

sequoia needles

Bulletin of the Sequoia Audubon Society
San Mateo County Volume 46, No. 8
May, 1997

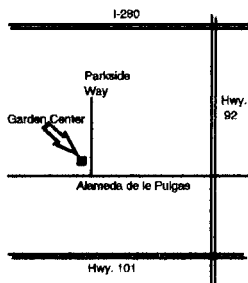
This Month's Program

Return Of The Condor Flying Free Again



Life-long birders Clark and Jean Moore are volunteers with the Condor Recovery Program

and the Kern River Research Center. Their program will cover identification of all three American vultures and show details of the raising and release of California Condors.



The meeting is at the Garden Center at Parkside on Alameda. Social get-together begins at 7:30 PM on Thursday, May 8. The meeting begins at 8:00 with the program following immediately thereafter.

New Officer Nominations



The Nominating Committee, Francis Toldi, Mary Bresler and Merry Haveman, are proposing the following persons as officers for the coming year.

President	Francis Toldi (Incumbent)
Vice-president	Marylyn Noah
Secretary	Debbi Frantz (Former VP and Treasurer)
Treasurer	Tom Vanden-Bosch (Incumbent)
Directors (Term Expires June, 2000)	Eileen Jennis-Sauppe (Incumbent)
	Gary Deghi

From The Editor

Cliff Richer

Unsung Heroes — When you get your *Needles* every month, you give little thought as to how it gets to you. For that matter, neither do I. The reason for

this is that we have an outstanding crew of volunteers who do the "grunt" work of getting the newsletter to you. **Anne Moser** takes care of getting the *Needles* to the printer and negotiating its production and costs. She deserves special credit since she has been instrumental in holding down the production costs over the years. **Sue Cossins** takes over after printing. She and her crew, **John and Nina Padley** and **Zoe Kendall**, take care of the labeling, sorting and mailing. Their dedication is outstanding. When you get the newsletter on time - credit them. When you get it late - usually I'm to blame.

They deserve a special thanks for the April issue, when a series of mini-disasters delayed the *Needles* at the printer. Even after a series of postponements, this crew dropped everything to get the newsletter out to you on time.

Habitat Restoration — The invasion of our natural systems by non-native plants is no less a loss of habitat than an asphalt parking lot. Our native wildlife cannot survive in a eucalyptus forest or in an eco-system dominated by pampas grass, Australian fireweed, ice plant, broom or other exotic growth. It is gratifying to note that there are restoration groups working throughout the county from San Bruno Mountain to Año Nuevo to eradicate these plant pests and replace them with native growth. These groups deserve our support and our volunteer efforts.

Non-native Animals pose another special problem. Rabbits in Australia, mongooses in Hawaii, cane toads on both islands and the brown tree snake throughout the South Pacific are special cases of environmental disaster. The black rat is now established everywhere throughout the world. Red foxes, feral pigs, goats and sheep can devastate an ecosystem, destroying native species or their habitat. Wild horses and burros pose a problem that required specific legislation. All too often, the elimination of these species is opposed by animal rights groups. Indeed, the Bureau of Land Management which captures wild horses and burros and puts them out for adoption has on occasion recaptured animals which were "adopted" and then re-released into the wild by well-meaning but misguided individuals. Although they maintain adoption records and know the identify of the responsible individuals, the BLM has declined to prosecute these individuals because of an anticipated public relations disaster. This is an emotional problem, rather than a rational one. Nevertheless, I can think of no solution to this problem except to continue our efforts to educate the general public on the potential damage done to the environment by these exotics.

Cliff Richer

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 SAS Calendar

May

THURSDAY, MAY 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.

