

The Stilt

Summer 2005

SAN FRANCISCO BAY BIRD OBSERVATORY NEWSLETTER

DIRECTOR'S CORNER

A Birding Trail for San Francisco Bay

New York has one, Virginia has one, and so do Vermont, Pennsylvania, Minnesota and Florida. Texas has the Great One. *And now San Francisco Bay has one too.*

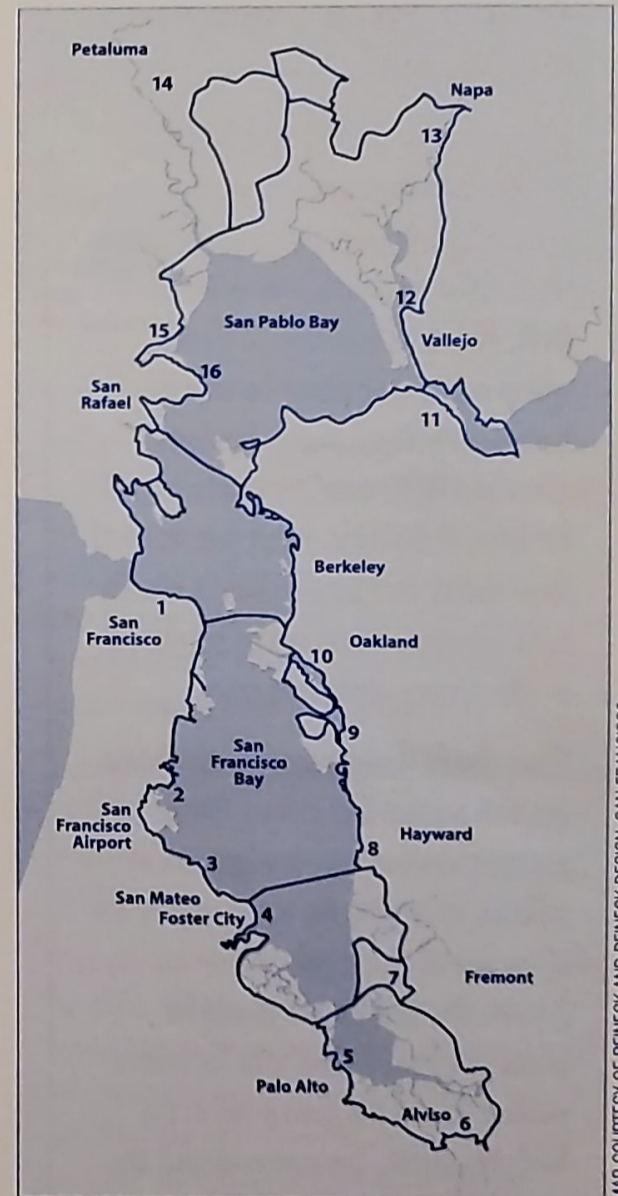
We're talking about Birding Trails, of course. These invitations to avian exploration are now found in more than half the states in the Union. Some are along major highways and are hundreds of miles long. Others wander along back roads. All offer a guide to some of the country's best birding, in a diverse collection of habitats.

Here at SFBBO, we frequently get calls from visiting birders and local new birders, asking where and when to see the best birds around the bay's edge. As the salt pond restoration moves forward, more and more south bay dwellers are discovering existing trails and eagerly looking forward to having new and exciting places to hike and bike. SFBBO set a goal to help inform and educate this growing audience of potential wildlife advocates. We want to encourage responsible trail use. And we want this burgeoning new audience to understand the value of preserving the trail's neighboring habitat for use by wildlife and to instill a sense of stewardship toward those sensitive habitats

SFBBO is very pleased to introduce San Francisco Bay's own new birding trail. Entitled "Birding the Bay Trail", this wonderful new brochure is the result of a partnership with the San Francisco Bay Trail. It includes 16 special birding sites along the Bay Trail. Each selected site is numbered on an area map. The information provided on each site is brief but dense, including best birds and times of year for viewing, detailed directions to the site, fees (if any), and the availability of parking and restrooms.

