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SAN FRANCISCO BAY BIRD OBSERVATORY NEWSLETTER

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EDITOR, MICHAEL RIGNEY

CALIFORNIA CLAPPER RAIL - A COOPERATIVE STUDY

by Peter Perrine

We were a bit nervous as we stood at the end of the P.G. and E boardwalk at Dumbarton Point marsh. After months of preparation, we were finally going to attempt to catch and band California Clapper Rails. But of the six of us there on that first day, only Roy Lowe had ever caught and held a live healthy rail in the wild. Would our capture techniques work? Would our new holding boxes contain them? None of us was sure.

Our uncertainty demonstrated the importance of this study. SFBBO and the San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge began work on the California Clapper Rail because almost nothing is known about the habitat requirements of the species. Today, the California Clapper Rail is an endangered species found only in salt marshes of San Francisco and San Pablo Bays. Historically, San Francisco Bay was covered with seemingly endless expanses of salt marsh. In the late 1800's, the California Clapper Rail was abundant throughout the bay area, with large populations in Monterey Bay and north along the coast as far as Humboldt County. An article from the San Mateo Leader dated October, 23, 1897 foretold a gloomy future for the Clapper Rail.

"Hunters galore swarmed the marshes all of this week hunting rail. It is safe to say to say that at least 5,000 of these birds have been slaughtered since the opening of the season last week. At this rate it will not be long before this species of game will be entirely exterminated in this county."

These vast marshes are now reduced to narrow strips along dikes and isolated marshes such as Dumbarton Point and the Palo Alto baylands. The total population of Clapper Rails in the remnant marshes has been estimated at 4500-6000 birds but may be half that. It is vital that we gather more data on the natural history of these birds.

The incoming tide rose around our feet as we arranged our banding equipment on the boardwalk. Roy started the airboat and moved off across the marsh with Mike Rigney and Al



PHOTO BY KATHY HOBSON

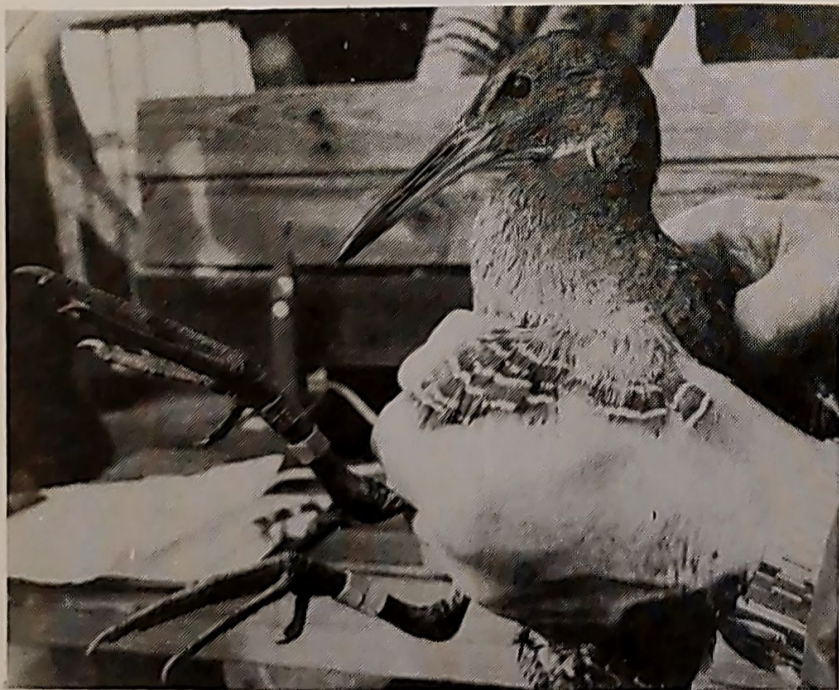
Schmitz to begin capturing the rails. The Clapper Rail is well adapted to salt marsh habitat. With its large feet and slender body it moves through the dense vegetation during low tide and walks on it as it floods. However they are weak fliers. Taking advantage of this weakness, we planned to capture them from the airboat with landing nets when the marsh was completely flooded. Within minutes the airboat roared back with Mike seated precariously on the bow triumphantly holding up 2 fingers. Those first birds were transferred to Dick Mewaldt who banded each with a regulation USFWS stainless steel leg band and three color bands.

He then passed the birds on to Valerie Layne and me to be weighed, measured and sexed. Sexes are similar in California Clapper Rails but males tend to be heavier and have larger bills and longer legs and feet. Unfortunately, the measurements overlap and we have yet to find a fool-proof way of verifying sex. We caught and banded eleven birds that day. The birds were released where they were caught, each with a different combination of colored leg bands. Eight more trips have been made and more than 180 birds banded, from Mowry Slough to Ideal Marsh and the Palo Alto Baylands. There will be many more trips in the next five years both to capture and band birds and also to census and record locations of previously banded birds. Volunteers are welcome to come share in the adventure. It's a great opportunity to get really close to an endangered species and to become involved in its protection.

