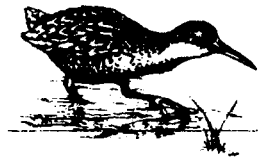


sequoia needles

Bulletin of the Sequoia Audubon Society
San Mateo County Volume 51, No. 3
March, 2001

This Month's Program **San Francisco** **Bay's Hidden** **Wildlife**



For the past two years John Cang has been photographing and documenting the

wildlife utilizing Cargill Salt's 25,000 acres of salt evaporation ponds that ring San Francisco Bay.

Although not a part of the natural ecosystem this unique habitat annually provides food, shelter, nesting ground, and migration stopover for hundreds of thousands of birds belonging to seventy species, including the endangered Clapper Rail, Least Tern, and Snowy Plover.

John will showcase images of birds utilizing this habitat, and provide insight into why these ponds are such a magnet for wildlife.

John Cang is a full-time wildlife and nature photographer based in San Jose. His photos have been featured by National Geographic, the Sierra Club, The Nature Conservancy. *Western Birds* and corporate advertising. He also leads photo tours to a variety of US and Canada destinations.

His website, <www.johncangphoto.com>, includes info on the Cargill ponds.

Oops!

The short column on Brown-headed Cowbirds in the December issue of the *Needles* mentions that this bird was found in Palo Alto by 1911.



The first documented records for this species in Santa Clara County were when Charles Smith found both eggs and nestlings in Wilson's Warbler nests along Coyote Creek in June 1925.

The earliest record for the Bay area appears to be for Alameda County in 1922 when La Jeunesse found them near Irvington.

Thanks to **Bill Bousman** for this correction.

From the President **In Panoche Valley**



A flash of bright blue dazzled us as the bird flew by. He came to rest on a fence post and we viewed him through the scope. This Mountain Bluebird was beautiful!

On posts nearby we spotted some crisply plumaged sparrows with a distinctive face pattern, Lark Sparrows. Flocks of Savannah Sparrows swirled around the fence at ground level, their yellowish lores visible in the bright sun. A sparrow hunt in the nearby hills netted one Sage Sparrow scruffling along on the ground with his tail cocked jauntily.

Later in the day two handsome Ferruginous Hawks allowed us long looks as they perched on telephone poles. Cliff Richer said, "I love that bird!" Probably one of the reasons that Cliff leads this trip- a chance to see a Ferrugie. Though it has a smaller looking bill than some hawks, the hook on the bill looks lethal. The light head and tail feathers contrast with the lovely rust on back and shoulders. The "leggings" were plainly visible as one took to the air. Wow! Worth the trip!



The Ferruginous hawks were quickly followed by one of my favorites, a Prairie Falcon. This particular bird was more deeply colored than most and let us have a long look before he moved his perch. We could see his signature "black armpits" clearly as he powered on to the next pole. I like the way they fly, all business.

Try looking into their eyes the next time you see one through a scope; no wonder birds flush when this falcon passes overhead!

At the lunch spot we met birding groups from San Francisco and the Peninsula along with a small group of motorcyclists out for a ride on a favorite road. After exchanging bird sightings we backtracked a little. It was a good choice as we saw Loggerhead Shrikes, Cassin's Kingbird and a flock of American Pipits at a roadside streamlet. A discussion followed about why the streamlet's water was flowing east instead of west. What drainage did we have here? The consensus was that it was flowing into the San Joaquin River, but further research is in order.

As we began to wend our way toward Hollister after the early afternoon doldrums, the birding picked up. A Phainopepla moved around in the top of an oak coming into view on occasion. A Northern Flicker flew across the road, showing his beautiful red wing linings.

As Yellow-billed Magpies were chattering in the background, a huge dark bird flew up and across the road. Its sheer size impressed us all even before we tumbled to the realization that it was a Bald Eagle!!! It perched in a tree and was immediately mobbed by the other large birds in the area. Before we recovered from the shock of seeing the Bald Eagle, another large, dark bird flushed

(Continued on Page Seven)

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, MARCH 1 — 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, MARCH 3 — BAIR ISLAND — Visit and bird in the newest part of the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge and learn about Sequoia Audubon's volunteer work on the Island. Take 101 to the Whipple Avenue exit in Redwood City. Go east on Whipple across the frontage road. to the parking area. Be careful and watch out for frontage road traffic. Meet at 9 AM at the refuge sign inside the gates.

LEADER ROBIN SMITH 325-3306

THURSDAY, MARCH 8 — GENERAL MEETING featuring **San Francisco Bay's Hidden Wildlife** by photographer/naturalist John Cang. At the Garden Center on the Alameda at Parkside. Social get-together at 7:30 PM with the meeting beginning at 8.

SATURDAY, MARCH 10 — SEA CLOUD PARK — This trip is especially for beginners and families. We'll have binoculars to share. Besides looking at birds we'll discuss binoculars, field guides and the basics of bird identification. All questions gladly answered. Take Hillsdale Ave, east from 101, make a right turn onto Edgewater Blvd., go 1.3 miles, turn left on Pitcairn Drive and look for the park entrance on the right. Meet at the end of parking lot at 9 AM.

