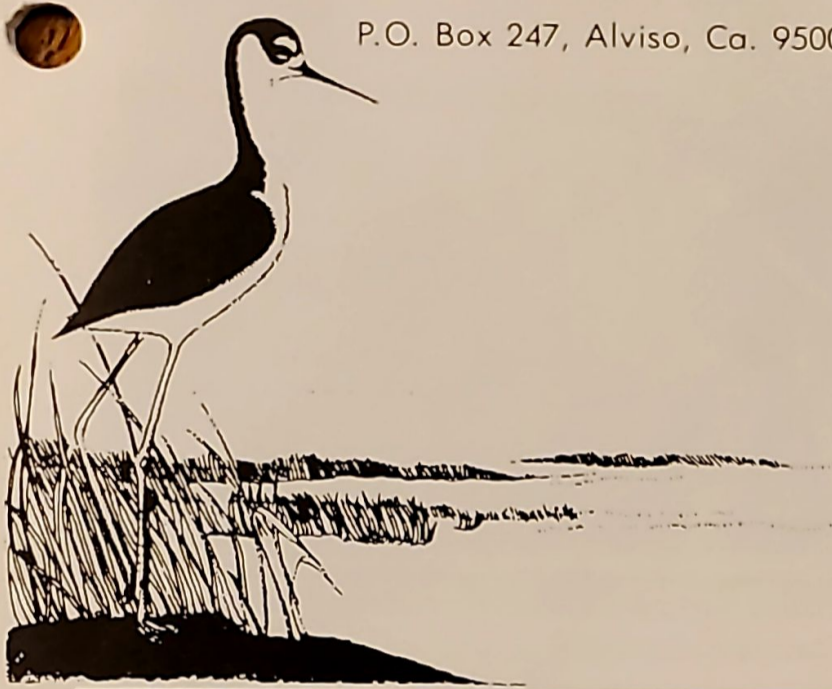


SAN FRANCISCO BAY BIRD OBSERVATORY NEWSLETTER

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

Non Profit Org.
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
Alviso, Ca.
Permit #9



Volume 6, Number 4

April 1987

The Bair Facts, or We've Barely Begun

by Ed Roberts

Bair Island has been a focus of SFBBO attention since the inception of our organization and with good reason. Outer Bair Island is of singular importance as habitat for a range of avian species from herons to terns to raptors, shorebirds, and marsh-dwelling passerines. SFBBO involvement on Bair Island has expanded thus far in 1987 and there are several projects in process for which volunteer workers will be gladly accepted.

Thus far we have done work with Great Blue Herons, Least Terns, Caspian Terns, shorebird banding, coyote brush restoration, and pickleweed control. What follows is a review of activities to date and a projection of work still to be done. If you find yourself interested in participating in one or more of these projects, call the office and volunteer to get involved. There is plenty of room for interested people to join in on the activities.

The problem of endangered California Least Terns and their sporadic to non-use of the Bair Island nesting colony for the past few years is being approached by activities to enhance the habitat and then to attempt to entice Least Terns to resume use of the colony in 1987. To try to accomplish this we are approaching the situation from several directions.

SFBBO has established an ad hoc committee, known as the Bair Island Interest Group, composed of concerned agency and private group persons, whose intent is to share information and to discuss ideas for protection and enhancement of the habitat of the island, particularly Least Terns. One of SFBBO's initial efforts for this group is to establish a Least Tern literature library. If you enjoy prowling among the stacks at the library or running the xerox machine, this is the job for you.

In the field, we have flooded the old salt pond around the Least Tern nesting area and, with the generous help of Monsanto

Agricultural Chemicals, we are investigating methods to control the pickleweed which has encroached into the nesting area. The historically-used nesting sites for Least Tern and Caspian Terns have been or will be covered with a layer of oyster shell to make them more appealing to the terns. The next step is to place decoys and cassette tape players in both colonies, if time, manpower, and funding permit. The cassette tape players will broadcast "friendly tern calls" over the decoys in hope of convincing the birds to use the sites for nesting. Volunteers are needed to help set up the decoys and sound system, to maintain the batteries which power the sound system, and to monitor the effectiveness of the program.

