

The Stilt

Vol. 14 No. 2

Summer 1995



Vicki R. Jennings

The Shorebirds of Winter

An account of SFBBO's February census of shorebirds on south San Francisco Bay.

By Janet Tashjian Hanson

The sun arose at around 6 a.m. on Sunday, February 12, and a few minutes later, so did I. After scanning the skies and the radio stations for weather reports, I called the National Weather service: its prediction called for showers later in the day. It had not rained for five days and if it could just hold off until after noon, our shorebird censusing teams could safely travel the levees to complete a winter count. Unlike the earlier survey scheduled for January 29 that we were forced to cancel, I felt confident this time, and on the recorded message, I gave the "thumbs up"

In 1992-1993, SFBBO conducted a study of the high-tide roosts of wintering and migratory shorebirds utilizing south San Francisco Bay. With the draft report completed in 1994, the Research Committee met, in conjunction with the Science Advisory Board, to determine the future direction of SFBBO research. A few of the many factors we considered were: the large scope of our study area, the relative importance of the habitat to different species, the relevance of the research for management and restoration efforts, and the deep well of volunteer enthusiasm for field observations.

In the days preceding the count, I talked to dozens of people, arranging for access and area coverage. Excellent experienced volunteers were to rendezvous with newer folks at various gates and parking lots, all with the intent of full coverage, a complete count of all the shorebirds residing along the bay's shoreline south of the San Mateo Bridge. Janet Kjelmlyr, a Point Reyes Bird Observatory biologist who helped coordinate that organization's shorebird census on the bay in 1988-1991, has likened it to "choreographing a dance". If the birds and the volunteers are the stars of the show, in the winter of 1995 the weather, in particular El Niño, was definitely the prima donna, temperamental, prone to storming and liable to shut down the whole show in one fit of pique.

The shoreline of south San Francisco Bay has been drastically altered in the last 100 years, mostly through the formation of a vast system of levees and salt evaporators. Nevertheless, the south Bay remains a major staging area for shorebirds utilizing the Pacific Flyway. The Western Sandpiper is the most abundant species; earlier PRBO surveys estimated that nearly a half million of these small sandpipers utilize the bay during spring migration, with the majority in the south bay (Stenzel and Page 1988). After intensive foraging on the mudflats and in shallow salt ponds, these tiny dynamos head for their breeding grounds in western Alaska. At least a few of them fly nonstop to foraging areas in Washington and British Columbia. San Francisco Bay is a vital link in the chain of west coast staging areas for more than 20 different species of shorebirds.

I was quietly easing out the front door, when the phone rang in the kitchen. It was the pilot I had arranged to fly aerial surveys, to cover the few areas of shoreline to which we could not obtain access. Even though we had perfect visibility, he could not fly that day

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Alviso, CA 95002
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and I learned an important lesson for the next survey: for the more important roles, always have an understudy waiting in the wings. Later, as I stood on a levee scanning a flock of Black-necked Stilts, with volunteer Kitty Pearson, it was gratifying to think of the 60 or so people who were also out that morning, scoping the ponds, enjoying the birds and the brilliance of the morning, and satisfaction of contributing to the count.

At dawn, on a spring morning in the south bay, one may observe 30,000 Western Sandpipers roosting on a shallow salt pond and perhaps foraging on brine flies. Their sheer numbers seem to guarantee their survival, yet consider...

"Four aspects of the natural history of shorebirds raise concern for their conservation: the fragile characteristics of their life histories, their concentration into small migration and wintering sites, the precise timing and energy requirements in migration, and their competition with man."
(Myers, et. al. 1987)

Shorebird researchers are forging international links in an effort to understand and protect the world's populations of shorebirds. In 1991, San Francisco Bay was recognized as a site of hemispheric importance by the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network, based on PRBO's comprehensive counts of 1988-1990.

