

SEQUOIA NEEDLES

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November-January 2004-2005

QUALITY OR QUANTITY?

BIRDING IN THE ECUADORIAN ANDES

BY FRANCIS TOLDI

Some people have room in the budget for long foreign birding trips led by expert field naturalists. They come home with long lists of incredible species. I envy them. I went on a trip like that once and it was the experience of a lifetime. Other people have all the time in the world, and if they can't or don't want to go with an organized group, they can take weeks to figure out logistics, learn the birds, and find their way to similarly long lists of birds at a very low cost, not to mention having many other interesting experiences. I envy them, too. So what hope is there for the rest of us? When we manage to get off to other lands on short, one-week trips, must we content ourselves with short bird lists, made up primarily of easy-to-see "junk" birds? Not at all!

Not long ago I spent a week birding in Ecuador. Partly because of fairly limited time, partly for budgetary reasons, and partly because of my own inclinations, I decided to "do it myself" and make my own arrangements. In recognition of the limited time I did make two concessions towards a longer list. First, I stayed in a "bird lodge" for most nights, which put me right in the middle of excellent bird habitat. Second, I hired a guide for two and a half days. Both of these choices added some expense to the trip, but added greatly to the number of species seen, not to mention gaining a better understanding of local environmental, biological, and social issues. Even with these two extras the costs were still well below what a tour would have cost. Allan Wofchuck accompanied me on the trip, which

added good company, shared costs, and another set of good eyes for finding birds.

So how did we do? 316 bird species, including 38 species of hummingbird, 43 species of tanagers and a steady supply of "fun" species such as trogons, toucans, raptors, and the like. There were maddeningly difficult to see skulkers, and more than a few surprises. So despite the title of this article, it isn't necessarily a choice between quality or quantity, but varying combinations of both.

For this article I've selected three days from my trip notes, with each day showing a different type of birding. The first day is "roadside" birding on our own (no guide), on foot, in the cloud forests of the Upper Tandayapa Valley. In this setting, with a reasonable amount of skill and preparation, you can expect a fairly long bird list of very high quality, not to mention a walk through some of the most beautiful forest in the world. The second is lowland rainforest birding with a guide—very high quantity and quality indeed! You could certainly bird this area on your own, but unless you are already an expert in neotropical bird vocalizations, don't expect to come away with as many species as we recorded on that day! For the last day I've picked a day in the extremely high Andes, with a car and driver but no bird guide. This day did not produce a long list of bird species, but what magnificent birds there were, and what scenery! Here, then, are three representative days of birding in Ecuador.

January 26, 2004. Another early morning. The previous evening had been wetter than previous days, and I was a little worried that it would be cloudy in the morning. I stepped out on to the veranda before dawn, and looked up at the cloudless sky, filled with brilliant stars in unknown constellations. Only in the far north did I see some familiar configurations of stars.

Allan and I teamed up today with one of our

(Continued on page 5)

Monthly Meetings

San Mateo Garden Center
(See program details on page 2)

November

Thursday, 11th, 7:30PM

Program: Nature Potpourri
Slideshow

December

Thursday, 9th, 6:30PM

Program: Potluck and British
Wildlife

January

Thursday, 13th, 7:30PM

Program: West Nile Virus

Upcoming Field Trips

(See trip details on page 3)

November

Saturday 6th Save the Bay Paddle
Trip, Bair Island

Sunday 7th Birds of the Barbary
Coast, San Francisco*

Saturday 13th Pescadero Marsh

Saturday 13th Canoe the Cosumnes

Sunday 14th Redwood Shores*

Thursday, 18th Coyote Point

Sunday, 21st Edgewood Park

December

Sunday, 5th Birds of the
Barbary Coast, San Francisco*

Saturday 11th Save the Bay
Paddle Trip, Bair Island

Saturday, 18th Crystal Springs
Bird Count

Sunday, 19th Pre-Christmas
Count, Edgewood Park

(Continued on page 3)

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MEETING PROGRAMS

BY BARBARA WILSON

Nature Potpourri Slideshow

By Bob and Sue Cossins

Thursday, November 11, 2004

Join SAS members Bob and Sue Cossins as they show slides of their recent trips. The photos will be mostly Western and Mid-Western U.S. nature scenes with a focus on birds and wildflowers.

