

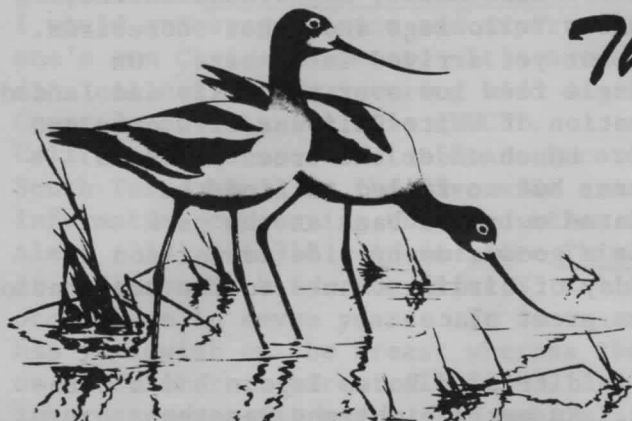
SANTA CLARA VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY, Inc.

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# The Avocet

TIME VALUE



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Volume 21, Number 10

December, 1974

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- Dec. 9 Board of Director's Meeting, Monday, 7:30 P.M. at the Peninsula Conservation Center -- members are welcome
- Dec. 10 Bird Discussion Group, Tuesday, 9:30 A.M. at the home of Eve Case, 20537 Verde Vista Lane, Saratoga. Topic: Hummingbirds
- Dec. 11 Field Trip South, Wednesday, 9:00 A.M. Montalvo Arboretum. West off highway 9 at sign about 1/2 mile south of Saratoga or 4 miles north of Los Gatos. Leader: Frank Farran 252-3874
- Dec. 14 Field Trip, Saturday, 1:30 P.M., Palo Alto Baylands at low tide. Embarcadero Road exit east off Bayshore to end of road. Meet at Nature Center north of Yacht Harbor. We will study shore birds on the mud flats and via slides and skins. Leader: Paul Kelley 494-1735
- Dec. 22 Christmas Bird Count, Sunday -- see note later in this AVOCET.
- Dec. 25 CHRISTMAS DAY, Wednesday, all day.

## FIELD TRIP REPORTS

Ted and Dottie Graf report that 18 people showed up on a cool clear day for the Nov. 6th jaunt to Santa Teresa Park. Car pools were formed to drive to the Upper Park. Walked up a slight grade, through a Oak and Bay Canyon. Twenty-four species were seen, including Loggerhead Shrike, Lark Sparrow, and Pipits. The highlight was observing a Bewicks Wren taking a dust bath on the trail downgrade.

Carol Zabel reports that 24 people attended the October 23rd trip to Foothills Park. Thirty-three species of birds were seen, among them a Kingfisher, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Fox Sparrows and Sharp shinned Hawk.

Don Brockhurst gives this report on the Nov. 10th event at Coyote Hills Regional Park. Some 24 birders showed despite overcast sky and threats of rain. However weather improved as we went along. There were many birds to see. We had good views of a Fox Sparrow, White-tailed Kites, both sexes of Marsh Hawks, Loggerhead Shrike, Say's Phoebe, Water Pipits, Burrowing Owls, Greater Yellowlegs and other shorebirds. The marsh areas are still dry so the ducks have not yet arrived in numbers. On our way back to the cars to get lunch a Golden Eagle flew low over the hills and landed on a power pole some distance away, while a formation of White Pelicans flew over and worked a thermal together in the bright sunlight. Lunch under the trees produced both kinds of Kinglets, Hermit Thrushes and others; but we failed to find the Great Horned Owl that roosts there. (The Long eared owls are back at the park again this year). A short afternoon walk gave us a good side-by-side comparison at close range of Sora and Virginia Rails. A fine day of birding thanks to the cooperation of the birds and weather. Coyote Hills Park is a great place.

Bob and Carol Yutzy tell us that the Oct. 27th field trip to Rodeo Lagoon had a turnout of 45 people and variable weather conditions. An early highlight was the Albino Red-tailed Hawk. We also saw a Common Gallinule, a flock of Golden-crowned Kinglets and a possible "good" warbler which eluded our identification. Otherwise we saw no uncommon warblers (althought a Northern Waterthrush was reported in the area). Hawk-watching from Point Diablo was discouraging because of fog and overcast. The true highlight was probably the fantastic views of San Francisco and the Golden Gate Bridge from the mountain top.

