

SEQUOIA NEEDLES

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MEMBERSHIP IN SEQUOIA AUDUBON

BY BILL CRITZER

The latest membership data reveal 1,465 members of Sequoia Audubon. This is an impressive number and I am pleased to tell you that it is up slightly from the previous count. The Society's aggregate membership number has been quite steady over the past several years, varying by only a few percentage points up or down as the months and years passed.

This issue of the newsletter is filled with opportunities to participate in the many excellent activities and programs available to members and the community at large. I can't think of any of our activities that are for "members only." We are truly a community organization and a community resource.

The Sequoia Audubon Society is inclusive and diverse and 100% volunteer. It is an effective organization deriving its strength from its membership. Thank you for belonging and participating.

Thanks to Wild Bird Center and Bird Seed Sale Volunteers

The 2005 Winter Bird Seed Sale was one of our biggest ever! We are fortunate to have the help of Bonnie Regalia and the Wild Bird Center in supplying Sequoia Audubon with seed for our bird-seed sales.

A big thank-you to all the hard-working volunteers who made the sale such a big success. Thank you to the Wild Bird Center for their ongoing support.

NEWS FROM AUDUBON CANYON RANCH

BY BETSY STAFFORD

Our three preserves are bursting with spring in all its bounteous beauty. We especially invite our Audubon Chapter Members to join us for one of the following occasions:

Bolinas Lagoon Preserve

Our public season opens March 19th and runs Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays through July 17th. Come view the nesting herons and egrets and hike some of our eight miles of trails. On weekdays (except Mondays) the Preserve is open to the public by appointment only. Call (415) 868-9244 to reserve.

Weekend Hosts. We are especially grateful to those of you who can volunteer a weekend day to help us greet visitors to the Preserve. In return for your gift of time as a Weekend Host, we can promise you a closer-up view of all the heronry's antics, the ponds' critters, the Preserve's workings, and an invitation to our popular Volunteer Appreciation Picnic in the fall. Please join us! Call (415) 868-9244 for more information.

Spring Work Day, Sunday March 6th, 9:30 AM-1:00 PM; lunch at 1:00 PM. Help us with trail work, library work, pulling weeds, planting native flowers, or cooking lunch (which we provide). Please call our office to register, so we can plan on enough food!

Bouverie Preserve

Guided Nature Walks. April 2, 16, & 23; May 14 & 21. 9:30 AM-1:30 PM. Here's your chance to experience the beauty and rich natural history of this 500-acre reserve in Sonoma County's Valley of the Moon.

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Monthly Meetings

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

April

Thursday, 14th, 7:30 PM

Program: Albatross: On the Wings of Antarctic Ocean Wanderers

May

Thursday, 12th, 7:30 PM

Program: Ecuador: Hummingbirds and Volcanoes

June

Thursday, 9th, 6:30 PM

Program: Eastern Tropical Pacific
Potluck Meeting

Upcoming Field Trips

(See trip details on page 3)

April

Saturday, 2nd Yerba Buena Nursery

Saturday, 9th Filoli Estate

Friday-Sunday, 8th-10th Carizzo Plain

Saturday 16th Middle Bair Island

Sunday, 17th Mines Road

Sunday, 24th Edgewood Park

Saturday, 30th Int'l Birding Trip*

May

Sunday, 1st San Bruno Mountain*

Wednesday, 11th Int'l Migratory Bird Day*

Sunday, 29th Edgewood Park

**Beginner/Family Trip*

Sequoia Audubon Society

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Members are encouraged to submit original or uncopyrighted material – articles, artwork, cartoons, photos – for Needles. The deadline for submission is the first day of the month preceding publication. Send comments and contributions to:

sas_editor@yahoo.com



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MEETING PROGRAMS

BY BARBARA WILSON

Albatross: On the Wings of Antarctic Ocean Wanderers

by Ted Cheeseman

Thursday, April 14th

Naturalist and expedition leader Ted Cheeseman will present an illustrated lecture sharing his experiences with some of the world's most majestic birds. From Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" to glimpses off our shores of Laysan and Black-footed Albatross, we know of albatross as visitors from a foreign realm. Through his expeditions with Cheeseman's Ecology Safaris, Ted frequently travels to the Galapagos and across the Southern Ocean to its sub-Antarctic islands, the heart of prime albatross habitat.

