

BAY BIRD REVIEW

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



SAN FRANCISCO BAY
BIRD OBSERVATORY

Director's Message

Species Richness

The country kids have moved to the big city. Or at least that's the way the Observatory staff feels at times, no longer in Alviso and now perched above a parking lot in Milpitas.

But leave it to these staff field biologists to find birds and nests among the landscaping that surrounds our new office. A Nuttall's Woodpecker is nesting in a high knothole in the post that supports our balcony roof. An Anna's Hummingbird's nest is delicately poised on a sycamore twig just outside my window. A small gang of Bushtit fledglings lined up and squeaked to be fed. And we think the Red-shouldered Hawks are probably nesting in the palm tree just visible over the rooftop.

With such abundance right outside the door, one might wonder what the fuss is all about. There are birds here, and not only are they here, but they are reproducing just fine. A member of the general public (i.e. not bird-crazy like us) might be inclined to think that we biologists are alarmist as we warn of declining bird populations.

Here is a stunt we do encourage you to try at home. Species richness is the simplest measure of biodiversity and one that can be observed in your own neighborhood. As exotic and generalist species increase, such as starlings and crows, some native species decrease. A few native species can benefit from changes we

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE *continued on page 2*



VISITORS SPY on Great Blue Heron chicks in their nests.

PHOTO BY DONNA NICOLETTI

Outreach Report

High Rise Neighborhood

On April 28th, the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory and Santa Clara County Parks of Los Gatos celebrated the 3rd Annual Salute to Vasona County Park's Great Blue Heron colony. The event was coordinated by Linda Sullivan, a Bird Observatory volunteer who has been closely monitoring the colony's progress since she discovered it in 2000.

For the event, volunteers and staff from the Bird Observatory lined up their spotting scopes to provide visitors with a "bird's eye view" of the Great Blue Herons on their nests. With seven active nests, onlookers were able to see the herons engaged in a range of behaviors from preening and loafing to feeding of the chicks. Over 150 people stopped by to view a Great Blue Heron specimen and a replicated heron skull. Visitors also enjoyed looking at colorful posters, photos, and informational displays about the Vasona Great Blue Heron colony, including a large permanent interpretive sign titled "High Rise Neighborhood". This sign is located next to the walking path below the colony. Linda Sullivan, along with Sha-

ron Mikayo, former Outreach Specialist at the Bird Observatory, designed and raised funds to make this sign possible. The Santa Clara County Parks erected the sign in 2006. Obtaining this sign was an especially meaningful endeavor to Linda Sullivan whose ultimate goal has been to "make people aware of the Great Blue Herons, save their habitat and to recognize the Bird Observatory for the great work that they do." For more information on the history and location of the colony, please visit www.okaponds.com. Join us in our salute to the Vasona Park Great Blue Heron colony in the spring of 2008!

By Stephanie Ellis, Outreach Specialist



A PERMANENT SIGN marks the presence of the Vasona Great Blue Heron colony.

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE *continued from cover*
humans make, like the House Wrens, American Robins and Nuttall's Woodpeckers that are seemingly ubiquitous in my Palo Alto neighborhood. But others, most probably the specialists like warblers and tanagers, need large amounts of undisturbed habitat.

In 1978, the California Department of Fish and Game compiled the first list of Species of Special Concern, with the purpose of identifying declining and vulnerable species that are at risk of disappearing from California if current trends continue. That list is currently undergoing revision and will include some 60 species accounts contributed by experts like Bird Observatory Senior Biologist Alvaro Jaramillo, writing on Tri-colored Blackbirds.

The Bird Observatory works with species on that list every day. We log the arrival and departure of Yellow Warblers, Yellow-breasted Chats and Belted Kingfishers at our field station. We will again band Black Skimmer chicks produced on salt pond islands during May and June. Our Snowy Plover field crew is out every day during this most intense period of nesting attempts.

The Bird Observatory works hard so that more folks understand the obstacles to survival that we humans place squarely in the road of our native birds every single day.

Through the Bird Observatory, you make a difference every day. We encourage you to enjoy the birds of summer.

By Janet T. Hanson, Executive Director



YELLOW WARBLER.
PHOTO BY TOM GREY

Migrations



In March, former Outreach Specialist **Juliana Chow** traveled to Taipei, Taiwan to teach English. At the Bird Observatory, Juliana was responsible for all communications and outreach. During her year at the Observatory, Juliana revamped the entire communications system including a reformatting of the quarterly newsletter and website, and a new Bird Observatory logo. Juliana is enjoying her time in Taiwan while brushing up on Mandarin and learning Taichi. In August, Juliana will be back in the states to pursue a Ph.D. program in English at the University of California, Berkeley. Juliana will be greatly missed!

