

sequoia needles

Bulletin of the Sequoia Audubon Society
San Mateo County Volume 50, No. 8
May, 2000

This Month's Program



During World War II, Midway became well known as a forward naval air base. Most experts regard the Battle of Midway as the turning point of the war in the Pacific.

One of the greatest obstacles to air operations on Midway were its "goony birds", albatrosses so numerous and so tame that they were constantly underfoot.

Today, Midway is a national wildlife refuge and the May 11th program, entitled, "Miraculous Midway", will cover the recent natural and cultural history at Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge.

The presenter, James Aliberti, lived on Midway for two years and four months as it's first refuge ranger. Today James works as a ranger and the volunteer coordinator at the San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge headquarters.

Next Month's Program

Bob Breen, long-time resident naturalist at the Fitzgerald Marine Reserve will acquaint us with the wonders of the inter-tidal world.

He will also bring us up to date on the plans to save the reserve from being loved to death and its expansion southward into the coastal wetlands.

Some of Bob's slides of the tiny creatures that inhabit this watery world are nothing short of spectacular and we're happy to have him back after too long an interval.

Nominating Committee

A nominating committee has been named to screen possible applicants for offices.

Francis Toldi Chairman

Sue Cossins

Anne Moser

The committee members welcome your suggestions and recommendations. Nominations may also be made from the floor at the June general meeting provided that the nominee has agreed to the nomination.

From the President

The Willets of Spring Robin Smith



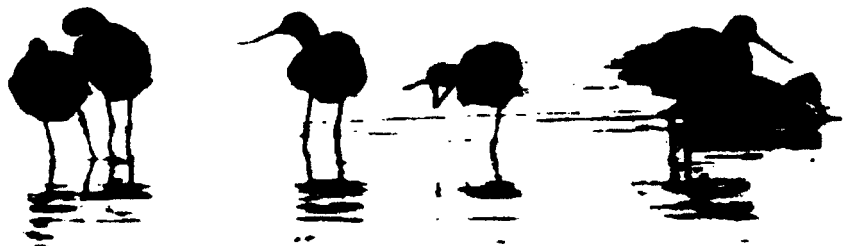
On a recent trip to Texas, my old friend, the ubiquitous Willet, was everywhere! In the piney woods of east Texas they were at the edge of the Sam Rayburn Reservoir, at Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge on the way to the Yellow Rail prairie, Willets adorned each fence post. Their soft, three noted calls floated up through the morning mist. Willets were present at each stop along the roads between the Gulf Intercoastal Waterway and the Gulf itself. Here they seemed to draw themselves up to their full height as they postured in the marsh. Willets mingled with myriad other shorebirds on Bolivar Flats and, after our ferry crossing to Galveston, we spotted them at East Beach. Every little corner in each marshy area sported its own Willet population.

Most of them were in full breeding plumage subtle change from the soft gray feathering they wear in winter here. Willets always remind me of a plain gray suit: a woman friend of mine owned, unadorned on the outside but opening to a bright red lining decorated with a fanciful design of small red beads. A startling surprise like the black and white pattern on the outspread wings of the Willet.

Houston Audubon Society holds sway at Bolivar Flats. They have built a viewing platform where birders can get a good view of the marsh next to the mudflats, so that's where we headed complete with spotting scope. The action wasn't in the marsh, though, it was in the air above. Willets were displaying by soaring way up in the air then fluttering their wings and calling as they slowly descended to the ground. I'd never seen them do this before and was properly impressed !!! It had a kind of ethereal quality in the sunny sea air over the marsh garbed in its spring plumage.

I thought how far some Willets fly to their breeding grounds in the northern United States and Canada. It is a LONG way from the Texas coast. As you know, many other species fly much greater distances to their favored breeding areas. Sequoia Audubon will celebrate these birds on International Migratory Bird Day, Saturday, May 13th. The festivities will be at Bair Island, between 9 and 11:30, and they will include a bird walk beginning at 9 AM. I hope you'll come to enjoy the day and wish the migrants a safe journey!

