

# The Stilt

Summer 1998

Vol. 17 No. 2

The Newsletter of the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory

## Research by Kayak

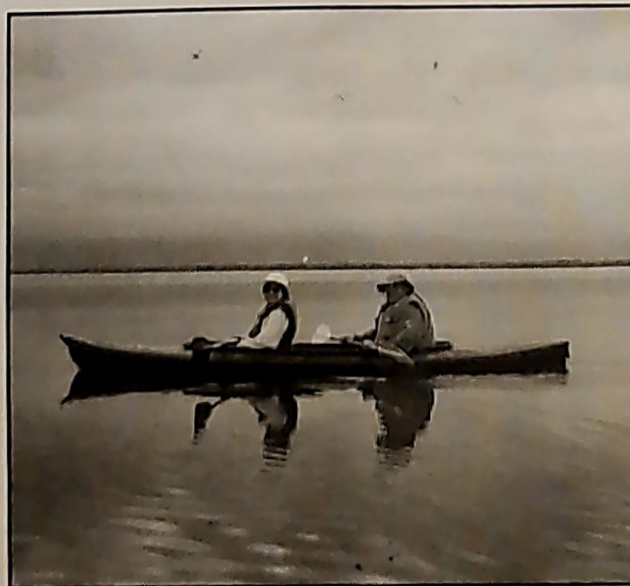
by Janet Hanson

One undeniable truth to studying colonial waterbirds: at some point, you will need to float, jump, catapult, walk or swim over water.

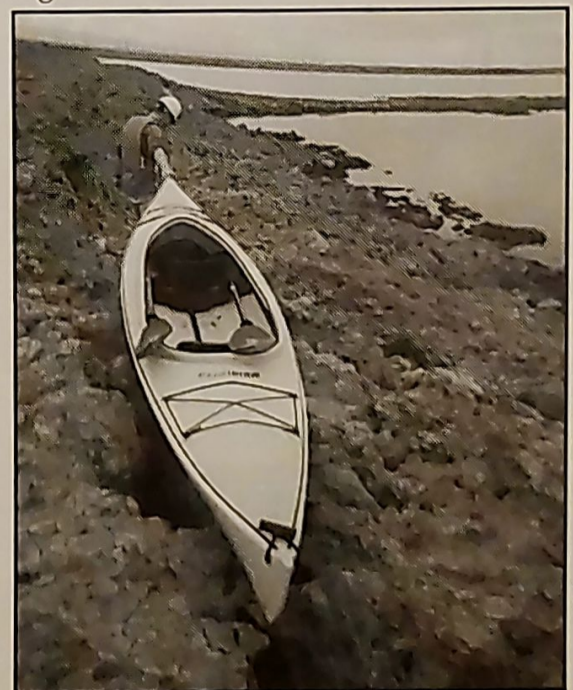
In 1997, with the addition of new staff and advisors, our Research Program became more ambitious and focused. These plans included many more trips to gull and tern colonies, with more staff, interns and volunteers teaming up to tackle these new research goals.

During past years, canoes were the vehicle of choice to get to isolated islands, although they were heavy to portage, difficult to maneuver in wind and pretty tippy (right, Joelle?). But last year, two of our staff purchased small inexpensive kayaks and their superiority was instantly clear, especially their ability to cross very shallow water and maneuver into small landing areas. It soon became clear that we needed an armada for the coming breeding season. Two separate kayak retailer/rental companies immediately came to our aid. Keith Miller of California Canoe and Kayak in Oakland came through with a great Aquaterra Keowee 2 two-seater that was put into use the day after it arrived. Then shortly thereafter, Cass Schrock of Monterey Bay Kayak engineered the

donation of another slightly bigger Aquaterra with paddles, also a double-seater, a brilliant deep yellow that immediately was christened the Banana Boat. Both boats were in use during Banding Bootcamp and both have now seen plenty of survey action, performing perfectly. Now it is no problem to tackle long distances across the ponds, even on windy days and with canoe knee to tend to later. Yet another windfall came our way in the form of a small inflatable boat with an electric outboard motor, donated by Marty Murphy of Half Moon Bay. This Sevylor Runabout, which came complete with oars and high-quality life jackets, looks like the little brother of our Yukon and Avon inflatables. It's great for transporting four people into shallow ponds when the engine is off and for long distances across deep ponds with an assist from the motor. Marty and her husband also donated a pair of binoculars and a truly terrific box of books, including a first edition of *North American Shore Birds* by D. G. Elliot. We thank these generous people for contributing greatly to the success of the 1998 Research Program.



Biologists Jen Parkin and Tom Ryan cruising a salt pond in the Keowee 2. (Sue Macias)



Portage is a fact of life on levees: intern Howatt King and the "banana boat". (Sue Macias)



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San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory

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# SFBBO Goes to the North American Ornithological Conference 6-12 April 1998

by Tom Ryan

We have now presented our work at three major ornithological conferences in the past year! This one was by far the biggest, drawing 1200 professional ornithologists to St. Louis, Missouri. Over the span of five days over 700 presentations were made. On some days as many as eight concurrent sessions were held. While it was difficult to make it to all sessions, I was able to attend several papers concerning several taxonomic groups we are studying including terns, gulls, rails, shorebirds, and several topics including long-term population monitoring, community ecology, breeding biology, population biology, taxonomy and bird behavior.

