

BAY BIRD REVIEW

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION ON THE SCIENCE AND CONSERVATION OF BIRDS AND THEIR HABITATS



SAN FRANCISCO BAY
BIRD OBSERVATORY

Director's Message

This year, the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory celebrates our 30th year! As we commemorate achievements in avian conservation and science, we draw upon our past successes, and look eagerly to our future. The Bird Observatory has changed considerably in 30 years, evolving from a group of citizens and scientists, intent on collecting the first baseline data on breeding waterbird populations, into a thriving nonprofit of science and outreach professionals, and we are now the authority on the birds of the South and Central San Francisco Bay. With much foresight, our founders established programs such as population monitoring of colonial waterbirds and avian demographic studies at Coyote Creek Field Station, our year-round bird banding station. Because of the longevity of these and other Bird Observatory

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE *continued on page 2*



FORSTER'S TERNS engage in a courtship ritual.

PHOTO BY KEN PHENICIE

Waterbird Science Report

2010 Colonial Waterbird Program—Year in Review

Long-term monitoring of waterbird populations and habitats is imperative to determine conservation status, detect population trends, assess health of habitats, and manage populations. San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory's Colonial Waterbird Program has monitored active waterbird nesting sites in the San Francisco Bay since 1980. Staff biologists and volunteers continued this work in 2010.

The Colonial Waterbird Monitoring Program focuses on colonies of Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, Snowy Egret, Double-crested Cormorant, Forster's Tern, Caspian Tern, and California Gull. Volunteers visited active colonies at least six times between March and August. Staff and volunteers also conducted one colony walk-through survey of every California Gull colony in the South San Francisco Bay to count the number of nests, eggs and chicks.

Hérons, Egrets and Cormorants

We documented 115 Great Blue Heron nests in the South Bay in 2010. This

population has been stable since 2005. The largest Great Blue Heron colony in 2010 was in Portola Valley, with 25 active nests. Great Egret numbers have also been stable since 2005, and in 2010, we documented 133 active nests in the South Bay. In 2010, the largest Great Egret colony was at Ruus Park in Hayward, with 41 nests. Snowy Egret nest numbers in the South Bay are declining, and the population decreased from 272 nests in 2005 to 64 nests in 2010. Hayward Regional Shoreline Park, which previously was a large nesting colony (107 Snowy Egret nests in 2007), was not active, and the Steinberger Slough colony in San Mateo declined from 46 nests in 2009 to five nests in 2010. The largest Snowy Egret colony in 2010 was on Bay Farm Island in Alameda, with 15 nests.

Double-crested Cormorants breeding in the South Bay increased by 35% over the 2009 population—the first increase in five years. In 2010, there were 532 Double-crested Cormorant nests in the South Bay. Two new colonies were

COLONIAL WATERBIRD *continued on page 6*



PHOTO BY JACQUELINE DEELY

AMERICAN AVOCET CHICK.

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE *from cover*

programs, we have the ability to track long-term trends in San Francisco Bay bird populations, assess the health of habitats, and inform management decisions that address conservation challenges of concern to resource agencies, policymakers, and California citizens.

The future of the San Francisco Bay Area is one of renewal and restoration of habitats, but also one of continued threats of habitat loss and degradation from climate change and development. More than ever, the data collected by our biologists are integral to shaping the future of the San Francisco Bay for birds, for wildlife, and for humans. We look forward to continuing our long-term research and monitoring programs, and to asking directed and applied research questions to help meet tomorrow's management challenges. Also this year, you'll witness a huge growth in our outreach programs as we extend our bird conservation activities to local neighborhoods and corporations. Finally, the celebration of our successes would not be complete without you—our donors, members, and volunteers. As supporters of the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory, you recognize the value of long-term data in guiding conservation actions and offer us your time, skills and money. It is only through you that all of this work has been possible. I invite you to celebrate with us at the first of many anniversary events, our 30th Anniversary Dinner on March 31st.

