



sequoia needles

Bulletin of the Sequoia Audubon Society
San Mateo County Volume 46, No. 1
September, 1996

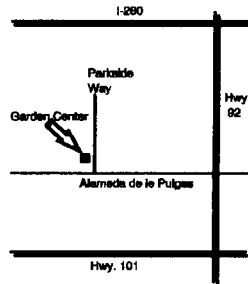
This Month's Program



California Bluebird Recovery Program

Don Yoder, this month's speaker, is a native of Illinois where his first contact with Bluebirds, and bird watching in general, started. A 50 year resident of California, he is retired and resides in Walnut Creek where he maintains his own nest box trail of 100+ boxes.

He is the originator-Program Director of the California Bluebird Recovery Program. He is a member of the Mt. Diablo Audubon Society and the North American Bluebird Society.

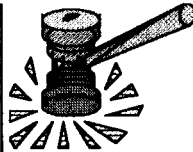


Bay/Coast Cleanup Day

The SAS conservation committee is once again teaming up with the city of South San Francisco to clean up the Bay. The date is Saturday, September 21. Meeting time is 8:30 a.m. Bring the whole family for a morning by the Bay. Gloves and bags are provided, as are lots of goodies (edible and otherwise). Take the Grand Ave. exit off 101 to Haskins Way and follow the signs. There is parking available. For more information call Cheryl Wade at 877-8540, City of South San Francisco.

Now Pinch-Hitting For...

In an unusual move, retiring President Julia Mandeville asked the June General Meeting to approve a change in our Board makeup. Normally, the retiring President remains on the Board of Directors as Past President. Because Julia was moving to San Francisco, she asked the General Meeting to approve the continuation of Anne Moser on the Board as Past President. The request was approved without opposition and we are happy to announce that Anne Moser will continue on the Board.



From The President

Francis Toldi

I have been a member of the Audubon Society for 19 years, over 30 if you count my family membership when I was growing up. In past years I always enjoyed receiving *Audubon Magazine* and the local newsletters from the Audubon group within the region I was living, but I was never very active in chapter affairs.

About five years ago I was very frustrated by some actions taken by National Audubon's leadership. I wrote a letter to the *Needles* expressing my frustration and saying we should all be asking exactly what our affiliation with National Audubon did for our organization. My letter ran in the *Needles* --, and - not surprisingly - drew a spirited opposition from the Sequoia Audubon Board. An article appeared in the next *Needles* that took issue with my concerns and extolled the many virtues of National. (Your editor had nothing to do with the reply and admits to having sneakily solicited the original letter.)

Imagine my surprise when within a few weeks the author of the reply invited me to attend a Sequoia Audubon planning retreat. He said the retreat was to help Sequoia identify its priorities and chart its course for the next few years. He said the organization would benefit from the expression and careful exploration of all views. I attended the retreat, meeting for the first time a number of people that have become close colleagues and good friends in the years since.

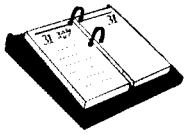
One very experienced board member said something that has stuck with me in the years since. "If you want this organization to be something, then you have to make it happen."

If Sequoia is to be anything other than the coincidental residence of some contributors to National Audubon then you have to prove to the world Sequoia's independent viability. In the years since I have put in many hours for Sequoia leading field trips, participating on the Board of Directors, working on the Breeding Bird Atlas, Christmas Bird Counts, the *Birding the San Francisco Peninsula* book revision, and writing the occasional allegedly entertaining piece for the *Needles*.

My experience with Sequoia has taught me an important lesson about Sequoia Audubon, and about life itself. This organization is made up of a small group of dedicated activists surrounded by a larger community of often silent but faithful supporters. We are all the organization; we all have a role to play. There is not one Sequoia identity, one project. To some Sequoia is the publisher of *Needles*, to others a provider of field trips. Some are drawn by our strong commitment to conservation. Others just want bird seed or information on local birds. We are all correct; Sequoia is all of those things.

(Continued on Page Two)

The mission of Sequoia Audubon Society is to participate actively in environmental education, and conservation and in the restoration, preservation, protection and enjoyment of our native natural resources with emphasis on birds and their habitats.



