

# SEQUOIA NEEDLES

Bulletin of the Sequoia Audubon Society, San Mateo County  
Founded 1949

Volume 57, No. 2  
November-January 2006-2007

## PRESIDENT'S LETTER

SAS UPDATE FOR 2006

BY CAROL MASTERSON

Sequoia Audubon volunteers have been busy in 2006 so I want to send a heartfelt **THANK YOU** to **ALL** our hardworking volunteers. Our volunteers are the heart and soul of Sequoia.

Sequoia continues a long relationship with Pescadero State Beach. SAS developed Sequoia Audubon Trail at the Marsh in the early 1960s and nurtured a docent program in the 1970s. We have now renewed our association with the State Parks and currently support Pescadero with trail-clearing equipment and volunteers to assist Ranger Dave Augustine. Thanks to all the people who came out to help Ranger Dave and Norma Vite clear the trail. Al DeMartini is currently working on an updated bird checklist for this important bird area on the coastside.

Thanks to Howard Rathlesberger, the long-time head of our Bluebird Box Monitoring program, and to all the San Mateo County box monitors. This last year we had over 400 boxes, over 50 box monitors, and a record 650 birds fledged.

Thanks to all who are involved in our Audubon Canyon Ranch activities: Sue Cossins, Host Coordinator, Francis Toldi and Leslie Flint, ACR Representatives, and all the volunteer hosts.

With Half Moon Bay State Beach staff, SAS held a Coastal Birding Day with lectures about Snowy Plovers, Pescadero Marsh, coastside native plants and a live raptor demonstration.

We helped the park with International Migratory Bird Days and had 175 visitors to the educational displays, children's activities, and bird walks. Thanks to Rita Jennings who organized the event. We also continue to help Ranger Nelle Lyons and park staff with the Snowy Plover Watch program at the State Beach. Thank you to all the Snowy Plover Watch folks.

Lee Franks heads our Edgewood Park Bird Monitoring Program and continues to lead monthly walks at Edgewood Park. Many thanks to him and to all the Edgewood bird monitors. We held an Endangered Species Day in conjunction with Friends of Edgewood Park. Theresa O'Brian, Sue Cossins, Lee Franks, Martha O'Neal, and Norma Vite helped with the event, which drew 75 people to scientific lectures about threatened and endangered species in San Mateo County. Sequoia Audubon also received a proclamation from the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors making February 26<sup>th</sup> Endangered and Threatened Species Day and declaring that Sequoia Audubon helped to educate all the citizens of San Mateo County about birds and birding.

Our hardworking volunteers make possible all of our ongoing programs. Thank you to our Newsletter Editor, Justine Carson; Peter Grace, our hardworking Treasurer, and members of our Board of Directors, Gary Deghi and Sue Cossins. We are glad to welcome new members Robbie Fischer and Kathy Peila to our Board. Thanks to our hardworking Conservation Committee: Sue Cossins, Robin Smith, Leslie Flint, Bob Wilkinson, Gary Deghi, and others. Cynthia McLaughlin writes our Arm Chair Activist alerts. Elayne Haller has mastered our Membership database. Thanks to Peter Metropolis (County records) and Francis Toldi, we now have a much needed update of our San Mateo County Checklist. Jeanne Scharetg, Iona Luke, and Anne Marie Holmes did a great job with our birdseed sales, helped by Fred McLihany, Judy Spittler, Bruce Pine, and Robin Smith.

