SAN FRANCISCO BAY BIRD OBSERVATORY NEWSLETTER

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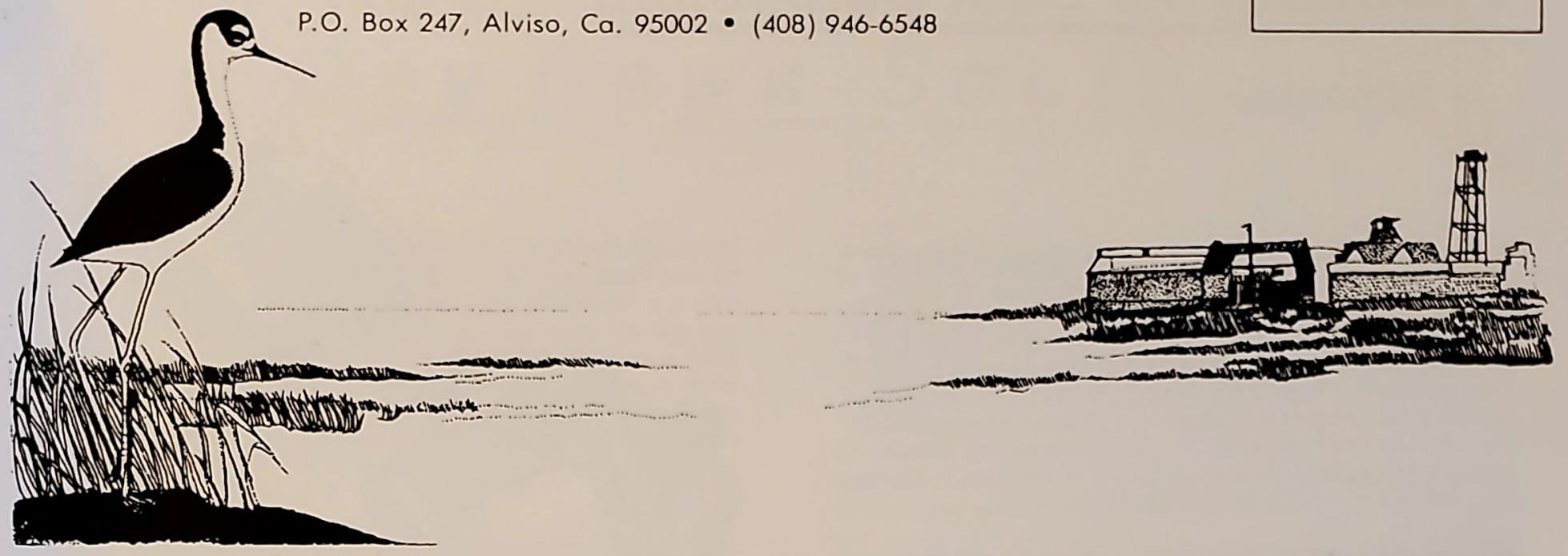


Volume 8, Number 4 July/August 1989

SFBBO ENDORSES BREEDING BIRD ATLAS

At the May 23 Board of Directors meeting SFBBO voted to officially endorse the Santa Clara County Breeding Bird Atlas, an affiliate of the Coyote Creek Riparian Station (CCRS). The atlas project will document the status of breeding birds in Santa Clara County and at the conclusion of the five year project will produce a publication consisting of a series of maps that show the distribution of breeding birds in the county.

The Bird Observatory is actively participating in this project gathering breeding records of colonial nesting birds that breed within the south bay. Volunteers of both SFBBO and CCRS are encouraged to participate in this project. Interested individuals may contact Bill Bousman - Project Coordinator at (415) 322-5282.

Take Note

The August 3rd General Meeting has been relocated to the SFBBO office in the Bay Side Cannery Building in Alviso. (see map on page 6) The presentation for this meeting will be given by Brenda Johnson and Janis Taylor speaking on Burrowing Owls. Both Brenda and Janis have been studying Burrowing Owls in an urban setting and will discuss the impacts of this habitat on the species.

Future Bird Identification Classes

In the recent past the Observatory has offered classes in bird identification including the gull class by myself and the owl class by Paul Noble. Both Paul and I are planning to expand this small list of classes to include shorebird, sparrow, and duck (with emphasis on the females) identification and a taxidermy class by a visiting expert. We will also include repeat classes on gulls and owls.