Robin Smith



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

THURSDAY, MAY 4 — 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.

SATURDAY, MAY 6 — AUDUBON CANYON RANCH — For those of you who have never been to Audubon Canyon Ranch and may not want to venture out on your own, we will have a special field trip to the Ranch. Ranch Naturalist **Greg Nevers** will be our guide. Meet in the parking lot of the Bolinas Preserve at 10 AM. We will break up at about noon. Bring your own lunch and enjoy ACR's picnic area. To get there take Hwy. 101 across the Golden Gate Bridge and then follow Hwy. 1 along the coast to Stinson Beach. The ranch is on Bolinas Lagoon a few miles beyond the town. If you don't like the curves and cliffs of this route, continue on Hwy. 101 until you get to Sir Francis Drake Boulevard. Follow SFD Boulevard to where it ends at Olema, turn left on Hwy. 1 and follow Hwy. 1 south until you come to the ranch several miles after the Bolinas turnoff.

THURSDAY, MAY 11 — GENERAL MEETING — **Miraculous Midway** is a slide show covering the recent natural and cultural history of this Pacific atoll that is now a national wildlife refuge. At the San Mateo Garden Center on the Alameda at Parkside. Informal get-together at 7:30 PM with the meeting beginning at 8 PM.

SATURDAY, MAY 13 — Sequoia Audubon will celebrate **International Migratory Bird Day** with a beginners' bird walk at **Bair Island** on 9 AM, Saturday, May 13. Volunteers from our Bair Island Task Force will be on hand to greet the public and offer looks at wildlife through their spotting scopes. The bird walk and the wildlife viewing should last until 11:30 AM.

LEADER FRANCIS TOLDI 344-1919

SATURDAY, MAY 20 - RANCHO DEL OSO — Rancho Del Oso is the coastal entrance to Big Basin Redwoods State Park. It boasts a "variety of habitats: including ocean beach, marsh, oak-pine woodland and riparian growth along Waddell Creek. Meet at the entrance on the Inland side of Hwy. 1. We will walk to the ranger station and the lower part of the Skyline to the Sea Trail. Meet at 9:00 AM. Half day. **Rain cancels.**



LEADER MERRY HAVEMAN 344-2146

Audubon President Visits

Bair Island

Bob Wilkinson

At a well-attended press conference at Bair Island on April 5, Audubon President John Flicker appeared to announce Audubon's Baylands Campaign to restore and protect 100,000 acres around San Francisco Bay. Comparing it to the Florida Everglades campaign, in which he participated, he spoke of the urgency of the plan to bring resources together to protect a very important ecosystem, including the numerous species of wildlife dependent on it. Mr. Flicker stated that the time is right to do it now. Property will never get cheaper. Also, we must take action before, not after, a crisis develops, as was the case with the Everglades. Although the ultimate cost may be \$1 billion it is always harder and even more expensive to try to fix the problem after an ecosystem collapse. We should take as a warning the fact that we have already lost 80 to 85 % of our historic wetlands.

Mr. Flicker was accompanied by California Audubon President Dan Taylor, who referred to the eight Bay Area chapters which have acted to make the campaign their priority. "We must commit ourselves to protecting the Bay," he said.

Also speaking at the event was Marge Kolar, San Francisco Bay Refuge Director, who spoke of the great opportunity presented by Bair Island for restoration, the Refuge's first major effort.

Mr. Flicker's day-long visit to the area included stops at other wetlands along the Bay to highlight the Campaign, including conferences with editorial boards of Bay Area newspapers.

SAS members who assisted with the press conference, led by President Robin Smith, included John and Nena Padley, Howard Rathlesberger, and Bob and May-Blossom Wilkinson.

