

BAY BIRD REVIEW

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION ON THE SCIENCE AND CONSERVATION OF BIRDS AND THEIR HABITATS



SAN FRANCISCO BAY
BIRD OBSERVATORY

Chair's Message

The 29th Annual Membership Meeting was held this year at Hidden Villa, in Los Altos Hills, a perfect setting for our membership to gather and celebrate the successes of 2010. Beneath the first storm clouds of winter, we headed out into the woods for some morning birding. As the bird walks concluded, we viewed the incredible photographs submitted to the Click Off 2010 photo competition, and voted for Best in Show. The Annual Meeting is the time when SFBBO performs business functions, such as informing members about the state of the organization and reporting the financial status. Outgoing Board Chair, Pati Rouzer, called the meeting to order, gave a general overview of the day's events, and turned it over to Executive Director, Jill Bluso Demers. Jill presented the "State of the Observatory" address, which included an amazing report of our California Gull and Western Snowy Plover programs.

The highlight of the meeting was the announcement of the California Fall Challenge top fundraisers, Matthew Dodder, Mike Mammoser and Karen DeMello; the winners of the Mewaldt Cup, the SLO Swifts—Doug Stinson and Maggie Smith; and the presentation of the first-ever Stilt Cup, an award designated for high school teams who participated in the California Fall Challenge. This year's winner was the Team Velociraptors of Branham High School in San Jose. As

CHAIR'S MESSAGE *continued on page 3*



CALIFORNIA GULL

PHOTO BY KEN PHENICIE

Waterbird Science Report

Gull Crossroads

For 30 years, the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory has studied California Gulls in the San Francisco Bay. We documented the incredible growth of their population in the South San Francisco Bay, from 20 gulls breeding in 1980 to over 45,000 gulls breeding in 2010. During that time, we banded over 10,000 California Gulls at the largest colony in the South Bay, a salt pond known as pond A6. Furthermore, in the past three years, we color banded nearly 1,000 additional gulls at that colony. This coming spring, we will enter a new phase of our California Gull research, which will focus on searching for new gull colonies established from those gulls displaced by the breaching of pond A6.

The South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project is restoring over 15,000 acres of former salt evaporation ponds in the South Bay to tidal habitats and managed ponds. This will increase the habitat for marsh species, but limit the habitat available to species that use the salt pond habitat. In the coming months, Alviso salt pond A6 (formerly known as

the Knapp Tract), located at the mouth of the Coyote Creek, will be opened to tidal action through the breaching of the levees that surround the pond. By opening the pond to tidal action, the restoration process will begin, and A6 will eventually revert to a tidal marsh.

In 2010, 23,000 California Gulls nested in this pond, mostly along the dry pond bottom. Once open to the Bay, water will enter pond A6 through the levee breaches and will flood the pond bottom. However, sections of the interior levee will remain, as well as sections of the exterior levee. The flooding of the pond bottom will make that area unusable for California Gulls during the 2011 breeding season, but California Gulls may continue to nest on the interior and exterior levees in coming years. Regardless, the displacement of the majority of the 23,000 California Gulls that nested in A6 in 2010 may threaten the success of the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project, as it is unknown where the gulls will nest in

GULL CROSSROADS *continued on page 2*

the future and no cohesive management plan is currently in place.

California Gulls may impact the other nesting waterbird species in the South Bay by outcompeting them for nesting habitat or by depredating their eggs and chicks. The Bird Observatory has already documented California Gulls depredating Western Snowy Plover eggs and chicks. California Gulls initiate their nests in late April. Therefore, for species like Forster's Terns, which start nesting in mid-May, California Gulls may easily encroach on their breeding habitat before terns attempt to nest. California Gulls may also nest in Western Snowy Plover habitat, which would further jeopardize the recovery of this federally threatened species. In 2010, biologists found the first California Gull nest at Eden Landing Ecological Reserve, home to the majority of the Bay's plovers. In addition, California Gulls nested at the Davis Waste Water Treatment Plant, the first documentation of this species nesting in the Central Valley. Also, PRBO Conservation Science biologists have recently documented California Gulls nesting on the Farallon Islands.