For those of us already hooked on birding, the brochure lays out a tempting array of hotspots along the Trail. For example, an astute birder visiting the east bay can pick

Continued on page 3



The Bay Trail is a planned recreational corridor that, when complete, will encircle San Francisco and San Pablo Bays with a continuous 400-mile network of bicycling and hiking trails. It will connect the shoreline of all nine Bay Area counties, link 47 cities, and cross the major toll bridges in the region. The Bay Trail is a project of the Association of Bay Area Governments.



VICKI JENNINGS

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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.



San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory
P.O. Box 247 1290 Hope Street Alviso, CA 95002

MAP COURTESY OF REINECK AND REINECK DESIGN, SAN FRANCISCO

BIRD CONSERVATION TIP!

Things we do around our homes can have a big impact on bird populations around the Bay Area. Every little bit helps. Spread the word!

A few newsletters back, former SFBBO Board President Jan Hintermeister shared his story of a Mirrored Forest, where birds were running into the windows of his office building. Attractive berry trees were mirrored perfectly in the window, confusing the birds, causing them to crash into the glass panes. Many of us have had this experience around our own homes or offices. We can't get rid of our windows, so what can we do to prevent winged disasters?

International Migratory Bird Day 2005 brought attention to this issue, and also provided a few suggestions. Many people are familiar with decal silhouettes of birds, placed on a window. A newer option exists, that cannot be seen by human eyes. Decal material reflects ultraviolet light, acting as warning signal for birds. It should be noted that many of these decals must be placed on a window to be effective. Decals can be purchased at <http://store.windowalert.com/>

Other simple changes around your home can also prevent bird strikes. House plants in windows may increase risk of collision, so moving the plants slightly out of the line of sight might help. Additionally, bird feeders should be placed either very close to or far from a window, so that the glass is not in the bird's flight path. The recommended distances are less than three feet from a window OR more than thirty feet.

This information is from The International Migratory Bird Day information sheet from Partners in Flight. More information can be found at www.flap.org and www.birdday.org

A Birding Trail for San Francisco Bay

Continued from page 1

up three species of wrens at Coyote Hills Regional Park (Rock, Bewick's and Marsh), and maybe Red Knots at Hayward Regional Shoreline. Traveling a bit north is Lake Merritt in Oakland, the nation's first National Wildlife Refuge and winter home to occasional Tufted Ducks. Further east lays the Carquinez Straits Regional Shoreline and the tidal



Mixed shorebird flock ©Les Chibana

4. Foster City/San Mateo Bridge



This part of the Bay hosts a wide variety of birds in winter and in migration that are not often seen elsewhere in the Bay. The shell bar near Tarpon St. is a great shorebird roost at high tide and the mudflats provide excellent foraging during low tide. Among the birds you can find here are Marbled Godwit, Willet, Red Knot, Black and Ruddy turnstones, and Short-billed Dowitchers. The waters near the bridge attract many ducks, often including rarities like Long-tailed and Harlequin ducks, and White-winged and Black scoters. Viewing is easy from the paved Bay Trail on the levee. The birding is good in winter and during migration.

Directions: From Hwy 101 south of the Hwy 92 interchange, take Hillsdale Blvd. east to the Bay edge. The road becomes Beach Park Blvd. as it turns southeast to parallel the Bay edge. Park between Egret St. and Tarpon St. and walk up to the levee along the Bay.

An excerpt from "Birding the Bay Trail".

Numerous veteran birders around the bay area helped in the selection of the 16 sites from all around the Bay and on the established Bay Trail. The candidate list was long and difficult to narrow down. Final selection was made based on accessibility, unique habitats and special birds.