Albatross have forever been the subject of myth and ocean-faring legend, but it is only with recent study such as GPS-telemetry that we are seeing into their lives. As we are learning how truly magnificent albatross are, many species face sharp declines at the hands of industrial fishing. Ted will take you on the wings of an albatross, an entertaining and educational journey among the world's greatest mariners with beautiful photographs and the most recent bird science.

Ecuador: Hummingbirds and Volcanoes

by Francis Toldi and Allan Wofchuck

Thursday, May 12

Join Francis and Allan for slides and stories of their recent trip to Ecuador. Their trip was to rainforest and cloud forest on Ecuador's mid-elevation northwestern slope. This area is home to some of the most dazzling hummingbird species in the world, in particular abundance here. They also ventured into the high elevation country – stark, windswept paramo, with towering volcanoes in the background.

Eastern Tropical Pacific

by Sophie Webb

Thursday, June 9

Artist/biologist Sophie Webb spends several months each year on research vessels counting seabirds and marine mammals in the Eastern Tropical Pacific (Mexico south to Costa Rica and along the Hawaiian Island Chain), spending six months there in the past two years. Enjoy the pictures of the birds, marine mammals, and other critters found in that region of the ocean and learn a little about what life is like on a research vessel.

Sophie Webb has drawn and painted wildlife since childhood. She has traveled as a biologist studying and painting birds from the Amazon to the Arctic and Antarctic. In 1995 she co-authored and illustrated *A Guide to the Birds of Mexico and Northern Central America*. She has written two children's books and is working on a third about dolphins in the Eastern Tropical Pacific. She is director of Oikonos: Ecosystem Knowledge and a Research Associate of Point Reyes Bird Observatory in California.

This meeting is a "potluck" meeting. Potluck begins at 6:30; program at about 8:00. Bring your own plate and utensils. Please bring a main dish, casserole, or salad to share. Sequoia Audubon will provide coffee, tea, and dessert. Come and meet our friendly members and vote on our slate of officers and directors.

Details and updates can be found on our website.

Monthly Meetings

San Mateo Garden Center

605 Parkside Way, San Mateo

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



FIELD TRIPS

BY CAROL MASTERSON

Yerba Buena Nursery – Bird Friendly Native Plants

Saturday, April 2, 9:30 AM

Yerba Buena Nursery is a wonderful place devoted to California native plants. Yerba Buena has a 2.5-acre demonstration garden with many different native plants. We will learn about the different California native plants that attract birds and butterflies. Afterwards we can bird around the grounds of the nursery looking for sparrows, vireos, warblers, flycatchers, woodpeckers, hummingbirds, and many more. Bring your lunch and we will picnic after birding. Hot and cold beverages and cookies can be bought in the Tea Terrace. The Garden Shop has hundreds of interesting items related to gardening, nature, and country living.

Directions: Take Hwy 280 to the Woodside Road exit. Go west through the town of Woodside and up the hill to Skyline Blvd. Go left/south on Skyline Blvd 4.5 miles. Watch for signs on the left for "Fogarty Winery" and on the right side of the road to "Langley Hill Quarry" and Yerba Buena Nursery. Turn right onto Langley Hill Road. Go 2 miles and watch for the Nursery signs. We will meet in the parking lot. Dress in layers; bring a lunch. Rain cancels. To say thank you for the tour, why not buy a bird friendly California Native plant?

Leader: Carol Masterson (650) 347-1769

Filoli Estate

Saturday, April 9, 8:30 AM

The Filoli Estate is the property of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. We have been invited for a morning of birding at this beautiful site on the edge of the San Francisco watershed land. The grounds of Filoli have a fine planted garden surrounded by large oaks and trails leading to riparian, redwood, and farm habitats. Over 96 species of birds have been found here. **Reservations required** because this trip is limited to 20 people. (Sorry, no children under 14.) No food or picnicking is allowed but all will be welcome after the walk to buy light food and beverages at the Café and visit the gift shop.

Directions: Take Hwy 280 to the Edgewood Road exit; go west. Turn right/

north on Canada Road and drive approx. ½ mile to the entrance of Filoli. We will meet in front of the Visitors Center. If you want to remain after the field trip to walk through the house and/or gardens, there is a \$10.00 entrance fee. Heavy rain cancels. Call Carol Masterson at (650) 347-1769 to reserve your spot.

