



sequoia needles

Bulletin of the Sequoia Audubon Society
San Mateo County Volume 50, No. 2
October, 1999



This Month's Program

A Bird Lister's View
of Alaska

Ted Chandik, a naturalist for the city of Palo Alto for 32 years will speak about two recent trips to Alaska.

He was searching for birds other than the familiar migrants of his native midwest or of California.

His search led him to some distant outposts such as Barrow, the northern-most community in the United States, where he finally got to see the Spectacled Eider and encounter polar bears, and to Gambell, on Saint Lawrence Island, where he actually lived with Eskimos for five days while birding the area.

Bair Island Becomes Part of SF Bay NWR

After decades of work by private citizens and by environmental groups, Bair Island finally became part of the San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge this summer when the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USF&WS) acquired the land from the Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST). POST had purchased the property in 1997 in order to protect its wildlife and open space resources from impending development into housing and office complexes. POST's intention had always been to hold the property only until it could be re-sold to the USF&WS.

The USF&WS plans to hold public hearings in November to present its management plans and to hear comments and suggestions from the public.

Sequoia was active in the campaign to preserve Bair Island, contributing both time and money to assist POST. Bair Island has been adopted by SAS through National Audubon's Refuge Keepers (ARK) Program and our volunteers will assist in educating the public on the merits of preserving this vital piece of the Bay Area.



From the President

Robin Smith

The day was fair, the breeze gentle and, after I trudged up the hill, the landmarks of San Francisco Bay were spread out below. All three bridges, Angel Island, Alcatraz, the Presidio, San Francisco itself, Marin, the East Bay, Mount Tam, Mount Diablo and the Pacific Ocean shimmered in the sun. And if that wasn't special enough, there were hawks to watch, too.

Since it was early in the hawk-watching season, the day's count was comprised mostly of red-tails, coops, kestrels, the ubiquitous ravens and turkey vultures. The birds, seen from below, showed their field marks well. The patagial marks on the red-tails were visible, along with the adults' red tails. The turkey vultures passed in teetering flight, red heads pointed earthwards. The kestrels zoomed by, their beautiful blues and browns a blur. A pair of glossy black ravens played on the air currents over the pines. But for my money, Cooper's hawks were the heart of the action.

Some coops flew over low enough to see their finer markings very clearly. Others stayed high moving with their flap-flap-glide flight style. One especially big one flew straight toward the hilltop, then altered course and dove down out of sight. We waited for it to come up again but we waited in vain. It had been RoboLured!

Say what?? RoboLured?? Golden Gate Raptor Observatory, the group that runs the hawkwatch, has developed a mechanical replacement for live lures, dubbed RoboLure, which is used to entice hawks into the traps. The banders were in a blind hidden from us by a hill and now the hawk was there, too, robo-lured in.

While the banders conducted their scientific work of weighing, measuring and banding, Allen Fish, the Director of GGRO, taught his new hawkwatchers how to maximize identification of the bird before its quick getaway or "how to tell if it's a Coop before it flies the coop". It was a successful lesson and fun besides.

You can have a similar experience on Sunday, October 3rd, when Leslie Flint leads a Sequoia Audubon field trip there. Hawk Hill is a very special place and Leslie Flint an accomplished GGRO hawkwatcher. Watching the hawk migration there is one of the bay area's unique experiences. **Don't miss it!**

(Last month, the wording on the President's Message seemed to indicate that we already had a monitoring program in effect at Bair Island. This program has not yet begun and we are recruiting volunteers to assist in this project. Call Robin for details or to sign up.

---Editor)

Bair Island Update

Sequoia Audubon Society received a start-up grant from a partnership of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the Fish and Wildlife Service, National Wildlife Refuge Association and National Audubon Society to support our work at Bair Island. Volunteers are needed to make the program happen. We'll have fun, too. Please contact Robin Smith at 325-3306 for more information.

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

OCTOBER

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 2- SEA CLOUD PARK — This is the first of what will be monthly **BEGINNERS' FIELD TRIPS**. A brief discussion on

the use of binoculars and field guides as well as on opportunity to ask questions will precede the trip. Sea Cloud Park in Foster City is reached by taking Hillsdale Ave. east from 101 and making a right turn on Edgewater Blvd. Go 1.3 miles and turn left on Pitcairn Drive. Look for the park entrance on the right and meet at the far end of the parking lot at 9:00 AM. Advanced and intermediate birders are invited so they can lend their advice and expertise.

