



sequoia needles

Bulletin of the Sequoia Audubon Society
San Mateo County Volume 52, No. 7
May, 2002

This Month's Meeting Half Moon Bay Meeting Location

On Thursday, May 9th the program will be **Michigan and Point Pelee, Winter and Spring** with SAS member, Tom Vanden Bosch. Tom is a lifelong birder, born and raised in Michigan. Tom has recently led birding trips to the area, and has seen as many as 195 species in two weeks in the spring, including 25 warbler species, and three grouse species.

We will meet at 7:30 PM at the Ranger Station, on Kelly Avenue in Half Moon Bay.

June General Meeting

The June General Meeting on Thursday, June 13 features our Spring Potluck Dinner and our annual Election of Officers as well as a program, **The Origin of San Francisco Bay**, with Dr. Kenneth R. Lajole, geologist with the USGS in Menlo Park. Ken's areas of expertise include environmental geology of the San Francisco bay region, mapping earthquake ground ruptures, and dating marine fossils.

Potluck Time

Those people whose last name begins with the letters A-F should bring a **CASSEROLE** or other hot dish; those whose names begin with the letters G-L, a **DESSERT**; and M through Z should provide a **SALAD**. Be sure your offering will feed at least 5 people.

The Potluck Dinner begins at 6:30 PM on Thursday, June 13 at the San Mateo Garden Center on the Alameda at Parkside to be followed immediately by the election of officers and program.

Nominees

The following are the official nominees for officers for the coming year.

President:	Martha O'Neal Macho
Vice President:	Bill Bechtell
Second Vice President:	Howard Rathlesberger
Secretary:	Sue Cossins
Treasurer:	Peter Grace
Directors	
Term Ending 2003	Peggy Bechtell
Term ending 2005	Tom Vanden Bosch
	Rick Baird

Nominations may also be made from the floor if done so with the permission of the nominee.



From the President

This letter to you is my "swan song" (yuk-yuk) as president of the Sequoia chapter. As I look back over the three years, I am heartened by the new faces that have emerged during that time, pleased with our accomplishments, frustrated with the difference between hopes and

reality.

I can hear the birds singing outside my window, one of my greatest pleasures. I often think of what life would be like without birdsong to enliven it and lament over the loss of avian habitat that is occurring all over the county.

Sequoia Audubon Conservation Committee members have spent countless hours writing letters, sending e-mails, attending meetings on local environmental issues, working with other groups trying to hold the line on development in sensitive wildlife habitat in San Mateo County and farther afield. The committee needs more members and a chairperson in order to do its job well.

As an example, let me tell you about a current issue in Menlo Park. Bayfront Park, where county birders find a Blue-winged Teal every winter for a county year list, was slated for development by the city, in order to bring in revenue to pay the operating costs. Bayfront Park is the site of the fill and cover dump east of 101 that was closed in 1984 and, as such, now can be developed for all but residences. It is also the only open space remaining along the bay and in the town. The park is used by joggers, bicyclists, birders, hikers, families, dog walkers, runners, and model airplane flyers.

The people who use it love the openness and views of the bay, so they came out in force to the public meetings and let the city know that development was definitely not favored!

I was among the speakers at the meetings, representing Sequoia Audubon. I found myself in the unusual position of advocating for a dump site! I did the Breeding Bird Atlas work for Sequoia at Bayfront and so it became "my park". I was stunned to hear that the city was considering development there after all the work that had been done to make it a park. Anne Moser, an SAS member, also spoke out as a Menlo Park resident and open space guardian. All the citizens who participated were rewarded when the city council decided to try to find other ways to fund the park.

This is the kind of energy it takes to participate in local conservation issues. Sequoia needs more of its members to get involved. Do you have an hour or two a month to give? Will you help keep the birdsong loud and clear in our county? Let the conservation committee know at 650 369-1093 that the birds can count on you.

Bird Banding Class

Are you interested in becoming a bird bander? The San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory is offering a Beginning Bird Banding Class from September to November 2002. They are looking for energetic people to become a part of their banding team at Coyote Creek Field Station.

Desired qualifications include bird identification skills, manual dexterity, good eyesight and somewhat physically active. For more information and an application, please call Gina at 408-946-6548.



