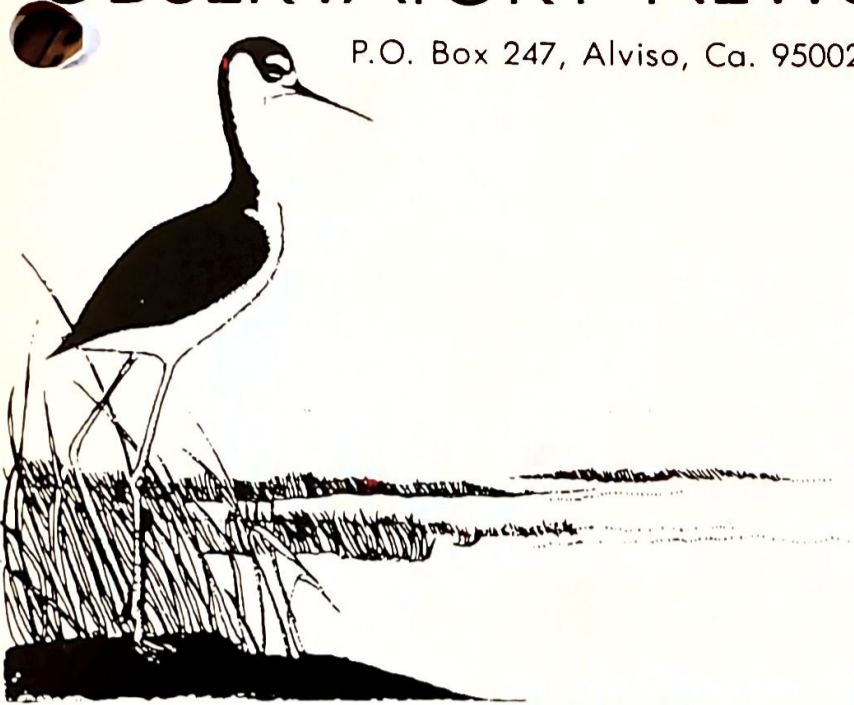


SAN FRANCISCO BAY BIRD OBSERVATORY NEWSLETTER

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Volume 5, Number 6

JUNE 1986

SFBBO 'BIG DAY' FUNDRAISER

By Paul L. Noble

"A Willet? We missed a Willet?", David and I asked each other. Oh well, so goes the unpredictability of a 'Big Day'.

Although the Willet failed to show up, we did manage to tally 157 species for the SFBBO 'Big Day' on April 26th, 1986. David Suddjian and myself were one of several teams participating in the fund raiser this year.

Our day began at Pescadero marsh at 3:00 pm, April 26th. Our scouting the week before had gone well, and with the many species we had staked out, we anticipated a good total. In the marsh we counted swallows, ducks and a variety of marsh species. From there we headed south along the San Mateo County coast searching for rocky shorebirds. A stop at Pigeon Point was to have produced many pelagics, but high winds reduced visibility. We would try again tomorrow morning. A stop at Ano Nuevo got us a Pygmy Nuthatch and Swanton Road netted us his Red-breasted kin. Two Snowy Plovers at Waddell beach were our only birds from Santa Cruz County. As the sun began to set we went back to Pescadero marsh for rails and called out a Virginia, but the Sora refused to answer. At dusk we drove to Canyon Road and got a Great Horned Owl and a Pygmy Owl to respond to our tapes. After a delicious dinner at Duarte's in Pescadero, it was time for the rest of our owls. Western Screech Owl came fairly easy at Butano State Park, but a dilligent search for a Northern Saw-whet Owl and Barn Owl went unrewarded. We had a long day ahead of us tomorrow, so we quit to get a few hours of sleep.

