



# The Stilt

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The Newsletter of the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory

## Streamside Songbirds

As eastern skies start to lighten over the Diablo Range, SFBBO biologists Sherry Hudson and Gina Barton push their way through the coyote brush near the Guadalupe River, to check on mist nets opened in pre-dawn darkness. The dawn chorus is just warming up and they can hear sparrows, towhees, warblers, and chickadees.

Sherry carefully extricates the first bird of the morning, a Lincoln's Sparrow and pops it into a small soft sack. In a few minutes, she will place a tiny numbered aluminum band on its left tarsus. Then she will weigh it, measure its fat load, record breeding condition, and finally determine its age and sex.

This is a special bird, because it is the first bird captured and banded in SFBBO's new project, **Streamside Songbirds**.

And this is a special site, because it is not a remote stretch of riparian habitat, but in fact is less than 500 feet from high tech buildings within Silicon Valley's famous

Golden Triangle, delineated by freeways 880, 101 and 237.

As development expands in San Jose and remaining open space decreases, it is critical to understand how best to manage our riparian areas. Working with the Santa Clara Basin Watershed Management Initiative has shown us just how difficult it can be to accommodate all the beneficial uses that our creeks provide. In particular, it is difficult to reconcile flood protection with wildlife values. SFBBO's Coyote Creek Field Station (CCFS) is on property owned by the City of San Jose and also is a flood control project of the Santa Clara Valley Water District. Recent analysis of our ten years of bird study in this overflow channel indicates that certain flood management practices may actually increase the abundance and diversity of birds using the area. This is an exciting discovery that may improve flood and other riparian management practices in urban areas all over the region and country.

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SFBBO Biologist Gina Barton examines a California Towhee before releasing it.

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*"Fun" raising at its finest*



San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory  
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## STREAMSIDE SONGBIRDS

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California Partners in Flight recognizes the important role riparian habitat plays in the conservation of our neotropical migrants, and the rapid loss of much of this habitat across North America. Many low elevation riparian habitats have been lost to urban development and accompanying flood control practices. Water management agencies across the West must cope with the conflicting pressures of flood protection and wildlife protection. Our findings will allow us to provide managers with guidelines for improving avian habitat quality in urban riparian areas.

This work is generously funded by:

- City of San Jose Watershed Grant Program
- National Fish and Wildlife Foundation
- Santa Clara Valley Water District

An outstanding feature of the funding includes presentation of our findings at meetings and in publications. SFBBO biologists Alvaro Jaramillo and Sherry Hudson have already presented preliminary results at the Riparian Habitat and Floodplains Conference in Sacramento in March and the Cooper's Ornithological Meeting in Albuquerque, New Mexico in April 2001.

— Janet T. Hanson

### *In Memory of Dr. Henry G. Weston, Jr.*

*We were saddened to hear of the passing of Dr. Weston, a long-time SFBBO supporter, in Kings Beach, California. Dr. Weston was a faculty colleague of Dr. Richard Mewaldt at San Jose State, where he taught biology from 1955-1988. He wrote Handbook of Birds of California, first published in 1963 and still in print today. An avid bird bander, Dr. Weston compiled an amazing 51 years of banding. His family has graciously donated his tools to SFBBO, including a wooden banding kit, beautifully made by Mike Rigney and similar in all respects to those still in use at CCFS. The Observatory sends its sincere condolences to Dr. Weston's family. We and the birds have lost a good friend.*

## Newsletter Banding Station Report

Thanks to the efforts of a group of volunteers and staff, we expect to have all the banding data entered and up to date in the banding database. When that occurs we will be able to easily track both individuals as they are recaptured in North and South America and track trends at CCFS. Thanks to **Rita Colwell, Helen Green, Sue Macias, Les Chibana, Juliette Bryson** and **Vicki Silvas-Young** for their dogged efforts to end the data backlog. Extra special thanks to **Irene Beardsley** for getting the database up and running smoothly, entering a load of data herself and for overall data management.

Here are a few facts and figures from the banding station to whet your appetite:

- 764 new birds have been banded at the banding station since the first of the year.
- Our new banders have had a chance to get to know a few individual birds very

well this season; 345 banded birds have been caught in the nets this year.

- We are looking forward to a few new feathered faces at the banding station: of the 69 species that were banded there last year, 52 or 75% have been caught so far this year.