The S A S Calendar



THURSDAY, MAY 2 — 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 4, BAIR ISLAND — See what migration has brought to Bair Island. Meet at the kiosk just inside the gates at the east end of Whipple Avenue. Take 101 to Whipple Avenue exit in Redwood City, go east on Whipple and cross the frontage road. There is parking here, but do watch out for the frontage road traffic as you pull in. Meet at 9 AM by the Refuge sign just inside the big, white gates. There are no bathroom facilities, so come prepared!

LEADER **ROBIN SMITH** **325-3306**

THURSDAY, MAY 9 — GENERAL MEETING — BIRDS OF MICHIGAN with **Tom Vanden Bosch**. At the Garden Center on the Alameda at Parkside. Social get-together at 7:30 PM with the meeting beginning at 8.

SATURDAY, MAY 11, COYOTE POINT — The wetlands fronting San Francisco Bay attract numerous shorebirds in migration. The trees and grassy areas also provide good birding. Take 101 to Peninsula Avenue in Burlingame. Go east following signs to Coyote Point Park, meet in the parking lot behind the Yacht Club at 9 AM.

LEADER **SUE COSSINS**

SATURDAY, MAY 25, WILLIAMS SISTERS' RANCH — 9 AM.

This beautiful ranch on Skyline is a National Audubon preserve. However, it is still a working ranch and will not be open to the public for some time. Reservations are required for this trip. Call the leader to save your spot.

LEADER FRANCIS TOLDI 344-1919

SATURDAY, MAY 25, ARASTRADERO PRESERVE —

BIRDING BY EAR — 9 AM — Come focus on the bird songs of spring. Take 280 south to El Monte, Foothill College exit, go west to fork in the road, take left fork, Moody Road. Follow Moody Road, watch for the Hidden Villa sign on the left. Park in the first parking lot on the right. Possible \$5 fee for park. This trip is also being listed by Santa Clara Valley Audubon.

SATURDAY, MAY 25, HIDDEN VILLA — BUTTERFLIES FOR BIRDERS — 1 PM — Come focus on the butterflies of spring. Take 280 south to El Monte, Foothill College exit, go west to fork in the road, take left fork, Moody Road. Follow Moody Road, watch for the Hidden Villa sign on the left. Park in

the first parking lot on the right. Possible \$5 fee for park. This trip is not suitable for small children.

LEADER **GARTH HARWOOD** **879-0724**

SUNDAY, MAY 26, EDGEWOOD PARK — 8 AM — See the birds of spring during nesting season. Meet the leader in the parking lot adjacent to the Day Camp area. The Edgewood Park entrance is east of 280 on Edgewood Road in Redwood City.

LEADER **LEE FRANKS**

THURSDAY, JUNE 6 — 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, JUNE 8, SAN BRUNO MOUNTAIN FAMILY TRIP (not recommended for strollers) **9 AM to NOON** — Look for a number of nesting or post-nesting birds as we walk along a service road and adjoining trails. From 101 take the Brisbane exit. Follow Old Bayshore north to Guadalupe Canyon Parkway,

turn left and follow the parkway to San Bruno Mountain County Park, turn right into the parking lot to meet the leader. Possible parking fee.

LEADER **LESLIE FLINT** **573-6279**

THURSDAY, MAY 9 — GENERAL MEETING — THE ORIGIN OF SAN FRANCISCO BAY, with **Dr. Kenneth R. Lajoie**. The program and Election of Officers will be preceded by our spring potluck dinner. At the Garden Center on the Alameda at Parkside. Potluck begins at 6:30 PM with the election and program following immediately thereafter. See Page 1 for additional details.

SATURDAY & SUNDAY, JUNE 15-16 — TIOGA PASS AND MONO LAKE — Travel across the Sierra and see the breeding birds in full swing. It's a spectacle that'll bring joy to your

heart! Call the leaders for directions and information.

LEADERS **JOE MACHO & MARTHA O'NEAL 692-8138**

SATURDAY, JUNE 22, BAIR ISLAND, 8:30 AM — See the May 4 trip for details. Note the earlier starting time.

LEADER **ROBIN SMITH** **325-3306**

SUNDAY, JUNE 30, EDGEWOOD PARK 8 AM — See the directions for the May 26 trip.

LEADER **LEE FRANKS**

I would like to say a big THANK YOU to all the trip leaders who responded to my request for help this past year. Without you we would have no field trips which are a core activity for our members, indeed the reason many participate in our chapter. You have been so generous, giving your time, knowledge and, encouragement to those who went on your trips).