By Jill Demers, SFBBO Executive Director



PHOTO BY JUDY BINGMAN

WESTERN TANAGER.



YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER.

PHOTO BY KATHERINE ULRICH

Birding the Carquinez Strait Scenic Loop Trail

In the Bay Area, the Carquinez Strait is unique. It is an eight-mile channel that connects the marine environment of San Francisco and San Pablo Bays to the Suisun Bay and the Sacramento River Delta. The strait offers an aquatic corridor for birds moving to and from the Central Valley and the Bay or coast. On the west side of the strait it is cooler and moister, while it is drier and warmer inland on the east side. This change in microclimate influences the distribution of plants, insects, and in turn, birds. The Bay Area's two major regional trails, the Bay Area Ridge Trail and the San Francisco Bay Trail, converge at the Carquinez Strait creating a 50-mile Carquinez Loop Trail. Because of the variety of habitats found in this region, the Carquinez Strait Scenic Loop Trail offers many great birding opportunities.



The "Birding the Carquinez Strait Scenic Loop Trail" guide is the result of a collaboration of the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory, the Bay Area Ridge Trail and the San Francisco Bay Trail. This lovely guide features a full-color map, site descriptions and short species lists for nine sites along the trail.

We are kicking off our Carquinez Scenic Loop Trail guided walk series on Saturday, May 21st, with a guided trip to Fernandez Ranch (see calendar on page 5). This beautiful area just opened to the public in the summer of 2010 and offers superb birding through riparian, oak woodland, and grassland habitats. At the Ranch, you can cross the bridge over Rodeo Creek from the parking area to two trails that offer great birding. The Black Phoebe Trail borders a riparian woodland then angles uphill as the Whipsnake Trail, giving access to an oak forest. Alternatively, the Windmill Trail to the right of the bridge borders a grassland and a narrow riparian corridor before heading up into the oaks. Join us on this inaugural trip and celebrate the amazing avian diversity of this unique place!

"Birding the Carquinez Loop Trail" was funded in part by the Richard & Rhoda Goldman Fund, The San Francisco Foundation, PG&E, the Coastal Conservancy and an anonymous donor.

Request your Carquinez guide by visiting www.sfbbo.org.

By Alvaro Jaramillo, SFBBO Biologist

Volunteering...Is for the Birds!

Volunteers are a crucial part of our work. Each year you give thousands of hours of valuable work to the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory. We appreciate that when we put out the call for people to help—surveys, bird banding, data entry, habitat restoration, net repair, or office work—you respond with enthusiasm and commitment! The work of the Bird Observatory is for the birds, but it's also for the humans who share their environment, to provide opportunities for people to be directly involved in the nature and science of the San Francisco Bay Area.



SHANNON MCMAHON, member since 2007. Participates in colonial waterbird and shorebird surveys. Volunteers at the Coyote Creek Field Station.



SPIKE MARLOWE, member since 1989. Participates in colonial waterbird, Snowy Plover, gull colony and shorebird surveys. Volunteers for the Avian Disease Prevention Program.



BILL HEPBURN, member since 2004. Participates in gull banding and gull colony surveys. Provides technical support for field projects. Volunteers for the Avian Disease Prevention Program.



JOHN ROBESON, member since 2008. Oversees management of our photo library. Participates in colonial waterbird, banded gull and shorebird surveys.



TOM STEWART, member since 2002. Volunteers as a bird bander. Participates in gull colony surveys.



SANDY MOORE, member since 2001. Volunteers as our Membership Manager. Fall Challenge fundraiser and former bird bander.

Volunteer Appreciation Party

This year, we'll host all of our volunteers at our Annual Volunteer Appreciation Party on Thursday, May 12th, 6:30 -8:30 p.m. Please save this date! This is our time to honor YOU and all of your hard work. Who does most of the observing, monitoring, counting, capturing, banding and recording of all these birds? You do! We would not be able to complete our research without you. Please come and celebrate all of our shared achievements with Bird Observatory staff and fellow volunteers. Enjoy good food, great people, 30 years of avian research, and of course, our local birds. The location will be announced soon. Check our website at www.sfbbo.org for more information. Please RSVP to Kathi Kendrick at kkendrick@sfbbo.org or 408.946.6548 x 10.