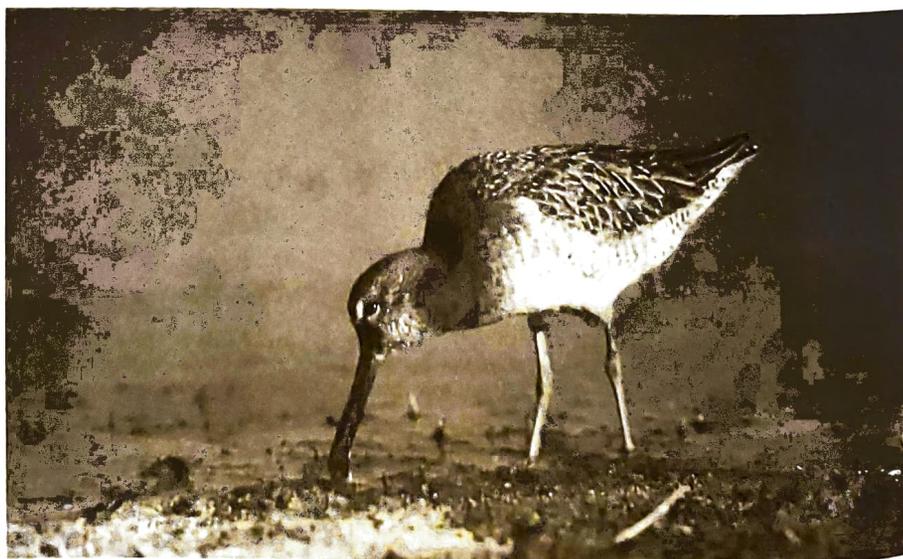
Given all of the factors, SFBBO's Research Committee chose to inaugurate a seasonal census of the south bay's shorebirds. Four mornings a year, our volunteer field observers will be out on levees and hiking trails, along tidal marshes and salt ponds to document the presence and location of our transient shorebird populations. A small investment of time for any one volunteer and a moderate expenditure for SFBBO staff, but a vitally important one to the future health and safety of these small travelers and our estuary.

Kjelmyr, Janet. Winter 1994-1995. Census choreography, San Francisco Bay. Observer, Quartely Journal of the Point Reyes Bird Observatory.

Myers, J. P., et al. 1987. Conservation strategy for migratory species. American Scientist. 75: 19-26.

Stenzel, L. E. and G. W. Page. 1988. Results of the 16-18 April 1988 shorebird census of San Francisco and San Pablo bays. A draft report of Point Reyes Bird Observatory.

Photos on this page and page 7 are by Al Spears, taken at Shoreline Park. A native of Liverpool, England, Al began to seriously study photography in 1982. He is a member of the Bay Area Bird Photographers and the Photography Guild of Los Gatos.