Field Trip Leader(s) Needed

Cliff Richer

Years ago, when I was Field Trip Chairman, I persuaded Gil West, one of my all-time favorite people, to begin leading some of our most difficult field trips -- Los Banos, Panoche Valley, Sacramento Valley Wildlife Refuges and Yuba Pass. When Gil became concerned about his health and feared that he might not be able to make these trips, I urged him to continue on with me as his assistant and back-up. And finally, when Gil's memory began to betray him, (He felt embarrassed when he spotted a bird, recognized it but could not remember its name.) I took over these trips.

And now I feel it's my turn to pass these trips on. I can no longer walk any significant distance and in recent years, I have come to be hospitalized by annual bouts of pneumonia and can no longer commit to leading these trips without help or backup.

So if any of you are interested in leading the above three "showcase" trips and/or trips to the Klamath Refuges in February and Mono Lake over Memorial Day, please let me know.

My plan is to lead each of these trips one more time, with an assistant leader, and then to continue to act as an advisor on future trips.

You do not have to be a "heavy-duty" birder for any of these trips. In fact, I just try to lead the group to where the birds are and then let them find the birds for me. Call me at 873-1754 if you have any interest in helping out on any of these trips.

Field Trip Report

March 18th, 2000

Foster City: 9 AM to 12 noon

Bair Island thereafter

Al DeMartini

Warm and wonderful weather enlivened both morning and afternoon trips. In Foster City, six of us searched through lessening numbers and varieties of waterfowl, eventually finding a close and tame pair of exquisite Hooded Mergansers.

At the shell bar we honed our identification skills on shorebirds in flight and on the ground in closely perched companies. Highlights were the Red Knots, both Turnstones, and Black-bellied Plovers. The rusty heads of the American Avocets and the aerial antics of a pair of Barn Swallows emphasized that Spring had arrived. We recorded 51 species.

Later, 15 birders gathered to scan the fields of Inner Bair Island and walk its levees. Early highlights included a somewhat unexpected Lincoln's Sparrow and an epic life and death struggle involving a Great Blue Heron and a very large alligator lizard. The lizard clung tenaciously to life and the heron's bill, wrapping itself around it like a snake, but eventually the heron gobbled it whole. Only the few of us who stayed later were lucky enough to spot the Burrowing Owl and see 5 Short-eared Owls in such excellent light that their gorgeous yellow eyes glowed supernaturally.

Thanks to all who came out.

County Science Fair Year 2000 - Recipients of SAS Awards

**Robert Webster- Sixth Grade -
Which Plane Flies the Farthest?**

Robert experimented with different wing configurations to see which produced the greatest flight distance. The planes carried the names of birds.

**Lauren Yapp - Seventh Grade -
Industries and the Water Quality of San
Francisco Bay**

An environmental project studying and comparing the quality of water at different industry outfall areas around the bay. Surprisingly, the water by the Chevron refinery was the least impacted!

**Marcus Acosta, Matt Bou, Ryan Lucia,
Rich Wolf- Eighth Grade -
Which Cleaner is Most Effective in Washing
Oil from the Feathers of Birds after
an Oil Spill?**

These students washed different kinds of bird feathers with various cleaners and measured the oil left on the feathers. An oven cleaner was most effective, but the students realized that it wouldn't be advisable to use it on birds, so Dawn dishwashing detergent was the winner!

Sierra Club Heads BLM Suit

A coalition of environmental groups filed a lawsuit against the US. Bureau of Land Management, charging that the agency is not fully protecting endangered animals on 10.2 million acres in the California desert.

The BLM hasn't implemented a conservation plan or considered the plan's overall effects on at least 24 plant and animal species in the Mojave and the Sonoran Deserts, the suit says.

The Sierra Club is joined by the Tucson-based Center for Biological Diversity and the Washington, D.C. based Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility in filing the suit in the US. District Court in San Francisco.

The BLM is preparing four regional plans to protect the imperiled species, including the desert tortoise, Peninsular Ranges bighorn sheep, Inyo California Towhee, desert pupfish and rare plants according to Doran Sanchez of the BLM.

