

The Avocet

Volume IV Number 1

January-February 1957

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Regretfully, your Board of Directors announces the resignation of Dr. Dick Mewaldt as our editor of The Avocet. Neither space nor time can grant us enough to express adequately what this loss means. The responsibility has been a big one and unfortunately almost a lone one. And so Dick, from all of us a humble and sincere -- Thanks.

The Avocet must continue! To do so, we will need help from YOU -- the members of our Society. We have learned too, though a little late, that the responsibility of The Avocet publication must be shared. It is not "Cricket" to rely on one man to shoulder the entire load. Therefore, anyone who has had experience in: 1. Editing; 2. Feature writing; 3. Typing; 4. Stencil-cutting; 5. Running a mimeograph machine; 6. Folding and "stuffing" envelopes, please do not hesitate to let us know how you can help. Phone or drop a card to Miss Mary L. Meehan, 1014 Clark Avenue, Mountain View - Whitecliff 8-4949 or Mrs. Dorothy Wool, Route 2, Box 728, San Jose - AMhurst 2-2577. Thankyou.

Dorothy E. Wool

COMING EVENTS AT A GLANCE

Meetings:

Jan 7 8:00 p.m. Regular meeting at Palo Alto Junior Museum
Feb 18 8:00 p.m. Regular meeting at San Jose State College

Screen Tour:

Jan 15 8:00 p.m. "Animals at Night in Color" Howard Cleaves

Field Trips:

Jan 12 9:30 a.m. Salt Marsh Sanctuary
Jan 16 9:00 a.m. Boronda Farm
Jan 26 9:30 a.m. Alum Rock Park

Feb 9 9:30 a.m. Aldercroft Heights
Feb 17 9:30 a.m. Tomales Bay
Feb 27 9:00 a.m. Glen Una Ranch



JANUARY-FEBRUARY CALENDAR

MEETINGS

Regular Meeting: Monday, January 7 at 8:00 p.m., at the Palo Alto Junior Museum. John O. Larson, Jr., Warden of our new Salt Marsh Sanctuary will give an illustrated talk - "Reminiscings of a Game Warden". (Board Meeting at 7:00 p.m.)

Regular Meeting: Monday, February 18 at 8:00 p.m., in Room 55 (Little Theatre) San Jose State College. Dr. Tom Harvey of the Biology Dept. will give an informal talk on "The Evolution of Birds". (Board Meeting at 7:00 p.m.)

Screen Tour: "Animals at Night in Color" - Howard Cleaves
Tuesday, January 15 at 8:00 p.m. in Morris Dailey Auditorium on the San Jose State College Campus. Howard Cleaves of Staten Island, New York, has prowled by night through forest and bayou with powerful floodlights and generator to record in color motion pictures the night life of deer, raccoon and muskrat; osprey, great blue heron and chimney swift; turtle, frog and cricket. An amazing revelation of the nocturnal activities of varied animals, birds and other wild-life.

A SPECIAL INVITATION has been extended to our Society to join them in celebration of their Fortieth Anniversary! There will be a banquet at the Hotel Claremont, Berkeley, on Thursday, January 10, at 7:30 p.m., The Anniversary Committee has announced that Dr. George M. Sutton, nationally known naturalist and writer will be the guest speaker. As an added attraction, the talented Audubon Players will present for the first time on any stage a one-act playlet, "Beating the Birds to the Bush." Reservations are \$4.00 each. EVERYBODY COME!! You may make up a table for a group, or reserve a place individually. Miss Mary Meehan, 1014 Clark Ave., Mt. View, WH 8-4949 will be happy to help you place your reservations.

FIELD TRIPS

Saturday, January 12, to what is left of the Alviso salt marshes. Meet at the Alviso Grammar School, on the San Jose-Alviso Rd., at 9:30 a.m. Jane and Frank Goraj (DA5-8847) will lead the trip. Bring lunch if desired.

Wednesday Morning, January 16, to Boronda Farm, which is southwest from Palo Alto, with Mrs. Elizabeth Tucker (DA2-9457). Meet at 9:00 a.m. at the Merryvale Antique Shop, 3249 Alpine Road, about two miles from junction of Alpine Rd. with Santa Cruz Ave. and Junipero Serra Blvd.