Some Preliminary Results of the February 1995 Shorebird Census

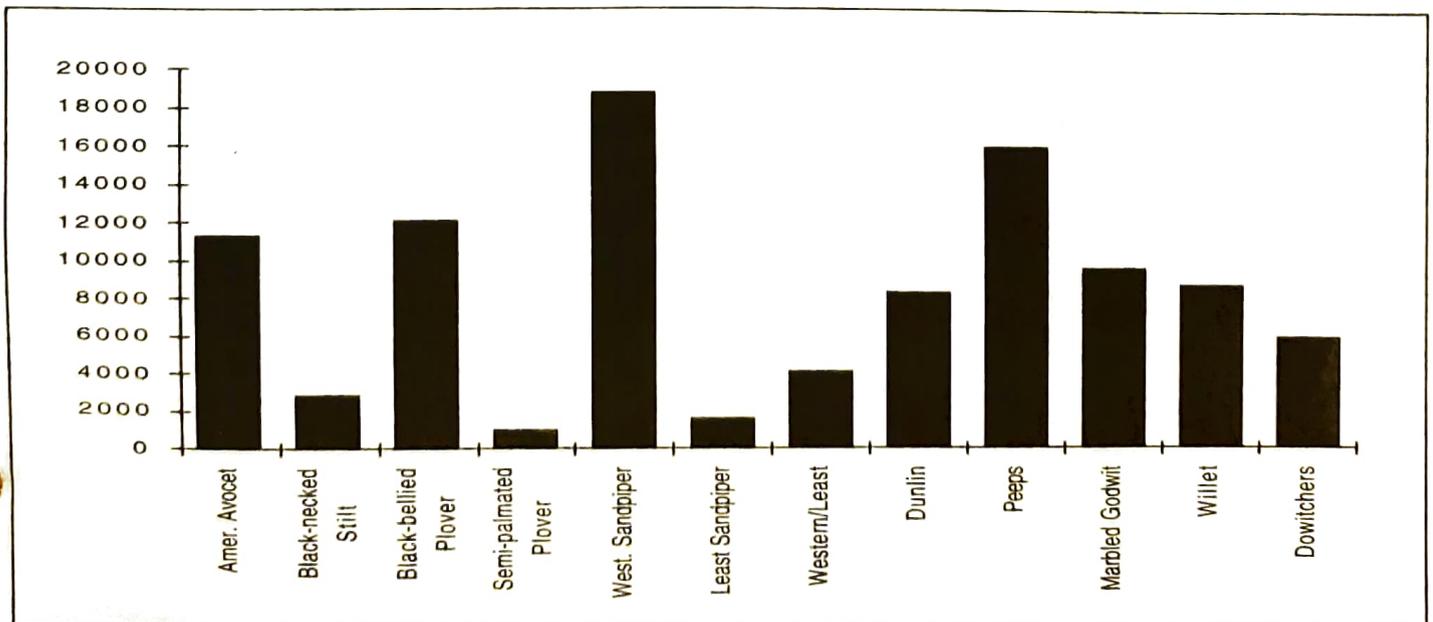
We achieved nearly complete coverage of the south bay shoreline: the notable exceptions were salt crystallizers in Newark, and outer Bair Island and Greco Island in San Mateo County. Two additional parcels were covered immediately north of the San Mateo Bridge on either end, as they are easily accessible and known to be highly productive for shorebirds. The count was held on a high tide, to minimize movement and to concentrate the birds on roost sites. The high rainfall of winter 1994-1995 flooded some areas formerly used by shorebirds during high tides, thus forcing more of them to crowd into fewer roosts. The rain also created more temporary inland ponds which we tried to include wherever found, but probably missed some of them.

SFBBO volunteers counted 26 species of shorebirds for a total of 101,942 birds. Western Sandpipers were the most numerous, accounting for 18,792 birds with an additional 15,920 identified as "peeps" (some combination of Western and Least Sandpipers and Dunlins). We counted 12,103 Black-bellied Plovers, 11,295 American Avocets, 9,584 Marbled Godwits and 8,662 Willets (see chart below). The least numerous species included 18 Whimbrels, 9 Black Turnstones, 31 Red-necked Phalaropes and 38 Snowy Plovers. Volunteers were asked to count herons and egrets, for a total of 820 birds and to also note raptors, for 152 birds, including 1 Peregrine, 1 Golden Eagle, 6 Short-eared Owls, 23 White-tailed Kites and 66 Northern Harriers. We were also able to report the locations of 3 red foxes to U.S. Fish and Wildlife personnel.

The information collected on SFBBO's shorebird surveys will be comparable to the baseline information collected by PRBO. Future analysis will look at population and species totals, population composition and seasonal patterns. These surveys will also continue to document important shorebird use areas.

We thank the following volunteer field observers for their participation in the February shorebird count: James Armstrong, Amanda Bingley, Edith Black, Mary Brezner, Richard and Pat Carlson, Rich Cimino, Howard Cogswell, Charles and Joan Coston, Steve Curran, Robin Dakin, Janice and Frank Delfino, Al DeMartini, Dave Drake, Bob and Cait Drewes, Don and Margaret Emery, Tom Espersen, Susie Formenti, Russ and Marilyn Fowler, Steve Glover, James Gorham, Leda Beth Gray, Jan Hintermeister, Lance Hull, Sue Hunt, Carole Hutchinson, David Jaffe, Alan Lyons, Sue Macias, Mike Mammoser, Joan Mancini, David McIntyre, Peter Metropulos, Anne Moser, Chris Overington, Ed Pandolfino, Kitty Pearson, Bob Richmond, Jean Richmond, Mike Rogers, Jill Singleton, Sandy Spakoff, Hildie Spautz, Kappy Sprenger, Karlene and Terry Stoker, Susan Stout, Jesse Suckow, Frances Toldi, Ruth and Gene Troetschler, Brendan White, Peg Woodin, Lou and Jean Young.