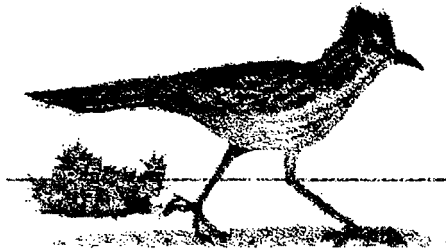
LEADER FRANCIS TOLDI 344-1919

SATURDAY, MARCH 17 — ARASTRADERO PRESERVE With its grassy slopes, oak trees, a pond and chaparral this is a very birdy place. Take 280 south to the Page Mill Road exit, go west on Page Mill Rd. The first major intersection is Arastradero Road. Turn right, continue and look for the parking lot on your right where we'll meet at 9 AM.

LEADER GARTH HARWOOD 879-0724

SATURDAY, MARCH 24 — OGIER PONDS — MORGAN HILL — From Hwy. 101 in Morgan Hill take Cochrane Rd. west to Monterey Hwy., turn right, go north 2.6 miles and turn right towards the Model Airplane Park where the power towers cross the Highway. Follow the road for one half mile and park in the gravel lot at the bend in road. We'll meet at 8:45 AM.

LEADER BOB REILING (408) 253-7527



THURSDAY, APRIL 5 — 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, APRIL 7 — BAIR ISLAND — Visit and bird in the newest part of the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge and learn about Sequoia Audubon's volunteer work on the Island. Take 101 to the Whipple Avenue exit in Redwood City. Go east on Whipple across the frontage road. to the parking area. Be careful and watch out for frontage road traffic. Meet at 9 AM at the refuge sign inside the gates,

LEADER ROBIN SMITH 325-3306

THURSDAY, APRIL 12 — GENERAL MEETING At the Garden Center on the Alameda at Parkside. Social get-together at 7:30 PM with the meeting beginning at 8.

SATURDAY, APRIL 14 — ARASTRADERO PRESERVE —

This trip is especially for beginners and families. We'll have binoculars to share. Besides looking at birds we'll discuss binoculars, field guides and the basics of bird identification. All questions gladly answered. Take 280 south to the Page Mill Road exit, go west on Page Mill Rd. The first major intersection is Arastradero Road. Turn right, continue and look for the parking lot on your right where we'll meet at 9 AM.

LEADER GARTH HARWOOD 879-0724

SUNDAY, APRIL 22 — COYOTE POINT — The wetlands fronting San Francisco Bay attract numerous shorebirds in migration. The trees and grassy areas also provide good birding. Take 101 north to Peninsula Avenue in Burlingame. Go east following the signs to the park. Meet at the parking lot behind the Yacht Club at 9 AM.

LEADER SUE COSSINS 347-9358

SUNDAY, APRIL 29 — MINES ROAD — A variety of habitats provides a fascinating variety of birds not found elsewhere in the Bay Area! This is an auto caravan trip that lasts until dusk. (You can break away at any time) Have a full tank of gas, water and food with you since facilities are scarce. Take the San Mateo Bridge and follow the signs to I-580. Stay on 580 about 25 miles past Livermore to Vasco Road. Take Vasco Road east to its end and turn right on Tesla Road. In about a mile you will come to the intersection with Mines Road (on the left). We'll meet at the intersection at 8 AM. (If you come late, our first stop is just up the road. Look for the parked cars)

LEADER CLIFF RICHER 873-1754



Wise people think all they say, fools say all they think

CHECK IN THE UPDATE FOR MAY EVENTS

News From Audubon Canyon Ranch

Betsy Stafford



How lucky we are to have spring come so soon to our Bay Area! Long before the equinox, February brings bright green to our hills, white milkmaids to our trails, and mating plumage to our avian friends. No doubt we'll have another wintry storm or two, but fresh spring mornings come more and more frequently, and yellow pollen gathers at a feverish rate.

At ACR it's time to think about spring-cleaning. We invite you to join us on a Workday at Bolinas Lagoon Preserve, on Saturday March 4, to help us spruce up Picher Canyon before the public season opens March 17. We can promise you wildflowers, good fellowship, an inside look at the earliest arrivals at our heronry, and a free lunch. Please give us a call at 415 868-9244, so that we can plan on enough lunch for all.

Weekend Hosts - Come One, Come All — We rely on you, our special Audubon friends, to help us through our public season each spring. Every weekend from March 17 through July 15 we are most fortunate to have volunteer hosts welcome the thousands of visitors that come to our Bolinas Lagoon Preserve. Please contact your Audubon chapter representative or host coordinator or call us directly at 415 868-9244 or via e-mail at Yvonne@egret.org.

USF&W Accused of Misusing Tax Money

According to the House Resources' Committee the US. Fish and Wildlife Service improperly used federal taxes paid by anglers and hunters to finance junkets to Paris, Florence and Rio de Janeiro and to give grants to favored programs, a probe by the House Resources' Committee has concluded. The agency's mismanagement of the \$550 million raised through excise taxes on sporting gear, boating fuel and fishing equipment is so bad that the committee is pushing Congress to adopt administrative controls specifying that the funds are earmarked for wildlife conservation efforts alone. They also would limit how much the federal government can use for administrative costs.

