

The Avocet

Volume XVII, Number 2

February, 1970

Voyage To The Galapagos

Homestead High School
Room 5, Bldg. C

Wednesday, Feb. 11
8:00 pm

Homestead Road
Cupertino

Mr. Alan Baldrige will recount, with aid of slides, a cruise to the Islands, undertaken in Feb.-Mar., 1968, on board the 140 ft. steel-hulled, two masted schooner research vessel, "Te Vega". This vessel, until recently operated by Hopkins Marine Station of Stanford University, has spent much time in the Eastern Tropical Pacific studying biological oceanography in both coastal and oceanic waters. He was particularly interested in the sea birds and the Galapagos fur seal, although the slides include most of the reptiles and birds, as well as other marine mammals.

Mr. Baldrige was born and educated in England. He came to the U.S. in 1962 and spent four years in Portland, Ore., before moving to the Monterey area in 1966 as Librarian at the Hopkins Marine Station. He is an active bird-watcher and conservationist and a regional editor for Audubon Field Notes magazine. He has observed birds in most of the countries of Europe and in the U.S. from Alaska to Texas.

Harriet Mundy, Program Chairman

Calendar of Events

- Board Meeting - - - - - Wed., Feb 4, 7:45 pm
At home of Phyllis Klein, 4264 Newberry Court, Palo Alto.
- Searsville Lake - - - - - Sun., Feb 8, 9:00 am
Meet at main entrance off Sandhill Rd, Portola Valley. We will all enter locked gates together and leave together about noon. Be prepared to stay as your car will be inside & cannot be left outside. Fee 25¢ @ person. Ldrs: McCanns, 327-4138
- Bird Discussion Group - - - - - Tues, Feb 10, 10:00 am
At home of Eve Case, 20537 Verde Vista, Saratoga, 867-4748. Subj: "The Big Bend".
- Santa Teresa Park - - - - - Wed., Feb 11, 9:30 am
Off Monterey Hwy south of IBI, sign on west side of road opposite Swan Lake Motel. Meet at picnic parking area. Leader, Catherine Lintott
- Bird Study Group - - - - - Thurs, Feb 12, 9:30 am
At home of Mrs. John S. (Marion) Jost, 169 Primrose Way, P.A., 326-3025, instead of Bonnie Roff's. Subj: Large Shore Birds, Peterson pg 103 & 118. Kay McCann
- Monterey - - - - - Sun., Feb 15, 9:00 am
Meet at Coast Guard Pier, south side of Monterey Harbor. (May still be a King Eider.) Leaders: Alan Baldrige & Bill Reese.
- "Tidewater Trails" - - - - - Wed., Feb 18, 8:00 pm
Charles T. Hotchkiss films the wild beauty of Tidewater, Virginia, as it inspired Colonial naturalist Mark Catesby. Nesting Orchard Orioles, an amusing opossum family, and courting Wood Ducks inhabit this scenic area along with Clapper Rail, and snapping turtles. At Morris-Daily Auditorium, San Jose State College.
- Conservation Section Meeting - - - - - Thurs, Feb 19, 9:30 am
At home of Florence La Riviere, 453 Tennessee Ln, P.A., 327-2854. Matters for discussion: encouraging action toward Wildlife Refuge for South Bay, the Southern Crossing, the large airport planned for Alviso area, proposed marina at Dumbarton Straits, & recent legislative advances against DDT. Please come & contribute your ideas or concerns.
- Calaveras Reservoir - - - Sat, Feb 21, 9:00 am
Meet at post office in Milpitas. Bring lunch. May be eagles. Ldrs: Mr. & Mrs. Les Sleeper

Urgent Request! - Please remember to wear your name tags at all Society functions, so we can all match faces with the names. May even save some embarrassment!



A Winter Interlude

We, Eve and I, went "South for the Winter". We found it!

We also found many hours of interesting birding, which at times were even "exciting birding".

As a result of what we had heard and read about the Big Bend area of southwestern Texas we selected that area as our objective and planned a trip that would include as many attractions as possible. This took us across southern Arizona, to and through wildlife refuges where Sandhill Cranes winter in central New Mexico, and down into the Big Bend National Park, southeast of El Paso, where the Rio Grande River makes a long sweeping bend, changing its course from southeast to northeast, enclosing hundreds of square miles of fantastic real-estate. We included areas of scenic or geologic interest because we were pretty sure that in December the bird population in those areas would be far from explosive.

