pair of herons and is

the first recorded nesting site for both species in either Santa Cruz or Monterey Counties.

Caspian terns have reestablished a breeding rookery in the Slough after an absence of nearly 15 years. Beginning with a few pairs in 1991, the colony has doubled every year. In 1994 Jennifer Parkin of the Moss Landing Marine Laboratories counted 150 breeding pairs with 187 nests and 321 eggs. This colony in the restored South Marsh also attracted a single black skimmer, a species which has the potential to breed in the same area.

Sequoia Audubon Society



Reserve researchers are managing the vegetation of the nest island to maintain its attractiveness to nesting terns.

Endangered snowy plovers have also shown a dramatic increase in breeding success in this central part of Monterey Bay. Fledgling numbers increased from 90 to 125 last year. This increase is attributable to improved habitat on the Moss Landing Wildlife Area and to the red fox control program at the Salinas River Wildlife Area.

These successes have followed a long-term program of habitat improvement and continued efforts to stem marshland loss due to tidal scour arising out of the "improvements" made over the years in Moss Landing harbor.

The slough is a living laboratory. Dr. Jim Harvey and his students from the Moss Landing Marine Lab are studying the movement patterns of harbor seals using telemetry and are examining foraging behavior, prey species utilization and pollutant levels in seal blood. Dr. Andy Thompson of the University of Santa Clara is studying mate selection and foraging ecology of the plain titmouse. Trish Lowe is examining shorebird use of marshes with differing vegetative cover.

The Reserve is managed by the California Department of Fish and Game in cooperation with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The Elkhorn Slough Foundation is a non-profit foundation dedicated to working with local agricultural interests to develop environmentally sound cultivation practices and to expand buffer zones above the wetlands.

In addition to the research and habitat work, a field-based education program on the Reserve provides a vital outdoor experience for over 10,000 students each year. 1500 teachers have been trained at the Reserve to use the slough as an environmental classroom. Quarterly workshops bring in more of the educational community each year.

The coalition of public and private interests in the slough has been a cornerstone of program success. The Foundation works with the Nature Conservancy, the DFG and the Coastal Conservancy to mobilize volunteers to protect the slough. The Foundation is the vehicle for community support of slough programs and

serves as a clearinghouse for activities in the watershed.

The Reserve has a visitor center and a network of trails for public visitors. Check lists of birds, amphibians, reptiles and mammals are available through the Foundation. In addition to its triennial newsletter, the Foundation maintains a library on the Slough. The Elkhorn Slough Foundation is a membership supported organization.

For more information write ESF, PO Box 267, Moss Landing, CA 95039 or call (408) 728-5939.

Sacramento Hosts Largest Purple Martin Colony In West

Studies conducted from 1992 through 1994 show that Sacramento has one of the largest urban colonies of purple martins anywhere. It may be the only urban colony in California and the largest concentration of martins in the West.

There are about 100 pairs of martins nesting at four Sacramento locations - the I Street Bridge near the Railway Museum, I-50 at 20th Street, the CALTRANS yard near I-50, 34th and T Streets and Highway 99 at Broadway.

The research on these sites is ongoing, through volunteers from Sacramento Audubon Society and is under the direction of Brian Williams.

Bobelaine Sanctuary Hit By Floods

Sacramento Audubon's Bobelaine Sanctuary, an area of riparian growth along the Sacramento River, was hard hit by floods this year. This refuge is in the river's flood-plain and this type of natural occurrence is expected periodically. Nevertheless, efforts are being made to clear hiking trails and firebreak areas.

Bobelaine Sanctuary is a private preserve managed by Sacramento Audubon and is a known nesting area for the endangered yellow-billed cuckoo.

Bird Sightings

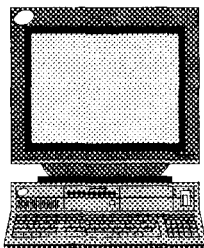
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- **Common Poorwill:** A pair of these locally rare, nocturnal moth-catchers were seen along Gazos Creek Road on March 25 to 31 (GJS, DN, BMcK).
- **Calliope Hummingbird:** There are few county records for this montane midget. This one was seen at a feeder in El Granada on April 24 (BS).
- **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker:** One at Canyon Road near Pescadero from March 24 to 29 (BMcK) was joined by a...
- **Red-naped Sapsucker:** on March 28 (BMcK). The red-naped stayed until April 2. Both were "sucking sap" from an acacia tree.
- **Clark's Nutcracker:** One seen flying along the ridge at Cascade Ranch near Año Nuevo on March 27 (GS) is only our second county record.
- **Magpie:** A magpie (unidentified as to species) was seen from the train at Millbrae on March 16 (FT). Yellow-billed magpies were resident on the Peninsula decades ago, but any magpie would be a rare stray these days.
- **McGillivray's Warbler:** One early arrival showed up at Gazos Creek on April 2 (DPo).
- **Summer Tanager:** The wintering bird along San Francisquito Creek in Menlo Park was still there, chattering loudly, on March 20 (SET).
- **Grasshopper Sparrow:** One early arrival was back on his breeding turf on Cloverdale Road near Butano Park on April 12 (PJM).
- **Swamp Sparrow:** One was skulking along lower Butano Creek near Pescadero from March 23 to 30 (BMcK, DPo).
- **White-throated Sparrow:** A wintering bird was still present at a La Honda feeder on April 25 (CG, RF). Another late lingerer still in Half Moon Bay on March 28, had been there since October (GD).