In order to teach these classes we are in need of a good library of slides of sparrows and shorebirds . Those of you who are members of photography clubs or just interested in taking good pictures of birds can be of help to us. We, also, welcome slides of hand-held birds that are often taken by banders and the wildlife rehabilitation groups. If you are willing to donate your slides, they will be given the utmost care. After duplicates are made the originals will be returned to you in the same condition we receive them.

What we are looking for are seasonal and age differences; juvenile birds compared to adults, and sexual differences. Especially important are good slides of Semipalmated, Least and Western Sandpipers showing seasonal and age differences. We, also, need shots of juveniles in the fall and spring and adults in the fall, winter, and spring, molting individuals and good back shots. We would especially appreciate good slides of those rare bird sightings too.

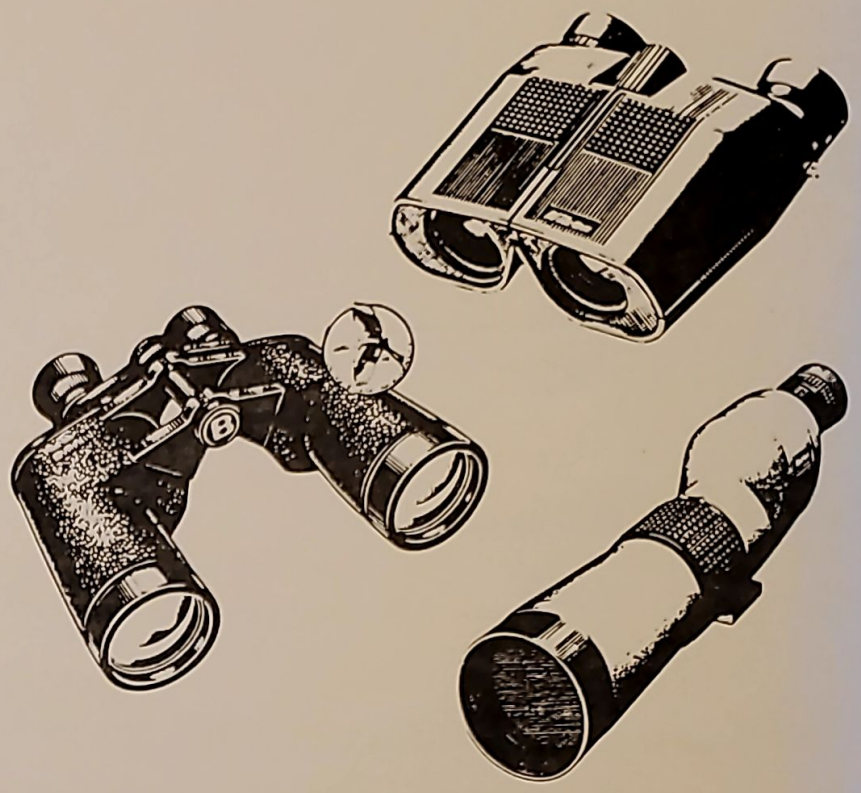
Please label your slides with your name, species, date, and location it was taken if possible. Send them to SFBBO in care of Don Starks. Again, your slides will be given special care and after duplications are made returned to you as quickly as possible. All photographers will be given credit for their work at each presentation.

Don Starks

Mark your Calendar - Binocular/Spotting Scope Show, Saturday, October 28.

Choosing the Best Binoculars - Part I

by Darrell Gray



If you are looking for binoculars or spotting scopes SFBBO will hold a spotting scope and binocular show on, Saturday, October 28 at the Environmental Education Center in Alviso. All major makers such as Celestron, Nikon, Zeiss, Swift and Leica will be displaying their binoculars and spotting scopes, and admission is free. It is one of the few chances to compare the multitude of models available and pick out what you really like. With so much available, it can make choosing difficult. To help you enjoy the show here is the first of a two part guide to the selection of binoculars and spotting scopes.

When we go shopping we are faced with scores of companies selling many sizes and shapes (and nowadays colors) of binoculars spanning a price range from downright cheap to astronomical. Getting through the maze to the "best" binocular, which is the one that is best for <u>your</u> needs, takes some understanding of how binoculars work. Let's start with a simple definition of binoculars, and see what some of our choices are in pursuit of the "best".