The S A S Calendar

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 5 - BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING at the Sequoia Audubon Office at 7:30 PM. All members are welcome. Please call ahead to be sure to confirm time and space.

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 12 - GENERAL MEETING at the San Mateo Garden Center on the Alameda at Parkside. An informal get-together begins at 7:30 with the General Meeting and Program at 8 PM.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 14 PHIPPS RANCH FIELD TRIP - The Phipps Ranch is best known for its outstanding produce stand but in recent years has become renowned as a year-round birding hot spot. At various times this ranch has yielded an astounding varieties of unusual and rare wintering birds. We'll meet at the Phipps Farm Stand at 9 AM. To get there take Hwy. 1 to Pescadero Rd. Follow Pescadero Rd. through town until you come to the farm stand. Park away from the buildings so as to leave the nearest spaces for customers.

LEADER DAN KELLER 726-3306

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 19 - POINT REYES FIELD TRIP. A search through the "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. Sturdy shoes are recommended. Clothing should be layered since the weather on Pt. Reyes is extremely changeable. Fall is normally the most pleasant time of year on Point Reyes but remember that it has the coolest average summer temperature in the continental US. 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 but if the birds are cooperative and their is interest we may continue on to Abbott's Lagoon.

LEADER; JUDI SPITLER 355-9362

SATURDAY, SEPT 21 - COASTAL CLEANUP DAY - See Page One for details on our Bayside Cleanup. There will also be cleanups all along the coast sponsored by other groups.

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 29 - PELAGIC BIRDS FROM SHORE - At Pigeon Point the deep-water channel comes closer to shore than at any other point on the Pacific Coast. In addition to the expected shearwaters (at least two species), marbled murrelets and rhinoceros auklets, rarities are possible from this spot. Meet outside the gate to the lighthouse premises at 9 AM. To get there take Hwy 1 south and take a right at the first lighthouse south (approximately 22 miles) of Half Moon Bay. Because of work conflicts, Barry Sauppe has passed the leadership of this trip on to the young and very able Bert McKee. Barry may co-lead for the first hour or two if he can arrange it.

LEADER BERT McKEE 879-0977

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 29 - THE FLORA AND FAUNA OF SAN BRUNO MOUNTAIN - Co-sponsored by The Friends of San Bruno Mountain, a new group primarily interested in habitat restoration. San Bruno Mountain stands in

isolation, looking a bit out of place alongside the skyscrapers of San Francisco. Yet it is home to a wealth of wildlife, hidden in pockets of woodland and in sheltered canyons. We will be exploring its unique flora and fauna during this half-day trip. We will meet at the San Bruno Mountain Park ranger station at 9:00 AM. To reach the ranger station: From northbound U.S. 101, take the Bayshore Blvd./Brisbane exit, and go north on Bayshore Blvd. about 1½ miles to Guadalupe Canyon Parkway. Turn left on Guadalupe Canyon Parkway and follow the road about two miles to the station.

LEADER

AL SEUBERT

588-9025

From The President

(Continued from Page One)

Ironically, National has made great improvements from those earlier trying years. National recently articulated new priorities and organization and has a new energetic president, brimming with ideas and respect for local chapters. Many, perhaps most, of my concerns seem to have been met. It is an optimistic time, however challenging.

Whoever you are reading this, we value and need your involvement. **There is still much to be done and we are chronically short of help.** Come see how interesting our programs are at general meetings, what a nice bunch of people are there every month! Come on a field trip. Come help with a project, join a committee, help at the office. Come express your opinion. Write me a letter, give me a call. Agree, or disagree with what you read in the *Needlex*, what I'm saying here. Come help us make this organization into something special. We are already well on the way, but need your help to make it better.

Quail Return to Coyote Hills

Over the years Coyote Hill Regional Park's resident population of California Quail has been eradicated by the introduction of non-native wildlife - feral cats, dogs and particularly red foxes.

When the nearby National Wildlife Refuge's fox elimination program began to show results, four pairs of California Quail were re-introduced to the park. These birds nested successfully and Naturalist Ranger Dave Riensche believes that by the year 2000, the park's quail population could be back to pre-fox levels.

