

El Tecolote

BULLETIN OF THE SANTA BARBARA AUDUBON SOCIETY, INC.

March, 1980
Volume 18, Number 3



MONTHLY MEETING—MARCH 28, 1980

"Through the Eye of the Professional"—A View of Birdlife from Mexico to British Columbia"

Allan Halfhill is a local television news photographer who began photographing birds and wildlife ten years ago. He will be presenting his slides at this month's meeting. Alan, at present, is Production Manager for KCOY-TV and in the past was news photographer at that studio and also Public Relations photographer at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo. Join us for a great evening of quality pictures and commentary at the Fleischmann Auditorium, Museum of Natural History, at 8:00 P.M. Fellowship and refreshments will follow. Please remember to bring your own cup.

CALENDAR OF COMING EVENTS

- | | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| March 13
Thursday | Board of Directors Meeting —Junior Library, Museum of Natural History at 7:30 P.M. |
| March 16
Sunday | Sandyland Slough —Meet at the Museum of Natural History at 8:00 A.M. or Santa Claus Lane at 8:45. Driver donation, .50. For reservations call Minna Smith, 966-7971. Leader: Bob Hough. |
| March 21
Friday | Catalina Weekend —Call Minna Smith for car pooling arrangements, and any questions. See you on the 7:30 P.M. boat from Long Beach to Avalon. We'll have a ball! |
| March 22
Saturday | Hope Ranch —Leader: Louis Bevier, 962-1037 evenings. |
| April 12
Saturday | Mystery Ranch —Leader: Charis Bratt. Call Charis at 967-7043 for details. |
| April 19
Saturday | San Roque Canyon —Meet at the Museum of Natural History at 7:30 A.M. or at the Entrance to San Roque Canyon off Foothill and San Roque Road at 8:00 A.M. for a half day walk down the canyon. Driver donation, .75. Leader: Dean Bazzi |

GOLDEN TROUT CAMP

For the sixth year, the Audubon Sierra Natural History Workshop will be held at Golden Trout Camp, a semi-primitive camp located within the Golden Trout Wilderness in the southern Sierra at an altitude of 10,000 feet. Guests hike in 2½ miles from the end of the road, which is about 17 miles southwest of Lone Pine. Hikes, led by naturalists offer a chance to learn the alpine ecology, flora and fauna of the area. Or, come to enjoy high mountain experience.

For brochure of more information, contact Mrs. Tomi Sollen, 825 N. Soledad, Santa Barbara CA 93103. Phone (805) 966-4836.

Session 1: Sun. July 27 through Sat. Aug. 2
Session 2: Sun. Aug. 3 through Sat. Aug. 9
Cost: \$125 adults, \$90 children under age 11

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

I re-discovered *Audubon* magazine this week. Rummaging through past *Audubons* for a Sage Grouse picture by Ken Fink, featured speaker at last weekend's Western Field Ornithologists convention here, I decided to read "North Again" by John Madson in the same issue (March 1977). Captivated by its watercolor, inspired by its prose, and edified by its discussion of northern prairie geology, I determined to read long-neglected articles and re-read some favorites.

Among the latter, two were immediately pounced upon, evoking memories of analogous personal experiences and blotting out all else as I entered the author's world. Not dissimilar in effect to well-written fiction. Plimpton's "Un gran pedazo de carne" (November 1977) and George Miksoh Sutton's "Fuertes" (November 1974) somehow strike a responsive chord in me.

The magazine, of course, has dozens of memorable issues packed with hundreds of glorious pictures. Issues standing out from the rest, in my view, include July 1977 with its focus on birds of prey, January 1975 and its discussion of cetaceans, and my personal favorite March 1973 with its exploration of the Antarctic; intimate photographs of a rumored world, and fold-out painting by Singer and Pekson. Simply incredible.

Other outstanding *Audubon* moments for me include: "In quest of the snatcher"—the climb is mind-boggling—November 1977 again, unquestionably "Phantoms of the polar ice" is the best-photographed single bird article I've ever seen (May 1976), January 1978's issue is lush, "Kanaginak: Eskimo *Audubon*" by Bill Gilbert is worth re-reading (July 1978), "Alexander Skutch and the appreciative mind" is a sensitive treatment of this complex immensely gifted observer/writer (March 1979).

I resist the temptation to continue. Articles, photographs, paintings equaling in quality those mentioned above keep coming in *Audubon*. Its regular segments featuring current conservation issues are worth the price of the magazine.

