

# The Stilt

Summer 2003

SAN FRANCISCO BAY BIRD OBSERVATORY NEWSLETTER

## DIRECTOR'S CORNER

### BIRDS, SCIENCE AND RUNWAYS

In 1999, SFBBO biologists were called upon to join an independent scientific peer review panel for the San Francisco International Airport's runway expansion project. In fact, many scientists from around the bay and beyond, came to the earliest meetings on what was then the biggest impending change facing the Bay's ecosystem and wildlife.

Now, four years and millions of words later, the Panel has met for the last time and the technical report has finally been released to the public. Despite the fact that the runway project itself has been shelved for now, the agencies\* who originally convened the Panel decided that the technical studies should be completed.

As a member of the Panel and the sole bird scientist, I have participated in many hours of meetings, commented on hundreds of pages and watched the consultant's efforts to not only describe the South Bay's ecosystem but also to predict what would happen if 1.5 square miles of runway were plopped down in it. Our job was not to make the decision on whether to build the runway or not, but rather to ensure that the science needed to support the decision was appropriate and sound.

Millions of birds utilize the South Bay's wetlands. The new runways would of course displace waterfowl that currently use the waters surrounding SFO. But the greater impact of the project on birds would take two primary forms: first, how would wetland habitats be altered by the change in the Bay's hydrology? Despite the best available computer models and the best efforts of the Panel and the consulting scientists, we were unable to make this call. The Bay is huge, and the further one travels from the project site, the less resolving power of the model, regardless of the quality of data fed to it (and available hydrological data on the Bay is excellent, thanks to USGS). It is not possible to know (today) with an acceptable level of certainty whether the runways would affect the South Bay's mudflats, where just a few feet of elevational change can cause erosion or accretion. This factor alone has major implications for the thousands of shorebirds that depend on those mudflats as foraging habitat.

Second, what would be the cumulative effect of the project on the Bay's birds? Consider that construction would be a 24/7 project lasting for six years. The dredging operation would re-suspend contaminants long buried in bay sediments ("legacy" sediments). Noise and disturbance would add to the cumulative effects of the project on wildlife. While much background information was collected and collated, it is not possible to predict these cumulative impacts. Models also lose resolution as they proceed from physical to chemical and finally to biological properties, swamped by the complexity of the system.

The technical report pulls together all of our current knowledge of the Bay's ecosystem and the tools available today for evaluating its conditions, especially the conceptual model which will be valuable to everyone interested in the Bay's ecosystem and restoration. The report also exposes the gaps in our data and understanding of this complex system and how changes in its physical properties affect the birds dependent upon it.

~ Janet Hanson  
Executive Director, SFBBO

\*The Panel was facilitated by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). It was convened at the request of the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC) and other regulatory agencies, joined by SFO, the FAA and the City of San Francisco.



VICKI JENNINGS

#### In this issue:

- 1 *Birds, Science and Runways*  
Director's Corner
- 2 *Coyote Creek Field Station*  
Update
- 3 *The Quest for Nests*
- 4 *Birds, Boats and Botulism*
- 5 *Serendipity and Stavocets*  
*Busy Season for the Birds*  
*of the Baylands Program*
- 8 *The Tern of Events*



MONICA LUNDY

The San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to the conservation of birds and their habitats through research, monitoring and educational activities.



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# Coyote Creek Field Station Update

**T**ime for the spring/summer update of happenings at the Coyote Creek Field Station! Summer has arrived and our spring migrants have moved along to their breeding grounds, which means that things slow down a bit at CCFS - the breeding birds are busy sitting on eggs and taking care of young. Baby birds started fledging from their nests as early as May, but recently fledging activity has slightly increased. In late summer the numbers of hatching-year (first-year) birds that we capture in mist nets will increase dramatically, both from birds fledged at CCFS and also from other birds dispersing from other nearby areas. For now though, we enjoy the opportunity to handle the occasional baby Song Sparrow and Common Yellowthroat with their brown/yellow wash, fluffy plumage, and that big yellow gape at the corners of their mouth that helps direct parents to put the food in the correct spot.

