

SEQUOIA NEEDLES

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

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February-March 2007

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

THANK YOU TO OUR DONORS

BY CAROL MASTERSON

Thank you to all the wonderful donors. You have made possible the following education, conservation, and birding programs in San Mateo County for 2006.

- ☐ Donations to Sequoia go to educational programs in San Mateo County, which teach kids and seniors about birds, birding, and nature.
- ☐ Sequoia has monthly programs with speakers, which are free and help educate the public about nature, birds, and birding. We also had 60 field trips free to the public.
- ☐ Sequoia presented lectures by a number of authors: Richard Rhodes, author of a biography of John Audubon, and Maria Rudd, author of a book about Marbled Murrelets.
- ☐ We support the Bluebird program in San Mateo County by building Bluebird boxes and providing educational materials.
- ☐ Sequoia Audubon has two Christmas Bird Counts each year and an annual Backyard Bird Count in February. Information from these activities is used for scientific study.
- ☐ We support the Edgewood Park Bird Study Program lead by Lee Franks, monitoring bird populations at Edgewood Park.
- ☐ We help support the Snowy Plover Watch program at Half Moon Bay State Beach.
- ☐ Sequoia held a number of educa-

tional programs in 2006. We held an Endangered Species Day at Edgewood Park; we helped at International Migratory Bird Days and Coastal Birding Day at Half Moon Bay State Beach.

- ☐ We support various conservation efforts in San Mateo County, such as helping to save Bayfront Park in Menlo Park and Wavecrest in Half Moon Bay.
- ☐ We support other conservation organizations in San Mateo, the State and the Nation.

For a list of our 2006 donors, see page 7.

EDGEWOOD WOODPECKERS

BY LEE FRANKS

When we think of bird sounds, singing is the first thing that comes to mind. But many birds have found other ways of generating acoustical signals to serve functions usually accomplished by songs. Some bird sounds are produced with the birds' bills, feet, wings, or tails. The best known use of bills to produce auditory displays among North American birds is the **drumming** of several woodpecker species. They do this by striking their bills against a hollow or dried tree branch, or, to the annoyance of many homeowners, metal gutters, drainpipes or even trash cans.

Why do woodpeckers peck wood? They want to get to the insects hiding underneath the bark. Woodpeckers have extremely acute hearing and are capable of hearing bugs crawling around under bark. If they don't hear them, they surely can feel the vibrations the insects create as they move about. Powerful muscles and a tough bill are necessary to produce the tremendous force needed to break through the bark. But while the woodpecker is pounding

(Continued on page 5)

Monthly Meetings

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

February

Thursday, 8th, 7:00 PM

Program: Birding Class: Shorebirds of San Francisco Bay and Peninsula

March

Thursday, 8th, 7:00 PM

Program: Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about (Bird) Sex

Upcoming Field Trips

(See trip details on page 3)

January

Sunday, 28th Edgewood Park

February

Saturday, 3rd Cosumnes River Preserve

Wednesday, 7th Eastshore State Park*

Saturday, 10th Shorebirds of the SF Bay and Peninsula

Saturday, 17th Charleston Slough*

Sunday, 25th Edgewood Park

March

Sunday, 4th Snowy Plovers at Half Moon Bay

Sunday, 11th China Camp State Park

Sunday, 25th Edgewood Park

April

Mid-April weekend Eastern Mojave Desert

Sunday, 29th Mines Road

**Beginner/Family Trip*

Check the field trip descriptions for

(Continued on page 3)

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MEETING PROGRAMS

BY PAULA MILLER

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

By Paul Donahue
Thursday, February 8, 7:00 PM
Paul Donahue is a bird painter, birder, naturalist, and environmental activist who divides his time between 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, censusing 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 on observing and photographing the shorebirds of San Francisco Bay and elsewhere along the California coast.

Accompanying field trip: Saturday, February 10

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

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.