Thank you all.

**Anne Moser,
Field Trip Chair.**



News From Audubon Canyon Ranch

Betsy Stafford

Dives, Squawks, Barrel Rolls, and Stretches — It has been a busy spring for the Bolinas Lagoon Preserve's heronry. On the opening day of our public season an immature Golden Eagle dove into the heron trees, flushing most of the adults off their seven nests. Happily, after lots of squawks, a very disappointed teenager flew off, and all the Great Blues returned to their nests. One week later, however, a feisty pair of Ravens barrel-rolled down the canyon, dive-bombed the heron trees, and picked off three eggs in one nest. At the time of this writing, there are eight Great Blue nests and lots of Great Egrets arriving each day. They are courting, displaying with dips and stretches, and beginning to lay eggs and incubate. Please be sure to come see the show, and walk our trails during our Public Season, Saturdays, Sundays, and Holidays, March 16 - July 14, 10 - 4. If you can help host on a weekend day, we'll be ever so grateful....and can promise you an inside scoop on this year's heronry.

3600 Schoolchildren and 200 Docents — This spring 200 docents at our two teaching Preserves - Bolinas Lagoon and Bouverie - will travel to 100 Bay Area classrooms and lead 3rd, 4th, and 5th-graders over miles of the Preserves' trails, streams, and ponds. Our award-winning school programs are so very successful because of the dedication and enthusiasm of our docent volunteers. If you'd like to gain the knowledge and confidence to lead these extremely valuable field trips for schoolchildren, please join Bolinas Lagoon Preserve's new training class beginning September 4th, once a week on Wednesdays for 22 weeks. Orientations are May 29 and August 28. Please call (415) 868-9244 for more information.

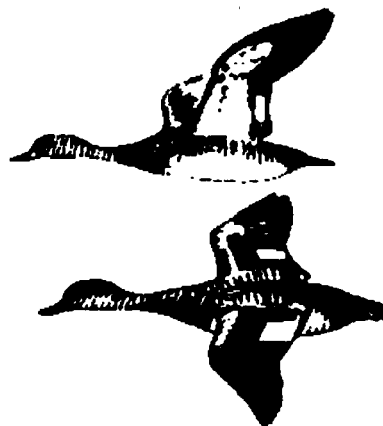
Guided Nature Walks through Newts and Meadows — "Though I've been on plenty of nature hikes before, none have been nearly as memorable or as intimate as this one at the Bouverie Preserve." So reports a nature writer in an article on Audubon Canyon Ranch in the April 2002 issue of *Sunset Magazine*. If you'd like to join one of our half-day guided nature walks on Saturdays throughout the spring and fall, please call 707/938-4554 for a lottery form. Walks are May 4, May 11, October 19, November 9 and December 7. There's no guarantee you'll get the date of your choice, but when you do finally make it, you'll share it only with your special tour group.



Birthday Coming Up

March 14, 2003 will mark a milestone in the history of wildlife conservation in America. It will be the Centennial anniversary of the National Wildlife Refuge System. When President Theodore Roosevelt set aside tiny Pelican Island on Florida's East Coast as a refuge for birds nearly a century ago, he began a conservation legacy that now spans 93 million acres across the United States and its territories, an area about the size of Montana. President Roosevelt said, "Wild beasts and birds are by right not the property of the people who are alive today, but the property of unknown generations whose belongings we have no right to squander." Nowadays we might no longer refer to wild beasts and birds as "property," but we certainly can appreciate the dedication to preservation of birds, other wildlife, and their habitats.

The National Wildlife Refuge System is America's only network of federal lands dedicated specifically to wildlife conservation, representing a steadfast commitment to protecting our wildlife heritage. This vast network of strategically located habitats protects hundreds of endangered species, serves as stepping stones for millions of migratory birds, and conserves premier fisheries. Wildlife of virtually every variety finds a home on the National Wildlife Refuge System.



Planning for Centennial activities aimed at projects and events that will strengthen the Refuge System is underway by the US Fish and Wildlife Service. To check on the latest news, visit the USFWS website at: <http://refuges.fws.gov/centennial> Another website to check out is by the Refuge Support Group (Friends) at <http://lfriends.fws.gov>.

Do Refuges Help?