Binoculars are an extra pair of eyes that collect light and magnify what is in front of us. Like a funnel, the front, or objective lenses collects the light and the twin eyepieces allow the collected light of the magnified image into our eyes. Big front lenses collect a lot of light and make a bulkier instrument, while more compact binoculars collect less light, but are easier to carry. Most binoculars are stamped with numbers telling you about the front lens size, always in millimeters, and the power, or magnification. Here are two examples:

POWER		OBJECTIVE (Front lense size)
7	x	42
7	x	25

The first example, the "7 by 42s", has larger front lenses, and if you had both of these binoculars in hand you would immediately see and feel the difference in size and weight, the 7 by 42s being much larger and bulkier than the 7 by 25s. But which pair is best? As with most things the answer is, "it all depends".

Each pair has its advantages and disadvantages, and to understand why we have to understand the term exit pupil. The examples above show the size of the tops of the optical funnels, 42mm and 25mm. But what is the size of the bundle of light coming out? It isn't seven, that's the magnification. The answer is found by dividing the objective size by the power:

OBJECTIVE		POWER		EXIT PUPIL
42	/	7	=	6
25	/	7	=	3.57

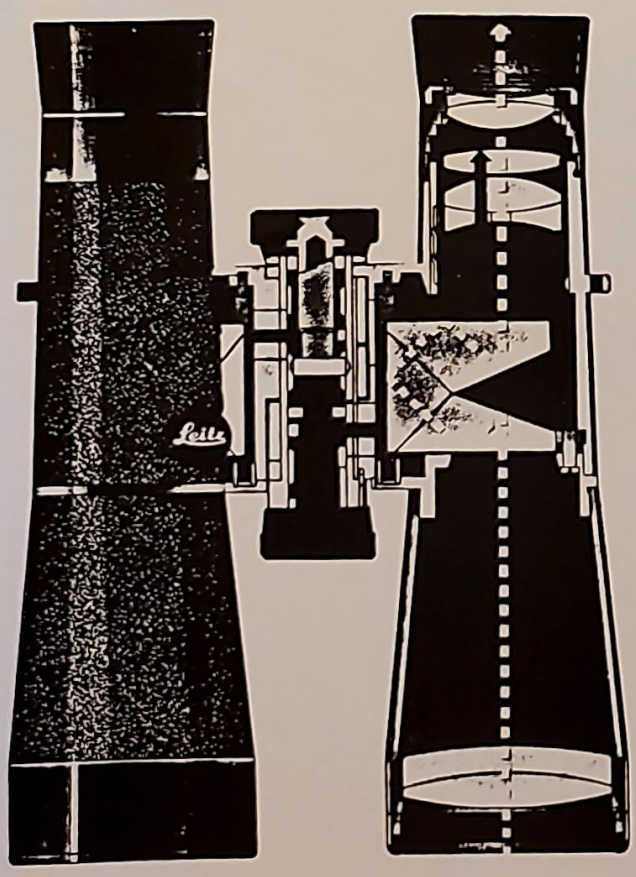
This is the heart of the matter. Most of us buy binoculars between 7 and 10 power, any lower being too little magnifiation, and any more being too hard to hold. What really changes is the exit pupil, one of the most important specifications to consider. The size of the exit pupil is important because of how our eye works. The pupil, the center of our eye reacts to changes in light, getting smaller in bright light and larger in dim light. An eye used to the dark will have a pupil as large as 7, the same eye will shrink its pupil down to 1.5 in extremely bright light. Looking at the above examples, one can imagine being out at dawn, or on a heavily overcast day, and really needing the heavier, larger, 7 by 42s. The eye would be able to take in all the light available. The smaller glasses would do a poor job indeed. Their smaller front lense takes in less light and pours little out to the eye. In bright light the difference between the two would be much less.

Try this experiment. Take a pair of binoculars having a relatively large exit pupil out on a sunny day. To make it easy look only through one side. Cut a hole in a piece of dark paper smaller than the front objective and place it in front of the lens. The image will get no dimmer until you have cut the exit pupil down smaller than your pupil. Try the same thing at dusk and watch the image quickly dim, with only a small reduction in the size of the front objective. Bigger, heavier binoculars usually have better seeing over a wide range of conditions. Smaller, lighter, binoculars pack anywhere, but are not so good in dim light. Larger exit pupils mean more comfortable viewing but a bulkier instrument. There are many models that are in between, and are good all-around choices. As a rule of thumb, anything in a binocular having ane exit pupil less than 3 isn't very practical, and unless you are out a lot at night, 6 is about the upper limit. Guess why 7 by 35s are so popular? Next in importance is how well you can see through any particular model, and how they feel to you.