On the run again at 4:00 am we set out in pursuit of that Sora Rail at Pescadero marsh. This time it cooperated and called for us. We went back to Canyon Rd. for a chance at our best bird of the count, a Black-throated Sparrow that David had found on the Friday before. Almost on cue, the bird began to sing at sunrise. It was here that we found a variety of woodland birds: Olive-sided flycatcher, Chickadee, Swainson's Thrush and others. From here we drove along Cloverdale and Gazos Creek Roads and ticked Savannah and Grasshopper Sparrows. Most fortunate was a flock of Wood Ducks flying overhead. With slightly better visibility on the coast, we picked up some pelagics missed yesterday (But where was that Willet?). We left the coast for the hills shortly after 7:00 am.

On upper Alpine Rd., we listed Lark Sparrow and a Cooper's Hawk. Skyline Open Space Preserve provided House Wren and Western Tanager. David's sharp ears picked out a Townsend's Warbler by chip note on Langley Hill Rd., but the MacGillvrays Warblers were not here yet. Russian Ridge Open Space Preserve gave us our staked-out Horned Larks. Our next stop at Monte Bello Open Space Preserve would be a time consuming one, for we had to walk a distance to get a Solitary Vireo. We were getting a bit nervous that we would miss a Lazuli Bunting, but as luck would have it, one flew in just as we were heading back to the car. We didn't, however, find a Western Bluebird, which is a regular up here. A bad miss. A Red-shouldered Hawk flying over Foothill College was fortunate because we had none staked out elsewhere. My neighborhood provided us with two

specialties; a Hooded Oriole and a Yellow-billed Magpie.

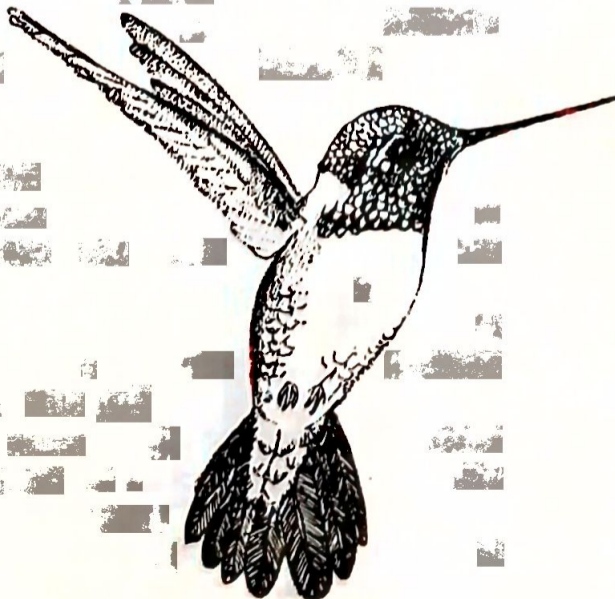
Time was growing short so we wasted no time getting out to the bay for additional shorebirds. We were, however, too late. The tide at Ravenswood National Wildlife Refuge was already far out and the shorebirds there were just specks even in our spotting scopes. It began to look grim for our missing Willet. Palo Alto Yacht Harbor was even worse with nary a shorebird in sight.

It was on to Mountain View Forebay where we got a Common Moorhen and a lingering Lesser Scaup. Most unfortunate was the absence of our staked-out Burrowing Owl. Perhaps the wind was keeping him in his burrow. The Palo Alto Flood Control Basin had a pair of Redhead and Matadero Creek riparian area, although giving us a Yellow-rumped Warbler, failed to offer up a Black-crowned Night Heron, Loggerhead Shrike or a Black-shouldered Kite. All three were stake-outs. Perhaps the wind was to blame. (the weather is always to blame).

Time was running out and so was our energy, so we opted for a chance at a Nuttall's Woodpecker along San Francisquito Creek in Palo Alto. It was a no-show, so we called it quits a little less than 24 hours since we began. The species were totaled. The results were checked and re-checked. The verdict was in. The final total came to 157 species.

In retrospect we did very well, although we both thought we had done better. We had some good birds on our list, but also some bad misses. (Oh Willet, where were you?!) But a 'Big Day' is a balance between good planning and sheer luck. Wait a bit longer at one spot for one species, and it may cost you three someplace else. You just never know. Whatever the final total, it mostly is a great deal of fun.