Continued on page 2

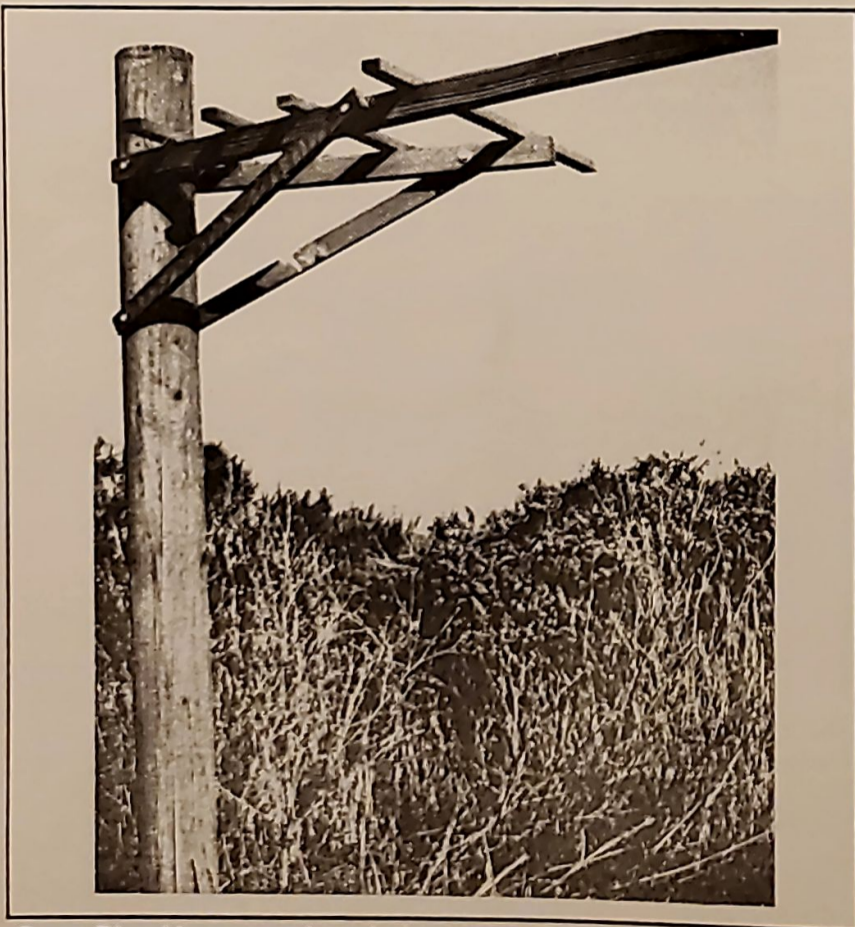


Bair Island volunteers back row from left: Sarah Roberts, Armond Gonzales, Rene Gonzales, Dave Formenti, and Eric Ford. Front row Ed Roberts and Isabelle Pelaud.

Other Bay Area habitats for both Least and Caspian Terns have been degraded by factors ranging from dredge spoilings placed on the nesting levee to heavy predation, so the physical effort of hauling oyster shell or grubbing out pickleweed is offset by the knowledge that we can gain useful scientific knowledge and help to maintain these species by our efforts.

SFBBO has been given license from Bair Island Investments, the owners of the land on which the heron rookery is located, to engage in two projects there. The mature coyote brush (*Baccharus pilularis consanguinea*), which has been used for nesting by Great Blue Herons, Snowy Egrets, and Black-crowned Night Herons, is dying out. This is especially a threat to Great Blue Herons as the die-out is occurring in that part of the island where they have nested since at least as far back as 1967. To counteract this problem, SFBBO has initiated a three-pronged program. Ten wooden nesting platforms, built for us by the San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge, have been placed in the colony. As shown in the photograph, these platforms consist of a triangular structure of wooden slates, with a long wooden perching arm, attached to either a post or a wooden bench at the approximate height of the existing coyote brush. What remains to be done is to observe the Great Blue Heron colony by means of spotting scopes to see if the birds elect to build nests on the platforms.