Leader: Sue James

Weekend Field Trip to Carizzo Plain Friday-Sunday, April 8-10

Join Francis Toldi on an exploratory trip to the Carizzo Plain of eastern San Luis Obispo County. This is a remote area of remarkable, if somewhat stark, beauty. The birds should be similar to those one might expect along Mines Road south of Livermore. The trip is timed to maximize the possibility of wildflowers. In some years the area can be a seemingly endless carpet of wildflowers, while in other years the display is more modest. There is a possibility that we might see some of the California Condors from a nearby release site. If time permits we may venture a bit further to look for LeConte's Thrasher in adjoining Kern County. Facilities in the area are limited. It may be possible to arrange for a motel ("open when open"), but primitive camping is the best way to enjoy the area. Call Francis Toldi to reserve your place on the trip and for more information.

Leader: Francis Toldi (650) 344-1919

Middle Bair Island Canoe/Restoration Project

**Sponsored by Save the Bay and the Don Edwards National Wildlife Refuge
Bair Island, Redwood City**

Saturday, April 16, 9:00AM – 2:30 PM
Save the Bay is partnering with Don Edwards National Wildlife Refuge to restore portions of Inner and Middle Bair Island. Bair Island is a unique wetland habitat in San Mateo County. It is home to many species of nesting birds, migratory birds, marine organisms, and marine mammals. The goal of the project is to restore areas of diked and leveed historic wetlands to tidal marsh. Much of the project site is off-limits to the public. We will have an introduction to the Bay and the Refuge, followed by safety and paddling instructions. We will then launch and paddle to

TIME TO RENEW?

If you see a notice on the italicized line above your printed name and address that says:

"Last Issue, Please Renew," it is that time!

We invite you to fill in the form on the outside back cover.

Bair Island, enjoying the wildlife and wetland habitat along the way. Much of the day will be spent on the island removing non-native plants. Dress in layers; bring a hat, lunch, water, and enthusiasm. Gloves, tools, and canoeing equipment are provided. \$35 for non-members of Save the Bay; \$25 for members. To sign up, contact Denise Shea at Save the Bay at (510) 452-9261x109 or dshea@savesfbay.org

Mines Road – The Ultimate Spring Bird Trip

Sunday, April 17, 8:00 AM

A variety of habitats provides a fascinating variety of birds not found elsewhere in the Bay Area. This will be an all-day trip to this area in the Coast Range Mountains between Livermore, the Central Valley, and Hwy 5. We will look for Phainopepla, Prairie Falcon, Lawrence's Goldfinch, Lewis' Woodpecker, and Golden Eagles, along with sparrows and hummingbirds. If we are very lucky we may even see a Wild Turkey or Roadrunner. Have a full tank of gas, water, and food since facilities are scarce. There are only two reliable restroom facilities, one at the lunchtime stop and another at mid-afternoon at a county park. Weather is unpredictable from cold and windy to hot and dry. Heavy rain cancels.

(Continued on page 4)

(Field Trips, continued from page 3)

Directions: Cross the San Mateo Bridge and follow the signs to Hwy 580. Stay on 580 for about 25 miles to Livermore. Take the South Vasco Road exit. Follow Vasco to Tesla Road; turn right on Tesla for 1/2 mile and turn left on Mines Road. Follow Mines Road for about 1/4 mile to the Murietta Wells Winery turnoff (on the right). We will meet in the small parking area alongside Mines Road. (Don't cross the bridge into the winery.) Call Leslie for carpooling.

Leader: Leslie Flint (650) 573-6279

Edgewood Park – Spring Birds And Wildflowers

Sunday, April 24, 8:00 AM

Edgewood Park has spectacular wildflowers and spring birding at its best. Over 60 species of birds have been identified here. Beautiful wildflowers and more than 300 species of plants are found in this rich area. Meet the leader Lee Franks in the paved parking lot near the main gate area at 8:00 AM sharp.

Directions: The Edgewood Park entrance is east of Hwy 280 on Edgewood Road in Redwood City. Look for the park entrance on the south side of the road.

Leader: Lee Franks (650) 592-7733

International Birding Trip – Without Leaving Home!

Saturday, April 30, 10:00 AM

See the birds of the world without leaving home. Come along on this docent-lead tour of the Birds of the San Francisco Zoo. We will see and learn about birds from all continents of the world and will also bird around the zoo grounds looking for resident species and migrants. We will learn about conservation efforts to preserve bird populations and environments around the globe and how our conservation efforts here in the U.S. can help migratory birds in South and Central America.