All the pledge totals are not in yet, but it should be close to \$1000. And it is the pledges that really make this 'Big Day' a success. Both David and I look forward to counting again next year. We are sure we can top this year's totals.



MORE BIG DAY NEWS

Reading Paul Noble's feature story, you realize that the sighting of 157 species in one day requires a lot of skill, knowledge of local habitats, and a cavalier attitude toward loss of sleep. Those of you who pledged a contribution can enjoy the experience vicariously when you receive David and Paul's species list plus a map showing the 17 locations in the three counties that they covered on the 'Big Day'.

Any armchair birder who didn't pledge can obtain this list and map by sending \$3.00 and a self-addressed stamped envelope to the SFBBO office.

Two other 'Big Day' teams racked up 100 or more species. The Gold Street Regulars, captained by Ginny Becchine and including Peg Woodin, Nancy Norvell and Peter Perrine, found an even 100. The Ladybirds, Betty Groce and Phyllis Browning, finished with 104. (For a donation of only \$1.00, Phyllis will read their list to you over the phone. Or promises not to read it to you, whichever you prefer.)

Our thanks to Paul and David, and to all of you whose pledges spurred us on when our feet flagged. We hope to see you in the field next year!

Phyllis Browning
Big Day Chairperson



PHOTO EXHIBIT

The Bear Valley Visitors Center at Point Reyes National Seashore will hold a photo exhibit of photo's by Rick Palmer from June 1-30. His photo's will consist of scenery and wildlife shots of the Central California coast from Point Reyes north to Point Lobos south.

BIG BIRDS

By Ed Roberts

How large are sharks? The answer: some of them are very large indeed. Basking Sharks (*Cetorhinus maximus*) and Whale Sharks (*Rhiodon typus*) of 45 feet in length have been caught. For those of you who want a scale of comparison, a 45-foot White Shark would run the length of the Observatory office. "Teeth identical to those of the Great White Shark (*Carcharodon*) have been dredged up that were over five inches long. A conservative estimate would put the shark who lost such a tooth in the neighborhood of 100 feet in length. The teeth involved are not fossils, but recent ones." (Roger Caras: Dangerous to man.

Such sharks are said to exist in the ocean deeps. Imagine a creature of such magnitude swimming in the depths of the Mariannas Trench. How would you catch one? Bait your hook with a frogman? A shark that size could eat a Volkswagon!

I can understand how a huge shark finds prey in the darkness of the deep ocean. Two-thirds of a shark's total brain mass is given to the sense of smell, but I questioned whether there was enough of a prey population to sustain such a monster. Then I was reminded that big lunker trout are not uncommonly found in the deeper portions of freshwater lakes. Perhaps these similar conditions exist in the ocean.

A few years ago, I saw a trout on display in the bottom of the double-doored soft drink case in the store at Wishon Reservoir. The lunker's snout touched one side of the 32-inch wide case and its tail was curled up along the opposite side. With its impressive girth to match its length, very little imagination was required to picture that big fish lying at the bottom of the lake, eating everything that came within its striking range. Perhaps there really are giant white sharks out there vacuuming the waters of the Pacific.

Birds do not have the pattern of continuous growth that fish do, but there are species of birds whose size is, nevertheless, quite impressive.

The Moas (*Dinornithidae*) were New Zealand ancestors of the present-day Kiwi. There were several species whose height reached nine or ten feet and who probably weighed in the neighborhood of 500 pounds. Large Ostriches, by comparison, are middleweights

at only 300 pounds. Moas were exterminated by the native Maoris some time before New Zealand was discovered by Europeans.

But, as they say, "You ain't seen nothin yet."

