

The Avocet

Volume XVI, Number 7

September, 1969

No September Meeting

Please take note NOW that our monthly meetings will again be held at the Homestead High School in Cupertino, BUT the meeting night will be the 3rd WEDNESDAY instead of the 3rd Thursday. This is necessary because the School has changed the nights for their adult education program. The first meeting will be Oct. 15th and the second Nov. 19th. I hope all our old friends can come and perhaps others who could not on Thursday nights.

Harriet Mundy, Program Chairman

Calendar

Bird Discussion Group

Topic will be "Most Interesting Bird of the Summer!"
20537 Verde Vista Ln., Saratoga, tel. 867-4748.

Tues. Sept. 9, 10:00
At the home of Eve Case.

Board Meeting

At Diane Conradson's, 4337 Miranda, Palo Alto. 941-2102

Thurs. Sept. 11, 7:45 pm

Coyote Hills Park

Meet at Shopping Center, N.W. corner Jarvis Ave. and Newark Blvd., Newark (east of Dumbarton Bridge).
Leader, Phillip Hathaway 793-3063

Sat. Sept. 20, 9:00 am

Home of Mrs. Ransom K. Davis

At 1140 San Mateo Dr., Menlo Park (322-8586), which is between Santa Cruz Ave. and Valparaiso Ave. about 7/8 mile west of El Camino. There are many birds to see in her inviting garden. You may bring a sack lunch; she will provide beverage. No reservations necessary.

Wed. Sept. 24, 9:30 am

Ecological Conference, Oakland Museum

Registration fee for the conference is \$2.00, plus an additional \$1.50 for those who wish to reserve box lunches, which will be available during the conference's noon recess on Sat., Sept. 27. Detailed program and registration form can be obtained from Hubert A. Dafeo, Acting Curator, Natural Sciences Div., Oakland Museum, Tenth and Fallon Streets, Oakland, Ca. 94607. See page 46 for program.

Fri. & Sat., Sept. 26 & 27


The Natural History of Man in California

A new course being offered by Dr. Thomas Harvey at San Jose State College, Science Bldg., Rm 5142. Two units, cost \$38.00, Wed. eves 7 to 9:30 pm. Preregistration can be made. It covers man's impact on his environment, starting with the Indians and concentrating on the present problems.

Oct. 1 - thru Dec. 17



THE BAY



Yes, the Governor has signed the bill, but what a long hot summer it was for those who worked so hard to get it. Don't relax, though. As was said to me at the last meeting of the Commission: "The citizens have a bigger job than before to keep track of every member." Come November when the new law takes effect there will be drastic changes in the composition of the Commission. This change took place on the Senate floor the last day when there was no opportunity to even discuss it. The Commission will have no proxies and all representatives of Boards of Supervisors and ABAG must be elected officials. Because of this the Commission is going to lose four or five of its most devoted and best commissioners. Among them Mr. Hans Feibusch, Dr. Upton, probably Dr. Joseph and Mr. Kane of Santa Clara County who was proxy for Mr. Quinn. Also, the continuity of the Commission will be seriously affected and the problem of getting a quorum may be present. So please don't sit back and consider the question settled. I will report on this as things become clarified.

Now for really good news! The Nature Conservancy has created a San Francisco Bay Project. Mr. Huey Johnson notes that "the ecological crisis of the Bay and its shoreline has created intense interest and concern but pressures for filling the Bay and developing its shoreline have also seen new heights. The resulting tensions will be with us indefinitely. One great omission concerning the Bay has been apparent. At present there is no agency carrying on a concerted area-wide effort to preserve key natural lands by acquiring those lands permanently." Mr. Gregory Archbald of San Francisco has been appointed director of this project. The first acquisition is Lower Tubbs Island, lying east of the mouth of the Petaluma River in San Pablo Bay. It is 330 acres and the price is about 300,000. Fund raising is underway. I have access to this property and hope we can have a field trip there this coming year. Now is the time to do something practical for the Bay. Consider the Nature Conservancy gave me a real chance to "put some money where my mouth has been." Donations may be marked "Tubbs Island" (or S.F. Bay Project) mailed to Nature Conservancy, 215 Market St., San Francisco, Ca. 94105.