A recent study by the Royal Society For the Protection of Birds (RSPB) concluded that birds on specially designated British reserves are, for the most part, faring no better than birds on unprotected areas.

The study found mismanagement and neglect at many sites, including allowing the plowing of land for high-value crops and the draining of wet areas. Such problems existed at half the sites.

While most US refuges are managed for the benefit of wildlife, there are some that are subject to the same kind of mismanagement. This should remind us that just establishing refuges and other conservation lands is only the first part of the battle and that long-term oversight and assessment are needed.

North Wavecrest: A Valuable Habitat for Raptors

Gary Deghi

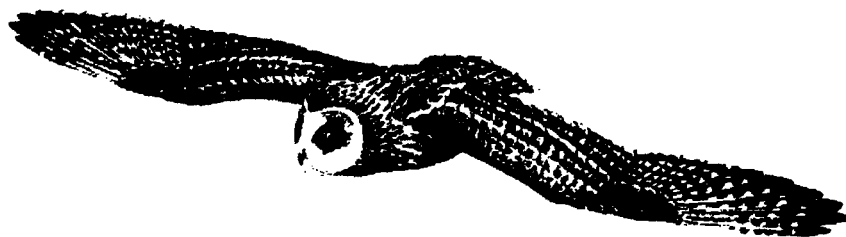
Raptors are what we typically think of as the birds of prey: the hawks, eagles, falcons and owls. To a raptor traveling along the coast, the North Wavecrest area in Half Moon Bay seems a veritable smorgasbord. This area has everything a hawk could want: mature trees that provide perching and roosting sites, grasslands that provide foraging habitat, riparian corridors and coyote brush in fields that provide cover, and an abundance of voles that serve as a source of prey.

The North Wavecrest area is considered by Sequoia Audubon Society (SAS) as the most important habitat for wintering raptors in San Mateo County, supporting a greater diversity of raptors and number of individuals than any other site. A portion of North Wavecrest is the site of the proposed Wavecrest Village Project, a large residential and commercial project, including a new middle school and Boys and Girls Club, currently being reviewed on appeal by the California Coastal Commission (CCC). My objective in writing this article is to inform readers about the affect the Wavecrest Village Project will have on raptor populations so that informed comment can be delivered when a decision is to be made on this project by the CCC early this summer.

I presented data to the CCC last year that summarized results of Christmas Bird Counts conducted in the North Wavecrest area each winter by SAS beginning in 1988. The data demonstrates extensive use by species such as Red-Tailed Hawk, Red-Shouldered Hawk, White-Tailed Kite, Northern Harrier, and American Kestrel, and use also by Sharp-Shinned Hawk, Cooper's Hawk, Great-Horned Owl, Barn Owl and Short-Eared Owl. The value of the site is enhanced

when considering the rare and vagrant species that have been documented during the winter or in migration — Ferruginous Hawk, Rough-Legged Hawk, Broad-Winged Hawk, Golden Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, Prairie Falcon, Merlin and Swainson's hawk (the first documented record of overwintering Swainson's hawk ever in coastal Northern California).

On the Christmas Bird Count conducted on December 16, 2000, a remarkable total of 65 raptor individuals were observed over the course of one day within the approximately 500 acre North Wavecrest area, that includes Wavecrest Village. This total consisted of 15 White-Tailed Kites, 10 Northern Harriers, 1 Sharp-Shinned Hawk, 4 Red-Shouldered



Hawks, 18 Red-Tailed Hawks, 9 American Kestrels, 5 Short-Eared Owls, And 3 Barn Owls.

The North Wavecrest area, including Wavecrest Village, also annually supports a wintering population of up to as many as 6 Short-Eared Owls.

The Short-Eared Owl is a large owl that lives only in grasslands and marshlands, and that has been designated as a species of special concern in California due to serious declines in numbers caused by conversion of grasslands to urban sprawl and agriculture. North Wavecrest is the most important wintering site for short-eared owl in San Mateo County, and is one of the most important wintering sites for the species in the greater San Francisco Bay region. When only coastal sites supporting wintering populations of short-eared owl are considered, the importance of the area takes on statewide significance.

The Short-Eared Owls roost during the day in the grasslands of North Wavecrest, and they forage at night over the entire North Wavecrest area, including Wavecrest Village. Development of

Wavecrest Village would destroy approximately 1/3 of the foraging habitat for the wintering population of Short-Eared Owls, compromising the viability of this population.

