

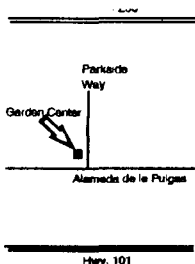
sequoia needles

Bulletin of the Sequoia Audubon Society
San Mateo County Volume 49, No. 6
March, 1999

This 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.

The meeting is at the San Mateo Garden Center just off the Alameda at Parkside. The meeting begins at 8 with the program following immediately.

1989 they had published *Important Bird Areas in Europe*, an impressive compendium of 2,444 sites in 32 countries that qualified as IBAs.

The European Union made it a responsibility of individual nations to protect their IBAs, and many nations have complied. Today, hundreds of sites in Europe representing at least 20 million acres have received some form of protection thanks to the IBA Program.

In 1995, the National Audubon Society and the American Bird Conservancy jointly inaugurated the American IBA Program. ABC has lead responsibility for compiling the list of nationally and globally important areas. Audubon, in keeping with its emphasis on state-based activities, has focused on building strong state programs. California is one of more than twenty states around the country to launch its own program through the cooperation of ABC, California Partners in Flight, Point Reyes Bird Observatory, Audubon chapters, and other partners.

Building strong state programs can result in effective conservation. In New York State, a bill signed into law last year recognizes "Bird Conservation Areas" on state-owned lands and has raised the bar of bird-habitat management for those sites. Pennsylvania automatically gives extra high ranking to areas that are on or adjacent to IBAs when considering applications for open-space funding and protection. None of these victories would have been possible without the support and participation of Audubon chapters and other local groups. The unique blend of skills, advocacy, and enthusiasm that volunteers bring to the table is ultimately what will ensure that individual IBAs get the protection they deserve.

When we are done in California, we will have identified a whole network of areas that are essential for bird conservation — and that this in turn links to a network of similar areas spread around the globe.

California is one of more than twenty states around the country to launch an Important Bird Areas Program. That puts it right in the mainstream of a program that is worldwide in scope and local in its conservation results.

Dan Taylor, State Director of Audubon California, says that the IBAs are "the best of the Audubon tradition. The IBAs identified will form the core of Audubon-California's bird conservation priorities for years to come. We look forward to working on this great endeavor with our Audubon National IBA Program, the American Bird Conservancy, Partners In Flight, and hundreds of volunteers throughout California."

See Page Three for **Christmas Count** **Results**

Next Month's Program

Al Jaramillo, Coyote Creek Riparian Station's resident ornithologist, a SAS director and a professional tour leader, will update us on "BIRD BANDING AND MIGRANTS AT COYOTE CREEK"

Al previously presented a very well-received program on the birds of his native Patagonia.

What's an IBA?

*Adapted from an article by Fred Baumgarten, Coordinator,
NAS Important Bird Area Program*

The Important Bird Areas (IBA) Program was begun in Europe by BirdLife International in the mid-1980s. The idea was simple: Compile an inventory of key sites using standardized, scientifically grounded criteria, publicize the compilation, and make it the basis for prioritizing conservation activities. By

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

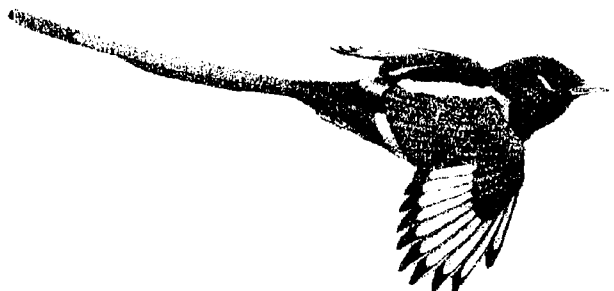
March

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 Page One for more details.

