



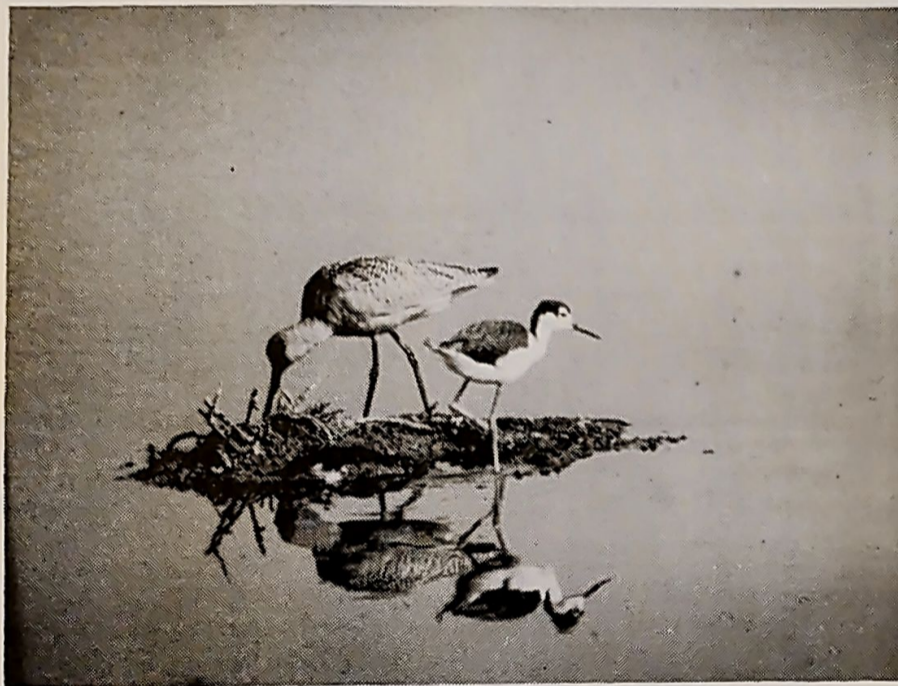
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# SAN FRANCISCO BAY BIRD OBSERVATORY NEWSLETTER



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## DIKED BAYLANDS— SEASONAL WETLANDS OR INDUSTRIAL PARKS?

Peter Ferrine

It's been months now since I've seen Great Egrets feeding along Highway 17. As I sat in my car during rush hour traffic watching these birds, it was nice to know that behind that fence or levee, there were even more shorebirds and waterfowl in the marshy areas wedged between the industrial developments. Cut off from the bay, but still deep enough to collect rainwater, these marshy areas make ideal habitat for migrating waterbirds.

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service is conducting a study on these diked baylands and is looking for volunteers to help census more than 100 sites. The study sites range in size from a few acres to vast tracts of land which are used for farming during the summer months. The sites all have one thing in common; they are former bay marshlands, which are now no longer affected by tidal action.

In summer, these sites are often dry weedy fields used by waterfowl, Savannah Sparrows and Tri-colored Blackbirds for nesting sites. They act as a buffer zone between developed land and shorebird habitats along the bay. In winter, they provide refuge and food when high winds and tides cover south bay marshes and mudflats. 70% of all shorebirds migrating on the Pacific flyway use the south bay and need protected places to stay when winter storms make the bay uninhabitable.

Unfortunately, these areas are not used only by wildlife. Many of the 73 areas in the north bay are being considered for major developments for the first time. Areas in the south bay are becoming so valuable for development that costs to purchase and restore them to tidal action may become prohibitive. Further, as pressures for development builds, regulatory authority to protect these wetlands habitats is decreasing. Ruth Pratt, a biologist with the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service office in Sacramento, states, "The Corps of Engineers has generally limited its jurisdiction over these areas to Section 10 of the River and Harbor Act of 1899 (for those areas below

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historic mean high water). Because many of these lands are farmed, they do not support a prevalence of wetland vegetation and therefore do not satisfy the Corps' legal requirement for a wetland under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act. Further, the Bay Conservation and Development Commission has no regulatory jurisdiction over most of these lands because its jurisdiction extends only to within 100 feet behind the shoreline band."

It is imperative that we get more data on these valuable lands. There are 115 study sites, two-thirds of them are in San Pablo Bay and the rest are in south San Francisco Bay. The data collected by this study can be used for assessment of the habitat value of any study sites which may come under permit review or be the subject of illegal fill activities.

If you are interested in helping protect some seasonal wetlands in your neighborhood, contact Ruth Pratt at (916) 484-4108 or the Observatory office for more information. We need to protect these remaining baylands to insure the continuation of varied birdlife in the bay area. Please join us. Volunteers of all levels of experience and expertise can help.



Buddhist prayer temple

All the buildings are constructed with no screws or nails, using traditional Japanese methods.