SUNDAY, MAY 4 — JASPER RIDGE — The Field trip to this unique Biological Preserve at Jasper Ridge will highlight nesting birds and late spring flowers. Possible sightings include wood ducks, blue-gray gnatcatchers, ash-throated flycatchers and black-headed grosbeaks. We will meet at the Stanford University Jasper Ridge Biological Preserve Main Gate (not the Whiskey Hill Gate) at 8:00 AM. Meet promptly at 8:00 AM as the gate will be open only from 8:00-8:30. From I-280 take the Sandhill Road exit west about 2 miles to a gate on the left side of the road. We will go rain or shine. **A USER FEE OF \$5 PER PERSON WILL BE COLLECTED AT THE GATE.** The size of the group is limited so please call the office (345-3724) early for this **reservations only** field trip. For additional information, call the leader.

LEADER JUDI SPITLER 355-9362

THURSDAY, MAY 8 — 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.

SUNDAY, MAY 18 — WILLIAMS SISTERS' RANCH. This marvelously tended ranch has been bequeathed to National Audubon and will eventually become one of Audubon's sanctuaries. Just off Skyline Drive west of San Mateo, it has an amazing diversity of habitat. We should find Lazuli Buntings and other grassland species as well as woodland and riparian species. **Because this is still a working ranch, we must limit the number of participants to 15. Call the office (345-3724) to reserve your space.** We'll meet at 9 AM in the parking lot of Alice's Restaurant at the intersection of Skyline Boulevard and Hwy. 84. From there we'll carpool and caravan to the Ranch. **Note that this is a change of date from previous listings.**

LEADER FRANCIS TOLDI 344-1919

MEMORIAL DAY WEEKEND, FRIDAY, MAY 23 (Optional) through MONDAY, MAY 26 — THE BIRDS OF MONO BASIN AND TIoga PASS. The exact itinerary of this trip will be left up to the last minute as weather and travel conditions dictate much of what can be accomplished. In addition, the leader has been called for jury duty and this could affect or interfere with the trip. So it is imperative that you contact him for details. We will be trying for high country and Great Basin species such as Great Gray Owl, Clark's Nutcrackers, Piñon Jays, Sage Grouse, Green-tailed Towhees, Brewer's and Vesper Sparrows and many others. **Reservations are required.** Call the leader for details.

LEADER CLIFF RICHER 873-1754

June

THURSDAY, JUNE 5 — 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 12 — GENERAL MEETING at the San Mateo Garden Center on the Alameda at Parkside. An informal get-together begins at 6:30 followed immediately by the Potluck, Annual Business Meeting, Election of Officers and the program., featuring Jan Moghler of the Peninsula Humane Society, on the interaction of local wildlife and the Society.

News From Your Ranch

A
C
R



Pegi Knopp

Visitors to our preserves see little of ACR's remarkable award-winning education programs:

School Education Program

On any weekday morning in the Spring or Fall, Bay Area classrooms come alive with games and activities designed to open young minds to the natural world. A week later, a bus provides transportation, underwritten through ACR foundation grants to ensure access for all schoolchildren. The children hike trails, explore study sites, open their senses and discover everything in nature. ACR's education program reaps tremendous value from volunteer commitment: some 6,000 schoolchildren make field trips to Bolinas Lagoon or Bouverie Preserve every year. These field trips are provided free of charge.

Cross-Cultural Environmental Leadership (XCEL)

The unprecedented XCEL program promotes leadership-awareness skills among high school students to become role models for elementary and middle school students. Each summer, XCELers live in residence at ACR's Volunteer Canyon for two weeks, exploring Bolinas Lagoon Preserve together. Day camp training involves a full six days of working with staff and docents to prepare for leading hikes with elementary schoolchildren. XCELers become hike leaders as Day Campers are transported from urban summer camp programs over the next four weeks. Each XCEler also develops a community project of his or her own design. Every season of XCEL shows renewal, growth and progress.

Public Education Program

Don't miss your opportunity to come to the Bolinas Lagoon Preserve for a rare opportunity to watch Great Blue Herons and Great and Snowy Egrets pairing up, building nests and raising their young. The Bolinas Lagoon Preserve is open to the public until July 13th on Saturdays, Sundays and Holidays, 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. On these days, ACR Ranch Guides have telescopes situated at the Henderson Overlook and are available to answer your questions and interpret points of interest. Admission is free of charge, but donations are welcomed!