The committee maintains that the Service used almost \$31 million of the tax money as "slush funds."

Among the irregularities:

- More than \$600,000 was used to pay bonuses to federal employees
- The funds financed foreign travel, including 71 trips taken by an assistant regional director at a cost of \$68,000.
- Liquor bills of federal grantees were paid with excise tax revenues.
- A "technical" irregularity was the spending of \$100,000 on programs benefiting the African rhino. (The law requires that the funds be spent in the US.)

The House committee unanimously approved the committee's bill to limit the USF&W to taking no more than \$10 million of the funds for administrative costs, and requiring the agency to fully document how funds are spent.

The investigation was sparked by the National Wilderness Institute, a conservation group that used Freedom of Information requests to get internal documents detailing how the funds were spent.

The institute found documents showing the money was used to finance trips of agency officials to France, Italy, New Zealand, Venezuela and Amsterdam and to casino hotels in Puerto Rico, Atlantic City and Lake Tahoe. Under the 60 year old program, the USF&W is required to spend the funds raised from hunters and anglers on sport fish hatcheries and wildlife husbandry programs. This regulation forbids the use of these funds even for internally beneficial programs such as restoring wolf and grizzly bear populations.

The congressional General Accounting Office said it could not account for all the money because the agency's books were not kept correctly. A GAO audit last year concluded the agency could not account for somewhere between \$7.4 million and \$20 million. *(Something that I learned years ago when I became financial manager of my fraternity — if you ever want to embezzle money, don't try to hide it — just don't keep any records. My predecessor had nearly put us into bankruptcy, but nothing could be proven because the only record we had was an unbalanced checkbook. — Ed.)*

Tylenol Rx

On the island of Guam, wildlife biologists are carefully giving Tylenol tablets to dead mice and rats.

No they're not trying to create a rodent Frankenstein — they're trying to cure another kind of headache.

The brown tree snake, accidentally introduced to Guam and some any other Pacific islands during WWII, has wreaked havoc on the local wildlife, virtually destroying the islands' native bird populations. One of the few things that can kill a brown tree snake is a good healthy dose of Tylenol.

Biologists are hoping that the Tylenol-laced, electronically-tagged rodents will be eaten by the snakes so that Guam's wildlife will be given a chance to recover.

United They Conquer

Argentine ants are spreading around the world. But whereas in South America their colonies typically attack one another, their behavior changes when they invade new territory. In California they assault and displace local species like the harvester ant, yet their own colonies rarely clash. Because they aren't fighting, they grow in numbers and form cooperative super-colonies.

(Oh good, first Killer Bees, Fire Ants and Presidential Candidates, now super-colonies! —Ed.)

From the Conservation Committee

Bob Wilkinson

Strong Public Support for Restoring San Francisco Bay

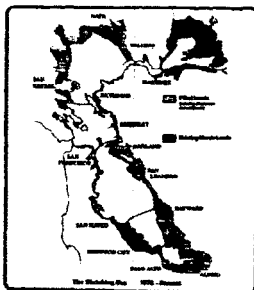
A Bay Area-wide public opinion poll was commissioned by California Audubon and conducted by Fairbank, Maslin and Associates to determine the potential level of support in the region for its major campaign to restore the Bay. Attitudes and values held by residents in the region are critical to an understanding of the tasks and strategies ahead.

The results of the poll indicate that the Bay and the lands around it top the list of environmental features, ahead of water and air quality, which the public believes important to maintaining the quality of life in the region.

The survey also reveals that most people expect the Bay and its surrounding lands to become degraded in the years ahead. The main culprits are seen as pollution and growth. Nearly 7 million live and work along the shores of the Bay and its immediate watersheds. This large population will be increased during the next 20 years by 1.6 million more residents.

Most people (88%) are supportive of efforts to reduce pollution, and almost as many favor protecting habitat for fish and wildlife in the area. An even greater reason felt by the public for protecting the Bay is to preserve it for future generations. Its uniqueness as the largest and ecologically most important estuary on the West Coast of North America may contribute to this high ranking of appreciation.

So what is the degree of support for those environmental organizations most likely to work for its preservation? 57% have a favorable view of Audubon, the same for the Sierra Club. If conservation



efforts require public funding 45% strongly support the idea, with 34% somewhat supportive.

The poll results led to a recasting of the name of the campaign to its present title in order to better resonate with public concerns as well as with Congress.

The outline of basic support is important to the efforts of Audubon's San Francisco Bay Restoration Program which continues to gather steam at its headquarters located at the Bay Audubon Center at Tiburon under the direction of Debbie Drake.

Audubon chapters such as Sequoia will pitch in to help the campaign by such strategies as asking endorsements from local governments and support of model resolutions for restoring the Bay.

Northward the Whales!

Although most gray whales have already headed north, the females with calves do not leave the south until March when the young have accumulated enough insulating blubber. The mothers and young travel at a more leisurely pace than the others, and may be seen along our coast anytime between April and June.

Barrel Burning Cliff Richer

When I was growing up in a small town in New Hampshire, nearly everybody had a backyard incinerator. Usually this was an old 55 gallon oil drum with some holes punched in it for air circulation.

