

SAN FRANCISCO BAY BIRD OBSERVATORY NEWSLETTER

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

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Volume 7, Number 1

January/February 1988

SFBBO BOARD NEWS

Officers for the 1988 SFBBO Board of Directors were elected at the December Board meeting. Ed Roberts was re-elected as President, Lou Young as Vice President, Jane Hawkey as Secretary and Jean Dubois was elected for another term as Treasurer.

In addition to elections, the Board dealt with the challenge of maintaining the organization's continuity and interagency affairs without placing too heavy a load on any one person. Coverage during the day will be provided by hiring a part-time office manager. Continuity of activities will be improved by assigning Board members to each of three committees - Operations, Projects and Finance. Each Committee will meet every other week to deal with both special committee business and also with current business. These committees will meet at the SFBBO office two to three nights each week, and the work planning duties will be spread over all of the Board. This plan was voted on and implemented during the week of December 7, 1987.

Listed below are the SFBBO 1988 Board of Directors.

| | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|
| Phyllis Browning | 1985 - 1988 |
| Jean Dubois - Treasurer | 1985 - 1988 |
| Lou Young - Vice President | 1985 - 1988 |
| Jane Hawkey - Secretary | 1986 - 1989 |
| Ed Roberts - President | 1986 - 1989 |
| Allan Sillett | 1986 - 1989 |
| Paul Noble | 1987 - 1990 |
| David Seals | 1987 - 1990 |
| Judy Wiley | 1987 - 1990 |

In order to streamline efficiency and reduce costs the SFBBO newsletter will go to a bimonthly publication starting with this issue. Look for your next newsletter in March.



S C O P E

By Paul Noble

This will be a regularly appearing column dealing with field identification of birds, particularly those species which look alike and pose a problem in separating from one another.

DUNLIN WESTERN SANDPIPER

This month I'll focus on two shorebirds which are commonly found in the South Bay in the winter and which are often mistaken for each other by the careless birder. Dunlins (*Calidris alpina*) and Western Sandpipers (*Calidris mauri*) both winter along the California coast and can be found together in the salt pond habitat of the south bay. Western Sandpipers breed in the high Arctic tundra, migrate south along the coast and winter from Northern California south to South America. Many pass through the south bay in late summer and early fall on their way to more southerly wintering grounds. Those arriving latest usually stay all winter and migrate north again in the spring. Dunlins also breed in the arctic and winter along the Pacific coast including San Francisco Bay. Both species are medium to small sized peeps which frequent tidal flats and, in the south bay, the margins of salt ponds.

The Western Sandpiper, in winter or basic plumage, is essentially pale cold grayish above with fine brown streaking on the crown and a fairly obvious clear white eye stripe or supercilium. Its underparts are white with the sides of the breast washed in gray and overlaid by fine blackish streaks. It has a fairly long, black bill with a slightly drooped tip. Its legs and feet are black - a really close look will reveal webbing between the toes.

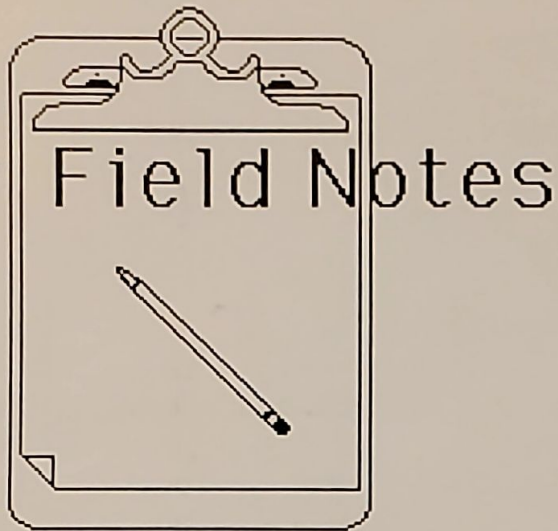
The Dunlin in basic plumage is similar to the Western, but with more of a brownish tone to its upperparts. It too has a white supercilium and white underparts washed with gray at the sides. This gray also tends to be a bit browner than in the Western. When feeding side by side (which is often the case) the Dunlin is noticeably larger with a longer black bill with more drooping at the tip. It often stands with a "hunched" look, showing little neck. This size difference is easily seen when the two birds are foraging together, but when observed alone, bill length is the best separating factor. The Dunlin's bill is generally longer than the distance from the base of the bill to the

