

# BAY BIRD REVIEW

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



SAN FRANCISCO BAY  
BIRD OBSERVATORY

## Director's Message

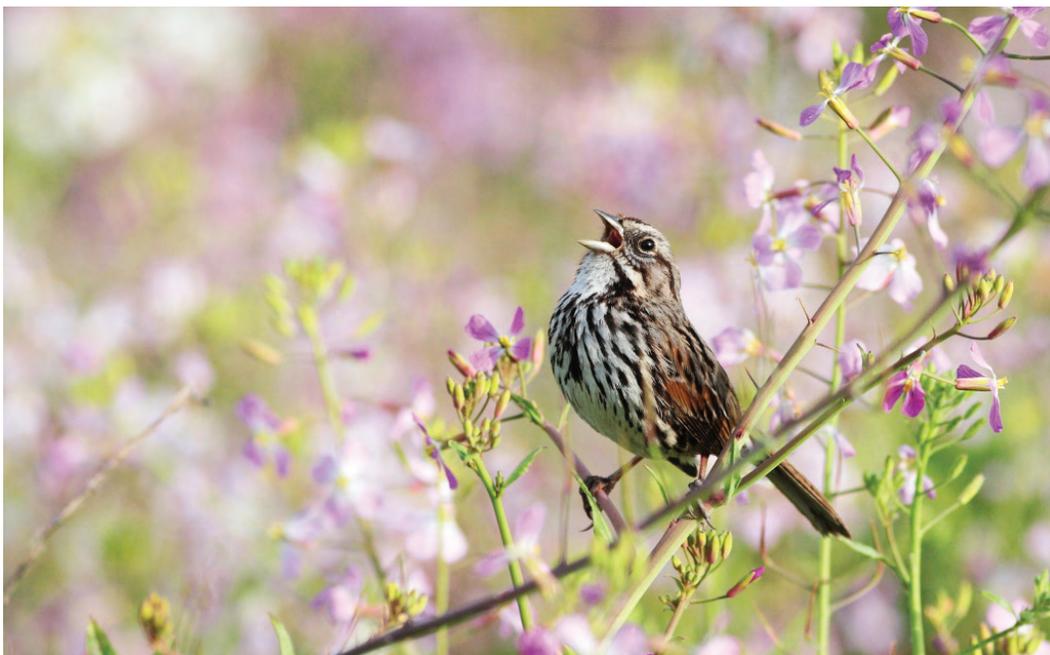
Happy 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary! This spring, Bird Observatory members came together for two very important and milestone events—events that culminated our 30 years of history and allowed us to look forward to the bright future of the Bird Observatory.

On March 12, 2011, over 30 people participated in a full day retreat centered on the topic "What does the Coyote Creek Field Station look like when it is thriving, healthy and full of life?" Coyote Creek Field Station is the Bird Observatory's bird banding station, and depends largely on volunteers for data collection. It was a day of vibrant, facilitated conversation among those who care passionately about the future of the Coyote Creek Field Station. Participants included Coyote Creek Field Station volunteers, staff, former staff and donors. Their hard work

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE *continued on page 2*



A CALIFORNIA THRASHER takes a bath.



SONG SPARROW.

PHOTO BY ASHUTOSH SINHA

## Landbird Science Report

### Trends at the Coyote Creek Field Station

In California, riparian ecosystems support a high diversity of plants and animals, but have been severely degraded by human activity. At the Coyote Creek Field Station (CCFS) we have been monitoring riparian bird populations since 1982 in order to document avian response to restoration and urbanization, as well as to document long-term population trends. CCFS is located on land owned and managed by the Santa Clara Valley Water District (SCVWD). Over the course of several restorations, there are now four distinct habitat sections at CCFS: the Mature Riparian habitat bordering the Coyote Creek; the Pilot Restored, revegetated in 1987 by SCVWD; the Overflow Channel, established in 1990 to manage annual flood events and actively kept free of woody vegetation; and the New Restored, revegetated in 1993.