One of the spring migrants that just recently left CCFS is the Swainson's Thrush, which arrived here in late April and reached peak numbers in mid-May. After a winter of Hermit Thrushes, the Swainson's Thrush seemed large and a little more awkward for handling and banding. However, some individual Swainson's Thrushes practiced their beautiful flute-like, upwardly spiraling song while resting



CCFS volunteer, Harold Fukuma, measures coyote brush while intern, Amy Scarpignato, records data.

at CCFS, and we all felt fortunate to hear this early 'run-through'. Swainson's Thrushes arrived here from Mexico or northern South America. Although they don't breed at the Field Station, their breeding range extends from coastal southern California up to Alaska. One of our most exciting mist net captures of the year was a color-banded Swainson's Thrush that migrated through CCFS in early May. This bird was banded as a nestling in Marin County last spring by biologists from PRBO Conservation Science!

This year we were thrilled to locate a White-tailed Kite nest in the revegetated area of CCFS. In our last CCFS Update we mentioned that we had observed the kites exhibiting courtship behavior. In late May we were happily surprised to see young kites flying around and perched near the nest location. According to *The Birder's Handbook* (by Ehrlich, Dobkin, and Wheye, 1988), White-tailed kites normally lay four to five, and sometimes up to six, eggs. Apparently this particular pair of kites are good parents because we counted six young kites flying around!

Everyone knows that saying: The early bird gets the worm. Here at SFBBO we are fortunate to have a committed group of volunteers to help us survey the birds. They have to be committed because the birds rise and start singing before dawn during the summer. In June, this translates to arriving for bird surveys before 5 am! Some of you may think the bird biologists and volunteers are insane to endure this, but there are many benefits. We experience the waking of the birds and the cacophony of the 'dawn chorus'; we get to see sunrise on every survey day; we often encounter other (nocturnal) animals such as foxes and owls when we first arrive; and last but not least, during our drive to the field station we are some of the only people who experience the south bay roads without traffic! It IS true, we get the proverbial worm by arising so early.

## VEGETATION SURVEYS

We completed our annual vegetation survey at CCFS in record time this year, thanks to a great team of volunteers. This takes a different type of commitment from getting up early for bird surveys. Instead, these volunteers spend hours helping us identify trees and measure grasses and other plants at CCFS, often during hot summer afternoons. Most people wonder why we survey the vegetation at CCFS every year. For that matter, why do we study birds? At SFBBO we are dedicated to the conservation of birds and their habitat, and we use the study of birds as a way to monitor the health of the San Francisco Bay ecosystem. By conducting annual vegetation surveys along with our bird surveys we are able to relate changes in bird populations to changes in habitat, allowing us to deduce reasons for changes in bird populations over time.

The vegetation at CCFS is composed of both natural riparian (streamside) vegetation, and areas where riparian vegetation was planted with native riparian trees and shrubs starting in 1987. Before 1987, one part of CCFS was a pear orchard. In 1987, biologists at CCFS (then known as the Coyote Creek Riparian Station) began annual measurements of the vegetation, so we have tracked the plants there for over 15 years. As the native plants grew over the years (they are still in a mid-successional stage), bird populations also have changed. A fascinating result of our ten-year study (1987 - 1996) revealed that out of the 18 species showing significant increase in abundance at CCFS, 11 actually decreased state-wide in California during the same time period. This increase in bird numbers at our study site is related to growth of the native plants, and an overall increase in the amount of riparian vegetation there. Another interesting result of the study was that the weedy field-like overflow channel in the middle of the riparian vegetation at CCFS has contributed to increases in numbers of birds and bird species there. This 'overflow channel' is maintained as a treeless

# The Quest for Nests

While battling with the vegetation in the overflow channel at CCFS, I spot a female Common Yellowthroat jumping from branch to branch. I glance at her through my binoculars and notice that she is carrying a small green grub between her bill. Ahah! I thought to myself, there must be a nest nearby. I continue to struggle a little further so I can receive a "bird's eye" view of the female and male Common Yellowthroat. The Yellowthroats were on to me by now and began to sound alarm calls that mimic rubber bands snapping, another indication that a nest may be nearby. I manage to squeeze my way into a small thicket of poison hemlock and various other weeds that will work as my cover. I sit down Indian style and begin to hold post.