back of the neck, whereas the Western Sandpiper has a bill that is roughly half this length. Since females have longer bills than males, particularly in the Western Sandpiper, the bill length difference may be less. But the Dunlin always has a longer bill than does the Western. Field experience will make such comparisons easier.

Voice can be helpful, but comparative field experience is necessary here as well. In general, the Dunlin's call is a rough reedy "trreep", whereas the Western Sandpiper utters a high thin "jeet". Keep in mind that the Sanderling may also frequent salt ponds along with Dunlins and Western Sandpipers, but the Sanderling is larger still and quite ghostly pale. Good source books on field identification are the National Geographic Society's Field Guide to North American Birds and Shorebirds by Hayman et al.

In the next newsletter, I'll discuss the two species of Goldeneye which frequent South Bay reservoirs and ponds. ■





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 photos and it will be included space permitting. If it's important enough for you to write down in your field notebook it's of interest to other birders.

Mountain Views Shoreline Lake

December 1986

By Paul Noble

Mountain View's Shoreline Lake was constructed in the early 1980's by the City of Mountain View. Though primarily used for sailing, in the winter, the lake has become a reliable place to observe various species of diving ducks which prefer deep water. Freshwater lake's of this depth (over 20 feet) are not common on the bay until one ventures north of Dumbarton. Last December, after the season's first big storm I went out to the lake to see what birds had been blown in. Surf Scoters were everywhere with a counted total of 133, certainly the high for the current season. Also present were 34 Bufflehead -- some already courting mates. Twenty-four Common Goldeneye were scattered about and 30 Scaup could be seen across the lake. Lesser Scaup outnumbering Greater Scaup by a ratio 2 to 1. High overhead flying in from Leslie Salt Pond #1 was a flock of Greater Scaup. Their altitude over the salt pond must have been over 300 feet in order for them to be out of range of a hunters shotgun blasts. Once over the lake, they wheeled and turned and dove in an almost ballet-like fashion. After a couple of passes to see if all was safe, they then came in on their final approach, legs down and webbed feet spread. They settled among their own kind looking rather wide-eyed but soon settled down to feed or snooze. All this time there was a parade of Double-crested Cormorants cruising the far side of the lake. They would dive and surface, keeping in a rough formation as they criss crossed over the lake.

Gulls also favor the lake. A quick perusal showed six species to be present: Western, Ring-billed, California, Herring, Glaucous-winged, and Thayer's. All this activity had taken place in only fifteen minutes or so, and a longer stay would no doubt turn up more interesting things, but it was time to go. As I took one last look at the

lake, a Red-throated Loon surfaced not twenty yards from where I had been sitting. Where it was in those previous fifteen minutes I know not. But it was there now and its image remained in my mind as I walked away. ■



Classes & Trips

Gull Class

Don Starks will again teach his class on the "Introduction To Bay Area Gulls and Their Identification" at the SFBBO office in March. The class will include four lectures and slide presentations, plus two field trips. If you have a difficult time identifying gulls, plan to join Don and learn the fundamentals of Gull Identification. Class fee is \$30. For more information and registration call Don Starks at (408) 371-9720.