How Will You Help this Year?

Thank you to every Bird Observatory member! You believe that research and stewardship are essential to a healthy community. Your support makes our programs possible. Here is a sample of the programs we will carry out because of your generosity in 2011.

- **California Gull Research & Monitoring.** With the breaching of Pond A6 in November 2010—and the displacement of the largest California Gull colony in the South Bay (over 23,000 birds)—we have the challenge in the 2011 breeding season to research where displaced gulls go and how they impact other breeding waterbirds.
- **Snowy Plover Recovery Program.** As the restoration of Pond A6 and others progress, more plovers will need to nest in less pond habitat. We are implementing experimental studies to determine how to increase the number of nesting plovers in the Bay.
- **Cargill Salt Pond Monitoring.** These active salt ponds are important to monitor as large-scale changes occur on the landscape. Pond-dependent species displaced by the restoration projects may move to these ponds from newly restored tidal marshes.
- **Coyote Creek Field Station.** We continue the enduring program of collecting avian information within one of the South Bay's largest remaining riparian habitats. We invite you to visit the field station or join us for a "Bird in the Hand" banding demonstration.

Please donate to science and habitat conservation in the San Francisco Bay Area. Your gift in 2011 sends a clear message that you support avian research throughout our unique and ever-changing ecosystem.

Please send your gift today.

Can Urban Riparian Restoration Support Birds?

California has lost 95% of its riparian vegetation, making restorations an important tool to provide riparian habitat. The San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory partnered with the Urban Creeks Council, a nonprofit dedicated to preserving, protecting, and restoring urban streams and riparian habitats, to study the potential benefits of urban riparian creek restoration in western Contra Costa County, California for riparian-associated birds.

To do this, Bird Observatory biologists surveyed birds bimonthly from April to September, 2009 and 2010. We conducted these surveys at five riparian restoration sites previously restored by the Urban Creeks Council. Most of these sites were located in heavily urbanized landscapes, varied in size between 0.240 and 3.471 acres, and varied in restoration years from 1987 to 2009. Sites include one site on Rheem Creek, two sites on Wildcat Creek, and two sites at

Baxter Creek. From these surveys, we calculated total bird abundance, density (birds/acre), species richness (species/site), and determined the instances of riparian-obligate species.

Most of these sites are small in size, and we were astounded to observe a total of 1,597 birds of 55 unique species during this study. We were surprised to find that bird density was negatively related with area size, with the smallest site exhibiting greatest bird density and the largest site having the lowest bird density (Figure 1). Conversely, species richness was positively related with area size of the restoration (Figure 2). We also detected six riparian-obligate species at the sites, including Black-headed Grosbeak, Orange-crowned Warbler, Song Sparrow, Willow Flycatcher, Wilson's Warbler, and Yellow Warbler. We found no trend in the occurrence of riparian-obligate species between sites.

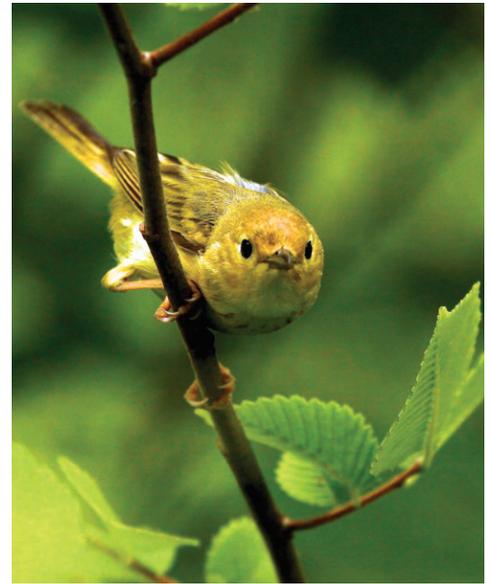


PHOTO BY CLARK CHET

YELLOW WARBLER.