The Bird Observatory welcomes **Stephanie Ellis** as the new Outreach Specialist. Stephanie has come all the way from Massachusetts where she worked for nearly a decade as a Licensed Massachusetts Wildlife Rehabilitator. Stephanie has rehabilitated a wide array of species from Northern Gannets to Kemp's Ridley sea turtles. Stephanie worked for the Massachusetts Audubon Society's Wellfleet Bay Wildlife



JULIANA CHOW in Taiwan.



STEPHANIE ELLIS.
PHOTO BY JAMES NORMAN.

Sanctuary on Cape Cod as a Seasonal Ornithologist and Naturalist offering a variety of bird walks, workshops and educational classes. Through the Massachusetts Audubon Society, Stephanie was actively involved in efforts to restore Piping Plover and Least Tern populations on the East Coast. Stephanie graduated from the University of Massachusetts, Boston with a B.A. in Psychology and BioBehavior with an emphasis in Ornithology, she also received an Associates degree in Business Management. Stephanie is an avid birder and has a love of rodents. "Birds have played a crucial role in my life for the last several years," said Stephanie. "I am thrilled to be working for the Bird Observatory. I am

in the position to reach out and make people aware of the plights of birds in the Bay area, and the conservation efforts that are being put forth to help them." The Bird Observatory is delighted that Stephanie has become part of the team!

Come and Join Our Board!

The Bird Observatory is on the brink of unprecedented growth and expansion. It's fun and exhilarating but we need good folks on our Board to push us over the top. We are looking for board members who love the Bird Observatory, its mission of science, outreach and the conservation of birds, who will give it their all, come to meetings, be financially supportive and who will open doors for us. A new board member may be someone newly retired who would love a stimulating challenge; someone who craves more contact with something other than work; someone who could grow and blossom with Board service for an organization that really makes a difference; or someone new to the Bay Area who wants to give of themselves and meet like-minded people.

Perhaps you know someone eager to dive in to our Board. If so, will you make the introduction? Or perhaps it is even you. Give us a call and let's talk. It may be the most rewarding leap of faith for birds that you will ever take. Contact: Janet Hanson, Executive Director at 408-946-6548 ext. 18 or jthanson@sfbbo.org

Heron Watch: Regional Teamwork to Monitor Heronries

A hundred years ago, herons and egrets were rarities in San Francisco Bay. Now, after their dramatic recovery from intensive hunting and other previous abuses by humans, these elegant birds have become popular symbols of wetland health and conservation. Such symbolism is strongly validated by their sensitivity to subtle changes in wetland quality and their roles as powerful wetland predators that patrol over broad areas of the landscape. However, details about the changing status and distribution of heron and egret populations in the San Francisco Bay area have been mostly a mystery—until 1991, when the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory and Audubon Canyon Ranch (ACR) decided to collaborate on an ongoing, regionwide monitoring effort.

The primary reason for such a huge commitment to grass-roots monitoring is this: the population status of these birds cannot be understood through isolated efforts at particular colony sites—no matter how intensive. Herons and egrets depend on networks of many colony sites to avoid local disturbances and respond to shifting patterns of

prey availability across the wetland landscape. Although heronries may remain active for several years, they can vary dramatically in size as birds move among sites, and they are often abandoned as new colonies are established in alternative locations. So each year, we track the health of regional heron and egret nesting populations by matching colony sites with a network of volunteer observers, who log considerable field time to measure colony size, nest survivorship, productivity, seasonal timing, disturbance rates, and individual behaviors at all known heronries in the region.

Ongoing investigations by hundreds of volunteer field observers have led to the recently completed atlas of heronries and the development of an unparalleled scientific database. We are using these data to address issues in heron and egret conservation biology, such as the regional effects of local nest disturbance and the landscape conditions required to protect nesting colonies. In analyzing regional information, we have uncovered evidence that these birds may respond to local habitat restoration by shifting their nesting distribution.