I started by saying that I "rediscovered" *Audubon*. It was never ignored or lost in my house, merely somewhat taken for granted. Never, I trust, again. Good birding, Brad Schram

BELL'S VIREO

From the Federal Register 45(26):8030 (Feb. 6, 1980):

"On November 8, 1979, the Service (US Fish and Wildlife) received a petition to list two subspecies of the Bell's Vireo (*Vireo velli*) from Mr. J.M. Greaves, Goleta, California. A review of the status of these two subspecies has been conducted and is summarized....the conclusion of the Service based upon this status review indicates that one or both of these subspecies may be candidates for a proposal as Endangered or Threatened under the protection of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended.... However, insufficient data were presented to permit the Director to propose listing either subspecies as Endangered or Threatened or to propose any Critical Habitat. Some, but not all, of the information still required by the Service before the Director can consider proposing any rules are: complete distribution and numbers still extant in southwestern U.S. and northwestern Mexico, specific habitats that may be proposed as critical, economic and other impacts of designating such areas as Critical Habitats, and the documented impacts of the cowbird and loss of habitat to the vireo. Any person having information on the vireo's past or present distribution or rate of cowbird parasitism are urged to send their records to the Service....The purpose of the extended comment period is to allow for at least the 1980 nesting data to be gathered and submitted."

Information is to be submitted to the Director of OES* by October 3, 1980. This notice of review does not commit anyone to anything. What is needed now is enough information, of sufficient importance to have the Director of the Office of Endangered Species propose listing of the species (or its subspecies) and any Critical Habitats. Once that proposal has been made, there are then only two years in which to gather and submit data to insure that a species be designated Threatened or Endangered, and its habitats be designated Critical Habitats, or the proposal is withdrawn. So, the next three years should be busy ones for Bell's Vireo research. *Mr. John L. Spinks, Jr. Chief, Office of Endangered Species, Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240 (703-235-2771).

BIRDS IN SANTA BARBARA

By Paul Lehman

The winter of 1979-80 was excellent for unusual species in the Santa Barbara region. Some of the more notable individuals were mentioned in last month's *El Tecolote* and they will not be repeated here. Due to space limitations, these rarities found in the Santa Barbara area proper will be discussed in next month's column.

The beginning of December was a very memorable one in the Santa Maria area. A McCown's Longspur, the first ever for Santa Barbara County, was found November 30, and was still present in February for the first record of a wintering bird on the coast of California. On December 2, several birders were checking pastureland west of town where upwards of 29 American Golden Plovers (of the asiatic race "funa", the one expected to winter at these latitudes) have spent the past two winters; there they discovered an immature Swainson's Hawk, the state's third winter record. This species has recently decreased in numbers and is now extremely rare in the region. A week later, a Sandhill Crane appeared nearby and was present at least through January; while large numbers are present annually on the Carrizo Plain, it is of only casual occurrence elsewhere in our region. Later that month the Santa Maria area also produced an Eastern Phoebe, Gray Flycatcher, and Black-throated Blue Warbler.

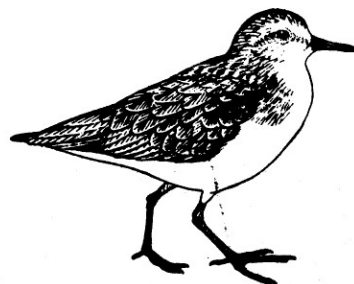
Also present for several days in early December was a Prairie Warbler at Lake Cachuma. This is a late date for this casual eastern vagrant. It is also quite unusual that it occurred at an inland locality as a very large percent of our vagrants are recorded from the immediate coast. An Arctic Loon on the lake during the same period was the first ever inland for the county.

Point Mugu continued to produce excellent shorebirds: a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper in late January is the first North American record for that month, 3 Ruffs (an asiatic species, like the Sharp-tailed), and the first-ever Stilt Sandpiper to winter on the coast of the state. Also seen around Pt. Mugu were a Tropical Kingbird (from western Mexico), Eastern Phoebe, Bank Swallow (a first for winter), and Rusty Blackbird.

During December, Two "mini-invasions" involving northern sea birds developed. A total of 8 Oldsquaws have been recorded between Santa Maria (including 4 together at the Santa Maria rivermouth) and Pt. Mugu; one each winter is normal. The other "invasion" involved Marbled and Ancient Murrelets. A small number of Marbled Murrelets were seen both around Santa Barbara and Ventura in December and early January; there are very few previous records for Southern California. Ancient Murrelet, a species which is very rare but of more annual occurrence, was recorded regularly off Santa Maria with smaller numbers south to Ventura.