Directions: Take Hwy 280 north to 19th Ave and Junipero Serra Blvd. Go to the right onto Junipero Serra Blvd. Go three stop lights on Junipero Serra to a left-hand turn onto Sloat Blvd. Go west on Sloat to 47th Ave and the entrance to the Zoo. There is also an entrance to the parking lot off the Great Highway. We will meet at 10:00 AM sharp. Heavy rain/wind cancels. There is a \$10 entry fee. For information call Carol Masterson at (650) 347-1769

Beginner/Family – Wheelchair Accessible

San Bruno Mountain

Sunday, May 1, 9:00 AM

San Bruno Mountain stands as an island of open space on the border of San Mateo and San Francisco Counties. It is home to a wealth of wildlife, hidden pockets of woodland, and sheltered canyons. We will look for quail, nuthatch, towhees, vireos, warblers, mockingbird, thrush, flycatchers, sparrows, wrens, hummingbirds, and many other migrants. Depending on the winter rains we may see spectacular wildflower displays.

Directions: Take Highway 101 north to the Bayshore Boulevard/Brisbane exit. Proceed on Bayshore Boulevard to Guadalupe Canyon Parkway. Turn west on Guadalupe Canyon Parkway toward the mountain and proceed up the hill to the park entrance on your right. Be prepared to pay a fee. Meet in the main parking lot just beyond the entrance kiosk. Dress in layers

for warm-to-cool and windy weather. Wear sturdy walking shoes/boots and bring fluids and snacks. We have binoculars to share. Not suitable for strollers.

Leader: Leslie Flint (650) 573-6279

Beginner/Family Trip

International Migratory Bird Day — Introduction to Basic Birding

Wednesday, May 11, 9:00 AM

Join us in a midweek celebration of migratory birds. We will talk about the importance of migratory birds in the San Francisco Bay area. We will also review basic birding techniques to help find those migratory birds. I can't find the bird everyone else is seeing! How do I use binoculars? What is good birding etiquette? Ever had basic birding questions and were afraid to ask? Dress in layers and bring water. We will have binoculars to share. Call Carol for directions. Rain cancels.

Leader: Carol Masterson (650) 347-1769

Beginner/Family - Wheelchair Accessible

Edgewood Park – Spring Birds, Butterflies, and Flowers

Sunday, May 29, 8:00 AM

Springtime birds, butterflies, and wildflowers abound at Edgewood Park. Talk with the leader Lee Franks about the important ongoing conservation studies and programs at the park. Starting at 8:00 AM sharp will increase our chances of seeing all the interesting resident and vagrant bird species.

Directions: Take Hwy 280 to Edgewood Road. Go east on Edgewood towards Redwood City and look for the park entrance and parking on the south side of the road. Meet in the paved parking lot adjacent to the main gate.

Leader: Lee Franks (650) 592-7733

OTHER BIRDING ACTIVITIES

(Sequoia Audubon does not sponsor the following activities.)

7th Annual Aleutian Goose Festival, Crescent City, CA

Friday-Sunday, April 1-3

Celebrate spring with virtually the entire world's population of the once nearly extinct Aleutian Canada Goose. There will be 80 different bird, nature, and ocean charter trips, and heritage excursions. For reservations and information, see www.aleutiangoosefestival.org or call (800) 343-8300.

Beginner/Family Weekend Trip

Godwit Days Spring Migration Festival, Arcata, CA

Friday-Sunday, April 15-17

Godwit Days is for the birds! This North Coast birding festival is held at the height of the spring shorebird migration. The Arcata Marsh and Wildlife Sanctuary is home to 250 species of birds. There are field trips, boat trips, workshops, exhibits, and demonstrations. Beginner, intermediate, and advanced birding and birding classes are available. For reservations and information, see www.godwitdays.com or call (800) 908-9464 or (707) 822-4500.