Monthly Meetings

San Mateo Garden Center

605 Parkside Way, San Mateo

Parkside Way is west of Alameda de las Pulgas, between 26th and 28th Avenues.

Potluck and British Wildlife

By Peter Headland

Thursday, December 9, 2004

Sequoia Audubon Society member Peter Headland reminisces about local wildlife "back home" in the UK. Peter will show us slides of backyard birds, badgers, squirrels, butterflies, fungi, and more. Last year Peter presented a fantastic show on Kenya.

The December meeting will be preceded by a Potluck Dinner. The dinner starts at 6:30 PM, so bring your favorite main course dish, salad, or hors d'oeuvres, and plates and utensils. We will provide dessert and coffee or tea.

West Nile Virus

By Chindi Peavey, Ph.D.

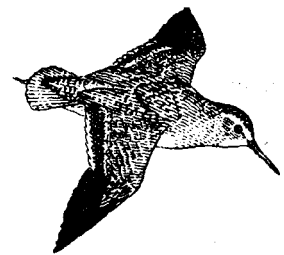
Thursday, January 13, 2005

West Nile Virus, much-anticipated and dreaded, came to California in 2004. Birds infected with the virus have been reported in almost every county of the state and human deaths have been reported. Join Chindi Peavey at the January meeting to learn more about the virus, what is being done in the way of research and prevention, and what we can do to limit the spread of the virus.

Chindi earned her Ph.D. in Parasitology from the University of California,

Berkeley, studying medical entomology and the ecology of Lyme disease and other diseases transmitted from animals to humans. She has an M.S. in Pathobiology from University of Washington and a B.A. from University of California, Santa Cruz.

Chindi has been with the San Mateo County Mosquito Abatement District for six years as the Vector Ecologist. She is in charge of the District's laboratory, acting as District Biologist, conducting disease surveillance, working with the control operators, and monitoring mosquito populations to evaluate the control program.



RECENT GIFTS TO SEQUOIA AUDUBON

SAS recently received birding-related items from long-time members, Fran and the late Roy Nelson of Belmont. Some of the books, feeders, and collectibles will be offered at our silent auction and raffle during our December holiday meeting. Other items such as personal journals and detailed checklists of their many birding trips will be kept at our office for reference. Many of the slides will be used in our slide show, "Birds of San Mateo County," which will soon be available to show to community groups. Many thanks to Fran Nelson and also to Diana Saidin of Borel Private Bank and Trust Company, San Mateo.

Thanks, also, to Jean and Roger Durick, SAS members living in Glenwood, Iowa, who have recently given two memorial gifts to SAS. The donations are in memory of their two dear friends, Joan Lindsay and Frances Robinson, who recently passed away.



FIELD TRIPS

BY CAROL MASTERSON

Save the Bay - Restoration Paddle at Bair Island

Two dates to choose from:

Saturday, November 6,

9:00 AM – 2:30 PM

Saturday, December 11,

9:00 AM - 2:30 PM

Help restore Bair Island in Redwood City, a wetland gem on the edge of the bay managed by Don Edwards National Wildlife Refuge. Sequoia Audubon was instrumental in helping to save this important wildlife area. We will paddle our canoes to our restoration site, and get connected to the bay through working with our hands to restore native habitat. Activities will include native seed collection, site monitoring, and shoreline cleanup. Reservations required. Mention you are with Sequoia Audubon. Members of Save the Bay \$25; non-members \$35

Contact: Save the Bay (510) 452-9261 or www.savesfbay.org

Birds of the Barbary Coast, San Francisco

Sunday, November 7, 9:30 - 11:00 AM

Join Ranger Carol Kiser to observe birds at the San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park in San Francisco. We will spend one and one-half to two hours looking for birds in the bay, shoreline, and woods in this urban park. This is a great walk for beginners to see both land and water birds, and to learn bird-watching techniques. Bring books and binoculars, if you have them, and dress in layers. Wheelchair accessible.