The Spring Bander Refresher Workshop was offered in March to our veteran crew, to review changes in data taking, keep skills sharp, and enjoy some well-earned comradery. An April work weekend brought out volunteers and staff to upgrade nets, poles and clear out net lanes.

Our Membership and other interested folks are invited to join our staff for a banding demonstration at the Field Station. We offer them every third Wednesday morning of the month. Call in advance for more information.

### *Class of 2001 Graduates Take to the Nets*

Congratulations to the six new banders who made it through the training program and kept their commitment to maintain their skills by banding twice a month. You have joined a remarkable and unique volunteer effort. The new banders, (you may recognize some returning faces) are **Juliette Bryson, Jodi Isaacs, Julie Klingmann, Yvette Leung, Allen Royer, and Debbie Wong**. Our heart-felt thanks go out to all of you for taking on this commitment and to veteran banders **Rita Colwell, Vicki Silvas-Young** and **Arleen Feng** for all the hard work that went into making this a first-class training. Thanks to **Danielle O'Grady** and **Ken Burton**, NABC trainers for assisting with bander training. The Class of 2001 celebrated with a field trip to the Big Sur Ornithology Lab, thanks to the initiative and effort of Graduate **Allen Royer**.

# Staff Migrations

Here at SFBBO we take pride in the staff, volunteers and interns that leave SFBBO to go on to careers in wildlife conservation and management. It can be, however, extremely difficult to lose co-workers who have become close friends, with whom we've bonded while kayaking in salt ponds, or bending, heads close together, over skimmer nests, banding birds or spreadsheets. We try to take the losses graciously and wish them the very best of luck as they pursue careers and hopefully make continued contributions to the avian world.

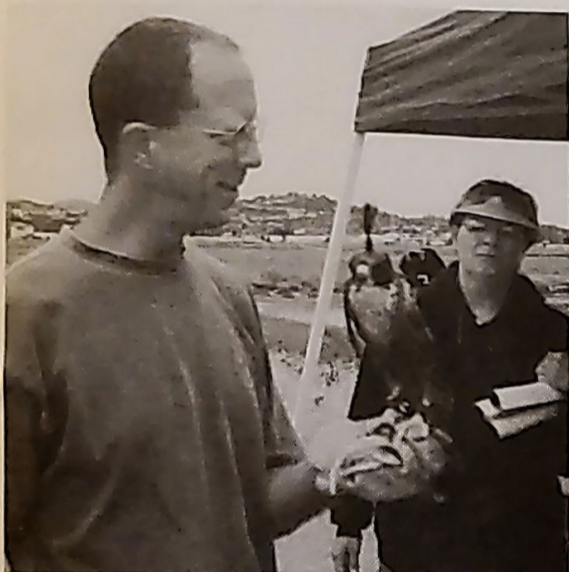


PHOTO BY J. HANSON

Doug Bell with his young Peregrine, Grommet

**DOUG BELL**, Ph.D. fulfilled a long-term dream by accepting a faculty position at California State University, Sacramento. As he finishes up his first year in academia, we hope he's helping to create the next generation of wildlife biologists.

Now a graduate student at Virginia Tech, **DANIELLE LEFER**'s work involves conservation of the endangered Piping Plover.

In email received recently, we learned that **CHRIS OTHAL** has accepted a position with the Fish and Wildlife Service in Carlsbad, California. Congratulations, Chris!

**CHERYL MILLETT** was accepted to graduate school at Humboldt State, with the intent of focusing on Snowy Plovers. Before leaving SFBBO and the bay area,

she wrote up a few thoughts, which we share with you here:

## *A message from Cheryl Millett, outgoing SFBBO biologist -*

There's good news and bad news for me. The good news is that I've been accepted into a Master's program at Humboldt State University and have started working there on a Snowy Plover project this spring.

The bad news is that I can't figure out how to commute from Arcata to Alviso and so I've got to stop working at SFBBO. This is no easy thing to do because SFBBO and the people here inspired me to pursue this path studying birds in the first place.

Janet Hanson started it all when she wrote on the bottom of my membership renewal letter, "How would you like to help us monitor herons and egrets at Lake Merritt?" That sounded marvelous to me, especially since that was down the street from my apartment, so I came to a Volunteer Orientation with Tom Ryan and Robin Dakin to sign up. That's where I found out about all of the volunteer opportunities at SFBBO: Heron and Egret Monitoring, Gull and Tern Monitoring, Gull and Tern Colony Walkthroughs, the Avian Disease Prevention Program, and at that time a Loon Monitoring project. They all were so enticing that I jumped in and tried them all that year. Not only were the programs themselves exciting, but the staff and volunteers at the Observatory kept kindling the fire.

