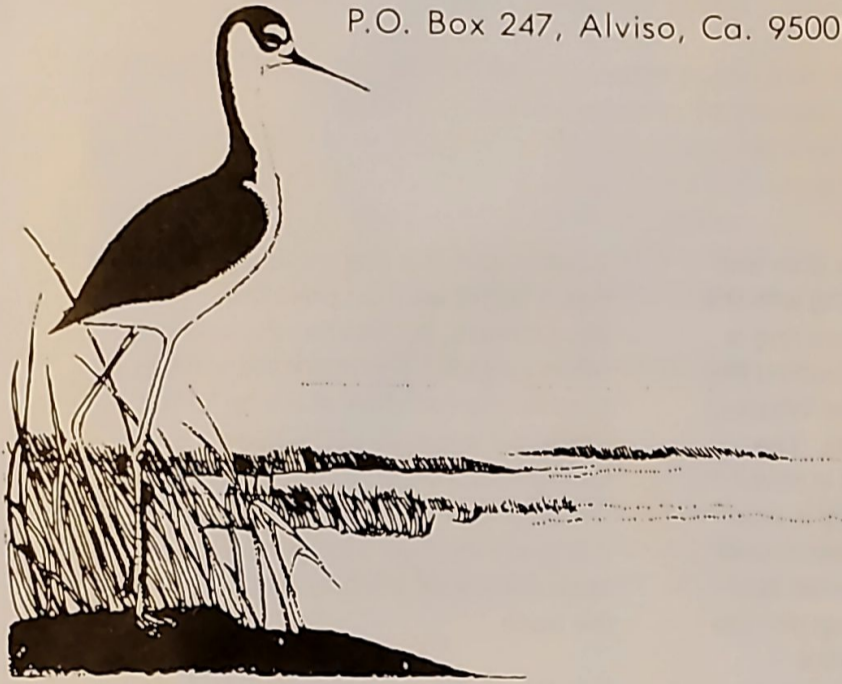


SAN FRANCISCO BAY BIRD OBSERVATORY NEWSLETTER

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Permit #9



Volume 8, Number 2

March/April 1989

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS DESK

Dear Members,

The work never seems to end. I get started on one project and three more pop up. It's a very busy time at the Bird Observatory especially with the breeding season coming up, and things are starting to move ahead again since I came on board. Our membership is increasing with new members and many old members have shown their support by renewing at a higher category.

I have been pleased to hear the great reviews from our members of our past General Meeting speakers. Due to the hard work of people like Susie Formenti and Kathy Hobson, we now have some fantastic programs scheduled for 1989 and going into next year. Our speakers topics are as varied as they are interesting. In November Harry Ohlendorf spoke on toxins in wildlife of the South Bay. This is front page news and the interest in this topic was shown by the many questions that were asked after his talk. Or how about Joe Morlan and Don Roberson? Two birders/authors of local as well as international stature and entertaining as well as enlightening. I still hear great things about Bill Bouseman's impromptu breeding bird atlas presentation - what a lifesaver. Dick Mewaldt started out the new year in January with an informative talk about the comparative roles of Bay Area bird monitoring stations. The future? As you look over our programs for the coming year on page 4 of this newsletter, you'll see that we have many interesting speakers who will keep you up-to-date on wildlife in the San Francisco Bay area as well as helping you fine tune your identification skills. I'm discussing details with a speaker that works with birds and the new world tropical rainforest for a future program. The destruction of this important habitat is a subject of international interest and a something we should all be concerned about.

Continued on page 4

CANNERY BUILDING IMPROVEMENTS

Work is continuing on the grounds and Cannery building that houses the Bird Observatory offices, particularly the soon-to-be native plant exhibition gardens. A new gate has been built along Hope Street so that trucks and heavy grading equipment can gain easy access to the garden grounds. Those curious mounds of soil will soon be spread out and built up into berms and planted with native plants. More soil is needed, both fill dirt and good rich soil backfill. A new wooden rail fence will be built along Mill Street to replace the dilapidated wire one. Some new dwarf coyote brush has been planted along the levee and soon the wildflowers will be blooming.

The building itself is really leaking now that the rains have started, mostly in the main "hanger". Most of this is unavoidable due to the building design, but some windows need plugging to keep out not only the rain but the pigeons as well. The main office roof is in pretty good shape. The windstorm in mid-December did some damage, blowing off some gravel paper and subsequent rains did some water damage to the office. Peg Woodin, Don Starks and I did some repair work and the roof is in good shape now.

As you can see there are many projects that could use some volunteer help. If you would like to be involved in any restoration around the building or grounds, don't hesitate to jump in. Call the Bird Observatory office if you would like to help.