Because much of the remaining habitat within North Wavecrest is privately-owned and subject to future development, the cumulative impact of the project is essentially the elimination of this wintering site for Short-Eared Owls and other raptor populations.

The best way to mitigate these impacts is to limit the amount of open grassland impacted by the project, preferably by selecting alternative sites. I would like to see my 9-year old son benefit from a facility for Coastsides youth, and I would

like for him to have the opportunity to attend a new middle school in the coming years, but not at the North Wavecrest site, and not at the cost to the environment that would result from the Wavecrest Village Project.

(Gary Deghi is a wildlife ecologist, professional environmental consultant, member of the Board of Directors of Sequoia Audubon Society and former member of the Half Moon Bay City Council. This article represents the official view of the SAS Conservation Committee.)

Burning Off Oil Spills

Last February the Coast Guard used explosives and napalm to ignite the freighter New Carissa's fuel when the ship ran aground and threatened to break up in Oregon's Coos Bay.

While this prevented a major oil spill, many were concerned about the smoke's health hazards. In this particular case the hazard was minimal as the wind direction kept the smoke offshore.

Since then at least one environmental specialist has proposed developing guidelines for future oil "burns" along the California coast.

Lostwood Refuge

Cliff Bechtell

In 1843, Audubon made the last of his great expeditions, following Lewis and Clark's route of forty years earlier up the Missouri River to its junction with the Yellowstone. There, at Fort Union, he discovered the "prairie skylark" described above and a "previously unknown finch." He named the skylark for Isaac Sprague, an artist with him on the trip. The finch received the name of a young friend, Spencer Baird, who later became one of the nineteenth century's leading ornithologists.

While traversing North Dakota thirty years later, Elliott Coues described Sprague's Pipits as "almost continually hovering about us." Of Baird's Sparrow, Coues wrote that "in some particular spots it outnumbered all other birds together."

A century and a half after Audubon, these two birds still draw birders to North Dakota. Both nest almost exclusively on native prairie, "ocean-like" in its vastness during Audubon's visit. With farming, however, the prairie began to disappear. Today, most of the land has been converted to agriculture, and biologists are considering listing both birds as endangered species.

One of the best places to see these and other hard-to-find grassland birds is Lostwood National Wildlife Refuge. The refuge is in northwestern North Dakota, about a hundred miles northeast of Fort Union, which is on the border of Montana and North Dakota. On Lostwood's 27,000 acres, visitors can experience wild, remote prairie much as Audubon and Coues did. Large portions have never been plowed. Add approximately 4,000 glacial wetlands ranging from seasonal sloughs to brackish lakes of nearly a square mile, and Lostwood offers some of the best bird habitat anywhere.

Audubon's Two Songsters

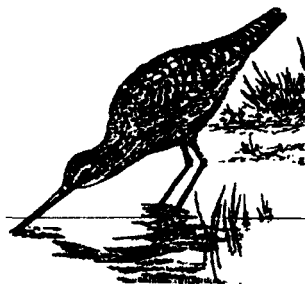
To find many of Lostwood's most wanted species and to appreciate them fully, you should learn their songs. This is especially true of Sprague's Pipit. Its song, a descending series of double notes, has been called a higher version of the Veery's, "the jingling of tiny sleigh bells," and "the jingling sound of a light chain when slowly let fall into a coil." Coues wrote, "No other bird music heard

in our land compares with the wonderful strains of this songster."

Male pipits sing hundreds of feet above the hilltops where their nests are hidden. Without hearing a Sprague's Pipit, the odds of spotting it in midair or finding the right hill are poor. After noting a bird skylarking, however, try walking the hilltop below. When flushed, pipits fly in a distinctive undulating pattern before dropping back into the grass. Move quickly to where one lands, and it might stay long enough to give you a good look. Or, just sit quietly and watch for birds going to and from the nest. Sprague's is more slender than a sparrow, with a thin, warbler-like bill. With its small head and long neck, it resembles a miniature Upland Sandpiper.

Baird's Sparrow is even more abundant at Lostwood than Sprague's Pipit and far easier to see. The pipit favors grassy hilltops, while the sparrow prefers hillsides. There it finds shrubs, principally silverberry and snowberry, from which the males sing.