Directions: Meet at the entrance to Hyde Street Pier next to Aquatic Park at the foot of Hyde Street at Jefferson Street.

Note: Parking meters are in force on Sundays. Parking is available at Ghirardelli Square and at the Anchorage Shopping Center. (and you can spend the afternoon shopping!)

Leader: Ranger Carol Kiser (415) 561-7100

Beginner/Family Trip

Canoe the Cosumnes; See Sandhill Cranes

Saturday, November 13, 9:30 AM-3:30 PM

Experience the pristine waters of the mighty Cosumnes, the last un-dammed river flowing from the Sierra to the Central Valley. Enjoy this leisurely canoe paddle through the Cosumnes River Preserve; look for the migratory Sandhill cranes, and learn about the public and private partnership that protects this 1200-square-mile watershed. Reservations are required. This trip is organized by Save the Bay. Mention you are with Sequoia Audubon. Members of Save the Bay \$50; non-members \$60
Contact: Save the Bay (510) 452- 9261 or www.wavesfbay.org

Pescadero Marsh with Gary Deghi

Saturday, November 13, 9:00 AM

Pescadero Marsh is one of the premier birding spots in the country. It is located on the Pacific Flyway and serves as an important stop-over point for migrant shorebirds, a wintering ground for waterfowl, and breeding ground for a variety of marsh birds. The weather may be cool or warm depending upon fog and wind conditions; prepare accordingly. Boots are recommended for wet conditions. Walking is relatively easy on level grades.

Directions: Take Hwy 1 South. Meet at 9:00 AM at the parking lot opposite where Pescadero Road meets Hwy 1.

Leader: Gary Deghi (650) 726-1340

Redwood Shores Walk

Sunday, November 14, 9:00 AM

Redwood Shores is a great place to learn about "backyard" birds unique to the San Francisco Bay Area, particularly waterfowl and shorebirds. Please contact field trip leader, Teri Tith, as the meeting place can vary (park w/tennis courts, tern rookery, or water treatment plant) depending on the time of year. This walk is especially suitable for beginners and families as there is a zero slope rating. It is held on the second Sunday of every month, except December, starting at 9:00

(Continued on page 4)

Upcoming Field Trips

January

Sunday, 2nd Christmas Count-Año Nuevo

Sunday, 9th Redwood Shores*

Saturday, 22nd Wavecrest Raptors & Short-eared Owls

Sunday, 30th Monterey Bay Winter Seabirds & Gray Whales

Sunday, 30th Edgewood Park

**Beginner/Family Trip*

Check the field trip descriptions for any special information or requirements. Late comers may be disappointed. For all field trips bring your binoculars, water, wear sturdy walking shoes or boots, sun block, hat, and always dress in layers for hot sunny weather to cool windy conditions. While we attempt to stay on schedule, circumstances may dictate changes to field trip leaders, dates, or times.

For the latest schedule and updates, go to the Sequoia Audubon web site, contact the trip leader, or call **Carol at 650-347-1769**.



Great Blue Heron

(Field Trips, continued from page 3)

AM. It can be one hour long or longer in duration, depending on conditions and the interests of the group. Heavy rain cancels.

Leader: Teri Tith (650) 341-7724

Beginner/Family Trip

Coyote Point

Thursday, November 18, 8:00 AM

Fall and winter are great times to view birds at Coyote Point. The wetlands fronting San Francisco Bay attract numerous shore birds. The trees and grassy areas also provide good birding.

Directions: Take Hwy 101 to the Peninsula Ave. exit in Burlingame. Go east following the signs to Coyote Point; meet in the parking lot behind the Yacht Club at 8:00 AM.

