

sequoia needles

Bulletin of the Sequoia Audubon Society
San Mateo County Volume 49, No. 5
February, 1999

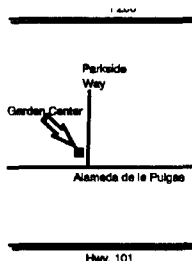
This Month's Program

The Pribilof Islands of Alaska

Leslie Flint will present a reprise on her 1991 trip to St. Lawrence Island and its neighboring islands a few miles across the Bering Strait from Siberia. Slides will illustrate not only the birds and wildlife but the native culture



of this isolated land. The meeting is Thursday, February 11 at the San Mateo Garden Center on the Alameda at Parkside. An informal get-together at 7:30 PM is followed by the meeting and program at 8.



Next Month'S Program

Audubon Canyon Ranch Update Raven Depradation

Ray Peterson, the Senior Naturalist at ACR, will present a program concentrating on the problems posed to the ACR heronry by the explosion in corvids — particularly ravens.



Ray's programs are always a delight, as he brings not only his enthusiasm but his unique sense of humor to any project.



Watch Next Month's *Needles* for the Christmas Count Results

From the President

Francis Toldi

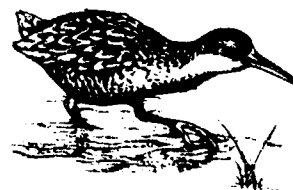
You have read in these pages various accounts of one of our most exciting ongoing projects, our Breeding Bird Atlas. In addition to the hours of field work and data recorded and analysis there is another fascinating dimension to the project: an overview of the changes in the county's biogeography. We are all sensitive to the many changes in the landscape of San Mateo County that have reduced and even extirpated many species of bird. Sometimes these changes result in an increase of species, such as American Robins and Cooper's Hawks.



Although our atlas project is first and foremost a compilation and explanation of our breeding bird data, we also hope to include a discussion on the changes in bird habitat in the county over the years. To accomplish this we need information on the habitats and birds of days past. If you have or know of any such information, please call me. It might take the form of old photographs, bird lists or accounts of wildlife noted in earlier years, or articles from old magazines and newspapers. If you know of a collection (such as the San Mateo County Historical Society) that might have this information, I would also appreciate hearing about it.

For your enjoyment, and in keeping with my recent historical theme, I offer this quote from an article on the early years (19th Century) of the Burlingame Country Club, reprinted from the Fall 1973 issue (Vol. XVII, No.3) of *La Peninsula*, the Journal of the San Mateo County Historical Association:

"Hunting appealed to many, and of course horses were used. Members could enjoy superb fishing at Crystal Springs Lakes, and a permit was easily obtainable from the manager of the Club. Pigeon shoots were also held at the lakes. In the early days, game hunting was especially good along the marshlands of the bay. Considered an especial delicacy was the Clapper Rail (*Rallus ion girostris obsoletus*). In recent years bay-fill plus the use of DDT sprays for mosquito control have almost exterminated the little bird."



Francis Toldi

Francis Toldi

The mission of Sequoia Audubon Society is to participate 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

February

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 4 -- BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING at the Audubon Office at 7:30 PM. All members are welcome to attend.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 7 -- WOODBRIDGE ROAD IN THORNTON is one of the prime spots for viewing wintering Sandhill Cranes as they feed in the farm fields on both sides of the road. While "killer" looks cannot be guaranteed this spot offers some of the best chances for seeing this bird at close range. Geese, ducks, swans, raptors, mountain plovers and cattle egrets are other regularly seen species in the area. Depending upon time and weather other areas may be visited before breakup in the afternoon. Bring lunch and liquids. To get there, 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 plenty of 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**



News from the Ranch

Betsy Stafford

As grassy fuzz begins to poke through our meadows of dry seedpods and fruits, so does our ACR organization change with the season. In October we gave hearty thanks to Jack Harper, Madrone Audubon member and ACR's Board President last year, and welcomed **Leslie Flint, Sequoia Representative, as our new President.** Other Chapter Reps to our 98-99 Board of 24: Gordon Bennett, Barbara Salzman, and Lowell Sykes from Marin; Jack Harper and Jeff Holzman from Madrone; Dan Murphy from Golden Gate; and Jean Holzman from Sequoia.