"Birding the Bay Trail" encourages visitors to slow down and appreciate the treasure of wildlife that can be seen trail-side. It may open the eyes and ears of the Trail's legions of hikers, bikers and roller-bladers to the importance of protecting the integrity of these sensitive habitats. And it can promote the various venues along the Trail, such as the interpretive centers at Lake Merritt and Palo Alto, to help further inform the general public.

The project owes a great debt to local birder, educator and graphic designer Les Chibana, who put all his knowledge to work in the creation of "Birding the Bay Trail". Thank you, Les!

"Birding the Bay Trail" was funded in part by the Coastal Conservancy, which uses entrepreneurial techniques to purchase, protect, restore, and enhance coastal resources, and to provide access to the shore; and by Proposition 12, The Safe Neighborhood Parks, Clean Water, Clean Air and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2000.

*—Janet Tashjian Hanson
Executive Director*

THE USUAL SUSPECTS

Snowy Plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus*)

As part of SFBBO's Birds of the Baylands Program, SFBBO staff, interns and volunteers monitor San Francisco Bay's Western Snowy Plover population. Spring and summer brings breeding pairs together, mostly in drained salt ponds, as we track their successes and failures. Participation in region-wide winter surveys tells us how many of the remaining 1500 individual plovers use the bay as overwintering habitat. The study is under the leadership of Biologist Cheryl Strong, co-leader of the Western Snowy Plover Recovery Team for San Francisco Bay.

As a federally listed species, Snowy Plover recovery efforts are an important consideration in the salt pond restoration planning process. As with the California Clapper Rail, existing habitat must be preserved and additional habitat must be created to meet breeding population goals.

SFBBO's Western Snowy Plover Project is funded by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Oracle Corporation.

Plovers are just one of the families that make up the group of birds called "shorebirds". With roughly 43 species in the world, the plover family is the second largest group of shorebirds after sandpipers.

At just over 6 inches, Snowy Plovers are one of the smallest in the family. Both sexes have white underparts and tan upperparts, but males and females can be distinguished by the variation in the darkness of their ear patch and partial breast band. This coloration is a prime example of what is called, countershading. Like so many shorebirds, this plumage pattern helps to conceal their location. In the case of the Snowy Plover, this camouflage works so well people often don't recognize the bird's presence and habitats are impacted.

Snowy Plovers are found in North America, Eurasia and Africa. Closer to home they can be observed along the Pacific Coast and in areas around San Francisco Bay.

Snowy Plovers prefer open areas found along sandy beaches, evaporation ponds and banks. These are often the same areas targeted for vacation resorts and recreational public access. Off road vehicles, dogs off leash and outdoor fun on the beach all impact the plovers. Dune restoration and beach clean-up also destroy the habitat they require. In California, the Western Snowy Plover is listed as a Threatened Species.

Plovers eat insects, invertebrates and bugs they pick-up along the shore. Depending on the season some Snowy Plovers have to migrate in order to find these foods, but the climate is mild enough throughout this area of California that many of our plovers remain year round.

During the breeding season the male claims a territory in hopes to attract a female. Once successful, plovers exercise quite a mating display and prepare for their brood.

A simple scrape nest is made in the sand and the parents decorate the edge with shells, bones and pebbles. The average clutch size is three and both parents take shifts incubating the eggs.

Once the chicks hatch they leave the nest as soon as their down dries. The mother also leaves as she looks for a new mate and starts another clutch. The male remains for several days as he teaches the chicks how to forage for food and hide from predators. Gulls, crows, rats, raccoons, house cats, ravens.....they would all welcome a plover snack. But soon, the male leaves the chicks to fend for themselves while he finds another mate to start a second clutch.

During the breeding season volunteers look for nests. When a nest is located near



An adult Snowy Plover imitating a broken wing to distract from a nearby nest.

PHOTO BY LESLIE TUCCI

people, barrier ropes are constructed and volunteers often stand vigil. Unfortunately high tides and wind also have negative impact. Each nest is given a number, chicks are banded and all observations are documented. These reports are valuable in determining current populations.

Educating the public to make them aware of Snowy Plover habitat has proven successful, but their numbers continue to decline.