Two plans would be ready in early summer, and the other two would be available later in the year. Completion of the plans would bring a 20 year old conservation plan up to date.

"The goal of the four major plans is for the protection and preservation of all the sensitive or threatened species," Sanchez said, "We have spent years collecting data, so when we make management decisions, we'll have the data to back them up."

The Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 included the California Desert Conservation Area, which stretches over 400 miles. The BLM com-

pleted the original required plan by 1980 but has done little to implement it since then according to the suit. "Rare desert plants and animals are suffering as the BLM keeps its eyes closed," said Daniel Patterson, desert ecologist for the Center for Biological Diversity. "Thriving on Earth for 67 million years, the desert tortoise has been decimated in just over 100 years by grazing, mining, off-road vehicles, utility projects and urban sprawl."

Sierra Nevada Field Campus Courses



The Sierra Nevada Field Campus of San Francisco State University located just east of Sierra City in Yuba Pass is offering a number

of courses which are of interest to birders.

From June 12 through the 16th Cornell University's Library of Natural Sounds will be offering a workshop on **Bird Song Recording**.

During that same period Dave Shuford will present "**Birds of the Sierra Nevada**".

From June 19 to the 23rd Luis Baptista will teach "**Bird Identification by Sound**".

Jim Steele, Mac McCormack and other staff members will teach "**Beginning Bird Banding**" from July 16-21 and "**Advanced Bird Banding**" from July 18-23. Both Jim and Mac are trainers for the North American Banding Council.

All the information on these and many other courses ranging from astronomy to geology is available on their web site <http://thecity.sfsu.edu/snfc>. The web site also contains a bird checklist for the Yuba Pass region and a list of nearby motels for those people who wish to attend but stay off campus.

* * * * *

Some say that a cougar can kill prey up to eight times its weight. Maybe so — but what is there out there that weighs 1200 pounds? And how can I avoid it?

From the Conservation Committee

Redwood Shores Levee Project Update

On Monday, March 27, 2000, the Redwood City Council again discussed the closing and locking of the gates at Redwood Shores to close off public access to two miles of levee. The purpose of the closure was to lessen disturbance to the endangered California Clapper Rails and Salt Marsh Harvest Mice and to allow for a predator management plan to be implemented. The US. Fish and Wildlife Service insisted on the closure before a permit extension could be granted.

When the council was polled at 11 p.m. the vote was to lock the gates and to continue to work on alternate solutions that would protect the endangered species and allow them to reopen the gates.

Both of the original permits from the Army Corps of Engineers and BCDC have expired and the city is in the process of requesting extensions in order to finish the levee project. Unless the levee is raised FEMA will not clear the area for flood insurance or future eligibility for disaster relief. Unless the gates are locked — as the council agreed to do in 1996 — the US Fish and Wildlife Service will withdraw its approval and without that approval the Corps of Engineers will not issue the permit to raise the levee.

In the past there have been similar situations at other sites along the Bay where work has been completed without a permit and later recognized as a *fait accompli* by the issuance of a retroactive permit.

It was feared that, under pressure from a vocal group of levee walkers, the council would attempt such a maneuver. Sequoia Audubon advised the city that they would sue if protection of the two endangered species was not maintained. This move guaranteed that the project could only go forward by adherence to the permit process and the council had "no choice" according to City Manager Ed Everett but to close the gates.

Your Conservation Committee has spent many hours on this issue. They deserve a big pat on the back! What they'd really rather have is more members work-

ing on the committee. There is lots to do and additional committee members would allow Sequoia to cover more issues. Call the office at 345-3724 and find out about putting your environmental values into action.

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In his press confer-

ences, both in Marin and San Mateo counties, NAS President John Flicker (*See the article on Page Two*) consistently refused to link restoration of Bay Area marshes to the airport's runway extension plans. "The airport is a separate issue," he said. "It should stand on its own merits."

The visit received good press coverage from the Associated Press, the BayInsider (Internet) and from newspapers in Marin, San Francisco, San Jose, San Mateo and Santa Rosa.