Ranch Hosts (sponsored by your Audubon Chapter) greet our visitors. we still have slots to fill for this year's schedule. Sign up today and bring friends, family and your lunch.

News From Your Ranch

(Continued From Page Two)

Orientation starts at 9:30 AM, but you are welcome to come early and take a walk around before the visitors begin to arrive at 10:00 AM. Call your Chapter Representative (Debbi Frantz) today to sign up to host, or call ACR at (415) 868-9244.

ACR's Bouverie Preserve includes over 500 acres in Sonoma's Valley of the Moon. It encompasses five plant communities, regionally renowned wildflower displays and a wealth of native wildlife. Reserve your place today for a free half-day (9:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.) Guided Nature Walk on May 10th, May 17th (Audubon Chapter Members' Day) or May 24th and take advantage of your chance to experience the beauty and rich natural history of our Bouverie Preserve. Call (707) 938-4554 for reservations, taken all during the month prior (they fill quickly!)

At Bolinas Lagoon and Bouverie Preserves, we rely on the dedication of volunteers to conduct our education programs. Their generous gifts of time and talent enable us to personally reach the thousands of children and adults who visit our preserves each year. Bolinas Lagoon Preserve also supports a Ranch Guide program of community volunteers who are trained to help enrich the experience of our weekend visitors. For training information, call Bolinas Lagoon (415) 868-9244 or Bouverie Preserve (707) 938-4554.

We look forward to seeing you at ACR's Bolinas Lagoon or Bouverie Preserves!

(More ACR News on Page Four)

21st Century California:

Anticipating & Planning for Growth & Environmental Quality

Miramar Sheraton Hotel, Santa Monica, CA
Thursday-Friday, May 15-16, 1997

The UCLA Extension Public Policy Program is convening a major statewide conference addressing future growth in California. Planned with diverse stakeholder interests in the state, this conference focuses on research and policy alternatives for mitigating conflicts over the future growth of California. After a lengthy and severe recession, the state is entering a new era of economic growth, accompanied by major demographic changes and new fiscal constraints. How and where we grow over the next 10 years and beyond is critical to the viability of California's communities, its economic health, and its ability to protect environmental resources. How can we use what we have learned from past growth cycles to do better for the 21st Century?

Fee: \$195 both days/\$145 Thursday only or Friday only. A limited number of partial scholarships are available for members of nonprofit community and environmental organizations.

For a conference brochure or more information, call the UCLA Extension Public Policy Program at (310) 825-7885.

SAS HOMEPAGE

Sequoia Audubon Society

Your local chapter for San Mateo County, California

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.

Our Chapter Online

- **Monthly Meetings** Come meet friends and enjoy a presentation on birding or other nature topic!
- **Field Trips** Come birding with us! Here are times, places, and information.
- **SAS Virtual Store** Shop in cyberspace for: Birding Books, Checklists, and more.
- **Birding Links and Info** National Audubon, other chapters, birding sites, rare bird alerts, etc.

We are pleased to announce the availability of a newly revised edition of *San Francisco Peninsula Birdwatching*.

For information about our chapter...

Sequoia Audubon Society
30 West 39th Avenue, #202
San Mateo, CA 94403-4561
415 345-3724 or fax 415 712-8571
email: sequoia@attus.com

For comments or questions about the website... email: sequoia@attus.com

Site designed and maintained by H. M. A. Groff TechnoLogic Design (SM)

Website and contents © 1997 S A S. Last updated: 02/13/97 17:53:40

In case you haven't seen it, this is SAS's Internet Home Page on the World Wide Web.

Conceived by Rich Kuehn and created by Bill Grohl, the web page will carry news on our field trips and other events, including those last minute changes that a newsletter cannot handle.

