

BAY BIRD REVIEW

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



SAN FRANCISCO BAY
BIRD OBSERVATORY

Director's Message

Disasters – Large and Small

On that first morning of November 7th, it sounded like just a close call: a ship had hit a tower of the Bay Bridge, with no immediate threat to anyone's life. But as the week unfolded, the news became much grimmer.

The day after the spill, Bird Observatory biologists began spotting oiled birds off Eden Landing in Hayward. In the following days, several Observatory staff underwent the training to collect birds, and we have since worked nearly every day with our partners in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The initial rush is over but as the escaped oil continues to move, birds will continue to get oiled and die, probably for months and years to come. We will never see most of them die at sea.

Meanwhile, as photos of oiled struggling birds appear on our screens and in our newspapers, bay area residents are rightfully outraged. How could this happen in the "greenest" of all places, in the most affluent country on earth?

In the best of times, birds lead precariously balanced lives. Migration occurs in tight time frames; a day or two of bad judgment means death. Habitat is a narrowly defined type of

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE *continued on page 2*

The California Fall
Challenge raises \$50,000!
See page 4 for more!



A SNOWY EGRET transports nesting material.

PHOTO BY MICHAEL KERN

Waterbird Science Report

2007 Birds of the Baylands; Year in Review

As part of the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory's "Birds of the Baylands" Project, staff biologists and volunteers have been monitoring waterbird nesting sites in the south San Francisco Bay since the early 1980s. This year, with the help of 50 volunteers, we surveyed 7 gull colonies, 7 tern colonies, and 32 heron, egret and cormorant colonies. This long-term data set allows us to see how some of the local species are doing over time, and to try to understand any declines that may occur. In this report, we focus on changes in colonies of California Gull, Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, Snowy Egret, Black-crowned Night Heron and Double-crested Cormorant over the last three years. We monitored colonies using binoculars and scopes during 5 sequenced 4-day periods during the season, counting adults, chicks, and nests. We also performed "walk-throughs" of certain gull colonies with our intrepid volunteers to count all nests, eggs, and chicks present.

Gull Census

We counted 18,381 California Gull nests in the south bay! This species continues to increase steadily in the South Bay. The largest colony (12,348 nests) is still the Knapp property (pond A6), a dry salt pond located in Alviso (Figure 1). This year A6 was the only gull colony in the Alviso salt ponds. In previous years,

YEAR IN REVIEW *continued on page 6*



PHOTO BY CATHARINE DOBBINS

GREAT BLUE HERONS at the Hillsborough Crocker Lake Open Space Preserve.

space. Just think of shorebirds that can only survive along the thin strip of our coast, or on small patches of inland wetland. Or think of migrating warblers that drop out of the sky into what is left of our riparian corridors, to refuel for the remaining journey. Or think of Surf Scoters that arrive every fall in the thousands to over-winter in our bay, just as they've done for thousands of years. Birds are a marvelous demonstration of the precision of evolution: their niches succinctly narrow, their habits ultimately specialized. But they also clearly demonstrate the glacial speed of evolution. Many species can't adapt fast enough to survive the environmental changes we thrust upon them.

Humankind, on the other hand, is wonderfully talented at changing the environment to suit ourselves. We can survive a winter in the Antarctic, or a summer in Death Valley or a trip to the moon. We are smart enough to invent the technologies that would allow humankind, bird-kind and all the other "kinds" to thrive together on our shared earth. Are we smart enough to demand them?

It's easy for the public to see the effects of a large disaster like an oil spill. It's tougher to demonstrate the results of the numerous small insults we hurl at birds every day, in the form of habitat destruction, invasive species, introduced predators, and toxic chemicals.

The Bird Observatory works hard to unravel the mysteries behind the decline of many of our bay area birds. We also work hard to shift the public's view of the steps that must be taken to protect native birds, such as habitat protection, reining in pesticide use, keeping cats indoors, demanding alternative fuels, and supporting those scientific and advocacy groups that develop the support and demand for these changes. Steps like these can be taken by any or all of us; steps like these are always first taken by individuals smart enough to see the road ahead.