SATURDAY, MARCH 13 — FOSTER CITY AREAS — Ducks and shorebirds will be our main interest along the bays and lagoons of Foster City. Meet at the Recreation Center on Shell Boulevard just south of Hillsdale Boulevard at 8:00 AM. **HEAVY RAIN CANCELS THE TRIP.**
LEADER . MERRY HAVEMAN 344-2146

SATURDAY, MARCH 27 — PULGAS RIDGE OPEN SPACE AREA — Our leader covered this area while conducting his Breeding Bird Atlas surveys and recommends it for its variety of habitats. We should see all our resident woodland species and catch some early wildflowers. The walk is a 3 mile loop with a 400' change in elevation. To get there from 280, exit on Edgewood Road and go east one mile, turn left on Crest View and left again on Edmonds. Go past the treatment plant and park on the right at the Blue Oak trail head. We will meet at 8 AM. **RAIN CANCELS THE TRIP.**
LEADER RICK JOHNSON 329-9639



The population of Canada geese in Anchorage is estimated at about 4,300 birds, 10 times what it was a decade ago. Projections have it increasing to about 20,000 in the next decade. A flock of geese caused a plane crash at the local air force base in 1994, with 24 people killed.

Science Fair

SAS Gives Awards for Environmental Projects

Sequoia Audubon Society recently presented awards to participants in the San Mateo County Science Fair for outstanding achievements in the environmental area.

Elizabeth Hubbard of the eighth grade at Parkside Intermediate School, San Bruno Park School District was recognized for *Where Eagles Dare — Wind Energy*, a project focusing on the birds of prey being killed by the windmills at Altamont Pass. She tested colors of rotor blades to determine which were most visible to the raptors, finding that eagles apparently see green best. She also came up with other suggestions for reducing raptor mortality at the windmill farms.



Kristen Gunther of the seventh grade at Cunha Intermediate School, Cabrillo School District, was also given an award for *Look Before You Leap*, a project showing the impact that visitors had on the sea anemones at Fitzgerald Marine Reserve.

SAS congratulates these and the other young scientists who participated in this annual event.

Audubon Habitat Collection

National Audubon, in partnership with Monrovia, a leading grower of container plants, is promoting plants that are friendly to a variety of birds and butterflies. Two hundred plant varieties selected by National Audubon are now available in local garden centers and nurseries.

Jesse Grantham, formerly from the Sacramento office, says "We believe we can educate gardeners about the important role plants play in a healthy environment, and how those plants complement each other in the survival and health of birds, insects, and other wildlife. We hope to introduce millions of people to birds and plants, and the relationship between the two. With an understanding of that relationship, people may be greater advocates for the protection of their environment."

Grantham points out that the two leading American pastimes are gardening and bird watching. "Birders are interested in learning how to attract birds to their own backyards, and gardening enthusiasts can add diversity to their gardens with plants that help attract beautiful birds and butterflies. This is just a natural fit, and the Audubon Society is pleased to be working with Monrovia to encourage people to garden for wildlife."

To find the nearest garden center offering the Audubon Habitat Collection, call toll free 1-858-Plant It! For a free brochure about gardening for birds, send a self-addressed, stamped, business-size envelope to: Monrovia Audubon Habitat Collection, P0 Box 1385, Azusa, CA 91702-1385.

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Always be sincere, even when you don't mean it.