This September, the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project celebrated the completion of pond SF2 in Menlo Park. This former salt pond on the southwest side of the Dumbarton Bridge is now a shallow water pond that contains 30

nesting islands and Western Snowy Plover nesting habitat. The islands were designed to support roosting shorebirds and nesting American Avocets, Forster's Terns and Black-necked Stilts. It is possible that the displaced gulls may nest on the newly created islands and out compete the other nesting waterbirds, for which the islands were designed.

Previous Bird Observatory research indicated that California Gulls heavily used local South Bay landfills as a food source. Many land managers and biologists in the bay assumed that the displaced California Gulls from A6 would nest at existing colonies near the South Bay landfills, or start a new colony near the landfills. However, with recent management changes, gulls may not nest closer to the landfills after all. Beginning in 2008, Newby Island Resource Park in Milpitas implemented an intensive abatement program to limit the number of gulls foraging and roosting within the landfill area. The program has been very successful in reducing the number of gulls at the landfill, and Newby Island is no longer a viable food source for the gulls. Tri-Cities landfill in Fremont is due to close within the coming year, further reducing the human-subsidized food sources in the South Bay.

Although no one knows exactly where the California Gulls displaced from Pond A6 will nest in April 2011, biologists and

volunteers at the Bird Observatory will be ready to monitor existing colonies and find any new colonies. We are currently working with land managers and biologists throughout the region to strategize the future of California Gull management. The Bird Observatory will continue to monitor Snowy Plover nests with remote cameras to further document the impact of gull predation on plover nests. In addition, we need volunteers that live outside the South Bay to look for new colonies along the coast or Central Valley.

The data collected by the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory are vital to understanding California Gull population growth and expansion in the San Francisco Bay. We thank the volunteers who, since 1980, helped count gull nests, band gulls, and survey for banded gulls. This work has been supported by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the California State Coastal Conservancy, Republic Services, Inc., and the membership of the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory. Most importantly, it is through the support of our membership that we have been able to maintain this dataset for 30 years.

Are you interested in volunteering for our California Gull projects or have you seen a banded California Gull? Email Caitlin Robinson-Nilsen at cnilsen@sfbbo.org or call 408-946-6548.

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By Caitlin Robinson-Nilsen, Waterbird Program Director



STELLER'S SEA EAGLE CRASH LANDING, *Endangered Species Category Winner by Christine Hansen, at left, and SUNRISE SILHOUETTE, Bird Portraits Category Winner photo by Steve Zamek, at right.*



PHOTO BY SPIKE MARLOWE

GALLINAGO GO GO'S Connie Cloak, Larry & Eileen Kay, Marilyn Hemmeter, Patty McGann, Kathy Stults, Julie Bryson, Shirley Wodtke, Harold Fukuma, Lori Cuesta, John Stults, Team Leader Lisa Myers, Gerry Ellis & Board Chair Pati Rouzer. Not pictured: Board Treasurer Dale Wannan & Lauri Wardlaw.

Birding Feature

Gallinago Go Go's Challenge—Marin County

The "Gallinago Go Go's" is one of the many guided bird trips created for the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory's California Fall Challenge. As the team leader, I strive to raise as much money as I can for this annual fundraiser while providing a memorable experience for all. All donations collected go directly to the Bird Observatory. This year we filled the team with 16 eager participants.

We birded Marin County focusing on the birds of Point Reyes. We began as soon as we crossed the Golden Gate Bridge. En route to Point Reyes, we stopped in the misty redwoods, and started our list with Brown Creepers and Band-tailed Pigeons. On the way to the Bear Valley Visitor's Center, we stopped in a meadow to find a Northern Harrier and Western Meadowlarks. At the Visitor's Center, we moved in the direction of the lighthouse, stopping several times along Sir Francis Drake Highway.

