Birds have always fascinated people with their grace and beauty, and their visible decline in response to overexploitation helped spark the modern environmental movement. In 1916, the plight of migratory birds inspired President Woodrow Wilson to sign the Migratory Bird Treaty, designed to protect birds as they traveled between wintering and breeding habitats. Despite this and other subsequent efforts to protect them, birds are still in trouble 100 years later. The newly published State of the Birds report by the North American Bird Conservation Initiative finds that 37% of all North American species at risk of extinction.

As natural habitats become converted to developed areas or altered by climate change, the numbers of bird species that require conservation action continue to rise. However, there are reasons for optimism as scientific studies have increased both our understanding of the important ecological role of birds and how to effectively conserve them.

Located in one of the most globally important estuaries for people and migrating birds, the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory has been a local leader in bird conservation due to our dedication to rigorous scientific research and to public outreach. For 35 years, we have worked with private and public organizations to devise scientifically-based conservation and management plans as well as introduced thousands of children and adults to the beauty of our local habitats and their wild inhabitants.

We are pleased to share some of our major successes from 2015 and invite you to join us as donors or volunteers to ensure that SFBBO can remain a strong voice for bird conservation in years to come. Projects led and carried out by SFBBO staff, collaborators, interns and volunteers contributed to management decisions for the next phase of the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project, the conservation of endangered Western Snowy Plovers, and an improved understanding of migratory bird movements. Our Habitats Program also expanded greatly in 2015 with the initiation of several multi-year projects that have already restored 5 acres of bird habitat and enhanced 700 acres of burrowing owl habitat.

In 2015, more than 200 volunteers participated in our citizen science projects, led educational walks or gave talks of their own! We are proud to include the public in our scientific projects as well as provide opportunities for thousands of Bay Area residents to learn to identify birds, visit our banding station, or attend talks by expert scientists. Thank you for taking the time to learn about our work and we look forward to working together in support of bird conservation!
2015 SCIENCE AND OUTREACH PROGRAMS

WATERBIRD PROGRAM

SFBBO conducted several research projects on waterbirds and their habitats in 2015.

Managed Pond Surveys

SFBBO completed a decade of monitoring the waterbirds and water quality of ponds associated with the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project. For the past two years, these surveys covered 82 ponds extending across the Alviso, Newark, Mowry, Ravenswood, and Eden Landing complexes. In 2015, SFBBO biologists surveyed over 20,000 acres of managed ponds in the South Bay and counted more than one million birds over the course of the year. These data guide the restoration efforts of the project and enable our partners to maintain ponds that support the needs of multiple local species.

Avian Disease Prevention Program

In 2015, SFBBO staff and volunteers conducted surveys on several sloughs in the South Bay to retrieve dead, sick and injured birds with the ultimate goal of detecting and preventing avian botulism. We have conducted these surveys annually since 1982, and completed our recent surveys from June to November in 2015. We are happy to report another year with no detected outbreaks of avian botulism in the South Bay. Along with removing dead birds and other vertebrates from the slough, biologists and volunteers collected 12 sick or injured birds and brought them to the Wildlife Center of Silicon Valley. Half of these birds were successfully released after rehabilitation!

Pacific Flyway Shorebird Survey

SFBBO continues to be a key partner in the annual Pacific Flyway Shorebird Survey. On November 23, 2015, SFBBO biologists and citizen scientists surveyed 40 sites across the South Bay, a significant increase from the 28 sites surveyed in 2014. The SFBBO team counted almost 118,000 shorebirds and also collected data on habitat conditions. Our data collected for this multi-partner monitoring program provided a Flyway-wide assessment of shorebird communities that is used to identify conservation needs along the Pacific coast.