I look forward to continuing the collaboration between ACR and the Bird Observatory, particularly in investigating how wetland management activities are likely to affect heron and egret populations. In addition, our combined monitoring activities have immediate practical value because they provide local information, in a regional context, about charismatic species generally considered to be worthy of protection—and this information is used by stewardship agencies, environmental consultants, land owners, and conservationists throughout the region. In fact, our geographic database which contains detailed information about each heronry is being shared and incorporated directly into existing databases used by regional planners. This ensures quick identification of colony sites near any proposed changes in land use and greatly improves opportunities for the protection of heronries. Perhaps most importantly, however, the project's cadre of volunteer field investigators has grown into a knowledgeable network of conservationists who detect and respond to numerous local threats to heronries throughout the Bay Area.



COURTING Great Blue Herons.

PHOTO BY SCOTT NORTON

For more information, please visit:
www.sfbbo.org/science/waterbird.php (PDF)
www.egret.org/cypress_grove.html
www.waterbirdconservation.org

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By John Kelly, Ph.D. John is the Director of Research and Resource Management for Audubon Canyon Ranch.

2007 Board of Directors

We welcome **Kim Wells, Ph.D.**, to our board of directors.

Kim Wells is a Senior Wildlife Ecologist and Project Manager at H.T. Harvey & Associates, an ecological consulting firm in San Jose. Prior to joining Harvey, Kim was a Research Biologist for the Missouri Department of Conservation where she was part of an interdisciplinary team addressing natural resource issues in agricultural landscapes. Kim grew up in northern New Mexico and earned her B.S. in Wildlife Ecology from the University of Arizona in 1998. Kim later completed her M.S. on grassland birds at Oklahoma State University and then went on to finish her Ph.D. also on grassland birds at the University of Missouri. Kim and her husband Jason are avid dog lovers and share their house with three dogs. When asked why she joined the board of directors at the Bird Observatory, Kim responded, "I joined the board to contribute to non-profit world efforts, address avian conservation issues and share my expertise with non-profit management and advocacy. I hope to apply some of the skills related to organizational development that I have gained through my experience with NGO management, and to have an opportunity to work with other motivated and committed people on issues of importance to me personally and professionally."



KIM WELLS.



Bird Observatory volunteer "Va" Landschoot is awarded a "Certificate of Appreciation" by the Board of Directors President Jennifer Krauel.

PHOTO BY BILL HEPBURN.

Celebrating Volunteers

On March 29th, the Bird Observatory held an Open House for its new offices in the Sobrato Center for Nonprofits and celebrated into the evening at our annual Volunteer Appreciation Party. Our volunteers enjoyed sumptuous hors d'oeuvres, a grand-scale book sale, and a hilarious skit involving a mist net and an albatross, produced by the California Fall Challenge 2007 Team.

Special recognition awards were presented to volunteers who made outstanding contributions in 2006. We announced Sandy Moore's special award from the Junior League (see story on page 6). Two other Bird Observatory volunteers received Certificates of Appreciation from the Junior League. The first was Rita Colwell, nominated for her 17 years of mentoring bird-banding. Her expertise and sincerity make Rita well-liked and well-respected among our volunteers, and she has helped to create the level of dedication and competence that our citizen science program is known for. Our third Junior League honoree was Virginia Landschoot. Better known by her nickname "Va", she is a very welcome new volunteer, who has been organizing our library and the book sale. She has come in nearly every single weekday since our move during the 2006 holidays. Drs. Mewaldt and Cogswell, the scientific founding fathers of the Bird Observatory, both cared deeply about the organization and accessibility of our library. Va has helped make their wishes become a reality.

We also recognized Gerry Ellis as an extraordinary Bird Observatory volunteer. Gerry has been banding for over 15 years, was a Member of the Board for six years, has been a Fall Challenge team member for the last 3 years, and is extremely generous with his time and talent in helping maintain our offices. We were pleased to present Gerry with the Golden Screwdriver Award.

And we honored Lou and Jean Young, for volunteering together since 1983. Lou's dedicated work on our Board and Jean's genial volunteerism at events and in the field have led to a combined effort of more than 40 years of active bird conservation.

All our active volunteers were awarded a beautiful coffee mug emblazoned with the Bird Observatory's new logo. If you were not able to attend the party, be sure to stop by the office and claim your prize!

The Best Show in Town

One of the best spring shows has opened for a new run at the duck pond in the Palo Alto Baylands Nature Preserve. Minutes from busy Highway 101, off Embarcadero Rd. and within sight and sound of Palo Alto Municipal Airport, the pond is popular all year around because of its resident flotilla of geese, coots, mallards, scaup and ruddy ducks.