Our two teaching venues, Bolinas Lagoon and Bouverie, have been abuzz with schoolchildren and docents. The 23 session New Docent Training Course is underway at Bolinas, and the Continuing Docent Training Course at Bouverie.

RESEARCH AT ACR -- At Bolinas we continue to assess the results of the intense raven predation of our heronry last summer (fewer than 15 successful Great Egret nests). ACR is beginning a collaborative study with Point Reyes Bird Observatory to study foraging behavior and nesting biology of Common Ravens in the Northern San Francisco Bay Area. Radio telemetry will be used to track their movements.

WE NEED LEADERS!

...IF SAS IS TO CONTINUE OFFERING FIELD TRIPS TO ITS MEMBERS AND FRIENDS.

You don't need to be a super birder. In fact, we could use wildflower or other naturalist leaders. You only need to know an area that you are willing to share with the rest of us.

CALL MERRY HAVEMAN (344-2146) IF YOU CAN HELP

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 11 -- GENERAL MEETING -- SAS's Leslie Flint will give us all the details of her 1991 trip to Alaska's Pribilof Islands. The meeting begins at 7:30 with an informal get-together followed by the meeting and program at 8 PM at the San Mateo Garden Center on the Alameda at Parkside. See Page One for more details.

THE PRESIDENTS' DAY WEEKEND TRIP TO THE NORTHERN REFUGES HAS BEEN CANCELED.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 20 -- ED LEVIN PARK -- This park in the east foothills boasts a varied assortment of habitats including a duck pond, Sandywool Lake, grass and riparian habitats. In winter it is particularly noted for woodpeckers and raptors. To get there take Hwy. 101 to Sunnyvale and then proceed east on Hwy. 237 through Milpitas where it turns into Calaveras Blvd.. Continue on Calaveras and keep to the right where it forks at Dowling Rd. The park entrance will be on the right. A fee is required. We will meet at 8:30 AM for this half-day trip. **RAIN CANCELS.**

LEADER **MERRY HAVEMAN** **344-2146**

Heavy rains last winter breached the levee at Cypress Grove Preserve and transformed the freshwater marsh to a tidal system. ACR now has an "opportunity" to study hydrogeomorphologic changes in the lower marsh in conjunction with ongoing monitoring of vegetation and bird use in the Livermore Marsh.

Visiting scientists are now studying the influence of bush lupine on plant community structure, acoustic communication in Plainfin Midshipman Fish, and holocene land-level changes along the San Andreas Fault.

For ten years ACR field observers have conducted shorebird and waterbird censuses on Tomales Bay four times a year. This year our efforts will be coordinated with Point Reyes Bird Observatory and Point Reyes National Seashore to inventory shorebird and waterbirds throughout coastal Mann wetlands.

1999 will be the tenth year for the Heron and Egret Project. Currently there are 72 active sites monitored by 90 dedicated field observers throughout the late winter and spring. If you are aware of any nesting colonies of Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, Snowy Egret or Black Crowned Night Herons, please call Katie at (415) 663-8203. New field observers are particularly needed for Sonoma and Napa counties.

An Open Letter from Anne Moser

Dear SAS Members,

Thank you! Thank you for the wonderful book that Francis, on your behalf, gave me at the December potluck meeting. I was totally surprised and very pleased.

If you haven't seen *Bay Area Wild* with text and pictures by Galen Rowell and Michael Sewell, do look at a copy. It is a beautiful recollection of the beauties of the very special place in which we live. Its given me hours of pleasure.

Again, thank you so very much.

Anne Moser

(During his presentation, President Francis Toldi noted Anne's two terms as President and four terms as Past President, without going into length on the specifics of Anne's outstanding service. In the opinion of your editor, Anne has been one of three outstanding Presidents during my 17 years of association with SAS. She has also been, in my opinion, the most effective member of the Board of Directors during that period. Besides that, she is a very fine lady.