Migrations

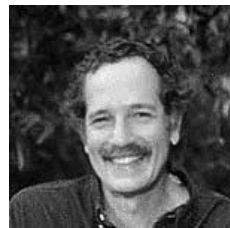


Roy Churchwell, the Bird Observatory's Landbird Program Director is leaving us for the land "Down Under". He has accepted a five-month position in the northern portion of Western Australia helping with a nest-searching project working with a bird called the Crimson Finch. He will be living with several other biologists and working at the Mornington Wildlife

Sanctuary. If you are interested in reading a little more about the project he will be involved with, visit: <http://www.milenkaya.org>. Roy says, "I don't have any concrete plans after I finish in Australia, but like the birds I study I will probably go where the wind blows".

Roy's expertise lies in population ecology, the influence of grazing on grassland ecosystems, statistics and GIS. Prior to the Bird Observatory, some of Roy's past work experience included banding research for the Idaho Bird Observatory during fall migration, and the study of winter survival and feeding behavior of mule deer in Hells Canyon for the Idaho Power Company. Previously at PRBO Conservation Science, Roy conducted point counts for shrub steppe habitat in southeastern Oregon, and managed the San Joaquin riparian restoration research project.

Roy has worked as the Bird Observatory Landbird Program Director over the last two years and has overseen the PG&E powerline project. Roy has also conducted community surveys for East Bay Regional Parks District and Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority, and helped develop a relationship with Santa Clara Valley Vector Control and the IBM Environmental Club. He explains, "Working at San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory has been one of the most challenging and rewarding jobs I have worked on so far in my biology career". We will miss Roy, and wish him the very best in his world travels.



I hope to build the Board of Directors, ultimately to better support the staff and goals of SFBBO. I would also like to help broaden the scope of SFBBO, just as other bird observatories have done.

Welcome to the Board!

The Bird Observatory would like to welcome Dave Johnston, Ph.D. to the Board of Directors. Dave is a vertebrate ecologist who specializes in the study of bats. A well-known authority on bats on the west coast, Dave also has a vast knowledge of the natural history of vertebrates in California. With this knowledge, Dave has provided numerous innovative mitigation options for potential impacts to populations of small mammals throughout the west coast. Dave is a former Executive Director of the Youth Science Institute, A non-profit organization in Santa Clara County and served as Executive Director of the Coyote Creek Riparian Station. He currently works as Senior Wildlife Ecologist at the Harvey & Associates; Ecological Consultants. Dave says "I hope to build the Board of Directors, ultimately to better support the staff and goals of the Bird Observatory. I would also like to help broaden the scope of the Bird Observatory, just as other bird observatories have done." We are delighted to have Dave's scientific expertise and enthusiasm on board!

California Gulls have nested on other levees in the Alviso salt pond complex. Nest numbers at the Coyote Hills colony decreased since last year (2,192 nests), and the Mowry colony has shown a slight increase (3,692 nests). Although the Mountain View California Gull colony has fluctuated in the last few years (2005: 310 nests; 2006: 90 nests; 2007: 149 nests), this year we found a new colony in the Palo Alto flood control basin! We are finding that although there are certain well-established colonies that keep growing, other colonies are more likely to vary from year to year.

