

SAN FRANCISCO BAY BIRD OBSERVATORY NEWSLETTER

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Avian Botulism Study In South San Francisco Bay

Outbreaks of avian botulism have occurred annually in the south bay for many decades. The most effective way to control the spread of the disease during an outbreak is to collect all of the sick and dead vertebrates. While the five year study for the South Bay Dischargers Authority has ended, we hope to be able to secure future funding to continue to monitor avian botulism in the south bay, particularly in Artesian Slough and Coyote Creek. We also hope to continue to work with the staff of the Sunnyvale Water Pollution Control Plant and provide assistance to them whenever possible.

Volunteers are a very important part of this work. We hope to start survey trips in June 1988 and would welcome the help of volunteers -- whether new or experienced.

This study was successfully conducted with the assistance of a large number of people who put in a lot of hours between approximately June 15 and October 15 each year. Most participated in the field work, conducting censuses of the study area, collecting sick and dead vertebrates, collecting mud samples, and testing water quality parameters. A few others helped us process the mud samples, identify invertebrates, conduct toxicity tests to determine the presence of botulism toxin in the samples, incubate invertebrate samples, and collect blood samples from the birds.

We are very grateful to the following individuals for their help with this study: Ginny Becchine, Joyce Bizjak, John

Bizjak, Aileen Brodsky, Jose Castillo, Barbara Cox, Mike Dressler, Lorrie Emery, Brett Emery, Lyman Fancher, Marilyn Fowler, Russ Fowler, Susie Formenti, Dave Formenti, Jason Formenti, Margaret Galvin, Terry Hart, Michealle Havenhill, Jane Hawkey, Kathy Hobson, Lam Huynh, Jim Jennings, Vicki Jennings, Dave Jensen, Dorothy Johnson, Dave Jensen, Cynthia Kevorkian, Sandra Kinchen, Vicki Knirck, Julie Klingmann, Valerie Layne, Dave Lonzarich, Carol Martin, Armando Martinez,



This photo shows waterfowl populations found in Artesian Slough. On this date approximately 2,000 Pintails were seen in the study area.

Photo by Peg Woodin.

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Volunteers collecting water quality data in Artesian Slough.
Photo by Tom Rountree.



Dave Lonzarich sieving out invertebrates from mud samples taken from Artesian Slough.

David Moore, Jean Moore, Lisa Nelson, Paul Noble, Nancy Norvell, Karen Oakes, Pat Page, Rick Palmer, Peter Perrine, Theresa Rigney, Mike Rigney, Ed Roberts, Edna Roberts, Tom Rountree, Allen Royer, Al Schmitz, Steve Shugars, Vicki Silvas-Young, Larry Silva, Art Simons, Laurie Simpson, Mike Souza, Rick Strauss, Janis Taylor, Lynda Vicars, Sally Walters, Judy Wiley, Peg Woodin, Jean Young, Lou Young and others.

A wide range of experts provided advice or assistance on everything from invertebrate sampling techniques to laboratory procedures for the toxicity testing. We are grateful to everyone and want to especially thank Lois H. Lindberg, Ph.D,

San Jose State University; Bill Clark, California Dept. of Fish and Game; Tom Harvey and Roy Lowe, USFWS; and Patrick S. Duffey, Ph.D and Daniel C. Mills, Ph.D, California Dept. of Health Services.

In addition, we would like to thank all of the local wildlife rehabilitation organizations who were willing to receive sick birds collected during this study. They include Wildlife Rescue, Inc., the Youth Science Institute, Peninsula Humane Society, Marin Wildlife Center, and the Humane Society of Santa Clara Valley Wildlife Center. Special thanks to Susie Brain, Judy Eaton, Dorothy Johnson, Frances Johnson, Maria Murphy, Vi Nisonger and Joan Priest. ■

WILDLIFE DAY

The Youth Science Institute is celebrating its 3rd Annual Wildlife Day at Alum Rock Park, San Jose, on Sunday, March 27 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Featured are activities for the whole family to learn more about our native wild animals. There will be plenty of opportunities to meet live amphibians, reptiles, birds, including hawks and owls, and mammals. Also planned are bird walks, slide shows, a film, nature crafts, booths with special displays, and items for sale, all with a wildlife theme.

The Institute is also sponsoring its third annual Wildlife Photography Contest. Both black/white and color prints of native California wildlife will be accepted until March 10. The entry fee is \$5. Prizes include an all day boat excursion to the Farallon Islands, an all day boat trip on Monterey Bay for marine mammals and sea birds, a youth summer backpacking trip, an autographed copy of *Tracks in the Sky* by Peter Steinhart and Tupper Ansel Blake, as well as gift certificates from the Nature Company, Reed's Sport Shop, Campbell Camera Works, and Ritz Camera. Winning entries in the

Wildlife Photography Contest will be displayed and prizes awarded at the Wildlife Day.

Alum Rock Park is located in the east San Jose foothills; the entrance is at the upper end of Alum Rock Avenue. For more information, please call (408) 258-4322.

SFBBO BIG DAY SET

Clean those binoculars and study your field guides because SFBBO's Third Annual **BIG DAY** Fundraiser is set for April 16-17. On this weekend counters will be combing the hills, bay and seashore for 24 hours trying to find as many species as possible. It's time to start getting your team together and think about those spring birding hot spots. Join in the fun and count yourself or in a team or pledge another team. This promises to be our biggest day yet, so line up your pledges now! Complete details and entry forms will be mailed to SFBBO members in March. If you are not a member, but interested in participating in this fun day benefit for the Bird Observatory call the office for details.