In April, other visitors arrive—photographers with cameras and long lenses mounted on tripods. They are there to capture the unfolding of new life in the egret colony that re-establishes itself each year in the palm trees on the north side of the duck pond. There, only yards away behind a fence, Snowy Egrets with wispy white plumes and bright yellow slippers display, court, nest and rear young. Joining them, usually in the dense rear of the palms, are several families of Great Egrets, identifiable by their larger size and yellow bills.

More secretive is a colony of Black-crowned Night Herons. The night herons are less fussy about accommodations. A few nest among the egrets;

others can be found in eucalyptus trees. But most prefer the seclusion and protection of myoporum trees near a duck pond parking lot and in the picnic area.

Early Birds

I have been monitoring the egrets and herons at the pond for several years. This March, when I made my first check, the egrets hadn't arrived. From a distance, no white dots speckled the greenery of the palms. But the Black-crowned Night Herons were already there, busy building nests in the protected undersides of the myoporums. When I returned in April, the weather had improved and the egrets had shown up. So had the first black crown chicks.

Baby Steps

The egret rookery is a bird sanctuary, fenced off and thus protected from intruders—at least human ones. As May and June arrive, the growing number of fluffy white chicks increases demands upon the adults to provide food. Noise level rises. So does the number of pho-



Art Carey shows his dedication to the Bayland birds.

tographers taking pictures of nesting activity. The baby egrets are similar to their parents. But the chunky offspring of the Black-crowned Night Herons appear to be different birds. Unlike their sleek black, gray and white parents, they are dark brown with white-spotted wings.

The number of active nests is difficult to determine because many are hidden in dense palm fronds. But last July, my "beak count" tallied more than 100 Snowy Egrets, adult and juvenile. Dozens of black crowns crowded nearby trees.

Birds of a Feather

The Palo Alto Baylands has other attractions as well. Beyond the duck pond on a recent spring morning, a Song Sparrow sang in the pickle weed, a Northern Harrier patrolled the marsh, and sandpipers, godwits and dowitchers lined mud banks in the company of avocets and Black-necked Stilts. Cliff Swallows, tiny wings in constant motion like the blades of helicopters, gathered mud and fashioned nests under the eaves of the reserve's nature center. The spring show continues daily. No reservations required.

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By Art Carey. Art is a volunteer for the Bird Observatory's Colonial Waterbird Program



A breeding Snowy Egret shows off its spectacular plumage

PHOTO BY ALAN WALTHER

Bird Observatory Volunteer Receives Public Honors

This past spring, **Sandy Moore** was honored for her outstanding volunteer contributions to the Bird Observatory. The Junior League of San Jose selects sixteen Crystal Bowl winners from among Silicon Valley's most active and effective volunteers. Sandy was one of the winners feted at the Volunteer Recognition Luncheon at the Santa Clara Marriott.

Since 1999, Sandy Moore has devoted one day a week to help manage the Bird Observatory's membership gifts. She mastered our earlier database, and then suffered through the transition to our current database, making herself available for extra training sessions. She now understands it so well that most questions about membership and donations often go straight to Sandy. Without her help, we would be hard-pressed to keep up with the generosity of our donors!

Besides working in the office, Sandy also contributes many volunteer hours to the Bird Observatory's bird banding

station at Coyote Creek. Starting as a field assistant, her enthusiasm for the scientific work grew and she trained to become a bander. Starting in 2002, Sandy joined our bird banding crew and



SANDY MOORE.

her eagerness to continue building on her technical skills makes her a well-liked member of our team.

Sandy also sets a great example for other members and volunteers by participating in our annual bird-a-thon. She asks friends and family to sponsor her day of birding in support of the Bird Observatory and has raised over \$5000 in the past few years. This sort of leadership is a powerful incentive to other members and volunteers to rise to the challenge and get past the fear of asking others for money for the causes we feel passionately about. We are sure this does not come easily or naturally to Sandy, but she does it anyway, and we are extremely grateful that she does.

Rita Colwell and Va Landschoot were also honored with Certificates of Recognition, in honor of their outstanding volunteer contributions to the Bird Observatory.

Congratulations, Sandy, Rita and Va!

Major Donor Trip to San Mateo Coast

The Bird Observatory treated its 2006 major donors to a birding trip to Princeton and Pillar Point Harbor, led by Senior Biologist Alvaro Jaramillo. After gathering at the fishing pier, the group spent the morning viewing seabirds and shorebirds in the harbor and along the breakwater. Liz Bathgate wrote: ... "the birding with Al was wonderful. He is so knowledgeable about everything dealing with nature that it is a pure delight to be with him. Thanks for the food and drink. It was an extra treat that we did not expect at all. The other people on the trip were wonderful about sharing their expertise and their scopes, so I was able to see so much more than just with my binocs." Indeed, it was our pleasure to thank these generous supporters of the Bird Observatory.