(Continued on page 7)

## Monthly Meetings

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

### November

Thursday, 9<sup>th</sup>, 7:00PM

**Program:** The Southern Ocean

### December

Thursday, 14<sup>th</sup>, 6:00PM

**Program:** Everything About Gulls

### January

Thursday, 11<sup>th</sup>, 7:00PM

**Program:** Birding Class

### February

Thursday, 8<sup>th</sup>, 7:00PM

**Program:** Birding Class

## Upcoming Field Trips

(See trip details beginning on page 3)

### November

**Sunday 12<sup>th</sup>** Pescadero Marsh  
Work Day

**Sunday 12<sup>th</sup>** San Francisco  
Aquatic Park\*

**Saturday 18<sup>th</sup>** Pescadero Marsh\*

**Sunday 19<sup>th</sup>** Edgewood Park

### December

**Saturday & Sunday, 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup>**

Sacramento Wildlife Refuges

**Saturday, 16<sup>th</sup>** Gull Class Field Trip

**Saturday, 16<sup>th</sup>** Crystal Springs

Christmas Bird Count

**Saturday, Dec 3<sup>rd</sup>** Año Nuevo

Christmas Bird Count

### January

**Saturday, 7<sup>th</sup>** Basic Birding\*

**Saturday, 13<sup>th</sup>** Birding Class Field  
Trip

(Continued on page 3)

# Sequoia Audubon Society

## OFFICERS

### President

Carol Masterson 650-347-1769

### Vice-President

Open

### Second Vice-President

Open

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Norma Vite 650-560-9740

### Treasurer

Peter Grace 415-467-0343

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\*08\* Sue Cossins

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\*Term ending

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### Christmas Count

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Robin Smith 650-325-3306

### Education

Kathy Peila 650-508-3491

### Field Trips

Carol Masterson 650-347-1769

### Hospitality

Eileen Kay 650-592-4626

### Membership

Open

### Needles Editor

Justine Carson 650-560-9776

### Programs

Sue Cossins, Paula Miller

PO Box 620292

Woodside, CA 94062-0292

650-529-1454

office@sequoia-audubon.org

www.sequoia-audubon.org

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 SUE COSSINS & PAULA MILLER

### The Southern Ocean, Including South Georgia, the South Orkneys, and the Antarctic Peninsula

By Doug Cheeseman

Thursday, November 9, 7:00 PM

This program will highlight the birds, animals, and wild places of the Southern Ocean.

Doug Cheeseman and family, of Cheese-

### 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.

mans' Ecology Safaris, have led expeditions to Antarctica and the Southern Ocean for over 20 years. Through his images and discussion of Antarctic biology he will take you on a journey into one of the world's richest and most extreme environments. Doug retired from 35 years of teaching zoology and ecology at De Anza College to photograph and lead wildlife safaris around the world full time. His nature photographs have been widely published in magazines including *National Audubon* and *National Geographic*.

### Birding Class: Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Gulls!

By Alvaro Jaramillo

Thursday, December 14, 7:00 PM

Al Jaramillo will conduct a class about the biology, natural history and identification of local gulls. It will center around gull migration, habitat use, and interesting gull behavior. Al will describe the species of gulls found in San Mateo County, and address some of the key issues in identifying them, ranging from learning how to tell their ages to pitfalls in identification, such as hybridization.

Alvaro (Al) Jaramillo is a staff guide for Field Guides, and a biologist at the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory. He was born in Chile but began birding in Toronto, where he lived as a youth. He earned a Masters degree studying co-evolution in Argentine cowbirds. Research forays and back-packing trips introduced Alvaro to the riches of the Neotropics, where he has

traveled extensively. He recently published *Birds of Chile*, an authoritative yet portable field guide to Chile's birds. He has also contributed both popular and scientific articles to various magazines and journals, and wrote the icterid chapter in *The Sibley Guide to Bird Life and Behavior*. Gulls are one of Al's passions; some say he may be obsessed with them.

**The program will be preceded by a potluck beginning at 6:00 PM.**

### Field trip and Christmas Count:

**Saturday, Dec. 16** 8 AM till 3 PM

field trip and Xmas Count. View and count the large gull flock at Venice Beach, Half Moon Bay. Please meet at the parking lot for Venice Beach, accessed at the end of Venice Blvd, north of Hwy. 92 and just south of Frenchman's Creek Rd. **This is a pay parking lot.** Alternatively, birders could park at the end of Wave Ave., and walk several hundred yards to the north to access the parking area. There is a \$5 fee to cover the instructor's time and a \$5 Xmas Count fee. Contact: Paula Miller 650-773-5656