Eye Comfort

When you look through a pair of binoculars you must place your eyes a certain distance from the eyepiece. Manufacturers design their products to make that easy for you, and most provide fold-down rubber eye guards for those who wear eyeglasses, so that your eye is correctly positioned. You may not wear prescription glasses now, but binoculars are a long term investment, so it is important that you try looking through them with glasses on (rubber cups folded down) and without (cups in normal position). Usually with glasses on the field of view is a bit narrower, but this varies from the same view to a greatly reduced field. If you don't wear prescription glasses, sunglasses will do for this check.

The size, weight, and feel of a pair of binoculars is of concern, especially if you intend to use them over extended periods of time. It is of little value to have the optically "best" pair if they are uncomfortable to handle. Different brands having the same specifications will vary greatly in the way they feel, for three reasons. First , all binoculars have prisms which are mirrors that make the image appear upright to the viewer. There are two types. Roof prisms are the most familiar, and make the binocular wide and short, while Porro prisms make the binoculars long and narrow. Some people like the grip of the wider binoculars while the feel of the straight binoculars pleases others. Secondly, the type of covering add to the feel, with leather, rubber, and polyurethane foam being some of the choices. Finally, there is the overall sense that you could carry and use the binoculars for an extended time, which is a combination of size, weight, balance and covering. Here are some other considerations.



The main feature of every pair of binoculars is the optical system. It decides whether you merely look at an enlarged image or are able to enjoy a completely new visual experience.

Field of View

Besides the numbers giving the width of the objective lense and the power, there is usually stamped on the binoculars the field of view, either in feet at 1,000 yards or meters at 1000 meters. The larger the number, the wider the view. Here are two examples:

POWER		OBJECTIVE	FIELD OF VIEW (@ 1000m)
8	x	30	123
8	x	30	138

The two are the same except for the view, but the wider field example is heavier and bulkier. The wider field model needs bigger prisms and all else being equal, the wider field binoculars are more expensive. Once again there is a trade-off of weight and balance.

Close Focus

Some models only focus to as close as 24 feet, while others focus under 12 eet, smaller binoculars tending to focus very close. This can be a deciding factor if you do a lot of looking at your back yard feeder, but can be useful at other times. The first Clapper Rail I saw was at 12 feet, the closest distance my binoculars would focus.

Zoom Eyepieces

These allow you to change power in your binoculars. A zoom eyepiece is very difficult to make, and should be carefully checked before buying. Cheap ones are useless, and good ones are hard to find.

Center Focus Versus Individual Focus

Most binoculars have a center wheel that focuses both lenses together, but there are models which must be focused one side at a time. This type is difficult to use, but can be sealed against water and dirt very well. However, so can center focus models, so it is a trade off that probably isn't worth it.

Water Proofing

At the scope show this year I want to ask the makers which binoculars are guaranteed water proof, and under what conditions. I havn't a clear idea, and moisture getting into a pair of binoculars can fog lenses and render them useless.

So far we have discussed getting binoculars that will meet our needs and that we feel comfortable with. Next time I'll talk about simple field tests for optical properties such as contrast and color fringing, as well as discussing spotting scopes.

This binocular and scope show is co-sponsored by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society.

Great Blue Herons Make Use Of Artificial Nesting Platforms

Persistence Pays Off With Great Blue Herons

Susie Formenti and Peg Woodin

In the March/April issue of the SFBBO newsletter we reported our past attempts at luring Great Blue Herons to the artificial nesting platforms which were constructed within the historic Great Blue Heron nesting site on Bair Island. 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.