Total numbers of selected shorebird species counted during the 12 February 1995 SFBBO Shorebird Census.



Avian Botulism Monitoring Program

Avian botulism affects countless waterfowl every year. In cooperation with the cities of San Jose and Sunnyvale, SFBBO monitors 3 south bay locations for the occurrence of avian botulism. On weekly boat surveys we collect sick and/or injured birds and all animal carcasses in order to check the spread of avian disease. Volunteers are needed to help with the boat surveys. **Space is limited;** call Valerie at the office (408) 946-6548 to reserve a seat in the boat. All trips last an average of 2-4 hours. Dress in layers, bring drinking water and a snack. Meeting place is the Cannery building in Alviso, call for directions.

<u>DATE</u>	<u>MEETING TIME</u>	<u>LOCATION OF SURVEY</u>
Sun July 02	3:00 pm	Mallard Slough
Fri July 07	4:45 pm	" "
Sun July 16	2:15 pm	" "
Fri July 21	5:00 pm	" "
Sat July 2	12:15pm	" "
Sat Aug 05	3:15 pm	" "
Sat Aug 12	12:30 pm	" "
Sun Aug 13	1:30 pm	Guadalupe Slough
Fri Aug 18	2:45 pm	Mallard Slough
Sun Aug 27	11:45 am	" "
Sat Sep 02	2:45 pm	" "
Sun Sep 10	11:15 am	" "
Sat Sep 16	3:15 pm	" "
Sun Sep 24	10:15 am	" "
Sat Sep 30	1:45 pm	" "
Sat Oct 07	10:15 am	" "
Sun Oct 08	11:00 am	Guadalupe Slough
Sat Oct 14	1:00 pm	Mallard Slough
Sat Oct 21	8:45 am	" "
Sat Oct 28	1:30 pm	" "
Sat Nov 04	8:00 am	" "
Sat Nov 11	10:45 am	" "
Sun Nov 19	6:30 am	" "
Wed Nov 22	8:30 am	Guadalupe Slough

Program Updates

Avian Botulism Monitoring Program

SFBBO enters its 13th year of monitoring Guadalupe and Mallard Sloughs for signs of avian botulism. We conduct weekly boat surveys from July through November, more often if an outbreak occurs.

Bair Island

Recent boat and aerial surveys indicate a large number of egrets and herons nesting on outer Bair Island, a possible sign of recovery from red fox predation that devastated the colony in recent years. The heavy rains have also encouraged growth of the vegetation they nest in. Boat surveys are planned to document the colony's progress. SFBBO works in cooperation with the California Department of Fish and Game and with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

California Gull

The California Gull breeding population on the south bay continues to grow. This spring we will count nests and the breeding population at the main colony site on Refuge property in Alviso, plus 4 satellite colonies scattered around the south bay shoreline.

Colonial Waterbird Monitoring Program

As spring slowly arrives, we begin our 14th year of monitoring the waterbird colonies in the south bay. This encompasses gull and tern colonies, and heron and egret rookeries. We continue our cooperative effort with Audubon Canyon Ranch to document all heron and egret colonies in the 8 Bay Area counties.

South Bay Shorebird Census

This is the first year of a long-term program to monitor seasonal shorebird population trends. We are currently assigning areas for the remaining two counts in 1995.

San Francisco Bay Shoreline Guide

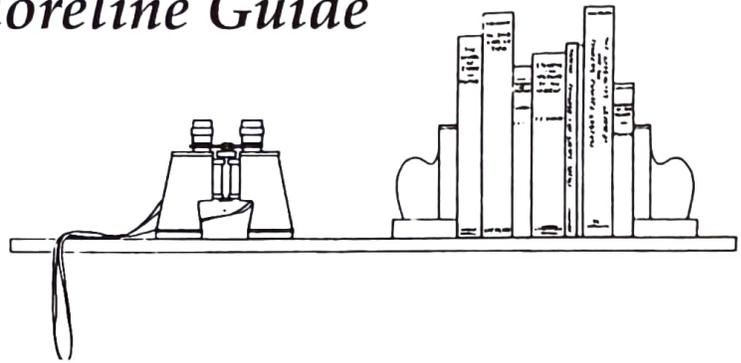
A Review by Steve Shunk

San Francisco Bay Shoreline Guide —
A California State Coastal
Conservancy Book
Project Director and Editor: Rasa
Gustaitus
Writing, research, text and maps:
Jerry Emery
Book and Map Design: Reineck &
Reineck
Publisher: University of California
Press