Leader: Sue Cossins (650) 347-9358

Edgewood Park Walk

Sunday, November 21, 8:00 – 11:00 AM

Birding should be great at Edgewood Park. Fall birding will be in full swing. We will look for resident and migratory species.

Starting early will increase the chance of seeing all the interesting fall birds at Edgewood. Warblers, sparrows, hawks, and thrushes are all possible. The walk is over moderately strenuous terrain.

Directions: Meet the leader in the paved parking lot at the main gate 8:00 AM sharp. The Edgewood Park entrance is east of Hwy 280 on Edgewood Road in Redwood City.

Leader: Lee Franks (650) 592 - 7733

Birds of the Barbary Coast, San Francisco

Sunday, December 5, 9:30 - 11:00 AM

See Sunday, November 9, trip description.

Leader: Ranger Carol Kiser (415) 561-7100

Beginner/Family Trip

Christmas Bird Count

Crystal Springs

Saturday, December 18

The Crystal Springs count is regularly one of the top ten for numbers of species identified. We need your help to exceed our count from last year. Some of the best birding you will do this year will be at the Christmas counts. Better yet, sign up for both the Crystal Springs and the Año Nuevo counts.

Pre-Christmas Walk

Edgewood Park

Sunday, December 19, 8:00 AM

Practice for the January 2 count and make this your early New Year's walk. Come and visit Edgewood Park for the last time in 2004. We should see wintering birds as well as year-round species. The walk is over moderately strenuous terrain. Heavy rain cancels.

Directions: Edgewood Park is east of Hwy 280 on Edgewood Road in Redwood City. Meet the leader in the paved parking lot at the main gate at 8:00 AM sharp.

Leader: Lee Franks (650) 592 - 7733

Año Nuevo Christmas Bird Count

Sunday, January 2

Come and help us make this the biggest bird count ever. This count has the potential to match or exceed the Crystal Springs count in species diversity and numbers of birds, but is traditionally under-reported due to the small number of participants.

Sign up now: Send email to office@sequoia-audubon.org or call Al at (650) 345-6988.

Winter Birds by the Bay

Redwood Shores

Sunday, January 9, 9:00 AM

See the Sunday, November 14 trip description.

Leader: Teri Tith (650) 341-7724

Beginner/Family Trip

Wavecrest Raptors & Short-Eared Owls

Saturday, January 22, 3 PM – Sunset

The North Wavecrest area is considered by the Sequoia Audubon Society 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.

Possible development of Wavecrest Village in this area would destroy this unique habitat for raptors on the coast.

We will expect to see Red-tailed and Red-shouldered hawks, Northern harriers, White-tailed kites, American kestrels. We will make a special effort at dusk to see Short-eared owls (a species of special concern), which winter here every year. If we are lucky, we may see rarities such as Ferruginous hawk or Rough-legged hawk.

Directions: Hwy 1 south of the intersection with Hwy 92. Turn right (west) – onto Wavecrest Road. Meet at the ball fields at the end of Wavecrest Road at 3:00 PM.

Leader: Gary Deghi (650) 726-1340

Winter Seabirds & Gray Whales with Shearwater Journeys

Monterey Bay

Sunday, January 30,

This fun all-day pelagic trip is organized by Debra Shearwater, an expert in seabird identification. This is an excellent time of year to see gulls -- Western, Herring, Glaucous-winged, Mew, Bonaparte's, and Black-legged kittiwakes. We will also be on the lookout for Rhinoceros and Cassin's auklets. Yellow-billed loons and Ancient murrelets are also possible. We will also watch for Gray whales and other marine mammals. To make your reservation send a check or money order to Shearwater Journeys, PO Box 190, Hollister, CA 95024. Mention that you are with Sequoia Audubon — don't miss out on this great trip. The cost is \$120.

Questions: Call Carol Masterson (650) 347-1769

Winter Birding at Edgewood Park

Sunday, January 30, 8:00 AM

See the Sunday, November 21, trip description.