In those days it was considered good civic duty to burn as much of your trash as possible before setting it out for the weekly trash collection. This not only lightened the load for the local garbage man — a well liked local character who had suffered physical and mental disabilities as the result of a childhood accident — but also reduced the amount of material at the local dump.

According to the EPA, there are still 20 million such backyard incinerators in rural America and they conclude that the barrel burners may release as many pollutants, especially dioxins, as did all the municipal incinerators in use before 1995,

when the EPA tightened burning rules.

The EPA has no authority over these individual activities but is encouraging state legislatures to impose restrictions.

The Nature Conservancy — An "Efficient" Charity

Last December we learned much to our surprise that The Nature Conservancy was rated as one of the "lower-rated" charity organizations, using less than half of its revenues to carry out its programs.

It is only recently that I learned that this rating is due entirely to the format of the IRS 990 that all non-profits — including Sequoia Audubon — have to file with the Federal government.

Under this form any real estate acquisitions must be classified as capital expenses — not as program costs.

Since the most important work of TNC is its acquisition of environmentally sensitive lands, this clearly changes the "efficiency rating" of it as a charity. As near as I could tell from looking at TNC's annual report, its beneficial use of funds varies from somewhere between 90.5 to 94%, depending on how you wish to classify some of its employees — most of whom have both administrative and scientific duties. In either case, an outstanding record!

Phasing Out Snowmobiles

The National Park Service (NPS) announced in November that snowmobile use will be phased out of Yellowstone and Grand Teton in the next three years.

The Park Service already had limited snowmobiles at nearly all facilities except Yellowstone and Teton.

While there will be no change in snowmobile use this season the machines will be phased out starting next year and banned by 2003-2004.

"Public activities should conserve resources and values for future generations," said Karen Wade, regional director for NPS. "Unfortunately, snowmobiles have been shown to harm wildlife, air quality and the quiet of these parks"