We collect data at CCFS by capturing birds in mist-nets, and affixing a uniquely-numbered band to each individual. These bands allow us to identify individuals year after year, through-

out their lives. There are 48 mist-nets distributed throughout the four habitat types (12 nets in each). In order to assess variation in bird use of the different habitats, we selected data from summer months (June, July, and August) from a 14-year period (1997-2010). For each habitat type, we tested annual trends in relative abundance (standardized as birds captured per 100 net-hours per year), species richness (total number of species captured per year), and an index of productivity (a ratio of the immature, or hatch-year birds, to the adult birds per year).

From 1997 to 2010, abundance in the Pilot and New Restored habitats declined slightly, but not significantly. In the Mature Riparian habitat, abundance remained relatively stable. In the Overflow Channel, abundance increased significantly ( $p < 0.01$ ,  $R^2 = 0.57$ ; Figure 1). Species Richness declined slightly in the Pilot Restored, and significantly declined in the New Restored ( $p < 0.01$ ,  $R^2 = 0.55$ ). The Mature Riparian

LANDBIRD REPORT *continued on page 6*

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE *from cover*

and rich discussions were inspiring. The day provided an excellent base-line of activities, opportunities, and challenges of the Coyote Creek Field Station; and as the Bird Observatory grows and evolves, we are deeply grateful to be able to pull upon the thoughts, ideas, and hopes of the many individuals whose hard work ensures the success of the Coyote Creek Field Station.

This spring, we also celebrated our historic year with our 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Dinner, held at Vahl's Restaurant and Lounge in Alviso. As we reflected on our past and looked to our future, it was very clear that the work of the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory is more than just relevant. With the collaborative efforts of our vibrant conservation community—our members, partners, volunteers, and staff—we have a chance to achieve an environmental future far brighter than the one we inherited.

I feel privileged to have participated in these events and to witness the passion and community that empowers this organization. I feel even more fortunate to be leading this organization into a promising future, and am thankful for the leadership that came before me for their vision and commitment to the conservation of birds and their habitats. Finally, I want to express my deep gratitude for the loyal support of all the individual members, partners and organizations of the past 30 years. The next 30 years will be defined by the strength of these partnerships. I invite all of you to reaffirm your personal investment in the Bird Observatory and share a bright future with us!

.....  
By Jill Demers, SFBBO Executive Director



ANNA'S HUMMINGBIRD. PHOTO BY ED NGUYEN



A MALE AMERICAN AVOCET and his chick.

PHOTO BY JACQUELINE DEELY

## Board Migrations

### *Welcome Brian Fulfrost*

Brian moved back to the Bay Area three years ago to start Brian Fulfrost and Associates, where he promotes the use of mapping and spatial analysis in sustainable planning and urban design, as well as natural resource management and conservation. Brian taught GIS in the Environmental Studies Dept. at U.C. Santa Cruz. He is a strong advocate for the use of GIS, remote sensing and related technologies to assist decision makers, land and resource managers, and urban planners to make more informed decisions. Brian has also served on government and nonprofit advisory committees. While at UCSC, Brian and his students provided assistance with the Bird Observatory's database and GIS needs and served on our Scientific Advisory Board. He currently teaches as an adjunct lecturer at San Francisco State University. We welcome Brian's experience and knowledge of regional conservation issues and his commitment to science education.



### *Welcome Shannon McMahon, Secretary*

Shannon is a California native who moved to the Bay Area 16 years ago. She works as a Marketing Programs Manager at NetApp, a high-tech company that creates storage systems and software designed to help customers store, manage, and protect their data. Shannon has always enjoyed the outdoors, and birds in particular, and became a Bird Observatory member in 2007. She has been volunteering at Coyote Creek Field Station and has been monitoring a waterbird colony at Shadowcliffs Park in Pleasanton since 2008. Shannon states, "I really enjoy being able to combine my love of birds and nature with the scientific research that is being done by SFBBO staff and volunteers. I am hoping that my marketing background will help us come up with activities that will generate more public interest in SFBBO." Shannon joined the Board in February 2011 and was elected Secretary in April 2011.