By nature, hot summer days in the San Francisco Bay Area have one sure antidote: the cooling breeze of the bayshore. And if you're looking for access to more than the just the same old parks and preserves, then the San Francisco Bay Shoreline Guide is your resource for bayside recreation.

This "first comprehensive guide ever published to the entire San Francisco Bay shoreline" holds an abundance of useful information. Whether you are looking for open space to fly a kite or a boat ramp to launch a canoe, this guide will take you there. Don't even bother taking the maps out of your glove box. From the regional map to the detailed maps at the front of each section, enough definition exists to make your way to hundreds of access points to the more than 173 miles of Bay shoreline currently open to the public.

Much of this public access is along the developing Bay Trail, a project of the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) in cooperation with local and state agencies and non-profit organizations. Once completed, the Bay Trail will provide access to over 400 miles of continuous shoreline. Much of that access will be "multi-use" - providing recreational opportunities for people of all interests and abilities. The Guide provides detailed information on existing access points for bikes, boats, and wheelchairs, and activities such



as fishing, windsurfing, swimming and birding.

The Guide also makes a prominent effort to introduce the sensitive and diminishing natural habitats around the Bay, although public access to these habitats can be a sensitive issue in itself. Less than 10% of the Bay's original wetlands exists today, and many endangered species rely heavily on their protection. Some refence to minimizing the impact of recreation occurs in the introduction and in sporadic sidebars, but readers should take special precaution as to the sensitivity of particular areas.

The Guide does an excellent job of describing specific families of local birds, such as gulls and terns, although these entries are difficult to find at a glance. This 450 square mile estuary also hosts an abundance of sealife. Seal and sea lion viewing are accessible in a number of locations, and fishing activities will yield a broad range of specimens, from sturgeon to sharks and rays. A number of environmental issues such as introduced species, bay salinity and shoreline development show up in sidebars. For those who seek a formal introduction to these issues, many of the parks and preserves around the shoreline host guided walks and talks on the natural and cultural history of the area. Trained naturalists can discuss the ecology of the endangered least tern or the rich anatomy of tidal mud. Use The Guide as your resource to educational opportunities for all ages.

Despite the apparently random placement of natural history information, The Guide displays a wide array

of high quality photographs. From native landscapes to historical perspectives, The Guide boasts over 120 photos and 65 well-crafted drawings. The diversity of the urban bayshore is well represented, with its salt ponds and tidal marshes, container ports and scenic boardwalks, and a true sense of urbanization is superimposed over this vast ecological paradise.

In all, the San Francisco Bay Shoreline Guide a welcome resource to recreational opportunities around the bayshore. A tremendous amount of research and collaboration resulted in a quality publication with lasting educational value. Access to this endangered oasis will become a key issue as projects such as the Bay Trail move forward. One can clearly see the impacts in developed areas, but those few spots that are still left untouched must remain intact in order to preserve the Bay as a natural habitat.

Steve Shunk is a "self-proclaimed naturalist", who has led trips on the bay of all types, including canoe trips to Grizzly Island. An outdoor enthusiast, Steve has taught natural history classes for the City of Saratoga and Youth Science Institute and is currently an active SFBBO volunteer. He is Outreach Coordinator for REI/Cupertino and was recently elected to the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society's Board of Directors. He and his wife Bonney are raising three self-proclaimed naturalists, including one that can handle a steep flight of stairs in high-heels.

Editor's Note: The Guide will be available at local bookstores. Cost \$14.95.

