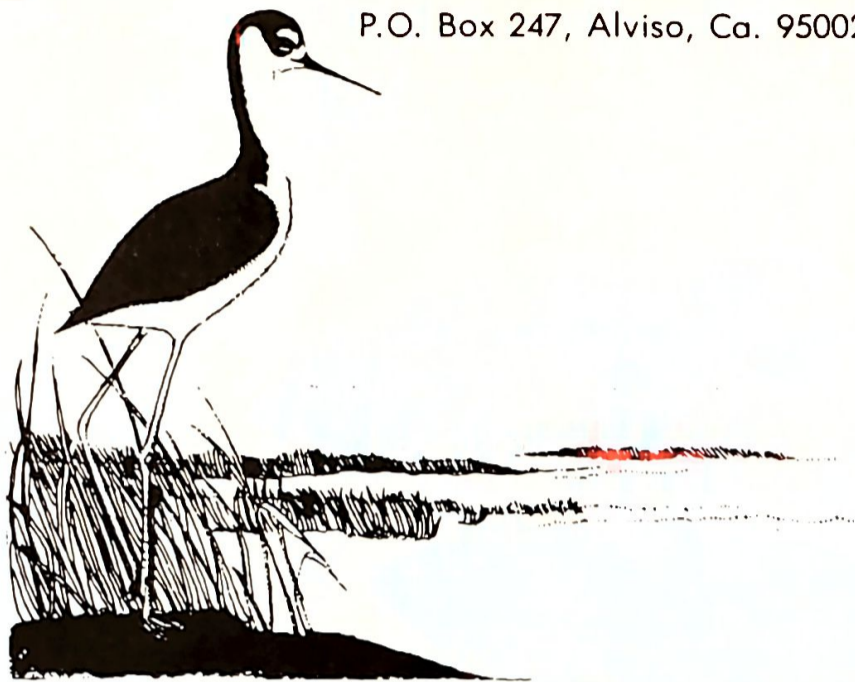


# SAN FRANCISCO BAY BIRD OBSERVATORY NEWSLETTER

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November/December 1988

## DON STARKS NAMED SFBBO EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The Observatory Board of Directors is pleased to announce that Don Starks has accepted the Executive Director position, effective on September 7, 1988. Don is taking charge of the Observatory's priority activities in fund-raising, expanding and enhancing our relations with relevant agencies and organizations, expanding our research and publications, and increasing membership.

Don comes to us with background of experience in ecological and scientific teaching and leadership to his new post. Don has led birding tours all over the United States and overseas, and has donated a large share of the profits to the SFBBO. A professional teacher with a degree in biology, he has taught courses in bird identification, with special expertise in gulls. He is a charter member of SFBBO, has served two terms on the Board of Directors, and was elevated to president from vice-president in 1986. His previous work for the Observatory has ranged from research team leader to heavy construction. David Seals, Board President, has expressed great pleasure that Don has accepted the post. "Don brings energy, dedication and experience to the most crucial position in the Observatory," Seals remarked.

The entire membership joins the Board in expressing appreciation to Kathy Hobson, who served as Executive Director from 1983 until her resignation was regrettably accepted this year. We wish Kathy good fortune and success in her career. The SFBBO was able to depend, for the last five critical years, on her tremendous knowledge base, her political acumen, and her multitude of contacts around the country. It would be very hard for any of us to truly appreciate all the time and self sacrifice she's put into the organization. Don will work hard to maintain the level of respect that Kathy earned for SFBBO from the natural science community. Good luck to you Kathy. ■

## CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

The annual Audubon Christmas Bird Count will be held on Sunday, December 18. The Bird Observatory will organize the Alviso section again this year. If you are new to Christmas Bird Counts, or a new birder, please don't let that stop you. Both novices and experienced birders are needed. We guarantee an exciting day. The final tally will be given at a dinner held immediately following the count. If you are interested in helping in the Alviso section, call Jean Dubois, section leader, at (408) 395-4264 for more details.

## CHRISTMAS WISH LIST

Since its inception members support has been a key factor in the Bird Observatory's success. Without it we could not carry out the important research projects that help us to understand the wildlife of the San Francisco Bay. Below is the Bird Observatory's Christmas Wish List for this year. Since the Bird Observatory is a non-profit organization, your donation is tax deductible. Please help make the wishes we all share for birds and the environment of the South Bay continue to come true.

Wild Bird Seed  
Camera - 35mm, used or new  
Spotting Scope  
Binoculars  
Slide Projector & Screen - 35mm

Computer Paper  
Life Jackets  
Electric Typewriter  
Canoe  
Walkie Talkie

# S C O P E

## Summer Peeps - Part II

Paul L. Noble

In the last issue I explained the differences in Least, Western, and Semipalmated Sandpipers. This time we'll look at the other look-a-like shorebirds that are sometimes seen in the South Bay.

Baird's, Pectoral and Sharp-tailed Sandpipers are all what can be defined as "rarities". That is, these species do not occur regularly in the South Bay, but rather are either casually uncommon or outright rare. Since the occurrence of these species in the South Bay is not part of their regular migration pattern it is by logic that most of the individuals of these species found in the South Bay are juveniles (First time migrants are more prone to "misorientation"). Lets get a feeling for the differences of the juvenile plumages of these three medium sized waders.