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Behind every argument is someone's ignorance.

—Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis



Salt Marsh Harvest Mouse

Lost Relative Found!



The large brown bears of Admiralty and Kodiak Island in Alaska have always been assumed to be subspecies of the brown bear (grizzly). Now researchers from

the University of Alaska have analyzed the DNA of most of the world's species of bears. Their conclusion is that the Admiralty Island Brown Bear is not related to the grizzlies at all, but to the polar bear! No word yet as to the ancestry of the giant Kodiak Bear.

Anti-Bear Spray Can Backfire

US. Geological Survey biologist Tom Smith has made a startling discovery. Anti-bear spray should not be used except in an actual confrontation with a bear. Some campers have been using it as a preventive — a potential disaster-creating situation.

The spray is a form of pepper spray and when used in its concentrated form, causes intense pain to the bear's eyes and mucous membranes. If used improperly on tents, food containers, clothing or other objects the spray is diluted and smells like many spicy human foods — attracting instead of repelling the bears.

Smith says, "I sprayed it onto a beach and then watched a sow and her cubs rolling in the gravel, just having a heck of a time." Bears can pick up the spray's scent from a quarter of a mile away, he adds. Spraying a campsite could create danger for the next people to use it. The residue appears to be a stable compound that lingers for weeks.



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Environmental Dictator?

In January 1998, a group of marine biologists, with special permission from the US and Cuban governments, surveyed the relatively unknown ocean off Cuba.

They were surprised to receive an unannounced visit from Fidel Castro, who revealed himself to be an informed and knowledgeable amateur ichthyologist and scuba diver. In the course of a three hour discussion with him the scientists became convinced of Castro's sound environmental background and his commitment to preserving Cuba's natural treasures.

His parting comments to the biologists and divers was to beware of Cuban sharks, to which one scientist commented "politicians are far more dangerous than sharks." Castro's response was "*Verdad*", which means truly in Spanish.

□ □ □ □ □

In politics stupidity is not a handicap.

—Napoleon

Hippophants or Elephopotami?

Elephants love water, and scientists at the University of Melbourne claim this is because they are descended from aquatic creatures. They studied an elephant embryo and fetuses from culling projects in South Africa and found kidney ducts akin to those of fish and frog. Some fossils support their findings as does the fact that elephants have neutral buoyancy and swim completely submerged with only their trunks above the water.



Good For Something, After All?

Blue Gum Eucalyptus, our most obvious invasive weed, does have at least one good point. It makes an ideal wintering home for monarch butterflies. The same acidic leaves that make the soil beneath the trees unlivable for most plant life have a narrow, lace-like structure that allows monarchs to secure a strong grasp during winter storms. The monarchs form clusters in the thousands on cold days with wings folded like roof shingles, weighing down branches but avoiding being tossed to the ground by wind or rain.



Fatal Attraction

Fireflies or lightning bugs are not a single species of beetle but a host of species comprising the family Lampyridae.

They come in different sizes and shapes but all follow the same general mating ritual — around dusk the male takes off and flies near likely looking vegetation while flashing to attract the female. Each species of male firefly has its own code and females of that species flash back that same code — except that there are a few large females that imitate other species, not for mating but for dinner. (*Would that be considered a light meal?* —Ed.)

Nothing New Under the Sun

The field guide says, "The native shorebirds of the area are in their last days. Apparently this is a result of the human colonization of the Hawaiian Islands, which had probably begun at least three or four centuries earlier. Although native Hawaiians recognized a spiritual tie between humans and their environment, and protected certain plants and animals by imposing seasonal restrictions on their exploitation, archaeological excavations and historical accounts show that they also dramatically altered floral and fauna habitats by causing runaway fires, and they may have eaten some bird species to extinction. And the Polynesian rat — a stowaway on the great voyaging canoes — may well have done even more damage." — From a description of Hawaii in the 19th century.

