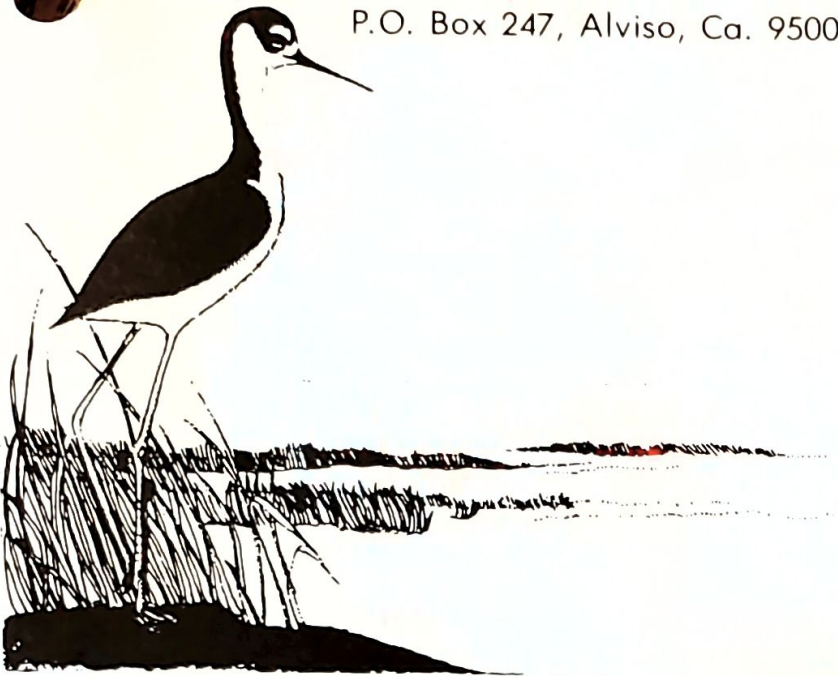


# SAN FRANCISCO BAY BIRD OBSERVATORY NEWSLETTER

P.O. Box 247, Alviso, Ca. 95002 • (408) 946-6548

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Volume 8, Number 1

January/February 1989

## FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS DESK

Dear Members,

As many of you know, I have been involved with SFBBO almost since its inception and I am very excited about becoming the Executive Director and taking on a leadership role in the organization. My decision to accept this position was not a difficult one and I will work very hard to see that the Bird Observatory grows under my directorship.

Since I came on board in September, I have been busy making contacts with Refuge personnel, fundraising organizations about grants, and consulting with Bay Area environmental agencies about habitat preservation in the San Francisco Bay. Basically just letting everyone know that we're still working very hard with our studies to preserve the wildlife and habitat of the Bay. In October I attended the Western Field Ornithologists meeting in Monterey where I presented a paper on the Alviso breeding colony of California Gulls. I've been speaking to local Audubon chapters letting them know what SFBBO is working on and I plan to give many more of these talks in the future. I've also made contacts with San Jose State student volunteers to set up a catalog system for the library at the Observatory.

With your continued financial and volunteer support I feel we can accomplish the goals set for SFBBO. If you would like to get involved in any part of the organization, please feel free to call me at the Bird Observatory office.

Don Starks

## VOLUNTEERS 1988

Every project at SFBBO relies on volunteers, the people who perform major roles in our field research and programs. During 1988 many volunteers have donated their time generously to Bird Observatory. We would like to thank the following for their support, as members and volunteers, for making our research projects possible.