— Irene Peter

1998 CHRISTMAS COUNT 1998

CS AN			SPECIES CS AN			SPECIES CS AN			SPECIES CS AN		
Red-throated Loon	63	86	Turkey Vulture	36	92	California Gull	2524	85	Winter Wren	22	30
Pacific Loon	99	379	Osprey	2		Herring Gull	124	40	Marsh Wren	11	13
Common Loon	22	23	White-tailed Kite	14	25	Thayer's Gull	13	4	American Dipper		1
Loon, species:		5	Bald Eagle	1		Western Gull	8131	746	Golden-crowned Kinglet	119	57
Horned Grebe	176	14	Northern Harrier	17	24	Glaucous-winged Gull	743	191	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	434	276
Red-necked Grebe	1		Sharp-shinned Hawk	11	7	Gull, GW x Western hybrid	280	1	Blue-gray Gnatcatcher		1
Eared Grebe	23	12	Cooper's Hawk	10	7	Glaucous Gull	1		Western Bluebird	16	22
Western Grebe	568	191	Accipiter, species:		1	Black-legged Kittiwake	2	16	Hermit Thrush	201	107
Clark's Grebe	58	6	Red-shouldered Hawk	30	11	Gull, species	3548	325	American Robin	1154	37
Aechmophorus, species	1	717	Red-tailed Hawk	140	66	Forster's Tern	41		Varied Thrush	160	73
Northern Fulmar	2	3	Buteo species	1		Common Murre	198	518	Wrenit	147	109
Sooty Shearwater		7	American Kestrel	50	41	Marbled Murrelet	4	19	Northern Mockingbird	20	
Short-tailed Shearwater		19	Merlin	5	4	Ancient Murrelet	11	8	California Towhee	9	6
Shearwater, sooty/short-tailed	4	28	Peregrine Falcon	4	9	Cassin's Auklet		4	American Pipit	15	6
Black-vented Shearwater		21	Prairie Falcon		1	Rhinoceros Auklet	2	48	Cedar Waxwing	57	42
Shearwater, species:			Wild Turkey	2		Rock Dove	777	39	Loggerhead Shrike	3	3
Brown Pelican	195	1231	California Quail	476	421	Band-tailed Pigeon	3		European Starling	1037	97
Double-crested Cormorant	539	29	Clapper Rail	3		Mourning Dove	303	60	Blue-headed Vireo		1
Brandt's Cormorant	41	141	Virginia Rail	14	16	Barn Owl	4	7	Cassin's Vireo		1
Pelagic Cormorant	15	73	Sora	3	3	Western Screech-owl	5	3	Hutton's Vireo	42	24
Great Blue Heron	15	9	American Coot	1871	147	Great Horned Owl	19	7	Orange-crowned Warbler	18	10
Great Egret	49	4	Black-bellied Plover	354	10	Northern Pygmy-owl	2	6	Nashville Warbler	3	2
Snowy Egret	172	3	Pacific Golden-Plover		1	Burrowing Owl	1		Yellow-rumped Warbler	1328	62
Green Heron	2	1	Snowy Plover	12	19	Long-eared Owl	1		Myrtle	58	15
Black-crowned Night-heron	21	3	Semi-palmated Plover	27		Short-eared Owl	1		Audubon's	297	75
Ross' Goose	1	2	Killdeer	133	225	Northern Saw-whet Owl	5	8	Black-throated Gray Warbler	1	
Brant	6	81	Black Oystercatcher	4	16	Anna's Hummingbird	372	63	Townsend's Warbler	368	112
Canada Goose	340		Black-necked Stilt	129	5	Belted Kingfisher	12	9	Hermit Warbler	1	
Wood Duck		31	American Avocet	1313		Acorn Woodpecker	20	51	Palm Warbler	2	
Green-winged Teal	292	28	Greater Yellowlegs	28	2	Red-naped Sapsucker		1	Black-and-white Warbler	3	1
Mallard	571	45	Willet	1754	94	Red-naped/Yellow Bellied SS	1		Wilson's Warbler	1	
Northern Pintail	22	408	Wandering Tattler	1	1	Red-breasted Sapsucker	10	6	Spotted Towhee	97	75
Cinnamon Teal	2	3	Spotted Sandpiper	10		Nuttall's Woodpecker	8		California Towhee	232	103
Northern Shoveler	481	46	Whimbrel	110	25	Downy Woodpecker	34	21	Savannah Sparrow	66	35
Gadwall	79	2	Long-billed Curlew	561		Hairy Woodpecker	20	24	Fox Sparrow	238	212
Eurasian Wigeon	4		Marbled Godwit	533	59	Northern Flicker	96	72	Song Sparrow	256	436
American Wigeon	353	7	Ruddy Turnstone	6		Yellow-shafted		1	Lincoln's Sparrow	59	48
Canvasback	1379	35	Black Turnstone	104	98	Pileated Woodpecker		1	Swamp Sparrow	1	7
Redhead	2		Surfbird	38	120	Black Phoebe	116	87	White-throated Sparrow	5	6
Black-necked Duck	36	27	Red Knot	42		Say's Phoebe	13	18	Golden-crowned Sparrow	811	615
Greater Scaup	15364	10	Sanderling	241	146	Thick-billed Kingbird	1		White-crowned Sparrow	863	858
Lesser Scaup	115	7	Western Sandpiper	698		Tree Swallow		7	Dark-eyed Junco	457	249
Scaup Species	1475		Least Sandpiper	119		Steller's Jay	156	123	Red-winged Blackbird	223	1245
Oldsquaw		1	Dunlin	3499	1	Scrub Jay	314	130	Tricolored Blackbird	100	301
Black Scoter	23	4	Peep, species	12		American Crow	106		Western Meadowlark	294	238
Surf Scoter	2590	305	Short-billed Dowitcher	1		Common Raven	327	174	Brewer's Blackbird	743	1171
White-winged Scoter	8	18	Long-billed Dowitcher	597	3	Chestnut-backed Chickadee	547	354	Brown-headed Cowbird	134	30
Common Goldeneye	888	16	Dowitcher, Species:	36		Oak Titmouse	19	2	Blackbird species:		235
Barrow's Goldeneye	28		Common Snipe	36	7	Bushtit	598	199	Purple Finch	50	35
Bufflehead	1648	59	Red Phalarope	1		Red-breasted Nuthatch	23	12	House Finch	622	256
Hooded Merganser	66	4	Pomarine Jaeger	1	3	White-breasted Nuthatch	7	6	Red Crossbill		19
Red-breasted Merganser	30	29	Bonaparte's Gull	4		Pygmy Nuthatch	76	54	Pine Siskin	16	213
Ruddy Duck	1325	64	Heermann's Gull	11	192	Brown Creeper	32	16	Lesser Goldfinch	16	1
			Mew Gull	203	175	Bewick's Wren	105	42	American Goldfinch	11	5
			Ring-billed Gull	388	0	House Wren	2	4	House Sparrow	127	65