Leader: Lee Franks (650) 592-7733

IN MEMORIAM — CLIFF RICHER

Sequoia Audubon has lost a long time supporter with the recent death of Cliff Richer. The chapter will miss his company and his many contributions.

Most of you will know Cliff as the long-time editor of the *Needles*. He was passionate about producing a well-written, informative, interesting newsletter and we continue to benefit from that tradition. Cliff received the chapter's Environmental Educator Award for his years of educating readers on all sorts of bird topics. It came as a complete surprise to him -- one of the few times he was speechless!!

Cliff was a past chapter president and a board member for many years. He was a Christmas Count participant in every count up to the last year or two. Owls by car became his count specialty when walking became difficult. Cliff was also a volunteer at San Pedro Valley County Park, giving many hours at the desk in the visitor center. It was his wish to have a party at the park to celebrate instead of mourn. The park volunteers will let us know the particulars.

Personally, I loved Cliff Richer. He taught me much that I know about birds when I was new to birding. He willingly answered my questions no matter how often I repeated them. His New England accent reminded me of my father and so did his sometimes curmudgeonly attitude. His e-mail name, Ulticoot, was fitting. I will miss the Ulticoot; my world is less interesting without him.

Robin Smith

(Ecuadorian Birding, continued from page 1)

fellow guests for a day of birding in the upper Tandayapa Valley. We had arranged through the lodge to have a taxi take us up to the "top" of the road (at around 2300 meters elevation) and drop us off. We had also arranged a packed lunch. We then slowly worked our way back down the road, eventually walking all the way back to the lodge in the late afternoon. The birding was good all of the way down, except for the stretch about 2-4 Km above the lodge, where there was very noisy (but obviously necessary) road maintenance work going on. Unfortunately there were some tantalizingly good flocks in this area, but the noise made it hard to hear them, and undoubtedly pushed them further off the road.

Although the upper part of the valley is still within the Subtropical zone, there are some significant differences in the birds found there as compared to the lower valley. Any bird trip to the area should allow time in both locations. I would have liked another day in the upper valley, but had to settle for this one day. It's not fair to dismiss this day as mere "road birding." I have to confess that I enjoy the easier visibility of birds found along the roadside, despite the typical absence of the more secretive species that usually require walking along

the often silent forest trails. I usually balance my tropical trips with some of each. In this case, even along the road we found a large number of forest species, including a few that had no business being there (by conventional wisdom)!

Although some species were visible throughout the day, the main birding opportunities here were governed by the presence or absence of mixed feeding flocks. We started at the junction of the old Nono-Mindo Road and the road to Nanegalito, and slowly worked our way down toward Bellavista Lodge. Among our early morning treats were spectacular, close views of RED-BILLED PARROT, PLATE-BILLED MOUNTAIN-TOUCAN, MASKED TROGON, very conspicuous TURQUOISE JAY and DUSKY BUSH-TANAGER. We heard the deep, "whooooo" of a WHITE-THROATED QUAIL-DOVE, but the bird never came out into view. I also recognized the call of the CRESTED QUETZAL on several occasions during the day but we could never seem to locate the caller. There were many calls and songs that went completely unidentified. Undoubtedly we missed some good birds through pure ignorance. A guide would have put us on to many new species, I'm sure, but it was great to just walk along this very beautiful forest road, with swirling mist appearing and vanishing, appearing and vanishing, while birds called from deep in the forest, sometimes showing themselves and sometimes remaining hidden from view.

Right at the junction of the Nanegalito and Mindo Roads we had a very lucky break: we found an ANDEAN PYGMY-OWL roosting in a small tree just above eye level. A mob of small birds was harassing and mobbing the owl. This brought up and out some birds we might have missed otherwise. In the mob we were able to pick out SPECKLED HUMMINGBIRD, COLLARED INCA (the hummingbirds were particular aggressive), FLAVESCENT FLYCATCHER, WHITE-TAILED TYRANULET, STREAK-NECKED FLYCATCHER, BROWN-CAPPED VIREO, BLACK-CRESTED WARBLER, CAPPED CONEBILL, MASKED FLOWERPIERCER, SPECTACLED WHITESTART.