Contact: Paula Miller 650-773-5656

Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About (Bird) Sex, But Were Afraid to Ask

By Lisa Meyers

Thursday, March 8, 7:00 PM

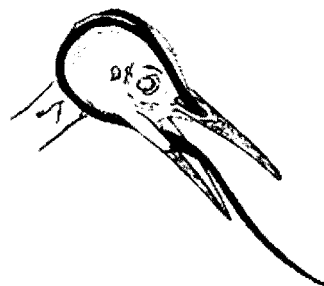
As birdwatchers we spend much of our time learning the different species and their field marks with the goal to go out and find our target birds in the field. But one bird topic we seldom discuss centers around the topic of sex. While most of us fully appreciate the many breeding plumages that help us identify a species, we often don't understand the other changes that

take place that allow birds to breed and continue their species. In this program we'll look at this topic, a topic that many birders are too shy to discuss. How do the different birds continue their species? Some males have many different mates, but did you know that some females do too? Some birds are considered "promiscuous" while others breed for life. Who helps with the child rearing and who leaves town? There are all kinds of fancy words to describe the details behind avian procreation and copulation and we'll cover quite a few, but we'll also have fun, too, as we incorporate a little humor into what could be a touchy subject!

Lisa Myers is an avid birdwatcher and owner of Let's Go Birding. Lisa teaches birding courses throughout the Bay Area and leads trips all over Central California with the goal to get more people into bird watching. Lisa also works part-time for Cheeseman's Ecology Safaris and is Vice President of the Board of Directors for the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory.

WOODPECKER TONGUES

Woodpecker tongues are barbed, sticky, and extremely long compared to the head size. Unlike the tongues of humans, which are primarily muscular, the tongues of birds are rigidly supported by a cartilage-and-bone skeleton called the hyoid apparatus. This set of bones and muscles controls tongue movement. All higher vertebrates have hyoids in one form or another; you can feel the "horns" of your own u-shaped hyoid bone by pinching the uppermost part of your throat between your thumb and forefinger. Our hyoid serves as an attachment site for certain muscles of our throat and tongue. In the woodpecker, the muscles are anchored near the nose or eye and the hyoid apparatus coils around the entire skull. The tongue in some species may extend as far as five inches.



<http://www.talkorigins.org/faqs/woodpecker/woodpecker.html>
<http://omega.med.yale.edu/~tj38/Woodpecker.htm>



FIELD TRIPS

BY CAROL MASTERSON

Edgewood Park Walk

Sunday, January 28, 8:00 – 11:00 AM

First Edgewood Walk for the year.

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. 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.

Leaders: Lee Franks & Marilyn Travis. (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 Bridgepointe Shopping Center in the 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 Road, where we should see thousands of Sandhill Cranes, Tundra Swans, and Ross. Snow, and Greater White-Fronted Geese fly in and 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

Eastshore State Park, Berkeley

Wednesday, February 7, 9:30 – 11:30 AM

We will visit part of the newly dedicated Eastshore State Park which runs from Emeryville to Richmond along the bay. We will be birding the Berkeley portion which has a variety of habitats. This will be an easy two-hour stroll on flat (though not paved) trails, with a chance for some exciting and varied birds. We will look for shorebirds, waders, ducks, gulls, rap-

tors, and songbirds. Bring scopes.

Heavy rain cancels.

Directions: We will meet at the Sea Breeze Café in Berkeley. Cross the Bay Bridge and continue on I-80 East. Take University Ave exit in Berkeley. You will now be headed east towards the hills; make a U-turn at 7th St. and head back west, crossing over the freeway. Look for the Sea Breeze Café on the southwest corner of the intersection of Frontage Road and University Ave. There are port-a-potties at the Sea Breeze Café and free parking. <http://www.ebparks.org/parks/eastshpk.htm>

Leaders: Marilyn Nasatir & Inge Svoboda. For info: office@sequoia-audubon.org

Beginner/Family Trip

Shorebirds of the San Francisco Bay and Peninsula: Biology and Conservation

Saturday, February 10, Time & Location TBA

This field trip is a follow-up to the Thursday, February 8th, evening program. Time and place for the field trip will be announced at the Thursday evening program. There will be a \$5 fee for the instructor's time.

Leader: Paul Donahue. For information contact Paula Miller 650-773-5656

Charleston Slough/Coast Casey Forebay/Shoreline Lake – Mountain View

Saturday, February 17, 8:00 AM

Visit one of the best known birding spots along the Bay. Habitats include mudflats, ponds, lagoons, coastal scrub, and salt and fresh water marsh, so we should see a nice variety of waterfowl, shorebirds, and some passerines. Dress in layers; bring fluids. Heavy rain cancels.

