



sequoia needles

Bulletin of the Sequoia Audubon Society
San Mateo County Volume 46, No. 5
February, 1997



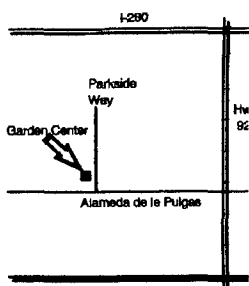
This Month's Program

Birding In Kenya

with Allen Hopkins

Allen Hopkins, First Vice-president of Golden Gate Audubon and Executive Director of the Native Species Network is no stranger to Sequoia Audubon, having authored portions of San Francisco Peninsula Birdwatching in both editions. Nevertheless, this is his first program for our group. The show is based on two trips Alan made to Kenya in 1994, and 1995 and presents that nation as seen through the eyes of a birder and tourist.

Our General Meeting is held on the second Thursday of the month, February 13 in this case, at the San Mateo Garden Center on the Alameda at Parkside.



A Birder In Spain

Peter J. Metropulos

On the morning of May 5, 1996, after eleven hours in the air, my plane approached the Madrid Airport and I got my first sight of European soil. Far from being the arid, scrubby terrain I expected, I saw a landscape awash with greenery and color. Red poppies and blue salvia covered every square inch of open land and carpeted the airport runways. A devastating drought, I was told, had recently come to an abrupt end. This had been the wettest (and coldest) spring in a quarter century and the Spanish countryside had come alive with vegetation. Anxious to see my first European birds, I quickly checked into a hotel near the airport and dashed off into the nearest neighborhood. Clouds of Common Swifts zoomed and screeched between tall brick skyscrapers. Greenfinches and Spotless Starlings scratched about in weedy lots. Wood Pigeons flapped among the sycamores. A White Wagtail perched on a rooftop. Blackbirds sang their American Robin-like song from lawns everywhere. It was a great beginning in an urban setting.

The next morning I awoke to the sound of rain pelting down. "The rain in Spain falls mainly on the plain", I said to myself, "am I on the plain?". At noon Tom Gullick, a tall sturdy gray-haired fellow, pulled up to the hotel in his Range Rover along with the three other tour participants. They were a jovial group of British birders. Tom, a 69 year old former British Navy Submarine commander who moved to Spain 25 years ago, would be our guide for the next 8 days. Within minutes we were on the highway speeding south through gently rolling hills with scattered vineyards and fields of wheat. Along the way the bizarre Hoopoe winged across the road, Corn Buntings perched on wires everywhere, and White Storks nested not only on church towers, but

also on power poles and on platforms constructed especially for them. Our first destination was in the land of Don Quixote, the La Mancha plateau. When we arrived at the *Lagunas de la Mancha*, a group of fresh and saline ponds surrounded by agricultural land, suddenly there were birds everywhere and I was out of the vehicle before it came to a stop! On the water I saw several endangered White-headed Ducks, a

very rare Ferruginous Duck, as well as Red-crested Pochards, and a Common Shelduck with chicks. It was past the peak of shorebird migration but small groups still foraged along the water's edge. We identified Lapwings, Ringed and Little Ringed Plovers, a Wood Sandpiper, Common and Spotted Redshanks, Greenshanks, and a Black-tailed Godwit.

(Continued on Page Seven)

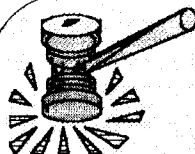
From The President

Thank you, members of Sequoia Audubon Society!

On December 9 Rich Kuehn of Sequoia Audubon sent a letter to all members requesting holiday contributions to Sequoia.

Thanks to your generosity we received over \$2000! This money will greatly assist us in our mission to protect and enhance the public's appreciation of birds in our county. Among the many programs that will directly benefit from the contributions are Audubon Adventures, our monthly general meetings, the activities of our very active Conservation Committee (especially the campaign to save Bair island) and the *Needles*.

Thanks again to our faithful members. We couldn't do it without you!