I visited the Natural History Museum at the University of Kansas prior to the meeting. Here I practiced my talk alongside KU grad students and professors. I also viewed KU's GIS computer where they are currently logging specimen data and published accounts of birds observed in Mexico and then using an algorithm to predict their distribution in Mexico. Especially interesting is this program's ability to predict where several endemics all occur, which can help in optimizing sites for conservation efforts. I discussed with Dan Kluza and Town Peterson possible applications for predicting locations where terns roost on the coast of Mexico; I am currently looking into providing them with the information needed for them to provide us with those predictions to assist our surveys in 1999.

Dan and I arrived at the NAOC on Tuesday and attended the Neotropical Ornithology session where John Bates discussed the importance of conserving genetic diversity. A debate erupted with Nigel Colliar of Birdlife International regarding the difficulty of saving species much less genetic diversity. SFBBO Science Advisor, Charles Collins presented our work on the Pygmy Palm-Swift at the session, pointing out that

many bird species, which are afforded consideration for conservation, are little known and may not be in trouble at all.

Talks began on Wednesday with a plenary address by Peter Raven. In a fiery speech he discussed the role of scientists in the environmental movement. Other plenary addresses were given by Paul Ehrlich and Luis Baptista. Both referred to the San Francisco Bay area in their talks.

Joe Jehl discussed problems with rising lake levels at Mono Lake affecting the ability of California Gulls to forage. As the lake level has risen, California Gull productivity has fallen. Another talk described the local migration of avocets; they tend to have large post-breeding movements. Another talk discussed the delectability of Black Rails using call counts; they used radiotelemetry to gauge the effectiveness of call counts. They found that mostly males called and the best time to survey was April to July. They made several recommendations for survey procedures. A study of Great Egrets provided evidence that mercury is stored in feathers and that even chicks fed high doses of mercury were asymptomatic until the feathers stopped growing at around 9 weeks. A study of salt pond systems in San Diego Bay demonstrated that these ponds provide important breeding habitat for Black-necked Stilt, and an important migratory feeding area for phalarope, and other sandpipers, and that these species use these ponds during all possible tidal conditions, i.e. they are foraging in salt ponds.

I was able to make several important connections with other ornithologists. Kevin McGowan of Cornell, Tom Scott of U.C. Riverside and Mark Robbins of University of Kansas were all quite interested in Charles Coston's recent Christmas Bird Count (CBC) analyses and feel that we should pursue these studies. We will soon be sending specimens collected during Avian Disease Preven-

## Congratulations to SFBBO Biologist Jennifer Parkin

In May 1998, Jennifer Parkin received her Masters of Science in Marine Sciences for her thesis entitled "Feeding and Reproductive Ecology of Caspian Terns (*Sterna caspia*) in Elkhorn Slough, California". She presented her thesis work at the Monterey Bay Marine Sanctuary Conference in 1994 and 1995 and at the Pacific Seabird Group/Colonial Waterbird Society joint meeting in 1995. Way to go, Jen!

tion Program surveys to Cornell University, University of Michigan and the Field Museum in Chicago, where they will be used as study skins and as tissue samples for studies of genetic diversity.

I presented a paper, "Population Trends of Herons and Egrets in southern San Francisco Bay - Towards a Metapopulation Analysis." This paper described the population trends we have observed in the local ardeids. It went on to discuss how we are using a metapopulation analysis to get a region-wide perspective on the behaviors of local populations and how we are using the analysis as a tool to determine where the problems with our local populations exist. I also discussed the strong points and problems with our current methodology, making suggestions for other long-term volunteer monitoring programs to improve their monitoring protocols. The talk was well received with several excellent questions afterwards. Howard Cogswell was in the audience. I thanked Richard Mewaldt, Peg Wooden, Mike Rigney and Howard for their design, DESFBNWR, and Cargill Salt Division as well as our volunteers, without whom this



data would not exist.

At the banquet, Dan Kluza, SFBBO research associate and student at University of Kansas, won the Mewaldt-King research award to continue the work he is conducting on the endemic birds in the dry neotropical forests of west Mexico. The award is in memory of our founder Richard Mewaldt.



## Volunteer Research Opportunities

Please call the SFBBO office for more information on any of the following projects.

- Avian Disease Monitoring Program: begins June 15, call for boat schedule.
- Band Reading: 1 day per month July 1 to Sept. 30, day and times flexible, no experience necessary.
- Tern Island Stake Removal: Saturday Sept. 12, 9 AM at SFBBO Office
- Knapp Enclosure Repair: Sunday, Sept 27, 9 AM at SFBBO Office
- New "indoor" opportunities: We need varying skill levels, commitment and a warped sense of humor. We offer flexible schedule, great teamwork and no pay.