The Usual Suspects is a new feature written by Lisa Myers, birding teacher extraordinaire and SFBBO Board Member. Lisa introduces people to the world of birding through her teaching for the Campbell Adult Education and her own endeavor, *Let's Go Birding* (www.letsjobirding.com). In coming issues, Lisa will introduce more of our "usual suspects" to readers of *The Stilt*, for those of us new to the bay's birds and to showcase the role of different species in SFBBO's science programs.

EDUCATION AND OUTREACH CORNER: REACHABLE WILDLIFE

Never underestimate the power of a tangible. It gives power to our words. A friend recently relayed an encounter with famous author Alice Walker. Having recently visited Afghanistan, Walker passed around a child's shoe she had found in some battle wreckage. As people in the audience held the shoe, strong emotions were evident throughout the group. All because of a simple tangible: a shoe.

I was recently reminded of the power of such tangibles in the world of SFBBO.

Working with longtime volunteer Linda Sullivan, SFBBO had the chance to show off one of the Great Blue Heron colonies being monitored. Vasona Lake County Park is a busy thoroughfare, with joggers, picnickers, strollers, and people of all ages. People who are not necessarily bird enthusiasts. Linda and other volunteers set up spotting scope row along the trail, along with bulletin boards Linda created to show off the colony's history.

Like every outreach event, we also had newsletters and membership envelopes, along with other SFBBO information. In the span of about 5 hours, 255 people stopped to gaze through the scopes. Through the lens, people could see Great Blue Heron families in progress; chicks with tufty, wry feathers, and adults sitting on the edge of the nests. Suddenly, thanks to a scope, the Vasona trail came alive

with wildlife that was always there, just out of reach. Virtually all of these people also stopped to talk with the volunteers about the life cycle of Great Blue Herons, and what SFBBO does as an organization. Though many Vasona regulars know of the colony, seeing the families at work up close and personal is an exhilarating experience. The scope and SFBBO volunteers made wildlife reachable. Doing so made SFBBO's research more relevant to the public than any lecture or poster alone ever could.

At Vasona, we made wildlife reachable to people passing by the spot. Thanks to the Santa Clara Valley Water District, SFBBO has been taking tangible wildlife into the classroom. Laura Weiss, Education Specialist, along with Sky Hunters Environmental Education are bringing migration and watershed conservation to the classroom through a game, an American Kestrel and a Barn Owl. In a classroom setting with usually less than thirty students, children have the chance to see wild birds closer than they ever would outdoors. And seeing the wildlife in one's neighborhood can be a much bigger motivator to conserve water or clean a storm drain, than simply having someone tell you to do so. What can a migration game coupled with wild raptors do for 2nd-5th graders? See for yourself from surveys:

"I liked that the presentation reminded me that birds and the environment are very important, so I am going to try and help the environment."

"My favorite thing about the presentation was getting to ask questions."

"I learned science today but in a fun way."

To some of us, these comments might seem superficial, or vague. But the words demonstrate that SFBBO and Sky Hunters are building the foundation for these children's interactions with the environment and conservation science. We are making science fun. We are encouraging children to be inquisitive. We are reminding them about how important the environment is.