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

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 2 — WOOD-

BRIDGE ROAD IN THORNTON is one of the prime spots for viewing wintering Sandhill

Cranes as they feed in the agricultural fields on both sides of the road. While "killer" looks cannot be guaranteed, this spot offers one of the best chances for seeing this bird at close range.

Geese, swans, ducks, wintering raptors, mountain plovers and cattle egrets are other possibilities. Depending on time, flood conditions and weather, other areas may be visited before break-up in the afternoon. Bring lunch and liquids. Proceed to Stockton and turn north on I-5. We will meet at 9 AM at the intersection of I-5 and Peltier Road, east of I-5. Allow ample time to get there as traffic can be heavy. The trip will go on rain or shine unless a major storm is predicted or in progress. If in doubt, call the leader on Saturday evening.

LEADER CLIFF RICHER 873-1754

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 6 — 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, FEBRUARY 8 — FOSTER CITY — Wintering ducks and shorebirds will be our main interests along the bays and lagoons of Foster City as we look for the fieldmarks that separate Barrow's from Common Goldeneye and Greater from Lesser Scaup. Learn how to identify the Red Knot (who is really gray) and pick the knot out of the flocks of dowitchers, plovers, Willets and dunlins. Meet in the parking lot at the Recreation Center on Shell Blvd. at 9:00 AM. Heavy rain cancels the trip which should end at noon.

LEADER NICK COIRO 349-1834

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 9 — RAPTORS OF ALTAMONT PASS — (Rescheduled from January) This area east of Livermore is best known for its windmill farms - except to birders. For birders, Altamont Pass is noted as the winter home of a great number and variety of hawks and eagles. Every winter the resident red-tails, prairie falcons and golden eagles are joined by their cousins fleeing the snows and cold of the north. Peregrines, bald eagles, rough-legged and ferruginous hawks are only some of the visitors to these rolling grasslands and rocky outcrops. This trip normally extends into the afternoon so bring lunch and liquids. We'll begin our caravan of the area at 9:00 AM. To get there take I-580 past Livermore to Vasco Road. Take the Vasco Road exit south. We'll meet near the gas station on the right a short distance down Vasco Road. Because of potential weather problems in this tour will be by **reservation only**. Call the office (345-3724) to make a reservation. There is no participation number limit. The trip can be excellent with many raptor and other bird sightings in favorable weather, but next to impossible, with rain and fog, in inclement weather. To be certain that the trip will go on (particularly if the weather forecast is questionable) call Nick Coiro (349-1834) before 10 PM the night before.

LEADERS NICK COIRO/LINDA DAVIES

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 13 — 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 on the **Birds of Kenya** at 8 PM.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 16 — BEGINNERS' TRIP, PALO ALTO BAYLANDS. This trip will concentrate on identifying basic marshland birds including the Palo Alto specialties - American Bitterns and Clapper Rails but may involve a search for some of the exotic visitors that find their way to this tiny refuge every winter. This will follow our beginners trip format of a relatively short field trip followed by a discussion session of what we saw - or any other topic of interest to the participants. We will meet at 9 AM at the parking lot nearest the visitor center.

LEADER: FRANCIS TOLDI 344-1919

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 15 — THE EAGLES OF THE THROUGH KLAMATH BASIN. —

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 17 This Presidents' Day Weekend trip to the Tule Lake

and Klamath Lake Refuges will allow us to view the largest concentration of wintering Bald Eagles south of Alaska. Drawn to the area by an incredible number and variety of waterfowl, they sit in wait for the weak and sick among the ducks and geese. In February any open water is dominated by the Tundra Swans' regal dignity. We will look at swans for a possible trumpeter and through the area for raptors, northern shrikes, tree sparrows and other northern and eastern wanderers as well as the expected concentrations of bald and golden eagles. The exact itinerary will depend on weather and birding conditions, but we will expect to visit the Alturas area as well. Weather requiring the use of tire chains to get to this area will cancel the trip. Reservations are required. Call the leader to make your reservations.