Directions: Take 101 south to San Antonio exit in Mountain View. Go towards the Bay on San Antonio North. Park in the large oval lot at the end of the road near the first gate.

Leader: Roy Carlson (rbcarlson1@aol.com)

Beginner/Family Trip

Edgewood Park Walk

Sunday, February 25, 8:00 – 11:00 AM

(Continued on page 4)

Upcoming Field Trips

(Continued from page 1)

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, a hat, and always dress in layers for hot, sunny weather to cool, windy conditions. While we will attempt to stay on schedule, circumstances may dictate changes to field trip leaders, dates, or times. For the latest schedule and updates always go to the Sequoia Audubon web site; contact the trip leader, or call **Carol at 650-347-1769**.

Audubon Canyon Ranch, Bolinas Lagoon Preserve Public Season 2007

SAS has again been asked to provide hosts for the upcoming egret and heron nesting season at ACR.

Please consider volunteering on one or more of the dates listed below. You will have an enjoyable time as you experience the beauty of ACR, view the magnificent birds and meet wonderful people. Duties include working from 9am to 4pm to greet and register guests and provide them with information and trail maps.

Available dates:

Saturday or Sunday, March 17 or 18

Saturday or Sunday, April 14 or 15

Saturday or Sunday, May 26 or 27

Saturday or Sunday, June 23 or 27

Wednesday, July 4

Free lodging is available at adjacent Volunteer Canyon if you would like to spend the night.

Please call Sue Cossins at 650-347-9358 for details and to reserve your day.

(Field Trips, continued from page 3)

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. 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.

Leaders: Lee Franks & Marilyn Travis. (650) 592 - 7733

Snowy Plovers at Half Moon Bay

Sunday, March 4, 9:00 – 11:00 AM

The Western Snowy Plover is a sparrow-sized shorebird that needs our help. The plovers nest along the beaches of the western US. They are under threat due to disturbance, predation, and habitat loss. Prior to 1970s they nested at 53 locations in California; today they nest in half as many sites. Join us on this walk to learn about the natural history of the plovers and what we can do to help them. We will also bird along the beach and in the nearby sand dunes looking for resident and visiting birds. Dress in layers; bring binoculars and a scope if you have one.

Directions: Take Hwy 92 to Hwy 1. Turn left or south at the intersection of Hwy 1. At the first stoplight make a right hand turn onto Kelly Ave. Drive to the end of Kelly and enter the Half Moon Bay State Beach. \$6 Parking fee. (The parking fee receipt is valid at all State Parks for the day.) Tell the ranger at the gate you are with Sequoia Audubon group. We will meet in front of the Visitor Center at the south end of the parking lot.

Leader: Ranger Nelle Lyons (650) 726-8804 (If you reach voice-mail press 5 followed by # to leave a message.)

Birding the Bay Trail – China Camp State Park

Sunday, March 11, 8:00 – 11:00 AM

San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory is sponsoring this field trip to China Camp State Park. The park is the site of an old Chinese fishing village and is located about 4 miles east of San Rafael on the shore of San Pablo Bay. We will explore the waterfront on the San Francisco Estuary. Many ducks and waterbirds work the shoreline and deeper waters, while landbirds inhabit the grasslands, forest edges, and mixed oak habitat. Reservations are required, as space is limited. Free for members of SFBBO, \$10 for non-members. Contact the SFBBO at (408) 946-6548 outreach@sfbbbo.org

Leader: Eric Feuss from SFBBO. http://www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=466

Edgewood Park Walk

Sunday, March 25, 8:00 AM – 11:00 AM

Come and visit this unique habitat with oak woodland, grasslands, and chaparral. Spring is the best time for this beautiful San Mateo County Park. Sparrows, meadowlarks, flycatchers, bluebirds, hawks, and more are all possible. Depending on the winter rains we will look for spring wildflowers, ferns, and fungi. Ask Lee about how you can volunteer to help the wildlife at Edgewood Park. The walk is 8 AM to 11 AM over moderately strenuous terrain. Heavy rain cancels.