YEAR 2000 CHRISTMAS COUNT STATISTICS

SPECIES	CS	AN	SPECIES	CS	AN	SPECIES	CS	AN	SPECIES	CS	AN
Red-throated Loon	7	151	Bald Eagle	2		Winter Wren	15	53	American Robin	1075	288
Pacific Loon	606	365	Northern Harrier	29	57	Marsh Wren	12	15	Varied Thrush	78	51
Common Loon	18	24	Sharp-shinned Hawk	8	8	Wren species		1	Thrush species		1
Pied-billed Grebe	132	21	Cooper's Hawk	5	4	American Dipper	1	3	Wrenit	92	174
Horned Grebe	55	25	Accipiter sp.	1	1	Golden-crowned Kinglet	32	18	Northern Mockingbird	13	2
Red-necked Grebe *		1	Red-shouldered Hawk	26	18	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	306	316	California Thrasher	5	2
Eared Grebe	31	18	Red-tailed Hawk		87	Jaeger species		1	American Pipit	18	107
Western Grebe	224	125	Ferruginous Hawk*		1	Forster's Tern	1		Cedar Waxwing	222	50
Clark's Grebe	181	5	Rough-legged Hawk *		1	Common Murre	5	1281	Loggerhead Shrike	1	
Aechmophorus, species	30	54	Golden Eagle *	1		Marbled Murrelet		11	European Starling	1273	568
Northern Fulmar *	12	13	American Kestrel	33	38	Ancient Murrelet		12	Hutton's Vireo	35	24
Short-tailed/Sooty Shearwater		2	Martin *	2	2	Rhinoceros Auklet		38	Tennessee Warbler	1	
Black-vented Shearwater		1	Peregrine Falcon *	4	2	Ald, species		30	Orange-crowned Warbler	18	15
Brown Pelican	64	275	California Quail	78	299	Rock Dove	709	73	Nashville Warbler *	2	1
Double-crested Cormorant	368	18	Clapper Rail	2		Band-tailed Pigeon	58	55	Magnolia Warbler	1	
Brandt's Cormorant	207	354	Virginia Rail	7	17	Mourning Dove	451	99	Myrtle	65	200
Pelagic Cormorant	15	68	Sora	5	2	Barn Owl	2	6	Audubon's	247	70
Great Blue Heron	28	19	American Coot	1677	113	Western Screech-Owl	3	13	Yellow-rumped Warbler	252	64
Great Egret	31	1	Black-bellied Plover	132	54	Great Horned Owl	14	20	Townsend's Warbler	90	90
Snowy Egret	89	7	Snowy Plover	41	10	Northern Pygmy-Owl	5	8	Hermit Warbler *	3	
Green Heron	2		Semipalmated Plover	1		Burrowing Owl	2	2	Palm Warbler	2	1
Black-crowned Night Heron	12	1	Killdeer	51	184	Spotted Owl	1	1	Black and White Warbler*	1	
Greater W.F. Goose	2		Black Oystercatcher	10	12	Long-eared Owl	1	2	Common Yellowthroat	25	23
Snow Goose	5	12	Black-necked Stilt	179	1	Short-eared Owl *	5		Wilsonia sp	1	
Ross' Goose	5		American Avocet	1288		Northern Saw-whet Owl	10	21	Black-headed Grosbeak		1
Ross/Snow goose	100		Greater Yellowlegs	25	16	Anna's Hummingbird	300	98	Spotted Towhee	65	18
Brant		2	Willet	4318	17	Belted Kingfisher	15	6	California Towhee	155	116
Canada Goose	218		Spotted Sandpiper	10		Lewis' Woodpecker	1		American Tree Sparrow*		1
Canada Goose (Small races)	2	1	Whimbrel	86	36	Acorn Woodpecker	42	131	Savannah Sparrow	41	230
Wood Duck *	11	26	Long-billed Curlew	126		Red-breasted Sapsucker	5	5	Fox Sparrow	46	71
American Green-winged Teal	292	49	Marbled Godwit	1489	15	Nuttall's Woodpecker	8	1	Song Sparrow	167	361
Mallard	325	70	Ruddy Turnstone	7		Downy Woodpecker	13	11	Lincoln's Sparrow	28	15
Northern Pintail	226	18	Black Turnstone	79	23	Hairy Woodpecker	10	16	Swamp Sparrow*		1
Cinnamon Teal		1	Surfbird	18	13	Flicker, N.(yellow-shafted)	1		White-throated Sparrow *	3	1
Northern Shoveler	129	31	Red Knot	6		Northern Flicker	73	76	Golden-crowned Sparrow	466	450
Gadwall	418	3	Sanderling	264	87	Pileated Woodpecker *		2	White-crowned Sparrow	708	621
American Wigeon	325	18	Western Sandpiper	38		Black Phoebe	122	82	Harle Sparrow	1	
Canvasback	1491	9	Least Sandpiper	485	4	Say's Phoebe	4	12	Dark-eyed Junco	511	301
Ring-necked Duck	135	41	Dunlin	1		Thick-billed Kingbird	1		Sparrow species		6
Greater Scaup	3120	2	Short-billed Dowitcher	3		Tree Swallow *	36	1	Red-winged Blackbird	282	1187
Lesser Scaup	142	3	Long-billed Dowitcher	45		Stellar's Jay	89	142	Tricolored Blackbird	91	506
Scaup, species:	4535		Dowitcher, species:	3		Western Screech Jay	262	138	Western Meadowlark	129	119
Long-tailed Duck	1	1	Common Snipe	22	22	American Crow	108		Brewer's Blackbird	976	583
Black Scoter *		10	Bonaparte's Gull		2	Common Raven	269	200	Brown-headed Cowbird	71	3
Surf Scoter	1044	103	Heermann's Gull	7	20	Chestnut-backed Chickadee	425	472	Blackbird, species	20	1250
White-winged Scoter	6	17	Mew Gull	123	50	Oak Titmouse	20	28	Purple Finch	13	28
Common Goldeneye	609	6	Ring-billed Gull	644	4	Bushtit	811	318	House Finch	562	240
Barrow's Goldeneye	2		California Gull	14038	133	Red-breasted Nuthatch	7	3	Red Crossbill	3	
Bufflehead	1345	66	Herring Gull	244	100	White-breasted Nuthatch	1		Pine Siskin	175	531
Hooded Merganser	40		Thayer's Gull	11	6	Pygmy Nuthatch	87	44	Lesser Goldfinch	60	1
Common Merganser	11	1	Western Gull	4462	1415	Brown Creeper	36	32	American Goldfinch	61	10
Red-breasted Merganser	12	12	Glaucous-winged Gull	7442	332	Bewick's Wren	53	48	Evening Grosbeak *		10
Ruddy Duck	1219	35	Glaucous-wingedxHerring gull	10		House Wren *	2		House Sparrow	135	86
Turkey Vulture	43	51	Glaucous-wingedxWestern gull	24	10	Blue-gray Gnatcatcher		3			
Osprey	2	2	Black-legged Kittiwake *	1	1	Western Bluebird	11	10	Total Species	187	173
White-tailed Kite	50	32	Gull species	3977	459	Hermit Thrush	60	43	Total Birds	72482	1833

Participants - Both Counts

**Rick Baird, Nat Bowditch, Sue Cossins, Al DeMartini, Gary Deghi, Merry Haveman, Jim Hully, Don Keller,
Chris MacIntosh, Peter Metropulos, Carol Miller, Pat Pauch, Pete Popin, Cliff Richer,
Robin Smith, Judy Spitler, Adam Winer.**

Participants - Crystal Springs Count

Charles Benedict, J.R. Blair, Geri Brown, Phyllis Browning, Ted Chandik, Al Eisner, John Epperson, Leslie Flint, Lee Franks, M. Franks, Sharon Hom, Grant Hoyt, Karen Hoyt, Jerry James, Sue James, Eileen Kay, Ron Kistler, Rosalie Lefkowitz, Iona Luke, Nelle Lyons, Joe Macho, Tristan McKee, Steve Miller, John Padley, Don Pendelton, Howard Rathlesberger, Susan Rowinski, Teri Ryan, Werner Schumann, Georgia Stigall, Ron Thorn, Francis Toldi, Tom Vanden Bosch, Barbara Vanderwerf, Bill Vanderwerf, Allan Wofchuck