Hoch Reunion

Alice Hoch has been teaching birding classes at the Fremont Adult School for 25 years.

On Saturday, May 6, she will hosting a reunion of her present students and her alumni from 10 am to 1 pm at Central Park in Fremont. Their tables will be behind the old community center at 40204 Paseo Padre Parkway (at the end of Mission View Drive.)

In case of rain, it will be held at the Noll School, 39600 Sundale Drive, Fremont. If you want, bring your lunch and beverage.

For more details call Alice at 510-657-0475 or the adult school at 510-791-5841.

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Filoli was completed by William Bowers Bourn II in 1917. This 43 room Georgian revival home sits on 671 acres including 17 acres of formal gardens of exceptional beauty and elegance. A Visitor & Education Center offers nature and arts classes for the public and historical programs for area schools. Filoli is owned by the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

The last roadrunner seen in San Mateo County was recorded at Filoli in 1927.

Condors — Back in Bay Area?

Plans are underway to release 18 to 24 California Condors somewhere in eastern Santa Clara County's Diablo Range beginning next January.

This is part of the Condor Recovery Program's search to find geographically diversified suitable habitat for the return of these birds to the wild. Other areas in which the birds appear to be becoming established are Big Sur in Monterey County; Castle Crags Wilderness, San Luis Obispo County; Los Padres National Forest, Ventura County; and the north rim of the Grand Canyon in Arizona.

With a wingspan of nearly 10 feet, and a weight of 24 pounds, the California Condor bears some resemblance to its smaller cousin, the Turkey Vulture, with dark feathers and a bare orange-red head and neck. The condor is much bigger, has distinctive white patches under its huge wings and soars on "flat" wings whereas the Turkey Vulture wobbles back and forth with its wings raised in a vertical dihedral. (Remember "V is for Vulture".) Like the other vultures it is more closely related to the stork than to raptors.

There is still no guarantee that any of the condor re-introductions will work. In the opinion of one biologist who worked with them in the early days of the Recovery Program, "This is the dumbest bird in the world with an intelligence and personality on a par with the banana slug."

Unlike the Turkey Vulture, the California Condor retains the lead in its intestinal tract when it feasts on an animal that was shot. It is also highly susceptible to the poisons that farmers use in controlling rats, coyotes and other farm "pests". The first condor releases were near disasters. More than half the birds succumbed relatively quickly to these poisons or to power lines. One even developed a taste for automobile coolant (death by anti-freeze).

The surviving birds were recaptured and future candidates for release were given aversion therapy to keep them away from power lines.

Nevertheless, despite efforts to keep the birds from associating humans with

food, at least one of the released colonies became beggars near human residences.

The release of AC-8 — the last female condor taken from the wild — and two juvenile birds on April 4 brings the total number of California condors in the wild up to 60, with 95 remaining in captivity. It is hoped that AC-8, who grew up in the wild, will be able to mentor the two young birds.

Eleven of the 60 condors in the wild are 6 years old and are of breeding age. Some of the condors have exhibited courtship behavior and biologists will be watching closely for future pairings and breeding behavior.

At last count there were a total of 157 California Condors with four "recaptures" being readied for re-release and 93 captive birds in the three breeding centers in Los Angeles (29), San Diego (24) and Boise, Idaho (40). At the species' lowest point in 1982, the total number of condors was down to 27 — all in captivity.

The Bluebird Journal

Howard Rathlesberger

The cavity nester's nesting season is really upon us. We are experiencing, as of March 29, an explosion of chickadee and titmouse nesting, egg laying, and even hatching of nestlings. They seem to be attracted to the hanging boxes, perhaps due to the height.

Interestingly, these are, in most cases, 1½" openings with the typical 5"x5" floor, in typical bluebird open woodland habitat. The small cavity nesters, chickadees, titmice and wrens, could use a 4x4 box with an 1¼" opening.