#### AUDUBON WILDLIFE FILMS

THE AVOCET received a note from David Roderick, the Director of Nature Expedition International (NEI):

"I regret to inform you that we have found it necessary to cancel our sponsorship of the Audubon Wildlife Film Lectures as of this date due to low attendance at the last two meetings.

Evidently, television and other communit events have replaced the need for such films in the surround communities and there is no longer the desire to support such films. As you know, as a non-profit organization, our programs are self-supporting to a large degree. At the current rate of attendance, we would have lost more than \$1000 if we continued to support the series this year.

We will be happy to make refunds for the unused portions of season tickets. If those concerned will turn in their unused tickets and send to NEI, P. O. Box 1173, Los Altos, California 94022, I will send them their refunds. Please be sure to denote whether the tickets are for students or adults.

Again, I wish to thank all of the local Audubon Society members for their past and present support of such programs. It is with great reluctance that we cancel such a series because of its important message about conservation and natural history education and the hight quality of the films and speakers." Signed: David Roderick, Director, NEI

#### AUDUBON LIBRARY

The Audubon Library at the Peninsula Conservation Center (PCC) continues to grow, and our librarian Miss Wayne Peters wishes to thank those people who donate their books to us. In particular we would mention Dorothy Wilson who gave some 14 books, Florence Wood for her donations and Neil Dickinson who gave us a collection of American Birds, Audubon Field Notes, and those lovely Audubon Magazines. Thank you again and again!

## WHERE IT'S AT

December brings Christmas Counts, ducks, geese, wintering hawks, land birds, water birds, and the beginning of the southerly Gray Whale migration. This month's site guide is to Los Banos Wildlife Area and Merced Wildlife Refuge.

I would encourage novice and expert alike to support and participate in at least one's own Christmas Count. It's a real chance for everyone to help contribute to data collection on wintering bird distribution. Please take a look at the Christmas Count dates later in this AVOCET.

California had another 1st State Records - a Groove-billed Ani (this is normally a South Texas bird) in the Riverside area and it was still there in mid-November. For information concerning this and other Southern California rarities, call L. A. Rare Bird Alert (213) 8741318. An immature Thick-billed Kingbird was still in San Francisco at McClaren Park for the first N. California record, fifth State record, and first occurrence in seven years. It is interesting that the immature of this Arizona species has yellowish on the breast whereas the adult is whitish. For up-to-date information on N. California birds call 843-2211. Also notable was a Yellow-billed Loon in the Inverness area (it might stay awhile).

Birds to look for or ones that might still be in the same areas are:

Monterey - Thick-billed Murre, Fork-tailed Petrel, N. Fulmar, and Oldsquaw.

Solano Lake - Two Barrow's Goldeneyes and six Hooded Mergansers.

Palo Alto (Flood Basin, Baylands, and Duck Pond) - European and Hybrid Widgeon, Redhead, Thayer's and a beautiful albino Herring or Glaucous-winged Gull.

Lake Merritt - Barrow's Goldeneye and Hooded Mergansers.

P. Reyes - Oldsquaw, Golden Plovers, three Swamp Sparrows, Green-winged (Common) Teal, Barrow's Goldeneye (Bolinis Lagoon), and Longspurs.

Bodega Head - Northwest parking lot, look down on Surfbirds and search for the wintering Rock Sandpipers (at least two there already). Also look for the many Black Oystercatchers (we saw eleven in one group and fifteen-twenty total).

Southern California - Red-throated and Sprague's Pipits were still in the Imperial area

Death Valley - A Least Flycatcher, Rusty Blackbird, White-throated, Swamp, Tree, and Harris' Sparrows.

Rough-legged and Ferruginous Hawks should be looked for in any open fields with mild rolling terrain. Any reservoirs should be checked for Common and Hooded Mergansers, Goldeneyes, Wood Duck, and possibly an Osprey.