Crystal Springs: Ano Nuevo

Total Species: 190 170
Total Birds Counted 76333 18808
Number of participants 59 32

Compilers **Bert McKee and Robin Smith**

Bold-faced type indicates a significantly higher than average number.

Underlined, italicized type indicates a significantly lower than average number

PARTICIPANTS - BOTH COUNTS

J.R. Blair, Nat Bowditch, Jo Chamberlain, Barbara Costa, Merry Haveman, Grant Hoyt, Jim Hully, Colleen Ibarra, Bert McKee, Peter Metropoulos, Susan Nutter, Dave Powell, Vijay Ramachanbram, Barry & Eileen Sauppe, Robin Smith, Judy Spittler, Barbara & Bill Vanderwerf, Adam Winer

PARTICIPANTS - CRYSTAL SPRINGS

Jerry Brown, Phyllis Browning, Virginia Clifford, Luke Cole, Sue Cossins, Gary Deghi, Al DeMartini, Al Eisner, Leslie Flint, Dan Greaney, Lou Hart, Marilyn Hemmelter, Dave Hershey, Howard Higley, Chuck & Linda Hignite, Sharon Horn, Karen Hoyt, Sue James, Alvaro Jamarillo, Ben Johnson, David Juliano, Malini Kaushik, Andy Kratter, Rosalie Lefkowitz, Iona Luke, Carol Miller, Peter Miller, Pat Pauch, Diana Quon, Cliff Richer, Bettina Toff, Francis Tokdi, Tom VandenBosch, Al Wofchuck

PARTICIPANTS - ANO NUEVO

Laurie Bechtler, Ed Brennan, Rita & Rob Colwell, Gloria Heller, Adam Kozlowski, Gary Nunn, Peter Popin, Rachel Rounds, Gary Strachan, Renee Tackluck, Ron Thorn, Veronica Vazquez

Bair Island

Support Still Needed to Save Vital Wetland

In January 1997, after nearly two decades of trying, the Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST)



successfully negotiated an agreement to purchase Bair Island for \$15 million using loans from individuals and foundations. In doing so, POST has created an opportunity to permanently preserve and restore this critical tidal marsh habitat.