LEADER

GARTH HARWOOD

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 3 — HAWK HILL FIELD TRIP —

Golden Gate Raptor Observatory volunteers count 20,000 Raptors annually during fall migration. Nineteen species of birds of prey have been recorded. Get tips on how to distinguish between Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks. Our leader is a 10-year veteran hawk watcher with Golden Gate Raptor observatory. Bring lunch, liquids and layers of clothing. We meet on top of Hawk Hill at 9 AM. To get there, take 101 across the Golden Gate Bridge and exit almost immediately on Alexander Street. Swing back under the freeway and follow the road up the hill.

LEADER

LESLIE FLINT

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 7 — BOARD OF DIRECTORS

MEETING — 7:30 PM — At the Sequoia Audubon office. All members are welcome. Call ahead to make sure that there will be enough room.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 14 — GENERAL MEETING —

with **Ted Chandik** presenting a slide program on **A Bird Lister's View of Alaska**, tales from his two most recent trips to that state. Social together begins at 7:30 PM, with the General Meeting at 8, and the program following immediately thereafter. At the San Mateo Garden Center off the Alameda at Parkside.

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 17 - POINT REYES — We will be

looking for fall migrants and early arriving winter residents in one of the premiere birding destinations in the state. Our destination will be the outer point, but the itinerary can change according to the weather and whatever vagrants that may have been reported. Expect some moderate walking. Clothing should be layered since the weather on Pt. Reyes is extremely changeable. We will meet at the Bear Valley Visitor Center at 8:30 AM. To get there, take 101 north across the Golden Gate Bridge, to the San Anselmo exit. Follow Sir Francis Drake Blvd. west to Olema. Turn left at the stop light and make the first left turn onto Bear Valley Road. The next left will be for the Bear Valley Visitor Center. Park near the rest rooms in the upper (left) parking lot.

LEADER

MERRY HAVEMAN



News from ACR

Betsy Stafford

Bolinas Lagoon Preserve — Bouquets of

native flowers to all of you who hosted during our 1999 public season. We hope you had fun welcoming the thousands of weekend visitors who walked our trails, poked in our ponds, and scoped out our heronry. Many thank yous for your time and smiles.

We are particularly delighted to report that the Picher Canyon heronry thrived this year. Our concern that the colony might suffer a repeat of last year's raven predation (when over 50% of the chicks and eggs were lost) was alleviated when Ray Paula and his band of observers counted 12 Great Blue Heron nests, 63 Great Egret nests and 5 Snowy Egret nests. We estimate that over 100 egret chicks and close to 20 heron chicks fledged by the time their weary parents migrated. As for the pair of ravens that had caused so much disturbance in 1998, they had one apparent nest failure and a resultant decline in their overall interest in the heronry. Our ACR Raven study will continue to track these corvids' behavior.

Our BLP biologist, Greg deNevers, reports steelhead in our streams and two reliable sightings of a badger on our trails. Perhaps that will tantalize you enough to come to our Fall Work Day on November 6 — free, but please call 415/868-9244 to register so that we can plan on having enough lunch for all of you.

We also invite you to our annual "Under the Heronry with Ray Peterson," a very special talk and walk under the heronry's redwood grove, open to the public only once a year. The date is Saturday, October 30 at 9:30 am. This is also free, but please call to register.

Bouverie Preserve — Our award-winning docent program begins its bi-annual training at our Sonoma preserve this month. There is a wait list, but don't let that stop you if you'd like more information on this superb program that teaches thousands of schoolchildren each year, both in the classrooms *and* on the trails.

Bouverie's Work Day is on Saturday, September 18. Come help us spruce up the trails, work in the gardens, or cook lunch - free, but please call 707/938-4554 to sign up for lunch.

The 1999 dates for our ever-popular Guided Nature Walks on beautiful Bouverie Preserve are October 2 & 9, November 6, and December 11. Call the office for a lottery form, which must be returned one month prior to the walk.