LEADER CLIFF RICHER 873-1754

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY, 22 — FILOLI ESTATE —

Donna Petersen will lead us on a birding tour of this estate and its magnificent gardens. To get there take I-280 to the Edgewood Road exit. Go west on Edgewood and turn north on Canada to the estate. Identify yourself to the gatekeeper as a Sequoia Audubon field trip participant. He or she will direct you to the proper parking lot where Donna will meet you at 9 AM and collect the \$5 fee. Heavy rain cancels the trip.

LEADER DONNA PETERSEN 344-5582

THURSDAY, MARCH 6 — 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, MARCH 8 — THE ECOLOGY OF PESCADERO MARSH with John and Nina Padley (345-2984)

THURSDAY, MARCH 13 — 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.

A Special Thanks

Contributors

We want to express a very special thanks to those of you who responded so generously to our Holiday Fund-raising Letter.

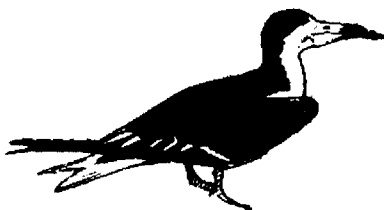
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SUSAN BERNHARD,
MARTHA BIZZELL,
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BEVERLY WHITING,
ROBERT WILKINSON,
ALLEN WOFCHUCK,
JOHN YOUNG
and
JOAN ZUCKERMAN

Anne Moser on SFBBO Board

Anne Moser, Director and Past President of SAS, has also been active in the operations of the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory and was elected this fall to its Board of Directors.

Heading the Nominating Committee which "fingered" Anne was her good friend and fellow SAS Director, Robin Smith. If this gives you the impression that nepotism was involved, let us remind you that Anne's terms as President and her work on the SAS Board have both been outstanding. Anne has been and continues to be one of SAS's most valued members and we know that her work on behalf of SFBBO must be equally distinguished.

Anne also served for ten years on the school board of the Menlo Park District.



Skimmers on the Bay

Another SAS member who has been active at SFBBO is Peter Metropulos, who co-authored the *Western Birds* article, "First Nesting of Black Skimmers on San Francisco Bay". Peter's collaborators were Bob Richmond, the well-known East Bay birder, and Valerie Layne, SFBBO staff biologist.

New NAS Bird Conservation Director for California

There have been wholesale changes in the organization and emphases at National Audubon since the departure of the unlamented Peter Berle. The new Strategic Plan, with its greater emphasis on chapters and on bird conservation was only the beginning.

One of the changes which is likely to affect us directly is the appointment of

Mini Nagendran as the new Director of Bird Conservation for NAS in California. She comes to Audubon as an international specialist on cranes having worked with various species throughout Asia and North America.

Mini is short for Meenakshi. She is a native of India and is fluent in several languages. She has presented papers to Audubon's Crane Conference at the NAS Rowe Sanctuary in Nebraska.

She also worked with Florida Game and Fish in the release of whooping cranes at the NAS Kissimmee Prairie Sanctuary. Mini earned her Ph.D. in Zoology from North Dakota State, and has done work with USFWS International Affairs, The Japanese Wild Bird Society, and the International Crane Foundation. She is said to be full of energy, have a great passion for birds, and lots of charisma.

Mini will begin to develop a solid bird conservation program for Audubon in California, in partnership with the 53 Audubon chapters. This will include starting an Important Bird Areas Program, working as the Audubon leader in the Partners in Flight program, and providing needed technical staffing for Audubon's joint ventures.

NAS Board Meeting to be Held in San Francisco

The National Audubon Society will hold its fourth quarter Board of Directors' meeting in San Francisco from December 4 to December 7, 1997. Chapter leaders will be invited to join the board in its public sessions and to provide input.

Redbud's Heron Days

Redbud Audubon Society will be holding its Heron Days Festival on April 12 and 13 this year. Field trips conducted from their Clearlake location will offer the opportunity to see "dancing" Western Grebes and nesting Bald Eagles.