S C O P E

By Paul Noble

In the last Newsletter, I promised to compare Common and Barrows Goldeneyes and the tricks to separate the two species in the field. Unfortunately, by the time you read this, most ducks will have left our area. So keep this column in mind next winter when they return.

It turns out there are few tricks so field experience is the best way to get to know the two species. The Common Goldeneye is a woodland duck which nests in tree holes in Canada and Alaska. It winters mainly on protected coastal bays and rivers of both the Pacific and Atlantic coasts. In the San Francisco Bay area it is found in the deeper parts of the bay and can be seen with some regularity at Lake Merritt and Laney College Estuary in Oakland, in the lagoons in Foster City, and at Shoreline Lake in Mountain View, and at the reservoirs and percolation ponds around San Jose.

The Common Goldeneye is a plump, compact duck with a fairly short shallow bill. The male is brilliant white below and dark above with white wing patches which are prominent in flight. He has a distinctive greenish head (visible in good light) with a round or oval white facial patch located just at and below the eye, between the eye and bill. The female is white below but browner above than the male and with less white in the wings. The head is brown with no spot. If you see a bird with a brown head and partial white facial smudge, it is a first winter male. In both the male and female Common Goldeneye the head slopes evenly into the bill at an angle equal to the slope of the back of the head. In this respect one can describe the head of a Common Goldeneye as having an equalateral triangle shape. The entire bill is black in the male while the female sports a yellow tip.

The Barrows Goldeneye also breeds in Canada and Alaska and winters along the north Pacific coast. Usually found in association with Common Goldeneyes, they can also be found at Lake Merritt and in Foster City. They are rare in the South Bay proper, but can usually be found here every winter. The Barrows is also white below and dark above with white wing patches. The main spotting difference is the shape of the head and size of the bill. While the Common Goldeneye has an equalateral head shape, the Barrows has a steep, abrupt forehead and a shorter, stubbier bill giving the head an overall shape resembling a right triangle. The males' head (in good light) may appear purplish, but beware, as I have seen some Barrows with green heads. The white facial spot in the Barrows is more of a crescent starting just above the eye and extending well below the eye. First winter males have brown heads and a faint white crescent as in the adult but not quite as well developed. The female

Barrows Goldeneye presents a small problem. Although the adult female sports an all yellow bill in comparison to the Common Goldeneye female which has only a yellow tip, the first winter female Barrows has a black bill with a yellow tip almost identical to the adult female Common. Head shape, however, is the key. Remember the geometry. Commons have an equalateral triangle shape and the Barrows have a right triangle shape. It is this difference in shape of head and size of bill which is the most important field mark to remember. Sometimes you may come across a Common Goldeneye which at first glance has a steep forehead like a Barrows. If this bird is a female you may be confused, but look at the bill size. Commons have proportionally larger bills than do Barrows. A good rule to go by is if you have to think about whether it is a Barrows, it probably isn't. Once you have comparative field experience with the two species, the Barrows Goldeneye becomes quite distinctive.

One last point. Both species have a bright yellow eye (naturally) and when in flight both produce a musical whistling which is where their nick name comes from - - hunters call them whistle-wings. Until next time, good birding! ■

GULL IDENTIFICATION 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 from 7-9pm on:

Thursday - March 10
 Tuesday - March 15
 Tuesday - March 22
 Friday - March 25

Also included in the class are two Saturday field trips on March 12 and 26

from 8:30am - 12:30 pm. 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.

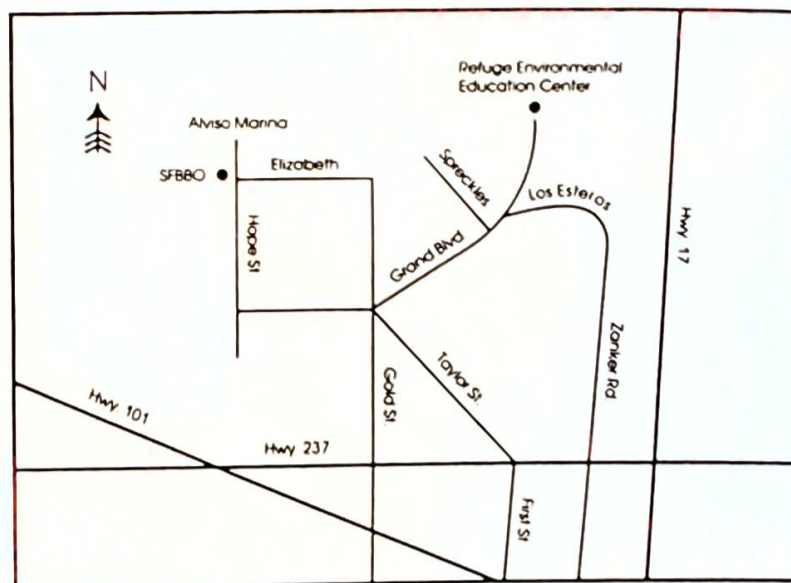


The Bird Observatory office is located at 1290 Hope St. in Alviso. The office is open from 1-5 pm weekdays and some weekends. But before stopping in, call (408) 946-6548 and check the schedule.

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.



EDITOR, Susie Formenti

GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS

Thursday, **March 3**, 1987

Refuge Environmental Education Center
in Alviso

7:30 pm

FEATURED SPEAKER: Rick Coleman, Refuge Manager for the San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge.

TOPIC: Reproductive Biology of the endangered Hawaiian Stilt.

Thursday, **April 7**, 1987

Refuge Environmental Education Center
in Alviso

7:30 pm

FEATURED SPEAKER: Skip Schwartz, Manager of Audubon Canyon Ranch.

TOPIC: Heron and Egret colonies at Audubon Canyon Ranch.



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

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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.