The pair notices I have disappeared and begin to hop closer to each other. I watch as the female approaches the male. He opens his mouth to her and she draws nearer with the grub in her mouth. They separate and the male begins his rubber band calls as the female drops into a cluster of weeds. I realize that this must be where the nest is and my thoughts are confirmed when the female reappears from the vegetation with no food in her mouth. I begin to stand so I can narrow the location of the nest. The pair is aware of my movement and begins to sound the alarm calls. They hop around hoping to lead me away from the nest. I crouch back down and look up to see the female about five feet from my head. She is hopping wildly in front of me and chirping. Soon the male

joins the female and both are calling for me to leave.

I stand up and decide I need a new vantage point. I check the surrounding vegetation and find a new spot to serve as my cover. I now have a better view of the nest area and more protection. I hurry to the new blind and sit down to begin my observations again. After a few minutes, I see the male with a grub in his mouth. Both male and female Common Yellowthroats tend to their young but only the female incubates. The male disappears into the vegetation

near where the female had gone before. I wait for one more food carry just to be sure. Soon the female has a large insect in her mouth. She enters the vegetation and I watch the leaves shake around her. I can now pinpoint the location of the nest and decide it is time to see its contents.

I scan the area for potential predators and approach cautiously but the pair are jumping around and calling loudly. Eventually, they realize they cannot stop me from approaching the nest and back off. I poke my nest stick around the area and locate the nest. It is best to search for

a nest with a nest stick so predators cannot pick up the scent I would potentially leave. As I part the vegetation and light shines through, four tiny mouths open. I see bright yellow and red gapes and gray downy bodies. The nest is about one foot off the ground and joined to nearby stiff pieces of

vegetation. The nest is cup shaped, comprised of tightly woven pieces of grass, about three inches long, three inches across, and two inches deep. I quickly make my observations and escape leaving

a different way than how I approached. It is important to use different routes when checking nests so paths for predators are not visible and trails do not dead end to nest locations.

Predators and nest parasites are major problems for nest success. The main predators at CCFS include snakes, mammals such as raccoons, skunks, and Gray Fox, and birds such as

Western Scrub Jays. Brown-headed cowbirds are nest parasites, meaning that they lay their eggs in the nests of other species. The parents of the other species end up raising the cowbird young. This is especially harmful because cowbird young tend to be larger than the young of the species they parasitize. The young that were originally in the nest will be out-competed and the cowbird will usually fledge successfully while the other chicks may die.

Well, the question that remains is what happened to the nest? I must say that I'm not sure. I was able to visit the nest a few more times and track the progression of the chicks. However, on one visit, the nest was empty. I returned one more time after this discovery to search the area for clues about what might have happened. I noticed that there were excretions on the rim of the nest. Common Yellowthroat chicks are only able to reach the rim of the nest about the same time they begin to fledge. So what happened? Did the chicks fledge or were they victim to one of the many predators that lurk in the vegetation of the field station? I like to think they made it successfully but then again, who knows?

~Amy Scarpignato  
SFBBO Landbird Intern



A young visitor to CCFS has the great (if new and a bit unsettling) opportunity to hear a rapid heartbeat of a recently banded bird before its release.

PHOTO BY DAVID CARDINAL/CARDINAL PHOTO



PHOTO BY DAVID CARDINAL/CARDINAL PHOTO

Visiting groups to CCFS have the unique opportunity to see birds up-close and learn about the important scientific and conservation work we carry out at the station all year-round.