Participants - Ano Nuevo Count

Laurie Bechtler, Luke Cole, Garth Harwood, Gloria Heller, Howard Higley, Rick Johnson, Gina Kim, Carol Masterson, Christina Noble, Jeff Powers, Nicole Salgado, Christy Scherr, Gary Strachen, Tim Sullivan,

Vesper Sparrow

In winter, when most warblers and flycatchers have sensibly retired to warmer climates, sparrows provide the biggest challenges for North American birders. While some observers despair of ever distinguishing the sparrows, these birds can be learned and can even become enjoyable to identify. Vesper Sparrow is one we might pick out as potentially easy, because it has ready-made field marks: a rusty shoulder patch and, most importantly, white outer tail feathers. The problem is that these marks often can be impossible to see when the bird is at rest. In identifying sparrows, it is more effective to start with the whole bird and work down to isolated field marks, rather than going the opposite way.

Compared to many sparrows, Vespers are not especially hard to see. They live out in open fields, and in winter they are often in small flocks. If disturbed, they may fly up to perch on fences or weed-tops. In other words, they behave much like Savannah Sparrows but are larger than most races of Savannahs and have longer tails.

In overall appearance, Vesper Sparrows are pale gray-brown, with fine dark streaks. While many sparrows have heavy dark stripes atop their heads, Vespers show only narrow streaks there. Lower on their faces, however, Vespers show a stronger pattern: the ear patch has a thick dark outline, set off against the broad whitish whisker stripe and a bold white eye-ring. This face pattern, visible from a surprisingly long distance, is usually the best mark on a perched bird.

The rusty shoulder patch is limited to a small area on the wing and is often hidden when the bend of the wing is tucked up among the body feathers. Likewise, the white outer tail feathers may be very hard to see when the bird is at rest. All the more reason to learn the face pattern and the overall appearance of the Vesper Sparrow, so that when those white tail feathers flash in flight, they will merely confirm an identification already made.

Toolmaker Crows

The corvids — ravens, crows, jays and magpies — have long been thought to

be the intelligentsia of the bird world. Now there is evidence that the crows living on the South Pacific island of New Caledonia have actually learned how to make their tools.

Researcher Gavin Hunt noted that the crows seem to take particular pride in their tools and take them wherever they go. He then noted that these tools appeared in two forms — one in which twigs were trimmed and another in which sturdy leaves were cut out, both to form a barbed hook at the end. These tools were then used to snag prey from otherwise inaccessible search sites. Hunt then noted, but was unable to absolutely confirm, that the tool making was confined to one or two crows in each flock, who apparently “sold” the tools to their less talented brethren for prey items.

Toolmaking and capitalism — what next? A corvid internet?

First Sooty Tern Nest in Western US



Michael R. Smith, writing in *Western Birds* described a sooty tern nest, involving a single pair, found in southern San Diego Bay in 1997. The first Sooty Tern ever recorded for the state was in 1982 and there have only been a few seen since then, with no nesting pairs. The closest permanent nesting colonies are on islands off Mexico and Hawaii.

The nesting attempt in San Diego was a failure when both birds were found killed, apparently by an immature Peregrine. The egg the birds had been incubating was collected and was found to be fertile.

Permanent colonization of the area by sooty terns is unlikely. The distance to any other permanent nest sites and the birds' long incubation period, extending well beyond that of any other local terns, leaves the bird highly vulnerable to predation.

San Pedro Creek Watershed Coalition

Pacifica's San Pedro Creek Watershed Coalition (SPCWC) was formed a year ago with the goal of enhancing and maintaining the health of the creek and its watershed. The group meets between 7 and 9 PM on the third Thursday of every month at the Visitor's Center of the San Pedro Valley County Park in Pacifica. It is working to assess the physical and biological conditions of the watershed, restore native flora and fauna, improve water quality and to protect the watershed and reduce pollution in the creek.

In the fall of 1999, the Coalition used a grant from the San Francisco Regional Water Quality Control Board to fund workshops for homeowners and watershed professionals. Led by the Waterways Restoration Institute of Berkeley, the workshops examined past and present methods of creek restoration and erosion control. Participants were given hands-on training in cutting and planting willows, brush layering and bank stabilization.

The Coalition's Water Quality Monitoring Committee regularly samples water from the north and south forks, and along Sanchez Creek, as well as at the mouth of the main stem and in the ocean. Unfortunately, samples taken at the beach in 1998 and 1999 revealed such high levels of fecal coliform that the beach should have been closed to surfers and bathers on one of every ten days, on average. With a grant from the Department of Fish and Game, the Committee will continue to test the watershed for fecal and total coliform, *e. coli*, streptococcus, nitrite and nitrate levels and try to determine whether the fecal coliform is from animal or human wastes, and where it is coming from.

SPCWC holds its first annual Creek Day at Sanchez Art Center in Pacifica on Saturday May 13, 2000, with oral presentations, discussion groups, watershed modeling, and demonstrations of erosion control and non-native invasive plant removal. If you are interested in helping with Creek Day, or would like more information, call Tricia Zimmerman at 415/646-0513 or desmata@sfsu.edu.