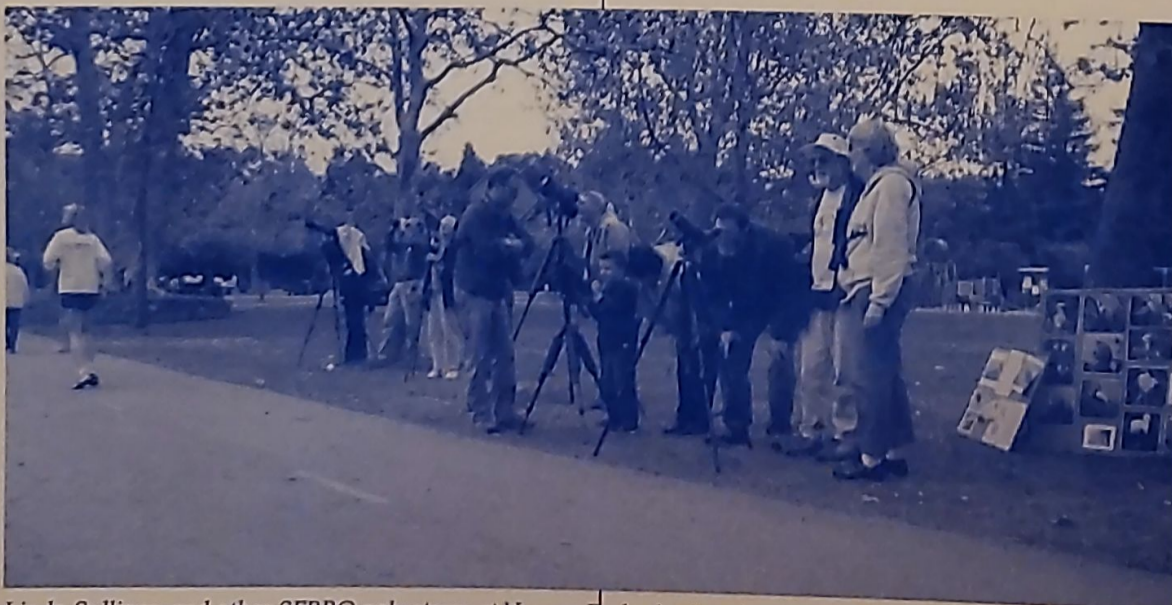
What can a tangible do? It can inspire the next generation to develop good watershed protection habits. It can inspire someone to join SFBBO as a member and volunteer. What do tangibles inspire in your life? As birdwatchers, our entire hobby revolves around seeing or hearing the next tangible.

And perhaps the best news is this: your continued support of SFBBO ensures that tangibles will continue to exist. Your membership support and volunteer time ensures better understanding of our community's environmental health and better data to manage and protect Bay Area bird populations. The next time you're out birding and see a songbird nesting, Great Blue Heron rookery, or a Forster's Tern hunting, remember that you're seeing SFBBO's work. The sight of these birds speaks louder than any words can.

Never underestimate the power of a tangible. It gives power to our words.

—Sharon Miyako
Outreach Specialist

Take the next step. Join up with one of our California Fall Challenge Guided Walks, and attend a fundraising workshop!

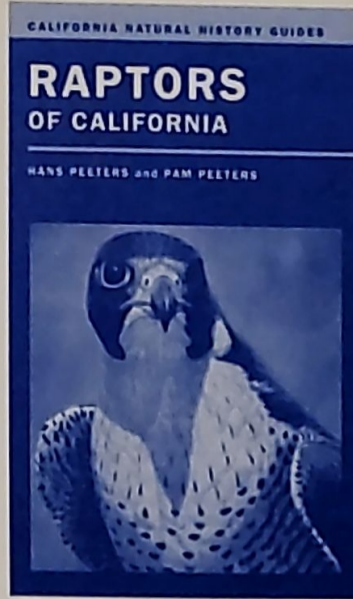


Linda Sullivan and other SFBBO volunteers at Vasona Park, sharing the Great Blue Heron Colony through scopes.

PHOTO BY LINDA SULLIVAN

RAPTORS OF CALIFORNIA: The Why and the How

by Hans Peeters



Observing hawks has been a lifelong passion of mine and has led to journeys to far-flung corners of the world. While ostensibly undertaken for more general biological and recreational reasons, these trips were in fact forays to see more new and exciting raptor species. Although born and raised in Germany, I have spent my entire adult life in California, a land ideally suited for someone fixated on birds of prey. The diversity of raptors in our state approaches that of some tropical areas, and every major habitat in California is home to three or more hawk species. The Central Valley turns into a Cancun for wintering buteos, as do some of the coastal areas, and Alameda County has the highest concentration of breeding Golden Eagles anywhere in the world. Our cities are aggressively explored as new breeding habitat by three spectacular raptors: the Peregrine Falcon, the Cooper's Hawk, and the Red-shouldered Hawk.