### Birding Class: Shorebirds of San Francisco Bay and Peninsula: Biology and Conservation

By Paul Donahue

Thursday, January 11, 7:00-9:00 PM

Paul Donahue is a bird painter, birder, naturalist, and environmental activist who divides his time among Maine, California, and South America. Despite many years spent studying birds in the jungles of the New World tropics, shorebirds remain his favorite birds. He began working with shorebirds in the 1970s at Manomet Bird Observatory, taking censuses and banding shorebirds along the Massachusetts coast. From 1997 through 2003 he worked with the Canadian Wildlife Service studying Semipalmated Sandpiper migration in New Brunswick's upper Bay of Fundy. While here in California he focuses his field time observing and photographing the shorebirds of San Francisco Bay and elsewhere along the California coast.

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## FIELD TRIPS

BY CAROL MASTERSON

### Filoli Estate Bird Walk

Saturday, October 28, 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. 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 Cañada 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 \$12.00 entrance fee. Heavy rain cancels. Call Sue James (650) 348-0315 to reserve your spot.

**Leaders:** Sue James and Donna Petersen

### Edgewood Park Walk

Sunday, October 29, 8:00 – 11:00 AM

Fall Migration should be in full swing. Visiting migrants and resident birds can be seen at this unique habitat. With grassland, oak woodland, and chaparral we should see lots of birds.

**Directions:** The Edgewood Park entrance is east of Hwy 280 on Edgewood Road in Redwood City. Meet at 8:00 AM sharp in the parking lot adjacent to the Day Camp area. Heavy rain cancels.

**NOTE:** Daylight Savings Time ends today; be sure to set your clocks back one hour.

**Leader:** Lee Franks (650) 592-7733

### Pescadero Marsh Work Day

Sunday, November 12, 10:00 AM – 12:00 noon

Help to keep the Sequoia Trail at Pescadero Marsh clear. We meet once a month to work for two hours and enjoy some birding. Bring gloves and

whatever garden tools you like to work with. Have some fun, meet some new people, and help Pescadero Marsh. This month we will be joined by Hands on Bay Area Volunteers, part of AmeriCorps Volunteers.

**Directions:** Meet at the parking lot, south of the bridge on Hwy 1. Or join us on the trail if you arrive after 10:00 AM. For information call Norma Vite (650) 560-9740.

### Environmental Restoration Activity

### San Francisco Aquatic Park

Sunday, November 12, 9:30 AM

Join National Park Service Ranger Carol Kiser on this beginners' bird walk to see shore, migratory, cityfied, and resident birds as we walk along Hyde Street Pier and Aquatic Park. Bring binoculars, bird books, and dress in layers. We will meet at the Hyde Street Pier entrance at Hyde and Jefferson Streets and go for about 1½-2 hours. There is no charge and the walk is wheelchair accessible.

**Directions:** Bus numbers 10, 30, 47, 49, the F trolley, and the cable car stop nearby. Call (415) 673-MUNI for details. As meter parking lasts only for one hour, parking is best at garages nearby for about \$2.50 per ½ hour at the Anchorage Shopping Center or at Ghirardelli Square.

**Leader:** Ranger Carol Kiser (415) 561-7100

### Beginner/Family Trip – Wheelchair Accessible

### Pescadero Marsh with Gary Deghi

Saturday, November 18, 9:00 AM

Pescadero Marsh is one of the premier birding spots in the county. 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. Walk along the newly cleared Sequoia Audubon Trail and see the work our volunteers have done on trail restoration. The weather may be cool or warm depending upon fog and wind conditions, so be prepared accordingly. Boots are recommended for wet conditions. Walking is relatively easy on level grades.

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## Upcoming Field Trips

**Saturday & Sunday, 20<sup>th</sup> & 21<sup>st</sup>**

Los Banos and Panoche Valley

**Sunday, 28<sup>th</sup>** Edgewood Park

### February

**Saturday, 3<sup>rd</sup>** Cosumnes River Preserve

**Saturday, 10<sup>th</sup>** Birding Class Field Trip

**Sunday, 25<sup>th</sup>** 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, sun block, and hat; wear sturdy walking shoes or boots, 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**.