The Baird's Sandpiper (*Calidris bairdii*) breeds in the high North American arctic and migrates mainly down the central part of the United States. It is a smallish calidrid, larger than both the Least and Western Sandpipers, but smaller than a Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*). It is short-legged and somewhat short-billed, but with proportionally long wings. This is a good field mark to look for. The wing tips project past the tip of the tail when folded giving the bird a 'streamlined' look. Often the wing tips describe an oval movement when the bird walks. The bill is black, finely tipped and slightly drooped at the tip. The short legs are black or blackish-gray. The juvenile is a basic buffy-brown with a buffy breast and a white chin. Most feathers of the upperparts show a gray-brown center shading to a darker sub-marginal area which contrasts with a buffy-white fringe. This pattern is heavily scaled. This scaly pattern is pronounced and is one of the first things one will notice about the plumage. The wings are a gray-brown with chestnut-buff fringes. The call of the Baird's Sandpiper is a

rough grating 'Krrt' often given as the bird flushes.

One can expect to see this species in the South Bay starting in late July and thru September. By October most have traveled on. There is no good record of a Baird's Sandpiper wintering (January-March) in North America. This species favors freshwater marshes with exposed mud during migration.

The Pectoral Sandpiper (*Calidris melanotos*) is a large calidrid with a fairly short, faintly decurved bill and yellowish legs. It can be recognized in all plumages by strong streaks on the breast sharply demarcated from the belly. This is an important field mark to note, as it will allow you to separate this species from the closely related Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (*Calidris acuminata*). The juvenile plumage is colorful with rufous edges to the crown feathers and upperparts.

White fringes form distinct white 'Vs' on the scapulars. The supercilium is quite prominent, and may be finely streaked behind the eye. Wing coverts are neatly fringed buff.

This species is a later migrant often not showing up in the area until August and sometimes lingering thru October. It prefers to forage at the edge of grassy freshwater pools, where it is sometimes present in large numbers, however two to four are most often encountered in the South Bay. The Pectoral Sandpiper has a harsh reedy 'churk' call quite distinctive and often repeated.

The Sharp-tailed Sandpiper is the rarest of all three; recorded only five times in Santa Clara County. It is a Siberian breeder and winters in Australia. A few misoriented juveniles find their way down the west coast of North America ending up in the Bay Area. This sandpiper is a bit smaller than the Pectoral, but bigger than the Baird's. At first glance the

Sharp-tailed is almost like a brighter Pectoral. Its cap is bright rufous, contrasting with a very prominent supercilium and dark ear coverts and reddish lores. The supercilium is more prominent behind the eye. The most important identification feature on this species is the breast/belly contrast. The Sharp-tail always differs from the Pectoral in its lack of a sharp demarcation of the breast streaking. The Sharp-tail's streaking is very fine and suffuse in contrast to the Pectoral's strong breast streaking that contrasts sharply with the clear white belly. The Sharp-tail's streaking is overlaid on a strong orange-buff that extends to the foreneck. The streaks are sometimes broken in the center of the breast and there may be streaking at the sides of the upper breast. The coloring of the juvenile remains distinct in the field until at least late November. A bird I saw on the San Jose Christmas Bird Count in 1986 was just beginning to molt into basic plumage.

Like the Pectoral the Sharp-tailed Sandpiper favors edges of grassy marshes on migration. It often crouches in the taller grass (snipe-like) to avoid detection. Its call is softer and less reedy than the Pectoral, typically "wheep" or "trrt".

Good places to look for these species in the South Bay are the Mountain View Forebay and the Sunnyvale Water Quality Control Plant ponds. Further afield, Monterey County is one of the best places to find these species. The Salinas Sewage Ponds often sports over a dozen Pectoral Sandpipers at once. Moonglow Dairy in Moss Landing off Dolan Road is also a good place to find rare shorebirds.

Good sources for shorebird identification can be found in *Shorebirds* by Haymen, Marchant and Prater, 1986 and the *National Geographic Society Field Guide To North American Birds*, 1983. ■

## SFBBO Elects Three To Board of Directors

At the September 8 General Membership meeting the SFBBO elected three members to serve three-year terms as members of the Board of Directors.

**Susan Stout** is a first-time director. Since joining SFBBO in 1986, Susan has been active as a volunteer in many of the on going Observatory projects, including night banding in the California Gull colony and California Clapper Rail survey. She works at Stanford University and makes her home in Union City.

Also new to the Board is **Darrell Gray**. Darrell has been one of our mainstays of the Observatory working on research projects involving surveys of bird populations in the South Bay. He recently obtained a master's degree in Art from San Jose State University. Working as a technician in the Art Dept. at SJSU Darrell brings a "can-do" spirit to the board.

**Lou Young** was elected to continue as a Director for a second term. He has served as Board vice-president for the past two years. Most of his work for the Observatory has been on finance and personnel committees, but he was also a tremendous help with the work crew on the restoration of our headquarters at the Bayside Cannery. Lou is an engineering manager at Lockheed and lives in San Jose with his wife Jean who is also an active member.