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

Leaders: Lee Franks & Marilyn Travis. (650) 592-7733

Eastern Mojave Desert Long Weekend Birding Adventure

Mid-April long week end (Date to be announced)

Join Francis Toldi on an exploratory trip to an interesting area with distinctive species and some chances for discovery. We will wander around the high Mojave and see what we find. The area we will explore is the Mojave National Preserve, encompassing the New York and Providence Mountains and adjacent area. The preserve is located between Death Valley and Joshua Tree National Parks. It encompasses 1.6 million acres of mountains, deserts, dry lakes and an opportunity for solitude.

We will look for wildflowers, cactus, desert tortoises, and Big Horn Sheep. Some of the migrant birds and desert birds we may see are Verdin, Scotts Oriole, Black-throated Sparrow, and Cactus Wren. Some target special local species are Bendire's Thrasher and Gilded Flicker. These birds would be lifers for many people, and new for California for most. This trip is a real adventure. There will not be any convenient motels, so we will carpool and camp (possibly open desert camping). Depending on interest and participants' availability for this trip we will set the exact date. If you are interested in this desert adventure, contact Francis Toldi. francis@dpisf.com or (650) 344-1919

<http://www.nps.gov/moja/>

http://www.desertusa.com/mnp/mnp_main.html

<http://www.mojavenp.org/>

Mines Road – The Ultimate Spring Bird Trip

Sunday, April 29, 8:00 AM

A variety of habitats provides a fascinating multiplicity 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 and the Central Valley and Hwy 5. We will look for Phainopepla, Prairie Falcon, Lawrence's Goldfinch, Lewis' Woodpecker, Golden Eagle, and 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 lunch time stop and another at mid-afternoon at a county park. Weather is unpredictable from cold and windy to hot and dry. Heavy rain cancels.

Directions: Cross the San Mateo Bridge and follow the signs to Hwy I-580. Stay on 580 for about 25 miles to Vasco Road; exit right. Follow Vasco to Tesla Road and turn right. Turn left on Mines Road. Follow it 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). Carpooling encouraged.

Leader: Leslie Flint (650) 573-6279



Photo by Bob Cossins

Northern Flicker

(Edgewood Woodpeckers, continued from page 1)

away at the bark, its brain is being subjected to hundreds of pounds of force. Any other bird's brain would be turned to mush, but the woodpecker's brain has a cushion that absorbs this pounding. The apparatus that supports the use of the bill is also impressive: strong, grasping feet -- two toes pointed forward and two pointed backward -- that work in concert with stiff tail feathers to form a triangular brace, allowing the bird to position itself for its strenuous pecking.

After the hole is drilled into the tree, how does the woodpecker get the bug out? It can't grab it with its bill, because the bill is the same size as the hole. What it does is insert its long, sticky tongue, which is three times longer than its bill, into the hole, catches the insect, pulls it out and eats it. But where does the bird put this long tongue when it's not in use? It's too long to keep in the bill, but can't be left hanging out. What the woodpecker does is stick its tongue into a nostril up inside its skull and wrap the tongue around its skull, under its skin.

We're most aware of woodpeckers in the early winter months when the woods are pretty much silent except for a solitary **tap, tap, tap**. It's not a loud tap, but it is distinctive. Often it will be the Downy Woodpecker (*Picoides pubescens*), the smallest woodpecker in North America (7"), and one of five woodpecker species present in Edgewood Park. It is usually alone, as they don't associate with their own kind until spring.

As spring approaches, the Downies with their black-and-white-striped heads, black upperparts with white in the center of the back, and white spots on their wings, change their be-

havior toward each other. Their tapping becomes a quite different, unbroken **trrrrrrrrr** lasting several seconds. This tapping, known as **drumming**, is no longer simply an effort to get food, but is a means of communicating to other Downies that this is "my" territory. It is also the first attempt to attract a mate. Both sexes drum. After the drumming unites the pair, courtship begins, resulting in a bonding of the pair and excavation of a cavity in a living or dead tree as high as 50 feet above the ground. It requires quite a bit of work for both birds, over a week or more, to carve out a gourd-shaped cavity, into which the female lays 4-5 pure white eggs. Both parents incubate for 12 days until the eggs hatch.

A close relative of the Downy is the rather shy Hairy Woodpecker (*Picoides villosus*). White backs generally identify both a Downy and a Hairy, but the Hairy is much larger (9-12"), and forages on taller trees. The Hairy Woodpecker has a bill that is equal to or longer than the length of the head, whereas the Downy bill length is shorter than the head.