The weather was warm and overcast which made bird identification a challenge, as field marks just don't "pop" under these conditions. Olema Marsh was filled with vegetation allowing for heard-only Virginia Rails and swallows above. Moving on to Schooner Bay, we arrived during a low tide for shorebird viewing. We had a great study of Ruddy and Black turnstones, and we also found poison oak along the road side. (It only took two weeks for the blisters to go

away!) From here, we worked our way to the Oyster Farm and found peeps among the shellfish. We had a magnificent Peregrine Falcon fly-over. He was so close to our heads we could have grabbed him out of the sky. As we turned toward Chimney Rocks, we spent time with the cows and found Eurasian Collared Doves and glimpses of Tri-colored Blackbirds. The roosting Barn Owl and Great Horned Owls were a favorite observation of the day, and we shared information about them with area tourists.

From here we scanned the ocean, adding three loon species, scoters and a Harlequin Duck to our list. As sunset approached, we headed north to Mt. Vision Road and found bushtits, flickers, juncos and a Lincoln Sparrow. Moving environmentally-conscious birders throughout this type of nature wonderland is like herding cats! As the trip leader, you have to keep the group moving regardless of captivating flowers, fungi, banana slugs and weasels. We ended our day with 90 species and many fantastic moments in nature. Thank you to all the folks who spent the day birding for the Bird Observatory, and to everyone that supported us crazy birdwatchers! It was a fabulous opportunity to bird with great people for a wonderful cause.

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By Lisa Myers, Former SFBBO Board Member and Let's Go Birding Founder

Welcome, Stephanie!

We are pleased to welcome back Stephanie Ellis as our Outreach and Communications Director. Stephanie worked as the Outreach Specialist at the Bird Observatory from 2007 – 2009, and returns after working as the Director of Animal Care for the Wildlife Center of Silicon Valley. She has years of experience in bird conservation and outreach on both coasts. Originally from Massachusetts, Stephanie studied Psychology and BioBehavior with an emphasis in Ornithology and worked for the Massachusetts Audubon Society. "Bird conservation has played a crucial role in my life for the last 15 years. I am thrilled to be a part of the Bird Observatory," said Stephanie. "Here I am in a position to reach out to the community and raise awareness of the plights of birds in the Bay area, and to bring attention to the outstanding conservation efforts of the Bird Observatory." We are delighted that Stephanie has rejoined our team. Say hi to Stephanie at sellis@sfbbo.org or 408-946-6548.



CHAIR'S MESSAGE *continued from cover*
 the first light rain of the winter fell, we huddled inside and enjoyed a great lunch with great company.

This meeting was a time to reflect on the past and look forward to the future. Next year SFBBO will celebrate its 30th Anniversary! We are moving full-speed ahead. As we enter into our 30th year, we have never been more excited about the prospects for SFBBO to expand and become more involved with avian research and education in the Bay Area and beyond. We look forward to seeing all of our members often in the next year, as we take very important first steps into a new decade.

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By Troy Rahmig, Board of Directors Chair

CALIFORNIA FALL CHALLENGE 2010

Mewaldt Cup Bird-A-Thon

The SLO Swifts—Doug Stinson and Maggie Smith—won this year's Mewaldt Cup Bird-a-thon Competition with 151 species.

Doug Stinson and I did a lot of pre-planning for our first official bird-a-thon together. We had done some casual big days, which often fell apart in the late afternoon because of poor lighting, traffic, tides, or just running out of sites for new species. We decided to start close to home where we could find the 'dawn chorus' birds, have good morning light, tides for the estuary and ocean stops, and then finish in Kern and Tulare counties where we could pick up species that are rare in our county.