Joyclyn Acrigg, Louise Accurso, Tony Aversa, Belinda Bain, Jose Castillo, Phyllis Browning, Gail Cheeseman, Howard Cogswell, Barbara Cox, Ken Cox, Derek Currall, Brigitte DeSaint-Phalle, Susan Dickey, Jan Dierks, John Dixon, Jean Dubois, Pat Dubois, Lisa Elliot, Lorrie Emery, Leora Feeney, Kevin Forester, Susie Formenti, Dave Formenti, Margaret Galvin, Darrell Gray, Betty Groce, Terry Hart, Jane Hawkey, Kathy Hobson, Vicki Jennings, Dave Johnson, Debbie Johnson, Dorothy Johnson, Cynthia Kevorkian, Valerie Layne, Max Lincoln, David Lonzarich, Carolyn Marm, John Moll, Brenda Monroe, Paul Noble, Chris Otahal, Rick Palmer, Elsie Richey, Eva Roberts, Mark Robinson, Allen Royer, Laura Scarborough, Alfred Schmitz, David Seals, Roberta Seals, David Sellers, Allan Sillett, Joann Simpson, Don Starks, Susan Stout, Phyllis Swanson, Jean Takekawa, Paul Travis, Judy Wiley, Crystal Woodin, Peg Woodin, Jean Young, and Lou Young.





# S C O P E

## Greater and Lesser Scaup

*Paul L. Noble*

Greater and Lesser Scaup are two diving duck species encountered often in the South Bay during the winter. These two species have many similarities which make identification difficult. Males of both species have dark heads with a bluish bill, black breasts and rumps, grey backs and white flanks. Females are both dark brown with some white feathering around the base of a pale blue bill. Both sexes of each species have yellowish eyes and white secondary feathers. There are, however differences that will enable you to separate the two species in the field.

The Greater Scaup is slightly larger than the Lesser, but this is difficult to judge without comparative experience, and only then, when the birds are in mixed flocks at close range. The most certain way to tell the two apart is by head shape. The Greater Scaup has a head that is smoothly rounded, bill to nape. It may even be flat on the crown. The Lesser Scaup has a noticeable peaked head just behind the crown. This difference in head shape can be noticed at some distance (even great range with a scope).

The Greater's bill is larger and broader (somewhat spatulate) with a black nail at the end of the bill which may cover the entire tip of the bill in some males. The Lesser's bill is narrower and the nail is small and centrally located.

The flanks on the male Greater tend to be bright and unmarked whereas the Lesser's flanks may be marked with variable amounts of brown or gray.

Some field guides stress head color as a field mark for identifying males. This color is not reliable and depends on lighting conditions, but in good light Greater Scaup have flossy green heads and Lesser's have dark purplish. Use this head color as a secondary field mark only.

Female scaup can also be identified by head shape, bill shape and nail size as the differences hold true for both sexes. Females of both species have white

feathering around the base of the bill, with the Greater Scaup being a bit more extensive. (the summer plumage of the female of both species lacks this white feathering). Female Greater Scaup appear paler brown (especially on the head) than do Lessers. In the summer some female Greater's show a faint white crescent on the ear covers behind the eye. Lessers don't show this mark (usually) and neither species have it in winter (though west coast birds may retain it through the winter).

A close view of a bird in flight or flapping on the water will give you a clue to identity by the amount of white on the flight feathers. The Greater Scaup has white extending out into the primaries, where as in Lessers it is restricted just to the secondaries (a good rule to go by is Lesser's lack white primaries while Greater's have a greater amount of white on the wings).

Juveniles and first winter birds are all brownish and lack any white around the bill. Use head shape to identify these individuals.