#### KOTANI-EN FOR PHOTOGRAPHS AND TOURS

Samarai residence

On October 27 and 28, Kotani-En will once again be open to the general public. On Saturday, photographers will get a chance at a \$100 first prize for best photograph. Sunday, there will be tours and a reception. The garden was designed by the Japanese architect Takashima to be identical to an estate of a Samarai warrior of the 13th century. Using period tools and methods, eleven craftsmen worked 10 years to construct this masterpiece. The mahogany, cedar, fish, plants, and even some of the stones were imported from Japan. The garden should be beautiful as the plants begin to show their fall colors.







## WILLETS, WHY NOT?

Tim Gates

Birds will be birds and willets will be willets, won't they? This bird deserves more attention than it sometimes gets on field trips and bird outings. It seems like it is always "bird barking" for attention among equally vociferous stilts and avocets, especially on the winter salt ponds in the south Bay region. Its audience of local birders who have been looking at them all their lives may treat them as a "ho-hum" species. I can relate to that. While living in Illinois and Texas I yawned at thousands of spring Lesser Golden Plovers and many fewer Stilt Sandpipers. It's not the Painted Bunting of the Scolopacidae, and it's not the Winter Wren of the "Tringa-likes". Its character is imbedded in its vivid mockingbird-like banner marks, its friendly habit of populating any ocean beach, and its winter omnipresence on the salt ponds in San Francisco Bay.

Willetts winter in the America's on both coasts. Two California coastal areas, Hayward and Morro Bay, showed the highest numbers of these birds in four of the past five National Audubon Society annual Christmas bird counts. These two areas have a five-year average of around 5,000 birds counted. Elsewhere in winter we can find willets along both Mexican and Central American coasts south to the Guyanas and northeastern Brazil on the Atlantic side, and as far south as northern Chile along the Pacific. There are at least three records from the eastern hemisphere, one each from Sweden and France, and even one of a carcass found in the Portuguese Azores.

Willetts are some of the first birds to arrive at a receding tide in the sloughs around the Bay area. The moment that the water is belly deep or less, a few willets will show up with other long-legged Charadriiformes to begin feeding. Generally, the food consists of crabs, mollusks, crayfish, and other mudflat animals. Probing, picking, and mowing are commonly used techniques for food gathering.

The willet was first described by Napoleon Bonaparte's nephew, Charles Lucien Bonaparte. Charles Lucien was noted for completing one of Alexander Wilson's books and for fathering systematic ornithology in America. He spent five years in America during which time he described for science the White-winged Scoter, Bridled Titmouse, and Cooper's and Swainson's Hawks. Traditionally, early American naturalists,

Willet populations are divided into two subspecies. The Eastern Willet is basically a coastal inhabitant, and the Western Willet may be found breeding in short grass interior meadows primarily, with seasonal water supplies. The Eastern Willet is mainly smaller, with a shorter, thicker bill and somewhat heavier breast markings than the Western Willet. Breeding Western Willets occur in eastern Oregon and the southern Canadian provinces, east to the Dakotas and Colorado. Lassen, Plumas, and Modoc counties in California are the nearby breeding centers. The Eastern Willet is found from Quebec and Nova Scotia, southward to Florida and the Texas Gulf Coast.

The scientific name of the willet is *Catoptrophorus Semipalmatus* from the Greek words katoptron and phero, and the Latin words semi and palma. The wing feathering made Bonaparte think of a mirror. The Latin words semi and palma mean "half" and "palm of the hand", alluding to the partial webbing in the feet.

All in all, I'd say that the willet has a lot of "character" to make up for its blase appearance. Prime habitat for feeding, grooming, and resting exists in the labyrinth of dredge dikes for these denizens of the salt ponds in the Bay. They are the perfect winter home for these birds. A stroll down one of them will bless the observer who hears and studies this incisively voiced shorebird.

MIKE BOYLAN



R. GILL





1985 pocket appointment Calendars available at the SFBBO office, \$3.50 each. Order calendars from the Bird Observatory office.

#### VOLUNTEER ORIENTATION

To help new volunteers become better acquainted with the Bird Observatory, I have set up a short, one-hour orientation program. The program is offered each month, just prior to the general membership meeting, on the evening of the first Thursday of the month.

Volunteers are given an information packet on how the Bird Observatory operates, volunteer opportunities, and current research projects, as well as a tour through the office and facilities. By attending the General Membership meeting following the orientation, they become acquainted with other members, volunteers and the Board of Directors.

These orientations were started in March and although I went back a few months to schedule all the new volunteers from the beginning of the year, I may have missed you. If you would like to attend this orientation, give me a call at (408) 779-8694 and I will be glad to schedule you for the next one.

Susie Formenti

EDITOR, PETER PERRINE

LAYOUT, KAREN OAKES

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Student/Senior	\$10 annually
Regular	\$15 annually
Family	\$20 annually
Associate	\$50 annually
Contributing	\$100 annually
Sustaining	\$200 annually
Life	\$400 *
Patron	\$2000 *
Corporate	\$500+annually

\* Single payment becomes part of an endowment fund.

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