On October 3rd, we were at Oso Flaco Lake in southern San Luis Obispo County before first light at 6:30 am, and walked out to the lake where we got our rails and waterfowl, which included a bonus male Canvasback and Ring-necked Duck. A Merlin, chasing Black-bellied Plovers over the farm fields on our way out, was another gift. Our next stop was the Oceano Campground and Community Pond where we spent over an hour and easily picked up 48 species, which included Nashville Warbler, Cooper's Hawk and Snowy Plover. We then started up the coast, making a short stop in Shell Beach for Peregrine Falcon and all three species of cormorants. We made many short stops around Morro Bay Estuary in Los Osos for terns and shorebirds, and hit the Northpoint Natural Area for rocky shorebirds, loons, alcids and scoters.

We headed inland on Hwy 41 and stopped at Cerro Alto Campground where we got Brown Creeper and other oak woodland birds. We were disappointed at Santa Margarita Lake, missing both Osprey and Bald Eagle there. Next, we headed for the Carrizo Plain for new species: Horned Lark, Common Raven, Prairie Falcon and Sage and Savannah sparrows. A bonus was a Greater Roadrunner. Well ahead of



PHOTO BY PATTY MCGANN

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR *Jill Bluso demers* with Mewaldt Cup winners *Maggie Smith* and *Doug Stinson*

schedule, we added nine species at Kern National Wildlife Refuge, then on to Pixley National Wildlife Refuge, where we added six more, including Sandhill Crane and Cattle Egret.

We stuck to our plan and had a great day of birding!

.....
Maggie Smith, SLO Swifts

The Stilt Cup 2010

This year, we piloted a new Bird-a-thon, the Stilt Cup. This is a competition for high school students. We had only one team entering the competition, and they set the bar for all future competitions.

The Velociraptors of Branham High School in San Jose included team captain Megan O'Brien, Carolyn Knight, Jonathan Amireh, Kevin Fasteen, Asit Dave, Tram Huynh, Serhiy Vorobyov, Juan Fernandez, and team advisor Melanie O'Brien.

In four hours, they birded throughout Santa Clara County and in this short time, they saw 57 species. The Velociraptors will definitely be the team to beat next year!



PHOTO BY PATTY MCGANN

STILT CUP WINNERS *Megan O'Brien*, *Carolyn Knight* and *Jonathan Amireh*



LILAC-BREADED ROLLER, *Birds of the World* Category Winner photo by Robert Heil

Click Off 2010 Photo Contest

The San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory 2nd Annual Click Off Photo Contest received more than 250 images. The purpose of the photo contest was to promote our mission of the conservation of birds and their habitats, raise funds for the Bird Observatory, and to introduce the active Bay Area bird photography community to the Bird Observatory's science and outreach efforts.

Photographers entered their work into six categories: Bird Portraits, Birds in Their Habitat, Bird Behavior, Endangered Species, Human Interaction, and Birds of the World. One image in each category was awarded a Best in Category award, with several other standout images awarded Honorable Mentions. From these images, a final award, the Best in Show award was selected by the members who attended the Annual Meeting on October 17, 2010. Richard Pavek's photo "White-tailed Kite Handoff" won this year's Best in Show award.

Category Winners will spend a weekend at Bruce Finocchio's Ramrod Ranch



WHITE-TAILED KITE HANDOFF, *Bird Behavior Category Winner and Best in Show photo by Richard Pavek*

in Monterey Country, which has been set up for bird blind photography. Photographers receiving Honorable Mention were awarded \$25 gift certificates to Borrow Lenses, and the Best in Show winner

will be able to spend a day in the field photographing with a Bird Observatory scientist.

.....
By Michael Kern, Board of Directors

Click Off 2010 Winners

BIRD BEHAVIOR

Category Winner and Best in Show – *White-tailed Kite Handoff* by Richard Pavek
Honorable Mentions – *Dinner Time* by Steve Zamek; *Dancing Beak to Beak* by Donald Dvorak; *Twisting Tern* by Son Nguyen; *Ballerina Egret* by Son Nguyen

HUMAN INTERACTION

Category Winner – *Bird Watching Close Up* by Donald Dvorak
Honorable Mentions – *Steller's Jay Stealing Sweetner Packets* by Bill Stone; *Hunted* by Brooke Miller