SPOTTING PELAGICS at the Mavericks off Pillar Point, with Alvaro Jaramillo.

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



We thank these donors for their contributions during the first quarter of 2007.

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The San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation dedicated to the conservation of birds and their habitat through science and outreach, and to contributing to informed resource management decisions in the Bay Area. Annual membership is \$40; donations are appreciated. Renewals and donations should be sent to the office.

BAY BIRD REVIEW is published quarterly by the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory.

Deadline for submissions is five weeks prior to the start of the quarter. Contact the editor at outreach@sfbbo.org for submission guidelines. Please send address changes to the office.

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Design by Alterpop, San Francisco.

Layout by e.g. communications.

Printed on recycled paper by Alonzo Printing.

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San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory

Our Thanks to Funders

The **San Francisco Estuary Project** is again supporting our citizen science program here on the Bay, with a grant funding volunteer coordination of our waterbird volunteer monitors...Our surveys of producing salt ponds in the east bay are funded by the **San Francisco Foundation's Bay Fund** and the **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**. The **Coastal Conservancy Association** underwrites our participation in the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration's Science Team...The **Cities of San Jose and Sunnyvale** are again generously supporting our Avian Disease Prevention Program, as we patrol the south bay by boat for signs of avian botulism and other wildlife diseases...Our Coyote Creek Field Station received crucial support from **Pacific Gas and Electric**.

Calendar



WALK: RSVP to outreach@sfbbo.org or 408.946.6548. Space is limited to 20 people. Free for members; \$10 for non-members.



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



SPECIAL EVENT



VOLUNTEER ACTIVITY

Saturday, June 9, 8 a.m. – 12 p.m.

BIRDING THE BAY TRAIL WITH CHERYL ABEL

SITE: CARQUINEZ STRAIT REGIONAL SHORELINE, CROCKETT

The park provides unique views of this inland waterway. The grasslands slope down to the water creating pockets of oak woodland and coastal scrub. These pockets provide lots of edge habitat for birds. Raptors take advantage of the hillside updrafts and western meadowlarks and Western Bluebirds are at home in this grassland haven. Come birding with Cheryl Abel, a Park Ranger, interpretive guide for the John Muir National Historic Site, and a trip leader for the Mt. Diablo Audubon Society. This park's elevation above the water provides an excellent vantage point to scan for waterfowl.



Interested in Carpooling?

Join our e-mail list group to make carpooling to San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory events easier at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/BirdObsCarpool>.

Saturday, July 21, 8:30 – 10:30 a.m.

A BIRD IN THE HAND

SITE: COYOTE CREEK FIELD STATION, MILPITAS

Visit the Bird Observatory's bird banding field station and experience conservation science in action. Tour mist nets, watch a bird banding demonstration, and explore a restored riparian habitat.

Meet at the Borders Bookstore parking lot in McCarthy Ranch, Milpitas.

Please include a contact phone number in your RSVP. Learn why bird banding is important and how it helps protect birds and their habitats. For more information about the Coyote Creek Field Station and a banding slide show please visit www.sfbbo.org/science/banding.php.



Saturday, September 15th through Sunday, October 14th

CALIFORNIA FALL CHALLENGE

SITE: THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

Plan now to take part in our annual birdathon, during the peak weeks of fall migration. Get sponsors, get birds, get prizes! More information will be winging your way by mid-summer.

Sunday Morning, October 28th

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

SITE: JASPER RIDGE BIOLOGICAL PRESERVE, STANFORD UNIVERSITY

Save the date for the Bird Observatory's annual meeting and the California Fall Challenge 2007 Awards Celebration. Event includes birding tours of Jasper Ridge, a delicious picnic brunch and a very good time to be had by all!

NEW WEB SITE

One crucial step in the Bird Observatory's new communications is the redesign of our web site. We are happy to announce that the new site is now up, at our same address: www.sfbbo.org. We are extremely grateful to Alterpop, San Francisco, for the beautiful design and structure, to Doug Moody for engineering brilliance, and to our ad hoc communications committee, Kris Olson, Lisa Myers, Matthew Dodder and Mary Keitelman for the time and talent they all contributed to the project.



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