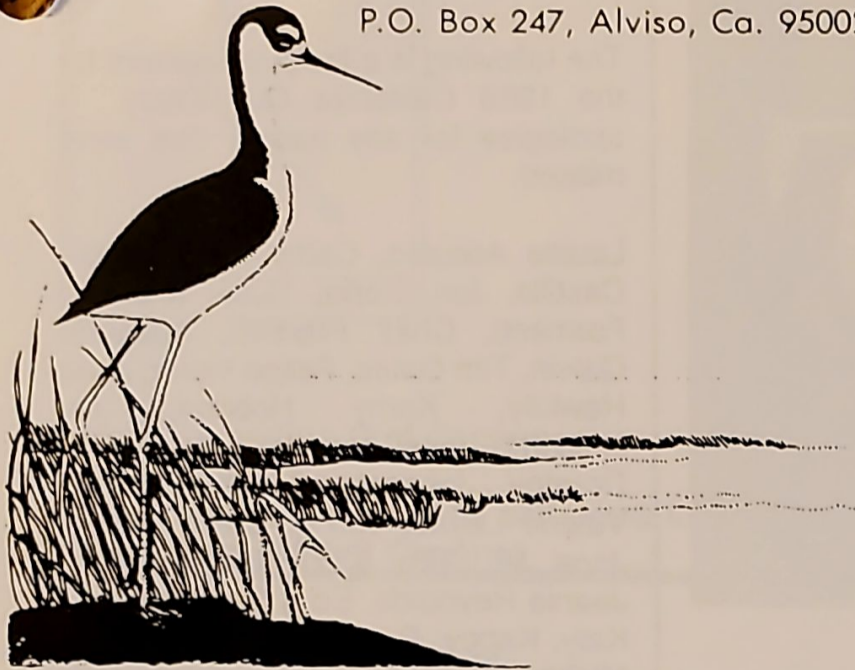


# SAN FRANCISCO BAY BIRD OBSERVATORY NEWSLETTER

P.O. Box 247, Alviso, Ca. 95002 • (408) 946-6548

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Permit #9

Address Correction Requested



Volume 5, Number 9

October 1986

## 1986 CALIFORNIA GULL STUDY

by Ed Roberts

As the accompanying picture shows, gull banders' outfits are beginning to resemble the Stanford Band at a Saturday football game. Every veteran of nighttime census and banding trips into the colony has his or her own strategy for appropriate attire. The veteran gull bander considers several factors.

Weather varies from blusteringly windy to placid, warm, and beautiful. Thus the vet usually dresses in layers. Add a layer or peel one off, depending on the meteorological whim of the particular evening. In addition to the layers of clothing, I wear hip waders, which serve a dual purpose. They keep me dry on those nights when I am working on the "wet side" - the levee which has a sunken portion, necessitating a wade from one section to the other. The waders also keep my knees from getting sore from scrambling about in the process of banding chicks which will mature into those adaptable, sleek, flying machines: California Gulls.

I am particularly smug and prideful about my headlamp. I bought one of those high-tech lithium battery headlamps, which allows me to keep both hands free. I slip my headlamp over my thick, wool, genuine Cowichan Indian watchcap, don my paint-splattered jacket, and I feel appropriately dressed for a night in the gull colony.

Now, there are some people who would tell you that I look like a refugee from a thrift shop in my outfit. O.K., I'll admit that once, on the way home after a trip, I was almost refused service at a self-service gas station because the

cashier couldn't stop laughing long enough to turn on the pump. But to those who make rude remarks about my attire, let me defend myself by pointing out that some of my fellow volunteers have their own idiosyncratic modes as well.

When she climbed onto the raft to cross the channel for the first 1986 banding trip, Peg Woodin had on a rock-climber's helmet. She looked like she had set out for a venture with the Yosemite Mountaineering group but had made a wrong turn en route and wound up with the rest of us "Friday Fanatics" in the middle of San Francisco Bay instead. And Susie Formenti wore a sort of floppy sunbonnet topped with a hard hat. Periodically the rest of us would hear a hollow, "thwang" sound, followed by a comment from Susie to some effect like, "Ha ha! that didn't bother me at all!" I should mention here that some adult California Gulls do not seem to appreciate our activities in their nesting area. They respond to our presence by screaming and diving at us like one of those little rocket-powered fighters that George Lucas concocted for the movie Star Wars, and then make contact with our heads by giving lusty kicks with their feet. Tim Gates claims that he's going to wear a pith helmet for his next trip.