You can reach the SAS Homepage at:

<http://www.belmont.gov/orgs/sas/>

Our sincere thanks to the City of Belmont for providing the web site.

Bay Cruise: Islands, Birds, and Bridges

Friday, May 16, 7-9 PM — Slide Presentations
Saturday, May 17, 8:30 AM - 4 PM — Cruise the Bay

Naturalists from the Richardson Bay Audubon Center and the East Bay Regional Parks District will lead an all day cruise aboard the *Salty Lady*. They will explore the bay's hidden islands, spectacular bridges and nesting sites. The event is in honor of International Migratory Bird Week! Registration is limited.

The fee of \$60 includes an evening program of slides and information at Crab Cove Visitor's Center in Alameda to set the stage for the next day on the bay. Douglas Bell from the California Academy of Sciences will give a slide presentation about Peregrine Falcons nesting on bridges in the Bay.

For more information, or to register, call the East Bay Regional Park District at (510) 636-1684 or fax (510) 521-0376.

SFBNWR Closes Marshlands Road

Protecting Snowy Plovers

Nesting season is once again at hand, and Snowy Plovers will soon begin nesting. These migratory shorebirds nest in flat, open areas, and use the levees and dried salt ponds along Marshlands Road. After hatching, the chicks wander onto the road surface, where their gray and white feathers blend into the asphalt, making it difficult to see them from a car.

The road closure creates a difficulty for anglers who wish to drive, out to the Dumbarton Fishing Pier. However the road is still open to bicycles and pedestrians and fishermen may ride to and from the pier in a shuttle van on Saturdays and Sundays. The shuttle leaves the main parking area at 9:00 am, 1:00 pm, and 5:30 pm. Anglers may make reservations by calling (510) 792-4275.

The road closure is effective April 1 until August 31. "The objective of this management action is not to close roads and inconvenience anglers," said Refuge Manager Marge Kolar, "but to insure the survival of these threatened shorebirds."

Snowy plovers are beach nesters but most have disappeared from the coast of central California due to spring and summer disturbance each year by humans. Unfortunately for the plovers, the nesting season coincides with the greatest human use of beaches. Fortunately, for its long-term survival the plover has adapted to other areas, such as the dried salt ponds and levees along Marshlands Road.

The refuge's auditorium will also feature an art exhibit, "Homage to the Animal Kingdom", of paintings, etchings and ceramics by Mexican artist Alvaro Angeles Suman through July 27. The exhibit emphasizes extinct wildlife.

(Note that - as editorial policy - the Needles will continue to use the "old" names of all National Wildlife Refuges rather than the official ones which include the name of some politician, who may or may not deserve the honor. — Ed.)

An expert is a man who has made all the mistakes which can be made, in a narrow field.

—Niels Bohr



NAS & American Wetlands Month!

National Audubon is launching a project to educate members of Congress about the importance of wetlands and the depth of public support for wetlands conservation. The goal for the project is to have as many chapters and volunteers as possible host a member of Congress at an important wetland site during May — American Wetlands Month.

Audubon wetlands advocates will be able to educate their Congressional members about the values of wetlands, the community's interest in protecting and restoring wetlands and the need for a strong Clean Water Act to protect this precious resource.

Some Audubon chapters across the country have embraced this project already. *(As usual, National Audubon failed to inform most of its chapters in time to be able to participate. The only participating chapters are those with full-time staffs or those who received advance notice. National has an optimistic view of chapter and congressional lead times.)*

Congress is now considering Clean Water Act reauthorization. Members of Congress listen to their constituents, and Audubon chapters across the country are uniquely positioned to convey a powerful wetland conservation message in the member's own district or state. The relationships that local chapters make (or renew) with one of their representatives in Congress will be valuable for years to come.