Heron and Egrets

The total number of heron and egret nests has been stable over the last three years, with a total of 701 nests in the south bay this year! The number of Great Blue Heron (537 nests) and Great Egret nests (139 nests) is similar to the previous two years (Figure 2). However, the number of Snowy Egret nests (138 nests) has decreased, and the number of Black-crowned Night Heron nests (133 nests) has increased in the last two years. Although some variation is expected from year to year depending on ecological conditions (food or habitat availability), heronry sizes can also vary as birds move among sites. This year new colonies of Black-crowned Night Herons and Snowy Egrets were established at Schlumberger Slough, and we also were informed of a colony of Great Egrets and Snowy Egrets at Bay Farm Island, in Alameda. Double-crested

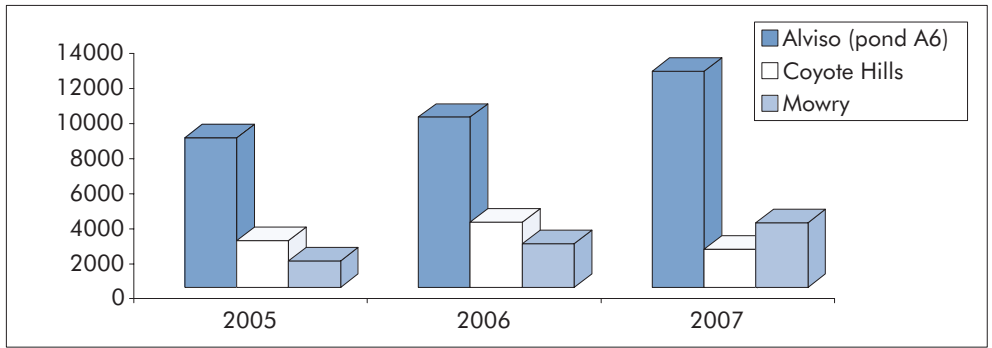


FIGURE 1. Number of California Gull nests at A6 pond in Alviso, Coyote Hills and Mowry.

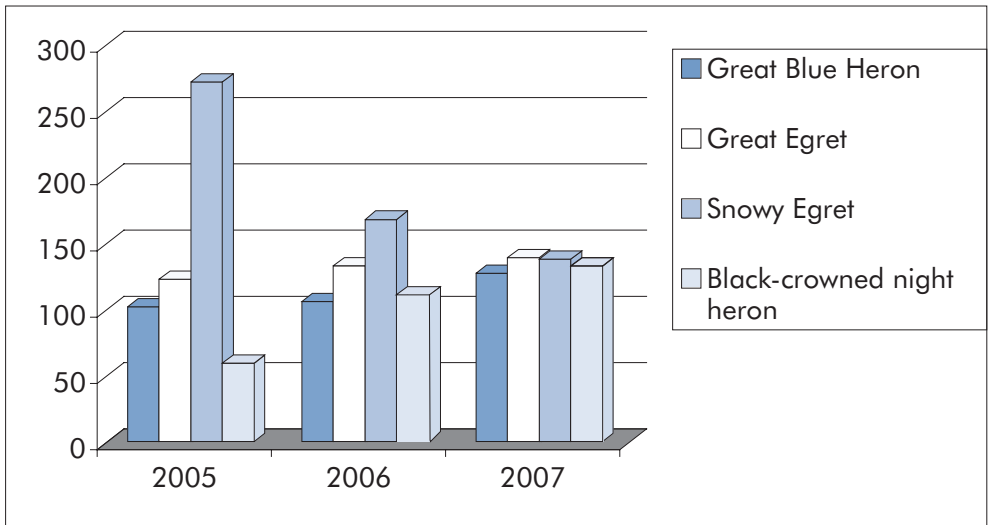


FIGURE 2. Number of Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, Snowy Egret and Black-crowned Night Heron nests in the South San Francisco Bay area.

cormorant nest numbers have remained similar to past years (701 nests). These data allow us to track the health of the south bay system, and the health of breeding colonies in our backyard. Thanks to all of the volunteers who made this monitoring possible!

.....
Danielle Le Fer, Ph.D., is the Waterbird Director for the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory



BLACK-CROWNED Night Herons at the Palo Alto Baylands.



A NESTING California Gull.

Become a Colonial Waterbird Volunteer!