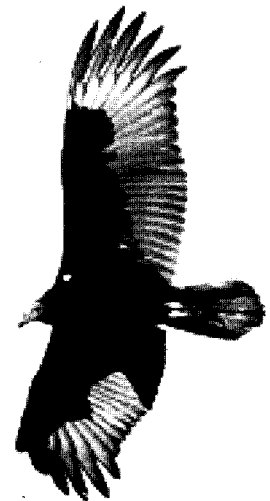


Photo by A. Wilson

*(Field Trips, continued from page 3)*

**Directions:** Hwy 1 south to Pescadero Marsh. Meet at 9:00 AM in the parking lot just south of the bridge.

**Leader:** Gary Deghi (650) 726-1340

**Beginner/Family Trip**

### **Edgewood Park Walk with Lee Franks**

Sunday, November 19, 8:00 AM – 11:00 AM

Birding should be great at Edgewood Park. Look for resident and fall migratory species. Ask leader Lee Franks about the Sequoia Audubon Bird Conservation Program at Edgewood Park and how you can get involved. Starting at 8 AM increases the chance of seeing all the interesting late fall birds at Edgewood

**Directions:** Meet the leader in the parking lot adjacent to the Day Camp area. The Edgewood Park entrance is east of Hwy 280 on Edgewood Road in Redwood City

**Leader:** Lee Franks (650) 592 – 7733

### **Sacramento Wildlife Refuges Weekend Trip**

Saturday & Sunday, December 2 & 3

The Central Valley is considered to be the single most important wintering site for waterfowl on the Pacific Flyway. Come join us for a weekend of great birding at the Sacramento Refuge Complex. This area has freshwater marshes, riparian woodlands, and valley grasslands. Some species we may see include White-faced Ibis, lots of ducks, White-fronted, Snow and Ross's Geese, hawks, sparrows, woodpeckers, and more. We will travel in a car caravan since walkers tend to disturb the wildlife in some areas. Motel reservations are advised. Willows and Williams have a good selection of motels in all price ranges. Camping is available at the Colusa-Sacramento River State Recreation Area in Colusa. Our precise itinerary will depend on where the birds are. Trip reservations are requested so we will know how many to expect. Bring your FRS radios if you have them.

**Directions:** Take Hwy 80 northeast towards Sacramento. Go north on Hwy 505 to meet Hwy 5 north towards Williams and Willows. Take the Princeton Road/68 exit. Turn right and go a short distance. Turn left before you reach the railroad tracks, and look for the refuge entrance on the right. We will meet at the parking lot inside the entrance to the Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge at 9:00 AM sharp.

**Leader:** Joe Macho (650) 692-8138

### **Gull Class Field Trip and Christmas Count**

Saturday, December 16, 8:00 AM—3:00 PM

Please see description in Programs section

## **SEQUOIA AUDUBON CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS**

### **Crystal Springs Christmas Bird Count**

Saturday, December 16

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.

### **Año Nuevo Christmas Bird Count**

Saturday, December 30

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!** To sign up call: Leslie Flint (650) 573-6279, Robin Smith (650) 325-3306, or Gary Deghi (650) 726-1340, or email [office@sequoia-audubon.org](mailto:office@sequoia-audubon.org)

**Christmas Count Compiler:** Al DeMartini

## **2007 FIELD TRIPS**

### **Birding Class Field Trip**

Saturday, January 13

Please see description in Programs section.

Time and place to be determined.

Contact: Paula Miller 650-773-5656

### **Pescadero Marsh: Winter Birds and How to eBird**

Sunday January 14, 9:00 AM

This walk at Pescadero Marsh will serve two purposes -- searching for a full list of wintering birds, and learning how to record your bird sightings on Cornell University's free international eBird program. Pescadero Marsh is one of the finest birding spots in San Mateo County and we will examine a variety of habitats, including ocean, marsh, and riparian. Specialty birds could include Eurasian Wigeon, Virginia Rail, Peregrine Falcon, and Merlin in addition to expected species of shorebirds, ducks, and sparrows.