---The Editor)

CALIFORNIA DUCK DAYS 1999

Now in its sixth successful year, California Duck Days will take place President's Day weekend, February 12-14, 1999. The festival features fascinating field trips, workshops, demonstrations, and a large Exposition Hall full of educational displays about wetlands and other Central Valley wildlife habitats.

There are over 40 field trips to view and learn about wildlife in areas throughout the Central Valley, many on private land not normally available to the public. There are children's activities galore, including live baby ducklings and a special performance by Voice of the Wood, a storytelling threesome with music, masks, and artwork held in an exposition hall full of hands-on activities, displays, and over 35 different organizations concerned with wildlife and habitat protection.

Call 1-800-425-5001 today to receive a Schedule of Events with full details about this wild wetland weekend.

California Duck Days is an educational, nonprofit event that inspires people about wetlands and wildlife of the Central Valley in a fun, family-oriented atmosphere. A one-day registration is just \$15, and a weekend pass that includes all field trips and on-site events is only \$25. Children 16 and under are admitted free.

Call 530-758-1286 for a registration form, or visit their website at www.volobasin.org/duckdavsl.htm.

California Duck Days is a project of the nonprofit Yolo Basin Foundation and is produced by a wide array of agencies and community organizations. The 1999 Steering Committee includes the Cache Creek Conservancy, California Waterfowl Association, City of Davis, Sierra Club California, UC Davis, and the Yolo Audubon Society. Novo Nordisk Biotech, Inc., the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, Sierra Club California, and Ellison & Schneider, provide major support.

Sequoia Audubon Society

The SAS Calendar March



THURSDAY, MARCH 4 -- BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING at the Audubon Office at 7:30 PM. All members are welcome to attend.

THURSDAY, MARCH 11 -- GENERAL MEETING — ACR's Ray Peterson will update us on the details of last summer's depredation of the Bolinas Heronry by Common Ravens and tell us of the study now being performed to determine how this activity can be minimized in future years. The meeting begins at 7:30 with an informal get-together followed by the meeting and program at 8 PM at the San Mateo Garden Center on the Alameda at Parkside.

See next month's *Needles* for the list of field trips

Half Moon Bay Dunes Restoration

Come join State Parks rangers and volunteers at the beach and be part of an exciting restoration project. They are restoring native coastal dune and bluff plant communities along a 2.5 mile section of the Coastside Trail. Volunteers will learn to identify ten native plants and five non-native plants (exotics). Projects will include planting native seedlings, removing exotics and collecting seeds. A walk will be scheduled to the nearby nesting sites of the threatened Snowy Plover.



To volunteer please contact:

Marianne Kjobmand
726-8801

California State Park
Half Moon Bay State Beach

The Restoration Team meets at 10 AM the first Saturday and third Sunday of the month at the main parking lot of State Park Headquarters at 95 Kelly Avenue in Half Moon Bay

Pt. Pelee Birding Site Destroyed

April storms ripped at the northern shores of Lake Erie, reshaping the tip of Point Pelee.

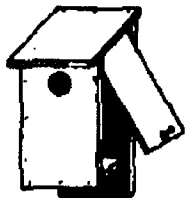
East Beach, famous for its low brush filled with warblers in May, was virtually destroyed. Most of the underbrush was covered with up to five feet of sand, the boardwalk shifted and had to be removed, the tip was greatly reduced in width and downed trees blocked access to it.

There are no plans to reconstruct the site, inasmuch as the changes were brought about through natural causes and the Canadian Park Service generally allows nature to run its course.

The Bluebird Journal

Howard Rathlesberger

During the fall and early winter the Filoli bluebird trails were enlarged from 36 to a total of 59 houses. 38 are of the hanging type, which proved so popular with bluebirds and swallows. Why so many boxes? To avoid conflicts between the violet green swallows which start nesting while the bluebirds are laying the first clutch of eggs. The swallow population also can exceed the bluebirds.