For future use, SFBBO volunteers have planted 120 seedling coyote brush plants in the colony. We hope that these year-old plants, grown from seed collected on the island, will one day provide natural nesting structures for this Great Blue Heron colony, perhaps a unique one because this species usually chooses to nest only in very tall trees. Concurrently, we will investigate the causes for deterioration of the old coyote brush. Several possible explanations exist as to why the old plants are dying and the problem is to determine which hypothesis is the correct one. If you are a volunteer who happens to be interested in an investigation into plant pathology, this is a chance for you to get involved.



Great Blue Heron nesting platform

Photo by S. Formenti



Armand Gonzales (left) and Ed Roberts constructing nesting platform. (Photo by S. Formenti)

A new project this season, under the able direction of Allan Sillett, is a beginning study of shorebird use of Bair Island. This study involves both night banding of shorebirds on the island as well as daytime census counts. The number and variety of species of shorebirds which use the Bair Island area for feeding and roosting is not well established. What we do know is that the four-season use of the area by shorebirds is quite extensive and that Bair Island may be of major importance for several species. Aside from the fact that a night spent on the island provides a scene of incredible beauty for human visitors, the information gained from this study may have a major influence on our view of the importance of Bair Island as it pertains to shorebirds.

SFBBO volunteers will also be needed for the colonial bird census of Bair Island. Once again we will take counts of the birds which use the area, including herons, terns, raptors (the island is important to both Black-shouldered Kites and Northern Harriers), California Clapper Rails, and passerines (a variety of sparrows inhabit the island, including the Salt-marsh Song Sparrow for which we intend to participate in the submission of a proposal that this species be given endangered species status). This year, we have requested permission to color band Great Blue Herons for a study of feeding dispersal - yet another project where volunteers can get involved.

If you have been thinking about volunteering, or if you have wanted to participate and have just been waiting for someone to call and ask you, consider the possibilities for Bair Island this spring and summer. As the "group shot" of coyote brush planters and nest platform builders indicates, it's a chance to increase your knowledge and to gladden your spirit. ■

Donations

Thanks to Judy Wiley, Julie Muller and Laura Orr for the refreshments for the March General Meeting.

MORE THAN AIRPLANES FLY NEAR MOFFETT FIELD

By Ed Roberts and Peg Woodin

The Moffett Field area may seem like an unlikely place for anything other than aircraft, but it provides important nesting and feeding habitat for a number of birds. SFBBO recently answered a request to compile a general report about this area, and those of us involved with this study would like to highlight for you some of the species we've observed. Specific to the areas marked on the map below, we have noted the following:

Zone 1: This area is a reserve under the control of the Mid-Peninsula Open Space Trust. A variety of waterfowl nest in this location, including Northern Pintail (*Anas acuta*), Northern Shoveler (*A. clypeata*), Gadwall (*A. strepera*), Cinnamon Teal (*A. cyanoptera*), scaup spp., and Blue-winged Teal (*A. discors*). Other nesting species in this zone are Common Moorhens (*Gallinula chloropus*), Eared Grebes (*Podiceps nigricollis*), American Coots (*Fulica americana*), American Avocets (*Recurvirostra americana*), and Black-necked Stilts (*Himantopus mexicanus*).

Zone 2: This area is owned by the Leslie Salt company. Juvenile birds of many species seem to depend on this area for feeding. Post-fledged Least Terns (*Sterna antillarum*) and Forster's Terns (*S. forsteri*) appear to be particularly dependent on this area.

Zone 3: The largest south bay nesting colony of Forster's Terns is found in this area located within the borders of the San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge. SFBBO census takers have counted more than 900 nests in some seasons. In addition, large numbers of shorebirds use this zone as a feeding area.

Zone 4: Burrowing Owls (*Athene cunicularia*), a species of concern, can be found in this zone.