Cornell's eBird project is a new way for citizen scientists to contribute to the study of birds and their behaviors. How to enter data, how to manage your own records on eBird, and how to gain information about birds locally and globally using the entire database, will be discussed. We will record the species and numbers from our combined hike. We hope to have Brian Sullivan, eBird Project Leader and Photographic Editor of *North American Birds*, with us on this walk. Stay tuned for details! For those who would like to stay for the afternoon, we can break into small groups to practice eBird counting. For more information on eBird, visit <http://www.ebird.org/content/index.html>

Bring your binoculars, scope if you have one, and boots for possible muddy conditions. The combined hike will last until noon; if you wish to stay for afternoon hikes beginning at 1:00 PM, bring along a lunch.

**Directions:** Take Hwy 1 south out of Half Moon Bay. Meet at the parking lot just south of the bridge over Pescadero Creek. If you reach the intersection of Pescadero Road and Hwy 1 you have gone too far.

**Leader:** Jennifer Rycenga (650) 440-0063 or (650) 712-0194 (don't call after 9:00 pm) or [gyrrlfalcon@earthlink.net](mailto:gyrrlfalcon@earthlink.net)

### **Los Banos Area Refuges and Panoche Valley**

Saturday and Sunday, January 20 & 21, 9:00 AM - dark

Winter is a really great time of year to visit the Central Valley. Waterfowl are abundant. We will be on the lookout for White-faced Ibis, Sandhill Cranes, and a large variety of waterfowl, geese, shorebirds, ducks, raptors, and owls.

*(Continued on page 5)*

(Field Trips, continued from page 4)

Bring fluids, binoculars, scopes if you have them, cameras, and lots of birding energy! Come for one day or both days. Day 1 will be at the Los Banos Area Refuges; Day 2 will be in Panoche Valley area. If you attend for both days you can stay overnight in a hotel in Los Banos. Check with AAA or on the web for hotels.

**Directions:** Meet each morning at the McDonald's parking lot in Santa Nella at 9:00 AM. You should allow two hours to get there from the Bay Area. On Highway 101, go about 4 miles south of Gilroy. Take Hwy 152 east over Pacheco Pass and go past the San Luis Reservoir and O'Neill Forebay. Go left (north) on Hwy 33 toward Gustine and Santa Nella.

McDonald's is at the intersection of Hwy 33 and Henry Miller Rd. in Santa Nella. Bring your FRS radios if you have them. Trip reservations are requested so we will know how many to expect.

**Leader:** Joe Macho (650) 692-8138 or cell phone (650) 291-6196

### **Edgewood Park Walk with Lee Franks**

Sunday, January 28, 8:00 AM – 11:00 AM

Winter birding will be in full swing for this walk. Some of the birds we will be on the look-out for are kites, hawks, sparrows, warblers and thrushes, and kinglets. Ask leader Lee Franks about the Sequoia Audubon Bird Conservation Program at Edgewood Park and how you can get involved. Starting at 8 AM increases the chance of seeing all the interesting winter birds at Edgewood. Heavy rain cancels.

**Directions:** Meet the leader in the parking lot adjacent to the Day Camp area. The Edgewood Park entrance is east of Hwy 280 on Edgewood Road in Redwood City.

**Leader:** Lee Franks (650) 592-7733

### **Cosumnes River Preserve – South of Sacramento**

Saturday, February 3, 7:00 AM – 7:00 PM

We will meet in Foster City at the Bridge Pointe Shopping Center parking lot by Home Depot at 7:00 AM. We will car pool or caravan to Lodi Lake Park and Cosumnes River Preserve and finish at Woodbridge Rd, where we should see thousands of Sandhill Cranes, Tundra Swans, and Ross, Snow, and Greater White-Fronted Geese fly in to land for the night in nearby fields. We should be back in the Bay Area by 7:00 PM. Please bring your FRS radios if you have them and pack a lunch and fluids. Trip reservations are requested so we will know how many to expect.