For more information and reservations call Roberta Lyons at (707) 994-2024.



Eileen Jennis-Sauppe
Conservation Committee Chairwoman

Looking back at 1996 I searched for and found a sense of accomplishment that often eludes the conservation minded. We had much to be proud of last year.

Each member of our small but persistent band of "eco-engineers" contributed, individually and as a team. Several directors and chapter members made important financial contributions as well. Meetings and events were attended, letters, FAX's and e-mail were sent, phone calls were made. This list points to our involvement with the local community as well as with the conservation community at large..

**1996 Conservation
Committee Inventory:**

ALCATRAZ ISLAND: National Parks officials allowed the premiere of the film *The Rock* to be held on the island. This event was a disaster for nesting Western Gulls and Black-crowned Night-herons. Our protests helped make sure this type of thing will not happen again.

BAIR ISLAND: There was much preparation for bringing the fragile habitat of this important marsh land to the public's attention. The success of this effort was spear-headed by Bay Area Audubon's media advisor, Bill Rukeyser. He coordinated the energy of several groups and arranged a media photo shoot targeted for the Japanese public (the island is currently owned by a Japanese development corporation), as well as local news agencies. And he arranged for a full-page ad in the New York Times to put pressure on the developers to sell Bair Island to the US Fish and Wildlife Service for inclusion in the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay Wildlife Refuge. We'll keep you posted.

BANNER: We now have a beautiful all-weather banner with our chapter name to use at public events.

BAY AREA AUDUBON COUNCIL (BAAC): Attendance at these

regional meetings is bi-monthly. We keep up with local and national Audubon goals and exchange news with other chapters.

BAY/DELTA SUIT: Joining with other Audubon chapters and The Sierra Club, a 60 day notice of intent to sue was filed against the EPA for abandoning their mandate to properly manage water quality. A key element was to use good science (not politics) as the standard for managing the bay/delta waters.

BEACH/BAY CLEAN-UP: We hosted an information table about the importance of wetlands, helped out on the clean-up and contributed a bird list for this South San Francisco site.

CHILDREN'S FIELD TRIPS: The first one was at the Palo Alto Baylands. This cooperative venture with our Education Committee and our birders is a vital element in preparing another environmentally conscious generation. Our second trip will be on the coast, with a classroom of middle school students.

EARTH DAY/ARBOR DAY: We hosted an information table about Audubon and our chapter activities at this Pacifica community event.

EDGEWOOD PARK: There is a new management/use plan being developed for the park. We commented on the plan and contributed data on birds in the park from our new chapter publication, *SAN FRANCISCO PENINSULA BIRDWATCHING*.

FAX MACHINE AND COMPUTER ONLINE! This upgrade in our technical capability brings news to us more quickly and makes conservation life sooooo much better!

LIBRARY EXHIBIT: In December 1996, the San Mateo main library displayed our beautiful photo exhibit, "ENDANGERED BIRDS OF SAN MATEO COUNTY." We're coming to a library near you in 1997.

LEGISLATION: This is a category too large for detail here. Providing comments on local and national legislation always keeps us hopping.

MEASURE T: We introduced the issue to our board of directors and provided information, background and encouraged a vote for endorsement (which they did). We issued an Action Alert for our members. To receive Action Alerts from our committee, call Terri at the office to be added to our mailing list.

PACIFIC SHORES : Comments were submitted regarding this large development set for an environmentally sensitive area.

PILLAR POINT HARBOR: We wrote comments and met on site with the Harbor Commission and the Army Corps. of Engineers regarding expansion of abalone farming and deep dredging in the harbor.

PILLAR POINT MARSH: We asked the El Granada Sanitary district to waive hefty assessment fees that were holding up purchase of marsh land by the county. We also nominated this new marsh acquisition (still in belated progress) for inclusion in the state-wide Riparian Habitat Joint Venture (RHJV) of which Audubon is a partner.

SAN BRUNO MOUNTAIN: There were meetings that included several groups interested in the issues surrounding the Habitat Conservation Plan for the mountain. We facilitated a birding field trip there together with the Friends of San Bruno Mountain.