### *Thank You!*

We thank Michael Kern and Ed Temple for their service on the Board of Directors. Michael joined the Board in 2008 and contributed greatly to our Strategic Planning process. Michael has managed the Observatory's photo database and annual Click Off Photo Contest. Ed joined the Board in 2009 with a focus on development. He led the planning for the 2010 Stilt Cup, a bird-a-thon competition to engage high school students in birding. Thank you Ed and Michael for all of your contributions!

# Click Off 2011 Kicks Off June 1st!

Announcing the 3rd Annual Click Off! Join our photo contest highlighting the birds and habitat diversity found in the Bay Area and beyond. Share your best photos and win valuable prizes while supporting the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory.

Winners are selected from six categories: Bird Portraits, Endangered Species, Birds in their Habitat, Bird Behavior, Human Interaction, and Birds of the World. In addition, a People's Choice Award is selected from the Category Winners and a new Youth Award will be awarded to the best image submitted by a person 18 years or younger. All winners are announced at the Annual Meeting on Sunday, October 23, 2011.

## *When, How & How Much*

Participants can begin submitting images on June 1st, 2011. Images must be received before September 1st, 2011. A \$25 fee for this competition entitles you to enter up to five images. To learn more about the contest's rules, category definitions, and schedule, or to submit images, please visit our website at [www.sfbbo.org/clickoff](http://www.sfbbo.org/clickoff).

## *The Winners*

**Awards of Merit** – In each category, judges give special recognition awards.

**Category Winners** – In each category, one image is selected by the judges as the Category Winner.

**Youth Award** – A special award will be given to the best entry in any category by a person 18 years or younger.

**People's Choice Award** – Prints of each Category Winner will be displayed at the Annual Meeting on Sunday, October 23rd, 2011. SFBBO Members choose one People's Choice award.

## *The Prizes*

Winning images will be featured on the Bird Observatory's web site and in newsletters reaching over 3,000 people.

## **People's Choice Award:**

A day in the field with a Bird Observatory biologist! Spend a day in the field photographing with a biologist at one of



WHITE-TAILED KITE HANDOFF by Richard Pavek, the 2010 Click Off People's Choice Award Winner.

our unique project locations, an exclusive chance to capture rare and dramatic images while spending one-on-one time with a scientist. Learn about the common, migratory and/or endangered species and habitats found in the Bay Area.

## **Category Winners:**

Bird Blind Photography Workshop with Bruce Finocchio and Michael Kern, plus a weekend stay at the private Ramrod Ranch in Monterey County. Value: \$475. View Bruce's work and images of his

ranch at [www.dreamcatcherimages.net](http://www.dreamcatcherimages.net).

## **Awards of Merit:**

BorrowLenses Gift Certificates. Value: \$25 each.

## **Youth Award:**

StreetWalker Pro backpack from Think Tank Photo. Value \$159.

Contact Michael Kern ([mkern@sfbbo.org](mailto:mkern@sfbbo.org)) or Stephanie Ellis ([sellis@sfbbo.org](mailto:sellis@sfbbo.org)) with questions regarding the Click Off 2011 Photo Contest.



WHITE-TAILED EAGLE Confrontation, Hokkaido, Japan by Christine Hansen. 2010 Click Off Birds of the World—Honorable Mention Winner.

# Tracking California Gulls from Mono Lake to San Francisco Bay

California Gulls are relative newcomers as breeders to the San Francisco Bay bird community. Before 1980, they nested exclusively in inland, arid lakes such as Mono Lake in eastern California and Utah's Great Salt Lake. The majority spend their winters along the Pacific coast. Biologists have documented a major coastal shift in the breeding biology of the species. Why did this happen? Garbage dumps and other anthropogenic food sources are a major reason. But turmoil that occurred at the large colony at Mono Lake may have motivated some pioneering gulls to make a big move.

Mono Lake is located in eastern California, and every year since 1983, biologists with PRBO Conservation Science have assessed the population size and reproductive success of the California Gulls that breed there. Mono Lake is a terminal lake, so it is salty and alkali. Its thriving environment supports trillions of brine shrimp and brine flies upon which gulls and many other birds depend.