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(Other Birding Activities, continued from page 4)

Beginner/Family Weekend Trip

11th Annual Kern Valley Bioregions Festival, Kernville, CA

Friday-Thursday, April 29-May 5

Celebrate natural diversity at the height of spring abundance. The Kern River Valley has five different bioregions. It is located at the southern edge of the Sierra Nevada near the Mojave Desert, with grasslands, forest, desert, chaparral, and Great Basin-type habitats. All have an abundance of birds (more than 220 species overall and 197 nesting birds), butterflies, (138 different species), mammals (115 species), and wildflowers. There will be birding, education, a wildlife art show, music, and children's activities. For information contact Valley Wild Bioregions Festival, P.O. Box 833, Weldon, CA 93283, see www.valleywild.org/bioregion or call (760) 378-3044.

(News from ACR, continued from page 1)

Our half-day guided nature walks are on Saturdays throughout the spring and fall. To receive a form for the lottery, please visit our website at www.egret.org, or call 707/938-4554. Audubon Chapter Members receive priority, so be sure to mention that you are a member.

Resource Management Days. March 21, April 18, & May 16, 8:15 AM - 12:30 PM. Please come help clear trails, pull non-native plants, or work in the native plant garden. Bring gloves, a lunch, and lots of energy. Drinks and tools are provided. Call 707/938-4554 to register.

Wondering and Wandering with Wildflowers. April 9, 9:30 AM - 2:00 PM. \$45 fee. A special talk and walk with our ACR Education Director and Biologist, Rebecca Anderson-Jones. Rebecca will discuss the art of wildflower identification, help you get started on the path to accurate field identification, and review key characteristics of a few common California plant families. Best of all, you'll hike the preserve with her, enjoying Bouverie's beautiful wildflower display. Call 415/868-9244 to register by March 20th.

Docent Training Program 2005-2006. The next training session for this most popular docent program begins August 31st. Classes meet once a week on Wednesdays for 23 weeks. For more information, please call 707/938-4554, or contact nancy@egret.org.



Great Egret

Photograph by Bob Cossins

GOBBLES, CHUCKLES, AND SQUAWKS -- THE SOUNDS OF SPRING AT AUDUBON CANYON RANCH

BY BETSY STAFFORD

Every year at this time, since anyone can remember, the raucous sounds of nesting Great Blue Herons, Great Egrets, and Snowy Egrets have filled the canyon that spills into Marin County's Bolinas Lagoon.

The Great Blues arrive in late January, searching out the lagoon's rich food and cruising the canyon for mates and nesting sites. These elegant birds — standing up to 4 feet tall and weighing about 5 pounds — court each other with graceful dances and stick presentations, then build or renew their nests with long branches from Coast Redwoods and Douglas Firs.

By the time most of the Great Blues have bonded, nested, and laid their 2-5 greenish blue eggs, the Great Egrets begin to arrive, speckling the tops of the canyon's 100-foot-tall trees with their snowy white feathers. By the end of April approximately 200 egrets (each standing 3 to 3½ feet tall and weighing a mere two pounds) have performed their own courtly dances and mated. Their eggs are laid and the male and female have begun to share equally the parental responsibilities of incubation, egg turning, and feeding of their voracious broods. In the past few years Snowy Egrets have joined the heronry at Audubon Canyon Ranch. The Snowy Egrets are smaller than the Great Egret, have shorter wading legs and brilliant yellow feet, and typically arrive later and lay their clutches of 2-6 eggs as late as April or May.

Once the chicks have hatched, the busy parents feed them fish, frogs, small rodents, insects, and snakes —any prey captured from the lagoon or neighboring hillsides. At first they regurgitate the food into the nest, but when the chicks have increased in size and strength, a raucous fight for food begins, with the ravenous chicks grasping and gulping the food straight out of the parent's bill. The sights and sounds of chicks feeding are marvelous to behold, an impressive lesson in survival of the fittest. In times when the parents bring plenty of food, all the chicks in the brood survive; but if food is limited, the younger chicks die. Adults usually raise two young successfully; sometimes three; rarely four.

Predation at the ranch's heronry also takes its toll on fledging success. When raccoons destroyed most of the chicks and eggs in the early 1980s, ACR wrapped wide metal bands around the trunks of the heronry's redwoods, thus preventing climbing predators from raiding the nests. When a Golden Eagle landed in the heronry in 1991, folks could only watch while all the adult birds abandoned their nests, leaving the eggs and chicks as free lunch for the world's most awesome avian predator. Luckily, the eagle hung around only a few

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WILDLIFE RESCUE IN SAN MATEO COUNTY

BY JUDY SPITLER

It's always surprising to me how many people are unaware of Peninsula Humane Society's Wildlife Department. It has been in existence since 1976 and is one of the most acclaimed and best-run wildlife rehabilitation centers in the area. It is the place to take the stunned Cooper's Hawk that ran into your window, the baby squirrel with the bloody nose that fell out of its high nest, or the fledgling California Towhee your cat brought in.