At our Coyote Creek Field Station, previous research showed that bird abundance and species richness increased with time since restoration, following a general pattern seen in other studies where old restoration sites showed greater species richness relative to young restoration sites. However, at the western Contra Costa County sites, the age of restoration influenced bird communities far less than the area size of the restoration. These sites are unique as they are highly urbanized and riparian habitat is limited. Due to these factors, bird response may differ greatly at these sites compared to a site like Coyote Creek Field Station.

Riparian habitats and restorations provide habitat for a variety of bird species. The urban restorations completed by the Urban Creeks Council provides habitat for riparian bird species within an urbanized environment. It is likely that these restorations are especially important to migrating birds and immature individuals dispersing from their natal sites. As urban areas continue to grow, understanding bird use of urban habitats and riparian restorations will be critically important to preserve migratory bird populations.

By Jill Demers, SFBBO Executive Director, and Josh Scullen, SFBBO Biologist

FIGURE 1. Bird density at five urban riparian restoration sites in W. Contra Costa County, CA, 2009 – 2010.

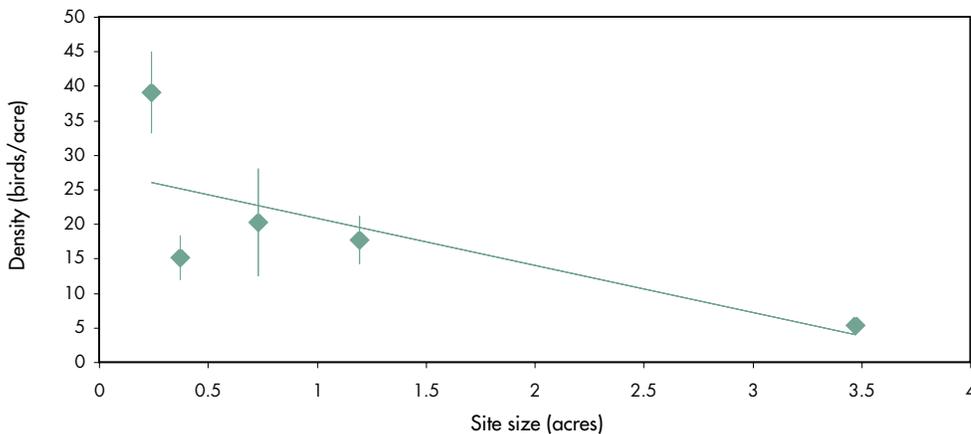
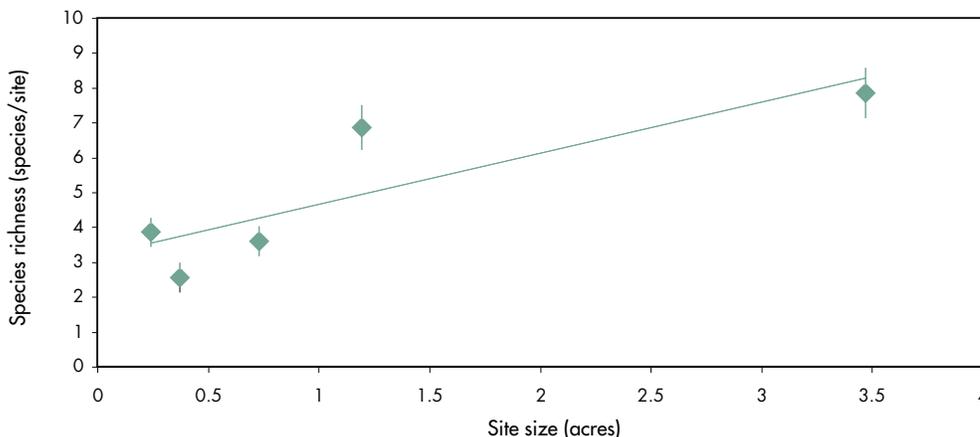


FIGURE 2. Species richness at five urban riparian restoration sites in W. Contra Costa County, 2009 – 2010.