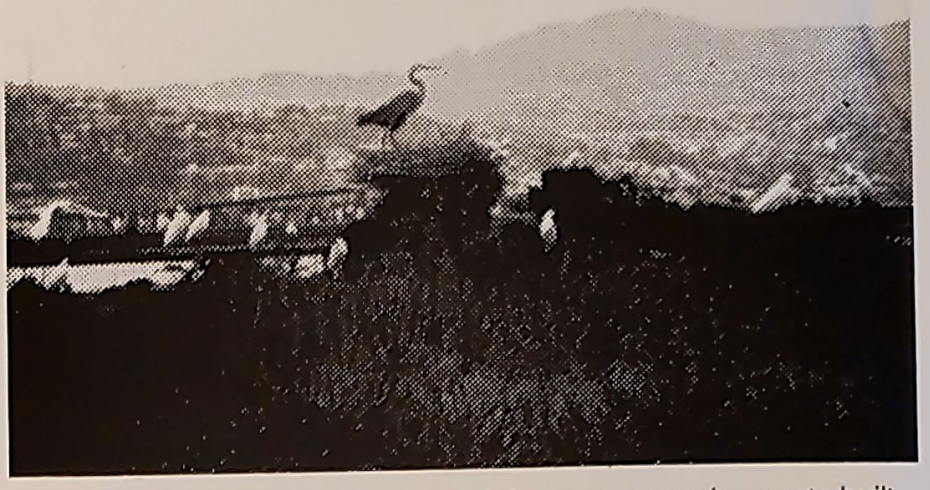
As previously reported during the last two seasons the Great Blue Herons chose to use these platforms for roosting rather than nesting. After three attempts, we have finally come up with the right combination of platform and nesting material. In early February of this year, volunteers constructed artificial nests made of grape vines and then wired them to the platforms. Three out of eight of these custom made grape vine nests were used by the Great Blue Herons this season.

During construction of these heron nests volunteers differed on their idea of "the perfect one". One was sparsly framed with the idea that Great Blue's needed to consruct the major portion of their nest during courtship. The construction progressed from this point to a nearly complete nest. The nests that were used by the Great Blue's consisted of the later. Of these three nests two were built by Brenda Monroe and one by Shanna Casebeers. All three of these nests were productive and had chicks.

Thanks to Mirassou and Congress Springs Vineyards, we had enough grapevines to make eight large heron nests and also leave an additional loose stack of vines. In this loose stack of vines there were approximately fifty trimmings ranging in length from three to four feet long. From our observations of old nests three to four feet is the average size of a branch that the Great Blue's use to construct their nests. These trimmings were left on one of the empty platforms in the center of the colony. On our first observation after the Great Blue's established their nest sites we discovered that not only were some of the nests used by the herons, but the loose stack of vines were also incorporated into nests in the heronry.

Next season we hope to expand the success of these artificial nesting platforms. This project was initially spearheaded by our past president of the Board, Ed Roberts. He was the one who researched artificial nesting platforms for Great Blue Herons and modified them for the Bair Island colony. None of this would have been successful without his work and the help of many volunteers from 1986 to the present. This seasons volunteers include the following: Ginny Becchine, Shanna Casebeers, Derek Currall, Jan Dierks, Tom Espersen, Susie Formenti, John Heus, Roger Hothem, Carol Hutchinson, Dorothy Johnson, Kirke King, Dave Lavorando, Ginger Levick, Brenda Monroe, Melissa Sheehan, Janis Taylor, Trish Wilson, Peg Woodin, and Lou Young.

On April 30 there were a total of 48 Great Blue Heron chicks and 19 eggs in the colony on Bair Island.



Great Blue Heron adult on one of the new grapevine nests built just before this nesting season. (Photo by: Susie Formenti)

Shanna Casebeer, counting young Great Blue Herons during the colonial nesting survey on Bair Island. This is one of two nests that Shanna built for the Great Blue's. (Photo by: Peg Woodin)

Great Blue Heron young close to fledgling stage. This is one of two nests that Brenda Monroe built. (Photo by: Peg Woodin)

Ref. to Great Blue Heron nesting (12pp)
Meirer, T.I. 1981. Artiticial Nesting Structures for the Double-crested Cormorant *Phalacrocorax auritus*. Wis. Dept. Nat. Resour. Tech. Bull. 0 (126)

Yes, Southern California has its "Big Day" possibilities, but to a couple of Northern Californians the sooner we got out of the LA area the better.

Big Day Down South

Paul L. Noble

One would think doing a "Big Day" in Southern California would be a cakewalk, what with the ocean, desert and mountains all within the region. The reality is that the southland is a BIG place and that entails a lot of driving. Although the big day record for California was set in Southern California (231 species in 24 hours) that endeavor used airplanes and other exotic forms of transportation. With all that said I will relate to you the weekend Don Starks and I had in Southern California during the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory's Annual Big Day fundraiser on April 30.