Cypress Grove Preserve — By early August many migrating shorebirds were already showing up in Tomales Bay. Our Cypress Grove Research Center conducts an annual census of all the birds around this richly bio-diverse bay. We are always looking for ambitious, excellent birders to help with our 8 counts (3 in winter, 3 in late winter, and 2 in the spring). Please call 415 /663-8203 if you can help with some serious birding by boat.

A Wish List — If you can help us with any one of the following, Yvonne at 415/868-9244 would love to hear from you and we'd be very, very grateful: a riding lawnmower, a 4 wheel drive pick-up, binoculars, outdoor propane heaters, a canopy tent, a 9-21 foot bay boat, or a 4 stroke motor.

SFBBO Absorbs CCRS Bird Banding

The San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory (SFBBO) is pleased to announce the friendly acquisition of the bird-banding program of the Coyote Creek Riparian Station (CCRS).

As part of a monitoring program for a Santa Clara Valley Water District flood control permit, CCRS initiated the bird-banding program in 1986 to document year-round bird use in the flood basin of Coyote Creek, one mile north of Highway 237 and one-half mile west of Highway 880. This lush riparian habitat is owned by the City of San Jose and is the site of a re-vegetation project by the Santa Clara Valley Water District. The project was originally designed by the late Dr. Richard Mewaldt, Professor of Biology at San Jose State University.

In addition to avian research, CCRS also developed volunteer creek monitoring programs. The best known of these were StreamKeepers and Community Creek Watch. These programs were made available to many other organizations and agencies that encourage community participation in water quality and aquatic resource monitoring programs. The Board of Directors of CCRS elected to transfer these programs to the North Bay Riparian Station, a program of the Bay Institute and the Bay Model Association, located in Marin County.

SFBBO was started in 1981 by Mike and Theresa Rigney along with other biology students at San Jose State. Located in the historic Bayside Canning Company building in Alviso, SFBBO currently has about 700 members who are welcome to participate in bird research and monitoring programs. SFBBO also offers a program of field trips and birding classes to the general public (call 408/946-6548 or visit www.sfbbo.org for details).

SFBBO has compiled extensive data on the birds of the baylands. Their studies have particularly focused on birds that utilize the salt ponds of the South Bay for foraging, roosting and breeding. SFBBO is a Cooperator with the San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge and also works cooperatively with the East Bay Regional Park District, the Santa Clara

Valley Water District, the California Department of Fish and Game, Cargill Salt and many local governments.

Central Valley Birding Symposium

The Central Valley Bird Club is hosting the Third Annual Central Valley Birding Symposium November 18-21, at the Radisson Hotel in Stockton, CA. There will be speakers, field trips, workshops, a Birder's Market, and more.

Speakers include;

- Paul Lehman, "Where the Birds Are; Weather and Bird Migration"
- Jon Dunn, "Flycatcher ID Workshop- Parts I & 2"
- Kimball Garrett, "Some Exotic Challenges to Bird ID"
- Joe Morlan, "Developing Birding Skills"
- John Kemper, "Finding Birds in Northern California" (presenting material from his new book)
- Rob Hansen on "Birds of the Tulare Lake and Valley".

Other topics that will be covered are; Beginning Birding, Landscaping for Birds and Wildlife, Basic Bird Photography, Bird Sketching, and more.

The price will once again be \$75 for the entire event, with lodging and most meals extra. A \$30 one-day fee is available. Students under 18 are free.

Over 160 species were recorded on last year's Symposium field trips. There are hundreds of thousands of cranes and waterfowl nearby at this time of year and 22 species of raptors. There will be hundreds of birders here from all over the country having a great time.

For registration information, contact Frances Oliver at ffoliver@ucdavis.edu.

The Symposium website is <http://www.geocities.com/RainForest/Vines/5954/cvbc.html>.



The redwood is at the mercy of those who admire it most, those who admire it as merchandise and those who treasure it as an experience.