BIRDS IN THEIR HABITAT

Category Winner – *Meadow* by Ashutosh Sinha
Honorable Mentions – *White on White on White* by Stephen Shunk; *Oops* by Ashutosh Sinha; *Springtime Rhapsody* by Richard Pavek

BIRD PORTRAITS

Category Winner – *Sunrise Silhouette* by Steve Zamek
Honorable Mentions – *Proud Mama* by Ashutosh Sinha; *High Five* by Ashutosh Sinha; *Mallard Magic* by Katherine Ulrich; *Yellow-rumped Warbler and Fall Colors* by Katherine Ulrich; *"I'm coming"* by Catherine Dobbins; *Coopers Watch* by Jack Sutton; *Northern Pintail Wingflap* by Eleanor Briccetti; *Caspian Turn* by Chet Clark

ENDANGERED SPECIES

Category Winner – *Steller's Sea Eagle Crash Landing* by Christine Hansen
Honorable Mentions – *Fledgling Spotted Owl* by Richard Pavek; *Clapper Rail* by Pati Rouzer

BIRDS OF THE WORLD

Category Winner – *Lilac-Breasted Roller, Savute Channel Botswana* by Robert Heil
Honorable Mentions – *"Has she noticed my tail yet?"* by Catherine Dobbins; *White-tailed Eagle Confrontation* by Christine Hansen; *Male Anhinga with Breeding Plumage* by George Perlstein

A Great Gift for the Birds

Why not give a Gift in Honor for the holidays this year to recognize a special person or family? For each \$25 Gift in Honor donation, we will promptly send a beautiful, personalized tribute card to you, or to the person or family you indicate, to notify them of your thoughtful donation. The card features this beautiful, full-color photograph of a Cedar Waxwing by Robert Fournier.



CEDAR WAXWING by Robert Fournier

Your donation will support our scientific research and monitoring projects that conserve birds and their habitats. All donations are tax deductible. Contact us at 408-946-6548 to tell us how many cards to send. Mail a check in the amount of your choice or make a secure online donation at www.sfbbo.org. Thank you for celebrating a loved one by conserving birds.

Thank you



to our 14th Annual California Fall Challenge Sponsors & Donors!

The 2010 California Fall Challenge has come to its climactic finale. This annual event is the Bird Observatory's biggest fundraiser. What a whirlwind of events! We are proud to announce that, to date, we've raised almost \$30,000, and the donations are still coming in. We celebrated the birds of the Bay Area by hosting 157 bird enthusiasts on 11 guided birding excursions in 5 different counties. Our Mewaldt Cup Bird-a-Thon fostered competition from around the state, and we kicked off our new Stilt Cup Bird-a-Thon for high schoolers. We thank all who participated or donated during this exciting event!

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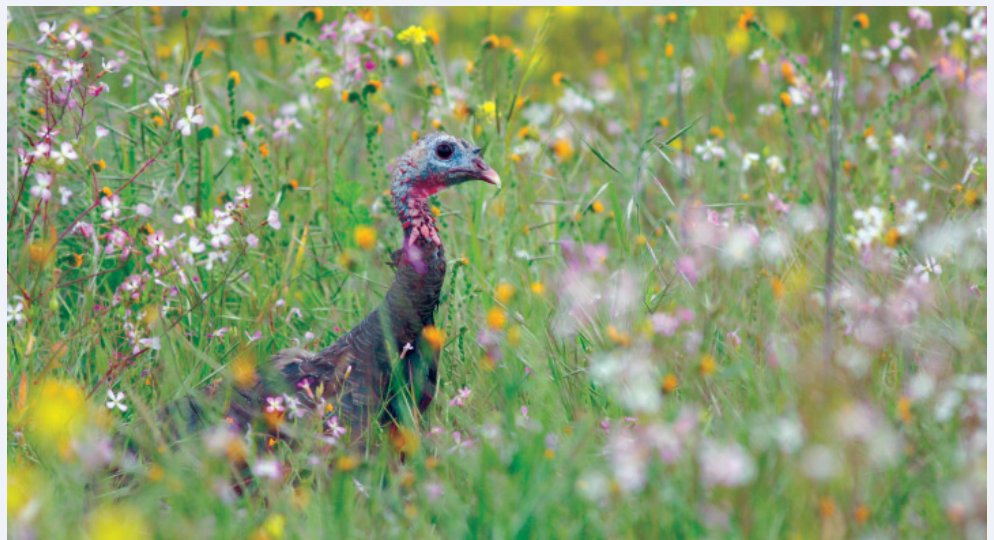
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MEADOW, *Birds in their Habitat* Category Winner photo by Ashutosh Sinha

