

# SAN FRANCISCO BAY BIRD OBSERVATORY NEWSLETTER

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

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November/December 1989

## ***Nesting Impoundment Built in Gull Colony***

by Paul Noble & Peg Woodin

This past spring the Bird Observatory began a study of nestling mortality within a controlled area in the California Gull colony in Alviso. Volunteers built a 10 x 20 meter impoundment on the southern most island levee that the gulls nested on this season. The basic configuration consists of a heavy duty grade of polyethylene netting with 1/2" mesh opening, 75 cm high, affixed to a PVC pipe frame. The netting was secured to the frame and to steel reinforcing bar along the surface. The results is a sturdy fencing that can endure the elements and not harm the gulls both young and adults.

The procedure to calculate nestling mortality starts near the middle of the gulls nesting season. In the Alviso colony, this is usually during the first week of May. This year three counts were made within the impoundment. The first count gave the numbers of nests (with eggs) in the enclosure. The second count gave the clutch size. This is when many eggs and the first chicks are observed. By the third count most, if not all, of the chicks have hatched and a total chick count is made. Since the only way out of the impoundment for the chicks is to fly

out (at about 8-10 weeks) chicks cannot wander off and die unnoticed. Shortly after chicks start fledging a mortality count is made. A second count is made after all the chicks have fledged. On August 5th the last chick fledged from the impoundment.

By comparing the total chick production to the number of chicks that perished, a percentage of mortality is calculated. This year the chick mortality within the impoundment was 8%; a fairly low rate of mortality, and one that is comparable to other California Gull colonies currently being studied (i.e. Mono Lake, per. com. Joe Jehl). The Observatory will continue this study in the coming years to compare chick mortality to other colonies and to see changes, if any, in mortality as this colony continues to expand.

The Bird Observatory would like to thank those volunteers who helped in the construction of the impoundment and monitoring it this season: Ginny Becchine, Darrell Gray, Susie Formenti, Paul Noble, Cliff Painter, Don Starks, Peg Woodin, Jean and Lou Young. ■



### **Sandra Kinchen**

We regret to note that one of SFBBO's charter members, Sandra Kinchen, passed away this summer of cancer. Sandra worked on many Bird Observatory projects and served as membership director in the organizations early days. She organized our library using the library of congress numbering system. She not only donated much of her time to the Bird Observatory, but also money for much needed supplies. She later became an active volunteer at the San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge headquarters where she was the catalyst that created the refuge volunteer program. Besides her good birding skills, Sandra had a good sense of humor and was a great person to work with on our projects. We send our condolences to her family. She will be greatly missed by all her friends at SFBBO and in the birding community.

### **GIFTS AND MEMORIALS**

*From Robert Edwards in memory of his father  
Albert Edwards*

*SFBBO sincerely thanks the Alyson Jack's family  
for their donation to the General Fund*

*Thanks to the SYSTAT Corporation for their generous  
donation of a statistical program call MYSTAT.*

### **CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT**

Set aside Sunday, December 17 for the annual Audubon Christmas Bird Count (CBC). Although the CBC began as a casual afternoon event in 1900 and remains an important social gathering during the holidays for many birders, it has become increasingly standardized and provides much needed information on the population status of birds present in North America in the early winter. Over 1,500 CBC's are completed annually. Each one is an all day affair, in which local groups of birders try to count all the individuals of all the species seen within a 15-mile diameter circle (177 square miles).

The Bird Observatory will organize the Alviso section again this year and your help is needed to make this day a success. If you've never participated in a Christmas Bird Count, this is the year for a new experience. Both novices and experienced birders are needed to adequately census all areas within the count circle and on-the-job training will be provided. The all day count will culminate with a final tally, pleasant conversation and a delicious meal. If you are interested in helping in the Alviso section, call Jean Dubois, section leader, at (408) 395-4264 for more details and save December 17 for an exciting day of birding.

### **Classes and Trips**

Earl Lebow, of the Santa Cruz Bird Club, is organizing a 10 day trip to Southern Manitoba and Churchill from June 16-25, 1990. Leading this trip will be Dan Weedon, naturalist at Riding Mountain National Park in Manitoba. Mr. Weedon has extensive experience as both a naturalist and trip leader and is an expert on birds and wildlife of Manitoba and Churchill. For more information contact Earl Lebow at (408) 475-5328.

### **SFBBO Elects Two Directors**

At the October General Meeting the SFBBO members elected two directors to serve a three-year term on the Board.

**Janet Hanson** is a first time director. Since joining SFBBO she has been active in many projects as well as the Knapp Study. She has a BS in Zoology from UC Davis and is working on her MS in Biology from California State Northridge. We welcome her new interests and skills to the Board of Directors.

**David Seals** was elected to continue as a Director for a second term. He has served as president and treasurer. Both he and his wife have been active in most of the Observatory projects including the Knapp Study and Colonial Birds.

The Observatory thanks two departing board members for their many years of valuable service and their continuing support.