Baird's song, another of Lostwood's auditory pleasures, consists of three or more rapid notes followed by a haunting trill on a slightly lower pitch. Karen Smith, Lostwood's manager, calls it a symphony compared with other grassland sparrow songs. Like any good symphonist, Baird's employs variation. The version heard most often at Lostwood is a bit different from the one on the Peterson CDs and tapes. When not singing, Baird's is one of the most difficult of all grassland sparrows to find.



Godwits and Grouse

Another of Lostwood's special birds is the Marbled Godwit, a large shorebird with a long, slightly upturned, bi-colored bill, often found on upland prairie. This species has a limited breeding range that nearly matches those of Sprague's Pipit and Baird's Sparrow. In the United

States, the godwit range centers on North Dakota, with fringes in Montana, South Dakota, and Minnesota. In Canada, it occurs in southern portions of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta. Nesting godwits will fly to meet visitors, circle them, then land nearby, their scolding call, *radica! radica!*, so constant that they sometimes become hoarse. Near water, Willets often join these aerial protests, their flashing black-and-white wings vying with the beauty of the godwits' cinnamon wings.

Sharp-tailed Grouse, northern relatives of prairie-chickens, bring birders to Lostwood too. In spring, the male grouse gather on hilltop dancing grounds called leks. Although otherwise drab, when dancing, sharp-tails enlarge yellow-orange combs above their eyes and inflate purple sacs on their necks. They spread their wings, lower their heads, rattle their spiked, white tails, and strut in circles on thickly feathered feet while emitting unearthly *coo-oo* calls and other sounds. They do all of this to attract females and intimidate rivals.

Lostwood has one of the highest populations of Sharp-tailed Grouse in the United States and about forty leks, one of them equipped with an excellent blind. Activity peaks during the last half of April, but dancing usually continues through May. Even after dancing ends each year, birders can see grouse. Males still visit the leks, and females nest nearby. You might flush a sharp-tail nearly anywhere on the upland areas of the refuge.

Piping Plover

Lostwood is also a key site for the recovery of the Piping Plover, a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. Piping Plovers nest on barren areas where they can keep watch for predators. Historically, the Great Plains population has nested on sand and gravel along the Missouri and other rivers and on the beaches of alkaline lakes. Populations have been hurt by overgrazing, pesticides, and the damming, dredging, and draining of wetlands. Also, the appearance of trees on what was previously grassland has provided habitat for predators such as American Crows, Black-billed Magpies, Great Horned Owls, and Red-tailed Hawks.

(Continued on Page Six)

Lostwood Refuge

(Continued from Page 5)

Efforts to help the plovers rely mainly on electric mesh fencing to keep foxes, coyotes, and skunks from nests, along with wire mesh cages called exclosures placed over the nests to bar avian predators. Without intervention, plovers in the Lostwood area fledge less than the 1.1 chicks per pair (from a clutch of four) needed for replacement. With the fences and exclosures, they are fledging two chicks per pair.

Because the plover is threatened, nesting areas are off-limits. On the auto tour, however, a sign identifies one nesting beach on Upper Lostwood Lake. You can see the exclosures from the road. With a spotting scope, you can add the Piping Plover to your life list and admire the American Avocets that share the plovers' habitat.

These five birds — Sprague's Pipit, Baird's Sparrow, Marbled Godwit, Sharp-tailed Grouse, and Piping Plover — are Lostwood's main attractions. But they only hint at the abundance and variety of bird life here.

More Prairie Specialties

Lostwood features a number of small brown specialty birds. In addition to Sprague's Pipit and Baird's Sparrow in the dry grasslands, there are three species that are more easily found in North Dakota's wet grasslands than almost anywhere else in the United States. The Sedge Wren's *chap chap p-r-r-r* recalls the opening notes of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. Less musical, but of great interest to birders, are the two thin hisses of Le Conte's Sparrow and the single gasp of a Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow.

The same hilltops favored by the Sharp-tailed Grouse and Sprague's Pipit are home to Horned Larks and Vesper Sparrows. Both are apt to flush just ahead of your car at places along the auto tour. On the hilltops, too, you will find Upland Sandpipers and hear their rising, then falling, "wolf whistle" calls.

The upland prairie where Baird's Sparrows nest also harbors Grasshopper and Savannah Sparrows, Bobolinks, Western Meadowlarks, and Brewer's Blackbirds. At times, singing males seem

to occupy every perch on the higher stems and shrubs. The meadowlark's song is flutelike; the Savannah Sparrow's, raspy. The Bobolink's marvelous *bob-o-link, bob-ohnk, pink, spank, pink* has a high-tech, electronic sound.