Thus began a June evening for SFBBO Members, with Hans and Pam Peeters, authors of a new field guide, **Raptors of California**. After a social hour, Hans sharpened everyone's raptor identification skills with wonderful slides comprising a Birding Quiz for accipiters. We only wish we'd had time for more.

Our sincere thanks to the Peeters for this delightful look at the raptors of California, to Freddy and John Howell of the Los Gatos Wild Bird Center for selling field guides for signing, as well as for gifting 10% of the proceeds back to SFBBO, to Julian Halasz for the donation of wine, and to Whole Foods Campbell for the tasty dessert platters from their bakery.

Are We There Yet?

A new environmentally friendly outboard motor tops SFBBO's "most wanted" list. As a science organization working in wetland habitats, our old smoky 2-stroke must give way to cleaner, better technology. SFBBO's Spring Campaign asked our supporters to help with this important acquisition among several other much-needed items:

- Statistical software, to keep up our momentum of publication
- Digital projector for training sessions and other presentations
- Scope and tripod for salt pond surveys and intern use

We are well on the way to that new outboard! And of course we always appreciate general operating support that we can use as we best see fit. Thank you so much for helping SFBBO and the birds of the Bay!



Report on Advanced Bird Banding Workshop

In April, a small population of migratory bird banders flew in from across the country to participate in our 4th annual workshop in advanced banding techniques, led by Peter Pyle. Peter is widely recognized as a dean of bird identification, the author of the bird bander's bible, "Identification Guide to North American Birds", and is currently a biologist with the Institute for Bird Populations. This workshop entitled "Advanced Ageing and Sexing of Passerines" is specifically to help experienced banders improve their ability to determine age and sex of the many small passerines we typically encounter in western riparian habitat. As in the past, the workshop was co-hosted by SFBBO, and the **Big Sur Ornithology Lab (BSOL)**.

We spent four intense mornings banding birds at SFBBO's Coyote Creek Field Station, the Carmel River Lagoon and Andrew Molera State Park. Captured birds included a **Winter Wren**, **Bullock's Oriole**, **Black-headed Grosbeak** and **Yellow-breasted Chat**.

After this intensive study of the ins and outs of micro-ageing birds by molt patterns, we headed down Highway 1 to look for **California Condors**. At one of the many turnouts on Highway 1, we saw a group of six condors flying along the ridges above the coastline and also a few migrating **Gray Whales** close to shore on the other side. No binoculars are needed to identify Condors - a very exciting and rewarding afternoon!

While reflecting on the vast amount of information presented during the week, we spent our last dinner together at Brazil Ranch. Kristina Westphal of **Whole Foods Monterey** prepared a spectacular dinner, culminating in a "to-die-for" Strawberry Shortcake. We thank our attendees, our partners at BSOL and Peter for making this another successful workshop.

—Gina Barton
Biologist

CALIFORNIA FALL CHALLENGE 2005

It's summer, and a lull in the birding world is coming. Or so it seems. Juveniles are dispersing, and the frenzy of spring nesting activity has diminished. However, behind the scenes, many birds will be preparing soon for fall migration. The birds will be building up energy, preparing for the challenging flight south.

Like the birds SFBBO is preparing. Fall brings not a migration to SFBBO, but the annual fundraising event: the California Fall Challenge. This is our only fundraiser for the year, and makes a significant contribution to keeping SFBBO's lights on, so to speak. It helps keep SFBBO's necessary day-to-day functions going, as well as giving us room to dream, expand and improve.

The CFC is simpler than it sounds. Essentially, participants get sponsors per bird species, go out birding, collect funds, and turn it all in to SFBBO. There are three ways for you to participate.