Landfill Surveys

SFBBO staff has surveyed gulls at a local landfill since 2007, and expanded this project to include a local recycler and the survey of corvids in 2014. In 2015, SFBBO found that gull numbers were lower than earlier surveys and abatement efforts to minimize gull use of the landfill are highly successful. SFBBO further provided recommendations regarding the most effective abatement strategies. Reducing landfill use by nuisance species limits population growth and their potential to negatively affect other local ground-nesting waterbirds.
Since 2003, SFBBO has studied and protected the federally threatened Western Snowy Plover in the San Francisco Bay. In 2015, our research showed exciting improvements in plover breeding activity compared to the previous season. The number of breeding adults increased by 20 individuals (195 total); the number of nests increased remarkably by 76 nests (304 total and the highest documented in the history of the Bay); and apparent nest success increased by 10% (60% total). These successes may be attributed to the first year of oyster shell habitat enhancement at Eden Landing which attracted more breeding adults than were anticipated. Impacts of enhancement will continue to be studied in 2016 by SFBBO and graduate students at San Jose State University; the project is funded by Ducks Unlimited. SFBBO staff and volunteers conducted rigorous field surveys and banded birds during the breeding season which contributed data to several research projects, and concluded Phase 1 construction activity for the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project. SFBBO staff and volunteers also increased monitoring efforts of wintering plovers during the non-breeding season which will provide a more complete picture of population health in the Bay.

**Impacts**

- **Monitored and worked with partners to protect 304 plover nests in 2015.**
- **Informed resource management and restoration planning throughout the Bay.**
- **Partnered with the Institute for Wildlife Studies during the final year of a study to determine an appropriate method for measuring reproductive success in a challenging environment.**
- **Investigated the effects of large scale oyster shell enhancement at Eden Landing (E14) during its premier season, which provides cover and protection for breeding adults, nests and chicks.**

**Colonial Waterbird Program**

For 34 years, a dedicated team of citizen scientists and SFBBO biologists has monitored nesting herons, egrets, terns, and other colony-nesting waterbirds through our Colonial Waterbird Program. In 2015, the team monitored 54 waterbird colonies throughout the Bay Area from February to August using observational methods. They recorded the number of adults, chicks, and nests and also noted conservation threats such as human disturbance. In addition, participants in this program documented 47,672 nesting California Gulls in the South Bay during several all-day walk-through surveys and re-sighted 51 banded gulls. Four of these gulls were banded by SFBBO in 1985 and 1986, making them more than 30 years old!

**Impacts**

- SFBBBO reported the pond survey data regularly to managers at the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the CA Department of Fish and Wildlife. They used the data to maintain target numbers for particular waterbird guilds, like Eared Grebes and phalarope.
- In the Colonial Waterbird Program annual report, we shared our results with volunteers, supporters, and partners, including the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge, which uses this information to make resource management decisions.
- In addition, three of SFBBO’s program directors summarized 30+ years of California Gull monitoring and research from the Colonial Waterbird Program at the South Bay Science Symposium in October 2015 to communicate trends in gull population growth and responses to restoration activities.
- The Avian Disease Prevention Program provided regular reports to the cities of San Jose and Sunnyvale, which ensures swift response in the case of a disease outbreak.
- Our landfill surveys assessed abatement measures to reduce gull use of the landfill and enabled us to make recommendations on effective approaches.
- In 2015, 61 volunteers contributed more than 702.5 hours to the Colonial Waterbird Program; 8 volunteers contributed 48.75 hours to the Gull Surveys; 25 volunteers contributed 61.5 hours to the Pacific Flyway Shorebird Survey; and 10 volunteers contributed 150 hours to the Avian Disease Prevention Program surveys.
HABITATS PROGRAM

Tidal Marsh Ecosystem Restoration

In 2015, we worked at several tidal marsh habitat management sites along the Bay’s margin, while contributing to methods and materials that will be used on several other sites. We found, collected, and processed over a dozen native plant species, and then introduced over 25 species of native plants to management sites. Our research was used in climate adaptability planning for conservation of the San Francisco Bay and we also held the 7th annual meeting of regional vegetation managers, hosted by The National Parks Service at Point Reyes National Seashore and attended by partners from federal and state agencies, as well as several NGOs.

Burrowing Owls

In 2015, SFBBO launched a five-year project funded by the Santa Clara Valley Habitat Agency to monitor populations of Western Burrowing Owls and enhance, maintain, and restore nesting habitat at the Warm Springs Unit, a vernal pool alkaline grassland part of the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge in Fremont.