The average nest is 3-4" high in the 5x5 box. The bird will deposit about 5x5x3½" or 87.5 cubic inches of nest material, whereas with a 4x4" floor box the bird would deposit 4x4x3½" or 56 cubic inches. It certainly appears the "one size fits all" idea really penalizes the smaller cavity nesters by making them work much harder to nest in the larger box.

So we have been building, what I call the junior box, with a 4x4" floor and

1¼" opening for back yard birders who normally wouldn't have bluebird or swallow activity. The other factor is that, in some instances, we're possibly losing bluebird or swallow occupancy to these earlier nesting birds. The whole situation provides the incentive to locate the larger boxes in more traditional, exclusive territory.

I'm not exactly sure what happens when the bluebirds start nesting in earnest and find many boxes are already taken over by smaller birds. It is possible that the early ones, like chickadee and titmouse nests, will be empty by the time the bluebirds are seriously ready to nest.

We've always anticipated the bluebird vs. swallow conflict and, to solve this situation, have basically doubled the number of boxes in an area. This drama will certainly unfold for us shortly.

Monday, April third, started us off with a bang. **Lee Franks** on his Canada College Trail captured an incubating Western Bluebird hen in Box #2, which he banded last year in Box #3. She was incubating 3 eggs. He was also able to discern a band on the male nearby. To our knowledge no adult males were banded last year in our area, so we surmised that the male was a nestling banded last year. This is what we were hoping would happen and it has!

Interestingly, that Canada College site is where we have the first Western Bluebird nesting/hatching in the county since we've been keeping records.

Let me, again, acknowledge **Red Pendleton's** pioneer work, as he started this trail years ago. Thanks, Red!

Later in the day Lee Franks and I banded five Oak Titmouse chicks in our front yard and six more at Menlo Country Club in a box along side Woodside Road. Incidentally, at Menlo Country Club we also saw two Wild Turkeys.

Please keep us informed when you find eggs in the nest. We'd like the approximate date of the first or last egg, so we can attempt to capture the hen incubating and also band the chicks when they are at least 6-7 days old.

We're off to a good start!

What's in a Name?

Brian Taber of Williamsburg, Virginia, writing in *Birdwatchers' Digest* takes his pet peeves in bird names and suggests some changes. Your editor's comments follow Mr. Taber's.

- **OLDSQUAW.** Politically incorrect. *Long-tailed Duck.* (I detest political correctness and I like Oldsquaw. By the way, my great-grandmother was a native American.)
- **COMMON MERGANSER.** Not helpful. *White-breasted Merganser.* (Not any more helpful. The male hooded and the Smew are both white-breasted and the common is the most common merganser over most of its range.)
- **MOUNTAIN PLOVER.** Not seen there. *Plains plover.*
- **RED KNOT.** Why knot? *Rufous sandpiper.* (Knot is an old name for sandpiper. I like it because I use the mnemonic "If its not anything else, its a knot.")
- **DUNLIN.** Little dark one? *Black-bellied sandpiper.* (Dun doesn't mean dark. It means brownish-gray. Sounds good to me.)
- **COMMON BARN-OWL.** Barns and owls are disappearing. *Pale owl.* (Barns and owls aren't disappearing from all six continents where this bird is found.)
- **COMMON NIGHTHAWK.** Why all these commons? *Greater nighthawk.* (What's the matter with common? Why all these greaters? And if you want to be accurate, why not Night-martin or Nightswallow?)
- **CALLIOPE HUMMINGBIRD.** A pipe organ? Muse of epic poetry? *Streak-throated hummingbird.* (I have a hard time justifying calliope for this little bird but I like the first part of its Latin name "little star". Little Star Hummingbird would be my choice.)
- **MAGNIFICENT HUMMINGBIRD.** Aren't they all? *Greenthroated giant.* (Leave it alone. Its a giant only among some hummingbirds.)
- **RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER.** You can't see the red. *Peterson's woodpecker,* for the father of modern bird watching. (Hard to argue except that Peterson deserves a "better" bird.)