Calendar

Sunday, March 27th, 12 – 3 pm

RSVP

BIRDING SHADOW CLIFFS

SITE: SHADOW CLIFFS EAST BAY REGIONAL PARK, PLEASANTON

Join Rich Cimino of Ohlone Audubon for an easy afternoon of birding. Shadow Cliffs borders the Arroyo Del Valle—home of a significant heron, egret and cormorant rookery. Participants can also expect to see several species of waterfowl, and we will comb a riparian trail lined with Cottonwood and Black Walnut. This may yield a surprise or two. This trip is in collaboration with Ohlone Audubon and Alameda Creek Alliance. The Bird Observatory monitors Shadow Cliffs rookery as part of the Colonial Waterbird Program. Please join us for this informative walk.



 WALK: RSVP to outreach@sfbbo.org or 408.946.6548. Space is limited to 20 people. There is no fee for this walk.

 ACCESSIBLE: Please contact the Outreach Director so that we can coordinate with you.

 SPECIAL EVENT

 VOLUNTEER ACTIVITY

Saturday, April 16th, 9 am - 12 pm

RSVP

MARE ISLAND EXPLORATION

SITE: MARE ISLAND, VALLEJO

Join Wally Neville and Robin Leong, Napa Solano Audubon Society field guides, and Mare Island Shoreline Heritage Preserve co-manager/naturalist Brian Collett for a morning of birding Mare Island. Expect to see several species of raptors and search for shorebirds, waterfowl and songbirds in varied habitats from cultural landscapes, including the U.S. Navy's oldest cemetery in the west, to woodlands, tidal and seasonal wetlands and open bay. Optional: Stay for lunch and a visit to St. Peter's Chapel with Myrna Hayes, co-manager of the Preserve and Mare Island history guide.



Saturday, April 23rd, 8:30 – 10:30 am

RSVP

A BIRD IN THE HAND

SITE: COYOTE CREEK FIELD STATION, MILPITAS

Tour the Bird Observatory's banding station and meet the Coyote Creek Field Station Manager, Josh Scullen. Learn about the Bird Observatory's bird

banding research and see several different species up close. We will tour mist nets, watch a bird banding demonstration, and explore a restored riparian habitat. Please join us and learn why bird banding is so important for protecting birds and their habitats. RSVP required. We will meet at the Borders Bookstore parking lot in McCarthy Ranch, Milpitas. In the event of rain, the tour will be cancelled. Free for members. \$10 for non-members.



Saturday, May 21st, 9 am - 12 pm

RSVP

BIRDING FRANKLIN CANYON HILLS

SITE: FERNANDEZ RANCH, MARTINEZ

Come for a walk in the beautiful Franklin Canyon Hills with Cheryl Abel, a fantastic birder and a ranger for the John Muir National Historic Site.

Owned by the Muir Heritage Land Trust, Fernandez Ranch opened to the public in June 2010. Expect to see nesting activity among woodland birds as well as raptors over open grasslands. Late spring wildflowers such as Gold Nuggets will be along the trail.



Workshops for the Birder and Naturalist - 2011

WITH: *Alvaro Jaramillo, SFBBO Senior Biologist*

SITE: *Sobrato Center for Nonprofits in Milpitas and San Jose*

Tuesday, March 15th (instruction) 6:30 – 9 pm;

Thursday, March 17th (instruction and field trip) 6:30 – 9 pm;

Saturday, March 19th (field trip) TBA

OWLS

Owls have a loyal following, including people who generally don't pay much attention to birds. Why are owls so special? It may be that owls seem so mysterious to us—sleeping while we are awake and becoming active at night. Of course, owls can be difficult to see and find, and are well known for having amazing hearing. This workshop will address identification, habitat and how to find the local owls. We will also learn more about individual species and their fascinating ecology and behavior. We will study their sounds and get participants ready to go and find owls in the field. We are excited to get out and see these amazing creatures!