Observers

Gary Deghi (GD) Al Eisner (AE) Roland Franz (RF)
Cathy Gill (CG) Donna Heim (DH) Jim Hully (JH)
Paul Keel (PK) Bert McKee (BMcK)
Peter Metropulos (PJM) David Nelson (DN)
Mike Petrosky (MP) David Powell (DPo)
Barry Sauppe (BS) Tom Schuster (TS)
Dan Singer (DS) Gary Strachen (GS)
Scott Terrill (ST) Ron Thom (RSTh)
Adam Weiner (AW)

MROSSD Goes On-Line



The Mid-Peninsula Regional Open Space District has gone on-line with the Internet. In addition to the Internet the District is also on line with Virtual Valley, a

much smaller local network sponsored by Metro newspapers and KTEH television.

This network includes many government and municipal "conference areas" and is free (except for the usual toll charges). Virtual Valley can be reached by direct access from your computer modem at 408-999-0966.

The district's e-mail address is <mrossd@netcom.com.

...And High Tech

MROSSD continues to be one of the most generous of park agencies and authorities in its treatment of mountain bikers. Bikers should be aware however that the District's board has approved the continued use of radar on its trails to monitor mountain bike use and enforce the District's speed regulations.

...And Low Tech

The District Board also expressed satisfaction with the Ranger Bicycle Patrol Program and voted to make it permanent. So, look out for them pedalin' Smoky Bears.

◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆
The Greenbelt Alliance has also gone onto the Internet's World Wide Web. Look for them at <http://www.rahul.net/gba/>
◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆

For 5000 years the Great Wall of China has been the largest man-made object on earth. In 1994 it was surpassed by the Fresh Kills Landfill on Long Island.

Shuford Teaches Mono Lake Classes

Dave Shuford of Point Reyes Bird Observatory is well known to most SAS birders as he periodically leads field trips for us to Bolinas Lagoon. He is a master birder and a fine teacher and has done much of PRBO's field work on the gulls of Mono Lake and the shorebirds east of the Sierras. This year he will be teaching two courses on behalf of the Mono Lake Foundation.

June 3-4 **BIRDS OF THE MONO BASIN** will concentrate on the 70 most common species found in the Basin and emphasize identification by both eye and ear.

August 19-20 **FALL BIRD MIGRATION OF THE EASTERN SIERRA** will emphasize the diversity of the migrating species from the Mono Lake Basin to Lake Crowley.

Courses are \$65 for Mono Lake Committee members, \$80 for all others. To enroll or register call the Mono Lake Committee at 619-647-6595 and ask for the field trip desk.

Courses in Geology, Hydrology, Photography and Wildflowers are also being conducted by the Foundation. Call the number given above for more information.

Well, I Swan!

Virginia is one of the few states where swans can be legally hunted, and the United States is the only nation where white swans are hunted for sport. A bill has been introduced in the Virginia legislature to outlaw this practice.

Meanwhile, some wildlife biologists in the Northeast are quietly contemplating ways - including hunting - to control the explosion in the mute swan population. Once rare in the area, and uncommon only a decade ago, they are now a source of concern in many states. Imagine a bad-tempered, aggressive starling five feet tall and weighing 35 pounds! Do you wonder why wildlife biologists are worried?

The Feather Duster

Cliff Richer
Cowbirds and Bird
Counts

When I grew up in northern New Hampshire our blackbird flocks were almost entirely composed of common grackles. Cowbirds were uncommon and hard to find. Today they are everywhere. Yet, the local songbirds seem unaffected. White-throated sparrows and yellow-rumped warblers are harder to find than I remember, but I can't be sure that there really have been any changes except in my vision. Thirty to fifty year old memories are not terribly reliable and there are no historic records for this under-birded area.