But the Mono Lake ecosystem once teetered on the brink of collapse. Beginning in 1941 the City of Los Angeles started diverting water from Mono Lake's tributary streams, which caused Mono Lake to decline. By the late 1970s Mono Lake was critically low and increased salinity concentrations threatened the entire



PHOTO BY OLIVER JAMES

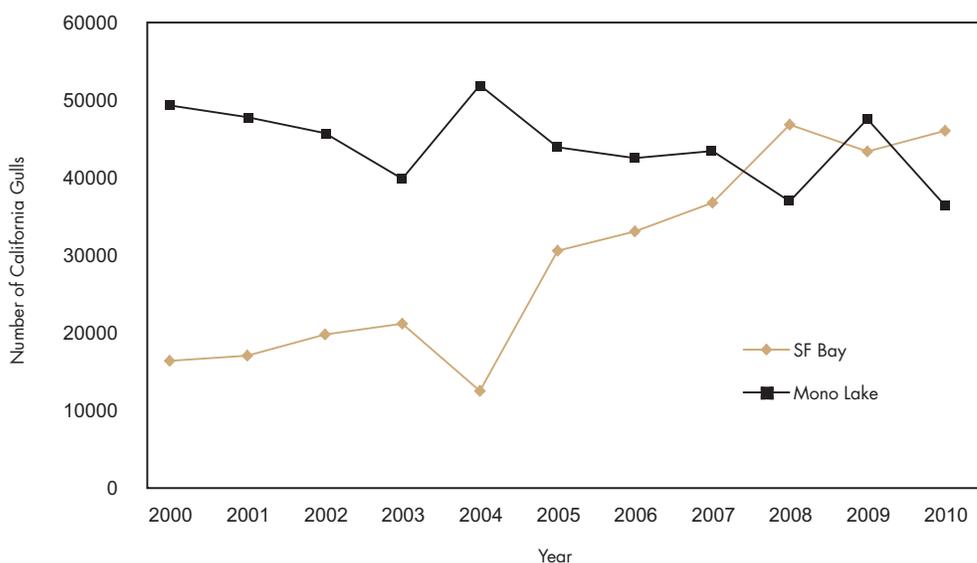
CALIFORNIA GULL colony at Mono Lake.

ecosystem. The California Gull population experienced perhaps the greatest impact, as once-isolated breeding sites on one of the lake's islands became accessible to predators. In 1979, coyotes entered the gull colony and decimated it. The following year, 1980, the gulls did something remarkable that suggests cognition and decision-making. They abandoned the historic nesting island where the predation occurred, and moved instead to smaller islets within Mono Lake that were still water-bound. Concurrently, about 20 California Gulls initiated nesting in the San Francisco Bay. Perhaps those individuals abandoned Mono Lake entirely. Since then, the Bay Area

population has grown tremendously. While historically Mono Lake hosted 80-90% of California's breeding California Gulls, last year the San Francisco Bay population exceeded that of Mono Lake by over 20%.

Additionally, research collected by SFBBO and PRBO Conservation Science has shown the Mono Lake and San Francisco Bay gull populations are negatively correlated. This means the population sizes swing up and down in a related way that suggests gulls are assessing conditions at both places and nest at the "better" one in a given year. Brine shrimp concentrations in spring, a driving force of the Mono Lake gull population, can be highly variable. In response, the gull population has fluctuated by over 45% annually. What do the gulls do during these "bad" years at Mono Lake? Many probably forgo nesting that year. Yet the correlation between the Mono Lake and San Francisco Bay populations may represent another way California Gulls are adapting to change. Some gulls may decide to nest in the San Francisco Bay if conditions at Mono Lake appear unfavorable. This apparently happened in 1980 with the very first San Francisco Bay pioneers. PRBO and SFBBO biologists look forward to future collaborations and seeing how this trend develops.

FIGURE 1. Number of California Gulls breeding on Mono Lake and San Francisco Bay between 2000-2010.



By Kristie Nelson, PRBO Conservation Science, Mono Lake California Gull Program Manager

## Calendar

Saturday, July 23rd, 8:30 – 10:30 a.m.