### First Call....

## West Mexico Birding Tour 1999

**Leaders:** Tom Ryan and Dan Kluza

**Dates:** January 12-19, 1999

Maximum group size: 12

**Price:** \$1400, excluding airfare, airport tax, passports, alcohol, gratuities, personal items.

Call the SFBBO office for more information and to reserve your space. Group size limited.

# California Fall Challenge

## September 18 - October 17, 1998

Sponsored by

**SFBBO**

San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory

P.O. Box 247, 1290 11th Street, Alviso, CA 95002

phone 408 946-6548, fax 408 946-9279, SFBBO@aol.com

The California Fall Challenge is a state-wide birding event that allows county teams to show others what their favorite California county has to offer. Here's how it works:

- ♦ Pick one county (or more) in California
- ♦ Form a dream team with your best birding friends
- ♦ Get your employer, friends and neighbors to sponsor your team
- ♦ Do a Big Day between September 18th through October 17th

### Register your team now and receive:

- ✓ CFC Rules including complete category and prize list
- ✓ The county list for each county you select to bird
- ✓ A CFC T-shirt for every registered team member
- ✓ A one-year membership in the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory

Visit our California Fall Challenge homepage at [www.sfbbo.com](http://www.sfbbo.com)

## FIELD TRIP REPORT:

### Elkhorn Slough and Monterey Bay

By Leader Tom Ryan

On Saturday, March 28 SFBBO sponsored a field trip to Elkhorn Slough/Moss Landing and the shoreline of Monterey Bay. Highlights included:

- Red-necked Grebe (Moss Landing, Coast Guard Pier in Monterey)
- White-winged Scoter (Moss Landing and Monterey Harbor)
- Northern Fulmar (Fishermans Wharf in Monterey)
- Sooty Shearwater (Pt. Pinos)
- Mew Gull (Coast Guard Pier in Monterey)
- Black-legged Kittiwake (El Torito & Coast Guard Pier in Monterey)

At Moss Landing we observed Red-throated Loon, Red-necked Grebe, White-winged Scoter, Long-billed Curlew, and Ruddy Turnstone, as well as numerous Sea Otters, (I know they aren't birds, but they sure are enjoyable to watch). At Elkhorn Slough we observed both the Great Blue Herons and Great Egrets at the rookery, some were apparently incubating eggs. Other highlights included White-tailed Kites (displaying), Allen's Hummingbird (displaying), Pacific-slope Flycatcher, Tree Swallow, N. Rough-winged Swallow, Barn Swallow, Orange-crowned Warbler, and Wilson's Warbler. Unfortunately, it was getting quite windy

by the time we got to the willows and oaks. In Monterey, we observed Black-legged Kittiwake while eating lunch at El Torito, a lunch-lifer for all participants! Another kittiwake was also observed at the Coast Guard Pier. Also near the CG Pier were a basic plumage Red-necked Grebe, Common Murre, Pigeon Guillemot, and Mew Gull. We were able to get close views here of breeding plumage Brandt's and Pelagic Cormorants. The Brandt's Cormorant is particularly striking with its outrageous blue gular pouch, aquamarine eyes, and plumes on the sides of its head. Also from this vantage point we observed an intermediate plumage Northern Fulmar feeding with cormorants and pelicans at Fisherman's Wharf. From a distance it sits high in the water and appears much like a giant phalarope. At Pt. Pinos we observed numerous Sooty Shearwaters close to shore. On shore we observed Black-bellied Plover, Ruddy Turnstone, Black Turnstone, Surf-bird, Black Oystercatcher, and Glaucous-winged Gull.

In all a very enjoyable day, despite ominous thunderstorms which seemed to go just north and south of our route. Despite a relaxed pace, we totaled 95 species.





“How much pressure do the corvids put on local birds? Just what food sources are they exploiting? Is it the garbage dumps?”

# Changing Bay Area Bird Populations – The Corvids

By Charles Coston, SFBBO Member

As longish-term (24 year) denizens of the south bay, it has been fascinating to track the resident birds in our neighborhood. Are there really fewer blackbirds now than in the past? How significant is the appearance of Black Phoebes seven years ago and Oak Titmice in my neighborhood of Sunnyvale this year? How does this fit into the bigger picture of species and abundance changes? And just what is the bigger, bay area wide picture for urban/suburban birds anyway?