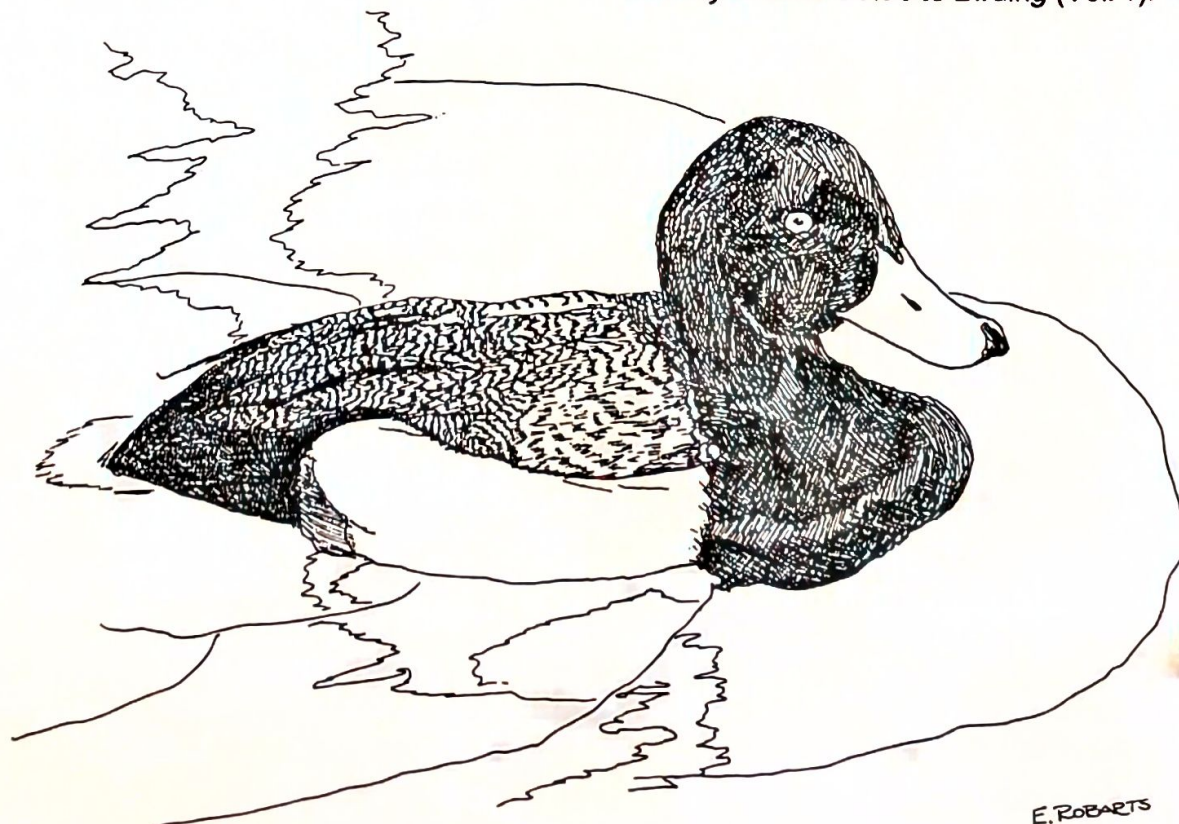
Both species are fairly common from

November thru February in the South Bay. By May, most have winged their way north to breeding areas in the Canadian tundra, but a few Lesser Scaup may linger thru the summer. There are a few breeding records of Lesser Scaup in the South Bay, all in the Palo Alto Flood Control Basin. Greater Scaup are much more rare in the summer in the South Bay.

Greater Scaup are very numerous on the open bay, particularly further north around Foster City and the Burlingame Bayfront where they loaf just offshore by the thousands. Lesser Scaup are more inclined to be found inland or on quiet waterways. If you see a scaup on an inland reservoir or pond it will most likely be a Lesser.

Good places to view these two species are the Palo Alto Duck Pond (bring some bread for the really close views), Mountain View's Shoreline Lake and Lake Merritt and Laney College Estuary Park in Oakland. Spreckles Lake in Golden Gate Park is also a good place to view scaup.

Good references for these species are the *National Geographic Field Guide to North American Birds*, and the *Audubon Society Master Guide to Birding* (Vol. 1). ■



E. ROBERTS



## GENERAL MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

The speaker for the January 5 General Meeting will be Dick Mewaldt, Manager of Coyote Creek Riparian Station. Dick will talk about the comparative roles of San Francisco Bay Area bird monitoring stations with a slide review of the Farallon and Palomarin Stations of PRBO, the Wool Ranch, and CCRS. He'll then compare the kinds and numbers of birds they have captured and banded.