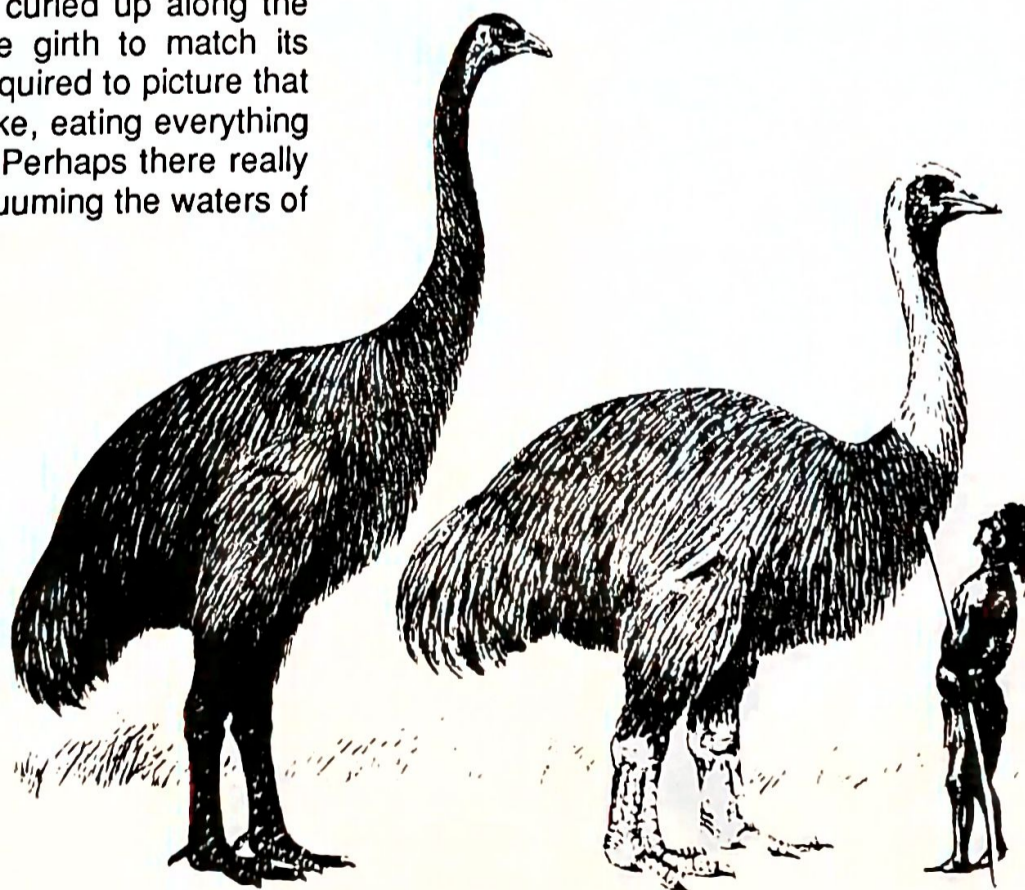
Consider the Elephant Bird of Madagascar. *Aepyornis*, the Elephant Bird, was no taller than a Moa, but its body was much more massive, weighing in at about 1000 pounds.

Fossilized Elephant Bird eggs have been found which are approximately one foot long. As with so many of our myths which originated and have been magnified from some originally factual creature or circumstance, the legend of the Roc, described by Marco Polo, most likely arose from the awe-inspiring Elephant Bird which truly requires no extension of the truth in order to impress us.