All of the work is performed by volunteers and without public funds. If you wish to help you can "Adopt a Quail" through the Regional Parks Foundation in Oakland. Call 510-635-0138 for more information.

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The bombardier beetle emits a burning, explosive chemical jet capable of killing small predators and irritating large ones. The substance is stored in the beetle's body as two harmless substances. The beetle avoids burning itself or blowing itself apart by mixing the chemicals in very tiny quantities, but is effective because it does it very rapidly - 500 times each second.





## 1908-1996

On July 28, 1996, Roger Tory Peterson succumbed to the last of a series of strokes. Although his health had been failing for a number of years, his death came as a shock to all of us in the birding community. Roger is rightfully called the father of modern birding. Birding today owes its popularity to two inventions - the center focus binocular and the field guide. Roger had nothing to do with the first and everything to do with the latter. Prior to the publication of his first guide in 1934, bird-watchers had to depend on cumbersome non-portable reference works.

That first field guide was rejected officially by four publishers before being accepted by Houghton Mifflin, a small Boston publisher of school books. The concept had, in fact, been rejected by at least a dozen publishers. The four were those to which the book was actually submitted. Even then Houghton Mifflin "hedged" its bets. Its first printing was only 2000 copies and Roger got no royalty on the first 1000 sold. They refused to gamble on color plates, so all the illustrations were black and white and they were all grouped together in the center of the book so that they could use cheaper paper for the text.

It was a runaway best-seller by those depression-era standards and someone - Roger, the publisher or their lawyers - came up with the idea of patenting the "field mark system" and to this day the Peterson series of guides are the only ones where you will find little arrows pointing to the distinguishing characteristics of the bird, plant or creature illustrated. Today, the Peterson Field Guide series, most written by others than Peterson, outsells the rest of the Houghton Mifflin line combined.

That first field guide was inadequate by present standards and contained many mistakes. Thus the first limited printing proved to be a godsend. Roger accepted comments from other birders and improved the guide with each new edition and printing. His expertise was still concentrated in the northeast and his field guide continued to be the "bible" for that region until the

## Tentative Field Trip Schedule 1996-1997

| Day       | Date     | Name                                    | Leader                  |
|-----------|----------|-----------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Saturday  | 9/14/96  | Phipps Ranch                            | Dan Keller              |
| Thursday  | 9/19/96  | Point Reyes                             | Judi Spiller            |
| Saturday  | 9/21/96  | Bay Clean-Up (SSF)                      | Cheryl Wade             |
| Sunday    | 9/29/96  | Pelagic Birds from Shore (Pigeon Point) | Bert McKee              |
| Saturday  | 10/6/96  | San Pedro Valley County Park            | Cliff Richer            |
| Wednesday | 10/9/96  | Hayward Regional Shoreline              | Nick Coiro              |
| Saturday  | 10/12/96 | Hawk Hill at GGNRA                      | Leslie Flint            |
| Sunday    | 10/13/96 | Burleigh-Murray State Park              | Carol Miller            |
| Wednesday | 11/6/96  | Coyote Point                            | Nick Coiro              |
| Saturday  | 11/16/96 | Sharp Park - Shore and Golf Course      | Judy Spiller            |
| Wednesday | 12/4/96  | Redwood Shores                          | Nick Coiro              |
| Sunday    | 12/12/96 | Princeton Harbor                        | Dan Keller              |
| Saturday  | 12/21/96 | Crystal Springs Christmas Count         | Dan Keller              |
| Saturday  | 12/28/96 | Ano Nuevo Christmas Count               | Dan Keller              |
| Wednesday | 1/8/97   | Foster City                             | Nick Coiro              |
| Sunday    | 1/26/97  | Altamont Pass                           | Nick Coiro/Linda Davies |
| Sunday    | 2/2/97   | Woodbridge Road, Thornton               | Cliff Richer            |
| Saturday  | 2/8/97   | Foster City                             | Nick Coiro              |
| Saturday  | 2/8/97   | Children's Field Trip                   | TBA                     |
| Saturday  | 2/16/97  | Beginners' Trip - Palo Alto Baylands    | Francis Toldi           |
| Saturday  | 2/15/97  | Tule Lake and Klamath Lake Refuges for  | Cliff Richer            |
| Sunday    | 2/16/97  | Eagles of the Klamath Basin*            |                         |
| Monday    | 2/17/97  | over Presidents' Day Weekend            |                         |
| Saturday  | 2/22/97  | Filoli                                  | Donna Petersen          |
| Saturday  | 3/8/97   | Natural History of Pescadero Marsh      | John & Nina Padley      |
| Saturday  | 3/15/97  | Sawyer Camp Trail                       | Werner Schmann          |
| Sunday    | 4/13/97  | Mines Road                              | Cliff Richer            |
| Thursday  | 4/24/97  | San Pedro Valley County Park            | Judi Spiller            |
| Saturday  | 4/27/97  | San Bruno Mountain                      | Al Seibert              |
| Saturday  | 5/3/97   | Children's Field Trip                   | TBA                     |
| Sunday    | 5/4/97   | Jasper Ridge*                           | TBA                     |
| Sunday    | 5/10/97  | Williams Sisters' Ranch*                | Francis Toldi           |
| Friday    | 5/23/97  | Lee Vining for                          | Cliff Richer            |
| Saturday  | 5/24/97  | Birds of Mono Basin                     |                         |
| Sunday    | 5/25/97  | and Tioga Pass*                         |                         |
| Monday    | 5/26/97  | over Memorial Day Weekend               |                         |