**Leader:** Joe Macho (650) 692-8138

### **Birding Class Field Trip**

Saturday, January 10

Please see description in Programs section.

Time and place to be determined.

**Contact:** Paula Miller

### **Edgewood Park Walk with Lee Franks**

Sunday, February 25, 8:00AM – 11:00 AM

Winter birding at Edgewood Park is great. Come and visit this unique habitat with oak woodland, grasslands, and chaparral.

We will look for kites, hawks, sparrows, warblers and thrushes, kinglets and more. Ask leader Lee Franks about the Sequoia Audubon Bird Conservation Program at Edgewood Park and how you can get involved. Heavy rain cancels.

**Directions:** Meet the leader in the parking lot adjacent to the Day Camp area. The Edgewood Park entrance is east of Hwy 280 on Edgewood Road in Redwood City.

**Leader:** Lee Franks (650) 592-7733



Photo by  
Robert Bernstein

## **INTRODUCTION TO THE TURKEY VULTURE**

BY CAROL MASTERSON

Vultures are large, carrion-eating birds. Until recently, biologists based the classification of vultures on empirical characteristics, such as their diet. For years it was believed that all vultures were raptors, members of the order Falconiformes. In 1994, it was discovered that the vultures inhabiting the American continents shared a common ancestor with storks and ibises. Now, American vultures, or New World vultures, are recognized as Ciconiiformes, in the family Cathartidae. European, African, and Asian vultures are recognized as Old World vultures (family Accipitridae, subfamily Aegypiinae). There are 15 species of Old World Vultures and 7 species of New World Vultures.

As an adaptation for their messy diet, the head and neck of vultures are mostly bare except for a thin covering of down. There is an important purpose to the vultures' bald head. When the vulture is eating carrion, it must stick its head inside the carcass to reach the meat. A feathery head would capture unwanted pieces of the vultures' meal, along with all the bacteria it hosts. After meal time vultures perch in the heat of the sun to "bake" off any remaining bits of meat.

The New World Vultures are distributed in North, Central, and South America. In North America they include the Turkey Vulture, *Cathartes aura*, (or TV) which is distinguished by its red

(Continued on page 6)

## SIERRA CLEAR CUTTING ALERT!

Did you know that rampant clear cutting is still destroying the forests of the Sierra Nevada? Did you know that most of this wood is being consumed by the U.S. homebuilding industry? Come to a meeting on December 2<sup>nd</sup>, from 10:30 to 4:45 at the Yosemite Room of the Sierra Club Office, (85 Second Street, San Francisco) sponsored by ForestEthics to learn more about this issue and find out how you can help! Lunch will be provided.

Over the past 15 years, literally tens of thousands of acres of Sierra forests have been irreparably destroyed through clear cutting by logging giant Sierra Pacific Industries (SPI). Clear cutting has a number of impacts on the Sierra: bird species such as Spotted Owl and Willow Flycatcher are more threatened; biodiversity is decreased as huge swaths of land are cleared and replaced with tree plantations; fire risks are even increased as tree canopy cover is removed, which encourages the growth of flammable brush.

The homebuilding industry consumes the vast majority of this wood and to stop this destruction, they need to start demanding better wood from SPI and other suppliers. Come learn how you can help to stop the rampant clear cutting in the Sierra! To attend, RSVP by contacting 415-863-4563 x. 328 or e-mailing [sierra@forestethics.org](mailto:sierra@forestethics.org), and to learn more visit [www.savethesierra.org](http://www.savethesierra.org).

## 2007 Snowy Plover Count

Help count the Snowy Plovers along the San Mateo County coastline. This one-day "Window Survey" is conducted twice each year, in early January and in May, up and down the coast. Small teams walk assigned beaches along the coast looking for Snowy Plovers. The 2007 winter survey will be held during the week of January 7. The survey is usually scheduled for Monday, Tuesday, or Wednesday of the survey week, weather permitting. If you are interested in helping with the survey, please sign up in advance so that you can be assigned to a team and be notified of the exact date and time of the survey. If you have questions or if you would like to sign up, contact Ranger Nelle Lyons at the Half Moon Bay State Beach office at (650) 726-8804. If you reach voicemail, press 5 followed by # to leave a message.