The reason may be found in the food-gathering abilities of the wood thrush. Scientists recently found that wood thrushes are often the victims of cowbirds. However, unlike smaller birds, the thrush chicks are big enough to defend themselves from the attacks of the cowbird chick. And since the wood thrush is a very efficient food finder, it raises both its own brood *and* the cowbird whas warblers and sparrows usually *not* feeding just the cowbird.

Wood thrushes are abundant in New Hampshire. Could they be sacrificial hosts? By raising the cowbirds they may be allowing the smaller songbirds to escape unscathed. It would be an interesting theory for some ornithologist to study.

For the last 10 years or more, the breeding birds of the Mono Basin have been censused. Here, too, the numbers of cowbirds have increased dramatically. But Mono's local songbirds *have* been affected and their decline is well documented. Peter Metropulos and others believe the increase in cowbirds is closely linked to an increase in the numbers of bird feeders in the area. This is certainly a factor, but it's unlikely that it's the main cause of the cowbird explosion. The statistics cry out for a scientific study to determine the other factors.

Closer to home, Luis Baptista and Pepper Trail have studied the impact of cowbirds on white-crowned sparrows breeding in the Bay Area. Fifteen years ago *about* 5% of white-crowned sparrow nests suffered cowbird parasitism. This

rate is now 40-50%! Extrapolating forward, Baptista and Pepper conclude that our white-crowned population will decline by 50% in ten years and could be wiped out by 2050 *from this cause alone*.

The first case involves my own eyeball observations and a hypothesis. Without data my hypothesis is nearly impossible to prove (or disprove). The second case is supported by documentation showing the trend. In this case Peter's conclusions constitute a sound basis for scientific study. The third is supported by many years of documented professional and amateur bird study *in all seasons* and is a sound basis for prediction.

Taken together these cases are a compelling argument for documenting your sightings and for bird censusing, not just in midwinter, but in spring, summer and fall as well. Shouldn't we be holding an Easter Count, an Independence Day Count and a Labor Day Count as well as a Christmas Count?

PCL Organizes Clean Team



The Planning and Conservation League is in the process of organizing a letter-writing network to help stop some of the anti-environmental bills they are now encountering in the California Assembly and Senate.

The letter-writing and local activists will be called the Clean Team and will consist of PCL members and members from its sponsor groups.

It is particularly important for PCL to determine which legislators are on the most key committees and match these names with the names of their activists in order to justify the cost of this effort.

Some of the legislation being proposed includes:

- Repeal of the California Endangered Species Act
- Restrict Environmental Standards to Federal Levels
- Eliminate clear-cutting restrictions
- Reduce re-forestation requirements
- Encourage exportation of raw logs.
- Require cattle grazing in state parks and refuges

- Allow Orange County to sell off parklands to pay its debt.
- Eliminate the future electric vehicle requirements.
- Build the Peripheral Canal (again!)
- Eliminate the roadside diesel smog check.
- Weaken the law requiring a 50% reduction in landfill waste
- Repeal environmental labeling
- Repeal container recycling
- Postpone plastic recycling

If you want to be a member of the Clean Team, contact the PCL by writing to:

The Planning and Conservation League
926 J Street, Suite 612
Sacramento, CA 95814
You can also call them at 916-444-8726.

The PCL is a membership organization devoted to the passage of sound environmental and planning legislation in California. Its annual membership dues are \$20 for students and seniors and \$33 for all others. You may have to join (and should join) in order to become a Clean Team player.

Parrots? In Foster City?

James K. Sayre

I spotted a parrot flying near the Foster City Boulevard Post Office at 8 AM on April 23. This was a single individual, flying rapidly, (*You won't believe how fast parrots can fly until you try to identify one against a "high sky" ..Editor*) with its characteristic squawk. I had seen a flock of 19 birds in Mountain View two years ago and small flocks have been spotted from San Jose to Burlingame.

Originally a native of Central and South America, this yellow-headed parrot (*Amazona oratrix*) has been living in California since 1961. Its a medium sized bird, with a green body and some yellow on the head. Once it has escaped this bird becomes quite shy and stays in the tops of trees well away from its former captors.

It seems to me that these birds must be breeding and reproducing their numbers. Is anyone trying to determine if this is now a valid California species?

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.

**Dante and Betty Fernandez, The Forcier Family, Virginia Ross Geller, Little Hands North, Betty C. Pex,
Larry and Fran Prager, Phyllis Cole and Lee Yamada, JoAnn and Gene Zlatunich**

in Memory of

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John and Nena Padley

In Memory of

Martin Alley

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.

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