"While You Look For Birds Other Creatures Are On You", will be the title of the February 9 General Meeting Program. Joel H. Hornstein of the Sutter County Department of Health will give a talk that will focus on Lyme Disease, its occurrence, Ixodes ticks, symptomology, serology and other animal carriers. Please note that the February Meeting will be held on the second Thursday of the month.

## IMPORTANT MESSAGE

In the past years SFBBO has been involved in many interesting and valuable research projects. Your membership dues and support of SFBBO are important to help us continue these worthwhile studies.

With your membership you receive our bi-monthly newsletter which keeps you informed of the research work conducted by Observatory members, information about the General Membership meetings and other events of SFBBO. Your membership also provides you the opportunity to participate as an active member in research projects.

We'd like you to share in the knowledge of this growing organization and continue your membership in the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory. Your newsletter mailing label will tell you the current status of your membership. If your membership expiration date is past due it will be highlighted in yellow. Won't you please renew your membership and continue your support.

## NEW BOOK

If you're interested in waterfowl, then *An Identification Guide to Waterfowl of the World* by Steven Madge and Hilary Burn would be a great addition to your field guide collection. This is the third volume in a series of guides which has included Seabirds and Shorebirds. Waterfowl covers 150 species of ducks, geese and swans, illustrating all major plumages and subspecies in color. Information on voice, population, distribution, range, habits and habitats are included for each species. This book, published by Houghton Mifflin and named the birding book of the year by British Birds, costs \$35.00. You can purchase it through the Audubon Society's Tiburon Center at (415) 380-2524 or from American Birding Assoc for \$29.00, if you are a member, at 1-800-634-7736. This would also make a great addition to the SFBBO library. If you're interested in donating a copy please call the office at 408-946-6548.

## Calendar Of Events

### GULL CLASS

Don Starks will again offer a class on Gull Identification. If you were unable to attend his class last year now's your chance to sign up. The class will begin on Wednesday, February 1, 1989 at the Bird Observatory office from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. The cost of the course is \$25 and will include four lectures and two field trips. For more information and registration, call Don at the Bird Observatory office (408) 946-6548.

### OWL CLASS

SFBBO is offering a class on owl identification and natural history in late March and April 1989. The class will be taught by Paul L. Noble, local birder and owl enthusiast. Classes will meet on Wednesdays from 7:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. on March 30, April 6 and 13, at the SFBBO headquarters office in Alviso. An "owl prow" to seek out local owl species in their natural habitats will also be scheduled in mid-April. Classroom sessions will deal with North American owl evolution, taxonomy, identification, natural history and conservation. Teaching materials will include slides, study skins and taped vocalizations. The class fee is \$30.00. For more information and registration call Paul Noble at (415) 948-3876. Class size is limited.

### BIRDING TOURS

SFBBO is offering a birding tour to Arizona and Texas this spring led by Don Starks. The trip will include stops at the Salton Sea, Carlsbad Caverns for Cave Swallows as well as the unforgettable bat show, Davis Mountains State Park, Big Bend National Park in the Chihuahua Desert. You will visit three, maybe four, of the deserts of North America only missing the Great Basin. The cost will be approximately \$480 for two weeks and will include expert guidance, campground fees, and park entrance fees. You can expect easy hiking, except for one day of rigorous walking to see the Colima Warbler in Boot Spring. Horses will be available to rent for this portion of the tour. Headliners for this trip are the Lucifer's Hummingbird and Colima Warbler, but you can expect to see many other species just as exciting. The trip will begin the last week in April and end the first week in May. If you're interested, call the Bird Observatory office for more information. A \$50 deposit will guarantee your reservation.

### SFBBO 4TH ANNUAL BIG DAY

The SFBBO 4th annual "Big Day" fundraiser is scheduled for April 29 and 30, so it's time to start getting your teams together and think about those spring birding hot spots. Complete details and entry forms will be in the March newsletter.