Birds that were seen and are probably not still seeable:

Monterey - Eastern Phoebe, Tropical Kingbird, Black-throated Blue, four Palm, Tennessee, Blackpoll Warblers, and American Redstart.

Moss Beach - Hooded, Black & White, Magnolia, Blackpoll Warblers, and Northern Water-thrush.

Coyote Hills - White-throated Sparrow (in our backyard also), Northern Waterthrush and Ross' Goose.

A Black-throated Blue Warbler in a backyard in Fremont, a Northern Waterthrush at Rodeo Lagoon, Tree Sparrow in Marin, a Brown Thrasher in Solano County, and a Goshawk was seen along the coast near San Mateo-San Francisco County line.

Pt. Reyes - Two Virginias and a Blackburnian (we have had far more of these two than would be expected even in this incredible season), three Black-throated Blue, five Palm, and a Black & White Warbler, eight Golden Plovers, two Northern (Baltimore) Orioles, the season's first Oldsquaw, Mountain Bluebirds, twenty-five to forty Chestnut-collared and fifteen to fifty Lapland Longspurs, and a Cattle Egret. P.R.B.O. had a Great Crested Flycatcher.

Southern California - a Black-throated Green and a Canada Warbler.

# KISS A FROG TODAY!

Death Valley - Fourteen to fifteen species of sparrows, including one White-throated, seven Tree, three+ Harris' (one fantastic), two Swamp, a Clay-colored, and two LeConte's Sparrows. Recent warblers include three Cape May, Ovenbird, two Tennessee, five Black-throated Blue, Parula, yellow Palm, and a confusing Bay-breasted-Pine type. The immature Least Flycatcher presented many with a difficult decision. Other goodies seen were Indigo Bunting, Broad-winged Hawk, a late Pectoral Sandpiper, at least two Rusty Blackbirds, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Gray Catbird, Brown Thrasher, Red-eyed Vireo, Eastern Phoebe, Ground Dove, Prairie Falcon, and a superb look at a Bobcat.

Los Banos State Wildlife Area and Merced National Wildlife Refuge are a good long one day birding trip, located some 90 or so miles from San Jose thru Pacheco Pass, near route 5. The Los Banos tour route offers excellent views of American Bittern and Common Gallinules (for these two-this is by far the best place) as well as White-faced Ibis, waterfowl, and Hawks. Rough-legged and Ferruginous in winter and Swainsons in summer (especially at neighboring San Luis Refuse). Los Banos also harbors White-fronted, Canada, Snow and some Ross's Geese, many other waterfowl, shorebirds, swallows and in summer Black Terns. It can be very rewarding here to walk some of the roads and paths.

Merced, while having some of the same species, also has Whistling Swans, White Pelicans, more Ross's Geese and Sandhill Cranes - though the tour route is often less defined here than in Los Banos.

Near Los Banos there is a fine (pond) for Whistling Swans, approximately 2 miles north of town, go west on the Henry Miller Road to the other side of the town of Volta. Between 152 and the town of Merced go left for 1-2 miles on Sandy Mush Road and check the pastures for Mountain Plovers, then continue on to the Merced refuge.

Good Christmas Counting,  
Bob Yutzy

#### SHORT COURSES IN ORNITHOLOGY AND WILD ANIMAL CARE

A mini-course in ornithology is being offered by the Mt. View-Los Altos Union High School District. This bird class is taught by Bob Yutzy, who is, among other things, the father of the Where It's At in the AVOCET each month. Bob is also a Board member of the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society and is senior author of the upcoming revised edition of Birds of the Santa Clara Valley Region. Bob's class will meet on four consecutive Thursday evenings at Los Altos High School, starting January 16, 1975.

Another somewhat associated course is offered in the convalescence of wild birds and mammals, Mrs. Virginia Collins will instruct a special three-week course in cooperation with the local Wildlife Rescue Team (WRT). Associated with the WRT since its beginning, Mrs. Collins will train interested adults on how to help the more than 1,000 birds and mammals which are injured or orphaned in our area every six months. The class is scheduled for Los Altos High School for three three-hour sessions, starting Monday, January 6, 1975.