NAS has prepared a packet of materials for American Wetlands Month. To receive the packet or for further information, please contact Mac Blewer of the Wetlands Campaign staff at (202) 861-2242 or mblewer@audubon.org

Taken as a whole, the universe is absurd.

Walter Savage Landor



News from Your Ranch



Pegi Knopp

Bolinas Lagoon Preserve — Literally thousands of people come to the Bolinas Lagoon Preserve of Audubon Canyon Ranch every year for a rare opportunity to watch the herons and egrets pairing up, building nests and raising their young. It is usually impossible for us to see these birds on their nests, because herons and egrets establish their colonies high in tall trees or on inaccessible islands -- out of reach of most ground predators and humans. At ACR, however, the nest trees grow in a narrow canyon where visitors can survey the colony from an overlook.

The Preserve will be open to the public from March 15th to July 13th on Saturdays, Sundays and Holidays, 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM. On these days, ACR Ranch Guides have telescopes situated at the Henderson Overlook and are available to answer your questions and interpret points of interest. Admission is free of charge, but donations are welcomed!

Chapter Ranch Hosts are the welcoming presence for our visitors. Hosts offer maps, registration cards and parking information. Sign up for a day and bring friends, family and your lunch. Orientation starts at 9:30 AM, but you are welcome to come early and take a walk around before the visitors begin to arrive. Call your Chapter Representative to sign up to host, or call the ACR office at 868-9244 if you would like to host beyond your Chapter's scheduled days.

During the week, our Bolinas Lagoon Preserve is closed on Mondays and open by appointment only Tuesday through Thursday, 2:00 PM to 4:00 PM.

Bouverie Preserve — Donated for permanent protection and environmental education by David Pleydell-Bouverie, the Bouverie Preserve includes over 500 acres in Sonoma's Valley of the Moon. With five plant communities and a wealth of native wildlife, this is a sanctuary for native plants and animals such as bobcat, coyote and mountain lion. The spring wildflower displays are regionally renowned, and a 100-foot waterfall crowns the upper end of the preserve.

Field Trip Reports

The Northern Refuges

February 15-17



Six birders joined the leader at Tullake. Amazingly, there was little snow and no ice on the refuges. With so much open water, ducks, geese and swans were scattered and the usual concentrations of swans and eagles were missing. Nevertheless, the birders did get good looks at most of the target species.

One highlight of the trip was an albinistic Prairie Falcon at the Petroglyphs of the Lava Beds National Monument. This bird was all-white with black markings — no brown whatsoever — and was striking in appearance. The possibility of its being a Gyrfalcon disappeared when it flew and revealed its tell-tale black “armpits”

Rough-legged hawks were hard to find but eventually one was located. A surprise — unfortunately only seen by the leader — was a rare wintering Swainson's Hawk.

Efforts to locate Bohemian Waxwings and Northern Shrikes were fruitless, but early returning Sandhill Cranes were a surprise. —Cliff Richer

Pescadero Marsh

March 8

Eight members and three potential members encountered very good weather for this walk. While there were not many ducks in the marsh, there were lots of egrets.



We did observe the Great Blue Herons building their nests in the eucalyptus trees north of the marsh.

The first swallows of the spring made their appearance (species unknown) and the western pond turtles were on the banks unashamedly engaged in mating behavior. —John and Nina Padley

I got disappointed in human nature as well and gave it up because I found it too much like my own.

James Patrick Donleavy

Owls of San Mateo County - Part I

Great Horned Owl



Our most commonly heard (and seen) owl is the Great Horned. Rivaling the hawks in size, this bird exceeds them in ferocity and frequently attacks prey which outweighs it many times over. It is one of the few creatures which will attack, kill and eat skunks and can sometimes be located by the skunk odor coming from its roost or nest.

It has no natural enemies and sits atop the night time food chain. Its prey consists mainly of rodents, but it has been known to prey on house cats, coyote pups, rabbits, moths, bats and other birds.