Last year the Wildlife Department received around 3,500 animals — approximately 75% of them birds — and achieved a 63% release rate. A release rate of 50% is considered respectable, especially when one considers what dire physical condition a wild animal must be in to allow it to be captured. The Department operates under three state and federal permits, which is the only way they can keep wild, native animals and migratory birds legally for more than 24 hours. They are also part of California's oil spill response network and the staff is trained in the safe handling and emergency stabilization of oiled birds.

There are many advantages for a wildlife rehab center to be connected with a Humane Society. Not the least is that the Animal Control Officers are often able to pick up injured birds and wildlife. Also, since the Wildlife Department receives no county funds and must rely solely on donations for its survival, the fundraising portions of Peninsula Humane Society can assist with that.

Most of the birds that we see are the common suburban/feeder birds that people are more likely to discover sick or injured. But even those are often a challenge to house and feed correctly. For example, baby California Towhees do better with a quieter, enclosed habitat, which can be a challenge at the height of "baby season." Even once they recognize the food source we're offering them, they must be allowed time to do their little "towhee dance" before they'll gape and accept the food.

Even if the majority of the birds seen are our beloved backyard birds, there are always a few unusual ones each year. There are storm-petrels and Northern Fulmars nearly every year, Laysan Albatross two years running, a Broad-winged Hawk, Peregrine Falcons, Wood Duck babies, rails, and I remember one European Goldfinch — obviously an escaped cage bird — but it got my heart beating fast.

Winter is usually the slow season for wildlife rehab centers, but there's always something interesting happening. Yesterday afternoon there was a White-throated Sparrow recuperating from a head injury, Red-tailed and Red-shouldered Hawks in the large flight aviary gaining strength, another Red-tailed Hawk that needed to be

weighed, a Western Gull that needed to be tube fed, and a Sharp-shinned Hawk in an enclosed flight cage. A subdued, non-flying American Kestrel was admitted; it had no obvious injuries but was dehydrated. Its blood work was acceptable, so it received SQ fluids and went into a quiet enclosure with food and water.

April and May are the start of "baby season," an intense four months when there's never enough help or time to do almost anything except deal with the influx of injured or orphaned babies. Already the first baby bird has arrived, an Anna's Hummingbird that has progressed to the point of eating on its own. The hummingbird babies look fragile but tend to be as tough and pugnacious as their parents. If anyone is interested in volunteering for a more "up close" bird encounter (either full time or just in baby season), please call the volunteer department at Peninsula Humane Society and SPCA.

HOW TO AVOID MIS-IDENTIFYING BIRDS

BY JIM FRAZIER & CAROL MASTERSON

Identifying birds is tough. It's tough for experienced birders and it's even tougher for new birders. Birds have a variety of different plumages including: winter, summer, juvenile, first spring, male, female, eclipse, and combinations thereof. Plus they molt. So don't feel bad if you can't identify every bird you see. On the other hand, learning these different plumage patterns and the other clues that help identify birds is what makes this hobby fun.

In this article, I'd like to give you, the new birder, 11 tips that will help you more accurately determine what that little flying critter in your back yard is.

1. Carefully study the bird. Start at the tip of the bill and work your way back, memorizing the sizes, shapes, and colors as well as the plumage of the bird. Also note the vocalizations, food source, behavior and the habitat. If you can make written notes or draw pictures, that's even better, but most people don't carry sufficient office supplies into the field. Memorize what you can.

2. Avoid looking in the field guide for as long as possible. Try not to flip through the book until you're pretty sure you've "gotten" the bird. If you see a rare bird, you'll want to convince others of your find. You can only do that by recounting to them the field-marks of the bird. Saying, "it looks just like the picture in the field-guide," won't help. You must tell them WHY it looks like the picture in the field guide.

3. Before you open up the field guide, recapitulate the features of the bird in your mind. One of the problems that can occur is having your mental image of the bird corrupted by what you see in the field guide. So try to prevent this from happening by "freezing" it in your brain first. Again, it's best if you can make your notes first, before you look in the field-guide.