On our way down to Bellavista we found a few more flocks, which included TOUCAN BARBET, CRIMSON-MANTLED WOODPECKER, AZARA'S SPINETAIL, STREAKED TUFTEDCHEEK, PEARLED TREERUNNER, MONTANE WOODCREEPER, CINNAMON FLYCATCHER, PLAIN-TAILED WREN (initially mistaken for Whiskered Wren), and GOLDEN, METALLIC-GREEN and BLACK-CAPPED TANAGERS. A particular treat was a good look at the vividly colored GRASS-GREEN TANAGER. We tried for some time to coax out an OCELLATED TAPACULO, but despite calling very close by, it wouldn't come out. While waiting quietly in that vicinity, though, we were surprised to see at very close range and in the relative open a SLATY-BACKED NIGHTINGALE-THRUSH, with a lovely YELLOW-BELLIED CHAT TYRANT in the same binocular view. A PLAIN-BREASTED HAWK and a bit later on a BLACK-AND-CHESTNUT EAGLE put in appearances overhead. A few WHITE-COLLARED SWIFTS sped by from time to time.

(Continued on page 6)

At around 11:00 a.m. we found ourselves at Bellavista Lodge. The owners were very friendly, and we sat for a while drinking excellent coffee and watching their hummingbird feeders. We enjoyed good looks at some of the same species we had seen at our "home" lodge (among them WESTERN EMERALD, ANDEAN EMERALD, PURPLE-BIBBED WHITETIP, BROWN INCA, BUFF-TAILED CORONET, BOOTED RACKET-TAIL, VIOLET-TAILED SYLPH and PURPLE-THROATED WOODSTAR), with the addition of SPECKLED HUMMINGBIRD and the striking COLLARED INCA. Unfortunately, despite carefully checking all of the feeders we could see, we didn't turn up a Gorgeted Sunangel, one of our key targets for that location. Larry, a professional naturalist guiding around some other people, kindly took us a short way up one of the forest trails to see a roosting COMMON POTOO that he had located earlier.

We walked down the road heading back towards our lodge. Since it was mid-day the bird activity had lessened a bit, and flocks were harder to find. Just down from Bellavista two GREEN-AND-BLACK FRUITEATERS were very quietly feeding in a tangle of vegetation. We were delighted and more than a little surprised to have excellent out-in-the-open views of a CHESTNUT-CROWNED ANTPITTA that Allan found right by the side of the road. We stopped at Loma Linda, Tony Nunnery's and Barbara Bolz's hard to find residence, and for \$5 each enjoyed herbal tea, cookies, our host's excellent company and another set of spectacular hummingbird feeders. It was a pleasure to sit on the deck, watching the feeders and feeding ourselves on our Tandayapa Lodge packed lunches. Barbara is an old friend of Dan Keller, known to many Sequoia Auduboners. All too soon we tore ourselves away from this lovely spot and continued on down the road. Occasional showers followed us down the mountain. Some noisy roadwork precluded much birding, but we still saw a number of nice flocks with now-familiar tanagers, and a few other excellent species including CRIMSON-RUMPED TOUCANET and BLACK-AND-WHITE COTINGA.

We returned to the lodge at around 4:30 in the afternoon. After another session at the feeders I took a walk around the grounds, not adding any new birds, but just enjoying the day's end in this lovely spot. Our daily total was 84 species, not bad for a day of very pleasant-paced birding on our own.

Continued in next issue of Needles

OTHER BIRDING ACTIVITIES

(Sequoia Audubon does not sponsor the following activities)

Sandhill Crane Festival, Lodi

November 5th-7th **Information:** www.lodichamber.com.

Central Valley Birding Symposium, Stockton

November 18th-21st **Information:** www.CVBS.org.