Photo by Paul LaTorrette

(Turkey Vultures, continued from page 5)

head. They are the most common vulture in California, preferring open areas, such as deserts, the coast, and even open space near towns. The Black Vulture, *Coragyps atratus*, has a black head, and is a more southern and eastern species. The California Condor, *Gymnogyps californianus*, is one of the world's largest flying birds and a species once on the brink of extinction.

Turkey Vultures fly with their wings in a dihedral or V shape. In flight the undersides of the flight feathers appear silver or white. TVs are most graceful in flight and can soar for hours at high altitudes, riding thermals of warm air, without ever flapping their wings. Contrary to popular belief, circling vultures do not necessarily indicate the presence of a dead animal. Circling vultures may be gaining altitude for long flights, searching for food, or just playing. Vultures circling in the air are called a "kettle."

Vultures live in large communal roosts. A group of vultures is called a "venue." They are gentle and non-aggressive and have few natural predators. The TV's primary form of defense is vomiting. If cornered or threatened, the vulture will cough up a lump of foul-smelling, semi-digested food that will deter most creatures. The TV's digestive system has a unique ability to kill viruses and bacteria. Their droppings and dry pellets (bolus) are clean and do not carry disease, per USDA tests.

Nesting is a secretive endeavor for the Turkey Vulture; they do not actually build nests, but lay eggs on the ground, often on cliff ledges, on tree limbs, in caves, or deserted sheds. Male and female are identical in appearance. They raise only one brood a year, laying 1-3 (but usually 2) blotchy-looking eggs. Both parents share the responsibilities of incubating and caring for the brood. The eggs incubate for 38-41 days with altricial young. The young fledge 70-80 days after hatching. Immature fledglings have darker heads and can be confused with the Black Vulture from a distance. TVs are about 25-32 inches long with a wing span of 6 feet. An adult weighs about 3½ to 5 pounds.

Turkey Vultures have a keen sense of smell, sight (but poor vision in the dark), and hearing. They find food by sight and smell. American Vultures can smell, but African Vultures cannot. Extremely un-aggressive and non-confrontational, TVs do not feed on live prey, an occasional habit of its cousin the Black Vulture. Vultures

(Continued on page 7)

### Sequoia eNews

Send us your email address to receive the *Sequoia Audubon eNews* each month. Get updates about field trips, conservation news and information you need to know. Send your address to [office@sequoia-audubon.org](mailto:office@sequoia-audubon.org)

(Programs, continued from page 2)

**Accompanying field trip:** Saturday, January 13

The birding class will have a follow-up field study session to a San Francisco bayside location (time and place to be determined). (\$5.00 per person)

Contact: Paula Miller 650-773-5656

**Birding Class: Shorebirds of San Francisco Bay and Peninsula: Biology and Conservation**

**By Paul Donahue**

**Thursday, February 8, 2007, 7:00-9:00pm**

See description for January.

**Accompanying field trip:** Saturday, February 10, 2007

The birding class will have a follow-up field study session to a San Mateo County ocean side location to look for rocky coast species. (\$5.00 per person)

Contact: Paula Miller 650-773-5656

(Turkey Vultures, continued from page 6)

are attracted to the presence of a carcass by the smell of mercaptan, a gas produced by the beginnings of decay. However they do not feed strictly on carrion, as more than 50% of the vultures diet is vegetative matter. They dine on grass, leaves, shoreline vegetation, pumpkins, and bits of crops. A study done in Livermore showed that plant material was the single most common ingredient of the TV diet.

Turkey Vultures do not have a syrinx. Therefore they do not make calls other than guttural grunts and hisses. Unlike raptors, the TVs' feet are quite weak because their main function is running along the ground rather than grasping live prey.