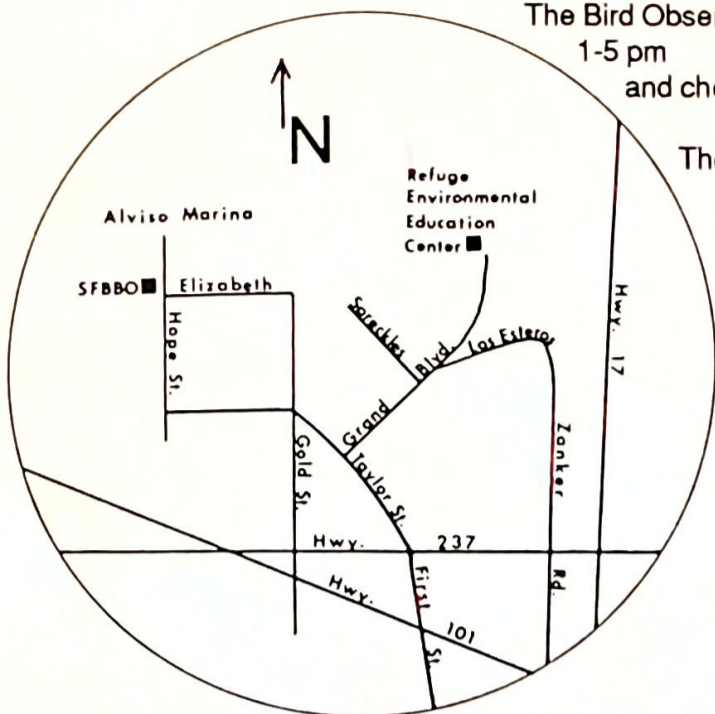
Look At Your Newsletter Mailing Label Closely

SFBBO depends on your continued support to carry out its many projects and studies. As a reminder when your membership renewal is due, check your newsletter mailing label for a clue. If it says, "Thank you for your support!" that's great. If it says, "Your Dues are Due", won't you please continue your support.

The largest moa *Dinornis maximum* and the largest Elephant bird *Aepyornis maximum*. Both birds lived until relatively recent times and may well have been seen by primitive man.



The Bird Observatory office is located at 1290 Hope St. in Alviso. The office is open from 1-5 pm weekdays and some weekends. But before stopping in, call (408) 946-6548 and check the schedule.



The General Membership meetings are held on the first Thursday of the month at 7:30 pm at the San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge Environmental Education Center in Alviso. (see map) The Board meetings are open to the membership and are held monthly. Call the Observatory for dates and times.

The newsletter deadline is the first Monday of the month. Send contributions to the editor: Susie Formenti, 16675 Buckskin Ct., Morgan Hill, CA 95037.

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

GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

Thursday, June 5, 1986

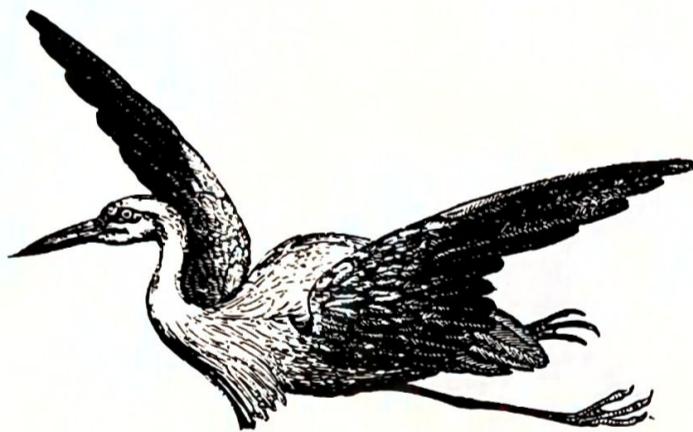
Refuge Environmental Education Center
in Alviso

7:30 pm

FEATURED SPEAKER: Dr. Carlos Alfaro, a member of the Bay Area Bird Photographers, will present a slide show on techniques and examples of avian photography with a blanket. You may laugh, but I hear he has some incredible photos.

DONATIONS. . . . Thanks to Pat Dubois and Judy Wiley for the refreshments for the May General Meeting.

CONTRIBUTIONS. . . . The Bird Observatory greatly appreciates Pat & Jean Dubois's donation of 3 four-man inflatable boats and to Harvey and Stanley Assoc. for the office desk.



Editor, Susie Formenti



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Make checks payable to SFBBO. Your gift membership is tax deductible.

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* Single payment becomes part of an endowment fund.