With the coming of March, a good number of spring migrants begin to arrive in the Santa Barbara area. The most characteristic species to do so include the Western Flycatcher, Warbling Vireo, and Hooded and "Bullock's" Orioles. By month's end, the first Black-throated Gray and Wilson's Warblers and Black-headed Grosbeaks will also have arrived. The months of February and March bring with them a large number of northbound Brandt's Cormorants past the coast.

Oddly as it may seem, several species of "spring" migrants already appear in the area in mid-winter. Allen's Hummingbirds are the first to make their presence known by mid-January. Rufous Hummingbirds follow soon behind in February along with five species of swallows: Violet-green, Tree, Rough-winged, Cliff, and Barn. In contrast, our other two swallows (Bank and Purple Martin) will not appear for another one or two months.



CONSERVATION

County Flood Control District twice last fall sprayed Atascadero Creek, allegedly to kill "weeds" in the channel. This came within a few months of complete dredging of the creek in the same areas sprayed (More Mesa to Patterson Avenue). As a result of the sprayings, hiding and foraging habitat was destroyed in the creek. Birds utilizing the creek have been less common since the initial spraying, and the weeds had barely begun the recovery process when the rains came. Now, after the flooding in the creek over the past ten days, there are very few "weeds" left. This is not (as FCD wants us to believe) due to the "effectiveness" of spraying, but to the effectiveness of Nature's process called torrential flooding. The net effect of the spraying? Probably ONLY the poisoning of many plants and animals, poisoning of the water flowing to the ocean (into the Coastal Zone, another whole level of concern), poisoning of the mouth of the creek at Goleta Beach, and possibly of a few unwitting humans at the beach.

Thus, without assessing the impacts of its actions, the FCD can, and DOES, continue to justify such actions in the name of "Flood control". The fact that the water did not overflow the concrete bank on the sides of the creek is not due to "flood control" efforts, but to the lack of sufficient rain to swell the creek to overflowing (witness the disastrous "floods controlled" in rivers and creeks to the south of us this past fort-night!). Please contact the State Coastal Commission (Naomi Schwartz), County Supervisors (Bill Wallace represents the district through which Atascadero Creek flows to the ocean), the Calif. Dept. of Fish and Game (Michael Wolter 1-688-7284), if you do not want to see your waterways poisoned and perverted the name of unproven "efficacy".

MORE MESA

At some time during the winter of 1979-80, Donald Simonson or his assigns plowed up the vernal pool on the east side of More Mesa, removing all willows and cat-tails from the area. A nearby resident has, meanwhile, kept the area watered in order to prevent the area from drying. Cat-tails are returning, but the willows are now gone. A tractor, ostensibly belonging to DS or his assigns, attempted to resume its destructive paths through the area, and promptly bogged down.

Meanwhile, the More Mesa Land Trust petitioned Naomi Schwartz of the State of California Coastal Commission in order to get the Regional CC to act. The Regional CC had been reluctant to do anything about enforcing the laws that are a part of its responsibility under State mandate ("to preserve unique ecosystems within the coastal zone"): thus the necessity of "going over" the local group's head to get any action. The State CC gave the Regional until February 19, 1980, to see that something was done to stop the wholesale illegal destruction of unique parts of the More Mesa ecosystem. The Regional CC issued, on February 14, a "Stop work order" to DS, pending a resolution of the charges being brought by MMLT.

On March 21 and 22, there will be field trips to More Mesa sponsored in part by the MMLT and Santa Barbara Audubon. The trips will attempt to inform the public of the plant life of the Mesa, as well as show visitors the unique birds found there. A late afternoon field trip, on Saturday around 4 to 5:30 p.m. will offer visitors the opportunity to view both Burrowing and Short-eared Owls, as well as White-tailed Kites, and other, more common species inhabiting the More Mesa.

Members of the SBAS are urged to attend these field trips, and bring as many guests as they wish. Please attend—numbers are important, as this will be a "show of strength and concern". The Regional CC is apparently over-loaded with non-elective commissioners who have little or no intention of preserving the basic requirements of the Coastal Commission: the preservation and enhancement of California's uniquely rare wild coastal ecosystems in southern California.

In March, the State and Regional Coastal Commission will begin Special hearings to address the More Mesa battle. Please attend. Watch the **Santa Barbara News Press** for time and date.

Members of SBAS are urged to take trips to More Mesa as often as possible and keep their eyes open to any destructive activities that hint of attempts to destroy or alter the present ecosystem. Take notes, and pass them on to Larry Bickford, 964-2904, or the conservation committee of SBAS.