1. Build your own team, get sponsors, and go birding!
2. Join a Guided Trip (see below), get sponsors, and go birding.
3. Donate resources. Sponsor a team or make a one-time donation for the CFC.

Whether you're a novice or expert birder (or even a non-birder) you can participate in CFC 2005. Find some friends to bird with you, or join one of our guided trips. Read trip leader Francis Toldi's CFC report from 2004 to get an idea of what an all day trip might be like. Not for you? We'll have half day trips available as well.

Taking part in the CFC not only supports SFBBO's conservation science, but also can earn you prizes! Once again, the top fundraiser will receive an exclusive cruise for two with Discovery Voyages. A Leica scope is a stake, along with other optics, birding software, and an asundry of other prizes. There will be prizes for the best rookie fundraiser, the best overall

fundraiser, and all sorts of other rewards.

To put yourself in the running for the Discovery Voyages cruise, attend one of Bonnie-Bedford -White's fundraising workshops. Bonnie has been the top fundraiser two years running. Her workshop makes fundraising simple and much less intimidating. Last year's participants noticed a significant increase in fundraising results.

Birds need to build up their resources to make it to their seasonal home. SFBBO needs a successful CFC to continue growing as a prominent conservation science organization.

We need your help to reach this year's goal of \$50,000. Get Sponsors, Get Birding, Get Prizes for the California Fall Challenge 2005.

Keep an eye on the SFBBO CFC website for updates. www.sfbbo.org/cfc05.htm

CFC 2005 GUIDED TRIPS

THE WET SPOTS led by Rick Fournier

County: Monterey

Sunday, October 15, 2005, 7:15am

Enjoy birding this extraordinary wetland looking for returning ducks, shorebirds, and passerines. To add to the day's total, timing couldn't be more perfect for the occasional rarity or two! We'll cover all the environs in and around Elkhorn Slough from the Pajaro River Mouth south to the Salinas River including Moss Landing, Moon Glow Dairy and more. The team name, well, Elkhorn Slough is a wet place! Plan to bird through noon, stopping at Phil's Snack Shack or the Haute Enchilada Restaurant for lunch. Bring snacks and liquids. Last year the "Wet Spots" posted a respectable 107 species leaving the field well before dark. This year our goal will be to exceed this total and if necessary, we'll bird till dusk.



THE LINGERING MIGRANTS led by Mark Paxton

County: San Benito

Saturday, October 9; 5:00 am to the dinner hour (or dark, whichever comes first)

We'll begin with a hunt for owls (expect Great Horned, Barn, Northern Pygmy, Western Screech), before greeting the dawn at Fremont Peak, where we'll likely blunder into Canyon and Rock Wren, Band-tailed Pigeon and all the other usual suspects to be found in this sky island. Stops on the way down will put us in conifer forest (Purple Finch) and coastal chaparral (California Thrasher, Rufous-crowned and Sage Sparrow). We'll stop at a few scarce wet spots for scads of shorebirds and waterbirds. We'll follow our binoculars around the county until dark. Expect to log well over 100 species.



THE VARIED TWITCHERES led by Mike Rogers

County: Santa Clara

September, date TBA 8am-1pm

Check out what's flying around places like Shoreline Lake, Coyote Creek Field Station, the Don Edwards National Wildlife Refuge, and wherever else the expert Mike takes the group! Last year's participants totaled over 100 species in this fast-paced half-day blitz.

GALLINAGO GO GO'S led by Lisa Myers

County: Santa Clara

Dates TBA 7am-6pm



Lisa Myers is the owner of Let's Go Birding, and can be found introducing people all over the south Bay Area to

birdwatching. Known for her Beginning Birding teaching skills, she is an effective teacher and great trip leader.

www.letsjobirding.com

OUR THANKS TO THESE SUPPORTERS OF THE OBSERVATORY. . .

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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.