Interested adults should contact the adult education offices at Mountain View or Los Altos High, or by phoning 948-3278 or 967-7986.

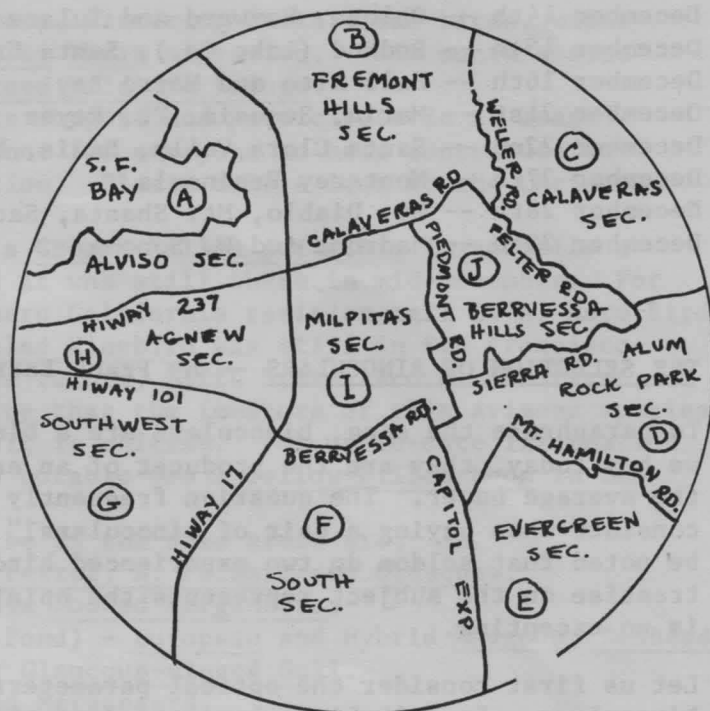
#### BIRD PICTURES NEEDED

THE AVOCET received a SOS from Bif Soper requesting "beautiful pictures of birds, trees, plants, animals, etc." These will be used to make teaching materials for school children. Pictures from old nature magazines, possibly snapshots, or even slides (if you can spare them for a while) may be sent to the Peninsula Conservation Center (PCC), c/o Bif Soper, 1176 Emerson Street, Palo Alto, Ca., 94301

**FREE!**

Section Leaders

- A. Dick Mewaldt ..... 258-4891
- B. Ed Piccolo..... 267-6035
- C. Don Brockhurst ..... 294-9879
- D. Bill Mewaldt..... 295-1083
- E. Craig Kuziel..... 964-6396
- F. Mike Rigney..... 738-2028
- G. Tony Look..... 968-3668
- H. Jim Hale ..... 283-3200
- I. Nancy Holmes..... 948-1854
- J. Frank Farran..... 252-3874



Don't forget! The Annual Christmas Bird Count is December 22nd. Choose that you'd like to bird, then call the Section Leader. Meet briefly with section leader at 7:00 a.m. on the morning of the count for assignments. Go out and rack up those species! Don' forget though, all counts must be in the designated area as outlined on the accompanying map.

The final tally is a lasagne, salad, and French bread dinner and all counters are invited to attend. The place of this tally/dinner is as yet a secret, but by the time you read this all the plans will be laid. Please check with your Section Leader or the Count Coordinator for details. We must know in advance if you plan to attend; two days advance notice PLEASE!!

We'd like to put in a special plea for you feeder-watchers, or anyone wishing to do a small neighborhood count. This census should reflect the habitats of the Santa Clara Valley. The avid birders tend to get carried away looking for the rare birds, but it is most important that we also have a working knowledge of the numbers of usual species seen in the area and that's where feeder watchers can be so important. Phone in your results to the count compiler between 5:00 and 6:00 p.m. on the 22nd. For any questions or general information about the count give me a call. I am this year's

Count compiler  
Phyllis Swanson  
274-2349

PALO ALTO BIRD COUNT -- December 16

The north Santa Clara County Audubon bird count will be on Monday, December 16, 1974. The ten-mile diameter circular area's center is near Page Mill Road and El Camino Real in Palo Alto. Volunteers may call Ed Helley (x2462) or Clark Blake (x2353) at the U. S. Geological Survey, 323-8111 between 7:45 a.m. and 4:15 p.m., Monday through Friday.