Paul L. Noble
Board President

S C O P E

Sierra Empids - Part I

Paul L. Noble

In this newsletter I'll get away from the bay shore and out of the Bay Area entirely. Let's look at an identification problem that crops up every summer in the Sierra Nevada forests. I am, of course, referring to the four Empidonax flycatchers common in the Sierra Nevada.

I remember struggling to identify these look-a-likes the first few times I birded the Sierras in June. Small wonder as Willow, Hammond's, Gray and Dusky Flycatchers are very closely related and look almost identical to each other. There are differences, however, that allow the observer to separate them.

As a group the four are all about six inches in length; dull, drab olive tones with pale eyerings and wingbars and squeaky, abrupt songs. Identification depends on voice, habitat subtle differences in size of bill and tail length. Let's look at each of these species, concentrating on the summer plumages. This newsletter I'll comment on Hammond's and Dusky Flycatchers.

The Hammond's Flycatcher (*Empidonax hammondi*) is an empid which generally looks rather large-headed. Its bill is narrow and short, in fact smallest of all empids (excepting the Buff-breasted Flycatcher) in North America. The lower mandible is usually one half to two thirds dark at the tip, fading to pale yellowish at the base. Typically Hammond's have what is known as long "primary extension". This is the distance the primaries extend beyond the secondaries when the bird is at rest. On the Hammond's this difference is quite noticeable. But, beware! the bird may disguise this extension by different postures. The tail is medium length relative to body size, but the long primary extension make the Hammond's look proportionally short-tailed.

Plumage on empids varies seasonally (looking fresh and unworn in fall plumage and somewhat washed out by the following summer). In general, Hammond's is a relatively dark empid.

The back is usually a dark olive gray and the head is less olive, contrasting with the back in good light. The white eye ring is quite well defined and is wider behind the eye, but not teardropped like the Western Flycatcher (*Empidonax difficilis*). The throat is grayish and the breast is olive-gray or brownish gray. The belly is pale yellow. Often the dark olive of the breast extends down the sides and flanks, and the yellow of the belly extends up into the color of the breast giving the bird a "vested" look. The wings are dark gray with dull white wingbars.

The Hammond's Flycatcher is a nervous, active bird. The tail and wings are flicked at the same time, particularly just as the bird lights after a feeding foray. It is a common bird of the Canadian Zone in the Sierra Nevada occurring at elevations of 6000 - 7800 feet among Red Fir/Lodgepole Pine forests. It typically stays under the canopy, preferring dark, moist shady areas. It will, however, venture into more open, drier areas just after breeding and often moves up-slope. Even here though it stays within the canopy as opposed to out in the open as with the Dusky.

The Hammond's song is quite "burry" and slightly variable in pattern, but generally consists of three elements. The first is a dry rapid "chi-pit" or "see-birk", sharply two syllabled, with the second syllable either higher or noticeably lower and rougher. The second is a rough "brk" at one low pitch. The third element is similar to the second, but rises in pitch toward the end. These parts are usually given in this sequence, but with pauses between the notes. Elements may be left out or in a different order than presented here. This song is most emphatic in mid-June and very early in the morning; often the first bird to begin the dawn chorus.

Listen carefully and you can pick out these elements. The call note most frequently heard is a sharp "peek" which is similar to the piping call of the Pygmy Nuthatch (*Sitta pygmaea*).

The Dusky Flycatcher (*Empidonax*

oberholseri) is a medium-sized empid. It has a larger bill than does the Hammond's, but intermediate among other empids. The lower mandible is one third to one half dark at the tip fading gradually into pale at the base. The Dusky has a short primary extension (when compared with the Hammond's) and this gives the bird a long-tailed appearance which may be constricted at the base.

The Dusky Flycatcher is rather drab in terms of overall coloring and contrast. During the summer there is little contrast between the drab olive or grayish coloring of the head and back. The eye ring is white, usually well defined, but sometimes broken. The eye ring may be less apparent because of the light colored head. A pale lore may also reduce the conspicuousness of the eye ring. The throat is pale gray, but can look whitish in bright light. The breast and back are olive gray. The belly is pale yellow and the wingbars are dull white.

Behaviorally, the Dusky differs from the Hammond's as being rather sedate, only occasionally flicking the tail while perched and not usually flicking the wings at the same time unless it is agitated.

On the summer breeding grounds the Dusky restricts itself to dry open terrain frequently singing from manzanita shrubs (indeed nesting in these shrubs as well). Typically found at similar elevations as the Hammond's, the Dusky shuns the shady, moist canyons. The Dusky's song also consists of three elements like the Hammond's, but tends to be less 'burry'. Differences in the songs of these two species is difficult to describe in words and it is best to listen to the two species singing on commercially available tapes; or better yet, listening to the two species singing in the woods.