SAN FRANCISCO BAYSIDE TRAIL: We monitored plans for completion of this trail and offered comments regarding how it will affect wildlife and habitat.

(Continued on Page Six)



SEQUOIA AUDUBON SOCIETY INC.

30 W. 39th Avenue #202, San Mateo, CA 94403
(415) 345-3724

WINTER 1997 SAS BIRDSEED SALE - - - ORDER FORM

ALL ORDERS WITH PAYMENT MUST BE RECEIVED BY WEDNESDAY FEBRUARY 12

Proceeds support local Audubon conservation and education programs

Please check preferred pickup location. Pickup dates will be February 20-23, 1997 with details to be advised later.

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

			# BAGS	S--COST--S
AUDUBON WILD BIRD MIX.....	20 lb @ \$ 9.50 /bag		_____	= _____
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Eco-Update

(Continued from Page Four)

SAN FRANCISCO WATERSHED:

The process to develop a first-ever management plan for the entire watershed complex continues. This process will take 3-4 years, and the EIR stage is just beginning. Our comments focus on PRESERVATION and PROTECTION.

SNOWY PLOVERS : We encouraged the Pacifica City Council and Mayor to support protection for snowy plovers nesting on Pacifica State Beach. This includes information signs and fencing.

SUSTAINABILITY PROJECT : There is a diverse group of concerned activists who are monitoring the sustainability of growth in our county. We attended meetings, provided input, and contributed data from Christmas bird counts starting with our beginning count year to 1995.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES: For our members who would like to be involved in habitat restoration or maintenance, the we published a list of projects ongoing all over the county..

Now we are looking ahead to new goals and continuing challenges. One of our premier goals for the new year is to expand the membership of our committee. Are you already involved in these or similar issues? Would you like to begin to take action and exchange ideas about the environment? If so, give me a call at 726-1081, FAX me at 712-8571 or yes, e-mail us at sequoia@sirius.com. There's lots to be done and Audubon may be just the platform to embrace issues important to you.

State Parks Restoration Project

State Parks has begun a major restoration project at Half Moon Bay State Beach. The site includes areas used by the Snowy Plover, San Francisco garter snake and red-legged frog, all endangered or threatened species.

Volunteers are needed to stabilize the dunes, protect the habitat of threatened species, remove exotic plants, plant native vegetation and build boardwalks and interpretive displays. Call Marianne Kjobmand at 726-8801 if you can help.



The Feather Duster

Cliff Richer

In The Background

Two of the world's most widespread birds are the California Quail and the Red-tailed Hawk...according to the movies.

Plains Indians signaled their readiness to attack the embattled wagon train by invariably using either the call of the Whip-poor-will or the California Quail. This was great to signal their positions since these calls couldn't be mistaken for a real bird. (Neither species occurs on the Great Plains.)

The California Quail has been heard at Gettysburg (*Shenandoah*) and on the fields of Themopylae. (I don't recall the name of this very forgettable movie, but Richard Egan was the martyred Spartan leader.)

And did you know that every bird of prey screams like a Red-tail? This includes the Harris' Hawk - a bird which was obviously widespread in medieval Europe.

Willow Ptarmigans are common in Central America. Wren-tit calls can be heard on the hillsides of South Korea. Australian Kookaburras are also found in the jungles of Africa.

The *Birdman of Alcatraz* captured an exotic finch in the Alcatraz yard and identified it as a "sparrow". Wow, some expert!

All of these anomalies have occurred in the movies and on television. The quail and red-tailed's appearances are too numerous to document and the Indian's use of quail and Whip-poor-will calls was a cliché of B (and some A) westerns of the 40s and 50s. The heroes of these westerns were obviously birders since they always knew that an Indian attack was imminent.

The Harris' Hawk -- a favorite of falconers -- was a star of the *Beastmaster* series and appeared in a number of other medieval fantasy epics.