Even before the cold gray dawn we left Saratoga. In the still-early morning we turned off of Highway 101 at Paso Robles onto Highway 46, and followed this eastward through the rolling Shandon Hills. It is here that Ian and Eben McMillan, those two dedicated and active "Condorvationists" have their working ranch. We love this area because of its inherent natural beauty, - the clear air that is not yet yellowed by smog, - the rolling hills that gradually flatten out into broad level land not yet marred by progress, not cut up by developers, - an area still much the same as it has been for many years.

East of the Shandon Hills and the community of Cholame, out on the grassy flatlands we began to carefully scan the fields on each side of the road, and we drove at a leisurely 30 or 35 miles per hour. Birding at 70 m.p.h. is not too successful! In the general vicinity of Blackwell's Corners we expected, and found, both Horned Larks and Mountain Plover. The Horned Larks were seen first, in small groups along the roadside near the fences, and in the intermediate areas where the grass was sparse and short. The color and striping on the sides of the head was very obvious, and positive identification was easy. The plovers were further away from the road in the open spaces. They, too, were easy to see and identify by their size, shape, and color. This area is known to be one of the favorite wintering areas of these birds, and they have been seen here year after year. (For the information of those who may go birding in this area: the old buildings which were formerly landmarks of The Corners have been torn down, but The Corners are still easy to recognize, because Hwy 33 is the only paved road that crosses Hwy 46 between Cholame and Lost Hills.)

Continuing eastward through Blythe to Phoenix, and southward through Tucson, in due time we arrived at the Santa Rita Lodge in Madera Canyon where we found snow on the top ridges of the mountains that enclose the canyon. "Old Baldy" was no longer a bare, bald dome of granite; he was wearing a luxurious crown of freshly fallen snow. (Well, we were going South-for-the-Winter, weren't we?)

We did not expect to find here the large numbers of hummingbirds that are present during the spring migrations, but we did find that a few females were wintering and the bird feeders located just outside of the windows of each room were heavily patronized by all species present. The Bridled Titmice, with that interesting black "bridle" on their cheeks, were to us the most interesting, because their territory does not extend into our area, being limited to southeastern Arizona, southwestern New Mexico, and the contiguous area of Mexico. Consequently, we see them only when we are on "safari" into their territories.



Other interesting birds included in our list for this area were both the Mexican and Gray-headed Junco; a Ruby-crowned Kinglet flashing his brilliant ruby-colored crown; Mexican Jays with their overall coloring of a soft gray-blue; Eastern Bluebirds with their blue backs and rusty throats and breasts; Phainopeplas with their glossy black plumage and that ruby eye; Black-throated Sparrows which we had for the first time seen in a dry wash in the Joshua Tree National Monument; Chipping Sparrows which may (sometimes) be seen in our home area; and last but not least, Brewer's Sparrows.

Returning from a foray out onto the desert and a hike up Florida Canyon (which is more of a dry-wash than a canyon) we found the bird that we both voted to be the "Most Amusing Bird of the Trip": a Golden Eagle. We first saw him perched in the top of a dead tree about 125 ft from the road, and obviously quite interested in the food possibilities of a dead Cotton-tail Rabbit lying at the edge of the pavement. We stopped the car immediately, to see what would happen. Our presence did disturb him, but since the car was motionless he apparently accepted it as harmless, and finally sailed out into several exploratory passes and circles just above the road, and at times very close to us. We had excellent views of details of his head and body plumage as he sailed near us. Finally he landed, not right at the body, but about 20 or 25 ft. away from it. Then came the funniest "Bird Act" we had ever seen! This bird, so extremely graceful and powerful in the air, - was just plain clumsy and ludicrous on the ground! His walk was more of a "wobble" than a "waddle"; his feet, with talons extended, plopped on the hard surface with each stiff-legged step, accompanied by a great deal of rocking body motion. Finally, he decided to make a run for it, and partially unfolding and spreading his wings to help him keep his balance, he broke into a most ridiculous looking gallop. Rocking from side to side, so that his wingtips nearly brushed the pavement first on one side and then on the other, he humped along in a fantastic, lop-sided gallop - like a small boy riding a broomstick horse - his big feet plopping down stiff and flat-footed, talons extended, with each stiff-legged stride.



What's so funny?!!

He was too funny for words, and, even at the risk of frightening him off, we both burst into laughter. However, with a couple more of those ungainly lop-sided wobbles, he reached his goal, seized it in one claw, and almost simultaneously he was in the air again, once more a regal eagle, instead of a clumsy clown.

From Madera Canyon, our road would take us across southern Arizona and across New Mexico to Las Cruces. At Las Cruces we would begin the second phase of our trip: visits to areas which we had never seen before, including the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge which is a wintering ground of the Greater Sandhill Cranes, and the Bitter Lake Wildlife Refuge where the Lesser Sandhill Cranes winter in large numbers. Then, on south to the Rio Grande.