Because the boxes are used for roosting by the bluebirds and other resident cavity nesters and, possibly, other perching birds that can enter the 1 9/16" diameter hole, we've winterized the boxes so the birds can retain more of their body heat during the freezing cold nights. Evidence of roosting is indicated by droppings and feathers remaining in the box. Monitoring all boxes during Christmas week revealed 12 boxes with evidence of roosting.

Monitoring the boxes frequently gives us an idea of activity and some indication of the population. The area around the Northgate is a popular spot. There's a box on a pole behind the gate house, one on the low limb of the large oak and 5 boxes in the large oaks across the way.

There were 2 bluebird and 2 violet green swallow nests in this area. Other very active areas are Meadow road, north west of the Mansion. There are 6 houses along here, all of which were active last season. The South Gate entrance up to the bridge has 6 boxes, 4 of which were active last year.

If you would like to participate in this project at Filoli or another location, please call Howard Rathlesberger, Coordinator of the Bluebird Recovery Program, San Mateo County at 367-1296 or e-mail at RATHLES@AOL.com.

Birding by Eurorail

Anne Moser

Birding from a European train is a lesson in frustration. Wanting to stop and really look and being unable to do so is infuriating. I traveled with my husband — a definite non-birder — from October 22 to November 6 visiting friends in Germany, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia and Austria. Many days were spent in trains going from town to town. But we did manage to see a few birds when we were able to walk through a few parks.

Watching from the train, I found I had to depend on such things as habitat, flight characteristics and silhouettes. The last especially since the train windows were often dirty and the light poor. We also had lots of rain and some snow. Anyway, I ended up with a train list of 21 and a walk list of 10*

Grebe (species unknown) Cormorant
Gray Heron Great White Egret
Mute Swan Mallard

Duck (species unknown) Marsh Harrier
Rough-legged Buzzard Buzzard Kestrel
Pheasant Coot Gull (species unknown)
Woodpigeon Rock Dove Stock Dove
Pied Wagtail* Robin* Blackbird*
Tree Creeper* Nuthatch* Great Tit*
Coal Tit* Blue Tit* Magpie
Nutmacker* Rook, Hooded Crow
House Sparrow*

My field guide was Peterson's *A Field Guide to the Birds of Britain and Europe*, fourth edition.

Birding Classes

Evening bird classes taught by Joe Morlan will start Feb. 9, 10, and 11. All classes meet 7-9:15 p.m. in room 222, Marina Middle School, 3500 Fillmore at Bay St. Free parking is in the school lot off Bay St. The instructor is co-author of *"Birds of San Francisco and the Bay Area"* and *"Birds of Northern California"*. He is also coordinator of the recorded Northern California Birdbox sponsored by Golden Gate Audubon. The text for all classes is *A Field Guide to Birds of North America*, second edition, by the National Geographic Society.

Fees are \$98.50 for each seven-week course. Pre-registration is strongly advised. For details call (415) 561-1860.

Sauppe Milestone Noted in SJ Paper

Cliff Richer

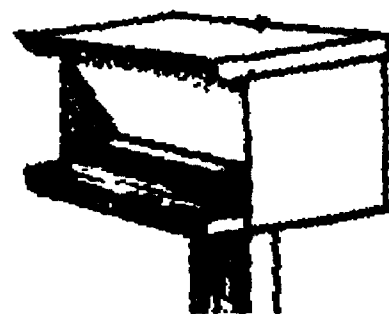
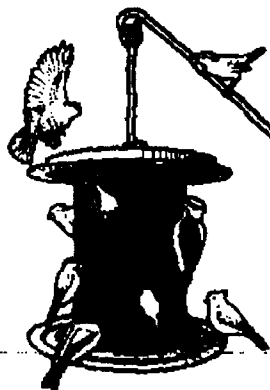
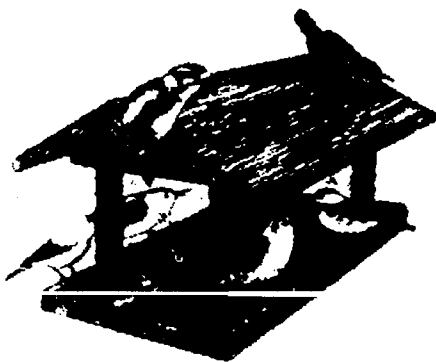
Jennifer Mena of the Mercury News decided it would probably be a good human interest story to cover one of the Christmas Counts and report on those eccentric people who tramp through the fields to complete this annual event. In doing so, she stumbled on a major birding achievement.

