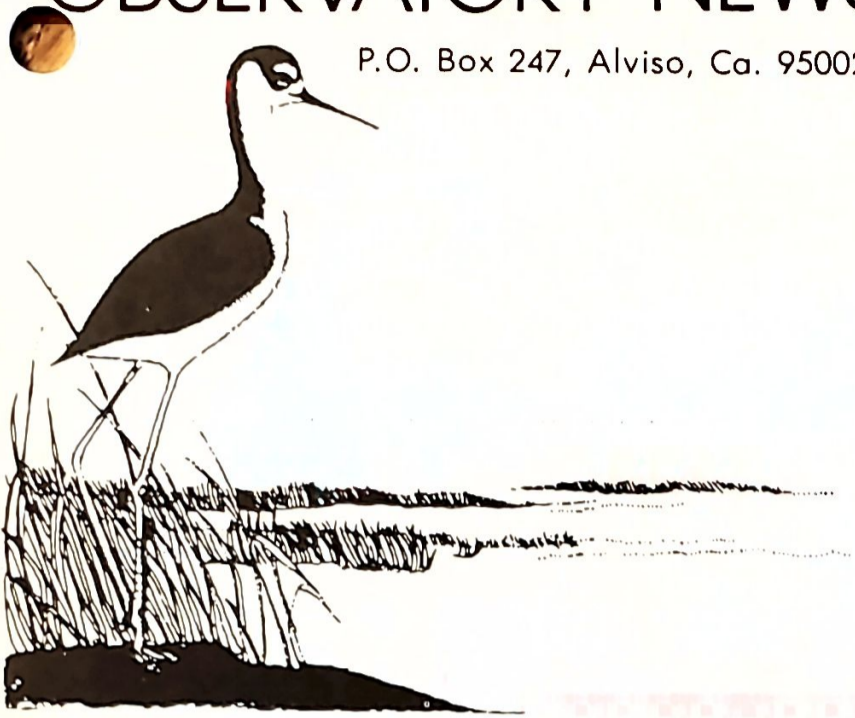


SAN FRANCISCO BAY BIRD OBSERVATORY NEWSLETTER

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

SFBBO projects for 1987 are, by this time, well into the planning stages that will evolve to action when the new year begins. November is the time to be getting ready, accumulating required equipment, and determining how many volunteers will be needed for this or that study. In the midst of this preparation period, however, it seems useful to stop for a moment and reflect on what has taken place during the year 1986. Such reflection can provide both the satisfaction of recollection of jobs completed and useful thoughts about how we can do better the next time around. As examples, let's look at a few of the things that were accomplished this year by SFBBO volunteers and at plans for the year to come.

A five-year project to monitor avian botulism reached its conclusion in 1986. Over that period a lot of volunteers spent many hours on the sloughs and streams which enter the South Bay, and they picked up a good number of birds, fish, and mud, some of which was splattered on their clothing and bodies. This work in service to the health of South Bay bird populations has been both valuable and informative. We hope to negotiate a new contract to continue to monitor against botulism outbreaks, so some of you veterans of those airboat trips and Avon boat excursions can expect your telephone to ring again next year with yet another request for your help.

Bair Island was the focus of SFBBO attention again this past year. Volunteers cleared vegetation, hauled oyster

shells, and propped up aging coyote brush, not to mention taking census of the various species which use this valuable avian habitat. As a result of the efforts of many volunteers, SFBBO was lauded on the front page of October 1 issue and on the editorial page of the October 4 edition of the Palo Alto Times-Tribune. And we have plans for 1987 which will take further steps toward enhancing avian habitat on the island. To date, SFBBO has applied for two grants which will allow us to increase our efforts on Bair Island, and we intend to seek others.

The ongoing colonial bird census has continued. Once again, in 1986, a large team of volunteers combed the edges, levees, and islands of the south Bay recording data on the success rates of a host of breeding bird species. Our goal for 1987 is to computerize this data so that it will be readily available as an information resource to SFBBO and to scientists and government agencies in a way that will allow easy analysis of population trends and changes. Several SFBBO volunteers are investigating existing computer programs, trying out newly published programs, and doing our own programming in an attempt to find the best possible system of information retrieval for this type of biological data.