Although these two species are quite similar, differences stand out. In summary, the Hammond's is smaller than the Dusky with a smaller bill and shorter (proportionally) tail. The Hammond's also

has a longer primary extension than the Dusky. The Hammond's is a more active flycatcher flicking its wings and tail often. The Hammond's prefers the shady moist understory while the Dusky frequents drier more open areas. The Hammond's shorter tail and longer wings give it a compact and large-headed look unlike the more streamlined Dusky,

Bear in mind that after breeding both Hammond's and Dusky Flycatchers drift upslope and may occur in the same general area together, but the Hammond's still tend to prefer the shady understory while the Dusky is more likely to be out in the open or at the edge of the canopy. Also remember that the differences I have described are mainly for birds on summer breeding grounds. On migration I'm afraid you are on your own!

In Part II I'll compare and contrast the Willow and Gray Flycatchers

Good sources for identification can be found in *National Geographic Society Field Guide to North American Birds*, 1983, *Audubon Society Master Guide to Birding*, *Birding Magazine* (Vol. XVII, Number 6, 1985) and *The Western Birdwatcher*, 1985. ■

JANUARY GENERAL MEETING

"Beware when you are looking at birds - there are other things looking or on you", said Joel Hornstein, Sutter County Department of Health Biologist, speaker at the SFBBO January General Meeting. What he was referring to were tiny ticks of the Ixodidae family whose bites cause Lyme disease, named for the place in Old Lyme Connecticut where the disease was first identified in 1975. Mr. Hornstein then listed the symptoms: a bulls-eye red rash, and general flu-like symptoms such as fever, achiness, head aches and stiffness of the joints. These go away, and then weeks, or even years later the more serious and debilitating aspects of Lyme disease appear, such as arthritis, heart problems, and meningitis.

The real problem is the size of the tick itself. "If you take a pencil, and make a dot, and maybe widen it just a slight bit" he said, you have the size of an unfed nymph". Thus checking for the tick, each and every time you come out of the field is very important. If you find a tick, it is recommended to take a pair of tweezers and gently pull it out, insuring that the entire tick is removed. The latest method says not to use a corkscrew method, but to gently work the tick out and then clean the area with disinfectant. If there is good news, it is if detected early the disease responds well to antibiotics. If caught later the treatment is more difficult. So after checking out the view, make sure to check yourself out. If you develop symptoms, be sure to tell your physician that you may have been exposed to Lyme disease.

Darrell Gray

The Observatory regrets to note the recent passing of one of our members, James W. Tilden. He and his wife Hazel regularly attended our General Meeting Programs and were always a welcome addition. Bill was a retired biologist from San Jose State University where he taught entomology. He was one of those rare field biologists who was an expert in both birds and insects. I remember many long conversations with Hazel on past field trips after Jim could no longer go afield. Our condolences to Hazel, he will be missed.

Calendar Of Events

OWL CLASS

SFBBO is offering a class on owl identification and natural history in late March and April 1989. The class will be taught by Paul L. Noble, local birder and owl enthusiast. Classes will meet on Wednesdays from 7:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. on March 30, April 6 and 13, at the SFBBO headquarters office in Alviso. An "owl prow!" to seek out local owl species in their natural habitats will also be scheduled in mid-April. Classroom sessions will deal with North American owl evolution, taxonomy, identification, natural history and conservation. Teaching materials will include slides, study skins and taped vocalizations. The class fee is \$30.00. For more information and registration call Paul Noble at (415) 948-3876. Class size is limited.

BIRDING TOURS

SFBBO is offering a birding tour to Arizona and Texas this spring led by Don Starks. The trip will include stops at the Salton Sea, Carlsbad Caverns for Cave Swallows as well as the unforgettable bat show, Davis Mountains State Park, Big Bend National Park in the Chihuahua Desert. You will visit three, maybe four, of the deserts of North America only missing the Great Basin. The cost will be approximately \$480 for two weeks and will include expert guidance, campground fees, and park entrance fees. You can expect easy hiking, except for one day of rigorous walking to see the Colima Warbler in Boot Spring. Horses will be available to rent for this portion of the tour. Headliners for this trip are the Lucifer's Hummingbird and Colima Warbler, but you can expect to see many other species just as exciting. The trip will begin the last week in April and end the first week in May. If you're interested, call the Bird Observatory office for more information. A \$50 deposit will guarantee your reservation.

SFBBO 4TH ANNUAL BIG DAY

Clean those binoculars and study your field guides because SFBBO's Fourth Annual **BIG DAY** Fundraiser is set for April 29-30. 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 form is enclosed in this newsletter. If you are not a member, but interested in participating in this fun day benefit for the Bird Observatory, call the office for details.

NATURE SOUNDS CONCERT

New Music with birds, frogs and other creatures, a concert series which features works by composers who use nature and other related sound sources, returns again on Sunday March 12th, 3:00 p.m. at the James Moore Theatre of the Oakland Museum, 1000 Oak Street. Included on the program will be compositions by Brenda Schuman-Post, Bernie Krause, Latitia Sonami, Kenneth Atchley, Ron Alford, Candy Lowe and others. Tickets are \$5.00; museum members, \$4.00. For further information, please call 644-1685.