This oddly garbed crew accomplished some interesting work, and strange items of clothing were not the only things unusual about the 1986 breeding season survey of California Gulls. The season's color bands disappeared somewhere between England and Alviso,

*Continued on page 2*



never to be seen again, and the water level fluctuated from overflowing to bone dry. 2403 chicks were banded while an estimated 800 more were not. Because of the rapid population increase of the past seasons, we had expected a proportionate increase in 1986, but the figures show instead that the past season's production of chicks represented a decline of approximately eighty from 1985 figures.

Two changes were noted in 1986 which displayed a clustering of breeding California Gulls into the area of the main colony. In 1985, satellite colonies on the levees at Pond A-9 and near Mowry Slough appeared to be flourishing at a rate proportionate to the main colony. Both of these satellite areas decreased greatly in 1986. Simultaneously, there was a large increase in the number of birds which nested along the roadside on the levee leading to the Knapp hunting lodge. In previous years, a few gulls have attempted to nest along that road near the lodge, but the number of birds which used this sector was much larger in 1986. Over 108 nesting attempts were made in this area and ninety-two chicks were banded along the roadside.

Among these roadside nesting pairs of California Gulls, the keen eyes of Don Starks spotted an oddity. One

breeding pair included a second-year bird. Such precocity has not, as far as we have been able to find, been noted for this species. Fortunately, Don was able to document his find with several photographs which show that the second-year bird not only attempted to breed but was successful. — More extensive information on Don's find will be reported in a future newsletter.

Two conclusions can be drawn as a result of analysis of the data and the circumstances at the local California Gull colony. The first is that 1987 studies by SFBBO should be expanded to investigate other aspects of the gull colony besides population documentation. For example, a one-day preliminary study, under the direction of Dr. Howard Cogswell, was performed to determine an appropriate method for investigating feeding dispersal patterns to local garbage dumps. Studies such as this are needed to help us learn more about what is really going on in the gull colony. The second conclusion that you might form is that you, too, have the opportunity to join our sartorially splended cadre of gull study volunteers for the 1987 season. The group photograph may not make the cover of some fashion magazine, but a friend of mine who saw the '86 version suggested that one could paste it to the front window of the

house and it would frighten off door-to-door salesmen and would-be burlars.

The following is a list of volunteers for the 1986 California Gull Study. I apologize for any names that were missed.

Louise Accurso, Cathy Brown, Jose Castillo, Jan Dierks, Susie & Jason Formenti, Chaz Franklin, Margaret Galvin, Tim Gates, Felipa Harer, Jane Hawkey, Kathy Hobson, Jay Holcomb, Joan Humphrey, Ken Israel, Dorothy Johnson, Michael Lamb, Valerie Layne, Jon & Sylvia Leupp, Jane M., Tim & Debbie Reichert, Jeanie Reynolds, Ed & Sara Roberts, Katy, Kappy, Randy & Sue Sprenger, Michael Stahler, Mark Stephens, Jean Takekawa, Trish Wilson, Peg & Annette Woodin. Carol, John & Marshal who's last names were unknown. ■





### Colonial Breeding Bird Census

July 20, 1986

Guadelupe Slough & Leslie salt pond A5 near the mouth of Moffett Channel

On July 20, 1986 I conducted a Colonial Breeding Bird census along the eastside levee of Guadelupe Slough. Most of the sightings were migrating shorebirds including Least and Western Sandpipers and Semipalmated Plovers, but the high count went to American Avocets (~175). Duck populations were surprisingly low, mainly male Ruddy Ducks. Going northwest along the levee and looking into the tules Great Blue Herons, Black-crowned night herons and Snowy Egrets were still roosting.

It's interesting how your instincts tell you that something you are looking at is different. You know when you've seen one Snowy Egret you've seen them all, but at this time of the season it pays to take a closer look. This particular bird appeared to have a shadow on the wings. It was about 50 meters from me in the tules at the mouth of the Moffett Channel and as I took a closer look I could see its pale greenish legs, pale bill with the dark tip and powder blue plumage. It was obvious to me that it was an immature **Little Blue Heron**. The group of Snowy Egrets around it gave me a good comparison to confirm my observation. Other sightings during the Colonial Bird census for this species were made by Darrell Gray on June 22, 1986. He observed two on pond A10 and one on pond A9.