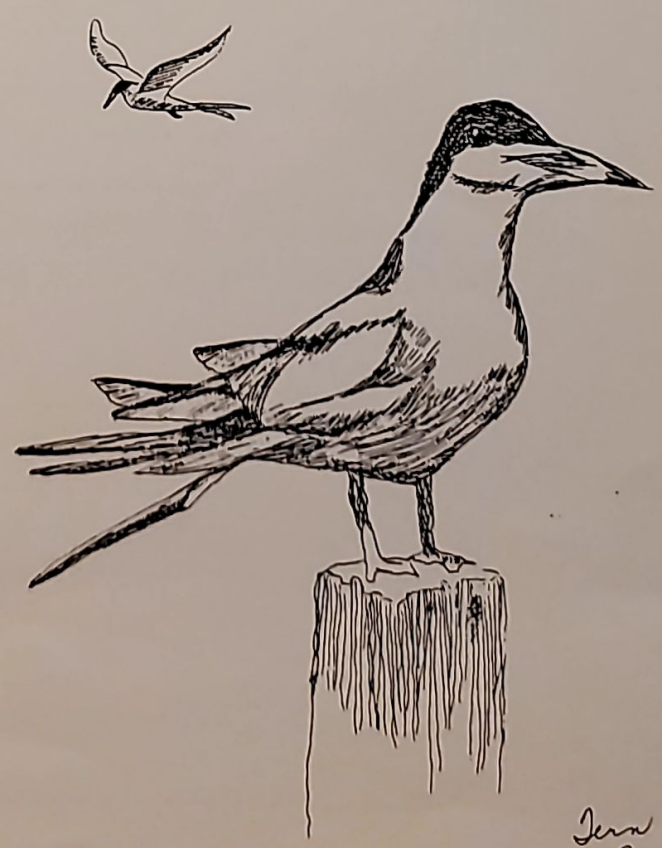
We embarked for the south on Friday, April 29. Our planned stop that night was on the east shore of the Salton Sea. Our first surprise was a Sooty Shearwater flying east over Interstate 10 west of Indio! Occasionally these highly pelagic birds are blown into the LA basin and over San Gorgonio Pass into the desert. Our next surprise came at our campsite. When returning from the bathroom I saw Don with a silly grin on his face. "Guess what I forget," Don remarked. I said, "I hope it isn't important." "It is -- the stove," Don replied. Well, instead of beef stew that night we ate raw celery, carrots and potatoes.

On Saturday we scouted out all the areas around the Sea in preparation for Sundays Big Day. We checked Red Hill Landing first. There were a few birds here and it was deamed worth looking at tomorrow. We drove on to Unit One of the Salton Sea National Wildlife Refuge. Here we saw our best bird of the trip. Two adult Franklin's Gulls in breeding plumage. Quite rare anywhere in California in any season. Don was estatic (after all it was a gull). We both hoped that these birds would stick around another day. Also here was a Gull-billed tern (a Salton Sea speciality). We checked Salton City for an elusive Yellow-footed Gull. This species nests in Mexico early and is very rare north of the border in April. Salton City is one of the more reliable places to find one in the spring. But we could find not a one, so we headed to the north end of the Sea and the Whitewater River Delta, one of the best areas on the sea. We were, however, thwarted by locked gates on the always open levees. Apparently the local water district does not want people wandering their levees. This was a big blow as it could cost us several species. We drove on to the Finny-Ramer Unit of the refuge where we camped for the night and ate a hot meal thanks to the stove I bought in Brawly. At Finny Lake a spectacle unfolded. The recently filled lake had grown some fairly extensive emergent vegetation and Cattle Egret and Yellow-headed blackbirds were using the area as a nesting colony. The sounds coming from this conglomerate of birds was cacophonous. We went to sleep feeling pretty good about the next days possibilities.

At 6 a.m. we rose and began the clock. A walk around the camp revealed the resident birds as well as several migrants including Western Tanager, Northern Oriole, Black-headed Grosbeaks and Dusky Flycatchers. A drive around the lake produced a Western Grebe. We checked Ramer Lake next for any ducks and for a Roadrunner, but the lake had no ducks and the Roadrunner was not there. Next we checked the Brawly Community Hospital, the only reliable place in California to get a Gila Woodpecker and we did get it. We then proceeded to Unit One hoping for the Franklin's Gulls. Alas the gulls had gone, but the Gull-billed remained as did Black Terns and a Lesser Nighthawk. On the way back to Red Hill a Roadrunner dodged the Land Cruiser. Outstanding! At Red Hill we got shorebirds including a Red-necked phalarope and a lone Godwit.