—May Theilgard Watts

San Bruno Mountain Forum

The Fifth Annual San Bruno Mountain Forum will be held Saturday morning, October 9, starting at 9:30 am. This year's forum will focus on stewardship & habitat management issues. The forum is free and open to everyone who cares about San Bruno Mountain. The meeting place is Lipman Middle School, located at 1 Solano Street in Brisbane. For more information, call Deb Ruddock of the Sierra Club at 650-390-8414, or Kathy Manus of Friends of San Bruno Mountain at 415-584-7320.

F. O. Wilson, Harvard University Agassiz Museum of Comparative Zoology Research Professor, considers San Bruno Mountain to be one of the 18 most important "ecological islands" in the world.

No Watershed Golf Course!

The San Francisco Board of Supervisors voted by a wide margin to prohibit any new golf course construction on open space lands in the Crystal Springs Watershed. This is an important victory for those who have worked many years for conservation of this unique natural area. The supervisors who voted for this measure are to be applauded, particularly in the face of pro-golf noises that had been made by Mayor Willie Brown.

NAS's 1st Field Guides Honored

Two of the *First Field Guides* series, *Birds and Wildflowers*, were selected as Outstanding Science Trade Books for Children, by the Children's Book Council, and by the National Science Teachers' Association.

Before National Audubon gets too excited it should be pointed out that the television show *20/20* recently found many history and science textbooks endorsed by these organizations contained gross errors. Worse than that, it found that many teachers were unaware that these were errors — including statements that Sputnik was a Russian ICBM with an atomic warhead, that the first atomic bomb had been used in Korea and that the Statue of Liberty was made of bronze.

From the Conservation Committee

Bob Wilkinson

The Sequoia Audubon Conservation Committee reviews critical issues related to wildlife habitats and provides comments to cities, agencies and other jurisdictions. To attend our meetings, phone Leslie Flint at 573-6279.

Don't Just Sit There, Grab A Pen!

Don't Just Sit There, Grab A Pen!

The Conservation Committee is reviving the legislative alert network for Sequoia and inviting all members to participate. With the assistance of our very able legislative lobbyist in

Sacramento, John McCaull, and the National Audubon legislative alerts, we will be able to notify members of the network about those bills which need our support, or as the case may be, our informed opposition.

Many times, legislators have said that the telephone calls or handwritten letters they receive from their constituents keep them aware that there is an electorate which cares about conservation issues; they hear often enough from developers and those less concerned about wildlife and more interested in pouring asphalt.

We expect to call upon our network only several times a year for very important issues, beginning early next year.

If you are interested, send in the identifying information below to the SAS office.

Yes, I want to be part of the Legislative Alert Network and I want to participate in letter-writing or telephone campaigns that may make a difference!

Name.....

Address.....

Phone.....Fax.....E-mail.....

Mail the forms to the Sequoia Audubon office at 30 West 39th Avenue, San Mateo 94403.

LA DWP to Return Water to Owens Lake

The worst airborne pollution in the US comes from dust storms around Owens Lake, south of Lone Pine in Inyo County. The lake bed has been bone dry since the 1920s, when the DWP diverted the Owens River to supply about half of Los Angeles' water.

After nearly 80 years of wrangling and 20 years of litigation, city officials agreed to reduce the dust by covering 22.5 square miles of the lake bed with gravel and vegetation and allowing some water to return to the lake.

The project is estimated to be completed in 2006 at an estimated cost of 120 million dollars. Along with recent developments at Mono Lake, there is cause for cautious optimism that the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power may have had a soul transplant.

A Dirty Dozen

In this area, the most pervasive and damaging invasive weed is the **blue gum eucalyptus**. Generally called a "water thief" by preserve and refuge managers, it poisons the soil beneath its canopy, is toxic to wildlife, brittle in high winds and highly flammable in wildfires. Although it attracts pollinating birds when it is in flower, this is a mixed blessing as hummingbirds and warblers have been found dead, their bills or nostrils clogged with eucalyptus sap and nectar.