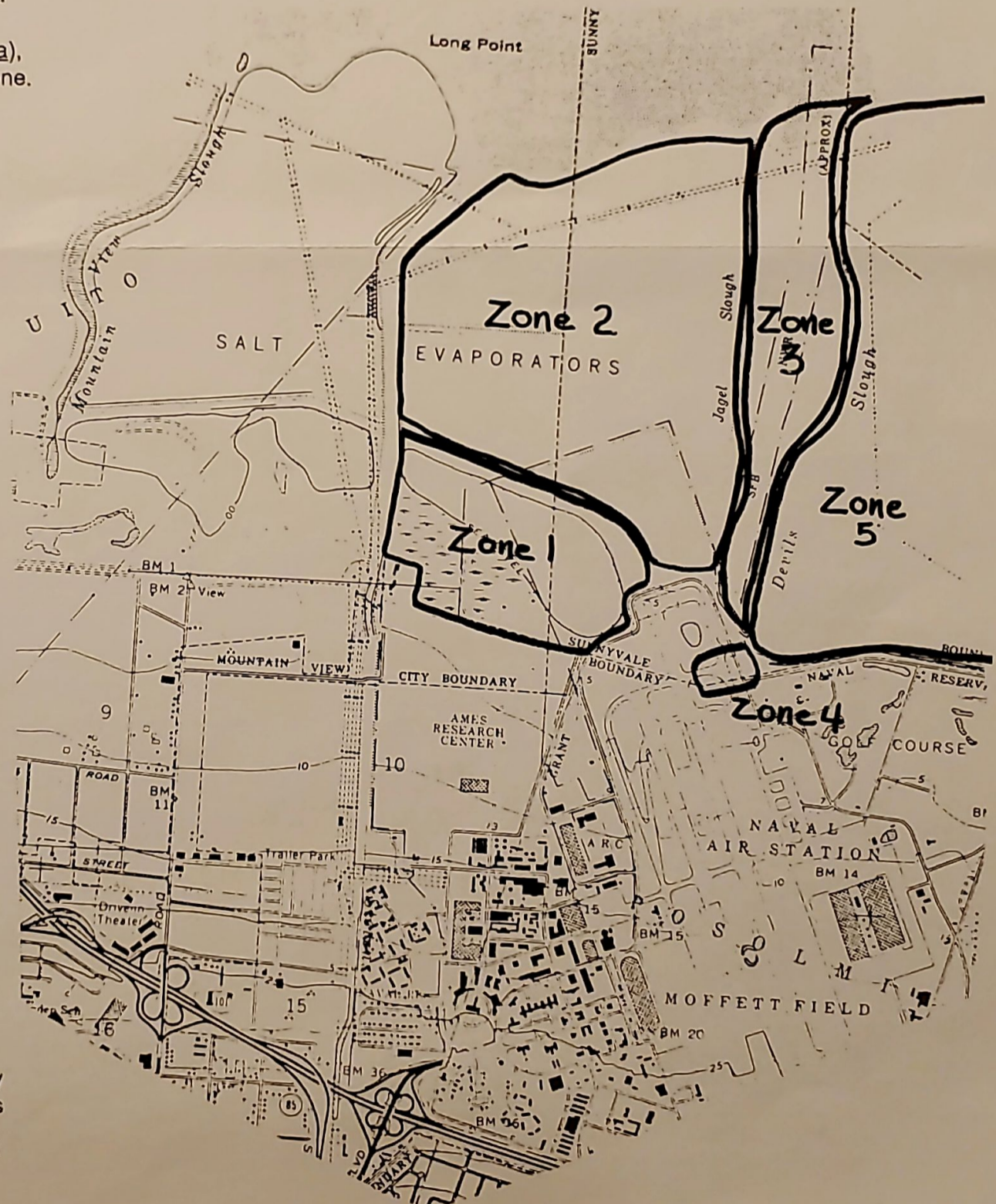
It can be speculated that the population of Burrowing Owls in this area will increase because of depredation of nearby habitat.

As with Zone 2, this area is an important feeding location for juvenile birds. Young Snowy Egrets (*Egretta thula*) and Great Egrets (*Casmerodius albus*) feed along the slough which runs through this area.