The Willow Ptarmigan was heard in the opening sequence of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, and was specifically called for in the script!* The Wren-tit made several

appearances on the television show, *M.A.S.I.I.*, and the Kookaburra was a favorite of Johnny Weismuller's Tarzan movies.

In the last few years, the movies have gotten better. However in one recent case, the director and star was told that the California Quail call should not be used. Nevertheless, Clint Eastwood persisted since he wanted a "recognizable" western sound in the Oscar-winning *Unforgiven*.*

I know of some birders who keep lists of birds they see or hear in the movies and on TV. While a lot of birders' lists may be more fantasy than reality, this is the only list that is deliberately so!

(*Thanks to David Koeppel, an ardent birder, member of the LA Audubon Society and a film editor by profession, for the "inside information" on these goof's.)



The Bookworm

Cliff Richer

Birds of San Francisco & Bay Area by Chris Fisher and Joe Morlan

This book is a big disappointment. Despite Joe Morlan's name on the cover, don't believe this is a true collaboration. Joe appears to have been more of a consultant than an author.

A major fault is the selection of species. Despite the fact that five species of loons have been identified in the Bay Area, only the Common Loon is shown. Pacific Loon and Red-throated are incorporated by reference and no mention is made of either the Yellow-billed or Arctic Loons. Least Sandpiper merits only a single sentence under Western Sandpiper. This is an unforgivable omission.

The illustrations are generally excellent but the drawings of the American Crow and Common Raven omit the most reliable fieldmarks (the large bill and wedge shaped tail of the raven). Instead the artist has chosen to exaggerate some very minor characteristics of the raven (shaggier and chunkier appearance) to a ridiculous degree.

This is not a book I would recommend as either a field guide or reference. Local birders may, however, want to include it for the illustrations or simply to round out their bookshelves.

A Birder In Spain

Peter J. Metropulos

(Continued From Page One)

Whiskered Terns and nesting Black-headed Gulls hawked for flying insects over the ponds as nesting avocets and stilts scolded us from the adjoining marsh. A strikingly-marked Bearded Tit, normally a shy skulker, popped up to be identified. Here I won the "Bird-of-the-day-award" by picking out a drake Blue-winged Teal which proved to be one of very few Spanish records. As the sun set we toasted my great find with a glass of fine Spanish brandy as Calandra Larks fluttering above serenaded us.

By the time we reached Tom's spacious, new hacienda near Valdepeñas, about 2-1/2 hours south of Madrid, his young wife, Kate (a graduate of the Cordón Bleu Culinary Academy) had dinner ready for us. Meals here were truly a family affair with Tom's six year old daughter acting as waitress and his 4 year old son creating much entertainment at the dining table. We were to spend most evenings during the tour at the house for dinner and sleep then head out at day-break to explore the surrounding countryside until after sunset.

Typically, we would arrive home at 7:00 pm, have a quick cocktail then a shower. I usually had time to enter notes in my journal before we met to call out the daily bird list. Dinner was served at 9:00 and lasted until 11:00 followed by coffee and dessert. Liqueurs made their appearance around midnight ("oh, all right"), and then we would all stagger off for a few hours of sleep.

The next morning we followed dirt roads through vast wheat fields on Tom's 8,000 acre rancho looking for a "dependable" Scops Owl. We not only found it, roosting in a thicket of poplars, but also a Little Owl (the European equivalent of our Burrowing Owl) perched on a nearby rock pile. The best owl of the day, however, proved to be an Eagle Owl whose nest with chicks we found on a rocky ledge among a thicket of scrub oak. Orchids, iris, peonies, and other wild flowers covered the stony ground here. As the Range Rover blazed a path across the range, flocks of Sandgrouse, both Pin-tailed and Black-bellied exploded into the sky before us. Stone-curlews scolded

our intrusion into their territory, a pair of sinister looking Great Spotted Cuckoos crossed our path and several species of larks provided varied song. Continuing on, our spirits remained undampened despite unusually cold drizzly weather. We were rewarded with the spectacular sight of 17 magnificent Great Bustards ("like a turkey on steroids") displaying out on the short grass steppe. The weather cleared long enough for a splendid picnic banquet on the shore of *Laguna Rudeira*. Colorful birds were abundant and conspicuous and song filled the air. Here we added Little Bittern, Bee-eater, Azure-winged Magpie, Woodchat Shrike and Golden Oriole to our list.