Volunteering at SFBBO made me realize I wanted to study birds, and it also inspired me to return to school to study biology. I've been lucky to have

been able to work at SFBBO since the end of 1998 while working on that undergraduate degree and I've had the great fortune to work with a truly inspiring group of people here.

From volunteer board members like Gerry Ellis and Lou Young who have worked so hard to get the trailer up to snuff so that the office can move in, to Vicki Silvas-Young who is dedicated to the banding program, to Jan Hintermeister who is a wonderful spokesperson for SFBBO. And who could forget the many words of praise heard from members who went on field trips like Wine, Wildflowers and Woodpeckers with former board president Dick Carlson and Pat Carlson? Or all the vital computer wizardry of George Oetzel and Irene Beardsley?

And of course there are far too many volunteers to mention, though they all deserve it for all of their hard work and humor under duress. All I can say is that no Avian Disease Prevention Program field season is complete without a lot of help from Kar and Terry Stoker, who both tie a mean knot and tell a great story while going beyond the call to get sick and injured birds. And no Colonial Waterbird Monitoring season is complete without the consistently excellent data gathered from volunteers like Laurie Bechtler, Susan

*Continued on page 4*



PHOTO BY A. CLARKE

Cheryl Millett

## STAFF MIGRATIONS

Continued from page 3

Sandstrom, Dr. Howard Cogswell, Bob Richmond, and Phil and Pat Gordon. And of course there have been those who are always available to help on those last-minute trips to gull and tern colonies and who never flinch at closing and opening the dreadful doors to the Observatory, like Chris Illes, Charles Coston and Sue Macias.

But a large part of what makes my leaving work at SFBBO bad news is that it means I'm unable to see the rest of the staff who have truly been energizing. Janet Hanson not only does all of her executive work, but she also has helped me along considerably on my path and she cuts a mean swath in the field as well. Janet's able leadership has secured the foundations of the Observatory and led it to this wonderful position where the staff and membership can carefully reflect on the past and plan future efforts. It is a very exciting time for SFBBO and I will be sorry to miss it.

Doug Bell, Tom Ryan and Robin Dakin taught me quite a bit about what it's like to work well in the field. Al Jaramillo has been very generous with his amazing wealth of knowledge about bird identification and bird lore. Sherry Hudson and Gina Barton have amazed me with their banding acumen, their ability to maneuver through rough terrain while stringing up nets flawlessly, and their good humor while doing so in the darkness of early morning. Sue Macias has been generous with her extensive knowledge of the local area, the birds and botany here and how to tell when that rain cloud should make you run to the truck. Anna Clarke has astonished me with her ability to not only do what I used to do in the office, but to go beyond that, conjuring up bigger goals for SFBBO and working to see them through.



It's been a life-changing experience for me volunteering and working at SFBBO and I'll miss it and everyone here, but I hope to keep in touch. I'll surely be a part of the California Fall Challenge, putting together a team here in Humboldt County. And most of all, I hope maybe some of the enthusiasm SFBBO inspired in me comes through here and inspires some of you to become more involved in the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory. It's addictive in the best of ways.

### INCOMING!

To our great good fortune, we have added a couple of key players to the Observatory's staff. We look forward to introducing you to them at our Annual Meeting, October 14, at the South Bay Yacht Club here in Alviso. Save the date!

**ANNA CLARKE**, our new Director of Development, grew up in Los Altos, where her management skills brought a small neighborhood bookstore to profitability. Surprisingly, she is also a trained bird bander, and has run MAPS (Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survival) stations in the Midwest. We are unbelievably lucky to have found Anna, who can manage databases and do banding demonstrations, and knock our rough edges off at the same time.

**GINA BARTON** hails from Oklahoma, by way of Georgia. She has an undergraduate degree in biology and is also MAPs trained. Gina has jumped right into our Streamside Songbird program, expending much physical and mental energy at ungodly early hours. Contributions to her giant field "snack bag" always welcome!