CALENDAR OF MEMBER EVENTS

■ COYOTE CREEK FIELD STATION VISIT

July 9, Saturday, 8-10 AM

July 23, Saturday, 8-10 AM

Join SFBBO biologists and outreach staff for a tour of SFBBO's Coyote Creek Field Station, including a bird-banding demonstration. For reservations, call 408-946-6548 or email Sharon Miyako at outreach@sfbbo.org. Funded by the Santa Clara Valley Water District.

■ CALIFORNIA FALL CHALLENGE "HOW TO WIN" WORKSHOP

July 21, Thursday, 7 PM

SFBBO Headquarters

Past champion Bonnie Bedford-White will share her winning ways, to give the rest of us a fighting chance to win the Alaska wildlife cruise from Discovery Voyages. Attendees are eligible to win a beautiful Great Egret print by wildlife photographer David Cardinal! To reserve a seat, call 408-946-6548 by July 18th.

■ CALIFORNIA FALL CHALLENGE 2005

September 17th through October 16th

Mark your calendar for a big day run at our CFC 2005 prizes. See page 6 for more information.

■ ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING AND CFC CELEBRATION

October 30th, Sunday

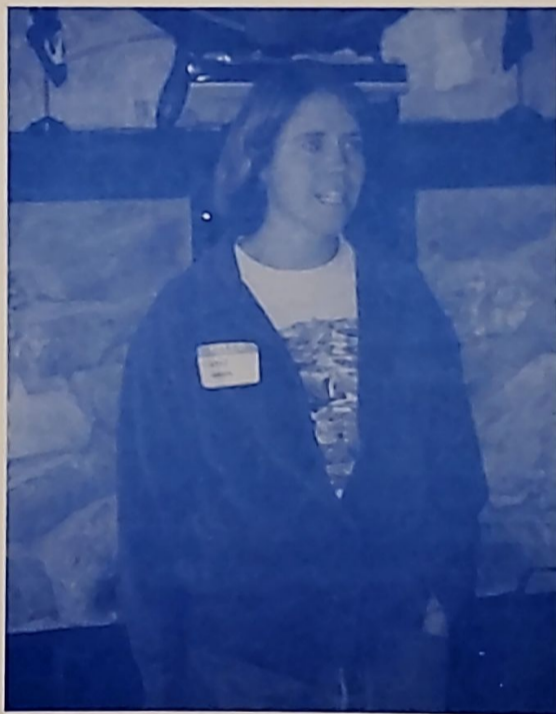
Save the Date!

Migrations

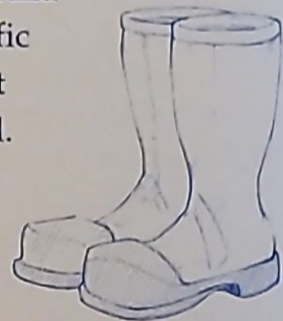
SFBBO Biologist Cheryl Strong and husband Dave Thomson welcomed Harper Rose on January 26th. Biologist Anne Hanson, Ph.D., has been very ably filling in during Cheryl's maternity leave, keeping our army of volunteers well informed and on the job during the busy spring breeding season. And now Anne and husband Mike are expecting their own new family member in August, leading us to speculate about the chair at that desk.

We also welcome Delma Montes as our new Office Manager. Delma worked in the high tech world and now brings her considerable experience in human resources and management skills to SFBBO. We are very happy to have her help.

Several new interns and field assistants have joined SFBBO. Please welcome Leslie Tucci and Jeanie Geary to our Snowy Plover Project. Interns Elias French and Sarah Stoner-Duncan are both working in marshes and salt ponds in our Waterbird Program, alongside our partners from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services and other agencies. Michael McDonald and Michael Sears are field assistants in our Urban Impact Program.



And we are sad to lose biologist Sherry Hudson as she moves to the next phase of her life and career in her home state of Washington. We want her to know how much we admire her and miss her here at SFBBO. Our Migration Program, especially the Coyote Creek Field Station, owes much to her organizational and scientific abilities. She's left tough boots to fill. We wish her all the luck in the world.



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