We conducted two line transect surveys, weekly breeding burrow surveys, and photo trapping to estimate the population and breeding success of the Burrowing Owls at the 790-acre Unit. We also assisted the Refuge in vegetation, rare plant, and aquatic surveys and collected data to be included in the Refuge’s biological reports. We shared our data with other researchers and organizations who conduct relevant work.

Impacts

- Seeded and planted 5 acres of transition zone habitat in the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge Bair Island project site.
- Partnered with California Coastal Conservancy, Ducks Unlimited, San Francisco Bay Joint Veture, Santa Clara Valley Water District & Habitat Agency, and US Fish and Wildlife Service.
- Received a grant from the California Coastal Conservancy to create and enhance 12 acres of plant communities at the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project’s Refuge Pond A17 site.
- Recorded 3 active nests and 14 active burrows.
- Nesting success was 100% and productivity was 4.33 chicks per pairs.
- Spent 195 hours in vegetation management.
- Installed 16 rock piles and planted 4 vegetative islands.
- Restored over five acres of bird habitat and enhanced 700 acres of Burrowing Owl habitat.
LANDBIRD PROGRAM

For nearly 35 years, SFBBO staff and volunteers have banded birds at our Coyote Creek Field Station (CCFS), located on a restored riparian habitat on Santa Clara Valley Water District property in Milpitas. SFBBO and academic partners use this information to track avian responses to climate change, restoration and urbanization, and to document long-term demographic trends.

In 2015, we captured 4,813 birds of 66 species, and added a new species, Summer Tanager, to our station list! It is unusual for us to catch a species that we have never encountered before. Other recent additions to our species list include White-breasted Nuthatch (2014) and Hairy Woodpecker (2013), both of which are resident in the Bay Area.

SFBBO continued our three-year partnership with the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District to evaluate bird communities in montane grassland habitat throughout central coastal California. Montane grassland is a unique habitat that has largely gone unstudied, yet faces threats from habitat alteration such as grazing and fire suppression, as well as urban development. We also began a new partnership with H. T. Harvey and Associates conducting biodiversity surveys on Google campuses.

OUTREACH PROGRAM

In addition to conducting scientific research, SFBBO offers a robust community outreach and education program that informs the public about avian conservation issues and gets people of all ages excited about birds. During the past three years, SFBBO has increased the number of outreach and education events we offer to the public by 117%. We also increased the variety of ways we connect with the community. In addition to offering citizen science opportunities, bird walks, bird ID workshops, and bird banding demos, we now offer more special events and science talks, a new Ambassador Program, and family-friendly activities. In 2015, more than 200 volunteers participated in our programs, and we wrote articles that were published in national publications such as Birdwatching Magazine and Discover Magazine's Citizen Science Salon. In addition, our annual California Fall Challenge—a month of bird walks and contests—was again a success and raised more than $30,000 to support our programs.

Impacts

- 40 citizen science volunteers spent nearly 4,057 hours to collect our CCFS data, which was shared with researchers from several universities and other organizations.
- Two graduate students from San Jose State University and CSU East Bay continue to utilize SFBBO datasets to study Western Flycatcher and Common Yellowthroat populations to answer questions about migration timing, breeding destinations, and the impact of climate change on breeding timing.
- A graduate student from San Francisco State University studied Hermit Thrush population phenology using birds captured at CCFS and Point Blue banding sites, and completed her Master’s program.
SFBBO 2015 FINANCIALS, year ended Dec 31, 2015

SUPPORT AND REVENUE

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CHANGE IN NET ASSETS

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2015 PROFESSIONAL REPORTS


REVENUE 2015

Program Fees: 31%
Government contracts: 40%
In-Kind contributions: 18%
Membership: 4%
Contributions: 7%
Fundraising: 5%
General and administrative: 23%
Avian Science: 58%
Outreach & Education: 7%
Habitats: 23%

PARTNERS

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Bay Area Climate Literacy Impact Collaborative
Bay Farm Island Library
Bay Nature
Birdwatching Magazine
Brian Fulfrost & Associates
Citizen Science Association
De Anza College
Discover Magazine
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