And **SHERRY HUDSON**, who is heading up the Landbird Program:



Hi! I am excited and a little relieved to have successfully completed my first few months as the new Landbird Biologist for SFBBO. So far I have been familiarizing myself with the Coyote Creek Field Station and its operation, as well as getting to know by way around the office in Alviso.

As interested members you are probably wondering who I am. I received an M.S. degree in Zoology from the Department of Biological Sciences at the University of Idaho in May of 2000. The title of my thesis "Landbird use of riparian areas in the Mid-Columbia River Basin during fall migration." Prior to graduate school I worked seasonally for both the Mid-Columbia River National Wildlife Refuge Complex located in eastern Oregon and Washington, and the Point Reyes Bird Observatory's Landbird Program. I have also been involved in bird research projects in Belize and Guatemala with the Manomet Observatory and with the Peregrine Fund. Finally, this past summer I conducted Snowy Plover surveys at Owens Dry Lakebed in the eastern Sierra of California with PRBO's Coastal Program.

I hope to contribute my skills and experiences to the Landbird Program at SFBBO, and I know that I will continue to gain valuable experiences through my work here. Please call me up or send me an email if you are interested in chatting about the Program. And until we meet, happy birding!



# Dust is Flying in the Bird Observatory

Thanks to three volunteers, **Sandy Moore**, **Mary Ann Danielson**, and **Bob Hole**, and able assistance from **Pete MacInery** and **Nick Neely**, some of the resources of the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory will soon become more available to members and local scholars.

Over the years, members of the Bird Observatory have donated many books, journals, specimens, slides and reprints collections. So many in fact, that three outstanding volunteers have rolled up their sleeves and begun tackling the task of organizing, cataloging, and labeling our collection. Sandy Moore is bravely whipping the image collection into shape, Mary Ann Danielson is working on the specimen collection, and Bob Hole is tackling the print collection.

Bob joined SFBBO via the website early this year and promptly offered his services as a volunteer. He can be found elbow deep in the stacks many Saturdays. We are very lucky to have an experienced ornithological collections manager taking the library in hand. Thus far the journals and books have been organized and duplicates removed for the first time in many years. Many of the duplicates are the result of the merger with CCRS. The print collection includes over 500 monographs and more than 50 Journal titles, some with complete runs dating back to the early 20th century.

While Bob dispels disorder in the print collection, Sandy is tackling the enormous number of images that you have generously shared with SFBBO and CCRS over the years. Your slides and photographs are used by scientists, area educators and local researchers, and of course, birders! Sandy has been a member of SFBBO since 1997. After 25 years of volunteering at her church she decided it was time for a change and SFBBO is the happy beneficiary of her persistence and experience.

Mary Ann Danielson has taken on perhaps the most complicated part of preserving the resources of SFBBO by agreeing to

organize the specimen collection. SFBBO has a permit not only to salvage carcasses, but to keep and display specimens for educational and research purposes. Mary Ann has cataloged the specimens and is organizing a plan to better preserve them. Specimens are important tools for researchers, bander training and education. Our mounted specimen of a Clapper Rail is currently on display in the Alviso Library.

On a personal note, watching the library take a more coherent shape has been inspiring. It has been a delight to share Bob and Sandy's discoveries in the boxes and shelves that we have idealistically referred to as the library. The Observatory has become a repository and a place for people to share understanding of this region's remarkable ecosystems. The shelves of beautifully illustrated journals remind me that we are part of a long scientific endeavor, and the files of reprints remind me that we have made significant contributions to that endeavor.

Some of the subjects in the slide collection include: an anonymous volunteer catching a quick catnap between surveys on Bair Island, photos of Burrowing Owl Banding, re-

vegetation sites, Clapper Rail Surveys, presentations by Dr. Mewaldt, banding demonstrations, and avian botulism boat rides. Countless slides of the birds that set all of our hearts alight form an important part of the collection and are a wonderful tool for teaching banding and identification skills. While many of the slides are credited to a myriad of volunteer photographers, many are anonymous. Seeing the slide collection has brought it home to me that SFBBO's survival over the last 20 years has been a communal effort, fueled by a passion for birds and the understanding that scientific research is as necessary to conservation as advocacy and legislation.

Mary Ann, Sandy and Bob recently joined the scientists at the Observatory on a visit to the California Academy of Sciences to learn how our unique collections can benefit from the expertise of the librarians there. The biggest need in the library continues to be a photocopier that can handle large documents and an affordable service agreement to maintain it. We look forward to keeping you informed of the library's progress and celebrating the re-opening of the library at the annual meeting in October.