\* Indicates that reservations are needed.

Trips outlined by a dark border are multi-day trips. Meeting places and itineraries are highly dependent on weather and the leader must have the names of the participants in order to keep them advised of any changes.

All trips are open and suitable for beginners unless specifically marked. Trips designated as Beginner's Trips also include advice on binoculars and telescopes and a short open-ended discussion on birding and the environment.

While this schedule will be adhered to whenever possible, readers should recognize that it is subject to change.

Trips may be added, cancelled or dates may be changed.

All changes will be announced in the Needles as far in advance as possible.

publication of the National Geographic guide. Indeed, I had never even seen another field guide until I moved from Massachusetts to California in 1980.

I saw him only once, too briefly to call it a meeting, at a book-signing at the Nature Company in San Francisco. The place was a madhouse, with a long line waiting to have their guides signed by him. Some people in the line were carrying several guides of varying vintage. He was aristocratic, regal, harried and tired. He was trying valiantly to be accommodating as a number of people in the line tried to engage him in conversation. I decided not to wait. I will regret it forever. Good-by Roger...and good birding.

---Cliff Richer



### Eileen Jennis-Sauppe

It is easy to be upset about the frequent cases of habitat destruction and abuse reported in the news or witnessed in our daily lives. Sometimes it does a world of good to go out into the open spaces of San Mateo county and help put the pieces back together. Here is an overview of some restoration activities right here in our own beautiful backyard. All of these projects require work that could be damaging to hands and nails *so don't forget to bring your work gloves.*

**QUARRY PARK:** Second Sunday of the month, 9:30 a.m. Corner of Santa Maria Avenue and Columbus Street in El Granada. This is a new 40 acre park in progress. Help maintain the lower park area or join in efforts to restore the creek and add riparian vegetation. Long term goals include ridding the park of exotics, and taking struggling native plants from the understory of the Eucalyptus groves and transplanting them to where they will have a better chance. A field trip is being planned this month for teachers and educators. The Committee for Midcoast Community Parks hopes to generate interest in an outdoor education program beginning in the Spring. For more information and details of the field trip call Susan Ayers-Matonis at 726-5190, or Barbara Vanderwerf at 726-3123.

**McNEE RANCH STATE PARK:** Third Sunday of the month, 10:30 a.m. Meet at the access gate just north of the Chart House on the east side of Highway 1 between Pacifica and Moss Beach. Park in the beach parking lot on the west side, or in the pull-out in front of the bright yellow entrance gate to the park on the east side of the highway. Help rid Montara Mountain of exotics and experience great ocean views. This area is rich in unique, indigenous coastal mountain plant communities. For more information call Chuck Kozak at 728-8239.