### 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.



Saturday, August 13th, 7:45 – 10:00 am

### YOUNG AUDUBON SUMMER ADVENTURE: BIRD BANDING

SITE: COYOTE CREEK FIELD STATION (MILPITAS)

Together with Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society, we are offering a very special bird banding demonstration at the Coyote Creek Field Station for families and children. Come learn about bird banding, tour the field station, and see wild birds up close and personal. This tour is for ages 7 and up and lasts ap-

## Carquinez Strait Birding Series

Celebrate the Birding the Carquinez Strait Scenic Loop Trail brochure by exploring some of the beautiful habitat and bird diversity that can be seen along the Carquinez Strait Scenic Loop Trail. Request your Carquinez brochure at [www.sfbbo.org](http://www.sfbbo.org).

Saturday, June 11, 7:45 am – 12:00 pm

### CARQUINEZ STRAIT REGIONAL SHORELINE WITH ERIC FEUSS

SITE: NEJEDLY STAGING AREA (MARTINEZ)

Come explore areas along the Carquinez Strait Regional Shoreline with Eric Feuss. The walk will take us through many diverse habitats including oak and riparian woodland, grasslands, marshes, and open water—we are sure to see a great variety of species. We will begin at the Nejedly Staging Area, near Martinez. RSVP required.



Saturday, July 16, 9:00 am – 12:00 pm

### CARQUINEZ SHORELINE WITH ALVARO JARAMILLO

SITE: MARTINEZ REGIONAL SHORELINE AND THE WATERBIRD REGIONAL RESERVE (MARTINEZ)

Martinez Regional Shoreline is a salt marsh wetland adjacent to the Strait; the Waterbird Regional Preserve is a restored fresh water wetland. These two different habitat types will afford us a chance to see a variety of species. We hope to find various waterfowl, egrets, and some regional specialties such as the Suisun Song Sparrow, interior Common Yellowthroats, and Great-tailed Grackles. We will begin at Granger's Wharf in Martinez. RSVP required.



proximately 2 hours. RSVP required and space is limited. Call Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society at (408) 252-3740 for reservations. Groups with children receive priority. Fee is \$25 per family (\$8 children, \$10 per adult).



WALK: RSVP to [outreach@sfbbo.org](mailto: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 Director so that we can coordinate with you.



SPECIAL EVENT



VOLUNTEER ACTIVITY

## Workshops for the Birder and Naturalist - 2011

WITH: *Alvaro Jaramillo, SFBBO Senior Biologist*

SITE: *Sobrato Center for Nonprofits in Milpitas*

Monday, June 6th (instruction) 6:30 – 9:00 pm;

Wednesday, June 8th (instruction) 6:30 – 9:00 pm;

Sunday, June 12th (field trip) TBA

### BIRD SOUND WORKSHOP

Bird song is captivating for its complexity and beauty, and is an important method for identifying bird species. This workshop will train birders to identify birds by song and understand the ecology and behavior of bird vocalization. Topics covered: the development of song; song variations; the purpose of song; and how to visualize, learn, and study bird sounds. On the field trip we will listen to bird sounds in nature and do some simple experiments to hear what we learned in the class. Birding Level: Beginner and up.



Monday, August 15th (instruction) 6:30 – 9:00 pm;

Wednesday, August 17th (instruction) 6:30 – 9:00 pm;

Saturday, August 20th (field trip) TBA

### SHOREBIRDS IN FALL

The fall offers a fun shorebird challenge! Shorebirds can be difficult to identify in the fall as they return from their breeding grounds in juvenile and non-breeding plumages. We will dig deep into shorebird behavior, physiology, ecology, and everything else that is relevant to this season and your enjoyment of migrating shorebirds. This is an opportunity for you to create depth to your shorebird identification skills, have a great time, and view many shorebird species. Birding Level: Intermediate and up.



habitat also showed slight but non-significant declines in species richness; the Overflow Channel remained stable (Figure 2). Productivity remained stable between years in all habitats.

The declines in abundance and species richness in the Restored habitats conflict with the results of other studies, including a CCFS report from 1987-1997, which reported that abundance and species richness increase with the age of the restored habitat. The declines we report here may be explained by the height of our mist-nets versus the height of the restored vegetation. Mist-nets only sample a 2-meter high section of the understory, and as the Pilot and New Restored vegetation matures, the vegetation height increases beyond the reach of the mist-nets. Therefore, we lose the ability to sample birds using the upperstory layers and capture a lower proportion of

the birds using the habitat.