Barry Sauppe, who virtually invented the concept of pelagic birding from shore, was at his usual spot near Pigeon Point when Jennifer came upon him and Eileen. During the course of the interview, Barry, whose record-keeping is as meticulous and obsessive as his birding, noted that he had just recorded his 10,000th hour at the point.

To those who are unimpressed by that number, remember that is equivalent to one year, one month, 20 days and 16 hours of non-stop birding! Or put another way, nearly 13% of his entire leisure time for 26 years was spent on his way to, coming back from, or at Pigeon Point peering through a telescope. (Anyone who has tried looking through a scope for an extended period of time can appreciate that Barry may be the world's largest consumer of Visine).

Those who know Barry are not surprised. They know that he spends 100% of his time birding. His senses are always turned on. Once, while traveling in a particularly noisy van, with the radio blaring and a four way conversation underway, he called "Stop!". He had heard a Yellow Warbler — a bird we hadn't yet seen that day — singing from the roadside. We turned back and sure enough, a half mile back, there was the little bird, chirping away.

To Jennifer's credit, she did not succumb to the temptation to characterize we birders as the harmless, but somewhat dotty eccentrics that we really are. But she did fall prey to the "what is it?" syndrome. Had we followed her lead, we would have been the only Christmas Count to have recorded the rare "Black-vintaged Shearwater".



WINTER 1999 BIRDSEED SALE ORDER FORM

ALL ORDERS WITH PAYMENT MUST BE RECEIVED BY WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 10

Proceeds support local Audubon conservation and education programs

Please check preferred pickup location. Pickup dates will be February 18-21, 1998 with details to be advised later.

☐ San Bruno

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THE NEXT SEED SALE WILL BE HELD IN APRIL 1999

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

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Mail your check and order to

SEQUOIA AUDUBON SOCIETY

30 West 39th Avenue, Suite 202

San Mateo, CA 94403

345-3724

Thank You! Thank You! Thank You!

Once again you have come to our aid. This year we asked for your help because Audubon Canyon Ranch had suffered severely from depredation by Common Ravens and was asking for our assistance in funding a study of the problem, because Bair Island's funding has not yet been repaid, because our Audubon Adventures educational program is important to our future and because the Needles is our major means of communication with you. Your response was outstanding.

And now, we have just been informed that the cost of producing this newsletter will more than double, beginning with this edition. Your help was both timely and appreciated and was sufficiently generous that we will be able to meet our other funding commitments to ACR, Bair Island and to Audubon Adventures. Thank you.

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SAN MATEO
HILLSBOROUGH
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*Members of Santa Clara Audubon

More Threats to Rainforest

The president of Venezuela has issued a decree opening up the eight million acre Imataca Reserve to gold and diamond mining.

The reserve is on the border between Venezuela and Guyana and is mostly pristine rainforest. The decree would allow mining and logging in 96% of Imataca.

The Venezuelan Congress, declaring the decree illegal, has taken the issue to that nation's supreme court.

Five native peoples who have inhabited the forest for centuries are among the many Venezuelan groups opposing the decree. "The Imataca is our home, our laboratory, our hospital, our university. It is the source of the knowledge we need to survive. Our fight against the decree is a fight in defense of life," said a tribal spokesman.

Opposition political parties and even the Catholic Church have weighed in against the decree.

Field Trip Report

Friday, Nov. 27 -- Coyote Point

Ten hardy souls braved the drizzle and birded the Coyote Point Yacht Harbor, jetty and fresh water pond.

SAS members included John Padley, Kathleen Schnee, Paul and Madeline Arnaud and Bonnie Michalek — accompanied by her brother-in-law, visiting from Washington state.

We were rewarded with 41 different species including a "mystery" duck.