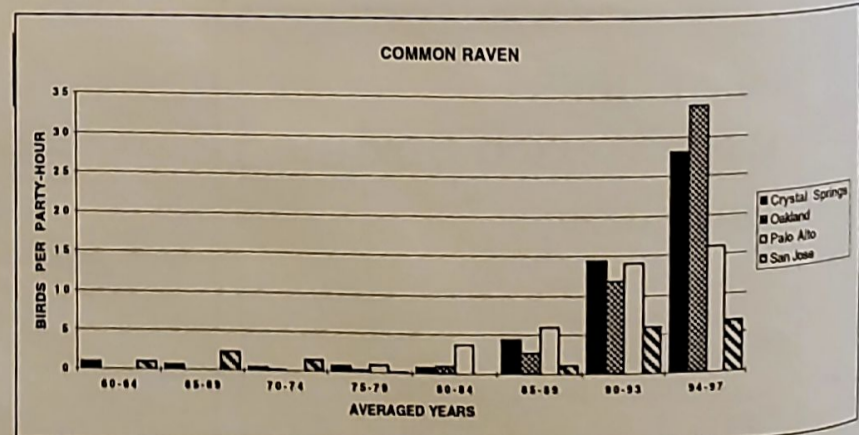
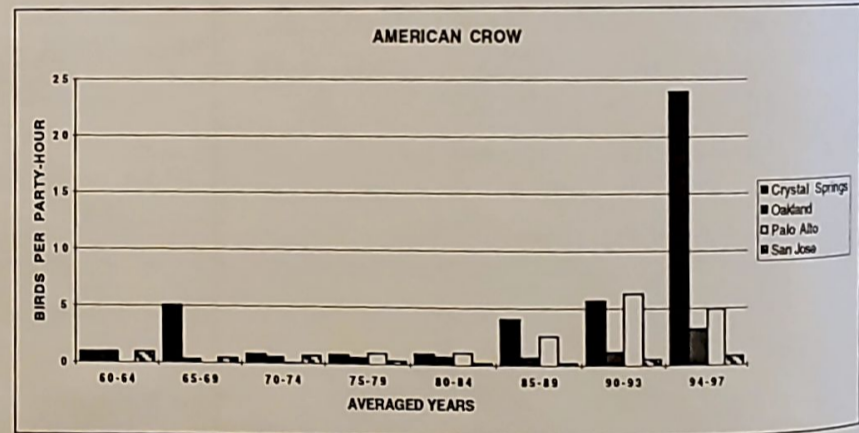
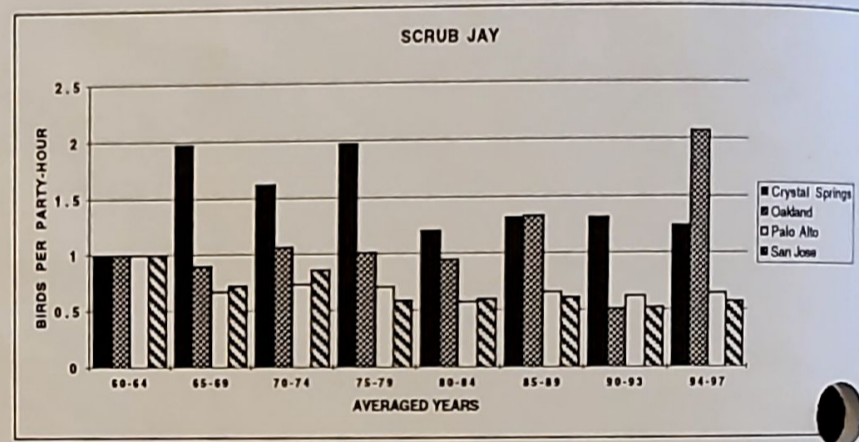
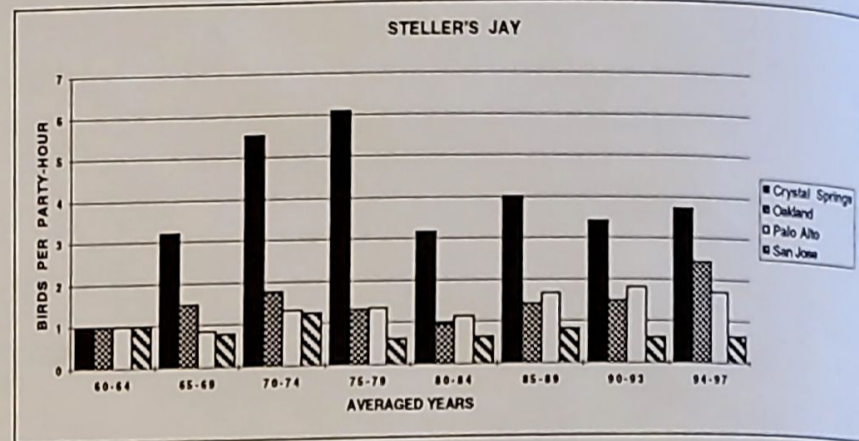
Tom and I discussed these and related notions one afternoon, and I blundered into his trap as he deftly steered me into a preliminary investigation of this “bigger picture.” As the only comprehensive data available, we settled on five local Christmas bird counts, San Jose, Palo Alto, Crystal Springs, Oakland, and San Francisco, from 1960 through 1997. (Unfortunately, because the San Francisco count was defunct for twenty years that data turned out to be unusable.) To accurately reflect changes in the local urban/suburban bayside conditions, each species included would be a stay-at-home, every day species, with little migratory component to their winter populations. Ultimately I selected 33 species for analysis, though I cheated a bit, including Turkey and Ring-necked Pheasant from pure curiosity. A couple of the species selected, Band-tailed Pigeon and Brown-headed Cowbird, have spotty winter populations that proved unreliable for analysis, leaving 29 species plotted and examined more thoroughly. Some (e.g., Scrub Jay) are of more value as controls than as of direct concern, although all are interesting and have a story to tell.