**PACIFICA STATE BEACH:** The fourth Sunday of the month, 9:00 a.m. Meet at the Pacifica Community Center parking lot on the corner of Highway 1 and Crespi Drive. Join Pacifica's Environmental Family as they remove iceplant

and make room for native plants on the dunes and in the wetland area at the north end of the beach. For more information call Shirley Suhrer at 359-0892.

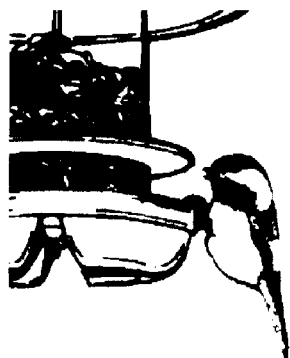
**SAN PEDRO VALLEY PARK:** The SPV Volunteers get together on the second and third Saturdays of every month for trails work and habitat restoration. The \$3 parking fee is waived for volunteers. The second Saturday is devoted primarily to trail maintenance, but there are always a few people working on habitat restoration. This group meets at 8 a.m. at the Visitor's Center at 600 Oddstad Boulevard in Pacifica. The third Saturday is devoted to habitat restoration and the volunteers meet at 9 a.m. at the Visitor's Center. Call 355-5454 to indicate your interest. This is an answering machine and it may take a few days for one of the volunteers to get back to you, so be patient. The Volunteers also have an independent work program under which a person can work on their own pre-approved pet project on their own time schedule. The San Pedro Valley Park Volunteers are working with Pacifica's Environmental Family to establish native plant gardens at the park and at the Sanchez Adobe. Work on these projects is expected to be start this fall.

**SAN BRUNO MOUNTAIN:** Fourth Sunday of the month, 9:00 a.m. Meet at the main entrance to the park off Guadalupe Canyon Parkway. The \$3.00 fee for parking is waived for weeding parties. Join Friends of San Bruno Mountain's volunteer weeding team. Light weeding is done near the main entrance. No experience is necessary and children are welcome as long as they can follow safety instructions. Tools are provided, or bring your own favorites. Sturdy shoes, layered clothing, a sun hat, liquids and snacks are recommended. On Saturday, October 26, there is a tentative plan for ground-breaking and a first symbolic planting of the Native Plant Botanical Garden. This is planned to be a full-fledged community event complete with dignitaries and an appropriate dedication ceremony for the garden. All the plants and seeds are ready and everyone who attends will have a chance to plant something. For more information on the volunteer crews and details of this symbolic planting day call Kathy or Louis Manus at 584-7320.

**EDGEWOOD PARK:** Various dates and times during the week and on week-ends. This is a coordinated effort involving the Friends of Edgewood Park, The Volunteer Horse Patrol, and Matt Leddy's horticulture class at the College of San Mateo. They are working to restore a hillside that has been scarred and eroded by off-road vehicles and dirt bikes. The horticulture students are sowing seeds gathered by volunteers and replanting native purple needle grass and slender needle grass. These are the delicate perennial bunch grasses that are now in summer hibernation. It is crucial that the restoration areas not be disturbed during this period because the growing cycle of these plants can be broken. So spread the word - Don't walk off the trails! Two weed abatement groups go out to eradicate exotic plants, mostly the rampant star thistle. For the dates and times of these weeding groups call Ellie Hess at 368-8993 or Ken Himes at 591-8560. There are several acres of eroded park land that will need to be restored once the current bunch grass program has been completed. For more information on this call Suzanne Sommers at 325-2519, or Chris Romano at 361-8235. They would also appreciate ongoing bird survey data by SAS members who are willing to come to the park on a regular basis. The County is re-working its plan for the Preserve and updated bird lists are important.

**SIERRA CLUB** meets on weekend mornings, at various dates and locations. This summer they began a cleanup of several creeks in and around the city of San Mateo, starting with Laurelwood Park Creek. The program is funded by a grant for the restoration of urban creeks, and this will be a continuing effort throughout the year. SAS members who can help identify the birds of the riparian habitats being restored are especially appreciated. For future dates, times and locations call Maurianna Webster at 359-1573.

**SAN FRANCISQUITO CREEK:** Various locations and times, sponsored by Bay Area Action. They are sponsoring work days on San Francisquito Creek, bordering San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties. For specific times and locations along the creek call the Bay Area Action office at 321-1994.