**Ed Roberts** put in a tremendous amount of time and energy to the Bird Observatory. He was one of our main project leaders including research management, field work and building improvements around the Bayside Cannary building (SFBBO Headquarters).

**Allan Sillett** served on the Research Committee and has been a great supporter of bird banding projects for the Observatory. His efforts in conducting bird banding classes for the Observatory have been greatly appreciated.



# Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs

Paul L. Noble

An identification problem that crops up every late summer and early fall is the two species of yellowlegs. Rarely one may see both together and then of course the problem solves itself: the Greater is greater and the Lesser smaller. But this does not often happen and we more likely see one species alone or in small groups.

The Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs are medium sized shorebirds that breed in the Canadian Arctic and Alaska and are mainly migrants thru the south bay (A few Greater over summer and often winter in the area). Both species begin to show up on their southbound journys in late July, reach a peak in late August and begin to dwindle by mid October. As stated above, the Greater tend to winter more commonly than the Lessers. In late March the northbound migrants show up (though few Lesser Yellowlegs are found in the south bay in the spring) and by early summer most have moved through the area.

To separate the two species requires a good look at the bill, comparisons to nearby shorebirds and by voice.

The Greater Yellowlegs (*Tringa melanoleusa*) has orange-yellow legs. In alternate plumage the underparts are boldly streaked with black on the upper breast and throat which gives way to dense black spotting and barring on the lower breast and flanks. In flight the Greater shows light brownish notching on the secondaries extending into the inner primarie. Flight feathers are plain on Lesser (see A in drawing). In juvenile plumage the Greater has a white throat and breasts with a distinct bib streaking. The bill of the Greater Yellowlegs is longer than the head and is straight or marginally uptilted toward the end. The bill is bi-colored with a noticeable pale base (see B in drawing). The call of the Greater is a loud resonate "Tu tu tu" dropping in pitch on the last two syllables. When alarmed, the Greater also utters a series of "tu" notes closer together than the main call.

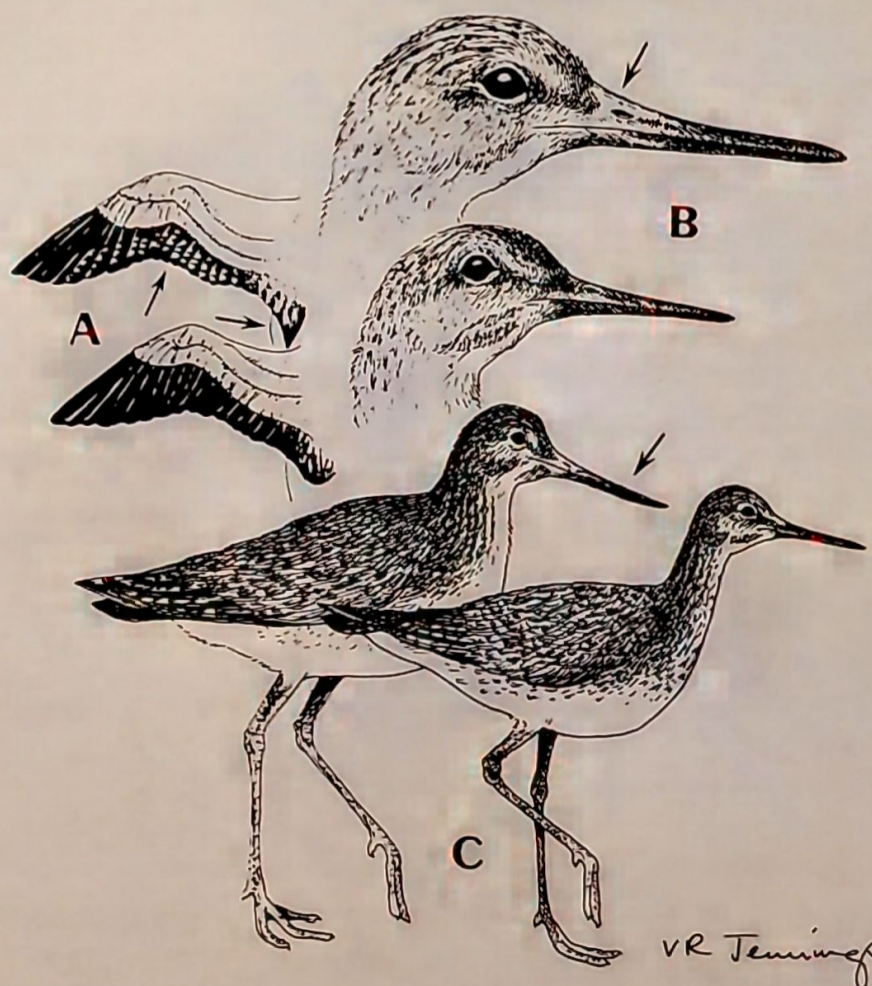
The Lesser Yellowlegs (*Tringa flavipes*) plumage is similar to the Greater, but in alternate plumage the Lesser has a finely streaked throat and breast with some barring on the flanks. The primary and secondary feathers appear "solid" unlike the notched appearance of the greater (see A in drawing). In juvenile plumage the Lesser has a gray throat (rather than white) and the streaking may be smudged or not visible at all. The Lessers bill is shorter than the Greater and typically does not measure longer than the head. It is dark throughout its length except at the very base it is sometimes pale (see B in drawing). The call of the Lesser

Yellowlegs is a more mellow "Tu tu. . .tu tu". The Lesser also gives a long series of "tu's" when alarmed, but they differ from the Greater as being more mellow and less harsh or loud.