On the third morning we headed up into the woodlands of the *Sierra Morena* in the province of *Ciudad Real*. The landscape here is dominated by open oak grass land with an adjoining chaparral-type habitat of scrubby pines and blooming lavender, rosemary and rockrose. Tall rocky cliffs rise above and provide nesting and feeding territories for numerous raptors. This region is said to be the best in all Europe for its variety of nesting hawks, eagles and vultures. During the day I tallied 237 individuals of sixteen species including 31 Griffon Vultures, 7 Black Vultures, 3 Egyptian Vultures, 4 Bonelli's Eagles, 4 Short-toed Eagles, 4 Booted Eagles, 60 Lesser Kestrels, one Black-shouldered Kite, 2 Red Kites and 105 Black Kites. Along the streams Crag Martins and Red-rumped Swallows were searching for nest sites. We passed run-down villages of brick and clay buildings with narrow streets in which short old women, dressed in black, stared at us blankly as they swept their porches. The "clink" and "funk" sounds of bells around the necks of roving sheep and cows filled the air. Ruins of castles and fortresses perched atop cliffs overlooking the fertile valleys. Expanses of red, white, blue and yellow wild flowers carpeted the flatlands especially along the many streams rushing through the region. This was a floral display the magnitude of which I've never witnessed in California! At one stream we surprised a Black Stork wading in a roadside creek. Later in the afternoon we located one on a nest in a cave on a cliff face, a rare sight indeed! Looking skyward toward sunset I spotted a flock of large swallow-like birds high above. They

proved to be a group of Collared Pratincoles hawking for flying insects.

Our next destination was northern Andalusia where we made a brief "tourist stop" at Cordoba to view the awesome *Mezquita*, a thousand year-old Moorish mosque. (Actually, I suspect this was just an excuse for the leader to stop and replenish his supply of Cuban cigars at a nearby tobacconist.) On hilly, winding roads we passed vast fields of sunflowers, stopping at a stony olive orchard near the *Laguna Zonar* Nature Preserve. Here we found one of our target species: the very local Rufous Bush-Robin, singing its loud chat-like song. For the first (and only) time of the trip the clouds dispersed and the weather warmed up. Here we munched on fresh bread and cheeses washed down with the local red wine.

Scoping the lagoon below. I was delighted to see one of my "most-wanted" birds, the prehistoric-looking Purple Swamp-hen feeding on wild asparagus growing along the shore. Migrant Honey Buzzards were riding high overhead on thermals heading north after having left Africa and crossing the Strait of Gibraltar perhaps 3 or 4 hours earlier. Continuing south we pulled off the highway to scope some cliffs near *La Roda*. Alpine and Pallid Swifts and Choughs were performing aerial maneuvers among the tall jagged rock formations. A few miles more we were at the *Fuente de Piedra* Lagoon Preserve. Looking out across this huge shallow saline lake we were awestruck by the sight of at least 10,000 Greater Flamingos. 8000 pairs nested here this summer making this the second largest colony in Europe. As the sun sank low and the mosquito clouds grew thicker we headed north to Moriles for some night-riding. We cruised for hours on dusty back roads through grain fields and orchards playing tapes and shining lights until we finally located our quarry, a Red-necked Nightjar, sitting right in the middle of the road, red eyes glowing like hot coals. A shot of brandy to celebrate then off to our hotel in Montilla where my dinner of swordfish tasted like salty veal, my shower had no hot water and loud trucks passing by all night long made sleep impossible.

(To be continued in March)

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Irene Kuehn in memory of Carroll Kuehn

A full list of all who responded to our Holiday Fundraising Letter can be found on Page Three

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