In order to complete the purchase, POST must raise \$5 million in private donations, which it will use to leverage \$10 million in public funding for the acquisition. POST has received \$1.1 million in public funds from the State Wildlife Conservation Board and seeks \$8.9 million in matching funds from the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund.

POST's pledge of \$5 million is by far the largest commitment of private funding for any land acquisition project being considered by Congress and more than 3,900 Peninsula residents have donated \$4.3 million in private funds towards this goal.

The strong outpouring of local support for Bair Island's protection, combined with the dedicated efforts from local Congresswoman Anna Eshoo and Senator Barbara Boxer, have been pivotal in securing initial approval for \$3.5 million in federal appropriations. POST will need even more local support to reach the \$5 million in private donations as it continues to seek the full \$8.9 million in federal appropriations from the Land and Water Conservation Fund. The bottom line: Bair Island is not saved yet.

If you would like information about how you can help save Bair Island and the wildlife that depends on it for survival, please contact POST at (650) 854-7696, x 22.

(Condensed from an article by Andre La Fleur, Peninsula Open Space Trust in the Watershed newsletter.)

Degradable Plastic

Biopol, a biodegradable plastic formed from sugar and soil bacteria, is one of the first products launched by Monsanto's new Sustainable Development business sector. In a compost pile, Biopol degrades into carbon dioxide and water within three months. Greenpeace recently issued biodegradable credit cards made of the material. Monsanto was the first big U.S. corporation to embrace The Natural Step, an approach to environmental citizenship that emphasizes avoiding destructive corporate behavior.

Pacifica Land Trust

The Pacifica Land Trust has been created to mimic its larger cousins such as the Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST) to preserve open space environment for present and future generations. Like POST it will



- Acquire land for public benefit
 - Encourage public awareness of the values of conservation and open space
 - Educate citizens to respect and value open space
 - Encourage economically viable community development in accord with the mission of the land trust
- Land trusts work in a variety of ways by directly negotiating land transactions, many of which offer direct income, estate, or property tax benefits to a landowner.
- A landowner may give property to the land trust by a gift or will.
 - The land trust may buy the property, usually at a reduced rate that benefits the land trust and offers certain tax advantages to the landowner.
 - The landowner may sell or donate the land but retain the right to live on it throughout their lifetime.
 - The land trust can arrange a strategy whereby the least environmentally significant portion of a property is developed to finance conservation of the rest.
 - The landowner can enter into an agreement with the trust to retain the land in its natural or open space condition.

Audubon Files Law Suit to Allow Use of Leg-Hold Traps

Marin, Golden Gate, and National Audubon Societies and the Muir Beach Enviro have filed suit in federal court to overturn provisions of Proposition 4 that forbid the use of leg hold traps to protect endangered species. Under Proposition 4 it is unlawful for any to use a leg-hold trap to capture any fur bearing animal except to protect human health or safety.

The suit seeks to allow federal, state and local officials to use padded leg-hold traps to protect endangered and threatened species and those species protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. It contends that Proposition 4 is invalid because it frustrates the purposes of the Endangered Species Act and the Migratory Bird Treaty.

The United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) has been using these traps in the San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge since 1991 in response to severe declines in numbers of endangered wildlife. The California Clapper Rail population plummeted from over 1000 in the early 1980s to fewer than 300 in 1991. The primary focus of the predator management program is the red fox, a non-native species. USFWS biologists contend that the use of padded leg-hold traps is the only effective way of capturing the red fox and preventing predation on Clapper Rail eggs and chicks. This fox is also a threat to the Light-footed Clapper Rail, California Least Tern, Western Snowy Plover, salt-marsh harvest mouse and the San Joaquin kit fox, all listed as threatened or endangered. Without the ability to use the padded leg-hold trap, the Service will not be successful in achieving recovery of any of them.