The Nuttall's Woodpecker (*Picoides nuttallii*) is similar to and only slightly larger than the Downy, but is readily distinguished by the presence of white/black barring on the back (the mid-back is pure white on the Downy). Nuttall's have similar forage preferences to Downies and will defend their territories just as aggressively. While they are often seen foraging in oak trees, acorns make up only a small part of their diet. Insects such as beetles, caterpillars, and ants are sought among the oaks with the most abundant foliage. Nuttall's creep diagonally as they forage in crevices and underneath bark, often hanging upside down as they probe. While probing, an individual often turns its head from side to side and peers into crevices.

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Photo by Bob Cossins

Hairy Woodpecker

SPECIAL EVENT: BIRD WALK AND TOUR OF THE FOLGER STABLE HISTORIC DISTRICT AT WUNDERLICH PARK, WOODSIDE

The historic Folger Estate Stable, located in Wunderlich Park, is a magnificent example of architecture from the "Great Estates" era when Woodside was the summer home of wealthy San Francisco families.

Please join us for a free event co-hosted by the Sequoia Audubon Society and the Folger Stable Committee.

Date and Time: Saturday, March 24, 2007 -- Come anytime between 9 AM and noon and join an hour-long bird walk, take a self-guided tour of the Folger Stable Historic District, and enjoy hot chocolate and muffins.

Directions: From Highway 280, take Woodside Road (Highway 84) exit west. Drive approximately four miles, through the Town of Woodside. The Wunderlich Park entrance will be on the right side of the roadway, about a mile after the sign to Huddart Park. Car-pooling is suggested due to limited parking.

Reservations are requested so that we will know how many to expect. Contact Anne Wellner de Veer of Friends of Huddart and Wunderlich Parks @ 650-851-2660 or anne@parksupport.org by March 20, 2007.

(Edgewood Woodpeckers, continued from page 5)

Walkers strolling through Edgewood Park may be surprised by a woodpecker flushing from the ground before them. As the jay-sized Northern Flicker (*Colaptes auratus*) beats a hasty retreat, it reveals an unmistakable white rump and red wing linings, contrasting strikingly with its rich brown/black-barred back. The center of its chest sports a black crescent and the face and upper breast is gray with a prominent red moustache stripe. The Northern Flicker is the least arboreal of our woodpeckers, and it spends more time feeding on the ground than in the trees. It is the "anteater" of the bird world. In addition to eating ants, the birds squash them and then preen themselves with the remains. Ants contain concentrations of formic acid, which is believed to kill small parasites living on the flicker's skin and in its feathers.

Northern Flickers do not have the super-hammering apparatus of most woodpeckers. They can't drill into hard wood and need rotten or soft trees for nest cavities.

Last, but not least, is the highly social Acorn Woodpecker (*Melanerpes formicivorus*), a cooperative breeder that lives in family groups of up to a dozen. Only a pair or two may actually breed, and the remainder of the group help the parents raise the young. Acorns are probably best known for their unique method of storing acorns in specialized trees called granaries, which are available to all family members. Group living and acorn storage are not, however, characteristics of the population in Edgewood, which appears to be a splinter group from a family group located somewhere outside the Park boundaries. Insects are their preferred food and are eaten at any time of the year when weather permits. Acorns are supplemental and are eaten, rather than stored.

This woodpecker is medium-sized (9"), clown-faced, black and white with a distinctive red crown, glossy black and white head, white eyes, and a yellow throat. They have a limited presence (winter only) in the Park, but when you hear **waka, waka, waka**, their most common vocalization, you can be sure they are not very far away.

References

The Birds of North America; No 194, 1995; No 166, 1995; No 555, 2000

Cornell Lab of Ornithology -- various publications

Birds of San Francisco & the Bay Area; Chris Fisher, Joseph Morlan



Northern Flicker in nest cavity

Photo by Bob Cossins

MUCH APPRECIATED!

Thank you to all the individuals and organizations who contributed to SAS in 2006. Your generosity has helped to fund Sequoia Audubon's education, conservation, and nature programs in San Mateo County. You make it possible; we could not do it without you!

Magnus Akerblom
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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.