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Message of Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving is a special time to reflect on what is good in our lives. We ask ourselves, "What are we thankful for this year?" At the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory, there is one single answer to this question. We are thankful for our members. Your annual gifts, large and small, support our avian research and monitoring projects—data that informs land managers, and educates policymakers and Bay Area residents. You help us tell the world that science is imperative to conservation and management of healthy ecosystems and birds.



SAN FRANCISCO BAY BIRD OBSERVATORY

524 Valley Way
Milpitas, CA 95035

www.sfbbo.org

Calendar

Saturday, January 8th, 2011

9:00 am – 12:00 pm

TEST YOUR GULL-ABILITY

SITE: PALO ALTO BAYLANDS

Join Bird Observatory biologist and gull expert, Alvaro Jaramillo, for a morning of birding at the Palo Alto Baylands. The Baylands' duck pond is a great location to study gulls up close. Put your gull I.D. to the test! Participants can also expect to see several species of waterfowl and we'll comb the mudflats for wintering shorebirds. There is no charge, but RSVP is required. This trip is in collaboration with Bay Nature Magazine. We have reserved 10 spaces for Bird Observatory participants. Sign up soon!



Tuesday, January 18th and Thursday,

January 20th (instruction), 6:30 – 9:00 pm;

Sunday, January 23rd (field trip)

GULL WORKSHOP WITH ALVARO JARAMILLO

Believe it or not, gulls have a fanatical fan base in the birding world. But for most of us, gulls can be a challenge to identify. This workshop will help you understand the general concepts of gull identification to give you the confidence

to go out there and give the local gulls a name (and age). We live in a gull-rich part of the world. This course will help you to fully appreciate the gull haven in which we live. Apart from identification, we will touch on topics such as human influence on gull distribution, the impact of gulls on other breeding birds, gull behavior, and migration. This workshop is ideal for the intermediate birder on up. A \$150 fee is required to attend the workshop.



Saturday, January 22nd, 2011

8:00 am – 12:00 pm

WINTER BAYSIDE BIRDING

Join the Bird Observatory's new Outreach Director, Stephanie Ellis, for a fun and informative morning of winter birding along the Bay. We will start at the Alviso Marina and hit several locations including Sunnyvale and Mountain View in search of gulls, waterfowl, shorebirds and more. This is a great opportunity to learn more about the Bird Observatory's Science and Outreach Programs throughout the Bay. Dress warm. RSVP requested. Rain cancels.



Saturday, February 19, 2011

8:30 am – 10:30 am

A BIRD IN THE HAND

SITE: COYOTE CREEK FIELD STATION
(MILPITAS)

Visit the Bird Observatory's bird banding station, the Coyote Creek Field Station. Learn about the Bird Observatory's bird banding research and see several different species up close. We will tour mist nets, watch a bird banding demonstration, and explore a restored riparian habitat. Please join us and learn why bird banding is so important for protecting birds and their habitats. RSVP required. Rain cancels.



BIRD WATCHING CLOSE UP, *Human Interaction*
Category Winner photo by Donald Dvorak



WALK: RSVP to outreach@sfbbo.org or 408.946.6548. Space is limited to 20 people. Free for members; \$10 for non-members.



ACCESSIBLE: Please contact the Outreach Specialist so that we can coordinate with you.



SPECIAL
EVENT



VOLUNTEER
ACTIVITY