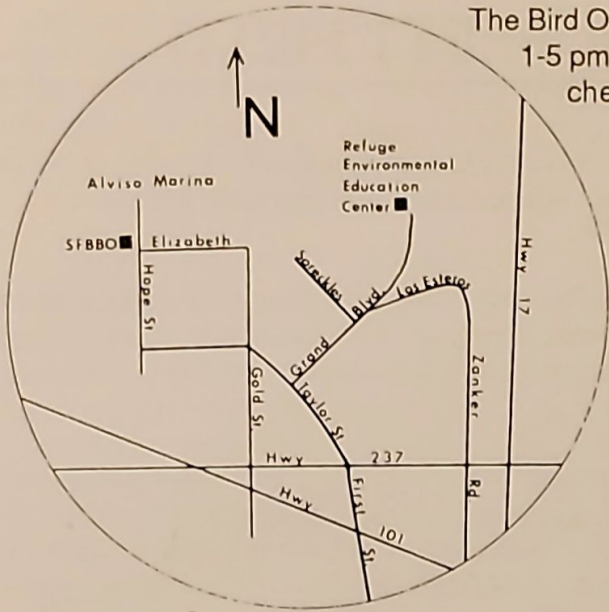
Zone 5: The deeper water of this area, which is owned by the Leslie Salt Company, is used for feeding by American White Pelicans (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*) and Brown Pelicans (*P. occidentalis*) and by both California Gulls (*Larus californicus*) and Western Gulls (*L. occidentalis*).

In addition, SFBBO volunteers have found nesting Killdeer (*Charadrius vociferus*) and sparrows, including the Salt-marsh Song Sparrow, in these areas. Salt-marsh Yellowthroat have been observed nesting as well, as is noted in a SFBBO study of this species.

Without the help of our volunteers, much of this useful information would remain uncovered. Like so much of our regional information, this data has been compiled by individuals who did not think of their efforts as being a scientific research project, but simply as an avocation to be shared with others. So much more needs to be learned about the birds using this valuable habitat. There is ample opportunity for SFBBO members to engage themselves



Continued on page 4



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.

GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

Thursday, April 2, 1987

Refuge Environmental Education Center
in Alviso

7:30 pm

FEATURED SPEAKER: Dr. Howard Cogswell,
Professor Emeritus, CSU - Hayward.

TOPIC: Using a data base to examine bird activity
or behavior.

Moffett Field

Continued from page 3

in interesting and useful studies of our local areas. Perhaps you would like to try your hand at conducting a project. If so, call the office. We'll provide whatever help you need. ■

BAN ON HUNTING MOUNTAIN LIONS

SFBBO has received a letter from Assemblyman Thomas H. Bates summarizing AB 467 which he introduced on February 3, 1987. This bill, if passed by the legislature would reinstate the statewide ban on hunting mountain lions in California. Similar legislation was passed in 1986 but was vetoed by Governor Deukmejian.

Assemblyman Bates has invited comment on this proposed legislation either to him or to Governor Deukmejian. If Any member of SFBBO wishes to make such comment, Assemblyman Bates' letter is on file at the Observatory office or you can obtain more information by contacting Rachel Richman, Legislative Aide, at 916-445-7554. ■

Editor, Susie Formenti



P.O. Box 247
Alviso CA 95002
(408) 946-6540

I would like to join Renew my membership in the
San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

PHONE (____) _____

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.



San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory

O U R S E C O N D B I G D A Y !

The San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory's second BIG DAY Fundraiser will be held on April 25, 1987. David Suddjian and Paul Noble will be in pursuit of as many species as they can see or hear in one 24-hour period. And once again, we'll be counting on your support. Please pledge 5 cents, 10 cents, 20 cents, or whatever you can afford for every species that they see (last year it was an amazing 157 species). We'll let you know how much your contribution will be after we receive their tally.

Better yet, organize your own team and give Paul and David some competition. You can chase birds from San Jose to San Francisco, or just count the species in your backyard, city park, or favorite birding hot spot. The spring migration may bring you some surprises wherever you go. In any case, use the back of this form to record your sponsors and their pledges. Then send it to us with the pledges you've collected after April 25th. We'll announce the results in a future SFBBO newsletter.

Checks should be made payable to SFBBO. We are a nonprofit organization, so your contributions are tax-deductible.

I'll pledge _____ for each species Paul and David see.

I/we had a BIG DAY, too, and saw _____ species. The sponsors are listed on the back of this form and their checks are enclosed.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Send your pledges or contributions to: **SAN FRANCISCO BAY BIRD OBSERVATORY**
P.O. Box 247, Alviso, CA 95002