Additionally, the vegetation composition in the understory of the Restored habitats may be changing to the disadvantage of some species. From 1996 to 2007, Common Yellowthroat abundance declined in the Pilot and New Restored habitats, whereas Song Sparrows remained stable. Both Common Yellowthroats and Song Sparrows use the understory layers, therefore the habitat suitability may have decreased for Common Yellowthroats. Song Sparrows may be competitively excluding Common Yellowthroats, or a combination of both may be occurring.

Unlike the Pilot and New Restored habitats, the Overflow Channel increased in abundance over time. Productivity did not vary over time in this or any other habitat, indicating that the increase in abundance is driven by an increase in the number of both immature and adult birds in the Overflow

Channel. This is likely due to population changes in specific species; for example, from 1996 to 2007, Song Sparrow populations were found to be increasing in the Overflow Channel, whereas Common Yellowthroat populations showed no significant change.

Understanding abundance and species richness is important for assessing avian response to restoration, but these measures alone can be misleading indicators of habitat quality. Trends may differ between species, and maturing vegetation may benefit only a subset of the species using the habitat. Assessing demographic trends such as survival and productivity by species are also important for understanding how bird populations change as restorations age into mature habitats, and help us shape future restorations plans.

By Josh Scullen, SFBBO Biologist,  
Coyote Creek Field Station Manager

FIGURE 1. Abundance in 4 habitat types at CCFS from 1997 to 2010. Abundance increased significantly ( $p < 0.01$ ,  $R^2 = 0.57$ ) in the Overflow Channel. All other trends were not significant.

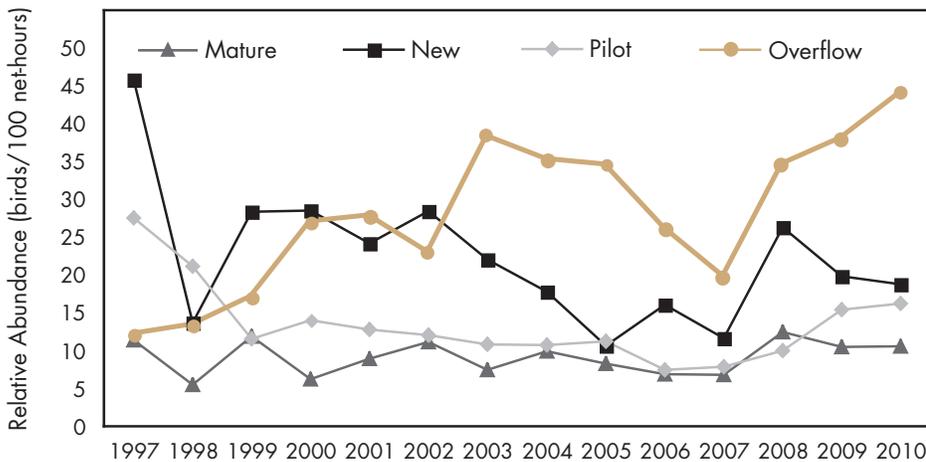
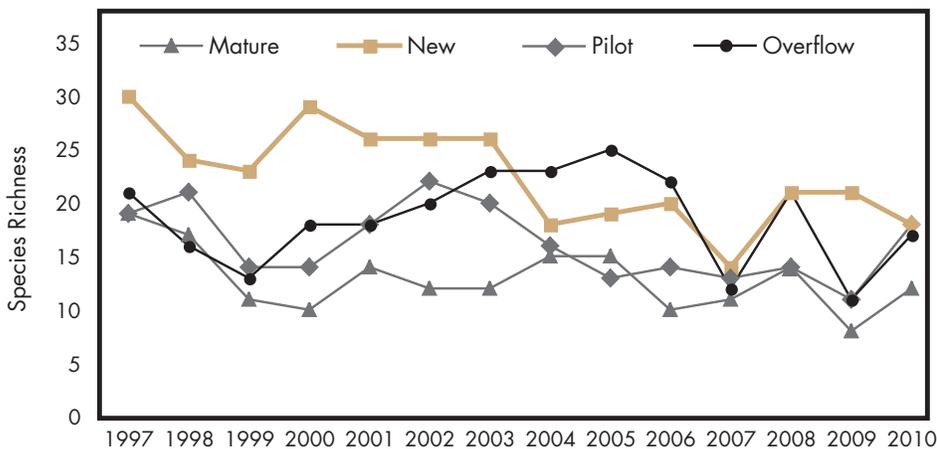