Panoche Valley

(Continued from Page One)

from the same area. It was variously identified as a Harrier and a Raven before we could see its identifying tail pattern. A smallish, immature Golden Eagle!!

What a day!

Join us on our spring trips, especially Mines Road in April, and have one of these wonderfully satisfying days yourself!

—Robin Smith

Half Moon Bay Beach Plover Watch

Volunteers Wanted!

Each spring, snowy plovers arrive to nest at Half Moon Bay State Beach. These small, well-camouflaged shorebirds are part of a population of less than 1,800 snowy plovers left in California.

Their population has been threatened mostly by human disturbance, loss of habitat due to development and predation. *You can help make a positive impact!* Becoming a Plover Watch Volunteer requires an investment of 4 to 16 hours per month during the nesting season (March-August) to monitor the activity of the birds, and offer information to beach visitors about the importance of protecting them.

How to get involved: Attend a training session on March 3, 2001 or March 10, 2001 from 9am-2pm to learn more about these interesting little birds. The first half of each session will cover Snowy Plover natural history and include a slide program. Then we will observe plovers in the habitat area.

The sessions will be held at the State Park Office, 95 Kelly Avenue, Half Moon Bay.

Refreshments will be provided but please bring a sack lunch.

To register for training call Ranger Nelle Lyons at 726-8819. Nelle may be able to arrange for additional training sessions if you can't make these scheduled Saturdays.

Northwest Festivals

Two bird festivals highlight the spring calendar in the Northwest corner of the state.

The **Aleutian Goose Festival** is held in Crescent City from March 23 through 25. For more information contact REDI, 207 Price Mall, Crescent City, CA 95531, 800-343-8300 or on the web at <www.delnorte.org/soar>.

Godwit Days at Arcata is held from April 27 through 29. For more information contact Arcata MainStreet, 791 8th St., Suite 2-3, Arcata, CA 95521, or <www.godwitdays.com>.

Keep Tabs on Washington

It's important to stay abreast of what the federal government is doing — after all, it uses our money, and its actions affect us all. You can keep track at **FED-BUZZ.COM**, a private site that provides current news and information about the government as well as links to further resources. The site is arranged by topic — such as Health & Safety and Land/Environment — rather than by department or agency, which makes it easy for us civilians to navigate. Its goal is to present information “without bureaucratic spin or governmental agenda.” On the lighter side, check out the GovGoodieBag for free or low-cost maps, posters, cookbooks, etc. available from Uncle Sam.

West Indian Seabirds in Trouble

Most of the seabirds nesting in the Caribbean are in trouble. Of the 21 species nesting in the region, 15 are listed as near threatened to critically endangered, including all six of the region's endemic species of seabirds.

For the most part the threats are the same as those faced by seabirds the world over: habitat destruction and disturbance, human consumption of eggs and birds, the introduction of predatory animals and pollution.

Some are also blaming ecotourism,

which has been growing steadily. They believe that the seabird colonies themselves have become a tourist attraction, with predictably negative results.

Donors

We wish to thank all of the following individuals who donated to Sequoia Audubon over the last several months.

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Gifts and Bequests

The list of donors may be found on Page Seven

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 PO Box 3897, Redwood City, 94064-3897 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.

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Sequoia Audubon Society

Update for February 2001

Volume 1, Issue 3
February 2001

NEXT SEQUOIA AUDUBON GENERAL MEETING:

**February 8th,
7:30 pm**

**Half Moon Bay
(Francis) State
Beach, Kelly Ave.
Half Moon Bay**

**Check SAS
February
Events! See
inside for
more de-**

February Field Trips

**SATURDAY,
FEBRUARY 3 & 4
Los Banos
Refuges and
Panoche Valley
Trip**

**SATURDAY,
FEBRUARY 10
Sea Cloud Park,
Beginner/Family**

**SATURDAY,
FEBRUARY 17
Princeton Harbor**

President's Letter— Robin Smith

On the way to the Grand Canyon to celebrate Christmas with the National Park Rangers in my family, we spent time at Lee's Ferry to check out my son's new digs and new job. Lee's Ferry is just "around the corner" from the Vermilion Cliffs. If you've been following the reintroduction of California Condors into the wild, you've undoubtedly heard of the Vermilion Cliffs, which are a beautiful sight as you head toward the Colorado River.



With directions to the shade ramada where the Peregrine Fund monitors do their work, we set out across the desert. It was a beautiful day, sunny and warm, free of clouds, and crowds. At the end of the thirty mile drive, we came upon the ramada which was sheltering four birders from Arizona but no official watchers. No matter! The Arizona contingent was friendly and had brought along a very nice spotting scope. They gave us long looks

at the one visible condor. It was perched on a rock, engaged in a little desultory grooming of feathers. It had a number patch on its wing that we could almost read with the scope, but it was otherwise big and black with a hairless head. The most amazing thing about it was that it was there at all. If only they'd eschew a diet that sometimes includes lead and antifreeze!