## FALL 1996 SAS BIRDSEED SALE - - - ORDER FORM

ALL ORDERS WITH PAYMENT MUST BE RECEIVED BY WEDNESDAY OCTOBER 9TH

Proceeds support local Audubon conservation and education programs

Please check preferred pickup location. Pickup dates will be October 17-20, 1996 with details to be advised later.

☐ San Bruno
                    
 ☐ Burlingame
                    
 ☐ Belmont
                    
 ☐ Half Moon Bay  
☐ Pacifica
                    
 ☐ San Mateo
                    
 ☐ Atherton

|                                             |                      |  |  | # BAGS | \$-COST-\$ |
|---------------------------------------------|----------------------|--|--|--------|------------|
| AUDUBON WILD BIRD MIX.....                  | 20 lb @ \$ 9.00 /bag |  |  |        |            |
| red & white millet plus black oil sunflower |                      |  |  |        |            |
| RED/WHITE MILLET MIX .....                  | 20 lb @ \$ 8.25 /bag |  |  |        |            |
| BLACK OIL SUNFLOWER.....                    | 25 lb @ \$13.00 /bag |  |  |        |            |
| WHITE PROSO MILLET .....                    | 25 lb @ \$ 9.00 /bag |  |  |        |            |
| THISTLE .....                               | 5 lb @ \$12.00 /bag  |  |  |        |            |
| SUNFLOWER CHIPS.....                        | 25 lb @ \$24.00 /bag |  |  |        |            |

SALES TAX IS INCLUDED IN ALL PRICES ABOVE

Contribution to Sequoia Audubon Society (tax deductible)

CHECK # \_\_\_\_\_

TOTAL \_\_\_\_\_

Please enclose a **stamped self-addressed envelope** to receive your order confirmation and directions to your pickup location.

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 City \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
 Phone (Home) \_\_\_\_\_ (Work) \_\_\_\_\_

Mail your check and order to  
**SEQUOIA AUDUBON SOCIETY**  
 30 West 39th Avenue, Suite 202  
 San Mateo, CA 94403

## Birder Found by Gray Jays

**Francis Toldi**



Even when I'm not really on a birding trip I can't help but keep an eye open for birds. Fortunately those with whom I travel are indulgent of this habit, most particularly my dear

wife, Leigh.

We celebrate our anniversary every year by spending three days in the Mendocino area. It's a time to relax, to take pleasant walks in beautiful redwood forests, to do a little shopping, to look at art-work, to sleep late in a charming bed and breakfast, to eat in superb restaurants, to enjoy the sea and each other. It is also a time to hope for a glimpse of a Gray Jay.

Gray Jays are quite common in their primary range. I have enjoyed their antics while camping in Oregon, Washington, the Rockies and Canada. Here in California they are at the very edge of their range in the Warner Mountains of northeastern California and in Coastal forests of Mendocino County. I have looked for these birds in all the proper places in California, but never with any success. I saw one once about ten miles north of the California/Oregon border, but this ain't horseshoes. I have also carefully searched for them in their reported strongholds in Mendocino County on various occasions, not the least of which are on our ten previous anniversary trips there. Thankfully, Leigh never objected to wandering around and around in the Van Damme and Russian Gulch State Park campgrounds, to getting up early or staying out late to try and time our arrival in the preferred Gray Jay areas.

This year we checked in to our favorite bed and breakfast, the Victorian Farmhouse in Little River. The proprietress warned us that the Jays were particularly pesky this year. Well, you know how those Steller's Jays can be, we thought. We carried in our bags, and sat down for a short rest. "Tap tap!" went a little bird on the window. A cute little gray and white face was peering in the window. "My goodness!" I said, "what in

the world is wrong with that jay? Is it an albino or something? Wait a minute - it's... it's... a Gray Jay!" Throughout the next three days we enjoyed watching the antics of this family group of 3 adults and 2 fledglings still being fed by the adults.

What a cosmic joke! Fifteen years of looking, eleven years of anniversary trips, careful searches of appropriate habitat! There are important life lessons here, only I can't figure out exactly what they are. I guess I'll think of it as "if you really want to see a particular bird, just wait for it to tap on your bedroom window."