# BIRDS, BOATS AND BOTULISM



PHOTO BY BRYAN DIAS

Head Birds of the Baylands Biologist, Cheryl Strong, is able to walk from island to island in a shallow East Bay salt pond during this year's breeding colonial nesting waterbird monitoring season. SFBBO conducts numerous research and monitoring activities throughout the year around the Bay's habitat. Two of the most important monitoring activities are the annual surveys of breeding bird colonies and the Avian Disease Prevention Program.

It was very hot, and had been so for the better part of the week. Michelle Melby and I stood on a berm looking at a mallard not more than three feet away from us languishing in the mud on the shore. The duck just sat there for a moment before plopping into the water and rowing itself clumsily across the sludge pond with its wings. It couldn't fly, couldn't stand up, couldn't dive under water. Its only means of escaping us was to windmill itself across the water. As we continued to look around, we found many other sick ducks, some of which were lying on the ground unable to stand, lift their heads or fly. These were classic symptoms of avian botulism. In advanced stages, the birds would be unable to blink their eyes, and finally unable to breathe. Many ducks in the latter stages of the disease often suffocate or drown, unable to haul themselves out of the water or lift their heads out of the water as the paralysis becomes severe. This was my first experience with avian botulism in the south bay. We gathered up

a number of sick ducks that day, mostly mallards and gadwalls, and took them to Wildlife Rescue, a local wildlife rehab facility in Palo Alto. Many more birds were infected or died before the outbreak played itself out.

The disease appears sporadically and unpredictably in wetlands across the western United States and is known as a "summer disease" particularly of ducks, Coots, gulls and shorebirds. It tends to occur during periods of hot, dry weather, in shallow, nutrient-rich bodies of fresh or brackish water. The pH and water temperatures tend to be high, and water circulation, poor. Botulism is particularly common in bodies of water that either cyclically or seasonally drain or dry down.

Botulism is commonly called "Western Duck Disease," since ducks are particularly susceptible to it. This is largely because of your average duck's eating preferences. Ducks love to grub in the mud for their eats, since they are particularly fond of

invertebrate snacks that abound in wetland mudflats, sloughs, shallow ponds and lagoons. This is exactly where the bacterium that causes botulism thrives, since saturated soils (science talk for "mud") are anaerobic (science talk for "lacking oxygen"), and *Clostridium botulinum* is a common, natural soil organism that grows only in the absence of oxygen. It isn't an easy organism to coax to grow either, even under laboratory conditions because only slight traces of oxygen are toxic to *Clostridium*. I used to work as a microbiology lab tech, and when I had to culture *Clostridium*, the cultures had to be placed in a special gasket-sealed container in which all of the oxygen was then chemically removed. If the voodoo chant I then invoked worked, and the vacuum seal held and kept the oxygen out of the container, the bacterium would reluctantly grow.

*Clostridium* is one of several genera of spore-forming bacteria, and its spores are dormant most of the time in nearly all

Continued on page 6



PHOTO BY DAVID CARDINAL/CARDINAL PHOTO &amp; SFBBO

## SERENDIPITY AND STAVOCETS

**Ser-en-dip-i-ty** – The faculty of making fortunate discoveries by accident. The fact or occurrence of such discoveries. An instance of making such a discovery.

It was pure serendipity that I just happened to have David Cardinal, a professional wildlife photographer, with me when I spied what appeared to be a hybrid Black-necked Stilt/ American Avocet on the Baumberg salt ponds. I was conducting my weekly monitoring for nesting Snowy Plovers, and David had come along in hopes of capturing some images of plovers. Unfortunately, it was early afternoon by the time we noted this oddity and the heat waves rising off of the salt pond, compounded by the distance of the bird made capturing a really good photo nearly impossible. Still, David was able to produce a good enough image to document our find. Initial examination of the photos that David quickly emailed, revealed a bird that looked much like an American Avocet

except for the dark black patch of feathers that ran the length of the back of the bird's neck. The legs appeared longer and the beak looked straighter than those of an American Avocet; evidence that suggests that this individual is not just an odd color mutation.