Because vultures cannot sweat, the turkey vulture will direct urine onto its legs to help cool itself by evaporation. In addition the urine contains strong acids which can kill any bacteria that may remain on the birds' legs after feeding on carrion.

In history the vulture played an important role in ancient Egyptian culture. One of the gods, depicted as a vulture, was Mut or Nekhbet, the female counterpart of the king of the gods. Her name means mother and she was believed to have brought forth all that exists. In Native American culture the vulture was regarded as a very important totem animal, representing a cleansing spirit and strength to accept difficulty. The Cherokees call the Turkey Vulture the "Peace Eagle" because it is mighty but does not kill to survive.

**References:**

The Turkey Vulture Society

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(Sequoia Audubon 2006 Update, continued from page 1)

Thanks to Bob Cossins and Sonny Mencher who help supply us with photos for our website and our silent auction. Norma Vite heads our Pescadero Marsh Trail maintenance program and is our Secretary. Thanks to Georgia Stigall for help with our fundraising letter. We are lucky to have Eileen Kay and Leonie Batkin to greet newcomers at our monthly meetings. Thanks to Barbara Wilson for help with programs; Paula Miller and Sue Cossins for locating speakers for our monthly meetings, and to Anne Carpenter, Webmaster. We welcome our new bookkeeper Christine Krenzel. Carol Farina is hard at work as our Corresponding Secretary. Our Christmas Count compiler is still Al DeMartini with help from Robin Smith, Gary Deghi, and Leslie Flint. Thanks to all our great Field Trip Leaders: Joe Macho, Martha O'Neal, Ranger Carol Kiser, Rita Jennings, Leslie Flint, Eddie Bartley, Al DeMartini, Robin Smith, Jean Ouellete, Lee Franks, Ranger Dave Augustine, Linda Votteri, Ranger Nelle Lyons, Sue Cossins, Susan Peterson, Francis Toldi, Sue James, Donna Peterson, Arthur Feinstein, Gary Deghi, Debra Shearwater, Judy Spitler, Inge Svoboda, Marilyn Nasatir, Allen Fish, and Allan Ridley.

And finally, thanks to all the people who support our conservation efforts in San Mateo County -- all those who sign petitions, write their lawmakers, and go to city council meetings. Thanks to all the wonderful volunteers who help with the Christmas Bird Counts and a special thanks to the donors who have contributed generously to our chapter in 2006. Thanks to those I have not listed; it's only with your help and the volunteer time you give to Sequoia Audubon that we stay strong.

**GULLS, WATERFOWL, SHOREBIRD/MIGRATION WORKSHOPS**

The San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory presents birding workshops taught by Biologist Alvaro Jaramillo for the birder and naturalist. Workshops will be in January, February, and April 2007 at the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge in Alviso, CA.

Cost per workshop is \$150 and space is limited.

Register starting November 2006. For course information and registration, go to [www.sfbbo.org/birdingworkshops.htm](http://www.sfbbo.org/birdingworkshops.htm) or call 408 946-6548.



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**2006 Annual Christmas Bird Counts**



Sign up today by calling Leslie Flint, (650) 573-6279, or Gary Deghi, (650) 726-1340, or email to [office@sequoia-audubon.org](mailto:office@sequoia-audubon.org)

Come join the large group of counters for fun and great birding. The Christmas count is done every year to record as many individuals and different species in one day as possible. This year the counts are scheduled for:

**Crystal Springs Count – Saturday, December 16, 2006**

**Año Nuevo Count – Saturday, December 30, 2006**

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. We also need feeder-watchers to count birds at their home feeders for a period of time in December.

Counters with all levels of experience are welcome. For beginning birders, this is a great opportunity to gain experience working with the old pros.

When you sign up for the Christmas Count, please let us know your phone number, email address, experience, and whether you would prefer counting bayside or coastside. Be prepared to spend the day having fun and 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 (Crystal Springs, 12/16, San Mateo Garden Center and Año Nuevo, 12/30, Pescadero Community Church) 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.*