Sequoia Audubon's Conservation Committee also saw the danger of this and opposed Proposition 4. Sequoia supports the actions of its sister chapters.

(Condensed from an article by Barbara Saltzman in the Redwood Log, newsletter of the Marin Audubon Society.)



SPRING 1999 BIRDSEED SALE ORDER FORM

ALL ORDERS WITH PAYMENT MUST BE RECEIVED BY WEDNESDAY, APRIL 7

Proceeds support local Audubon conservation and education programs

Please check preferred pickup location. Pickup dates will be April 15-18, 1999 with details to be advised later.

☐ San Bruno

☐ Burlingame

☐ Half Moon Bay

☐ Pacifica

☐ San Mateo

☐ Atherton

☐ San Carlos

				# BAGS	\$-COST-\$
AUDUBON WILD BIRD MIX.....	20 lb@	\$10.00	/bag	_____	= _____
red & white millet plus black oil sunflower					
RED/WHITE MILLET MIX.....	20 lb@	\$ 9.00	/bag	_____	= _____
BLACK OIL SUNFLOWER.....	25 lb@	\$12.00	/bag	_____	= _____
WHITE PROSO MILLET.....	25 lb@	\$ 8.00	/bag	_____	= _____
THISTLE.....	5 lb@	\$ 8.00	/bag	_____	= _____
SUNFLOWER CHIPS.....	25 lb@	\$22.00	/bag	_____	= _____

SALES TAX IS INCLUDED IN ALL PRICES ABOVE

Contribution to Sequoia Audubon Society (tax deductible) _____

CHECK # _____

TOTAL _____

THE NEXT SEED SALE WILL NOT BE UNTIL OCTOBER 1999

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

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ Zip _____

Phone (Home) _____ (Work) _____

Mail your check and order to

SEQUOIA AUDUBON SOCIETY

30 West 39th Avenue, Suite 202

San Mateo, CA 94403

345-3724

Burrowing Owls

Lynne Trulio

The burrowing owl is not easy to spot. With its mottled brown and white feathers, this small bird -- only 9 inches tall -- is virtually invisible in its grassy or bare soil habitat. It is also difficult to find because it is becoming rare in the Bay Area. The best places to look are large, open treeless fields in the South and East Bay with plenty of ground squirrel burrows.

The burrowing owl is the only owl that nests underground and is active both day and night. During the day, the owl stands by its burrow. At dusk and into the night the bird becomes an active hunter. The burrowing owl does not hoot but has a variety of different calls, from mating "coos" to alarm "chirps".

The burrowing owl is a bird of the open short-grass prairie. In California, almost none of the owl's original prairie habitat remains. Fortunately, it has adapted to living in human-altered landscapes. Throughout the state, this bird is found on the margins of agricultural fields, in grazed pastures and in urban areas on golf courses, airports, open fields and parks. It needs adequate foraging lands adjacent to ground squirrels. Since it doesn't dig its own burrow, the owl might be named the "borrowing" owl.

While the owl and squirrel don't live in the same burrow, they are often close neighbors. The burrowing owl clearly benefits from the ground squirrel's prolific digging prowess. Not only does the squirrel dig the owl's home, but it cleans out the burrow in the winter time when the owl vacates it. The squirrel will move into the owl's nest for the winter and enlarge it in the process. In the spring the owl moves back into its renovated home while the displaced squirrel will use one of its many other burrows.

What does the squirrel get from this arrangement? During the day while the squirrel is foraging, the owl is standing at its burrow watching for trouble. When it sees a predator, the owl calls and bobs up and down. The squirrel seems to respond to these calls and benefit from this alarm.

The squirrel has many defenses against predators, but it doesn't use them against the owl. It treats the owl like

another squirrel. The burrowing owl is a raptor but it weighs only a quarter of a pound and is no threat to an adult squirrel. It is a hunter of small rodents and large insects. It is especially fond of Jerusalem crickets, but is opportunistic in its diet. To find enough prey the owl requires large areas of open space. How much is not well known. They spend much of their time within 150 feet of the burrow, but will go further afield to hunt.