Tuesday, May 10th and Friday, May 13th (instruction) 6:30 – 9 pm;

Sunday, May 15th (field trip) TBA

UNDERSTANDING AND ENJOYING MIGRATION

Nothing in birding and ornithology is as exciting as migration! Since ancient times, birds have migrated throughout the world, capturing our imaginations. Today we have many more tools at our disposal to understand migration, and begin to explain how these little creatures do it. This course is an introduction to, and a summary of, bird migration with a focus on recent study techniques and findings. Also, we will learn about our local birds and get a sense of where they go and how they accomplish it. The field trip will take us to places where we can see some local migrant birds, landbirds and shorebirds, brush up on identification and find out where they are going. Great for the beginning birder and up.



monitored this year, one in the PG&E towers adjacent to the Dumbarton Bridge and one on pond A18 in Alviso. The largest Double-crested Cormorant colonies were at Steinberger Slough in Redwood City (162 nests) and northern Lake Merced in San Francisco (88 nests).

Terns and Gulls

Forster's Terns nesting in the South Bay increased to 930 nests in 2010, compared to 841 nests in 2009. The largest colony in 2010 was at Hayward Shoreline with 614 nests, nearly double this colony's size in 2009. The colony on pond B1 in Mountain View increased by 89% between 2009 and 2010 to 37 nests. The colony on pond B2 declined from 181 nests in 2009 to 10 nests in 2010. The size of Forster's Terns colonies can vary greatly between years and, likewise, their numbers can fluctuate annually Bay-wide. Despite this variation, this species has been slowly declining in the South Bay since 1982.

Caspian Terns have declined greatly in the South Bay since the Bird Observatory recorded 1,900 individuals in 1981. In 2010, Bird Observatory volunteers monitored only three Caspian Tern nests, all at Agua Vista Park in San Francisco, and our partners at Oregon State University recorded only two Caspian Tern nests at Eden Landing Ecological Reserve, compared to 147 nests there in 2009. Brooks Island remains the largest colony, with



PHOTO BY ROBERT FOURNIER

SNOWY EGRET CHICKS await a feeding from the adult (right).

approximately 500 nests (OSU, unpublished data).

We documented 23,026 California Gull nests in the South Bay in 2010, more than in any previous year. California Gulls have increased rapidly in the South Bay since the first nests were discovered by Bird Observatory volunteers in 1980 (Figure 1). The largest California Gull colony was located on pond A6 in the Alviso salt pond complex. A6 held just over 50% of the total nests in the South Bay in 2010. Pond A6 was restored to

tidal action in December 2010 as part of the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project, likely displacing thousands of nesting gulls.

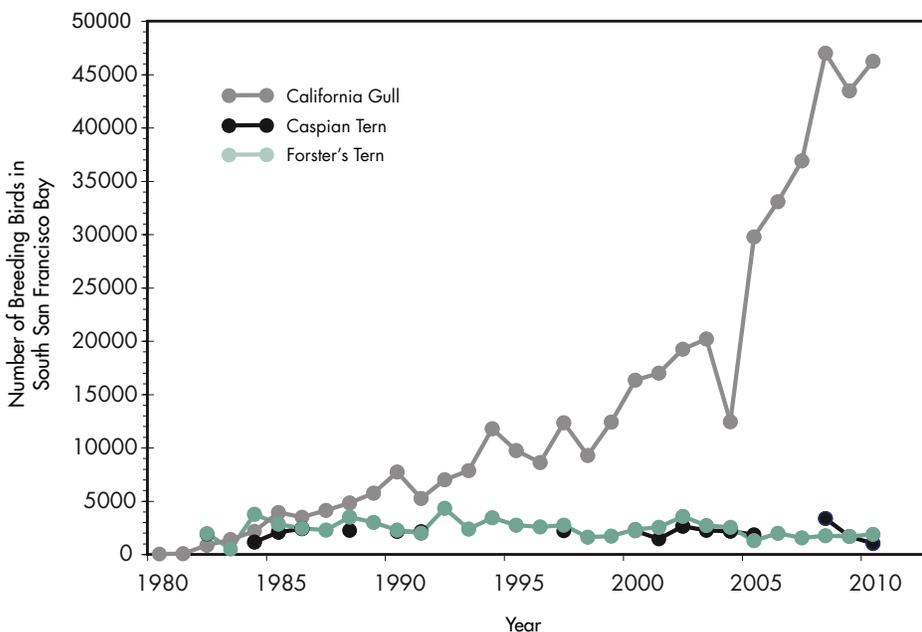
SFBBO is studying where these displaced gulls will nest during the 2011 breeding season. We will be calling on volunteers to help us look for new California Gull colonies, particularly in areas along the coast, in the North San Francisco Bay and in the Central Valley.

