



TIME VALUE

Volume XVII, Number 10

December, 1970

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

NO GENERAL MEETING. Please help with the Christmas Count.

Dec 9 Board Meeting. Wed. 7:30. At home of Al Jamieson, 592 Channing Ave., Palo Alto. All members welcome.

Dec 6 Palo Alto Yacht Harbor. Sun. 1:00 pm. Meet at parking lot. Leader: William Lakin 328-0238

Dec 26 Christmas Count, Sat. 7:00 am. Details below.

CHRISTMAS COUNT 1970

The Christmas Count will be held on Saturday, December 26 (the original date, December 20 is not in the count period). Unless section leaders make other arrangements, starting place will be Security Savings and Loan, 2830 Alum Rock Ave. San Jose at 7:00 a.m. Those who wish to count in a particular sector may call the sector leader and make arrangements. The sector leaders are: Southwest, Ruth Troetschler, 948-4142; Evergreen, Roy Cameron, 868-9309; Alum Rock, Emelie Curtis, 799-2637; Calaveras, Al Wool, 747-0317; Alviso, Russ Greenberg, 327-0329.

Counters will reconvene at Security Savings and Loan, beginning at 4:30 when refreshments will be served prior to the count-down. To save time the count-down will note only the presence of a species in the area. The total tally will be computed and published in the Avocet later.

It is suggested that those who know the area they will cover, scout this area sometime during the previous week. Also names of species of birds seen in the count period but not on the count day should be sent to the compiler together with details of the observation.

Careful notes should be made of bird species rare or unusual for the count area. It would help, if unusual species were confirmed by observers other than the original.

The validity of Christmas Counts as statistical data on bird numbers and distribution is open to some question. However, these data are among the only ones available to those interested in the distribution of

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BOARD MEETING NOTES

1. SCVAS is helping to sponsor a January talk in Palo Alto by famous conservationist, Dr. Paul Sears. Our contribution \$25.
2. Pins advertising the South Bay Refuge are available from Nancy Holmes for \$1.25. Profits go toward the refuge.
3. SCVAS Board voted to contribute \$25 to Audubon Canyon Ranch and \$9 to California Tomorrow (we will receive a subscription to Cry California their magazine).
4. President Joseph Greenberg will again represent the board's stand against the County's plan to "develop" Palo Alto's flood basin into a diked and flooded lake, at the meeting of the P.A. Planning Commission, Wed. Nov. 18.

--Dianne Conradson

Christmas Count (Cont.)

winter birds and are often extremely useful in validating conservation projects. Therefore the participation of everybody is urged.

Besides, it would be fun to beat last year's record count (for this area) and to record over 160 species and put the San Jose count in the elite best count group. Finally, ask for a warm, windless day.

--Russ Greenberg, Compiler
270 Kellogg Ave.
Palo Alto, 327-0329

SHOREBIRD COURSE PLANNED

A study of birds of the Pacific Ocean and those that frequent the Pacific shore is offered jointly by UC Extension and Pt. Reyes Bird Observatory, February 26 to 28 at UC Extension Center, 55 Laguna St, San Francisco, with field observations at Limantour Estuary and Bolinas Bay.

The program includes talks by Monte Kirven, San Diego Natural History Museum, on effects of chlorinated hydrocarbons on marine bird populations; John Small, acting director PBO -- birds of coastal estuaries; Frank Pitelka, Chairman UC Department of Zoology -- diversity of sandpiper social systems; Wm Hamner, UC Davis-- orientation, migrations and circadian rhythms; Robert Lasiewski, UCLA -- physiological adaptations to heat stress; Thomas Howell, UCLA -- desert nesting seagulls of Chile; Ned K. Johnson, UC-- avifauna of the California Channel Islands; and Howard Cogswell, Cal State Hayward--San Francisco gulls and garbage dumps.

For further information and enrollment forms write UC Extension, 55 Laguna St. San Francisco.

FIELD TRIP REPORT

Dumbarton Bridge, Sept. 27. About 30 people on this warm cloudy Sunday saw 32 species of birds, mostly shorebirds. There were Avocets, Stilts, Willets, and Least Sandpipers; many Pintails; Marsh Hawks and Kites; and a few passerines. Most notable sight was about 30 Elegant Terns resting on a sandbar.

--Joseph Greenberg

PALO ALTO FOOTHILL PLANNING: HAZARDS AND OPPORTUNITIES is a current 40 page report by the League of Women Voters to provide useful background information to aid citizens in their evaluation of the challenging and complex problems of foothill land use. Price 65¢ (mailed) from Mrs. Linda Northway, 539 Rhodes, Palo Alto 94303, 325-1811.