Because of this last habit, the Great Horned Owl is often “mobbed” by other birds during the day. Jays and crows often engage in this mobbing, which consists mainly of rushing at the owl while calling loudly and raucously. They can be joined by small birds like the tiny kinglets and even predators like the Red-shouldered Hawk. The object of this mobbing is to annoy the owl enough so that it will move. Once darkness descends, they and their nestlings are all potential meals for the Great Horned Owl so they want it elsewhere before dark.

It is the only one of our owls that says “Who?”

Barn Owl

The Barn Owl is found on every continent except Antarctica. It is sometimes known as the farmers' friend since it will keep its resident barn free of rodents.

It feeds its young almost exclusively on mice and voles which it sometimes will release still live into the nest so that the young owlets can learn how to kill their own prey. It also will hunt for moths and other large insects that are attracted to bright lights and can sometimes be seen perched on light poles in deserted parking lots late at night or early in the morning hours before the sun is up. Normally, however it patrols low over the



fields listening for the tiny rustlings of its rodent prey.

It is in a different genus from the other owls and is quite distinctive looking. It is some-

times described as being “monkey-faced” and is our only owl that is all white underneath. This white appearance and its silent flight (typical of most owls) probably has given rise to many legends of ghosts. That it frequently hunts in cemeteries and screams and hisses (no hoots) makes this even more likely.

Its only natural enemy is the Great Horned Owl who loves to eat Barn Owls.

Western Screech Owl

The biggest of our “small” owls (8-10 inches long) this is one of our hard-



est owls to find. It usually does not come out until it is dark and rests in a cavity in a tree or hollow log during the day.

Despite its name the Western Screech Owl does not screech, but has a beautiful trilled whistling call. It is often the most difficult of the owls to call, but is sometimes impossible to shut up once started.

Its prey consists of small rodents, reptiles, insects and birds.

It prefers wooded habitats with trees large enough to support the nesting and roosting cavities it needs but is surprisingly common in our coastal scrub.

According to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, no fewer than 63 million people fed birds in their backyards in 1991.

Approximately \$2 billion was spent on birdseed, and no one knows how much on feeders and other equipment. The trend seems definitely to be going up, with some sellers of birdseed estimating that sales have quadrupled in the last decade.

Wildlife Recreation = Big \$\$!

The US Fish and Wildlife Service reports that traditional outdoor recreation - hunting, fishing, camping and wildlife viewing - resulted in annual consumer expenditures of more than \$40 billion.

The largest single area of expenditure was for equipment, particularly outdoor vehicles - campers, motor homes, trailers and off-road vehicles.

The second largest area was travel-related, with an estimated \$3 billion spent on food and drink, \$1.5 billion on lodging, \$1 billion on transportation and \$2 billion on miscellaneous fees and expenses.

The report went on to note that an estimated 109 million Americans participated in wildlife recreation as compared to 105 million who attended major league sports in 1991.

Garamendi Proposes Reducing Refuge Water Priorities

While the Clinton government is not the "most anti-environmental administration of all time" as characterized by the Green Party in last year's election, it is hardly an environmental model. The latest proposal by Deputy Interior Secretary Garamendi attests once again to the ambivalent nature of this crew.

Garamendi proposes to change priorities for water allocation and put the refuges below commercial water users. Garamendi's proposal would (in theory) meet the court requirements by buying water. That part of the proposal ignores two facts — that water may not be available on the open market and that no funds are available for the purchase of water.

If this proposal takes effect there will be immediate negative consequences for the Central Valley refuges — particularly for those in the Los Banos area where 13,000 acres of waterfowl food production would be lost, 1500 acres of fall and winter habitat would disappear, 1000 acres of nesting habitat would dry up and the salt and selenium reduction programs would have to be eliminated.

Floods Good for Waterfowl

Proving that every cloud has a silver lining, wildlife biologists from both the federal government and from Ducks Unlimited are predicting that this winter's floods will result in unprecedented waterfowl numbers next year.