— Anna Clarke



Enjoying Thai after our staff trip to California Academy of Sciences (left to right) Janet Hanson, Mary Ann Danielson, Al Jaramillo, Gina Barton, Sherry Hudson, Cheryl Millett, Sue Macias, Gerry Ellis, Anna Clarke, Bob Hole.

Inset: Sandy Moore in Costa Rica.

## SPRING ALMANAC -

### DECEMBER 17TH

Black-backed Wagtail first spotted in Alviso, by David McIntire during the Christmas Count

### FEBRUARY 20TH

Barn Owl returns to newly renovated nest box. (thanks, Peg and Becky!)

### FEBRUARY 26TH

First blue-billed Ruddy Duck spotted in salt ponds

### MARCH 15TH

Cliff Swallows return en masse to nest in abandoned cannery building

### MARCH 25TH

First brood patch detected during banding at CCFS, on a Chestnut-backed Chickadee

### APRIL 22ND

American Avocet pair screeching at joggers on slough levee, apparently defending an ill-placed nest

### MAY 11TH

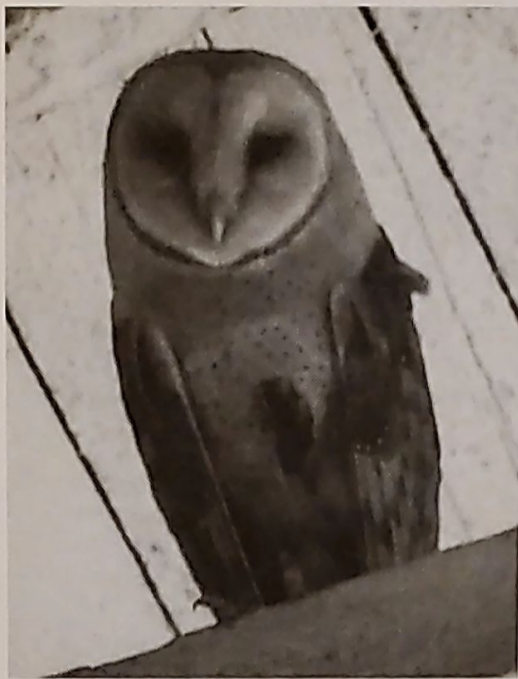
First Gadwall ducklings of the season, paddling in the SFBBO pond

### MAY 29TH

House Finches fledge brood of three inside the Cannery (thus revealing condition of roof)

### JUNE 15TH

Four young Barn Owls receive evening flight lessons over Alviso skyline



## Stock Donations are Appreciated

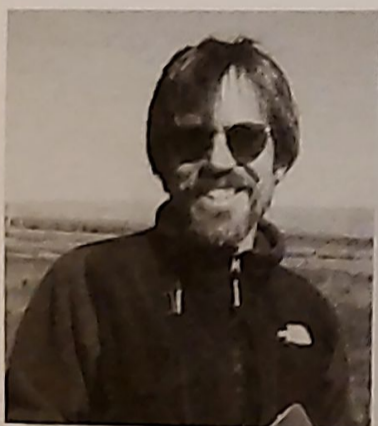
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## VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT ON ... PAUL STEVENS

"I've been helping out on the Observatory's Palo Alto marsh rail count for 5 years now. It's been a great excuse to get out onto the boardwalks and observe how the rails adapt to having their whole habitat changed by the high-

est tides of the year. While this gives us a great opportunity to observe and count rails, it also gives their predators easier hunting conditions. Often there are some interesting "dramas" that unfold while we're there. One such memorable event was when we were trying to cheer on a little Black Rail that was being chased by a Great Blue Heron.

Year-to-year I've seen it both swarming and nearly devoid of rails; more likely due to weather than true numbers. But, I always enjoy the opportunity to re-connect with some of the same volunteers from previous years. SFBBO always seems to attract some of the warmest and most friendly folks!"

## SFBBO - Online!

Thanks to the efforts of our WebMaster George Oetzel, supporters of SFBBO can now contribute online with a credit card, safely and securely. Contributions via the web site are fully tax-deductible. To request additional documentation of your contribution, please direct an email to [admin@sfbbo.org](mailto:admin@sfbbo.org).

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

## MEMBERSHIPS

We welcome the following new and returning members of the SFBBO.