As expected, the population of the California Gull colony continued to expand in 1986, and, as usual, a crew of SFBBO volunteers put in many hours of night work in the

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colony. 1987 will see diversification in the study of CAGUs (as they are known at the Bird Banding Laboratory). In addition to continuing the general study we have been doing with this breeding colony, we will be doing studies designed to investigate several more specific aspects, and you'll have a chance to meet some new project leaders in the upcoming year.

We've made progress in an effort to improve the efficiency and appearance of our office and headquarters as well. The Refuge has let a contract to rewire the entire office building, with a completion date of March 1, 1987. Also, we have a plan to insulate and strengthen the office walls. That job will be followed by the next step: repainting the exterior of the building (leaving, of course, our unique mural on the front and south side of the building). Once these jobs are done, along with several smaller ones inside the building itself, our headquarters complex will be able to function more efficiently, in keeping with the needs of SFBBO to expand as it grows into a mature scientific research organization.

Another aspect of the maturation process is, we hope, an increase in the funding base from which SFBBO operates. To increase our ability to seek and obtain funding from various areas in addition to memberships, new board member, Tom Medeiros, has conducted a series of goals planning and funding workshops. These sessions are designed to cause us to think about where SFBBO is going and how we can get there, and to make us more capable of approaching the tasks of obtaining grants and corporate funding. Now, with a bit of effort, SFBBO should be able to establish a more secure financial base from which to operate.

This list of activities and plans mentioned above is by no means comprehensive. My intent in outlining them is to give you, the member and volunteer and the backbone of SFBBO, some idea of what we have accomplished in the recent past and what we intend to accomplish in the near future. A quick perusal of what I have written makes one thing quite clear: whatever accomplishments SFBBO has made and whatever goals we will reach, it is the wonderful efforts of many volunteers that have and will continue to make SFBBO successful. I hope that you all feel the way I do: That the hours we spend as volunteers are not only enjoyable, but they lead to useful achievement.

Ed Roberts
President

New Office Hours

SFBBO Executive Director, Kathy Hobson, has taken a leave of absence for the purpose of returning to school and working on a special project. In the interim the office will be staffed on weekdays from 10 a.m. - 2 p.m. and from 3 p.m. - 6 p.m. Weekend office hours are still to be determined.

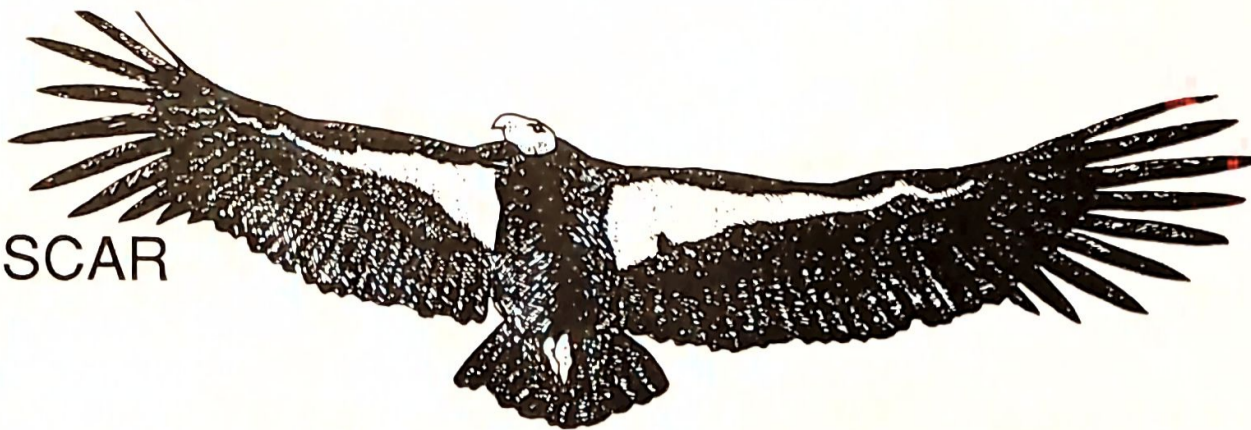
BOOKS

Artemisia Press has announced the reissue of Joseph Grinnell and Alden H. Miller's The Distribution of the Birds of California, first published in 1944, in an exact reproduction of the original text plus new appendices which update nomenclature and list recent publications on California bird distribution. This valuable source of information on seasonal status, abundance, and geographic range of 644 species and subspecies can be obtained from Artemisia Press, P. O. Box 119, Lee Vining, Ca 93541. Prices are \$18.00 paperback, \$25.00 hardbound, including shipping and handling. Add 6% sales tax and also add \$3.50 per book if you wish your order to be mailed first class.