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(Gobble, Chuckles, and Squawks, continued from page 5)

days, probably becoming bored with the meager portions of food available at a rookery. When a pair of Common Ravens began to prey heavily on Great Egret chicks in 1998, Audubon Canyon Ranch began a study of local raven populations. The study is important and ongoing — for more information, please visit ACR's website www.egret.org, or direct inquiries to ACR's Research and Resource Management program at Cypress Grove Preserve, phone (415) 663-8203.

What makes the rookery at Audubon Canyon Ranch so special is the opportunity to have a bird's-eye view of the life cycle of these magnificent herons. The thrill of seeing firsthand the splendid courtship display of an egret's nuptial plumes or the miraculous first flight of an eight-week-old Great Blue is unmatched.

The public is welcome to visit the ranch on weekends this year, from March 19 through July 17. Special visits for Audubon

chapter members can be arranged for weekday afternoons (except Mondays) by calling (415) 868-9244. Binoculars and telescopes are available for public use at several spots along the Preserve's 10 miles of trails and at the viewing stand overlooking the heronry.

The **best way** to have a closer, more intimate look at this remarkable colony of herons is to spend a day volunteering as an Audubon Chapter Weekend Host. In return for time spent welcoming and registering visitors to the Bolinas Lagoon Preserve, Weekend Hosts enjoy a day of witnessing the many everyday miracles of this successful heronry. All hosts will receive an invitation to ACR's popular Volunteer Appreciation Picnic in the fall. Please call Carol Masterson at (650) 347-1769 to sign up.

Betsy Stafford is a docent at the Audubon Canyon Ranch Bolinas Preserve and a member of ACR's Advisory Board. You may contact her at (415) 332-2024.



Photograph by Bob Cossins

Great Blue Heron

(Mis-identifying Birds, continued from page 6)

4. When you DO finally look in the field guide, don't commit to the first bird you find. Find at least one other bird that looks like your bird. Now ask yourself why it's not that bird instead of the one you had decided on. Sometimes, if they are similar birds, the field guide will give you some hints on the differences. This is VERY important. Always go through the exercise of eliminating all of the other possible birds. Because other birders will ask why you decided it was Purple Finch instead of a House Finch.

5. A common mistake for brand-new birders is that they flip through the field-guide and settle on the first bird they find that looks like their bird. I call this the "first-page" syndrome. I once had someone report a Yellow-

Crowned Night Heron. This bird is only found in Florida and would be a spectacular find in northern California. I checked the field guide and it appeared on the page just before the picture of the much more common Black-crowned Night Heron, a very similar bird.

6. Read the text in the field-guide, don't just look at the pictures. Does your bird match both the text and the picture?

7. Be wary of basing your identification on plumage alone. Plumage is probably the most variable feature of a bird and if you're not paying attention to other things, like the shape and color of the bill, behavior, vocalizations, leg color, and eye rings, you may be making a mistake. I once had a

(Continued on page 8)

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(Mis-identifying Birds, continued from page 7)

call from a woman who had five American Bitterns roosting in a tree. If she had read the text, and looked for another similar bird, she would have discovered that they were actually immature Black-crowned Night Herons.

8. Does the range of the bird in the field guide match where you're seeing the bird? Is it the right season for the bird? Rare birds show up outside of their range all of the time. However, the odds for the out-of-range bird are much lower than for local birds. Make sure you can legitimately eliminate the more likely local birds. In the San Francisco area, you're much more likely to get a Townsend's Warbler than a Black-throated Green Warbler. So read the field guide carefully.

9. Pay particular attention to the female and immature plumages. These will often confuse new birders who don't realize that the female Purple Finch they think they have is really a female sparrow.

10. Use a local field guide. I had one fellow call in a whole bunch of Eastern birds. It had me amazed at the amount of vagrants showing up at the tiny park he was calling from until I realized that he was using an Eastern guide. Here in California, we have Western birds (most of the time).

11. Don't focus on size. This is a dangerous field-mark to rely on, particularly when the bird isn't near any other birds for comparison. Western Scrub Jay can be mistaken for a Northern Mockingbird and Red-tailed Hawks can be mistaken for eagles.

Now you have 11 ways to better identify the birds you see. And if you do see a Black-throated Green Warbler, call me! (Jim Frazier: www.speakingofbirds.com)

Clapper Rail



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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.