The Observatory owes a tremendous debt to the two directors whose terms have expired. Each has served with great distinction on the Board.

**Jean Dubois** has been a leader in many of the Observatory undertakings while serving as both president and treasurer of the organization over the past six years. He has agreed to continue to provide the Observatory budget analysis and statements that flow from his computer, to assist the incoming treasurer. For their many years of continuing support we thank both Jean and his wife Pat who has also been an active volunteer for SFBBO.

**Phyllis Browning** served on the Research Committee and has been very helpful in editing crucial SFBBO study reports and papers. She worked on the Clapper Rail Study and also organized and participated in the annual Big Day Fundraiser for SFBBO. We will miss her energy and warm sense of humor at the Board meetings.

### WELCOMING BRENDA

SFBBO welcomes **Brenda Monroe** to the staff as office assistant to the Executive Director. Brenda is an Alviso resident who has been active in many environmental issues in the South Bay. Along with her clerical assistance she has taken an avid interest in the native garden around the Cannery Building. Although she has been with us just a few months, she has already proven to be an asset to the organization.



## Calendar Of Events

### OPTICAL WORKSHOP

Would you like to know more about binoculars and scopes? Are you looking for a special Christmas gift for a birder, but don't know what type of equipment to buy? Or are you just interested in what's new on the market in optical equipment. Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society, the City of Palo Alto Arts & Science Division and the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory are co-sponsoring a Binocular/Spotting Scope Workshop on Saturday, December 3, 1988 from 2 - 4 p.m. at the Palo Alto Cultural Center. Many popular manufactures of optical equipment will be on hand for demonstrations and lectures on how to choose and care for binoculars and scopes. The center is located at the corner of Newell Road and Embarcadero in Palo Alto. For more information call SCVAS at (415) 329-1811 or SFBBO at (408) 946-6548.

### OWL CLASS OFFERED

SFBBO is offering a class on owl identification and natural history in April 1989. The class will be taught by Paul L. Noble, local birder and owl enthusiast. Class dates have not been set yet, but will likely be two or three classroom sessions dealing with North American owl evolution, taxonomy, identification, natural history and conservation. Teaching materials will include slides, study skins and taped vocalizations. Also included will be a nocturnal "owl prow!" to seek out local owl species in their natural habitats. Look for more information in the January/February newsletter.

### NEW BOOK

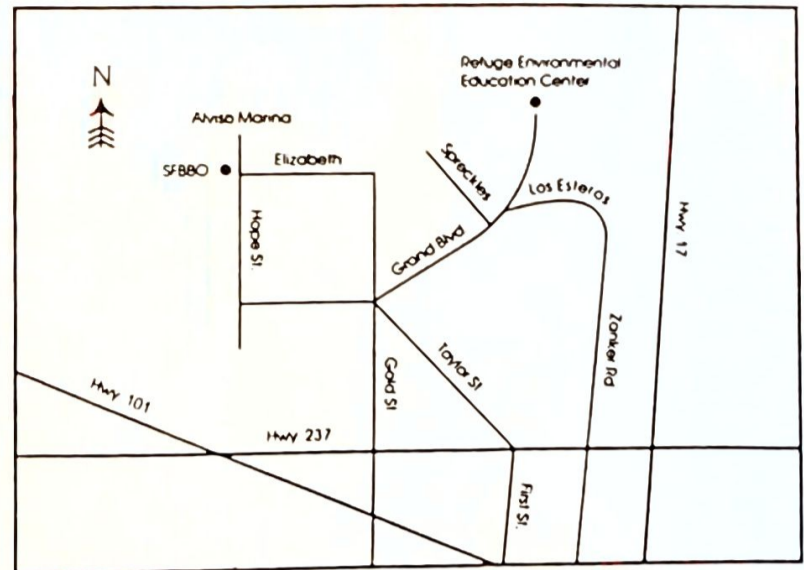
A new owl book by Paul A. Johnsgard is due out in October, which should be good news for owl watchers. Titled North American Owls: Biology and Natural History, it has 304 pages, with 33 color plates, in a 7 x 10 inch cloth format. Some watercolors are by Louis Agassiz Fuertes. Smithsonian Institute Press is asking \$45.

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 typically held on the first Thursday of the month, but are sometimes changed due to the availability of the speaker. The program starts 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 is a bimonthly publication. 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 MEETING

Thursday, November 3, 1988

Refuge Environmental Education Center  
in Alviso

7:30 p.m.

**FEATURED SPEAKER:** Harry M. Ohlendorf, Research Station Leader for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

**TOPIC:** "Birds and Environmental Contaminants in San Francisco Bay". Harry will give a description of their research concerning the occurrence and effects of environmental contaminants in birds of the Bay, including work they have conducted in recent years as well as that now underway.

### GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

Thursday, December 1, 1988

Refuge Environmental Education Center  
in Alviso

7:30 p.m.

**FEATURED SPEAKER:** Don Roberson, author of *Birder's California* and *Rare Birds of the West Coast*.

**TOPIC:** Field Identification - Christmas Bird Count Review.



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(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.