Several data manipulations were required to expose the underlying trends in the statistical scatter of the data. First, to minimize the effect of changes in counting effort, each count record was converted from total birds to birds per party-hour for that year. Next the data was averaged for five or four year intervals, which helped reduce the annual scatter. Data for each species was then normalized by comparing to some

reference-interval (usually 1960-64). Thus, each species is compared only to itself, with the reference set at 1.00. Finally, bar graphs of the normalized data were generated for each species in each count circle.

This article deals with the urban corvids - Scrub and Stellar's Jays, American Crow and Common Raven. From my neighborhood data, the Scrub Jay is common and little changed in twenty years, and Stellar's Jay does not occur there. Twenty-four years ago a crow in our neighborhood seemed unusual, and ravens caused great excitement. Now crows routinely search our lawn with brassy impunity, and ravens fly by regularly. Did I miss something twenty years ago, or is this a real, general change? What are the general trends in corvid abundance and distribution around the bay?

From the graphs, the Scrub and Stellar's Jay populations have indeed been reasonably stable (given the difficulties in interpreting Christmas bird count data, variations by a factor of two are considered large but not compelling.) Crow numbers too were fairly stable until the '90s and since the early 80's the raven population has exploded. The data clearly backs up the “gut feel” that in the bay area the smaller suburban before the middle '70s, they are now routine. Something changed.



A strong indication that ravens are indeed on the march came in 1987, when they nested in the NASA wind tunnel structure, a first for ravens breeding near the bay in Santa Clara County (SCCO). Subsequently, bayshore nests have

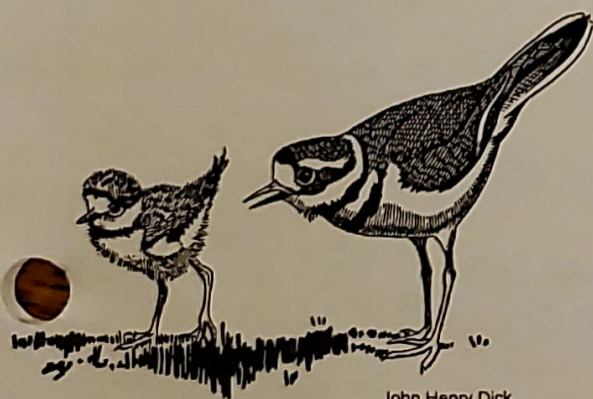


increased to at least three this year, with the birds regularly using power towers along the bay. The influx of ravens means either there is more of their preferred food than in the past, or some other bird loses - perhaps both. In addition, Ravens may have become more tolerant of man's presence. To me, they seem more approachable than twenty years ago.

How about them crows? If their food sources are being pressured by the ravens, they have a funny way of responding. The crow increases in three of four counts are dramatic, and indicate that something in the environment or in their own behavior has changed to favor them. Possibilities include an increase in suitable food, increase in mature trees for nesting and refuge, reduced use of pesticides in the urban/suburban setting, greater tolerance for the presence of crows and humans, and many others.

Because of their reputations as aggressive predators on nests and young, the rapid corvid population expansions raise concern for threatened and endangered species in the bay. Indeed, at Point Reyes it has been necessary to shroud nests of the Snowy Plover to prevent almost total loss of the eggs and young to ravens. How much pressure do the corvids put on local birds? Just what food sources are they exploiting? Is it the garbage dumps? If so, why did they continue to encroach after the Sunnyvale dump closed? There are lots of good studies possible here.

This study establishes that the eruption of crows and ravens in the last decade or so is very large. While that may not be a surprise, it shifts the interest from "how big?" to "what's the cause and effect?" These are difficult questions that will require a challenging level of investigation.



John Henry Dick

## 1997 Financial Report

The Observatory's improved financial picture at the end of 1996 allowed us to expand staff hours spent on research in the field. Grants and contracts continued to supply the bulk of our funding, however membership and fundraising showed an increase. Development costs include such one-time expenditures as design and implementation of our new logo and board training and development. 1997 was the first year of the California Fall Challenge and this exciting new event's potential is shown as a separate item. As always, our success in fundraising is due to the continuing support of our members and friends and we thank you for a great 1997.