Suddenly our attention was taken by a hunting hawk out over the desert. He seemed to be just hanging in the air over some prey species on the ground. The dark wrist patches on the wings and the dark subterminal tail band were plainly visible as he hung in the sky. He was beautiful! After a while, he dropped down on some unlucky bit of lunch and went off to perch on a bush. Viewing this rough-legged hawk hunting in the desert was a real treat for me. Rough-legged hawks are occasionally seen wintering in San Mateo County. This one, however, even eclipsed that day's look at the condor.

Suddenly, the Arizona birders remarked that they heard pipits. Pipits? Seemed like an unusual place for pipits to me, as I've most often seen them near the coast or the baylands here at home. Pipits like grasslands, so they are denizens of the high deserts in Arizona and elsewhere. No need to go to Arizona for pipit sightings, though! Come along on one of our bayside field trips and enjoy seeing pipits right here in San Mateo County.

Robin Smith

SAS Field Trips for February 2001

For more general information call 369-1093

Saturday, February 3rd & Sunday, February 4th: LOS BANOS REFUGES & PANOCHE VALLEY TRIP

Leaders: Cliff Richer 873-1754 & Francis Toldi

This overnight field trip covers two diverse areas and exposes us to a variety of rare and unusual birds. The refuges of Los Banos are noted for White-faced Ibis, Sandhill Cranes, a large variety of waterfowl and shorebirds, raptors, and owls. Twenty miles south of Los Banos, Little Panoche Road winds its way through the Diablo Range into Panoche Valley, where wintering flocks of Mountain Plovers, Vesper Sparrows, Mountain Bluebirds, Long-billed Curlews, and perched raptors vie with the resident Roadrunners, Phainopeplas, and Chukars for the birders' attention. Saturday we plan on meeting in the parking lot of the Los Banos Wildlife Area on Henry Miller Road north of the town of Los Banos at 9 am. Sunday we will meet at the parking lot above Little Panoche Detention Reservoir at 8:30 am. The trips will go rain or shine. Motel reservations are recommended.

February 8th, 7:30 pm

GENERAL MEETING: COASTSIDE CONSERVATION EFFORTS

Half Moon Bay (Francis) State Beach, Kelly Avenue, HMB

Come see slides and hear about two exceptional local conservation efforts supported by Sequoia Audubon Society. The Central Coast Riparian Bird Conservation Plan of PRBO, and the Snowy Plover Watch Project of State Parks. Refreshments served.

Saturday, February 10th SEA CLOUD PARK 9:00 am Leader: Robin Smith 325-3306

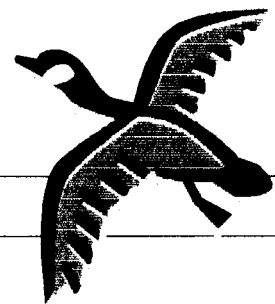
This is especially designed for beginners and families. We have plenty of binoculars to share. Besides looking at the birds we will discuss binoculars, field guides and the basics of bird identification. Questions gladly answered! Sea Cloud Park in Foster City is reached by taking Hillsdale Avenue east from 101 and making a right turn on Edgewater Blvd. Then 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 a.m.

Saturday, February 17th PRINCETON HARBOR 9:00 am Leader: Gary Deghi 726-1340

The only sheltered harbor between Santa Cruz and San Francisco, Princeton Harbor is winter home to a good variety of bay ducks, loons, cormorants, and other divers, as well as gulls and shorebirds. Long-tailed ducks (oldsquaws) and glaucous gulls are regular winter visitors, and the area almost always has a few surprises. To get there, take Hwy 92 to Hwy 1, and follow Hwy 1 north to Capistrano Rd and turn left at the lights. Take the first left, and another immediate left into the parking lot, where we will meet.

Thursday, March 8th, 7:30 pm

GENERAL MEETING: THE AMAZING PHOTOGRAPHS OF JOHN CANG, San Mateo Garden Center



UPCOMING EVENTS/HAPPENINGS

Participate in the National Great Backyard Bird Count, February 16th-19th
For more information go to www.sequoia-audubon.org

Attend the Bald Eagle Conference in Klamath Basin, CA, February 16th-18th
For more information contact 541-882-1219 or www.eaglecon.org

The Aleutian Goose Festival: A Celebration of Wildness, Crescent City, CA
March 23rd-25th. 1-800-343-8300, or www.delnorte.org/soar

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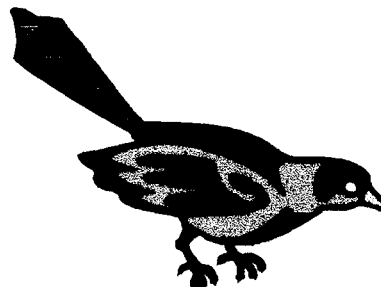
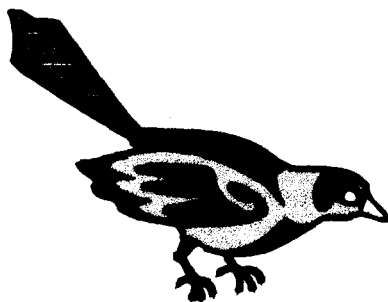
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-Peter J. Metropulos

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