The Greater Yellowlegs is as large as a Willet (though with a slimmer bill) while the Lesser Yellowlegs is Killdeer sized. Generally, if you have to think about whether it is a Lesser it probably isn't as the Lesser Yellowlegs presents itself as a more slight shorebird (see C in drawing).

Both species prefer fresh to brackish water habitats to forage in during migration. Mountain View Forebay is a good place to see these two species in late summer. You might even see both species together in the same view. Good sources for Yellowlegs are *Shorebirds: An Identification Guide To Waders of the World*, by Peter Hayman et al., 1986, *The Western Bird Watcher* by Zimmer, 1985, and *The National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America*, 1983.

Continued on page 4. See editors note.



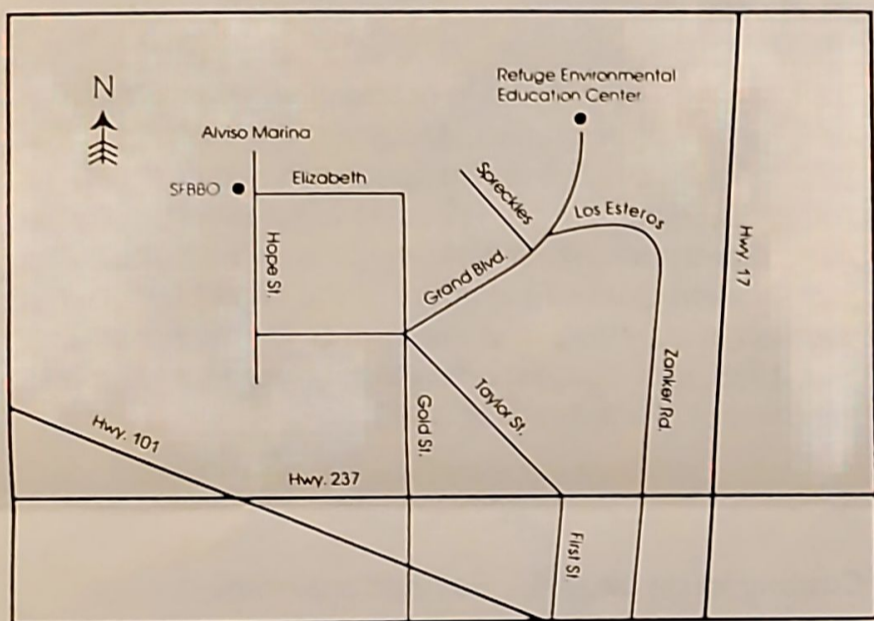


The Bird Observatory is located at 1290 Hope St. in Alviso. The office is open from 1-5 pm weekdays and some weekends. But before stopping in, call (408) 946-6548 and check the schedule.

The General Membership meetings are typically held on the first Thursday of each 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 office 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.**



**EDITORS NOTE:**

According to Sill et al., 1988, *A Field Guide to Little-Know and Seldom-Seen Birds of North America.* "Middle Yellowlegs *Tringa Intermedius* and Least Yellowlegs *Tringa Minor*. Existence of these two new species was substantiated only shortly before this manuscript went to press. Both are similar to the Lesser and Greater Yellowlegs; however, they are readily identified by the fact that the Middle Yellowlegs is smaller than the Greater Yellowlegs while the Least Yellowlegs is smaller than the Greater, Middle, and Lesser Yellowlegs, but is larger than some smaller birds. Many ornithologists believe

larger than some smaller birds. Many ornithologists believe that a Slightly Lesser Yellowlegs, which is . . . , Oh, nevermind.

**Specialized Equipment in Identifying Yellowlegs:** In order to estimate sizes, it is helpful to insert a number of yardsticks in mudflats where Yellowlegs feed."

*You can obtain a copy of this humorous book at the San Francisco Bay Wildlife Refuge headquarters in Newark.*

**SFBBO GENERAL MEETING PROGRAMS FOR 1989-90**

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).

- November 2, 1989      **David Suddjian**  
Topic: Santa Cruz Breeding Bird Atlas.
- December 7, 1989    **Don Starks, SFBBO Executive Director.**  
Topic: Gull Identification
- January 4, 1990      **Louise Accurso**  
Topic: Her masters work on ducks of the San Francisco Bay.
- February 1, 1990     **Howard Wilshire, Geologist, USGS**  
Topic: Impact of Off-Road Vehicles on the Desert Environment
- April 5, 1990         **Bob Drews, Herpetologist California Academy of Sciences**  
Topic: Frogs of Tropical Africa

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



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

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

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

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.