We thank the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory volunteers as this dataset would not be possible without their efforts. This work has been supported by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the California State Coastal Conservancy, and San Francisco Estuary Partnership. Most importantly, this work has been supported by the members of the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory—it is this support which allowed the collection and maintenance of this dataset for 30 years. We sincerely thank you for your generosity.

Are you interested in volunteering for our Colonial Waterbird Program? Email Caitlin Robinson-Nilsen at cnilsen@sfbbo.org. The full Colonial Waterbird Program report can be found on our website (www.sfbbo.org/science).

By Caitlin Robinson-Nilsen, SFBBO
Waterbird Program Director

FIGURE 1. Breeding California Gull, Caspian Tern and Forster's Terns from 1980-2010.



Our thanks to these supporters of the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory!



Thank you new and returning members, and generous donors, October – December 2010

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SAN FRANCISCO BAY
BIRD OBSERVATORY

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Milpitas, CA 95035

www.sfbbo.org



AMERICAN AVOCET.

PHOTO BY STEVE ZAMEK

San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory's 30th Anniversary Dinner Celebrating Avian Science

Join us for an evening commemorating San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory's 30 years of bird research and habitat conservation in the San Francisco Bay Area. **On Thursday, March 31, 2011, we host our 30th Anniversary Dinner at Vahl's Restaurant and Lounge in Alviso**, and celebrate our legacy, our community and the partnerships that empower our work.

Our featured speaker is Paul Rogers, the award-winning Natural Resources and Environmental reporter for the San Jose Mercury News and the Managing Editor of *Quest*, a multimedia series of KQED. He has written extensively about Bay Area science and ecology for 15 years. Paul will discuss some of the big environmental issues of 2011, and how the media, in general, decides what environmental news to cover.

Celebrate your partnership with us! Reservations are required for this event. Your invitation will arrive in the mail soon. If you don't want to wait for the details, you can go to www.sfbbo.org/support/Anniversary.php, or contact Stephanie Ellis at sellis@sfbbo.org or 408.946.6548. Celebrate the Birds!



PAUL ROGERS

Birding and Educational Opportunities Abound

Check out our calendar on page 5. We have an abundance of activities lined up this spring! Whether you would like to explore Mare Island, view a bird banding demonstration at our Coyote Creek Field Station or participate in an owl workshop with Biologist Alvaro Jaramillo, we are guaranteed to have something for you. You can also view our activities page online by going to www.sfbbo.org and clicking "Activities".

Wingbeat, our Monthly E-Newsletter

Every month we send out *Wingbeat*, our electronic newsletter with updates on our research and monitoring projects, and other information you don't get in the quarterly *Bay Bird Review*. You'll find new activities, links to online resources, and stories about the birding world. Send us your email address to start receiving your monthly report. We promise we'll never, ever share your email address. Contact outreach@sfbbo.org to sign up for *Wingbeat*.