- **DOWNY WOODPECKER.** Is it? *Lesser white-backed woodpecker.* (I personally dislike lesser and greater which imply inferiority or superiority. I prefer little or big.)
- **HAIRY WOODPECKER.** Is it? *Greater white-backed woodpecker.* (See above.)
- **BARN SWALLOW.** Again with the barn. *Fork-tailed swallow.* (What's wrong with barns?)
- **BLUE JAY.** Most North American and Central American jays are blue. *White-winged jay.* (On the basis of a single white wing bar? This jay likes to be around houses more than its cousins. How about Yard Jay?)



- **HERMIT THRUSH.** Many thrushes are shy. *Rufous-tailed thrush.* (Both the Veery and the Wood Thrush can have rufous tails.)
- **AMERICAN ROBIN.** After the resemblance to the European robin. *Rufous-breasted thrush.* (This is the only bird that most Americans can recognize. Leave well enough alone.)
- **LUCY'S WARBLER.** Daughter of an ornithologist. *Mesquite warbler.* (Why select this one out of the numbers of birds named after someone? Besides, I've never seen one in mesquite.)
- **CONNECTICUT WARBLER.** Just passing through. *Walking warbler.*
- **KENTUCKY WARBLER.** Found across most of the Southeast, East, and Midwest. *Black-faced warbler.*
- **CANADA WARBLER.** Not nearly as "Canadian" as many others. *Neck-laced warbler.*
- **LOUISIANA WATERTHRUSH.** Not there much. *White-throated waterthrush.* (The above four were named for where they were first

discovered. Name changes would be in order.)

- **NORTHERN WATERTHRUSH.** Yes, but boring. *Streak-throated waterthrush.*
- **WORM-EATING WARBLER.** Don't all warblers eat worms? *Brown-and-buff warbler.* (No, all warblers do not eat worms! The name implies its ground-feeding behavior.)
- **COMMON YELLOWTHROAT.** Ubiquitous, but many others have yellow throats. *Masked warbler.* (If you changed this one you'd have to change several other "yellowthroat" species from South and Central America. Leave it alone.)
- **AMERICAN REDSTART.** Named for a European thrush. *Black-and-orange warbler.* (see Yellowthroat above.)
- **ORCHARD ORIOLE.** Found in many other habitats. *Chestnut oriole.* (Makes sense to me.)
- **SUMMER TANAGER.** Too seasonal. *Rosy tanager.* (I like it.)
- **HOUSE FINCH.** They don't nest in houses. *Red finch.* (It's the only finch I've seen that does nest near and in houses.)
- **EVENING GROSBEAK.** Never saw one at that time of day. *Yellow-and-brown grosbeak.* (Where I grew up, evening was always the best time of day to see them. and aren't they yellow and black?)

Running the Gauntlet



Most of the world's Laysan and Black-browed Albatrosses are born on the small islands of the Hawaiian Islands National Wildlife Refuge. In late May and June, tiger sharks gather in the shallows surrounding these nesting areas.

As the young fledgling albatrosses take their first flights, many of them falter and fall short. Few of them get a second chance, falling prey to the hungry sharks before they can recover.

Biologists at the Refuge have estimated that 10% of all young albatrosses become tiger shark tid-bits each year.

Expansionist Gnatcatchers

Over the last quarter century the diminutive blue-gray gnatcatcher has expanded its range to cover most of the northeastern United States, portions of Ontario and Quebec, and the eastern foothills of the Rocky Mountains.

This northward march entailed not only occupation of new real estate, but slight changes in habitat as well. The gnatcatchers' expansion required colonization of alternate habitats. In moving north of Colorado Springs, the blue-gray gnatcatchers exchanged traditional pinyon-juniper breeding grounds for ponderosa pine or mixed ponderosa-juniper sites, particularly where these woodlands grow in association with an understory of Gambel oak or other large shrubs.

Theories to account for the expansion remain few and sketchy. Among the leading early candidates are warmer winters and an increase in shrub-land habitat due to fire suppression.

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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