The official waterfowl numbers surveyed this year were considerably lower than in past years, but this is attributed to the considerable expansion of habitat produced by the floods. Duck and geese numbers are generally taken from selected areas and then multiplied to reflect the "usual" available habitat. This year the waterfowl were so scattered that this method proved very unreliable.

DU biologist Fritz Reid believes that "more habitat gives the birds a chance to spread out and gain nutritional resources needed for the long migration back north. They also avoid potential disease, like avian cholera, which is triggered by overcrowding." He believes that this should mean earlier nesting, higher nesting success and record numbers next year.

Many of the refuges suffered heavy damage in the floods. The San Luis complex reported more than \$7 million in damage, mostly on the Merced National Wildlife Refuge.

Oakland Museum Presents Exhibit of Bio-Illustration

The Oakland Museum is celebrating "California Species: Biological Art and Illustration" through September 7 in an exhibit of 60 works by 44 artists.

These illustrations, intended to elucidate and educate, are precise and accurate, but must also be natural and lifelike. As a result they are often striking in their beauty and can be presented as fine art.

The species represented in the exhibition include plants, invertebrates, amphibians, mammals and birds and are in varied media from pen and ink to sculpture.



Sierra Nevada Classes

The Sierra Nevada Field Campus of San Francisco State University, once again under the direction of Jim Steele, will offer the following birding courses this year.

- June 2-6: Bird Identification by Song
Luis Baptista
- June 9-13: Birds of the Sierra Nevada
Dave Shuford
- June 30- July 4: Birdwatching in the Sierra
Nevada David Lukas
- July 14-18: Sierran Bird Banding 1
Jim Steele, Mac McCormick & Staff
- July 28-Aug. 1: Sierran Bird Banding 2
Dave DeSante & SNFC Staff

Each course listed costs \$165. Most of these courses are filled by late May.

The Sierra Nevada Field Campus is located on Hwy. 49, near Yuba Pass on the Tahoe National Forest. For more information contact Jim Steele at (415) 738-1814 or visit their web site at <http://thecity.sfsu.edu/snfc> where you can peruse information about courses and instructors or view the "Checklist of Birds of the Sierra Valley and Yuba Pass Area." The web site also lists additional local accommodations — motels and campgrounds — with links for more information.

County Acquiring Pillar Point Marsh

The county has closed escrow on 17 acres of the environmentally valuable Pillar Point Marsh and is still negotiating with the Dolger estate and with the Fahey and Valencia families on the remaining 12 acres.

When acquisition is completed, this marsh will come under the jurisdiction of the County Parks system and be managed by the Fitzgerald Marine Reserve staff.



Xerox: A trademark for a photocopying device that can make rapid reproductions of human error, perfectly.

Merle L. Meacham

A Pox on Your Feeders...

We've been hearing reports from various people who have been seeing birds — especially House Finches — with growths around their eyes.

While there are a number of bird diseases that can cause this condition, the most likely and most common cause in feeder birds is called avian pox.

Avian pox is a virus that infects the bird through cuts or abrasions. The growths that result are not fatal unless the bird is also suffering from other diseases but they can interfere with vision and can lead to secondary infections that *are* fatal.

The disease is easily spread at feeders where the virus can contaminate the feed or the feeding surfaces.

If you see any birds with this condition at your feeder, two courses of action are recommended. The easiest and most drastic is to discontinue feeding the birds for the season. Remove the feeder entirely and clean it with household bleach, diluted with nine parts of water. The alternative is to clean and disinfect your feeder frequently — at least daily. The same nine parts water to one part bleach mixture should be used. Refill your feeder with fresh seed. Dispose of any uneaten food in your household trash, preferably putting it in a plastic or sturdy paper bag.

You can also inspect your feeder to be sure that it does not have any sharp edges or rough surfaces that can cause cuts or abrasions.