Saturday, January 26, to Alum Rock Park, in the foothills east of San Jose. Mrs. Grace Brubaker (CL8-2289) will lead this trip. Meet at 9:30 a.m. in the park at the Junior Museum. Bring lunch. Trip will be canceled if raining.

Saturday, February 9, Mrs. Angelina Snow (EL4-5038) will lead us on a walk in the vicinity of Aldercroft Heights. Meet at 9:30 a.m. in front of the Lyndon Hotel in Los Gatos. Bring lunch.

Wednesday Morning, February 27, to the old Glen Una Ranch. Meet Miss

Emily Smith (EL4-2494) at her home, 19651 Glen Una Drive (gray house with holly-leaf cherry hedge around it, at corner of Bellecourt) at 9:00 a.m. Turn off Saratoga-Los Gatos Road at either Glen Una or Bellecourt, about a mile from Saratoga.

Francis Goraj
Chairman, Field Trip Committee

SEASONAL BIRD OBSERVATIONS

The Red-breasted Sapsucker, as colorful as a Christmas-tree ornament, is a winter visitant to our area but only occasionally seen in our trees. In spite of its sap-sucking food habits, it is a welcome sight in any bird-watcher's tree. Early in November Dorothy Smith watched one chisel neat little holes in her elm, which is already peppered with sapsucker holes of many past seasons. Suddenly an Anna's Hummingbird, showing tinsel-red on head and throat, was at one of the holes, drinking sap which was oozing out. While the sapsucker went on chiseling apparently unmindful of its tiny guest, the hummingbird visited more sap holes. Two years ago Peg Gorham saw Audubon's Warbler and Ruby-crowned Kinglet, as well as Anna's Hummingbird, at fresh sap holes in another elm in Los Gatos. Sap and bits of soft growing wood make up much of a sapsucker's diet; but the many ants which are attracted to the sweet sap are relished, and also insects picked off trees or caught on the wing, in flycatcher fashion. And members of our Society have told of seeing sapsuckers eating figs, pepper tree berries and poison oak berries (the last two reported in *The Avocet*, Vol.II, p.32, and Vol.III, 10).

June Miller, who found a dead flicker with yellow shafts in her garden in Palo Alto last August, found another on October 26. This second bird was a beautiful specimen, showing clear yellow on wing and tail feathers, a bright scarlet crescent on back of head, and black "mustaches." Such a pity it was shot! Dick Mewaldt, to whom the specimen was sent, says it looks like a "pure" form of the Yellow-shafted Flicker but it must be carefully checked.

In mid-November, in the middle of an afternoon, Anne Peterson and Grace Brubaker found about sixty Black-crowned Night Herons idling in pear trees by the Guadalupe Creek, a short distance from Alviso. There was considerable evidence that the herons had frequently used these trees for perching, including pears that the pickers had left on the trees as unsaleable. When the two bird enthusiasts returned two weeks later, again in mid-afternoon, there were no herons in the pear trees, although four were seen nearby. It was possible, they thought, that the birds had been disturbed by pheasant hunters in the area. On this second visit they noticed, on the ground under the trees, pellets such as owls regurgitate, but instead of the fur and bones of rodents, the pellets were composed of the armor-like coverings of Jerusalem crickets (sometimes called potato bugs). This was a puzzling find, for the staple diet of Black-crowned Night Herons is commonly supposed to be fish and other more or less aquatic animals; and also because the Jerusalem crickets are not ordinarily gregarious insects. And so a boxful of the pellets were gathered and sent to John Harville and Dick Mewaldt, at San Jose State College--which may mean more about herons and Jerusalem crickets in the next issue of *The Avocet*.

A pair of Plain Titmice in my neighborhood has already chosen their nest cavity for the coming nesting season. They were first noticed early in November, inspecting a bird house across the road. Ten days later, with soft calls and trills, they were looking into a bird house which hangs in a prune tree outside one of our windows. About the same time we looked in vain for two titmice

which I banded in early September (the newcomers are not yet banded), and which I had assumed were an established pair, although they had not broken the cobwebs across the entrance to the bird house. Remembering that a banded female titmouse which nested in this bird house two years ago, was already roosting in it early in December, I soon started a dawn watch. On November 27, about half an hour before sunrise, a titmouse, presumably the female, left her "cavity" for the day. Roosting in it is, no doubt, an effective way of establishing ownership.