From early March through August, the Bird Observatory conducts colonial waterbird surveys throughout the south and east bay. Surveys occur once per month in the early morning. Volunteers are needed to document nesting, and evidence of disturbance and predation at selected nesting sites of gulls, terns, herons and egrets. Previous experience identifying the given species is preferred but not required. If you are interested, we would love to have you join our existing team of experienced and enthusiastic volunteers. Please contact the Colonial Waterbird Monitoring Program Coordinator, Cynthia Padula at cpadula@sfbbo.org.

CALIFORNIA FALL CHALLENGE 2007

\$50,000 Goal Met!

Here is an exciting update for members and friends of the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory. This year's California Fall Challenge successfully met the fundraising goal of \$50,000! Raising this amount was a first for this event and required dedication from the eight-member committee. Our goal was to provide members with several different educational opportunities in which they could participate. Held from mid-September to mid-October, everyone was encouraged to go out and fundraise or support others who were. Members could also get involved by signing up for a guided trip or special event. It was the committee's challenge to do whatever they could to motivate everyone to get involved! Every weekend of the event guided trips were organized and led by some of the bay area's most active birding educators. The Observatory also collaborated with the Golden Gate Raptor Observatory and Sky Hunters and spent an entire day in the company of raptors during peak fall migration. A special movie night was also a great chance to meet other Bird Observatory members while learning about south polar penguins. Everyone was impressed



PHOTO BY PATTY MCGANN

THE CALIFORNIA FALL CHALLENGE Committee at the 11th Annual Membership Meeting and Fall Challenge Awards Ceremony 07. Left to right: Lisa Myers, Chair, Cheryl Adams, Joelle Buffa, Cindy Ralston, Jane Jordon, Gerry Ellis and Jan Hintermeister, Bonnie-Bedford White, not pictured.

with the t-shirt designed by local artist Rene Reyes to commemorate this year's event. While many of you were birding the habitats of California, college student Ryan Terrill supported the fundraiser by birding the neotropical habitats of Argentina! And finally, during the Annual Meeting on October 28th, a

silent auction raised an additional \$2500, and the winning fundraisers were congratulated and awarded prizes. We thank them and all of you for supporting the Bird Observatory in this year's event.

.....
Lisa Myers
CFC Committee Chair and Board Member

"BIG DAY" COMPETITIVE BIRDING HIGHEST PERCENTAGE OF COUNTY LIST

	1	2	3	4
TEAM	The Refugees	Pish, Fast, & Loud	MBB Overdrive	DeDucktions
TRIP DATE	10/11	10/10	9/23	9/29
MEMBERS' NAMES	Mike Rogers Mike Mammoser Francis Toldi	Mike Rogers Scott Terrill Steve Rottenborn Steve Rovell	Bob Power Mary Wisnewski Bill Walker	Matthew Dodder
COUNTY	Merced	Monterey	Alameda	Santa Clara
COUNTY TOTAL	213	292	249	239
NUMBER OF SPECIES SEEN	131	164	133	127
% OF LIST	0.6150	0.5616	0.5341	0.5313



MIKE MAMMOSER AND MIKE ROGERS receive the Mewaldt Cup.

PHOTO BY PATTY MCGANN

Thank you



to our 11th Annual Fall Challenge Sponsors & Donors!

TOP 10 FUNDRAISERS

Leonie Batkin	\$5,176
Lisa Myers	\$4,110
Joelle Buffa	\$4,001
Matthew Dodder	\$3,023
Janet Hanson	\$2,875
Gina Barton	\$2,135
Jane Jordan	\$1,900
Sandy Moore	\$1,619
Mike Rogers	\$1,410
Karen DeMello	\$1,340

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FALL CHALLENGE TEAMS/GUIDED TRIPS AND LEADERS:

Intrepid A-to-Zers (*Karen DeMello and Kay Partelo*), Varied Twitchers (*Mike Rogers*), MBB Overdrive (*Bob Power, Mary Wisnewski, Bill Walker*), Garbled Modwits (*Deb Barton*), DeDucktions (*Matthew Dodder*), Gallinago Go Go's (*Lisa Myers*), Kings' Birders (*David Rice, Helen Green*), Cliffswepers (*Phil and Pat Gordon*), Coffee Brewer's Blackbirds (*Alvaro Jaramillo*), Pish Fast and Loud (*Mike Rogers, Scott Terrill, Steve Rottenborn, and Steve Rovell*), The Refugees (*Mike Rogers, Mike Mammoser, Francis Toldi, Rich Jeffers*), Slack Bimmers (*Karen DeMello, Jan Hintermeister, and Tom Stewart*), Wandering Vagrants (*Scott Terrill, Joelle Buffa*), and 2BRRDRRS (*Bob and Carol Yutzky*)

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EGRETS! A New Colony at Harbor Bay

CRAZY That was my first reaction last June when my friend, Reyla Graber, telephoned me to report she had just seen both Great Egrets and Snowy Egrets nesting and feeding young in a mature pine tree along a busy Harbor Bay lagoon path.

The Harbor Bay project is a part of Bay Farm Island, a portion of Alameda, and its lagoons have been in existence about 30 years. Historically Bay Farm Island was the location of extensive marshes between what later became Oakland Airport and Alameda, and an important stopover for birds migrating along the Pacific Flyway. Most of that ended beginning in the 1950's with the draining and filling of the marsh, the coming of a large sanitary landfill, the construction of two golf courses, and extensive commercial and residential development. The lagoons were built as amenities for homeowners alongside them, and not for wildlife enhancement.



A FAMILY of Egrets at Harbor Bay.

So far as I was aware, the area was now devoid of any breeding birds larger (or more interesting) than a Rock Pigeon, other than the weirdly hybridized, sedentary Mallards and the odd Cooper's Hawk or White-tailed Kite which might show itself. Even the numerous American Coots, which were everywhere in winter, migrated elsewhere to breed.

Nevertheless, I agreed to meet Reyla at the location she described the next

morning. I walked the lagoon path to the indicated location maybe 100 yards from the Safeway Supermarket. Approaching the area I first heard a "whooshing" noise from overhead. I looked up and was awestruck by a beautiful array of perhaps 30 juvenile white egrets decorating the sparse foliage of a large pine tree growing by and partly overhanging the lagoon.

Most were Great Egrets, ranging in size from just hatched to adult (about 3 feet tall). The Snowy Egrets, about half as big as their larger cousins, were present in small numbers, still mostly on eggs or brooding their hatchlings. Reyla arrived shortly after I did. I promised I would not doubt her sightings again.

GETTING STARTED Neither of us had any experience with keeping records of observations for breeding colonies of birds. We eventually contacted the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory. A meeting was promptly scheduled with Stephanie Ellis, the Outreach and Education Specialist, who along with Biologist Cynthia Padula and volunteer Spike Marlowe provided us with forms and guidance for tracking the colony. Their enthusiasm and moral support were infectious, and we were able to recruit several additional helpers in our watch over the colony.

During the ensuing days, we located birds and nests, and witnessed the feeding behavior of the young by their parents. Every arrival of an adult precipitated an attack by three to four hungry chicks. Over time the juvenile birds grew larger and more determined until the parent seemed in danger of being overwhelmed by deep thrusts of their dagger-like bills into the parent's throat.

Our work included preparation of a map (thanks to the splendid work of Nancy Issel-Mayes, a retired science teacher) showing the position of each nest. Our final count came to not fewer than 18 nests in the pine tree and about

13 nests at a second grove a short stroll down the lagoon path. Productivity was extremely high, and we estimated more than 100 birds fledged from the two sites.



PHOTO BY KAREN EIKELAND

A GREAT EGRET carries nesting material.

BEAUTY IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER... Almost as interesting as the behavior of the egrets was the reaction of the human population to this little bit of wildness adjacent to and/or above their houses. Although a few complained about bird droppings, the overwhelming reaction was one of shock and awe. Even devout joggers at times were stopped in their tracks by the sight of so many spectacular birds. Parents with children stopped to allow their children to take in this phenomenon.