Harriet Mundy

Ecological Conference Program - Oakland Museum - Sept. 27

- 8:00 am - Registration and Museum Tours
- 9:30 am : OUR TOTAL ENVIRONMENT by Stewart L. Udall
- 10:30 am : Panel Discussion, "Pesticides"
 Moderator: Dr. Ray F. Smith, Chairman, Dept. of Entomology & Parasitology
 University of Calif., Berkeley
 Panelists: Dr. Roy Hansberry, Assistant to Mgr., Shell Development Co.
 Dr. John H. Phillips Jr., Dtr., Hopkins Marine Station, Stanford
 Dr. John E. Swift, Ext. Entomologist, U. of C., Berkeley
 Dr. Robert L. Rudd, Prof. Zoology, U. of C., Davis
- 12:30 pm : Box Lunches in Museum Plaza, Continuous Museum Tours
- 2:00 pm : Panel Discussion, "Population, Pollution, and Land Usage"
 Moderator: Alfred E. Heller, Pres., California Tomorrow
 Panelists: Joseph E. Bodovitz, Exec. Dtr. BCDC
 Dr. H. Thomas Harvey, Assoc. Dean, School of Natural Science
 and Mathematics, San Jose State College
 John T. Knox, Assemblyman, 11th Dist., State of Calif.
 Stephanie Mills, Valedictorian, Mills College Class of 1969
 William M. Roth, San Francisco

Conference addresses and panel discussions will be held in the Oakland Auditorium Theater (seating 2,000), directly opposite the new museum's Fallon St. entrance. See further data on front page.

California Birds

by

Russ Greenberg



After the rapid succession of first state records and new discoveries about California birds in the past few years it seems incredible that, like the last days of Cannery Row, this might be the beginning of the end. This prediction being true, the symbol of the quickly diminishing birdlife would be the Brown Pelican. With the extirpation of any other species the ways have been too subtle or days of abundance too long past to have anything to do with most people's reality. It may be sad to know the Clapper Rails are suffering from habitat destruction and eco-alteration; but it isn't really a very blunt reality. Condors had always been "the rare bird" to most people. And nobody ever saw that many eagles and Peregrine Falcons.

But the loss of the large soaring pelican is enough to shake anyone. For a long while the pelicans will remain deceptively common and birds in immature plumage will still be seen slowly flapping along with adults. But, the long-to-mature, long-lived pelican is already doomed. And there is no evidence that the way that sealed the fate of the pelican will ever melt. DDT is here to stay - in the fat of us all. Apparently no pelicans nested successfully in California this year. Pt. Lobos has been inactive for years and the historical spots on the channel, Santa Catalina, Anacapa, and Los Coronados Island showed no success. Nothing to show but some broken eggs.

Paul Erlich, population ecologist at Stanford and author of "The Population Bomb", predicts the sea will be dead by 1979. Some say it is already infected with a terminal disease - pesticides pollution. It's all very easy to believe.

But people will still go through the same silly rituals - including birders. Birders from all over the country joined the annual late summer trip of San Diego. This year it produced Pink-footed, Sooty, and Pale-footed Shearwaters, Pomarine Jaegers, lots of Leach's and Black Petrel. The great surprise of the trip was the number of Least Petrels. Peterson says it is rare off San Diego. But with estimates as high as 35 birds that statement holds little weight. This species has been found every year since 1966. The big disappointment was the absence of Tropicbirds. San Clemente Island failed to re-produce the concentration of last year when as many as 9 were seen (July). Craveri's Murrelets were also absent.

Post-breeding tropical wanderers were down from last year. Only one Frigatebird was found on Point Loma and Mission Bay in July. The Salton Sea only produced 2 skimmers (Guy McCaskie et al) and a Roseate Spoonbill along with the usual Western Gulls. No Boobies, - no Frigatebirds.

Another conspicuous absence was that of the Whip-poor-will in the San Jacinto. Heard all last summer until August, not one could be found this year. The Chimney Swifts resident at Solona and La Jolla last year were not present this year. But McCaskie saw 2 in San Diego in June.

The herons returned to Aubry Burns' backyard. A sub-adult Yellow-crowned Night Heron and a Little Blue Heron. Both are again roosting or possibly nesting on the West Marin Island Rookery.

The Farallons produced three state records: Field Sparrow, Yellow-throated Warbler, White-eyed Vireo. The latter two were found in July with Red-eyed and Yellow-throated Vireos. Another state record was White-rumped Sandpiper found by McCaskie on the Salton Sea. First west of the Rockies!

Dave Desante banded 3 waterthrushes and saw 1 Canada Warbler at Deep Springs in May on a warbler migration study. On Memorial Day an army of vagrant hunters

produced 3 Parula Warblers.

Death Valley had only 1 Bobolink, 3 Eastern Kingbirds, Lucy's Warbler, and an Ovenbird (Saratoga Springs). One Broad-tailed Hummingbird was at Paramint Springs. The usual Bendire's Thrashers, Gilded Flickers, and Gray Vireos were found at Cima, Mojave Desert, with two Joshua-tree-hopping Snowy Egrets. A nearby vagrant trap produced a Parula Warbler and a Lucy's Warbler. And Morogo Valley had the Summer Tanagers, Wied's Crested Flycatcher, and Lucy's Warblers.