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The Bird Observatory is located at 1290 Hope Street in Alviso in the historic Bayside Canning Co. building. If you would like to tour the Cannery or visit our Coyote Creek Field Station, please call in advance.

Board meetings are held monthly and are open to the Membership. Call the Observatory for dates and times.

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## SFBBO

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# Wine, Wildflowers, Woodpeckers... Wonderful!

Richard and Patricia Carlson have been supporting the work of SFBBO since 1993. Their level of personal contribution reached a new and wonderful high with the advent of their fundraising event, the Wine, Wildflower and Woodpecker Weekend. A limited number of guests are invited to spend the June weekend at their beautiful cabin near Tahoe City. Our greatest appreciation to the Carlsons, who help fund SFBBO's avian programs in a most delightful way.

San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory had its 3rd annual Wine, Wildflowers and Woodpeckers weekend June 1-3 at Lake Tahoe. The weather was almost too gorgeous – warm, windy and dry. We saw 93 species in 2 days, but the numbers were down from our usual 100 species.

We started with a “walk in the wind” at beautiful Blackwood and Ward canyons where the birds decided to take a nap, so we enjoyed walking through great fields of yellow Balsam Root, red Paintbrush and blue Larkspur. The hike whetted our appetites for dinner and “squirrelvision.” The flying squirrels swooped in on cue at 9 p.m. and we all sat there in the dark, watched them eat peanut butter and sipped our wine.

The next morning we got up early to find both birds and flowers. We started with Mountain Bluebirds at Hobart Mills where we also had excellent looks at a Williamson's Sapsucker, Brewer's Sparrows, and Tree Swallows.

We then hiked Sagehen Creek to see Wilson's and Yellow warblers, 2 Williamson's Sapsuckers, nighthawks, Pewee's, Olive-sided Flycatchers, Vesper Sparrows and Spotted Sandpipers. The flowers were in full bloom, with blue and yellow Lupine, Pink Shooting Stars and red Paintbrush.

On the way to Sierra Valley we stopped in Sierraville to see the most intensely blue Western Bluebirds we've ever seen along with a Cassin's Finch. Sierra Valley was dry, but we had great views of several Sandhill Cranes, several Bittern hiding with their beaks in the air right by the road, and hundreds of brilliant Yellow-headed Blackbirds. There were dozens of White-faced Ibis, but less than their usual 100's. We had great views of several Wilson's Phalaropes and also saw many Willet in breeding plumage and a Sage Thrasher.

Tahoe Birders, left to right: Art and Jan Carey, Sue LaTourrette, Gail Fulbeck, her husband Greg, and Dick Carlson. That's Twin Peaks in the background



We returned to Tahoe for home-baked lasagna, wine, more squirrelvision and early to bed.

The next morning we hiked into amazingly dry and warm Paige Meadows. We immediately saw a Black-Backed Woodpecker, along with a nesting Hairy Woodpecker and a Red-Breasted Sapsucker. There were flycatchers everywhere, mostly Pewees and Olive-Sided, but also good numbers of Dusky and Hammond's. We had excellent views of a tiny Calliope Hummingbird, flashing his ruby-red gorget at us, and a Nashville Warbler. Evening Grosbeaks and Western Tanagers were common. The meadows were a carpet of blue Camas Lily's and pink Shooting Stars.

Then we drove back to Ward Canyon where the Lazuli Buntings and Green Tailed Towhees finally appeared. Nothing quite like looking down on a turquoise Lazuli who is sitting in a field of yellow flowers. Unfortunately, “Oscar the Grouse” – the crazy, bicycle chasing Blue Grouse did not make one of his appearances. We did have a good look at Mountain Quail.

Then back to the cabin for the Carlson's famous Swedish pancakes. At the feeders we had Cassin's Finches, Steller's Jays, Mountain Chickadees, White and Red Breasted Nuthatch and dozens of Pine Siskin.

We could not relocate the Rose-Breasted Grosbeak that we found in Tahoe City on May 27. The Lewis Woodpeckers were at Martis and Truckee Assembly of God Church, but only 1 or 2 not the usual dozen. The Martis campground also had a few Pygmy Nuthatches and another Mountain Bluebird. We saw very few raptors; an Osprey being the highlight.

Altogether, another wonderful weekend of birding with friends at Tahoe.

~ Dick and Pat Carlson

**SFBBO** 

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