IF YOU WANT TO SAVE YOUR ENVIRONMENT, START AT HOME is a 56 page handbook with ideas and suggestions on what can be done at home, in the garden, in the community and in the government. Proceeds will benefit the Palo Alto Branch of the American Assoc. of Univ. Women in a national fellowship program. Call Mrs. Howard Harrington, 321-9594, for copies.

EDF SUIT AGAINST USDA

The Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) has filed suit against the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) seeking to prevent the continued application of mirex in an attempt to eradicate the Imported Fire Ant (see Nov. Audubon p. 143). Mirex is a persistent chlorinated hydrocarbon insecticide. The suit alleges: 1) that mirex will be discharged indiscriminately.. 2) that mirex has been demonstrated to cause cancer in mice; 3) that mirex is extremely toxic to shrimp and crabs; 4) that it will be transported into aquatic environments to be concentrated in food chains; 5) that USDA has not adequately studied the ecological effects of mirex; 6) that the fire ant, while a nuisance, is not a serious pest, and is a beneficial predator; 8) that even if eradication were feasible, it is not justified; 9) that the ant can be adequately controlled locally where it is a nuisance.

Environmental Defense Fund is an action organization that presents scientific information before courts of law. It has joined with other conservation organizations; Sierra Club, Audubon Society, W. Michigan Environmental Action Council in a suit seeking cancellation and suspension of all registration of DDT. EDF address is Drawer 740, Stony Brook, New York 11790. Membership is \$10 a year.

- PREPARE FOR COUNT
1. If you have a pedometer, bring it on count day. Make our milage "guesstimates" more accurate.
 2. Practice estimating flock sizes, then compare your estimates with a direct count.
 3. Practice scanning flocks for rare species. That flock of White-crowned Sparrows may have a White-throated Sparrow too.

ENDANGERED LOCAL SPECIES

The U.S. Department of Interior "Redbook of Endangered Species" 1970 includes five local species; California Black Rail, California Clapper Rail, Salt Marsh (Red-bellied) Harvest Mouse, California Least Tern and Western Brown Pelican.

The threat to three of these, the Black and Clapper Rails and the Salt Marsh Harvest Mouse seems to be a direct result of the filling of marshes and estuaries, an increasingly common occurrence in recent years--such practices being the target of last year's "Save our coastline" bills - all of which died in various committees of the California Legislature.

Both rails are elusive birds which slip virtually unnoticed between the Pickleweed and Cord Grass of the marsh area. Only a visit to the marsh during high tide is likely to reward the bird lover with a glimpse of either.

The Black Rail is most common along the coast from Tomales and San Francisco Bays south into Mexico. Locally it is more difficult to find than the Clapper Rail which is a resident of Tomales, San Francisco, Monterey and Morro Bays. Both species are believed to feed on the snails, worms and other invertebrates which live in and on the mud.

The range of the Salt Marsh Harvest Mouse is restricted to San Francisco Bay's tidal marshes; it is found

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PUBLIC COMMENTS ARE REQUESTED by Commissioner Randolph Thrower (Internal Revenue Service) 15th & Penn. Ave NW, Washington D.C. 20224 concerning the proposed suspension of tax exempt status for all public interest law firms and other groups involved in law suits on environment and consumer protection issues. Such a step would have the effect of drying up funds for support of such organizations and thus give polluting industries and relectant government agencies a free hand. Deadline for comments -- 10 Dec. 1970.

Endangered Species (Cont.)

nowhere else in the world. A nocturnal animal, it builds bird-like nests above the ground. When thirsty it can consume salt water without ill effect and it is one of the few marsh dwellers which feeds directly on the marsh plants. It can, in turn, serve as prey for owls, snakes and several mammal predators.

The attractive little Least Tern breeds along the coast from Monterey County to southern Baja. Human disturbance of their nest sites on the upper sandy beaches may be the cause of their decline. Since sandy beaches are increasingly utilized by people, only protection of preferred sites would seem to insure the survival of this bird.

The Brown Pelican was, until recently, considered an abundant coastal California bird, but their current failure to reproduce successfully, will, unless checked, lead to their ultimate extinction. Needed are steps to further curb the use of DDT and related chlorinated hydrocarbons, since these seem to be the primary cause of the reproductive failure.

Even though the pelican may live 20 to 30 years, these persistent pesticides may remain in the environment for 20 years or more, and thus prompt action is needed if the Brown Pelican is to survive.