Peg Woodin

*FIELD NOTES is a new feature of the Bird Observatory newsletter that will keep you informed of observations made in the field by other Bay area birders and volunteers of the Bird Observatory. You are invited to contribute to this column along with maps, drawings or pictures and it will be included space permitting. It can be a short note stating a new sighting or something as long as what Derek Currall has submitted for this newsletter. If it's important enough for you to write down in your field notebook it's of interest to other birders.*

## BOARD NEWS

San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory salutes two departing Board members, and we welcome two new members to our Board. For their many years of valuable service and their continuing support for SFBBO we thank Peg Woodin and Susie Formenti. Although, I'm sure we will continue to see them working around the Bird Observatory on projects and committees. At the September General Meeting the membership voted in three new Board members, Allan Sillett & Tom Medeiros, and Ed Roberts who ran for a second term. We welcome their new interests and skills to our Board of Directors.

At the September 6 Board meeting the following officers were elected for 1986-87:

President	Ed Roberts
Vice-President	Lou Young
Treasurer	Jean Dubois
Secretary	Phyllis Swanson



### New Office Hours

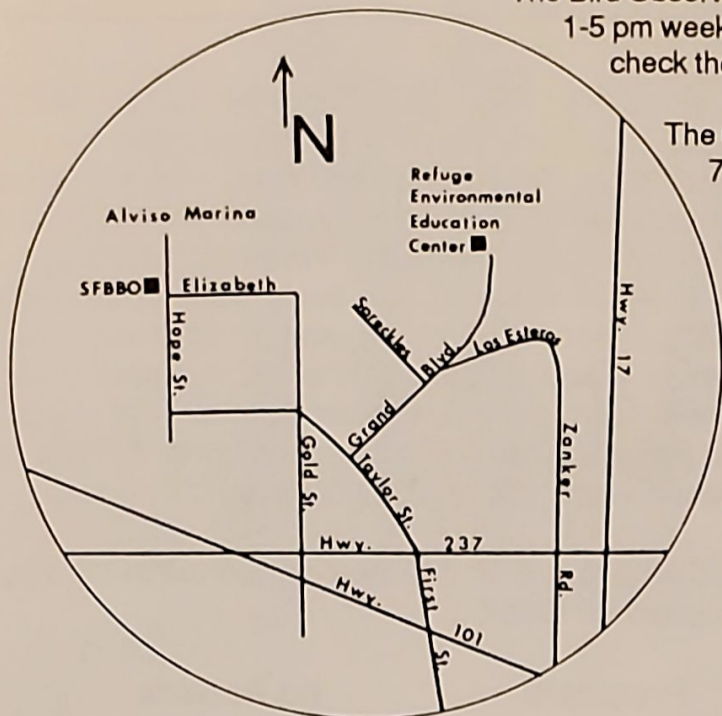
SFBBO Executive Director, Kathy Hobson, has taken a leave of absence for the purpose of returning to school and working on a special project. In the interim the office will be staffed on weekdays from 10 a.m. - 2 p.m. and from 3 p.m. - 6 p.m. Weekend office hours are still to be determined.

### Important Meeting

A major portion of the September 29 Board of Directors meeting will be devoted to a session on goals planning and a grant development workshop conducted by new board member Tom Medeiros. This meeting will be held at the Bird Observatory office from 7:30-9:30 p.m. All members who are interested are invited and encouraged to attend this meeting.

Ed Roberts  
President

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.

**DONATIONS.** . . . . Thanks to Judy Wiley and Pat Dubois for the refreshments for the September General Meeting.

## GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

Thursday, October 2, 1986

Refuge Environmental Education Center  
in Alviso

7:30 pm

**FEATURED SPEAKER:** Jean Takekawa, biologist for the San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge, will present a slide show on birds of the Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge. Loxahatchee, located in south eastern Florida, is part of the Florida Everglades.

Editor, Susie Formenti

## BAYDAY CRUISE

"Bayday" is designed to provide education about the Bay and the issues surrounding it. Come aboard the "Gold Rush," the new, luxurious catamaran of the Blue and Gold Fleet - for a complete circle of the Bay. As we cruise, prominent Bay experts and well-known naturalist scrutinize the Bay from top to bottom: its history, geology, and biology are explored; its fish, marine mammals and birds discussed; its water quality examined. We look at the issues of landfill, dredging, pollution and the Bay's connection with the Delta. An outstanding "faculty" of naturalists and experts will discuss various aspects of the Bay.

The 9 a.m. - 2 p.m. trip will begin at Pier 39 in San Francisco. The fee of \$42 includes Bay cruise, box lunch and educational materials. For more information contact the Marin Conservation League at (415) 456-1912



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I would like to join  Renew my membership  in the  
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Make checks payable to SFBBO. Your gift membership is tax deductible.

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

\* Single payment becomes part of an endowment fund.