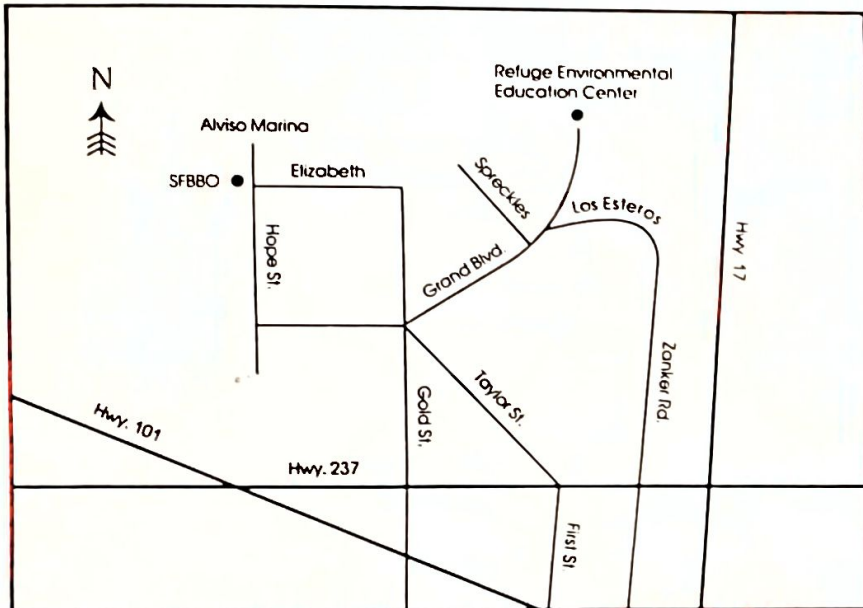


The Bird Observatory office is located at 1290 Hope St. in Alviso. The office is open from 1-5 pm weekdays and some weekends. But before stopping in, call (408) 946-6548 and check the schedule.

The General Membership meetings are typically held on the first Thursday of the month, but are sometimes changed due to the availability of the speaker. The program starts 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 is a bimonthly publication. 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.



### DONATIONS.....

The Bird Observatory would like to gratefully thank Jean Alexander for the donation of a 35mm Canon camera with zoom lens.

The editor would like to thank Eva Roberts for her drawing of the Scaup on page 2.

## SFBBO GENERAL MEETING PROGRAMS FOR 1989

General membership meetings are held on the first Thursday of the month (unless otherwise noted) at 7:30 p.m. at the San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge Environmental Education Center in Alviso. (see map)

January 5, 1989

**Dick Mewaldt**, Manager,  
Coyote Creek Riparian Station.  
Topic: Comparative Roles of  
San Francisco Bay Area Bird  
Monitoring Stations.

February 9, 1989 \*

**Joel H. Hornstein**, Sutter  
County Department of Health.  
Topic: Lyme Disease and Other  
arthropod vectored diseases  
that may be potentially  
hazardous to birders.

March 2, 1989

**Peter Pyle**, Point Reyes Bird  
Observatory.  
Topic: Birds of the Pacific,  
Including the Farallons.

April 6, 1989

**John Stelner**, SFBNWR Park  
Ranger  
Topic: Butterflies of the San  
Francisco Bay Region.

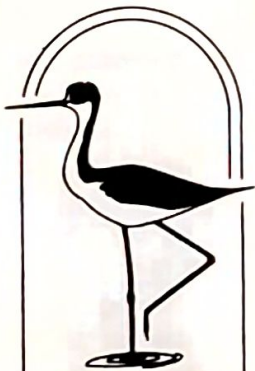
May 4, 1989

**Dave Lonzarich**, SFBNWR  
Fisheries Biologist  
Topic: Community Profile of  
Fish Inhabiting Salt Evaporator  
Ponds

June 1, 1989

**Louise Accurso**, SFBNWR  
Wildlife Biologist  
Topic: Ducks of the San  
Francisco Bay

\* Denotes meetings not held on the 1st Thursday of the month.



P.O. Box 247  
Alviso, CA 95002  
(408) 946-6540

I would like to join  Renew my membership  in the  
San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory.

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

\* Single payment becomes part  
of an endowment fund.