In brushier areas, Clay-colored Sparrows abound and fill the air with their insect-like *bzzz-bzzz-bzzz*. Song Sparrows like brush too, as do American Goldfinches, Brown Thrashers, and Common Yellowthroats.

Northern Harriers patrol both prairie and wetlands. They nest on the ground, often in patches of snowberry. If you find a nest, watch for a prey exchange. The male flies in, calling shrilly to the female, who appears from nowhere out of the snowberry. He then drops the prey, often a meadow vole, which she catches in mid-air. When voles are plentiful, Short-eared Owls nest in the same habitat.

In fact, Lostwood (and the farms that surround it) can be considered raptor heaven. Swainson's, Red-tailed, and Cooper's Hawks all nest in the area, and the careful observer may be rewarded with two rare prizes, Ferruginous Hawk and Peregrine Falcon.

Wetlands Breed Ducks

Like the rest of the prairie pothole region, Lostwood is a breeding ground for ducks. By the time most birders arrive in May and June, nests are everywhere. A hen exploding into flight may startle visitors walking through any sort of cover. The drakes rest on ponds and lakes. Mallards, Blue-winged Teals, Gadwalls, Northern Pintails, and Northern Shovelers are the common dabblers. Divers include the Ruddy Duck, or stiff-tail, and three beautiful pochards: Canvasback, Redhead, and Lesser Scaup. Eared Grebes and Wilson's Phalaropes are abundant, Pied-billed and Horned Grebes common.

Hidden within the cattails are Soras, revealed by their descending whinny, and Virginia Rails, with their *kidick kidick* and descending *oink* calls. An American Bittern gulps air to produce its *oong-ka-chonk* call. Quite visible, on the other hand, are Red-winged and Yellow-headed Blackbirds, gurgling and rasping, respectively, atop the cattails. Black Terns hover overhead, sometimes hawking insects,

sometimes diving after prey near the water's surface. From far above comes the eerie whistling *woowoo-woo* made by a displaying Common Snipe's tail feathers.

Aspens have invaded some of the refuge's low spots in the last century, providing habitat for other birds. These include Least Flycatchers, Yellow Warblers, and Baltimore Orioles. In recent years, some groves have been burned. Snags in these burned-over groves provide nests for Mountain Bluebirds, Tree Swallows, and House Wrens.

Prairie Needs Fire

Controlled burns are the biggest part of a major effort over the last decade to return Lostwood as much as possible to native prairie. Native plants and wildlife evolved with wildfires and the huge herds of buffalo that were still present in Audubon's day. Elimination of these forces changed the prairie in unforeseen ways, even in protected areas like the refuge.

By the early 1980s more than 500 clumps of aspen grew on the refuge, even though there were none in 1915. Brush covered as much as 70 percent of the land surface, up from no more than 10 percent in 1915. When brush increases that much, Sharp-tailed Grouse abandon their leks, and Sprague's Pipits, Baird's Sparrows, and Marbled Godwits won't nest.

Three to five burns, spaced every other year or every third year, weaken woody plants. The ideal time to burn is in July and August, when lightning fires most often burned the prairie. Burning also eliminates humus and thus controls exotic grasses, which don't thrive in open, arid conditions. After the initial burns, controlled grazing begins. Finally, when restoration is complete, a fire every five to six years and some grazing will maintain a beautiful prairie of native grasses and forbs.

It takes hard work, not just love, to preserve habitat like Lostwood. But birders will love the result. Audubon and Coues would too. After all, as Coues noted in 1897, Baird's Sparrow was the last bird described, named, and painted by Audubon, the last of the 500 plates in his *Birds of America*.

First Time Confessions of a Neophyte Birder Highlights of a day in the Klamath Wetlands

Carol Wiseman

Welcome to my virgin view of serious bird watching, an adventure that started, reluctantly, at 5:30 am. My husband and I are tagging along with the Sequoia Audubon Society, which has come to Oregon in search of Bald Eagles.