FIGURE 2. Species richness in 4 habitat types at CCFS from 1997 to 2010. Species richness declined significantly ( $p < 0.01$ ,  $R^2 = 0.55$ ) in the New Restored habitat. All other trends were not significant.



THE COYOTE CREEK Field Station bird banding trailer.

PHOTO BY MICHAEL KERN



COMMON YELLOWTHROAT in a mist-net at CCFS.

PHOTO BY WILL SIGNAL

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



*Thank you new and returning members, and generous donors, January – March 2011*

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And thank you to dozens of people who gave up to \$40 each to help us get started in 2011.

## **STILT SOCIETY**

Jacqueline Deely, Janet and Jay Hanson, Jan Hintermeister, Sheri Howe, Jane Such

The 2011 Spring Campaign is in full swing. Help us meet our \$15,000 goal. Please send your donation today.

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## A Tale of Two Gull Colonies: An Evening Lecture

Historically, California Gulls nested exclusively at arid, inland lakes like Mono. But in 1980 they began breeding in the San Francisco Bay when 20 gulls nested in salt evaporation ponds. In 1980, the Mono Lake gulls abandoned their historic colony location in response to coyote predation and a lowered lake level. The San Francisco Bay population grew to over 46,000 birds in 2010, surpassing the once-dominant Mono population.

In the Bay, California Gulls have negative effects on ground-nesting birds and are major predators of eggs and chicks of American Avocets, Black-necked Stilts, and Western Snowy Plovers. In December 2010, the former salt pond that hosted over 24,000 nesting gulls was breached for the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project, displacing the majority of the gulls at that colony. Biologists with San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory are researching the movements of displaced gulls by re-sighting banded birds and studying the impacts these displaced gulls are having on nesting waterbirds. Biologists with PRBO Conservation Science have been monitoring the Mono Lake gull population for almost 30 years. Join Kristie Nelson and Caitlin Robinson-Nilsen for this scientific tale of two colonies. You can read more about the gull colonies on page 4.

Register for the Mono Basin Birding Chautauqua or find more information by visiting [www.birdchautauqua.org](http://www.birdchautauqua.org).

Friday, June 17th

7:30 – 9:00 pm

Lee Vining, CA

Caitlin Robinson-Nilsen,  
SFBBO Waterbird Program Director  
Kristie Nelson, PRBO Conservation  
Science

*An evening lecture presented at the 10<sup>th</sup>  
Annual Mono Basin Birding Chautauqua*



CALIFORNIA GULL COLONY at Mono Lake.

PHOTO BY NORA LIVINGSTON

## Alvaro Jaramillo Awarded Eisenmann Award

On March 8th, San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory Biologist Alvaro Jaramillo was awarded



the Linnaean Society of New York Eisenmann Award for "excellence in ornithology and encouragement of the amateur."

The Linnaean Society of New York was organized in 1878 by a group of amateurs dedicated to ornithology and natural science. Members share an active interest in observing and learning about the natural environment of New York, with a particular emphasis on the resident and migratory birdlife of the area. Eugene Eisenmann was a model member of the Linnaean Society—a lawyer by profession, and an avid amateur ornithologist who became one of the most influential figures in mid-century American ornithology.

Alvaro shares this prestigious award with ornithological greats such as Ernest Mayr, Olin S. Pettin-gill, Roger Tory Peterson, Frank B. Gill, David P. Wingate and David A. Sibley. Congratulations Alvaro!

Visit the Society's website at <http://linnaeannewyork.org/about.html>.