High mountain birding in Yosemite was slow until the early July snow melting. The Great Gray Owl was harder to find at Peregoy than at Crane Flat. Birds staying in lower elevations included the Pine Grosbeak (devout inhabitant of the Hudsonian-upper-Canadian zones) which was at Heness Ridge and Crane Flat (transition). Vaux Swifts returned to Crane Flat although no nest was seen. High elevation campgrounds remained wet a long time putting undue pressure on lower elevation accommodations. Our field trip in June did well but missed the owl and Three-toed Woodpecker at Peregoy which had a lot of snow.

Also, Condors were seen regularly in August at Mt. Pinos. Unfortunately, not on the day of SCVAS field trip. Five to fifteen roosted on the north side.

Locally, Marbled Murrelets were seen off Pigeon Point. And in nearby San Gregorio, Grasshopper Sparrows continue to nest. A Chat was seen by Mike Perrone in June and a pair of Cedar Waxwings were seen through July by Dave DeSante and Rich Stallcup. At Coyote Hills in May every species of western warbler was netted in the willows. DeSante, doing a roadside breeding census from Colma to Scarsville, found a severe reduction in bird numbers in the last year since the building of the Freeway. He found Red-breasted Nuthatches and Creepers nesting on Skyline.

It is now migration and a visit to Coyote Hills or the coast, particularly Pt Reyes or Monterey, should produce good land birding. The Bay, Humboldt Bay, Bolinas Lagoon, Bodega Bay and the Salinas and Carmel River Mouths should produce good shore birding. The earliest migrants should be California residents: Wilson's Warbler, Hutton's Vireo, Black-headed Grosbeak. The rarer bird will come later, possibly as late as October. Pectoral Sandpipers like the grassy, sandy areas above the surf or tide line. Baird's like river mouths and coastal lagoons. Look for the rarer, more rufous Sharp-tailed Sandpipers and the long-billed, white-rumped Curlew Sandpiper in with Pectoral and "Red-backed" Sandpipers.

Banding Clinic at Point Reyes Bird Observatory

PRBO will hold another banding clinic on Saturday, Sept. 27 and Oct. 4, 1969 for those interested in participating in the PRBO program.

PRBO's primary purpose is to study birds; their ecology, population dynamics and the impact of man's activities on their natural environment. The underlying aim of PRBO is to supply information to aid and support general conservation efforts.

Volunteer help has been an invaluable aid to the entire Observatory program. Capturing and banding birds and the associated record keeping is the heart of Observatory activity and has been accomplished largely by volunteer help. No previous knowledge of bird identification or banding is necessary. The opportunity to learn more about birds while contributing to our general knowledge, and thus advance conservation efforts generally is open to all interested people. It is recommended that interested persons attend both sessions. The clinic will start promptly at 9:00 am and last until 12:00.

To reach the Observatory take Highway 1 to the Bolinas turnoff. Take the turnoff to Mesa Rd., and turn right. Continue on Mesa Rd. to Pt. Reyes National Seashore and turn right onto dirt road. Proceed $\frac{1}{2}$ mile and you will see PRBO on your left.

Yosemite Field Trip Report - June 7

There were about twice as many people as last year (a trend, or better signals), about 15 people and almost as many cars. It was quite clear that this was an unusual year: high campgrounds still snowy and closed; Tioga opened and closed the same day. And so there seemed to be a scarcity of some birds - Black-backed Woodpeckers, White-crowned Sparrows, and Great Gray Owls-, and an unusual abundance of others - Pine Siskins, for example. There were 63 species of birds seen by one or another of the group, and I think most everybody saw most birds. A mountain trip may become an institution for SCVAS, if we can get more leaders.

Dr. Joseph Greenberg, leader

Mt. Pinos Field Trip Report - Aug. 2

Nine hopeful people gathered at the Condor Lookout only to be buffeted by relentless strong winds and a burning sun. The only Condors spotted were along a distant ridge and numbered three. Another try is in order for those of us seeking a "lifer". (E. Curtis)

Leader, Dr. Joseph Greenberg

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Where All Good Penguins Go

Jan. 10 - Today I visited two colonies of the Gentoos, and learned where good penguins go when they die! We have often remarked upon the extraordinarily few dead penguins encountered among the large populations. Now I have discovered their romantic sepulchre.



Near the summit of a coastal hill I came upon a lonely pond in a hollow of ice-cracked stones. Several sick and drooping penguins were standing at the edge of this pool of snow water, which was ten or twelve feet deep. Then, with a tingling of my spine, I perceived that the bottom was strewn, layer upon layer, with the bodies of Gentoo Penguins that had outlived the perils of the sea to accomplish the rare feat among wild animals of dying a natural death. By hundreds, possibly thousands, they lay all over the bed of the cold tarn, flippers outstretched and breasts reflecting blurred gleams of white. Safe at last from sea leopards in the ocean, and from skuas ashore, they took their endless rest; for decades, perhaps for centuries, the slumberers would undergo no change in their frigid tomb.

-- from Logbook for Grace by Robert Cushman Murphy --

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AVOCET

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