On my next visit to the Baumberg salt ponds, a few days later, I saw the bird again. This time I got a much closer look at it and noted that its call, while Avocet-like, sounded subtly different. Unfortunately I had neither David Cardinal nor my own camera with me at the time so no further photo documenting of this unusual bird could be done. It would be another two weeks before I saw the bird I began to refer to as the "Stavocet" again.

Tuesday, June 17th, David and I agreed to meet and make another try for some Snowy Plover photos on the Baumberg salt ponds. We decided to start our plover survey on the south west corner of the pond in the same area that we had originally seen the hybrid. This is a relatively wet area of the pond where I had seen many Snowy Plovers and their chicks making a banquet of the thick carpet of brine flies congregating in the shallows. Again, we were blessed by the gods of serendipity. Unpacking his camera equipment from the car, David almost immediately saw the hybrid and was able to get some much better photos. Later, as I examined the digital photos on my computer at home I noted another interesting feature of this bird that had previously escaped my notice. A slightly darker shadowing of feathers around the head was suggestive of the mask-like markings on the face and cap of a Black-necked Stilt.

Beyond being a simple curiosity, this is an interesting find because cross-genera hybrids, while not unheard of, are fairly rare. This is not the first documented case of such a hybridization. About 10 years ago, Jim Rosso, a photographer and birder, leading a birding class field trip in the area of Moss Landing, noted and photographed a very similar bird. If my luck holds and the bird stays in the same area, I will be able to get a sonogram of this bird's call for comparison to those of American Avocet and Black-necked Stilt. This should provide enough information for submission to a scientific journal for publication. Here's to serendipity!

– Robin Dakin, SFBBO Birds of the Baylands Field Assistant

## Busy Season for the Birds of the Baylands Program

As summer rolls along, colonial and semi-colonial waterbirds are preoccupied with procreation throughout the Baylands. Salt ponds and nearby mashes are filled with the sounds of watchful parents, ready to defend and distract any potential predators from their eggs and young. During the course of our research, many an SFBBO biologist, intern, and volunteer has borne the brunt of this watchfulness – with either a bump on the head or the need to wash their clothing at the end of the survey.

Forster's terns are conspicuously missing from a number of historical nesting sites this year, including the islands near Hayward Shoreline Regional Park and the Ravenswood salt ponds. However, the salt ponds on the southeast side of the San Mateo bridge appear to have more

Forster's terns than average. This may be a natural temporal and spatial shift, but there appears to be fewer Forster's terns around this year in the Bay overall.

Caspian terns also appear to be fewer in number in the Bay this season. They are using the same ponds as last year, just in lower numbers. As similar islands are available to them in the same ponds where they currently nest habitat does not appear to be limited. The Columbia Bird Research Group is currently researching food habits of the Caspian terns in the Bay. This study may help elucidate the population limitations of these fish-eaters in our area.

In contrast, California Gulls are on the rise in the bay. We have an estimated 20,000 breeding adults and the numbers increase every year.

Black Skimmers are nesting in only two locations this year, but have already hatched out more chicks than last year. It appears this slow but steady range expansion may come about after all for this persistent species.

American Avocet and Black-necked Stilt chicks are out and about with their parents. These birds can easily be seen foraging along levees and in the marshes. Avocets commonly nest with the Forster's terns on islands in salt ponds while stilts are more often associated with marsh areas. However, these are not hard and fast boundaries as noted in the article by Robin Dakin in this newsletter!

~Cheryl Strong  
Head Birds of the Baylands Biologist

## BIRDS, BOATS AND BOTULISM

Continued from page 4

soils. Unless the soil is anaerobic, the spores remain dormant. When the weather becomes hot for an extended period in a favorable wetland habitat, and water and soil temperatures rise, the dormant spores in muds and decaying vegetation germinate. The ducks then come along grubbing in the *Clostridium*-tainted mud and ingest the bacterium along with the muddy munchies. *Clostridium*

grows vigorously in the warm nutrient-rich, oxygen-poor digestive tracts of birds. The avian strain of the bacterium, known as Type C botulism, carries a viral plasmid that manufactures a powerful and progressively-paralyzing neurotoxin that infects and eventually kills the bird. When the bird dies, it is fed upon by insects, particularly flies, which lay their eggs in the infected carcass. The toxin is then passed on to the maggots.