Please save your old pictures from Audubon or Sierra Club magazines and calendars for John Howland, 328 Central Ave., Menlo Park 94025; 322-7708. Mr. Howland mounts the pictures on wood and gives them as gifts or donates them to raffles or rummage sales. He says, "Many of those to whom I give these gifts are not well informed, and in some cases, somewhat hostile to environmental reform, but maybe such a picture hanging in their den will change their thinking just a mite... Awakening of the general public must be undertaken on various fronts."

THE HISTORY AND VALUE OF THE 'CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS

At the turn of the twentieth century the late Frank Chapman initiated Christmas bird "censuses" as a substitute for the old time "Christmas hunt" which was an organized effort to kill hawks, crows, and other "vermin". For many years the censuses were published in Bird-Lore. They have since appeared in Audubon Magazine and are now published in Audubon Field Notes. Only 27 persons made the 25 lists of the first year. Participation has since made a spectacular growth, and the number of observers taking part has increased over two hundred fold.

The increased participation in the counts bespeaks their great popularity. The desire to contribute something to science, the wish to see one's name in print, the rivalry for best lists, sport, and recreation are some of the considerations which prompt observers to go afield in all sorts of weather to make the counts. Whatever the personal motives, these counts have proven to be highly effective means of collecting raw data on early winter bird populations.

It is proper to ask, then, of what value are the Christmas bird counts? Can we enhance their value and still hold the interest of the many who make them?

Except for the stimulus of finding unusual birds, and for charting the invasions of northern birds, many ornithologists think that about the only value comes from the recreation and the popularization of bird study, but others think that the counts hold neglected possibilities.

Attempts to apply the data to analysis point up the differences in coverage of various habitats and the differences in conspicuousness of the several species. Gradual extensions of, and changes in the routes covered forestalls direct comparison of the lists from successive years. Coverage of the different habitats is usually reported as percentages of total

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History of Christmas Count (Cont.)

time. Actually, numbers of birds found per mile is much more meaningful. The total number of birds is more nearly a function of the distance traveled than of time spent in the field.

Increasing use of the automobile, coupled with competition for long lists can lower the scientific value of the counts. In most cases the main count should include only birds listed by observers on foot. It is clearly unscientific to compare observations made from an automobile with those made on foot on a per mile or per hour basis.

In selecting a route, care should be exercised to avoid factors which artificially influence bird movements, such as bird feeders.

There are striking differences in proficiency in finding birds. The influence of human variables can greatly be reduced by several observers working together. At least one thoroughly experienced observer should be in each group.

Another important human variable is involved in personal estimates of the numbers in flocks. Estimates of the numbers in large flocks may vary widely, and the count-figures for large flocks, must thus be considered as only relative.

The flocking of birds presents a major problem to the count analyst. Large flocks may include all the members of a given species which are present in a considerable area. Since all types of winter flocking may be represented, calculations of percentages of the total bird populations may be seriously distorted if species forming flocks are included in the total.

It would seem that counts of non-flocking species would be fairly comparable. Actually there are many differences in conspicuousness among birds, and these differences are sometimes hard to detect and measure. Therefore inter-specific comparisons can be made only with extreme caution.

The application of Christmas counts would seem then to be restricted to the indication of trends in populations rather than the yielding of exact data on the absolute number of birds in a certain area. As a scientific method for collecting data on natural populations of wild birds, the count can be of vast utility, and is, indeed, the broadest available to science. The method will presumably always contain some flaws, but the value of the counts can be enhanced without serious infringement of their popular appeal.

(Condensed from Paul A. Stewart,
Wilson Bulletin)

MORE ON ALASKA'S NORTH SLOPE

The oil companies pushing for development of the 48 inch oil line across Alaska's tundra still are banking on a buried line in spite of the ecological hazards of the enterprise, according to an article in September Environment. A recent U.S. Geological Survey report, taking into account the experience of the Soviet Union, concluded that only an above-ground line is feasible in most areas. (The Soviets have engaged in research on methods of laying pipelines in permafrost since shortly after World War II.)

Possible hazards of a buried line include major disruptions of the drainage due to slumping and mudslides, threat of massive spills (one mile of pipe would contain 500,000 gallons of hot oil), and interruption of caribou migration routes.

In spite of the problems, only a pipeline seems to offer the efficiency and economy required in an operation of this magnitude, and only constant vigilance of government and conservationists will insure that the ecological damage is kept to a minimum.

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IF YOU SEE A GULL WEARING COLORED PLASTIC TAGS, please report to Dr. Howard Cogswell, Dept to Bio. Sci., Cal State, Hayward 94542. Include your name and address, date and place of observation, tag's color, species of gull or plumage description, bill and feet color.

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