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HAPPY NEW YEAR TO ALL

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SANTA CLARA VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY, INC., Branch of NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY

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FIELD TRIP REPORTS

On Wednesday, August 22, 1956, twelve people braved the morning traffic and grey skies to visit the relatively unspoiled marshes west of the PALO ALTO YACHT HARBOR. It was low tide when we arrived and the picture was one of grey sky blending with grey mud, and it took sharp eyes, at first, to distinguish the feed-shore birds from their background. In a rather large flock of Western Sandpipers 1 Least Sandpiper was discovered. The drab Willets feeding along the shore became beautiful in flight, as the black and white pattern of their wings was displayed. A Black-crowned Night Heron was spotted sitting on a fence, and later five were seen in flight over the marsh grass. A Great Blue Heron, 1 American Egret and many of the spectacular Avocets were present. As we were leaving the marshes the tide had turned and was coming in fast, and our last find was 1 Black-bellied Plover, 1 Long-billed Curlew, 1 Godwit, 1 Dowitcher and 1 Willet feeding close together----a very rewarding morning!

The complete list of birds follows: Great Blue Heron; American Egret in flight; 6 Black-crowned Night Herons; Killdeer; Black-bellied Plover; Long-billed Curlew; many Willets; Greater Yellow Legs; Least Sandpiper; Dowitcher; Western Sandpipers (several small flocks); Marbled Godwits; many Avocets; Ring-billed Gulls; Forster's Tern; Caspian Tern; Cliff Swallows; Western Meadowlark; Savannah Sparrow; Song Sparrows feeding on marsh grass seeds (a beautiful sight);
Dorothy L. Smith

On Sunday, November 18, SEARSVILLE LAKE. Twenty-six reported for the trip not counting a 7-months babe in arms whom I recommend for an honorary member of our society!

The water-birds seen were Mallards; Coots; 2 Greater Yellow Legs; Pied-billed Grebes; American Mergansers; our friend the artistic Great Blue Heron; Shovellers; Ruddy Ducks; 1 California Gull; Pintails, and 3-5 Dowitchers. Where do we put the Kingfisher? No doubt, as a transition bird between water and land! Anyway, we saw him, too.

On the hillsides and along the lake we saw the following: Bluebirds; White and Golden-crowned Sparrows; Audubon's Warbler; White-breasted Nuthatch; Brown creeper; Song Sparrow; Meadowlarks; Wren-tit; Brewer's Blackbirds; Flicker; Acorn Woodpeckers; Pine Siskins; 10 Killdeers; Brown and Spotted Towhee; Chickadees; Plain Titmice; Ruby-crowned Kinglet; Bewick's Wren; Scrub Jay; Black Phoebe; Sparrow Hawk; Green-backed and American Gold-finches; Redwinged Blackbird and the junco.

Most of us sat on straw bales and enjoyed luncheon in the sun - and I think a good time was had by all.

Harriet Mundy

On Saturday, December 21, SALT MARSH SANCTUARY. Thirty-six members of the Santa Clara Audubon Society made their first tour by boat through the Greco Island portion of the newly established sanctuary in South San Francisco Bay Area. Transportation was furnished by Sea Scout Ship #145, "Fury", of Redwood City.

The weather was pleasant, the water calm, and we felt a sufficient variety of species of birds was observed to make the time spent on the trip worthwhile. Miss Emily Smith kept a log of the birds sighted.

Since a sub-species of the Great Blue Heron and the Black-crowned Night Heron is among the species residing harmoniously during nesting season on the reservation in Texas, we felt we were greeting old friends when we observed them feeding together on the sanctuary here. We do hope everyone participating, enjoyed the trip as much as we did and that it was the first of many such tours the members of the S.C.V.A.S. will make long after we have returned to our Texas reservation.

Jean and John Larson