Ducks love maggots. Healthy ducks then find the carcass full of infected wigglies, eat them up and are in turn poisoned by the toxin. It only takes half a dozen or so ingested maggots to kill a duck. Birds feeding in muddy wetlands can also ingest and carry the dormant spores without being infected. The bird harbors the bacterial spores harmlessly in its tissues, which can infect the carcass when the individual dies. Decaying carcasses and beds of decaying vegetation provide an ideal warm, nutrient-rich anaerobic environment for the proliferation of the bacteria.

Given all of these avenues of transmission and infection, it is no wonder that the disease is so widespread, especially in the western United States. California has always been one of the most frequently hit regions, with over a million and a half waterfowl killed from 1934-1970. The only effective way to break the escalating cycle of death and infection during an outbreak is to remove the tainted carcasses and sick birds from the area as quickly as possible. Left

unchecked, the disease can spread rapidly through an outbreak area, killing thousands of water birds in a short period of time.

Avian botulism outbreaks have occurred sporadically in the South Bay. During 1998 over 1000 birds were infected or died of the disease in a South Bay outbreak centered in the Coyote Creek Lagoon.

Outbreaks are still impossible to predict, and we still know far too little about the conditions that encourage them. All of this becomes increasingly important in light of future wetland restoration of south bay salt ponds. Coyote Creek Lagoon, an enclosed tidal lagoon and fairly recent restoration project, has been the site of several recent botulism outbreaks. Why?

Unfortunately we really don't know why, which is disturbing because the last thing we all want to do is create habitats that kill

rather than nurture the bay's wildlife. We don't know nearly enough about avian botulism, and at best can only deal with the disease after it appears. We can't prevent it, we can only curtail it.

My first volunteer efforts at SFBBO were with biologist Valerie Layne doing botulism boat surveys in Mallard Slough in 1991, and I've been here off and on ever since. I was generally "the crew" on boat trips. We still do botulism surveys annually in the ongoing Avian Disease Prevention Program (ADPP). We had a good season in 2002, and saw only happy ducks and grouchy gulls on the weekly surveys. I hope it stays that way, since I did the surveys in 2002, with a crew of great SFBBO volunteers who put up with my dubious rookie boating skills with good humor and uncommon grace (thanks, guys), and I'm doing the surveys again this season, hopefully with similar results.

~Sue Macias

*Birds of the Baylands Biologist  
(and Dubious Boat Captain)*



Cheryl Strong holds a recently banded Black Skimmer chick. These birds are slowly expanding their breeding range to now include the SF Bay.

PHOTO BY DAVID CARDINAL/CARDINAL PHOTO & SFBBO

## CCFS Update

Continued from page 2

area to accept floodwaters during rainy winter months, minimizing flood damage to nearby urban neighborhoods. We have found that it provides important habitat to wintering and breeding birds including the White-crowned Sparrow and the Common Yellowthroat.

Every year we recruit some hearty souls to tramp around in the hot afternoon sun, putting tags on trees and measuring their height and diameter, or picking their way through prickly blackberry and rose bushes, measuring the amount and height of these plants. Although this can be tedious at times, the information we gain is invaluable, and it allows us to fulfill our mission. Every year I learn more about the plants and the plant/bird interactions at CCFS. So next time you consider volunteering for SFBBO, think about the important information we gather from vegetation surveys . . . and we'll see you next summer!

Special thanks to this year's vegetation team: Gina Barton, Lauri Bechtler, Doug Campbell, Harold Fukuma, Sherry Hudson, Wen Hsu, Cyndie Illes, Kent Johnson, Ellie Loomis, Kleo Pullin, Amy Scarpignato, and Vicki Silvas-Young.