Another possibility is a form of conjunctivitis that has affected House Finches on the east coast and in the mid-west. This disease seems to be specific to House Finches and is far more serious, but has not been documented west of the Rocky Mountains as yet. In any case, the remedial measures — thorough cleaning and removal of infected seed are identical.

One feeder user reported that they discontinued using a feeding platform and simply scattered the seed on the ground. By scattering it broadly they maintained that they eliminated the overcrowding at the feeder and saw no more signs of the disease.

Invaders

Cliff Richer

Some of our California birds are relatively recent arrivals. In connection with this I recently looked through some old bird guides and found some rather startling comments and/or omissions.

Cattle Egret — completely omitted from guides published before 1950. This opportunistic little heron seems to fit into an ecological niche that was otherwise unoccupied and its rapid expansion does not seem to have been at the expense of other birds.



Turkey Vulture — a very unscientific search failed to turn up any reference to this bird prior to 1849. Instead one finds numerous references to great numbers of California Condors. My quick hypothesis is that the Turkey Vulture followed cattle herds driven up from Mexico and, despite its smaller size, displaced the Condor throughout much of the latter's habitat.



Barred Owl — a very recent invader from the east via Canada, this owl has become established in parts of Oregon and Washington. Although it has been seen in Northern California, there are no breeding records as yet. It is closely related to the Spotted Owl (some experts consider them to be conspecific) and has interbred. (The hybrids are sometimes called "sparred" owls.) More adaptable than the Spotted Owl, it has displaced it in some areas and may be as much of a threat to this endangered species as is clear-cutting.



Blue Jay — There are enough records from the Tahoe area to indicate that a small population of this eastern bird may have become established in the area. Aggressive and very tolerant of human habitation, it is nevertheless unlikely that this bird will pose any threat to our native Scrub and Stellar's Jays.



Black-capped Chickadee — I once believed this bird to be well established in the Mount Lassen area, but I have never been able to relocate the flock I encountered in 1982 and have since seen



and heard Mountain Chickadees do perfect imitations of the Black-capped's "Chick-a-dee-dee-dee" call — thereby eliminating all my other possible identifications of this bird.

Northern Mockingbird — The older guides differ on their treatment of this bird, with one guide referring to it as rare north of San Francisco, and another establishing it in Oregon. In any case this bird has been steadily expanding its territory northward. In Kern and Los Angeles Counties, it has been accused of replacing LeConte's Thrasher.



European Starling — Our most pernicious and damaging invader, this aggressive bird was only an occasional visitor in 1950. Birds of the West by Ernest Sheldon Booth (1950) concludes his description, "There are now scattered records of Starlings in almost every western state, but we hope they will find the area unsuitable to their liking and will return eastward." The effect of Starlings on cavity-nesting species, particularly bluebirds and Purple Martins, has been disastrous.



Brown-headed Cowbird — Once associated with herds of American Bison, this bird quickly adapted to domestic cattle and invaded the western states from both Canada and Mexico (different sub-species according to one guide) and quickly became common wherever sheep or cattle were found.



Great-tailed Grackle — Steadily and slowly expanding northward, it is now established in Mono and northern Inyo Counties and one pair even tried to nest in San Francisco in the 80's. Since it competes with other equally aggressive species of blackbirds for food and nesting areas, its progress northwards has been slow.



Northern Cardinal — Despite regular reports of vagrant cardinals and an ill-conceived attempt to introduce this bird in Southern California, this bird's western expansion seems to have stopped. It is still expanding northward into New England and southern Canada.



Saving Bair Island...for a Road?!?

A special thanks is due to Carol Yuen for informing us about a small but vocal group that "just doesn't get it". This group looks at the purchase of Bair Island as an opportunity to build an access road to Redwood Shores from Whipple Avenue so as to relieve commuter traffic.

Happily, the Redwood Shores Homeowners Association, through its newsletter, *The Pilot*, is actively opposed to this ill-conceived idea. Let's hope it stays just that - an ill-conceived idea.

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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