At Moffett Field, I have found about one owl pair per 30 acres of grassland.

The owl has chicks once a year. By February, owls are pairing up and they will often stand cheek to cheek at their burrow. Females typically lay up to 11 eggs in March. Chicks hatch in just under a month and emerge after two to three weeks underground. Observers are most likely to see owls from mid-May through early August. Often four to six chicks can be seen clustered together at their burrow. The youngsters fly within a month of emergence and by Fall they have molted into adult plumage and headed off to find their own burrows.

The western burrowing owl is found from the Mississippi to the Pacific, north into the prairie provinces of Canada and south into Mexico. While still found in much of its original range, the owl has declined significantly in the last 150 years. Agricultural conversion has destroyed 99% of the original prairie, our war on the prairie dog has reduced this friend of the burrowing owl to just 2% of its historic number and the owl is a bird in trouble. It is listed as endangered in Minnesota and Iowa and in all the Canadian provinces. In California, the bird is a Species of Special Concern, indicating the species is in decline.

State and federal laws have proven inadequate to protect the owl and arrest the loss of habitat. The species benefits from some legal protection through the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, but it has no status under the federal Endangered Species Act. The California Environmental Quality Act requires mitigation when

projects impact owl nest sites. While these laws protect active nests, they do little to protect burrows in the non-nesting season and they do not protect foraging habitat.

Only a few years ago, this little owl was a much more common sight in the Bay Area. Research by the Institute for Bird Populations indicates that there has been a 50% decline in the owl population in the San Francisco Bay Area in the last 10 to 15 years. Only about 175 pairs of owls are estimated to live between Palo Alto and Union City south to Morgan Hill. The bird has all but disappeared from most San Mateo County and is headed for the same fate in Contra Costa, Alameda and Santa Clara. The causes of the decline are conversion of open lands to urban uses, poisoning of ground squirrels, and current weed control practices.

Burrowing owl advocates have been fighting these forces for years, and each issue requires different tactics. Weed control is a problem because open fields are usually disked to prevent fires. Disking destroys burrows and any owls in the burrows. Mowing controls weeds and prevents fires, but does not destroy burrows or birds. Save BOTH, a burrowing owl habitat protection group, has worked since the early 1980's to encourage mowing. Moffett Field and the cities of Palo Alto and Mountain View have changed from disk to mowing on their lands to prevent the destruction of owls and the Santa Clara County Fire Marshall's Office is reviewing its weed abatement policy. However, even when municipalities switch to mowing, private landowners can still disk their lands to control weeds.

Preserving the owl means protecting ground squirrels. The burrowing owl is dependent on this species in our area. The Santa Clara Valley Water District, Moffett Federal Airfield, and the Shoreline Golf Course regularly work with owl specialists to control ground squirrel populations while protecting the owl at the same time.

Urbanization is the most difficult protection issue of all. Owl habitat on private land is rapidly being converted. Mitigation has not stemmed the precipitous decline of the owl population in our area. As development proceeds the burrowing owl is becoming increasingly confined to publicly-owned parcels. Most Bay Area owls are now found in the parks and open spaces that hug the Bay.

(Continued on Page Seven)

Sequoia Audubon Society

Burrowing Owls

(Continued from Page Six)

Specific methods for preserving the burrowing owl are being tested. Long-distance relocation is an appealing approach, but this owl is not easily moved. It has great site fidelity and tenacity. These traits combine to make the burrowing owl an unlikely relocation candidate. Owls taken to new locations fly back to the original site or disappear completely.

Allowing the owl to move itself to nearby burrows can be effective if enough habitat exists nearby. Janis Buchanan and I are using this method in an effort to preserve an owl population at Mission College. We are enhancing dedicated owl nesting habitat adjacent to ball fields to provide local, displaced birds with their basic nesting and foraging needs.