~Sherry Hudson

*Head Landbird Biologist*

### THE CALIFORNIA FALL CHALLENGE ROCKS ON!

7th Annual CFC 2003  
September 13 through October 12

The California Fall Challenge is a fun way to support SFBBO's avian conservation programs for casual, beginning and expert birders. Think about where you'd love to do your Big Day of Birding, what sort of yummy picnic lunch you'll feast on and how smug you'll feel when you bring in big bucks for SFBBO and win a fabulous prize, without even breaking a sweat. Have fun – that's the primary rule.

[www.sfbbo.org](http://www.sfbbo.org)

## WISH LIST

Scopes and tripods  
for volunteer field observers  
Binoculars for visitors to CCFS  
A four-stroke outboard motor  
Powerpoint projector  
Digital camera for rarities at CCFS  
Projection screen  
Frequent flyer airline tickets

## IT'S ALL ABOUT YOU

The Members of SFBBO are among its finest asset. We recently upgraded our record-keeping systems and want to be sure your information is correct in every way.

Have you been receiving Wingbeat, our monthly e-newsletter? Does this newsletter come to your current and correct address?

If we've lost touch with you in some way or another, we may be not be current with all of your information. Please let us

know what's new. Email us at

[officemanager@sfbbo.org](mailto:officemanager@sfbbo.org)

or submit your changes via the web at [www.sfbbo.org/newinfo.htm](http://www.sfbbo.org/newinfo.htm)

Or call us at 408-946-6548. Thank you!

## THE TERN OF EVENTS

*Continued from page 8*

- **SFBBO is very pleased to welcome several new interns aboard for the summer** - in the Birds of the Baylands program, Ellie Loomis and Ian Walsh have been assisting with the "Tern Contaminants" study. Also, Sharon Miyako will be bringing her expertise in interpretation and environmental education to that program. We are very pleased and fortunate to have these fine and talented people with us this summer!
- **Update Your Info** - Have you moved? Have you stopped receiving the Stilt? Do you not get "Wingbeat," our e-newsletter? If any of this is true, we at SFBBO may not have all you current information. We've recently upgraded to a great new database and really want to make sure we do a better job keeping in touch with you. Please visit our website at [www.sfbbo.org/newinfo.htm](http://www.sfbbo.org/newinfo.htm) or call us at (408) 946-6548 to update your information and let us know what's new with you!

~Bryan Dias

Outreach Coordinator

## Special Thanks to

**Howard and Bessie Cogswell** for the donation of many wonderful classic books on birds, plants, and ecology to our reference library.

**Jan Hintermeister** for the wonderful addition to our reference library, *Invasive Plants of California's Wildlands*.

**Peg Bernucci** for a working vacuum cleaner, really a great help, especially near the darn hole punch.

**Gerry Ellis** for time and materials on our air conditioner. We nominated you for sainthood in mid-June.

**Eddie Gilmartin** for the new HP Laserjet network printer. The trees thank you too, for the double-sided printing capability.

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## From the Executive Director

If you wish to discuss any aspect of the Observatory's work, please write to me at [jthanson@sfbbo.org](mailto:jthanson@sfbbo.org) or at P.O. Box 247, Alviso CA 95002, or call me at 408-946-6548.

I am always pleased to talk with any of our wonderful supporters. Thanks very much!

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The Bird Observatory is located at 1290 Hope Street in Alviso, behind the historic Bayside Canning Co. building. If you would like to visit the office or our Coyote Creek Field Station, please call in advance.

Board meetings are held monthly and are open to the Membership. Call the Observatory for dates and times.