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.

SFBBO GENERAL MEETING PROGRAMS FOR 1989

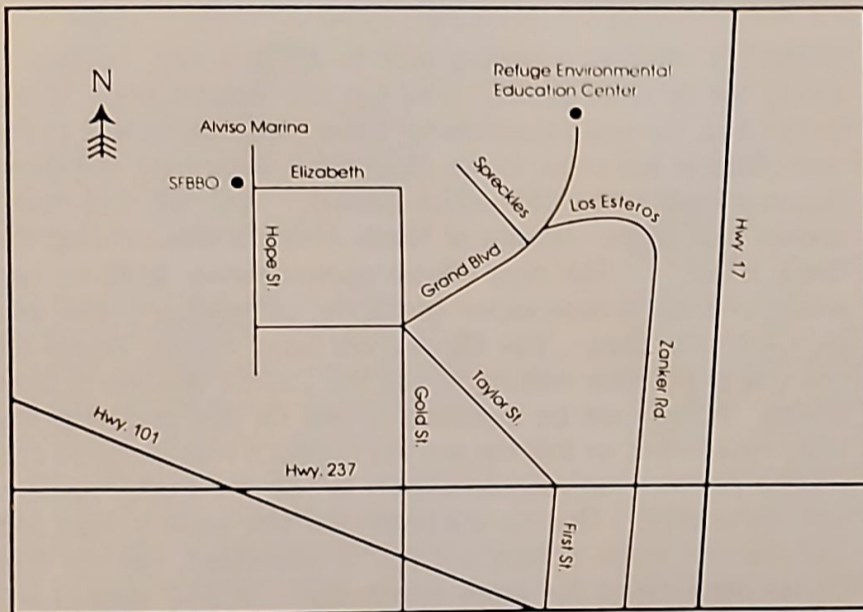
General membership meetings are held on the first Thursday of the month (unless otherwise noted) at 7:30 p.m. at the San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge Environmental Education Center in Alviso. (see map)

- | | |
|-------------------|---|
| March 2, 1989 | Peter Pyle , Point Reyes Bird Observatory.
Topic: Birds of the Pacific, Including the Farallons. |
| April 6, 1989 | John Steiner , SFBNWR Park Ranger
Topic: Butterflies of the San Francisco Bay Region. |
| May 4, 1989 | Dave Lonzarich , SFBNWR Fisheries Biologist
Topic: Community Profile of Fish Inhabiting Salt Evaporator Ponds |
| June 1, 1989 | Louise Accurso , SFBNWR Wildlife Biologist
Topic: Ducks of the San Francisco Bay |
| July 6, 1989 | Clark Blake , Geologist - US Geological Survey.
Topic: Geology of the South Bay and surrounding area. |
| September 7, 1989 | Jill Hedgecock , Rain Forest Action Network.
Topic: Birds of the American tropical rain forest and problems they are encountering because of deforestation. |

* Denotes meetings not held on the 1st Thursday of the month.

SFBBO would like to welcome the following new members and thank them for their support:

Stephanie L. Jones, Mavis E. Petra, Janet L. Rezos, Jane B. Taylor, and Stephen Woodward.



Executive Directors Desk *Cont. from page 1*

The point I'm trying to make is that we have great programs and we should show our support of our speakers by attending. We have some accomplished speakers coming up, so come on out to the Environmental Education Center in Alviso, have a cookie or two, and get involved.

Don Starks

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.



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San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory

SFBBO'S FOURTH ANNUAL BIG DAY!

The San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory's **FOURTH ANNUAL BIG DAY FUNDRAISER** will be held on the weekend of April 29 and 30. The SFBBO teams 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 your favorite team or the most successful team sees (last year it was an amazing 153 species found by the team of Paul Noble and Roberta & David Seals). We will let you know how much your contribution will be after we receive the tallies.

Better yet, organize your own team and support the organization while enjoying a great day. You can chase birds from San Jose to San Francisco, or just count the species in your back yard, city park, or favorite birding hot spot. The spring migration may bring you some surprises wherever you may go. In any case, use the back of this form to record your sponsors and their pledges. Then, before April 29, send it to us along with the pledges which you've already collected. We'll announce the results in a future SFBBO newsletter. If you have any questions about organizing or joining a team, call Don Starks or Brenda Monroe at the Bird Observatory office at (408) 946-6548.

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

I'll pledge \$ _____ for each species seen by the most successful team or the team of your choice

_____.

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 _____

Telephone No. _____



Send your pledges or contributions to: San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory
P. O. Box 247, Alviso, CA. 95002