Less well known are these alien invaders:

- **French broom** (*Genista monspessulana*) — Native to the Mediterranean, it alters soil nitrogen and outcompetes natives.
- **Scotch broom** (*Cytisus scoparius*) — Not from Scotland but from southern Europe and northern Africa. Its seeds are especially long-lived, surviving for up to 80 years.
- **English ivy** (*Hedera helix*) — Prostrate ivy can be pulled up, while climbing plants can be killed by cutting the vines at the base of the tree. Diligent follow up is required.
- **European beachgrass** (*Ammophila arenaria*) — This wildly successful invader, introduced to California in the late 1800s for erosion control outcompetes native dune plants, and is responsible for the near extirpation of the native fore-dune grassland community.
- **Himalayan blackberry** (*Rubus discolor*) — While the berries make it popular, its other attributes make it undesirable. Difficult to eradicate, it differs from native blackberry because it has five leaflets and arching stems.

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FALL 1999 BIRDSEED SALE ORDER FORM

ALL ORDERS WITH PAYMENT MUST BE RECEIVED BY WEDNESDAY, OCT. 6

Proceeds support local Audubon conservation and education programs

Please check preferred pickup location. Pickup dates will be Oct. 14-17, 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 FEBRUARY 2000

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

Profits from the Sale of Birdseed Go to Advance the Missions of Sequoia Audubon

The Bluebird Journal

Howard Rathlesberger

WHAT'S HAPPENED IN SAN MATEO COUNTY?



For the 1999 season a new dimension was added to our participation in the California Bluebird Recovery Program. Lee Franks and I, (under the tutelage of Hatch Graham, a Master

Bander and editor of *Bluebirds Fly*, the quarterly newsletter of the CBRP) began banding hens and chicks on the nest. Garth Harwood and George Oetzel also participated. We banded at Filoli, Runnymede, Edgewood, Canada College, Woodside, the I-280 trails, Menlo Country Club, Portola Valley, and Whiskey Hill Road. The effort was quite diversified with 5 adult and 52 bluebird chicks, 5 adult and 49 Violet-green Swallow chicks. We also banded 21 Chestnut-backed Chickadees, 30 Oak Titmice and 5 Ash-throated Flycatchers — all chicks.

This data has been sent to the Cornell Ornithological Lab for their permanent records. In addition, we'll be able to use this data to see how many returns we get and, even perhaps, returns to the same box during the 2000 season. Needless to say, this is exciting.

The banding activity required more detailed observation, so we became much more involved in monitoring the houses. We discovered two infestations of blow flies in Western Bluebird and Violet-green Swallow nests, which we wouldn't otherwise have noticed because in our frequent banding checks we had to actually handle the chicks by emptying the nest. In both nests we removed larvae from the chicks, destroyed approximately 20 larvae in each box, and replaced the nests. We also found mites and lice in two Violet-green swallow nests.

The Cornell study records, as well as Hatch Graham's records require a discreet box number (6 digits), elevation, latitude and longitude. We were able to use USGS maps for some locations, but for others,

we needed a borrowed Global Position Satellite reader.

The active trails and monitors starting at the north edge of the county are:

- Olympic Golf Course - Evelyn and Guido DeGhetaldi
- San Bruno Mountain - Harb Brant
- Crystal Springs Golf Course, North Half - Susan Cousins
- Crystal Springs Golf Course, South Half - **(We need a monitor for this trail.)**
- Howard Rathlesberger - Filoli - **(I can use some help with this trail.)**
- Moore Estate - Tom Daggett
- Edgewood - Lee Franks
- Runnymede - Lane Eubank
- Canada College - Lee Franks, Paul Keane
- Emerald Hills Golf Course - Paul Keane
- 280, Farmhill to Woodside Road - Janice Hepper
- Woodside Town Center and Library - **(We need a monitor here as well.)**
- Whiskey Hill Road - Arthur Middleton
- Portola Valley Ranch - Ann Chiller
- Menlo Country Club - Floyd Carley - **(Floyd can use some help.)**
- Sunset Gardens - **(Another trail that needs a monitor.)**
- Portola Valley, various locations - Mary Hufty, Elaine French

As you can see, we need monitoring help for the several of the trails. There are also many good habitat areas still untapped! Almost all of the boxes have the 1.5"-1 9/16" diameter entry hole designed primarily for Western Bluebirds and Swallows, and to exclude Starlings. Even so, where we get into shrubby areas, the boxes do accommodate Oak Titmice and Chestnut Backed Chickadees. Fortunately, we are not plagued by House Sparrows so we can make one size box that can be pole mounted, hung by a hook, or hung on a fence — much simpler.