Bell's Vireo Up-date: As a result of a petition from Jim Greaves to the Office of Endangered Species, notice was published in the Federal Register that the species' two southwestern subspecies are now open for comment regarding their status relative to listing as Threatened or Endangered. We have until October 1980 to supply additional information pertinent to its sensitive nature, its specific habitat requirements, and environmental factors that significantly affect its continued existence in California (as well as other states in the regions under comment), as well as any additional information on occurrence, nesting, etc. For this reason, the research in 1979, takes on an even more significant meaning, giving us the baseline date against which to compare any 1980 breeding data.



POINT MUGU TRIP

On Saturday, January 26, twenty five Audubon Society members visited the Pacific Missile Center at Point Mugu. As the base is closed to visitors except by special arrangement, it was a great treat to go birding in this protected area.

We were fortunate to have Ronald Dow, base ecologist, to escort our tour, for Ron knew where to find the burrowing owl and many other good birds.

The day was cool and windy, buffeting binoculars at times, but the trip was worthwhile indeed, at least 70 species of birds being sighted. While there were there, a fire-fighting practice across the base caused great excitement among birds and birders. Startled by billows of black smoke, many birds took wing. This provided a magnificent view of five white-fronted geese flying in front of the smoke, a study in contrast with the flock of the larger Canada geese which flew along with them.

Because it is a protected area, the base is richly endowed with wildlife, including ground squirrels. We remarked on the large number of red-tailed hawks, perching everywhere, soaring above, and hunting down the squirrels.

Among the more spectacular sightings were white-faced ibises, playing now-you-see-us-now-you-don't behind earth embankments and tall grass, an adult Thayer's gull, with its characteristic dark eye plainly visible through the scopes, and a stilt sandpiper (very rare for this area) probing in shallow water alongside the dowitchers.

Also seen were a pair of Lapland Longspur in a flock of horned larks, male and female black scoter, a common gallinule, a common murre and about 50 harbor seals, one of the few resident colonies on the south coast. Everyone went home satisfied, and once again we must thank Minna Smith for organizing a Diane Porter trip.

MEMBERSHIP

A Suggestion for soliciting new members: Bring a guest to one of our stimulating monthly meeting programs, invite a friend to accompany you on one of our varied field trips, lend or pass along a copy of your **Audubon** to someone to whom this beautiful magazine might appeal.

Flowers for the Living Department: Do you know who the people are that bring in the most new members to Audubon? From this Membership Secretary's experience, they are Minna Smith (who has organized our fine field trips) and Sidney Tarbox (who as Education Chairman leads special birding outings and speaks and shows slides to all kinds of organizations).

Please take notice: Our policy has been to continue to send **El Tecolote** to each member whomoves out of our area, unless he notifies us to the contrary. **From now on**, if you move out of the area we will remove your name from the **El Tecolote** mailing list **unless** you inform us that you want to continue to receive it. This for two reasons: first, to relieve you of mail no longer of interest, and two, to save our Chapter money (each issue costs about 15 cents per copy sent). Let us reiterate that we are happy to continue to send you **El Tecolote** if you would like to have it after you move.

Jean Johnson

4 P.M. - Sun. 22nd March

EL TECOLOTE DEADLINE

The deadline for contributions to the April issue is Friday, March 28 (monthly meeting). Bring your contributions to the meeting or send them early that week to John Bullock, 217 South Third Street, Lompoc, CA 93436.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

The SBAS Board of Directors meets in the Junior Library at the Museum of Natural History at 7:30 P.M. on the second Thursday of each month. The next meeting will be March 13. Members are welcome to attend.

DIAL-A-BIRD

For current news of rare and unusual birds in the Santa Barbara area call 964-8240 anytime, night or day. You will hear a 3-minute recording giving all the latest information.

MAILING PROBLEMS?

Send address changes to Jean Johnson, 266 Canon Drive, Santa Barbara, CA 93105 or call Jean at 687-1651.

BIRDATHON

Although final details are still unavailable, we are assured that full results will be published in the next issue of **Audubon Conservation Topics**.

EL TECOLOTE
Santa Barbara Audubon Society
P.O. Box 2067
Santa Barbara, CA 93102

Brad Schram, President
460 Amherst Drive
Goleta, CA 93017
964-9534

John Bullock, Editor
217 South Third Street
Lompoc, CA 93436
736-8074

Non-Profit Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Santa Barbara, CA
Permit Number 125

MISS BLANCHE BALZARETTE
1121 A N MILPAS
SANTA BARBARA CA 93103

**Dated
Material
Please Carry
Promptly**