(to be continued)

Lloyd N. Case

"Supervisors veto plan for professional trapper."

"Chalk up one small victory for the coyote and his fellow predators. The Board of Supervisors turned down a plan to obtain professional trapping services. Ian McMillan, Shandon rancher and one of the County's most active conservationists, urged the board to adopt 'a popular new concern' about the role of wild animals in our national environment.

"This article was followed by the following Editorial comment:

"To Coyotes- When a feller needs a friend you can count on Ian McMillan. He figures that any coyote that has survived civilization this long, has a right to howl!
- by Sam Luis in "The California Thrasher", Pasa Robles Aud. Soc.

LET'S GET BUSY HERE TOO !

Tubbs Island Field Trip Report - January 10, Leader, Harriet Mundy

The dawn didn't look too promising for a 150 mile round-trip to Tubbs Island. Neither did the puddly cause-way leading to headquarters. However, some fifteen of us negotiated the really not too bad roadway by car, and were plentifully rewarded. The typical salt marsh was patched with pools of open water, ideal nesting grounds for residents and wintering stops for migrants.

Large flights of Pintails were frequently in the air, likely beginning their northward migration. Smaller groups of Gadwalls and Shovellers flapped between the reedy pools. Several good flights of Stilts and Avocets were also seen. We turned our glasses on a flock of some 200 large shorebirds in a plowed field west of the preserve when 70 to 80 Long-billed Curlews drifted in to join their fellows on the ground. A real thrill!

Among the remaining 48 species identified were: Marsh and Red-tailed Hawks, White-tailed Kites (8), Short-eared and Burrowing Owls, Egrets and a Great Blue Heron, Western, Eared, and Pied-billed Grebes, a Surf Scoter, Ruddy's, Buffleheads, Goldeneyes, and Canvasbacks, and many Meadowlarks and Pipits.

For lunch we gathered in the headquarters home of the resident caretakers, Mr. and Mrs. Bill Lane, and heard a brief talk by Mr. Phil Waleen of the San Francisco staff of The Nature Conservatory San Francisco Bay Project. He answered many questions concerning the project, their approach, progress and future developments. Yes, contributions and other help are needed!

- Ed Wagenhals

The Militant Conservation Movement

Some clear views aired at a conference sponsored by the John Muir Institute, a new San Francisco-based national organization founded by David Brower, were:

"The conservation movement must be merged as a strong, sophisticated and activist political force in this country.

"The growing destruction of the environment by unregulated technological 'progress' must become a political issue enlisting power of mass support.

"And population control - going far beyond mere 'family planning' - must become an inseparable part of conservation's goals."

-from San Francisco Chronicle

New Game Laws

It is now legal that effective July 1, 1970, it will be illegal to indiscriminately shoot a mountain lion. Receiving support from the Dept. of Fish and Game the measure by Sen. Fred W. Marler apparently will give mountain lions more protection in California.

Where's The Beach?

The State Dept. of Parks and Recreation says for the state's 20 million citizens there is now only 90 miles of publicly owned beaches suitable for swimming. This figures out to be 1/5 inch of frontage for each resident.

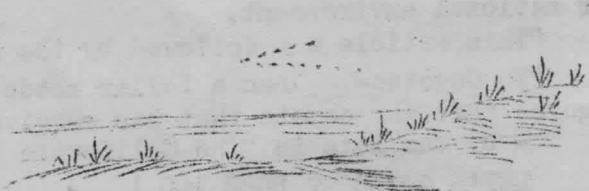
The Calif. coastline measures 1,051 miles not counting bays and estuaries. To date many bills have been introduced and commissions empowered to act but obviously with little success.

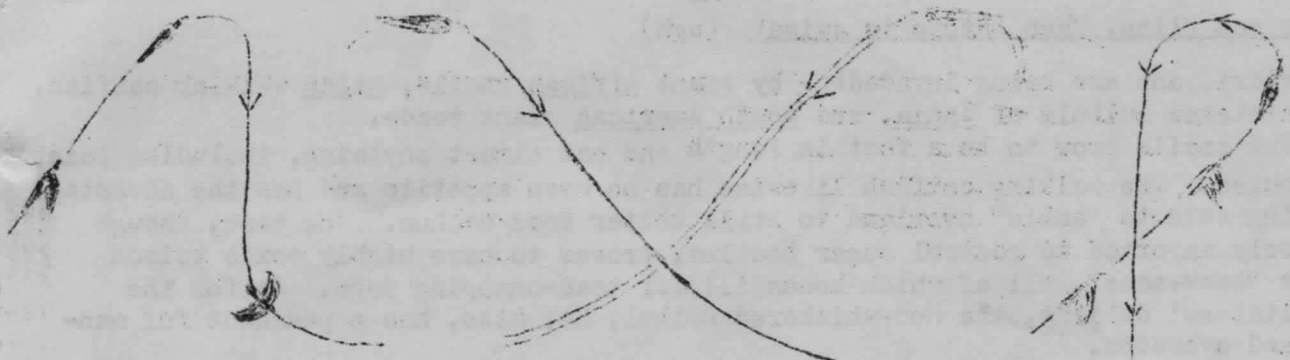
Assemblymen Alan Sieroty and John Dunlop have promised to introduce bills in the next legislative session which will prohibit any coastline development which will cause irreparable damage to the esthetic and recreation values of the shoreline.