A new project for this fall is a school-year-long event with a 6th grade class at Woodside Elementary where we'll

provide boxes in kit form. The students will assemble, place, and participate in one or more of Cornell's programs.

If you like to explore the Internet you may wish to look up these web pages:

- North American Bluebird Society - www.nabluebirdsociety.org
- Wild Birds Unlimited - www.wbl.com
- Cornell Nestbox Network - <http://birds.cornell.edu>
- Peninsula Birding Group - peninsula-birding@egroups.com

One of the surprises this season was George Oetzel's discovery of a Western Bluebird pair nesting in a natural cavity in a large oak in Burgess Park along Alma Street in Menlo Park. We're now planning to add some hanging boxes in that area for the 2000 season.

Several outstanding nesting results:

- At Edgewood a nest of Ash Throated Flycatchers fledged five chicks in spite of a grass fire which almost surrounded the box site.
- At Sunset Gardens a double nesting of Chestnut Backed Chickadees — a total of ten fledged.
- At Filoli's north side gate the same hanging box had two broods of Western Bluebirds with nine chicks fledging. Just 120 feet away another hanging box fledged five bluebirds..
- At Menlo CC, seven Oak Titmouse chicks fledged from one box.
- At the Woodside Library eight Chestnut Backed Chickadees fledged, and at Woodside Town Hall a brood of seven Oak Titmice fledged.

I would like to acknowledge the earlier efforts of Red Pendleton and his son, Stuart, who were the instigators of Bluebird trails along the I-280 corridor including Canada College and Whiskey Hill Road years ago. He was also instrumental in starting Bluebird trails in Santa Clara

(Continued from page four)

➤ **Gorse** (*Ulex europaea*) -- An infamous invader of coastal ecosystems, it can be distinguished by its spines.

➤ **Iceplant** (*Carpobrotus edulis* and *C. chilensis*) -- Some consider these to be a single species as they hybridize. Hybrids are especially invasive but easy to eliminate by pulling and burning dried plants.

➤ **Cotoneaster** (*Cotoneaster franchetti* and *C. pannosa*) Spread by birds who consume its bright red berries, it has become established in redwood and spruce forests. Cut shrubs can resprout from the base, so follow up visits are necessary.

➤ **Spanish heath** (*Erica lusitanica*) -- Wrongly called heather, this European shrub alters soils by lowering pH, making the soil inhospitable for native species. Heavy equipment may be required to remove plants and accumulated peat.

➤ **Pampas or Jubata grass** (*Cortaderia jubata* and *C. selloana*) -- Both species are commonly called Pampas grass. *Jubata* produces millions of seeds asexually and has posed a greater problem ecologically than *selloana* (true pampas grass), which requires two sexes. Recently, male plants are on the increase, increasing this species' invasiveness.

Most Troubled Bird?



For years we've been told how rain forest deforestation is causing a decline in our neotropical migrants like our

wood warblers. Then we learned that the fastest decline was occurring in grassland species which don't use the rain forest. Now Russell Greenberg and Sam Droege, after a painstaking analysis of Christmas Count, Breeding Bird Survey and Quebec Checklists Program data tell us that the Rusty Blackbird is the real loser, with declines of 89 to 93% between 1966 and 1996. While eastern birders may have noticed that there seem to be fewer rusties around, it hasn't gotten the attention of other species in trouble. In part it may be because the breeding range of the Rusty Blackbird is in relatively thinly populated

areas and in part because the rusty is a blackbird after all, and blackbirds (and their running mates, the starlings) seem to be doing all too well.

In their analysis, Greenberg and Droege also examined 84 published state and regional accounts from central and eastern North America during three periods — pre-1920, 1920-1950, 1951-1980 and post-1980. In each of these books, birds were described in the usual categories of abundant, common, uncommon, etc. They also examined more than 300 checklists, regional summaries, and data from the Migration Card Program that ran from 1880 through the 1940s. The results supported the conclusions from the statistical data and pointed to a decline starting as early as the beginning of this century. Rusty blackbirds were described as common to abundant in 88 percent of the pre-1920 sources, 81 percent of the 1920-1950 sources, but only 39 percent of the post 1950 sources. The data suggest that the declines started by at least the beginning of this century, but have accelerated rapidly in recent decades and that the greatest period of decline was probably the 1970s.