For any protection or relocation plan to work, the bird must have land for foraging, and our area is quickly running out of this. But there is hope for preserving the burrowing owl in our region. Two chances exist to stabilize owl numbers: enhancing existing public and private lands, and creating habitat for the owl on limited use lands such as landfills.

Public lands may be managed by mowing, tree removal and other habitat-enhancing techniques in currently marginal areas. Land management agencies, including the Santa Clara County Parks and East Bay Regional Park District, are interested in this approach.

Habitat can also be created where it does not currently exist. Landfills present such a growth opportunity. Upland habitat created on closed landfills can be made amenable to the burrowing owl. Newly created habitat must be within two miles of occupied owl lands and must be managed for the owl. This process has inadvertently occurred at Bixby Park in Palo Alto. Mounds of dirt placed on the landfill were colonized by ground squirrels and then by burrowing owls. Two to four pairs of birds can now be found in the new habitat. This suggests we may need to let the owls move themselves.

Burrowing owl specialists and biologists from the California Department of Fish and Game believe the best way to save the burrowing owl in our region is to form a Regional Burrowing Owl Management Plan to enhance, create and set aside habitat in Santa Clara and Alameda Counties. Site-by-site and city-by-city mitigation has proven unsuccessful. The

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species needs a large, multi-county regional plan that recognizes habitat loss compensates for those losses. This may be the only way to change the scenario in which habitat is whittled away to zero. The decline of the burrowing owl is a loss all of us. The burrowing owl is a harbinger of open grasslands and as this habitat is lost to development, open space decreases and traffic increases. Protecting burrowing owl habitat preserves our own quality of life.

Lynne Trulio is an associate professor in the Dept. of Environmental Studies at Son Jose State and has studied Burrowing Owls in the Bay Area for the past eight years. This article is condensed from a longer piece which first appeared in the Spring, 1998 issue of Tideline, the newsletter of the SF Bay NWR.

Fifth Annual Heron Days Festival



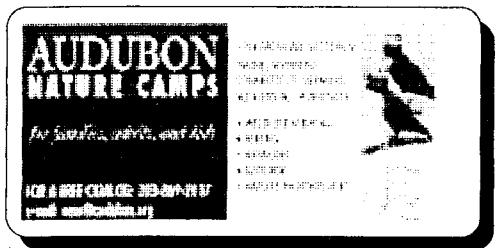
Pontoon boat rides in a marsh, nature walks, slide shows, and kids' activities are all part of the fifth annual Heron Days Festival on Clear Lake, Saturday and Sunday April 10 and 11.

Advance reservations are required for pontoon boat rides in Anderson Marsh, part of Anderson Marsh State Historic Park on Clear Lake. The trips are \$10 per person and enable participants to view a Great Blue Heron Rookery on an island in the marsh, as well as other wildlife in route.

For reservations call the Lake County Visitor Information Center at 1-800-525-3743.

Activities at the park also include guided field trips, informational booths, slide shows on bluebirds, hummingbirds and herons, and children's activities.

For more information about the Heron Days Festival, call Roberta Lyons, Redbud Audubon Society president, at (707) 994-2024. For information about lodging, camping, and other special events in the area, call the Lake County Visitor Information Center at (707) 263-9544 or 1-800-525-3743.



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\$485.00 per participant

August 23-28

Pt. Pelee Update

Damage Not So Bad After All

Tom Vanden Bosch writes "I visited Pt. Pelee in October and the reports of damage are *greatly* exaggerated! The storm last year did take out some of East Beach but the sandy point and the woods are as they have always been. The park has restricted access to East Beach, but you can still walk it if you have a mind to. Anyone planning to visit Pt. Pelee can expect to find the birding as it has always been. I'm planning to lead a group of 10 there in May."

Gifts and Bequests

Jean Allen Barbara Alexander Ethel Denton Joan Durkac T. Gettman
 Fredric Miller Randall Lewis Robert Rawlings
 Elizabeth Finkemeier in memory of Bob Sage
 Marsha McKay in memory of Nancy Chow

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