—Janet Tashjian Hanson

### Income

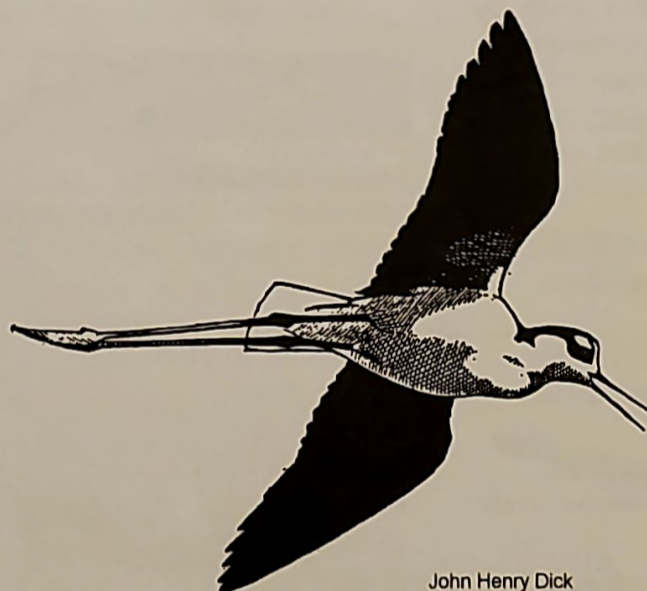
Research grants and contracts	41,390
Education Program	485
Membership	8,345
California Fall Challenge	7,150
Unrestricted gifts	3,559
Miscellaneous	209

**Total** 61,138

### Expenses

Research Program	31,399
Education Program	270
Member Services	1,753
Development	4,829
California Fall Challenge	2005
Operations	11,839
Other	10,922

**Total** 63,017



John Henry Dick

## A Special Thank You

John and Nena Padley of San Mateo have contributed generously to the Observatory, earning the title of First Patrons. This will become part of our Endowment Fund, helping to support the long-term effort of our research and education programs on the birds of the San Francisco Bay area. On behalf of the Board of Directors, the staff and the members of SFBBO, we send our sincere thanks to John and Nena.



# SFBBO Updates

## High Sierras

Provided the snow actually clears out this year, we depart early Saturday morning from Pmecrest, birding our way through several life zones to Sonora Pass at 9,624 feet! In the afternoon we will bird the Mono Lake area, camping above Lee Vining on Saturday night. Sunday we will bird the high country of Tuolumne Meadows, going over Tioga Pass for breathtaking views of the high country of Yo~mite. We will focus our efforts on high country specialties such as Pine Grosbeak and Rosy Finch, eastern Sierra specialties Pinyon Jay and Black-billed Magpie, searching Mono Lake for any early migrants.

**Dates:** August 7-9, 1998

**Leaders:** Tom Ryan and Gjon Hazard

**Cost:** Members \$50/Nonmembers \$65  
(price includes leaders, itinerary, checklists, and maps, it does not include entrance fees, food or lodging)

## Kayak Tour of Bair Island

Join us on these low tide kayak tours of Redwood Creek and the sloughs surrounding Bair Island. Thousands of shorebirds pause on the mudflats of the south bay to refuel on their way south. By special arrangement with Riptides and Rapids Kayaking. No experience necessary. Limited group size. Birding ethics observed. Advanced registration required.

**Dates:** Sunday, Sept 6, meet at 5PM, launch at 6 for full-moon/low-tide paddle.

Sunday, Sept. 20, meet at 7AM; launch at 8 on a rising low tide, peaks at 1:30PM.

Sunday, Oct. 4, meet at 3PM, launch at 4, for a full-moon/lowtide paddle.

**Cost:** Members \$60/Nonmembers \$75

## Bair Island Wildlife Surveys

Accompany two SFBBO biologists on our monthly wildlife surveys of Bair Island. Search for the return of herons, egrets and terns to their former nesting grounds on the island. Observe harbor seals as they lounge in the cordgrass. These surveys will be conducted at high tide both on foot and in our 13' powered inflatable boat. All trips depart from the Redwood City Marina. Call for departure times.

Reserve your space soon as each trip is limited to only 4 participants. Proceeds supplement FWS funds in support of this project.

**Dates:** July 20, August 21, September 19, October 17, November 17, and December 17

**Cost:** Members \$35/Nonmembers \$50

## Klamath and Tule Lake

This repeat of last year's spectacular trip will commence in the shadow of Mt. Shasta for another look for Black-backed Woodpecker. Continuing on to Butte Valley, we expect numerous birds of prey, including Ferruginous and Rough-legged hawks. The day finishes at Lower Klamath NWR for looks at Snow and Ross' geese, plus Tundra Swan and Sandhill Crane. On Sunday, we will check Tule Lake for wintering Bald Eagles, then conclude the trip at Lava Beds National Monument, searching for Pinyon Jays, Mountain Bluebird and Golden Eagle.

**Date:** November 6-8

**Leaders:** Tom Ryan and Gjon Hazard

**Cost:** Members \$60/Nonmembers \$75  
(price includes leaders, itinerary, checklists, and maps, it does not include entrance fees, food or lodging)

## Birding Day Trips

Look for more information on these upcoming trips in our Fall Brochure of Activities, coming to you this summer.

### Point Reyes

September 26, 1998

Leader: TBA

Cost: \$25/35\*

### Elkhorn Slough/Moss Landing

October 10, 1998

Leader: Tom Ryan

Cost: \$20/30\*

### East Bay Shoreline Refuges

November 14, 1998

Leader: Ed Pandolfino

Cost: \$15/25\*

### Los Banos National Wildlife Refuge

December 5, 1998

Leader: TBA

Cost: \$20/30\*

\* Non Members Cost

# Fall Classes

## HawkWatch: the Fall Migration

Here in the Bay Area, we have access to one of the great migration observation spots on the West Coast. The Marin Headlands are the source of the great thermal elevator that southbound raptors ride skyward before crossing the Gate. It is also home base to the Golden Gate Raptor Observatory's team of Hawkwatchers. Joe will help us understand raptor identification, behavior, migration ecology and conservation, then lead us on a trip to the Hill during the height of fall migration.