Which leaves the question of why? Rusty blackbirds are a species that inhabit its wooded wetlands at almost all seasons, and part of the reason may lie in the loss and degradation of that habitat. But much of the breeding range has been untouched by such activities, and loss of habitat on the wintering grounds is far less than the decline in blackbirds. In addition, much of the checklist data was collected in protected areas such as refuges, where the habitat has been preserved. Another factor may be acid rain. The acidification of streams and smaller wetlands has been well-documented, but it is uncertain how this would affect the blackbirds. The most likely scenario involves a decline in the invertebrate wetland prey that Rusty Blackbirds depend on, and such species have been shown to be sensitive to acidification in other areas. Logging and the construction of large hydroelectric dams that flood thousands of acres of boreal forest may have also contributed. The final answer, though, is that no one knows and we are not likely to know until we learn more about Rusty Blackbirds. Very little is known about

their behavior, and the information we have about the birds is mostly anecdotal.

It seems obvious that if we don't begin to address the problem now we might never get the opportunity. Rusty blackbirds are not rare yet, but the declines continue, although they seem to have slowed somewhat from the catastrophic seventies.

Cormorant Slaughter In Lake Ontario Provokes Outrage



A chill emerged from Lake Ontario's waters last July. New York State Department of Environmental Conservation researchers found nearly a thousand Double-crested Cormorants killed by shotgun blasts on Little Galbo Island, about five miles from the New York shoreline.

With 5,800 nests, the island serves as a rookery for cormorants, not endangered, but protected by state and federal law. Fishermen and members of surrounding communities had complained that the birds were hurting their livelihood by reducing populations of small-mouth bass and other sport fish.

To test the charges, conservation officials are conducting a year-long study. If this study is consistent with similar studies elsewhere, the cormorants should be found to be competing to some extent for the same prey fish as small mouth bass, but to have an overall favorable relationship with sport fish by helping to eliminate competing populations of "rough" fish such as blue gills.

Rewards as high as \$50,000 for leads on the identity of the perpetrators have so far produced no arrests.

Monterey Bay Bird

Festival

October 1-3, 1999

Moos Landing, CA

Gifts and Bequests

Sequoia Audubon gratefully thanks those who have donated funds or equipment and acknowledges them by letter and in the *Needles*. Gifts may be made in honor of, in recognition or in memory of other persons and that recognition will also be acknowledged.

Paul Patterson
Bank of America for their matching donation to Johanna Anderholm's

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. Information for all officers and chairpersons should be mailed to 30 West 39th Ave., Suite 202, San Mateo, CA 94403-4561. Please send **RENEWAL MEMBERSHIPS** directly to National Audubon in the envelope accompanying your renewal notice. Please send **LATE RENEWALS** or **NEW MEMBERSHIPS** through Sequoia Audubon Society to insure continuity of newsletter or magazine subscriptions.

SEQUOIA AUDUBON SOCIETY'S WEB PAGE'S URL is <http://Sequoia.ca.audubon.org/>

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	Eileen Jennis-Sauppe	726-1081
Term ending '01	Merry Haveman	344-2146
	Cliff Richer	873-1754
Term ending '02	Rick Baird	574-1067
	OPEN	

STAFF	Nicole Salgado	345-3724
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STANDING COMMITTEES

ACR Hosting	Barbara Stuart	
Audit	Rick Baird	574-1067
Christmas Count	Bert McKee/Robin Smith	325-3306
Conservation	OPEN	
Education	OPEN	
Field Trips-Weekday	Nick Coiro	349-1834
Weekends	Merry Haveman	344-2146
<i>NEEDLES</i> Editor	Cliff Richer	873-1754
Circulation Editor	Sue Cossins	347-9358
Programs	Sue Cossins	347-9358
Publicity	OPEN	
Membership	Sue Cossins	347-9358
Finance/Budget	Rick Baird	574-1067
Hospitality	Marilyn Hemmeter	
ACR Representatives:	Leslie Flint	



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