One of the more interesting parts of the trip was watching the Common Snipe in its bobbing feeding behavior.

—Sue Cossins

SW Europe Trip

Edris Cole of ACR still has room for a few people on her birding and natural history trip to the Pyrenees and to the French Camargue.

Led by noted British naturalist Ian Armstrong the trip will encompass the dates of 5/19 through 6/4.

If you are interested in this tour, give Edris a call at 415-868-2148.

The '98 Fall Challenge

Francis Toldi

Once again Sequoia Audubon Society sponsored a team in the California Fall Challenge, a bird race organized by the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory. Our team, the Rowdy Stone-terners consists of Peter Metropulos, Bert McKee and me. The rules of the game are that each team identify as many birds as possible on a given day in one county. Not surprisingly, we chose San Mateo County.

We got off to a terrific start: all the expected owls and rails called easily, including a Saw-whet Owl at Bert's house, and a Western Screech-owl along Canyon Road. The latter bird was working through its entire repertoire of hoots and whistles, including some I'd never heard before. We raced out to Pigeon Point just after dawn, to be greeted by a marvelous spectacle — thousands of Black-vented Shearwaters passing north just offshore. None of us had ever seen that many of this species. Otherwise the pelagic birding was a little slow, although we did see most of the hoped-for species such as loons, gulls, Pomarine and Parasitic Jaegers, Sooty Shearwater, and a few alcids.

Our next task was to try to locate the large insectivore flocks and search the interior canyons for late migrants. Just a week before a number of striking rarities were found and re-found in the coastal areas. We found the flocks, all right, but they seemed to consist almost entirely of Townsend's Warblers. Through diligent searching we found one each of Hermit, Yellow, and Black-throated Gray Warblers along Gazos Creek, along with a Tropical Kingbird.

Our final coastal stop for the morning was at the Princeton Willows, where we located the bird of the day, a Least Flycatcher found a few days earlier and still present on our big day. Also in the thicket was a Nashville Warbler, a welcome sight. A lone Eared Grebe on Princeton Harbor helped our meager grebe

total.

Next we headed over the hill, stopping at various points along Skyline for interior birds. Notable was a leucistic Bushtit near Sand Hill Road. The birds didn't cooperate as we had hoped here. Some we just missed, like White-breasted

Nuthatch. Others we found only with considerable effort, including Western Bluebird, Loggerhead Shrike and Green Heron.

Then it was off to the Bayshore for waterbirds and shorebirds. Foster City had its typical range of

shorebirds including Red Knot and Ruddy Turnstone (our near-namesake), Bayfront Park produced a heard-only Pheasant and, best of all, Ravenswood contained a few of the County's last Common Moorhens and an extraordinary concentration of Lesser Yellowlegs, uncommon at any season. We were still plagued by non-cooperative species, such as the completely silent and invisible Clapper Rail.

With the light fading, we rushed over the hill back to the coast. Along the way we checked the list for obvious misses, and found that we hadn't yet located a Dark-eyed Junco! Fortunately a flock was quickly located. We finished the day at Pescadero on a futile search for shorebirds seen a few days previously, and a more satisfying close at Año Nuevo watching Ring-necked Ducks, Pygmy Nuthatches and a late flock of Barn Swallows. Our last bird of the day in Pescadero was a hissing Barn Owl which we had missed in the morning.

Our species total for the day was 162 species, with 154 seen by all (95.06%). This amount won us three prizes: Highest number of species, highest percentage of regularly occurring birds and best bird (the Least Flycatcher). Among our prizes were two good pairs of binoculars, which we are donating to worthy Mexican Biologists in the name of SFBBO.

(Congratulations to Francis, Peter and Bert for their second sweep of the Challenge on behalf of SAS. Tom Ryan, SFBBO's former biologist, personally delivered the binoculars to his Mexican colleagues —Ed.).



Gifts and Bequests

Frances Nelson

Gwyneth Van in memory of Nancy Chow

Eric and Polly Bergman, Jose and Rose Mendiola, Noel Miller, Inc., and Jeff Sage in memory of Bob Sage

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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