CHARLESTON SLOUGH

FIELDTRIP REPORT

AUGUST 21, 2004

BY CARLA EDWARDS

On Saturday, August 21, I joined up with leader Roxie Handler and other members of the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society on a beginners' field trip to Charleston Slough at the east end of San Antonio Road at Terminal Blvd in Mountain View. From 1968 to the 1980's, Shoreline Park was used as a dump by San Francisco. Thereafter, it was slowly converted into a park. Charleston Slough is on the south edge of Shoreline Park. From the entrance, we followed a wide maintenance road that runs past Shoreline Lake to the golf course, then walked past a couple of tidal mudflats and a slough. In the bushes near the maintenance road, we observed male and female Lesser goldfinches as well as Bushtits, who were avidly eating poison hemlock berries. They did not seem to notice that the berries are deadly, at least to humans. We also saw a Common Yellowthroat, a Mourning dove, House finches, Song sparrow, House sparrow, and an American goldfinch. Behind the bushes in the first tidal flat were a Killdeer, a Yellowlegs, and Long-billed dowitchers.

Shoreline Lake had a plethora of birds. Overhead, groups of White pelicans flew to the edge of a mudflat. In the water, we observed Double-crested cormorants, a Black phoebe, a Greater scaup, Scoters, a Ring-billed gull, and a Glaucous-winged gull. A Green-backed heron was perched on a stationary device set in the lake. On the jetty sat a Snowy egret ignoring us, and a Willet. Behind us in the reeds we spotted several Black-crowned night herons and Semipalmated plovers. In between the lake and reeds someone saw a Nuttalls woodpecker.

The mudflats were teeming with Least sandpipers, Western sandpipers, Marbled godwits, the occasional Avocet, Long-billed curlew, Willet, Black-necked stilt, and a Great blue heron. White pelicans rested on the edges on the flats. Overhead we observed a Forster's tern, and Violet-green and Barn swallows.

What a treat we saw in the slough! There was a mother Pied-billed grebe sitting on her raft-like nest with at least four chicks clinging to her back. The chicks stirred as the father, with a fish in his bill, swam into sight. One chick flopped into the water and swam after Dad demanding to be fed. Our leader, Roxie, said the day before the water level in this part of the slough was much lower and she had seen the nest more fully with six chicks perched on the mother's back. Further on were Pintails, a female Northern shoveler, an American coot, a Moorhen, a Cinnamon teal, and a Gadwall. Flying over the former dump were a Turkey vulture and a Black-shouldered kite that very nicely

(Continued on page 7)

CARE OF BLUEBIRD NEST BOXES

BY HOWARD RATHLESBERGER

The end of summer also is the end of the nesting season. It is the time to clean out, inspect, and repair all nesting boxes so they can do double duty as roosting sites during the winter.

There is some controversy over cleaning out nest boxes, however. Some purists say natural cavities never get cleaned out as the nests oxidize and compost away. Some nests are quite messy and there's no alternative.

We've found used Bluebird boxes with nests that are immaculate and these we just remove to shake out the chitten, the dead skin that comes off the chicks as their feathers emerge. This collects on the floor of the box. We shake the compact nest and clean out the box before inserting the nest back.

We've also had to replace nests that were soaked by sprinklers on the golf courses with dry materials. We've also had boxes in which the adults had fed chicks a dark bluish berry, possibly elderberry. The nest was as though it had been dipped in dark blue ink, but it fledged healthy chicks. This nest was replaced with a manmade nest.

If a nest is clean we retain it through the winter. The next spring it will be recycled for sure.

Chickadee and Titmice nests are usually neat as a pin, but we remove the nests after the nesting season because bumblebees love to recycle them for their own use and there's nothing like bumblebees to discourage humans and birds. Frequently, these nests are reused when Swallows, Tree or Violet Greens, recycle them by adding feathers. They're usually not at all messy. Still, they must be removed from the box after the season.

If the box is located in a shrubby thicket area, it is likely that it will attract House wrens. The male wren claims his territory by taking over all nearby boxes and making a "false" nest in them. He will fill the boxes with twigs and small sticks. Only one will be chosen by the female and will be filled to the top of the box. When the nest is completed, she will make a burrow through the sticks at the back of the box and make a beautiful cup.