Please welcome new staff member - Sandra Skolnik

In January 1995, Administrative Director Pat Carlson resigned in order to pursue some extensive traveling plans with her husband Dick. She was a real pleasure to work with: energetic, open, great with people and mediation, and lot of fun to be around. The Board immediately set about filling the large hole created in our operation by her departure. Fortunately they had only to look within their own ranks to find someone well-versed in non-profit development. Sandra Skolnik has prior experience working with Wildlife Rescue and the Palo Alto Humane Society. She vacated her board seat and became our new Development Officer in March 1995. Please feel free to contact her with any questions you may have regarding membership, tax-exempt donations, corporate matching funds, and the like. We warmly welcome her to our staff.

1995 SFBBO/Wildlife Rescue Donation Drawing

Once again, SFBBO joins with Wildlife Rescue in our yearly donation drawing to benefit both organizations. Great prizes include a trip to Los Cabos, Mexico, kayaking on Monterey Bay, a rafting trip on the American River, a hang-gliding lesson, dinners, golf, gift certificates and more!! The drawing is scheduled for August 19 so look for your tickets in the mail starting in June. We hope we will have as successful an event as we did last year, thanks to your generous participation. SFBBO will have members-only prizes for our top ticket sellers, to be presented at the annual picnic in September.

SFBBO Wish List

A cellular phone and/or one year of "emergency" level service.
For our safety during excursions onto isolated levees and into the sloughs of south San Francisco Bay.

Good-condition used carpeting.
To replace the well-worn area rugs that warm up the concrete floors of our old Bayside Cannery office.

A Mac II or newer.
To replace our little old Mac Plus, the long-used keeper of our membership records, that we have now outgrown..

Calendar Of Events

April 23, Sunday, 7 to 10 a.m. Spring shorebird census of south San Francisco Bay.

May 6, Saturday. Birds on the Move Day at the Refuge Environmental Education Center.

Colonial Waterbird Monitoring Program

May 13. Alviso California Gull colony survey.*

May 21. Mallard Slough heron rookery survey.*

May 16, Tuesday. Bair Island.*

June 2-5 & 16-19. Window for heron and egret observations.

June 3-11 & 17-25. Window for gull and tern observations.

July 8-16. Window for gull and tern observations.

May 23, Tuesday, 7:00 p.m. Meeting, Board of Directors. Open to all interested members. Please RSVP if you would like to attend.

June 10, Saturday morning, exact times to be announced. Summer shorebird census of south San Francisco Bay.

June 18, Sunday. Bair Island Survey.*

July 2, Sunday. Beginning of boat surveys for Avian Botulism Monitoring Program.*

July 15, Saturday. Bair Island Survey.*

August 20, Sunday morning, exact times to be announced. Fall shorebird census of south San Francisco Bay.

September 23, Saturday. Tentative date for SFBBO annual picnic

**Space is limited. Call Valerie at the office to reserve a space.*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Welcome New members - since last quarter 1994. We thank all of our returning members who have renewed their memberships since the end of 1994 and we welcome the following new members:

Contributing:

Richard Croll, Thomas Grey.

Associate:

Jean Cohn, Ben Pless.

Family:

Ronald Barklow & Viola Saima-Barklow; Terry & Zoe Coddington; Jeanie Geary; Robert & Deborah Hirt; Richard Horrigan, M.D.; Tom & Lorraine Myers; Ed Pandolfino; Laurel & Lou Pavesi; Steve & Heather Rottenborn; Stephen Schneider; Karlene & Terry Stoker; Vivian Van Dijk; Tom & Marian VandenBosch; and Alan & Sandra Walther.

Regular:

Janice Andersen; Walter Berger; Dr. William Bros; Robert Christiansen; Robert Clement; Crab Cove Visitor Center; Nancy DeStefanis; George Finger; Donald Lewis; Sue Macias; Sohail Malik; David McIntyre; Chasi Mitchell; Nora Monette; Donna Olsen; Phyllis Pansegrau; Pat Pauch; Donald Reinberg; Allen Robinson; Sandra Robison; Michael Rogers; Leslie Schuman; Sandra Skolnik; and Emilie Strauss.