**WANTED!
SIGHTINGS OF COLORED-BANDED
CLAPPER RAILS**

by Peter Perrine

As was mentioned, we have color banded over 180 Clapper Rails in the South Bay and we need your help to find out where they go. They were banded with 2 plastic color bands on one leg and a color band and metal Fish and Wildlife band on the other. The band colors are white, yellow, orange, red and light green. If you see a banded bird, carefully note the color sequence on both legs, the location of the bird, the time and date. You can give this information to SFBBO or SFBNWR. We need as many sightings as possible to get a clear understanding of rail movements and territories.



**BIRD BANDING -
SFBBO STYLE**

More than 3,400 birds were banded by SFBBO personnel this year as a part of its many on-going research projects. A total of 107 species and sub-species were represented in this year's efforts. Of note were the 942 California Gulls banded as chicks in the gull study (see Newsletter #3) and the 326 Western Sandpipers banded in the sewage lagoons as part of our Riparian Field Station's ambitious monitoring program. The new California Clapper Rail study (see articles in this newsletter for details) netted (literally) 151 rails, all of which were also color-banded. Many ducks, gulls, owls and hawks were banded under the SFBBO station permit as a result of the activities of Wildlife Rescue volunteers.

We would like to thank and acknowledge the many people who made this year's banding activities such a huge success. Without your help, the accumulation of data and the futhering of our understanding would not have been possible.



BANDERS OF RECORD - 1983

Ginny Becchine, Joyce Bizjak, Virginia Bennett, Aileen Brodsky, Jennifer Browning, Chris Dienger, Michael Dressler, Bret Emery, Lorrie Emery, Bill Ferguson, Stevie Ferguson, Suzie Formenti, Marilyn Fowler, Russ Fowler, Tim Gates, Carol Hamilton, Tom Harvey, Steve Haydock, Alice Hoch, Kathy Hobson, Dave Jensen, Dorothy Johnson, Paul Jones, Paul Kelly, Sandra Kinchen, Larry Kistler, Julie Klingmann, Vicki Knirck, Valerie Layne, Roy Lowe, Carol Martin, Dick Mewaldt, Vi Nosinger, Nancy Norvell, Pat Page, Peter Perrine, Joan Priest, Elsie Ritchey, Michael Rigney, Theresa Rigney, Tom Rountree, Allen Royer, Al Schmitz, Don Schmoldt, Jim Siegel, Allan Sillett, Peter Siminski, Lynn Tennefoss, Vicki Silvas-Young, Sally Walters, Cassie Webb, Peg Woodin, Jean Young, Lou Young.

SFBBO ANNOUNCES BIRDING TOURS

by Don Starks

SFBBO BIRDING TOURS are designed with the adventurous and parsimonious in mind. Most birding tours these days cost nearly to \$1,000.00 per week and usually this does not include transportation to the tour site. On the other hand, these first class tours take care of your needs quite well. I've always felt that there is a certain segment of the birding population that wants to go on a professionally-led birding tour and is also willing to camp out and provide their own transportation. Our tours are planned to take advantage of this desire and also get you more birds per dollar spent.

Campgrounds are reserved in advance on all tours in order that a night's "lodging" is taken care of. As on most camping trips, meals are not provided but we may attempt a pot-luck situation if all participants are in agreement. Carpooling and organizing are taken care of at preliminary meetings held before each tour along with a description of areas to be visited, birds to be seen, equipment needed, etc. Each tour has a minimum of two guides so that every participant has a good chance at seeing all birds and the ratio between leader and participant is low.

SFBBO BIRDING TOURS welcome novices, senior

citizens, students, campers and anyone interested in natural history, particularly birds. The following is a list of our upcoming tours. If you're interested, please call or write Don Starks at 408-371-9720 (evenings), 2076 Foxworthy Ave., San Jose, Ca. 95124 for further information and literature.

Salton Sea	4days - Apr.	\$ 90.00
Death Valley	4days - May	\$ 90.00
Kern River	4days - Jun.	\$ 90.00
Yosemite	4days - Jul.	\$ 90.00
Arizona	9days - Aug.	\$280.00
Condor trip	3days - Aug.	\$ 70.00

Trips that are in the embryonic planning stage include Yellowstone in the summer, Colorado in the summer, the Dakotas in summer, Michigan in summer, west Texas in spring, Texas in spring, and Mexico in winter. Remember, these are all camping tours. If sufficient interest is generated we'll expand.

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Student/Senior	\$10 annually
Regular	\$15 annually
Family	\$20 annually
Associate	\$50 annually
Contributing	\$100 annually
Sustaining	\$200 annually
Life	\$400 *
Patron	\$2000 *
Corporate	\$500+annually

* Single payment becomes part of an endowment fund.

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