CONDORS LOST BIRDS OF THE SCAR

By Tim Gates



One of the first field marks visible on the condor was the whitish, frosty band across the inner secondaries and primaries on an otherwise all dark upper wing surface. In direct sunlight, the dark wings reflected a shiny navy-blue hue. Once or twice I glimpsed a superficial orange glow in the head region.

On that August, 1984 day, Don Stark's SFBBO Tours had gathered a group of naturalists and birders from all parts of the country to take advantage of a primary condor viewing place. We were watching from a Los Padres National Forest boundary marker, appropriately known as "The Sign". Located along a road which leads away from Condor Triangle at the base of Mt. Pinos, this spot proved to be a rewarding one to all of us who scanned the skies for condors on that morning.

The first huge bird soared in over the hillside east of the barren, rocky cliffs called The Scar. For awhile it circled repeatedly against the yellow hills. Views of the underside of the condor drew oohs and ahhs from novice condor-watchers. While the more seasoned observers of that rare and endangered bird dedicated that portion of the sighting to comments on three or four lines of a spiral notebook. These "veterans" exhibited a more restrained enthusiasm whereas first time viewers were filled with wonder and their spirits were soaring with the astonishing bird they were watching.

The condor seemed to be busy being simply a condor - oblivious to the naturalists' estimate that only sixteen other wild birds of the species *Gymnogyps californianus* were, at that time, left on this planet. With the entire home range of the species in view, it was easy to imagine the rest of the population hidden in various

distant mountain shadows.

The first bird disappeared between two ridges only to reappear ten minutes later with a second one. Condor number two made its approach from the southeast, coming in much higher than the first bird. I could see similar markings on the second individual, but didn't watch it as closely because my interest was held by the first bird.

Through a 35x telescope, the underwing surfaces of the condors provided breathtaking views against a background of cobalt sky. An uneven band of white wandered between the body and the wrist. The head presented a tapered appearance and the tail appeared to be proportionately shorter than that of a golden eagle. As a second pair joined the first two condors, the birds seemed, in my imagination, to resemble World War II B-29 Superfortresses. As they gradually decreased altitude, I could picture them as bombers returning home from another day of survival in the air.

In the typical gusty wind conditions of their native area, condors soar with only occasional wing tilts for stability. About 5% of the time they take one or two deep, hunched wing strokes to compensate for flying conditions. Occasionally they hunch up their wings in a slightly swept-back position to make a shallow dive. I observed two dives where the condor dropped 75 to 100 vertical feet. When the birds coursed low over the hills and ravines, they flapped their wings much more frequently.

At one time, I could see three condors at the same time as I gazed through my telescope. The three birds broke the skein formation to go into wide circles in the vicinity of The Scar and to make trips in and out of