Since the North End of the Sea was off limits we decided to go to Big Morongo Preserve north of Palm Springs. Here we would get many species including Summer Tanager, Vermilion Flycatcher, Nuttall's Woodpecker, and others. It was just after 3:00 p.m. Where to next? A look at the road map showed the high mountain areas in the San Gabrials to be an hours drive away, so we roared off west on Interstate 10. We arrived at Big Pine around 4:00 p.m. Here things were pretty quite as the mountains were just waking up for spring. We did get some birds here like Steller's Jay, Mountain Chickadee, Mountain Quail and Cassin's Finch. Light was waning now and we had a long way to go to our planned stop that night in Taft. We headed toward Taft via Palmdale. We got a Crow and Raven along the way, but all Palmdale had was just acres of new homes. We could only hope for a Barn Owl on our way to Taft, but it was not to be. Our final tally was 115 species. Our list was poor in ducks and we missed a few shorebirds, but considering the driving time we did fairly well.

Yes, Southern California has its "Big Day" possibilities, but to a couple of Northern Californians the sooner we got out of the LA area the better. Next year? Who knows, we might just hire an airplane.

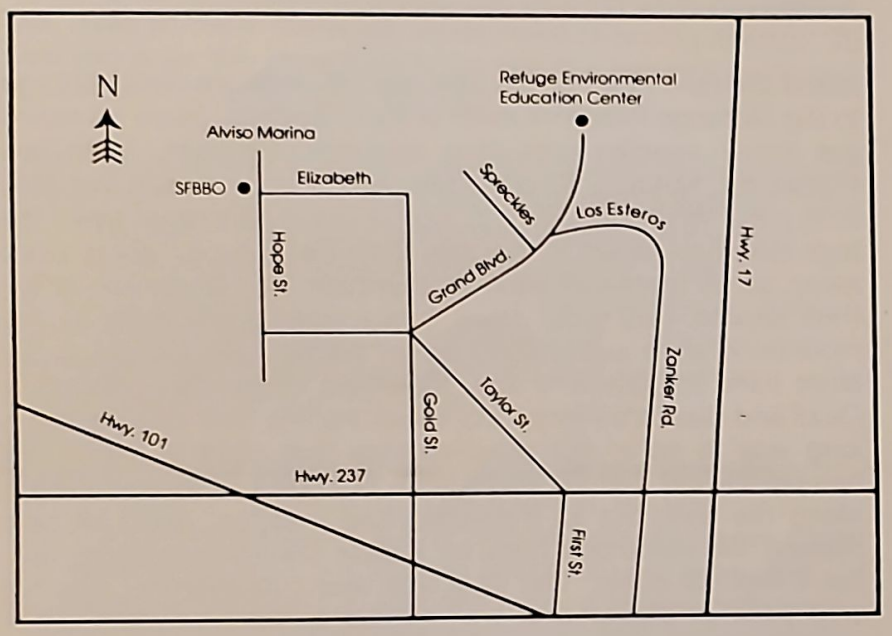


The Bird Observatory office is located at 1290 Hope St. in Alviso. The office is open from 1-5 pm weekdays and some weekends. But before stopping in, call (408) 946-6548 and check the schedule.

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.



TURKEY VULTURE
EVA ROBARTS

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)

July 6, 1989	**Felix Smith** Environmental Assessment Specialist, US Fish and Wildlife Service.
August 3, 1989	**Brenda Johnson**, UC Davis Topic: Burrowing Owls **Janis Taylor** Topic: Update on Burrowing Owl Colony at Mission College

Check front page for relocation of the August General Meeting

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.
October 5, 1989	**Clark Blake**, Research Geologists USGS. Topic: Geology of the South Bay and Surrounding Territory.
November 2, 1989	**David Suddjian** Topic: Santa Cruz Breeding Bird Atlas.
December. 7, 1989	**Don Starks** Topic: Gull Identification

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

P.O. Box 247
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I would like to join ☐ Renew my membership ☐ in the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory.

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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	

* Single payment becomes part of an endowment fund.