The egrets themselves, in plain view and some perched as little as ten feet above ground, paid absolutely no attention to us.

In today's busy world, the Harbor Bay egrets helped the human population for a few months to step back and take a look at the wonder and beauty of nature. The question now on everyone's mind is: Will the egrets be back next year? Stay tuned...

.....
By Tim Molter. Tim is a resident of the Community of Harbor Bay Isle and a dedicated Colonial Waterbird volunteer for the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory.

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



We thank the new and returning Members of the Bird Observatory, Jul. — Sep. 2007

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A Special Wish

On October 30th, the Bird Observatory was broken into and many of our laptops, scopes and binoculars were stolen. While our insurance will cover much of our loss, we miss our collection of quality used binoculars that have been donated over the years. If you are upgrading your optics soon, please consider donating your older "bins" to the Bird Observatory.

Wish List

- A mid-sized pick-up truck, low miles, 1990 or newer
- Laptop computers, running Windows 2000 or newer
- Spotting scopes with tripods
- Binoculars: 8x40 or better
- Kayaks: one-man plastic, with paddles
- Life preservers
- Color inkjet printer
- Slide scanner

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, January 12, 8:30 am-10:30 am
RSVP

A BIRD IN THE HAND

SITE: COYOTE CREEK FIELD STATION (MILPITAS)

Visit the Bird Observatory's field station and experience conservation science in action. Attendees will learn about our bird banding research and have the opportunity to see several different species up close and personal. We will tour mist nets, watch a bird banding demonstration, and explore a restored riparian habitat. We are likely to capture Bushtits, Song Sparrows and Hermit Thrushes. Meet at the Borders bookstore parking lot in McCarthy Ranch, Milpitas. Please include a contact phone number in your RSVP. In the event of rain, the tour is cancelled.



Interested in Carpooling? Join our e-mail list group to make carpooling to Bird Observatory events easier at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/BirdObsCarpool>.

Thursday, March 6, 7:00 pm – 9:00 pm
RSVP

VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION NIGHT

SITE: THE BIRD OBSERVATORY OFFICE (MILPITAS)

Join the Bird Observatory in celebration of another year of valuable volunteer time spent on Bird Observatory field-work and projects! This is our day to celebrate you and all your hard work. Enjoy hors d'oeuvres, desserts and good company! RSVP by February 29th.



Saturday, January 19, 9:00 am – 12:00 pm
RSVP

GULLS AND LANDFILLS

SITE: DON EDWARDS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION CENTER (EEC), ALVISO

Join Bird Observatory staff Michael Mammoser and Stephanie Ellis in search of White-winged gull, Glaucous, Thayer's gull and other winter oddities. Learn how the Bird Observatory tracks gull populations at local landfills and how this research plays a crucial role in future wetland restoration efforts. Please dress warm! 

WORKSHOPS FOR THE BIRDER AND NATURALIST

With Alvaro Jaramillo

SITE: SOBRATO CENTER FOR NONPROFITS IN MILPITAS (HOME OF THE BIRD OBSERVATORY!)

RAPTORS AND OWLS: MARCH 18TH & 20TH (INSTRUCTION); MARCH 22ND (FIELD TRIP)

These workshops incorporate ecology, evolutionary biology, behavioral ecology, and natural history to complement bird identification information taught in class. There are two evenings of instruction and a weekend all-day fieldtrip. Put your birding into an ecological context!

Cost per workshop is \$150 and space is limited.

For workshop descriptions and registration forms please visit <http://www.sfbbo.org/activities/workshops.php> or call Stephanie Ellis at 408 946 6548 to RSVP.

Times: Instruction evenings will go from 6:30 - 9:00 p.m. on Tuesday and Thursday evenings; field trip times and location TBA.



SAN FRANCISCO BAY
BIRD OBSERVATORY

524 Valley Way
Milpitas, CA 95035

www.sfbbo.org

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