## CHRISTMAS COUNTS CONTINUED -----

December 14th -- Ohlone, Hayward and Tulare  
December 15th -- Redbud (Lake Co.), Santa Cruz, Golden Gate/Oakland  
December 16th -- Palo Alto and Morro Bay  
December 21st -- Marin, Sequoia, Pt. Reyes  
December 22nd -- Santa Clara Vally, Davis, Napa/Solano and Redwood Region  
December 27th -- Monterey Peninsula  
December 28th -- Mt. Diablo, Mt. Shasta, Sacramento  
December 29th -- Madrone and W. Sonoma

## THE SELECTION OF BINOCULARS -- by Frank Farran

To paraphrase the song, binoculars are a birders best friend. Like many of the things we buy today, they are the product of an esoteric technology not well understood by the average buyer. The question frequently asked is, "What, really, should one consider when buying a pair of binoculars?" Before answering this question, it should be noted that seldom do two experienced birders use the same model of binoculars. Any treatise on the subject represents the opinions of the author. The following critique is no exception.

Let us first consider the optical parameters normally employed in defining a pair of binoculars. In 7x35 binoculars the 7 is the magnifying power and the 35 is the diameter in millimeters of the front or objective lens. The 7 means the objective appears to be 7 times as wide (or high) as it would through the naked eye. Another way of expressing it is that the objective appears to be only one seventh as far away as it really is. It would thus seem that for birding the greater the magnification power the better. Not so! The greater the magnification power, the more the image seems to jump with slight motions of the glasses. Binoculars of 12 power on up are of practical use only when they are steadied by some sort of support. For general bird watching, 7 or 8 power glasses are a good compromise.

The light transmitting power of binoculars is another very important consideration. The light transmitting power is limited by what is known as the exit pupil diameter is determined by dividing the diameter of the objective lens by the magnification. For 7x35 glasses it is 35 divided by 7 which is 5 millimeters. One can see this exit pupil as an ephemeral spot on the rear lens when the binoculars are pointed at the ground and held a foot from the eyes. In poor light the pupil in the human eye increases to 7 millimeters, or so, and may become larger than the exit pupil. The exit pupil then becomes the limiting factor in the optical system. Thus, objects will appear dimmer and colors less evident than when viewed with the naked eye. Under such conditions 7x50 glasses will be preferable to 7x35 glasses and 7x35 glasses preferable to 8x35 glasses ( $50/7$  is larger than  $35/7$  and  $35/7$  is larger than  $35/8$ ). In selection of glasses one must make a choice between the optical advantages of a larger objective lens and the resultant size and weight advantages associated with a smaller objective lens. Seven by fifty glasses are fine only if you are able to handle them comfortably.

The field of view is an important optical factor in selection of binoculars. The larger the field of view, the easier it is to locate a bird. The higher the power of binoculars, the smaller the field of view providing another argument against very powerful glasses. Field of view is normally given in terms of the width of the field seen at 1000 yards. Sometimes it is given in degrees. A 10 degree field of view is the same as 525 feet at 1000 yards. The relative fields of view of several binoculars can be compared simply by sighting them successively on the same group of distant objects. Using this procedure, the author found that the field of view given on binoculars often has little meaning. For example, a pair of 7x50 glasses with a rated

field of view of 373 feet at 1000 yards actually had a wider field of view than a pair of "extra wide angle" 7x35 glasses with a rated field of 578 feet at 1000 yards. Both glasses were made by the same company. You just can't believe what you read, even when it is engraved on binoculars.

Modern binoculars have an anti-reflection coating on the optical surfaces. This coating gives the lenses a blueish metallic appearance. Its purpose is to minimize sunglare. This is one of the innovations that renders older glasses quite obsolete. An important feature of binoculars for birding is the capability of focusing on objects near at hand. For land birding binoculars should provide a clear image down to at least 20 feet.