**Instructor:** Joe Didonato, Head Naturalist, East Bay Regional Park District.

**Class meeting:** Thursday, October 1 and 8; 7:30 - 9:30PM

**Field trip:** Sunday, October 11, 10AM - 2PM (bring a lunch); location: the Marin Headlands

**Cost:** Member \$40/Nonmember \$55

## Shorebirds of the Pacific Flyway

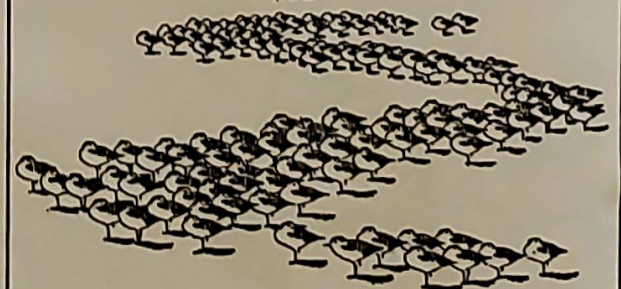
The class time will cover introduction to our local shorebird subgroups, with emphasis on identification using slides, and on shorebird natural history. John received his Masters under H. Cogswell and now leads field trips to shorebird breeding areas in Alaska.

**Instructor:** John Luther, Instructor, College of Alameda, Oakland Museum. Field trip leader for Field Guides, Nature Company Betchart Expeditions.

**Class meeting:** Wednesday, September 30 and October 7, 7-9PM

**Field trip:** Saturday, October 10, 9AM - 1PM; Hayward Shoreline

**Cost:** Member \$50/Nonmember \$65



John Henry Dick



## Our thanks to these supporters of the Observatory....

### Memberships

We welcome the following new and returning members of the SFBBO (February, March, April):

Regina Anavy, Paul and Joan Armer, John and Colleen Arnold, Laurie Bechtler, Robert Berka, Peg Bernucci, Barbara Borthwick, William Bousman, Robert Bowman, Ted Brannon, Richard and Pat Carlson, Steve Chance, Robert and Susan Christiansen, Chris and Tom Clough, Nicholas Coiro, Irene Contreras, Charles and Joan Coston, Kathleen and Derek Currall, Kate Curry, Steve and Robin Dakin, Adrian del Nevo, Ph.D., Joan DeWitt, Melissa Ferreira, Joanna Flanders, Al Fleischman, Leslie Flint, Christina Garcia, Marie Gordon, Theresa Grieve, Roger Harris, Grace Hattori, Chip Haven, Lillian Henningsen, Vicki Hoffman/Trabold, Barbara Houghton, Sue Hunt, Amy Hutzel, June Hymas, Kumi Ishida, Debbie Jenkins, Rosemary and Bjorn Jorde, Robert Juhl, Edwin Laak, Shirley Larson, David Lavorando, Anadel Law, Julie and Robert MacLean, Larry Manning, Barbara Margolis,

Nora Monette, Thomas Moore, Thomas Myers, Frances and Leroy Nelson, Bess Nericcio, Phil and Vi Nisonger, Ellen Noble, Pam Ogasawara, Donna Olsen, Doug Padley, Ed Pandolfino, Ben Pless, Peter Radcliff, Steve and Heather Rottenborn, Steve Rutledge, Marguerite Ryan, Byron Ryono, Susan Sandstrom, Mary Schaefer, Marilyn and Phil Scowcroft, Marc Seal, Elaine Senf, Debbie Shearwater, Chris Shoemaker, Sandra Skolnik, Kendric and Smith, Scott and Gayle Spencer, Kappy Sprenger, Paul Stevens, Vivek Tiwari, Richard and Vivian van Dijk, Judith Wagner, Ph.D., David Weintraub, Estelle Weiss, K. Clark White, Peter White, Perry Whittle, Kermit Wilson, Allan Wofchuck, Nick Yatsko, Lou and Jean Young.

#### Wish List

Drawings of local birds and wildlife  
Bookcases  
A rack for our pickup truck

### Contributions

Our special thanks to these Contributors to the Observatory (February, March, April): Regina Anavy, John and Colleen Arnold, Richard Baird, Laurie Bechtler, Peg Bernucci, Edith Black, Floyd Carley, Steve Chance, Irene Contreras, Charles and Joan Coston, Charles Davies, Adrian del Nevo, Al Fleischman, Leslie Flint, Grace Hattori, Chip Haven, Jan Hintermeister, Richard Horrigan, June Hymas, Kumi Ishida, Rosemary and Bjorn Jorde, Robert Juhl, Goerge Kenyon, Shirley Larson, David Lavorando, Anadel Law, Larry Manning, Gary Meyer, Marty Murphy, Thomas Myers, George and Martha Oetzel, John and Nena Padley, Jennifer and Bill Parkin, Pat Pauch, Steve Rutledge, Byron Ryono, Marc Seal and Family, Chris Shoemaker, Martin Sidor, Robin W. Smith, Vivek Tiwari, David and Natalie Weber, William Wilson, Lou and Jean Young.