# THE TERN OF EVENTS

## *What keeps the lights on at SFBBO?*

How does SFBBO stay aloft? Like many smaller non-profits, fundraising is critical to us. As you may know the "core" of what we do at SFBBO is the critical research and monitoring - the science - of birds and their habitats around the Bay. This work, typically, is done on a contract or grant basis and usually the funding provided from these sources allows us a "one project only opportunity." That is to say, each grant or contract is limited to covering the specifics (staff time, needed equipment, materials cost, etc.) directly related to that project. Often, ongoing projects, such as the Birds of the Baylands "Tern Contaminants" study, now in its third year, actually requires us to put together a grant application each year in order to continue our research.

That's all fine and good perhaps, but maybe you can already spot the rough patch. To put it simply, "What keeps the lights on at SFBBO?" How do we cover our overhead - that is, the cost of running a business: the electric bill, paying organizational costs not directly tied to a specific project (things like the newsletter or the website), and research and writing for new grant proposals? Frequently, grants, for example, do not allow us to include a line item for "overhead." If we can include any at all, we are normally limited to a certain percentage, usually based on the staff hours called for in the project, and it's often an amount that's quite small.

What then is the answer to how we keep the lights on? It basically happens from the only other way we are able to bring funds into the organization - through development and fundraising efforts. That means such things as membership dues, fundraising events like the upcoming 7th Annual 2003 California Fall Challenge, and individual or corporate donations. The money raised in this way is "golden" to SFBBO. Why? We may get a large monetary sum for an individual grant, but the vast majority of it is inextricably tied up in the cost of doing that project, as we mentioned before. So, money that comes in via development and fundraising is much more "flexible." SFBBO can use it to cover expenses that fall into the "overhead" category and cannot be sufficiently met by grant and contract funds.

So, here's the bottom line answer: SFBBO members and donors are what keeps the lights on around here! These incredibly valuable contributions, from people like you, are what allow us to keep running on a day-to-day basis, to hire new staff in order to help us grow and meet the increasing demand for our critical work (such as with the SF Bay salt pond restoration

effort), and continue to offer (and hopefully improve!) many of the membership benefits and opportunities we provide such as the newsletter, expert guided walks, and special screenings of "Winged Migration!"

Every little bit makes a difference. So, with that in mind, we hope you have the opportunity to help out SFBBO this year by participating in the upcoming 2003 California Fall Challenge where your participation makes a real difference!

• **The Annual 2003 California Fall Challenge** - SFBBO's 7th Annual 2003 CFC is just around the corner from September 13th through October 12th. It's a great way to get out there, see some birds, meet new folks, help out your favorite organization - SFBBO - and win great prizes! Whether you're a top-flight birder or just like to get out in the fresh air and have a look at some of your avian neighbors, this is the event for you. This year, we will have more ways than ever for everyone to participate, have fun and help out. Here are just a few of the great prizes we have lined up so far for this year's event:

- *Leica Spotting Scope* courtesy of Leica Inc. - The highly coveted Tevid Model, with Zoom Optics Eyepiece included.
- *Discovery Voyages Cruise* - 1 week cruise for 2 in Prince William Sound, Alaska - whales, puffins and gourmet dining.
- *Great optics* - From the Wild Bird Center, Los Gatos.

Please check our website at [www.sfbbo.org](http://www.sfbbo.org) for more information and upcoming CFC news and details. See you in the fall!

• **Expert Guided Walks Continue** - After the terrific success of our first round of guided walks based on "Birds and Salt Pond Restoration," SFBBO will continue the series with the next two walks themed "Explore the Peninsula with SFBBO." August will feature a walk on "The Forest Bird Monitoring Experience" led by local bird guide, Les Chibana, at Castle Rock State Park on Sunday the 17th at 7 AM. On Saturday, September 20th at 7 AM, SFBBO Ornithologist, Alvaro Jaramillo, will lead a walk at the Fitzgerald Marine Reserve in Moss Beach on the San Mateo Coast entitled "Bird Migration at the Edge of the Continent." For more information on the walks, please visit our website at [www.sfbbo.org](http://www.sfbbo.org). Walks are free to SFBBO members. A small donation is requested from non-members.

*Continued on page 7*



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