## Florida Eats Field Guides

**Cliff Richer**

Like Francis, I sometimes (?) (always) combine birding with pleasure and business trips. This summer I went to visit my youngest daughter, a biologist with the Corps of Engineers in Florida. The occasion was to commemorate the birth of her new son, my first grandchild, and incidentally to celebrate her promotion. (The US government has now officially designated her as a scientist - not merely a biologist.)

This was my fifth visit in twenty years to our southernmost state. During that time I had lost five field guides - two Petersons, one Golden and two National Geographics - all in Florida! On my last visit I had purchased a replacement guide at the Visitor's Center at Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge and I was determined to hold on to this one!

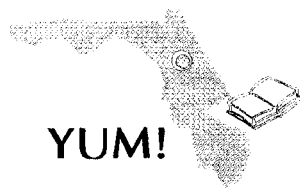
For ten days I held on to my field guide through thunderstorms and cloying, humid, energy-sapping heat. (On most days the humidity percentage was as high or higher than the maximum daily temperature).

However on the eleventh day I visited Loxahatchee once again. This was my eighth or ninth visit to this refuge and surrounded by relatively familiar surroundings I relaxed and lowered my

guard. So far as I can remember, I never removed the guide from the car but nevertheless it disappeared! Six field guides in five trips! Is this a world record? Is there a guide-eating alligator who can open car doors? Have aliens from outer space established a base in Florida and do they have an insatiable thirst for field guides? The mystery was beyond my understanding.

A few days later the answer became obvious. While visiting a local convenience store, I spotted a tabloid newspaper headline. A quick examination of the paper revealed the fact (?) that the state of Florida led the world in incidents of human spontaneous combustion! I began to tremble to think how closely I had avoided death. Obviously, whatever malevolent being was behind these involuntary immolations had narrowly missed me and had instead taken my field guides!

So, if you're planning on visiting Florida, keep your favorite field guide in a fireproof box - preferably vacuum-sealed. However, for your own safety, leave a dummy field guide unprotected and out in the open. Otherwise you may literally go down in flames!



## The Great Thrush Mystery

Lurking in the heavy undergrowth along our streams the Swainson's thrush sings and calls almost constantly. The male thrush's rolling, echo-like song is one of the most commonly heard bird voices all summer.

But for over a hundred years ornithologists have been trying to solve a mystery surrounding this bird. Sometime in August, every Swainson's thrush will stop singing and calling. One day they will be singing with their usual enthusiasm. The next day they will all be silent.

This silence will last for two to four weeks and then, just as suddenly as they stopped, the Swainson's thrushes will start singing again right up to the time that they migrate.

While a number of explanations have been offered for this phenomenon, none rings quite true. What's your theory?

## The Wandering Tattler

Anne Moser

On May 29, I flew to Charlottesville, Virginia, rented a car, and drove south on the Blue Ridge Parkway. I followed the directions in Simpson's *Birds of the Blue Ridge Mountains* in hope of seeing a number of eastern birds. The scenery was beautiful with azaleas and rhododendrons in bloom. A Scarlet Tanager landed ten feet from my parked car. What a beautiful bird! A Blue-headed (Solitary) Vireo flew into her nest almost at eye level. Up in the trees I saw a Rose-breasted Grosbeak, a Great Crested Flycatcher, an American Redstart and a Black-throated Green Warbler.

At Cumberland Knob I found a Brown Thrasher and a talkative ranger making for a full and rewarding drive.

I continued across South Carolina to the Congaree Swamp just south of Columbia. Arriving late on May 31, I thought I'd "case" the swamp before birding there the next day. Since the sign said the gate closed at 5 PM, I parked outside and walked in following the long boardwalk that led into the swamp. As I wandered by myself into the heart of the swamp the shadows lengthened and the sounds grew more eerie. Barred Owls called and Pileated Woodpeckers drummed. When the Northern Cardinals added their variegated whistles, I looked back to see if someone or something was following me - but no, I was alone!

The next day around the swamp, I was able to add a pair of Yellow-throated Warblers, a Yellow-throated Vireo and an Acadian Flycatcher to my list.