The final optical property to be considered is the quality of the optical elements (lenses and internal prisms) and the accuracy with which they are mounted. It is this factor which really differentiates good glasses from poor glasses. The image provided by good glasses will be clear and undistorted even at the edge of the field of view. Details will be well defined. Colors will be true across the field of view and there will be no evidence of any "rainbow" patterns.

Weight and size are probably the most important mechanical factors to consider. The lighter and smaller binoculars are, the easier they are to carry and handle. However, because of the relationship between the diameter of the objective lens and light transmitting power, it is inherently impossible to reduce the size of binoculars beyond a certain point without making sacrifices in the optics. Very small and light glasses have another disadvantage. Because they lack inertia, they are difficult to hold steady. It is the feeling of the author that a person should get the largest glasses that he finds comfortable to handle. As a rough index, 44 ounce glasses are too heavy for many people. On the other hand, 24 ounce glasses are light enough for the smallest adult. There is merit in glasses with a magnesium housing so that adequate physical size can be combined with acceptable weight.

All but the very cheapest binoculars hinge in the center so that they will accommodate to the spacing of the users eye. However, there are binoculars where this adjustment is inadequate for certain people. This is something to watch for.

The focusing system of binoculars is very important. Even expensive glasses are sold which are not equipped with a central focus; that is, each eye must be focused independently. Birds won't always wait around while this is being done. For birding, a central focus combined with a separate focus on one eye is a must. Once the separate focus is set to accommodate for variation between the users eyes, it normally need not be readjusted for the balance of the day.

All of the mechanical adjustments should work freely (but not loosely) at room temperature. If they do not, at low temperatures adjustment may be most difficult. A person who normally wears eye glasses can see better through binoculars with his eye glasses off. However, birdwatchers seldom find it convenient to remove eye glasses each time they use binoculars. Rubber eye pieces facilitate the use of binoculars with eye glasses.

What should one pay for binoculars? In the discount stores, and elsewhere binoculars are available for \$35 or less. Some of these glasses are surprisingly good for the price. A beginning or casual birder would be foolish to pay more. Binoculars with better quality optics are available for prices up to \$300 or higher, but some of the best birding glasses sell for under \$100. Before making a major sacrifice to purchase a pair of binoculars, remember that they probably won't be a "once in a life time" purchase. The usual demise of binoculars is loss, breakage, theft or technical obsolescence. The best binoculars sold twenty five years ago are now quite obsolete.

One last point. Be it a \$20 purchase or a \$300 purchase, binoculars are a very personal item. One should no more buy a pair of binoculars without trial than a pair of shoes. There is always the rather indefinable but vital consideration of how the glasses feel to the hand and eye. In addition, criteria such as close focus, field of view and quality of the optics can best be evaluated only by trial and comparison.

One good place to try many types of glasses is on an Audubon field trip. If there are 30 people on the trip, there will be close to 30 models of glasses available. In a store it is a good idea to try glasses where many types may be compared. When the purchase is made, it is best to take home the actual pair of binoculars evaluated. There can be variations from pair to pair of the same model.

#### A PLEA FROM THE ENVIRONMENTAL VOLUNTEERS

The environmental volunteers need good, close-up slides of a male Greenback Goldfinch (Lesser Goldfinch), a House Finch and Bushtit. I will pick up slides, have them copied, and return them.

They are needed for a new workshop on the Observation of Nesting Birds in our urban environment and will be used in classrooms all over the Peninsula. Please call or write: Betty Emlen, 854-A Jordan Avenue, Los Altos, Ca., 94022. 969-2758

#### PCC GIFT SHOP

We mention the Peninsula Conservation Center (PCC) so much in the AVOCET, since that lovely building houses the office of the SCVAS. However, we'd like to mention that the PCC has a Gift Shop of sort, so you might like to drop in and Christmas shop early. Lots of clayware, art, stationery, bunches of books, -- very neat "nature" sort of things. We're guessing at the hours here, but the PCC is open from about 9 A.M.- 5 P.M. during the week. Address & phone number under logo of AVOCET.

# Thanks.

THE AVOCET is published every month except July and August. It is sent without additional charge to paid-up members of the National Audubon Society who live in this area. Subscription for non-members is \$2.00 per year, payable to the Treasurer. Please notify the Editor promptly of any address change.

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