The day begins with a briefing, where printed routes (for stragglers, I presume) and walkie-talkies are distributed to each of the seven cars in our procession. Our 9:00 liftoff is a quiet one, but in my head I hear, "Gentlemen, start your engines." So, clutching the essential ID book and binoculars, we pile into cars and head out to the levee roads of the Lower Klamath Wildlife Refuge. (Who knew that binoculars came on a shoulder harness, just so your arms wouldn't get tired?)

Suddenly, the intercom squawks and alerts our van. It's from the lead car, "Bald Eagle on the fence, ahead of me to the right." Our first sighting, and my first non-television Eagle, is apparently the crème de la crème of the day. From my back-seat perch I finally spot the distant black dot while our car train slows down to creep up as close as we dare and not trigger flight. All binoculars engage. But by the time we get close enough, and I replace my own glasses with binoculars, fumble with the focus, and find the dot in the viewer - poof - it's gone. This was soon to become the story of my day - intercom warning, remove glasses, focus binoculars, find object, miss object. Obviously, I had a lot to learn.

As the day progresses - and eagles get common - we get bolder, and closer. This time it's a married couple whose large black bodies stand out among the winter branches of a large oak tree. The regal pair calmly watch the parading gawkers creep along the road in front of them. Evidently we hit a safe distance because all cars stop, doors slam, and scopes are positioned as we see how long Mr. and Mrs. Bald will tolerate us. The Mrs. panics early. Next stop, the water - and BBHs. A

voice from the front seat spouts exotic names, Bufflehead is my favorite, but to me they are all just BBHs, Bobbing Black Heads. A minor walkie-talkie dispute discusses whether these ducks have black stripes or black dots, black eyes or gold, but speculation quiets as more appear. I suspect that each side decides they're right in their own heads. *(Mrs. Wiseman is apparently a quick learner. She has already picked up one of the most important lessons in birding. Every birder is always right. — Ed.)*

By 3:00 this day is longer than I remember days being. Just when my patience is stretched, when "a bird is a bird is a bird" mentality begins to creep in, an immense rock formation looms ahead. Dozens of people, telltale binoculars harnessed around their chests, are facing it with necks craning upwards. What stands before me was once an island where Native Americans carved symbols in the soft volcanic surface. The base is imprinted with stick figure drawings - no doubt telling a story of the times. I know it's history. I know I should, but I just can't get out to "look" at anything else. By this time, I can no longer get excited about anything, much less stick figures on rocks. But Audubon excitement continues, as a Great Horned Owl and Prairie Falcon are spotted in the rock crevices.

Scopes are out one last time. Lou feeds me one last morsel: The Prairie Falcon has a distinctive color where his wing joins his body. (Who knew birds had armpits?)

When my van companions return from the final discovery of the day, discussion turns to tomorrow, Sunday morning at 5:45 am. Would Bill and I be joining the group to see the Eagle "fly out?" I'm thinking, "But hadn't we just spent all day looking at these same birds?" In my heart I feel guilty and admit to myself the lack of proper reverence for these magnificent birds, but "No thanks. One day is enough for me"

The wisdom of our decision to hang back is confirmed the next morning at 8:00 when we open the drapes and find three inches of snow blanketing the parking lot. "Double no thanks."

♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪

If you obey the rules, you miss all the fun.
—Katherine Hepburn

Sleeping Ducks

For some time ornithologists speculated that some bird species, particularly ducks, sleep with one eye open or with frequent wake-ups every few seconds in order to remain on guard against predators.

Research has confirmed this and the scientists have named it "unihemispheric low-wave" sleep.

Researchers at Indiana State University have now shown that birds can increase the amount of unihemispheric sleep when there is heightened risk of predation. In a recent article in *Nature*, they report on research showing that birds can control whether they sleep with one or both hemispheres of the brain based on perceived risk.

Doctoral student Niels Rattenborg, the primary investigator, studied four groups of Mallards in rows of four each. Birds on the outside (at greater risk of attack) spent more than twice as much time in unihemispheric sleep than those in the middle. In addition, birds on the periphery had their open eyes facing away from the group and in the direction of potential predators at least 85 percent of the time.

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.

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Urban Geese

The problem of urban populations of Canada Geese just won't go away. Now it has reached the unlikely venue of Anchorage, Alaska. According to a Reuters news service story, managers of the Anchorage airport have been authorized to kill geese as part of a plan to cut the city population of the birds in half. The plan also calls for removing eggs from nests, relocating young geese, and discouraging residents from feeding the birds.

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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