Senior/Student:

Carl Dierkes, Pat Hauswald; Marie Ranger; Allan Wofchuck; and Ardyth Woodbury.



Photo by Al Spears

SFBBO goes "on-line"

You can reach SFBBO by email at our address:
SFBBO@aol.com

If you spot a banded bird.....

Several researchers along the Pacific Flyway have been colorbanding shorebirds, most notably Western Sandpipers and American Avocets. For example, an American Avocet was spotted in late April near Refuge Headquarters that had been banded in Nevada. If you spy a colorband, please let us know. We will post the message via email to the Western Shorebird Group and will quickly let you know the traveling history of "your" bird.

SFBBO gratefully acknowledges the following contributions:

The following employer-employee teams for matching funds donations :

Apple Computer and Nancy Grove
Sun Microsystems and T. Gracon
Cargill Salt Division
East Bay Regional Parks District
Zebra Copy

And Special Thanks to:

Peter J. Metropulos for his generous donation of one pair of new waders. They are already in use and appreciated! (Dry socks are a wonderful feeling...)

Dr. Howard Cogswell for updating SFBBO's banding records.

Tom Patterson for all the work done to maintain the building.

Marie Ranger and Audrey Patterson for office help.

Robin Smith for organization and contributions to our library.

We extend condolences to the families of members AnneMarie Youngman and Zelda Glaze.

We extend heartfelt thanks to all of our members, donors and volunteers for their generosity and support, which allows SFBBO to continue with its programs.

Other ways you can help SFBBO:

Double your contributions by checking your employer's benefits department for matching fund programs.

Make a donation in memory or honor of someone special.

Give a gift membership to a friend.

Consider including SFBBO as a beneficiary in your estate planning; check with your attorney or tax person for tax considerations.

San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory

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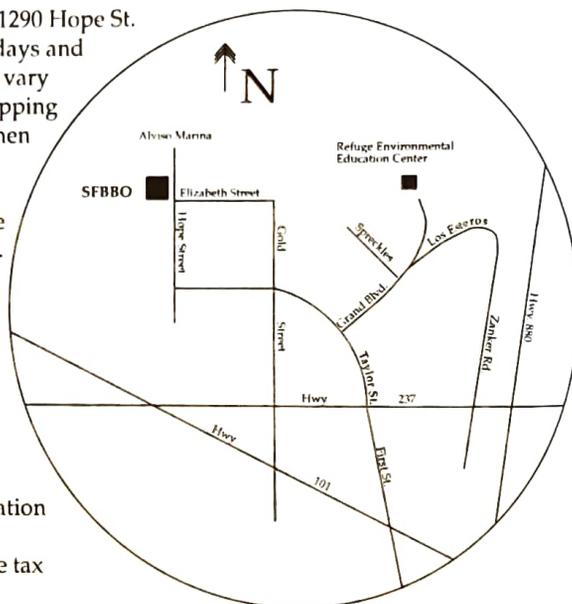
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The Bird Observatory is located at 1290 Hope St. in Alviso. The office is open weekdays and some weekends, but specific hours vary with our field schedule. Before stopping in, call (408) 946-6548 and check when we will be available.

The Board meetings are open to the membership and are held monthly. Call the Observatory office for dates and times. The newsletter is a quarterly publication. Send contributions to the editor: Susie Formenti, P.O. Box 247, Alviso, CA 95002.

The San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory is a non-profit corporation under IRS statute 501(c) 3. All memberships and contributions are tax deductible.



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We invite your membership in the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory. To join, please complete and mail this form with payment to SFBBO, P.O. Box 247, Alviso, CA 95002. Make checks payable to SFBBO.

Membership categories: check one

- | | | |
|----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Student/Senior \$10 | <input type="checkbox"/> Associate \$50 | <input type="checkbox"/> Corporate \$500+ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Regular \$20 | <input type="checkbox"/> Contributing \$100 | <input type="checkbox"/> Life Member \$400 * |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family \$25 | <input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining \$200 | <input type="checkbox"/> Patron \$2,000 * |
- Donation:** SFBBO greatly appreciates your tax-deductible donation.

* Single payment becomes part of an endowment fund.

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