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*Executive Director*  
Tom Ryan  
*Senior Biologist*  
Robin Dakin  
*Biologist*  
Jennifer Parkin  
*Biologist*  
Jesse Suckow  
*Biologist*

### 1998 Research Interns

Kiera Freeman  
Howatt P. King  
Brian Ryckewaert

### Research Associates

Howard Cogswell, Ph.D.  
Janis Buchanan  
Daniel Kluza  
Sue Macias  
Emilie Strauss  
Peg Woodin

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Susie Formenti

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W. David Shuford - *Point Reyes Bird Observatory*  
Nils Warnock, Ph.D. - *University of Nevada, Reno*

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.

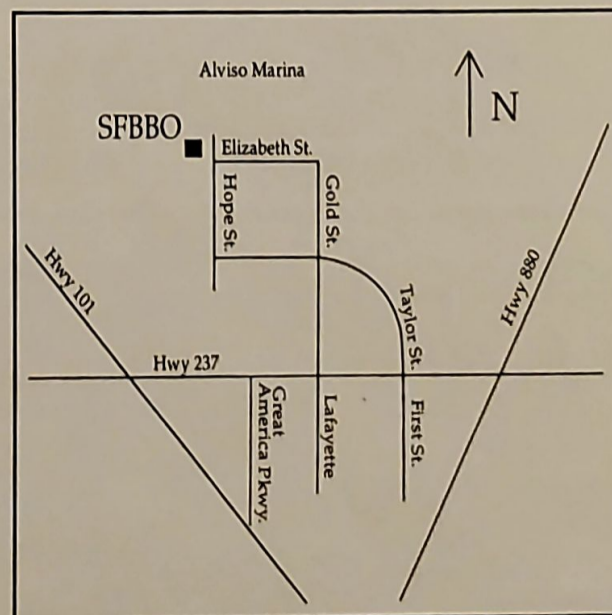
The Board meetings are open to the membership. Call the Observatory office for dates and times.

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Life: \$400 Contributing: \$100



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Individual: \$25  
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# California Gull Surveys: The Alviso Colony

by Howatt King, 1998 Colonial Waterbird Program Intern

Sunday, May 19 marked the start of the 1998 field season with our first incubation survey at the California Gull breeding colony on the former Knapp Property, now part of the S.F. Bay National Wildlife Refuge. Biologists, interns and volunteers had to sludge [that is. ..slog plus trudge] past saturated levee roads, portage across mounds of dredge spoils, and endure an aerial bombardment of protective parents before the day was over. When all was said and done, participants were covered in mud, poop and smiles, telling a story of a successful survey.

The "Knapp" is one of five California Gull breeding colonies in south San Francisco Bay, monitored by SFBBO since 1980. Participants paired up to collect scientific data on breeding numbers, clutch sizes, and distribution. A small enclosure within the colony was repaired for use in studying nest density and to contain hatchlings as candidates for the banding program slated for late May. Banding will aid in determining survivorship as monitoring of the colony continues year to year.

Historically California Gulls breed further inland, typically near lakes, reservoirs and rivers, preferring islands for breeding and nesting. Gulls are opportunistic by nature, so foraging grounds are generally nearby to within 60 km. The gulls of the breeding colony at the Knapp use neighboring land fills and saline-rich evaporating ponds, that culture thousands of pounds of brine flies and brine shrimp, for their primary food source during breeding, chick-rearing and fledging.

Counts were performed by three teams (Sue Macias and Kiera Freeman, Karlene Stoker and Melissa Ferriera, Cheryl Millet and Marjorie Siegel) covering four sub-regions within the colony. Two teams, (Adrian del Nevo and Robin Dakin, Tom Ryan and Kim Briones) conducted reproductive measurements within the enclosure; another team was responsible for rebuilding the enclosure (Terry Stoker and myself). For all these surveys, time is of the essence. Biologists Tom Ryan and Adrian del Nevo kept a close eye on the amount of time spent among the nests to limit the amount of disturbance imposed upon the colony. Reproductive measurements and counts were completed in one hour.

Counts revealed 3,281 nests, representing roughly 72% of the total nests counted in five monitored South Bay colonies to date. The average clutch size of 2.34 was calculated after counting 7,679 individual eggs. Total numbers for the Knapp are slightly up from last year.

Overall the effort out at the Knapp "... was a huge success and its execution flawless" reported Tom Ryan after everyone returned sun baked and muddied from the event. Thanks goes out to everyone who participated, especially our volunteers, whose contributions and enthusiasm keep the SFBBO going. Keep up the good work and we'll keep you posted on the progress of the study.



From left, Sheryl Millet, Howatt King and Adrian del Nevo banding gull chicks at the Knapp.

(Sue Macias)



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