To my delight a Prothonotary Warbler kept pace with me along the boardwalk. What a bird! So bright! Now I know what eastern birders mean when they talk about Prothonotary yellow! And with a surprisingly loud song. What a great day!

After reading *Finding Birds* in South Carolina, I had contacted the author, Robin Carter. On the phone he had told me to try Godspeed Road. Another treat! When I got there I saw more than thirty Mississippi Kites pursuing insects. Watching them glide, bank and wheel through the air was truly breathtaking.

(Continued next month)

## Birdwatching the Corporate Campus

James K. Sayre

Some birders never take "no" for an answer. They will birdwatch whenever they get a chance. In the workaday world, they will sometimes be reduced to glancing at the soaring Turkey Vultures high above the freeways as they drive to work. Once at work, the pickings become even thinner. Workers with a window will at least be able to stare directly outside. Those of us in the inner cubicles have to content ourselves with bird and nature photographs mounted on our cloth-covered cubicle walls. Only on breaks can we take short walks out of doors.

Between the massive cement, steel and glass structures, the topiaried and trimmed hedges, the mowed lawns, the jet-blowered sidewalks, and the human foot and vehicular traffic, there would seem to be little room for wildlife in the corporate campus world. But here and there, between the managed vegetation, small ecological niches exist for certain birds, small mammals and insects.

On the Adobe Corporation's Mountain View campus, a pair of Killdeer had made a nest less than one hundred feet from the doors to a large building. They have made their nest in a large triangular expanse of gravel, with a thick hedge bordering on two sides and a neatly mowed lawn on the longer side. Killdeer, *Charadrius vociferus*, traditionally choose to nest in open fields. This habit would seem to be foolhardy, but the Killdeer have managed to survive and flourish in modern America. Over the weekend of June 15 -16, the eggs hatched and the bird family departed for parts unknown.

These birds have developed the "broken wing ploy" as a way of distracting potential predators from their nest sites. The adult bird limps away, calling insistently, luring the predator to another part of the open field, and finally flies off, leaving the predator confused and frustrated.

The birdlife of a corporate campus is limited to only a few hardy urban species. On the Mountain View campuses of Alza and Adobe Corporations, the following species of birds have been observed: American Robin, American Goldfinch, Mourning Dove, House Finch, English Sparrow, Brewer's Blackbird, Bushit,

American Crow, Mallard, California Towhee, Black Phoebe, Killdeer, Red-winged Blackbird, Northern Mockingbird and European Starling. Most of these species are nesting in this same area. These birds have to be tough, resourceful and flexible to live in an area with manicured lawns, pedestrian traffic, lawn mowers and few trees. Of course, these corporate areas have some benefits: a regular water supply and few if any feral cats or other predators. Occasionally, there may be a bird feeding station hanging from a tree, with a good supply of nutritious birdseed available.

There is a constant natural population pressure which drives young birds to seek new, marginal or previously unexploited habitat. For example, Red-winged blackbirds have learned to forage in shopping center parking lots. These blackbirds, along with Brewer's Blackbirds, may be seen foraging on the lawns of the campuses.

After you have successfully watched and identified all of the local birdlife, you can move on to examining the local flora. Although many corporate plantings are frightfully dull: trimmed trees and topiaried shrubs and neatly clipped lawns, there are sometimes interesting specimens. The weeds and wildflowers make a valiant attempt to grow, flower and seed before they are snipped off by the weekly gardening crews. In the lawns and in the odd corner, small weeds survive and flourish: Dandelion, White Clover, Sow Thistle, Wild Mustard and Bindweed - all bloomed in June.

Don't be shy about taking a couple of outdoors walks each day. State and Federal labor laws mandate a ten minute break every two hours. One can easily stash a pair of 3X opera glasses in a back pocket. Notes can be taken on a small pad or just a sheet of paper. Computer essays can be stored on floppy disks on the "A" drive for privacy. And you may end up writing essays like this one. Sure beats working.

(The author works as a contract technical writer in Silicon Valley. He was educated as an engineer. He has recently published a reference book entitled, **North American Bird Folknames and Names**, under the imprint of Bofflebrush Press. He is a member of Sequoia Audubon Society.)

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