Spring Birding Tour

Erika Wilson, a native of Santa Clara Valley, who now resides in Northern Virginia is offering a Spring Birding Tour designed with the Western Bird watcher in mind. You will see warblers, shorebirds, and other East Coast migrants. The tour runs from May 11 - 18 and begins and ends in Washington, D.C. with visits to National Wildlife Refuges and other birding hotspots in Northern Virginia, Chesapeake Bay area, Chincoteague and Assateague, Delaware Bay including Cape May and Maryland. Call or write for details: Don Peterson, CARDINAL BIRDING TOURS, P.O. Box 7495, Alexandria, VA 22307. (703) 360-4183.

BIRD BANDING WORKSHOP

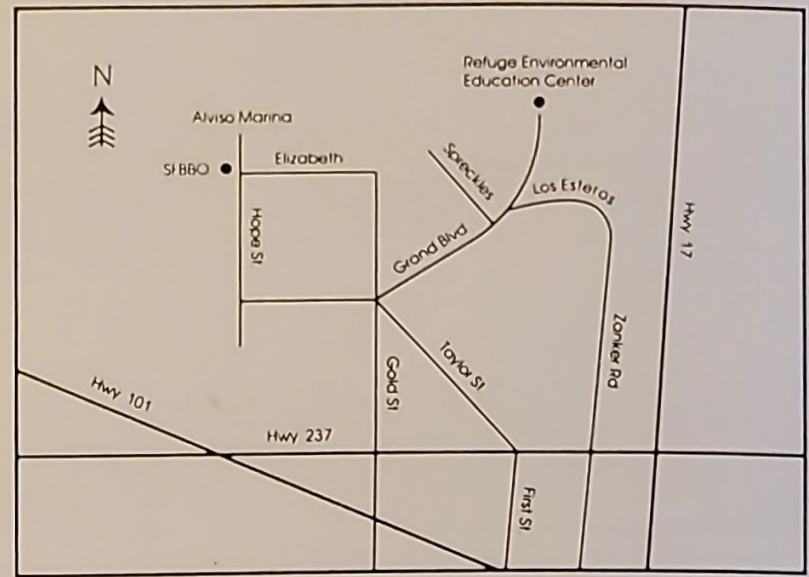
A workshop on the techniques of bird banding is being offered by **Coyote Creek Riparian Station**. It will include three Monday evening sessions beginning 25 January and seven morning workshops (dawn to noon) in February, March, and April. Instructors will be Richard Mewaldt, Michael Rigney, Allen Royer, and other experienced CCRS volunteers. Fee is \$35 (\$20 for CCRS Members). Contact CCRS at P. O. Box 2019, Alviso, CA. 95002, or (408) 262-9204. The workshop is limited to twenty registrants. Prerequisite is a basic knowledge of local bird identification.

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, **February 4**, 1987

Refuge Environmental Education Center
in Alviso

7:30 pm

FEATURED SPEAKER: Lee Lovelady, volunteer naturalist at the Environmental Education Center.

TOPIC: Lee will discuss Barn Owls, owl pellets, habitats and ecology of owls, and the bones found in dissected owl pellets. This talk will be based on presentations given to adult groups at the Refuge Environmental Education Center, and will include a slide presentation, exhibits, and teaching aids.

Editor, Susie Formenti

DONATIONS

Thanks to Pat Dubois, Susie Formenti, Kathy Hobson, Fran Mewaldt, Elsie Richey, Roberta Seals, Hazel Tilden, Sheila Torres, Judy Wiley, Crystal Woodin, and Jean Young for General Meeting refreshments for the past six months.

Most of the pictures and drawings in the SFBBO newsletter are submitted by our staff or donated by members and friends. We are always looking for more. If you have good black and white bird photos that you would like to share with us (or exceptionally sharp color slides that we can convert), please send them to Susie Formenti, 16675 Buckskin Ct., Morgan Hill, CA 95037. For each photo you send, include your name, address, species name, and location and date photo was taken. The newsletter also welcomes written material from readers. The deadline is the first Monday of the month. Send contributions to the editor, Susie Formenti.



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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.