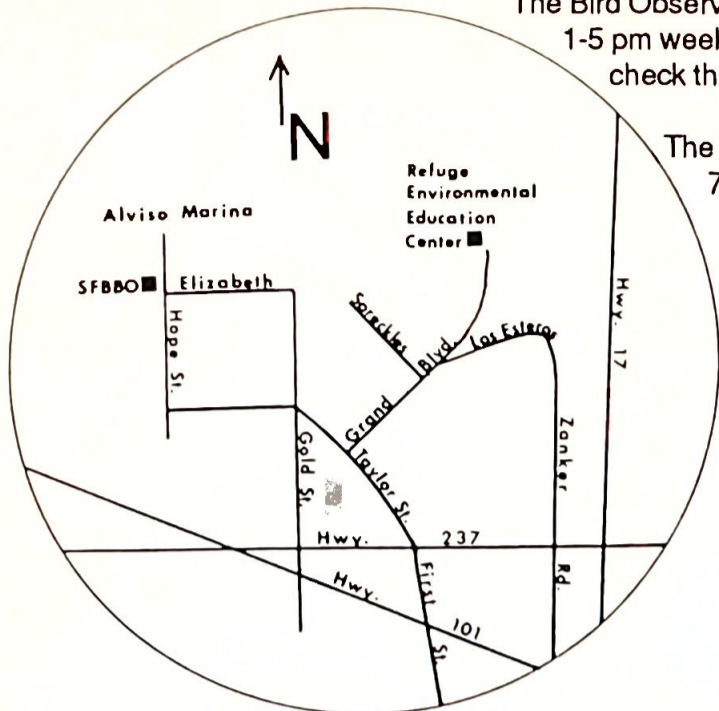
the adjacent ravines. Then all three approached the gouged-out cliffs of The Scar and, with tarsi extended and wings flapping laboriously to slow their flight, all three birds settled onto the rock ledges.

At 45x the condors appeared through the heat waves as rectangular, black blobs. One bird spread its wings in cormorant fashion to cool itself. Occasionally it had to catch its balance by moving its feet a few inches when an unexpected updraft whipped up the face of the hot, sandstone cliff. When this condor finally refolded its wings, the action required four different steps to accomplish satisfactory placement against the body. The first step was to collapse the primary flight feathers into the secondaries. The still-fanned secondaries were then folded, leaving the wings in a drooping "M" configuration. The third step was to draw all the flight feathers in tightly and tuck them next to the body. Finally, several flicks and jostles, common to all birds when folding their wings, resulted in the final arrangement of the scapulars and tertials, and the bird had accomplished its task.

Ten minutes later the condors launched in a seemingly suicidal dive from the cliff. As they gained speed and lift, those giant, thermal gliders recovered from their plunge and set course for the adjacent ravine where all three disappeared, presumably in hope of finding a carcass or a less conspicuous resting place.

The realization that we had just viewed nearly 20% of the world's population of California Condors lent both grace and a sense of desperation to that August day. Now, two years later, the feeling of desperation remains blended with a sense of nostalgia. We can no longer

The Bird Observatory office is located at 1290 Hope St. in Alviso. The office is open from 1-5 pm weekdays and some weekends. But before stopping in, call (408) 946-6548 and check the schedule.



The General Membership meetings are held on the first Thursday of the month at 7:30 pm at the San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge Environmental Education Center in Alviso. (see map) The Board meetings are open to the membership and are held monthly. Call the Observatory for dates and times.

The newsletter deadline is the first Monday of the month. Send contributions to the editor: Susie Formenti, 16675 Buckskin Ct., Morgan Hill, CA 95037.

The San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory is a non-profit corporation under IRS statute 501(c)3. All memberships and contributions are tax deductible.



CONDORS

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drive our cars to The Sign and admire wild condors soaring over The Scar. Only a controversial captive breeding program stands between the California Condor and extinction. If the efforts to save the condor fail, we will be left with only memories of these great birds. Winds 100 years from now will still create the swirling updrafts, but there will be only the spirits of California Condors to rise on the currents. ■

GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

Thursday, November 6, 1986

Refuge Environmental Education Center

in Alviso

7:30 pm

FEATURED SPEAKER: Wally Bennett, of the Monterey Bay Aquarium will talk about the background and building of the Aquarium.

DONATIONS. Thanks to Barbara Cox, Susie Formenti, and Elsie Richey for the refreshments for the October General Meeting.

HAVE YOU MOVED?. If you have, please send your address change to the office promptly so that you will continue to receive your newsletter.

Editor, Susie Formenti

The newsletter welcomes material (written or drawn) from readers. The deadline is the first Monday of the month. Send contributions to Susie Formenti, Editor, 16675 Buckskin Ct., Morgan Hill, Ca. 95037.



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Make checks payable to SFBBO. Your gift membership is tax deductible.

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Life	\$400 *
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Corporation	\$500 +

* Single payment becomes part of an endowment fund.