Our normal top-hinged, side-opening box proved to be a bad design for wren nests so we changed the design to have a bottom-hinged opening. This prevents the full nest from being crushed when the side is opened by the monitor. Monitors must clean these boxes at the end of the season also.

The depth of the nest box from the entry hole to the floor is based on a normal nest height of approximately 2 to 3 inches

high. The hole is approximately 6 to 7 inches from the floor; if you subtract the 2-to-3-inch nest height, then the hole to the nest is 4 to 5 inches. This is to prevent a raccoon or cat from reaching through the hole to grab eggs or young.

We also attempt to avert this situation by extending the front roof overhang to 6 inches, preventing a raccoon or cat from clinging to the roof and attempting to enter the hole.

If we allow multiple nests to accumulate and consume the gap between the hole and the nest, then we are risking a failed nest due to predation. There are trade-offs. If we make the box deeper, the short-legged swallows have difficulty getting out of the box.

Our real effort is to increase the yield of fledglings from every nest attempt. We want our boxes to offer the best, most reliable, and predator-proof home while the birds raise their young. Our persistent efforts are bringing many cavity nesters back into urban areas. On balance it is probably better to remove all old nests in the fall.

UPCOMING AUDUBON ASSEMBLY

NOVEMBER 17 & 18, 2004
RADISSON HOTEL, STOCKTON

Audubon California will host an Audubon Assembly at the Radisson Hotel in Stockton on Wednesday, November 17th and Thursday the 18th. The Assembly is a statewide meeting open to all members and is a chance for Audubon activists, chapter leaders, and staff to assemble, discuss, and decide our legislative priorities for the coming year. Come and participate in the process that will help determine our policy agenda and the ways that we can work together to achieve it. The conference theme this year is *Building Constituencies for Bird Conservation* and will feature a fantastic array of workshops and programs. There will also be a special trip to the Woodbridge Crane Reserve near Lodi to watch for the crane fly-in at dusk. Swans, ducks, geese, hawks, herons, owls, and other wildlife are often seen on these tours. For full details about the Assembly contact Jill Shirley at 530-795-0550, or jshirley@audubon.org, or visit the website at www.audubon-ca.org.



Yellow-bellied Sapsucker

THE BIRD BOX
RARE BIRD
ALERT

415-681-7422

(Charleston Slough, continued from page 6)
kited for us a couple of times.

I thought we saw an amazing variety of birds in three hours. Because of this trip, I have learned to recognize several of these mudflat- and slough-loving species.

SAS appreciates your tax-deductible donations, which help fund the Chapter's education, conservation, and ongoing activities.

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2004 Annual Christmas Bird Counts



Sign up today by calling Al at (650) 345-6988 or email to Al_DeMar2@yahoo.com

The Christmas count is done every year to record as many individuals and different species in one day as possible. The data gathered gives us important information about the birds of San Mateo County. This year the counts are scheduled for:

Crystal Springs Count – Saturday, December 18, 2004

Año Nuevo Count – Sunday, January 2, 2005

We will break into teams counting birds on the coastside, hills, or bayside. After the count everyone gathers to tally the results and enjoy a compilation dinner.

Counters with all levels of experience are welcome. For beginning birders, this is a great opportunity to gain experience working with the old pros. We also need feeder watchers to count birds at their home feeders for a period of time in December.

When you sign up for the Christmas Count please let us know your phone number, email address, experience and whether you'd be interested in counting bayside or coastside. Be prepared to spend the day looking for birds, rain or shine.

Each count costs \$5 to cover the expense of publishing the CBC results. Be sure to sign up for the informal compilation dinner. For a mere \$5 enjoy tasty warm food and lively stories about the counts. Reservations requested so we can plan accordingly.

The Christmas Bird Counts will be some of the best birding you will do for the year!

**Mission
Statement**

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.