If introduced and passed, such legislation would give protection to estuaries, beaches, bays - all of major ecological significance.

This would indeed be a major conservation bill.

- from Aud. Cons. Topics, West





Notes on Golden Eagle Dives

Jan. 16, 11:20 am - Arrived at nest site. Wisps of white mist float along top of ridge milking out the wet, green scene, almost giving life to the mountain with its movement. Steady trickle of the waterfall. No eagles in sight.

11:25 - Both eagles take to air from hidden perch near base of ridgeback. Studied cock's wings carefully. No. 8 primary missing on right wing. This had not been missing before fight earlier this week. Both go to exposed perches and half-spread wings to dry in still damp air.

12:00 - Both circling tightly above nest #1. Calling gently from one to the other as they climb. Pleasant to hear as they do not often call while on the wing. Cock sails up-canyon. Hen continues to circle.

12:05 - Hen commences dives. They are fine, deep, vertical dives with great sureness of execution. Apex varies. She sometimes continues climb into full loop, reaching apex on her back and dropping downward over same space she'd started climb; or she'd swerve to side at apex and drop down; or just ride forward over hump of apex with set wings. Always the apex is reached with tightly closed wings. An exciting performance!

12:15 - Cock in now and diving too, but not as deeply as hen.

12:20 - Third eagle in sky! And diving too - right with my pair. All three diving grandly and independently. Can tell them apart only when wings are set in a sail as they circle occasionally. Now a fourth eagle circles high above other three. This one dives very little.

Two pairs of adults tolerating one another. No sign of aggression. Must be pair B from 2 miles away. Always felt they were somehow related to pair A.

Dives continue all over sky for at least 30 minutes. Area covered is well within immediate nest area, yet I forego my binoculars in order to note interaction of all four birds at one time. At one point two birds started a 45° dive facing one another and reaching the nadir simultaneously - very like the Blue Angel jet pilots. I wonder how far abreast they were as they passed one another!

They are absolutely exuberant! Most remarkable performance I've yet witnessed and the first dives I've seen involving more than 2 performing eagles at a time. No calls during any of this diving.

Though dives are performed throughout the year, this is the first sustained session and precursor of nuptial activity.

— Emelie Curtis

Watch for Color-tagged and Dyed Gulls

Gulls under study may be wearing bright colored plastic tags on back or one wing, or may display prominent patches of red, yellow, green, blue, or violet dye. Any observation reports should include date and place (local name) of sighting, name and address of observer, and as much information about the tag or dye as possible, as well as description of gull if specie is not identifiable.

Send to Dr. Howard L. Cogswell, Dept. of Biological Science, California State College, Hayward, Calif. 94542.

S.C.V.A.S. MEETING DATES: Mar. 11, Apr. 15, June 9, (May cancelled re Seattle Conv.)

All is not Bliss, When Nature is Amiss! (ugh)

Floridians are being invaded! - by giant African snails, Asian walking catfish, Red-whiskered Bulbuls of India, and South American giant toads.

The snails grow to be a foot in length and eat almost anything, including paint off houses. The walking catfish likewise has no mean appetite and has the advantage of being able to "amble" overland to still better food caches. The toad, though purposely imported to control sugar beetles, proves to have highly toxic poison on its "back-sacs", all of which bodes ill for toad-snapping dogs. As for the bird-listers' delight, the Red-whiskered Bulbul, he, alas, has a penchant for mangoes and avocados.

Unwelcome imports, all!

"A robin redbreast in a cage
Puts all heaven in a rage.
A dove-house filled with doves and pigeons
Shudders tears through all its regions.
A dog starved at his master's gate
Predicts the ruin of the state.
A horse misused upon the road
Is done by one who's heart is cold.
Each outcry of the hunted hare
A fibre from the brain does tear.
A skylark wounded in the wing
A cherubin does cease to sing."

- William Blake



S.C.V.A.S. Officers and Chairmen

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AVOCET

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