

El Tecolote

NEWSLETTER OF THE SANTA BARBARA AUDUBON SOCIETY



May 1992

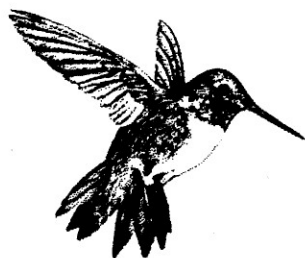
Vol. 30, No. 7

HUMMINGBIRDS

Those Amazing Americans

WITH brilliant flashes of jewel colors, tiny hummingbirds dart from flower to flower, drawing nectar from deep-throated blossoms using a tubular brush-tipped tongue, and at the same time transferring pollen between flowers on their thorn-like bill. A hummingbird's tongue reaches far beyond its bill, licking at 13 times a second, drawing nectar into its throat as fast as it can swallow.

The smallest birds in the world, hummers weigh from 2 grams (0.07 oz) to 20 grams (0.66 oz). They burn up huge amounts of energy—more energy



for their size than any warm-blooded animal—so they must drink over half their weight in nectar each day, and always be near blooming flowers, preferring reds and pinks. They also catch insects to enrich their sugary diet with protein.

The world's fastest wings

Dazzling in their iridescence, the birds can maneuver not only forward at lightning speed but stop instantly, hover, rise vertically, or go into reverse—the

most skilful flying machines on earth. Wings beat at an incredibly rapid pace, blurring gauze-like and producing a soft humming sound. Wingbeat varies with the size of the bird: the giant hummingbird beats at the rate of 10 times per second, the ruby-throated at 50 per second and the bee hummer of Cuba at 80 per second. Unlike other birds, hummers have stiff wings which flip over at every beat, thus giving equal lift on the up and the down stroke. No wonder the wing muscles account for one-third of the body weight. With amazing stamina and endurance hummingbirds can fly long distances nonstop, across the Gulf of Mexico for example. And yet, when temperatures drop at night, these dynamos unwind, lower their body temperatures to conserve energy, and suspend animation for brief periods of "hibernation"—then revive as the day warms up.

Wing feathers that are crucial for precision flight and good insulation quickly become worn, dirty and dusted with pollen, so hummingbirds must devote some time every day to groom their plumage. Bills serve as fine combs to smooth the feathers until they all neatly interlock.

Distribution

Unique to the Americas, hummingbirds evolved from ancestors in the tropics to more than 300 species spread between Argentina and Alaska. The greatest variety of species and largest numbers occur in South America. Some species

are strongly migratory, coming to and departing certain areas at specific times of the year; others are permanent residents for our year-round delight. About fifteen species migrate across the Mexican border, most coming north to nest. The ruby-throated is the only hummer throughout the East coast of the United States and Canada, arriving at Cape May, New Jersey, in late April. The broad-tailed prevails in the Rockies and Great Basin, with the first males coming to the high mountains in early June. In the West, from Ensenada to Vancouver, you can spot Anna's, Allen's, rufous, black-chinned and calliope. Costa's move up from Baja and Sonora in Mexico into the deserts of California, Arizona and New Mexico, following the succession of blossoms on such plants as the ocotillo cactus.

In Santa Barbara County, the summer arrivals are Allen's, black-chinned and Costa's; rufous pass through during spring on their way to nesting in Alaska, then return south in the fall to winter in Mexico; and Anna's are here all year. Over a thousand Anna's were observed during our 1991 Christmas Bird Count.

Displays

At most times, hummingbirds' throats seem to be black, but each throat feather produces iridescent color, not with pigment but with a mirror-like structure that refracts sunlight. Hummers use this display not only to attract mates but also to warn other birds away from their territory; they can be feisty and aggressive against unwanted birds—and humans!

Hummers have little in the way of song, but when courting, the male embarks on a dramatic plunging flight display towards the female, each species having a distinctive style of swooping down.

(Continued on page 4)

Field Trips

Saturday, May 9

Camino Cielo. Led by Rob Lindsay (964-9514), this trip will focus on chaparral birds and Spring migrants, such as the lazuli bunting. Kinevar Road may also be included. Meet at Carls Jr, State St. and La Cumbre Rd. at 7:30 a.m.

Friday/Saturday, May 15/16

An overnight trip to Mono Campground on upper Santa Ynez River. Jim Greaves (682-4638) will lead us on the morning of the 16th to show us least Bell's vireo, yellow-breasted chat, lazuli bunting, warblers and more. Call the Audubon office (964-1468) for sign-up and details.

Saturday, June 6

Trip to Nojoqui Falls for the purple martin. See June newsletter for details.

Sunday, April 26 Earth Day

The Santa Barbara chapter of the Audubon Society will again staff a booth at Earth Day. We need volunteers who can spend 1-2 hours at Alameda Park to show thousands of our neighbors what Audubon is all about—locally, and worldwide. We will again display lifesize stuffed birds (courtesy: Natural History Museum), which always provoke amazement and joy from the many small children passing by our booth. We will also be distributing brochures and *El Tecolote* newsletters. For our many members who may not have the time or energy to participate in field trips or other Audubon activities, but want to help Audubon, volunteering for Earth Day would be a terrific way to assist us. Please call 964-1468 ASAP.

Audubon Activist Award

This annual award is presented to chapter members who are exemplary in their conservation and environmental activism. We are proud to announce that Lee Moldaver was one of ten people in the entire Western Region to receive the award this year at the Asilomar Conference.

Meetings

Saturday, May 2: Southern Calif. Audubon Coordinating Council Meeting

Audubon leaders from throughout California will visit Santa Barbara for a regional meeting. Besides chapter and national reports, the new Audubon California Legislative Affairs Director, John McCaull, will provide updates and receive input on legislative issues. Plus, Carol Whiteside of the California Resources Agency will speak on the Natural Communities program to be held at the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History on May 2 from 9:00 a.m. till 3:00 p.m. Please RSVP at the Audubon office if you are interested in attending.

Friday, May 22: Workshop and Members' Slide Night

7:15-7:45 p.m. at the Bird Hall and Bird Habitat Hall, Museum of Natural History
Bird Identification Workshop

A special opportunity to study birds in the Bird Hall with biologist and SB City College ornithology instructor Rob Lindsay. Learn identification tips, what birds to look for, and where and when to find them at this time of the year.

8:00 p.m. at Farrand Hall, Museum of Natural History

Slide Show

Here's your chance to share with other members the beautiful, one-of-a-kind natural history slides that have been accumulated on treks to favorite spots, near and far.

Presenters include naturalist Guy Tingos showing slides of wildlife in Kenya and Tanzania. Audubon president Ron Hirst, just back from a Venezuela expedition, will share birding scenes from around the world. Other presenters include biologist Rob Lindsay and wildlife photographer Jim Greaves on endangered wetlands. Join us for a fun and casual evening.

Please note this is our last program of the season. We will take a summer break and resume monthly meetings starting September 25.

Sunday, June 7, 1:00-4:00 p.m.: Annual Picnic and Board Elections

Join our last meeting of the season, celebrated by socializing, excellent barbeque lunch, volleyball, reunions, and elections of the new board for the next year.

We will again have the use of charming Giorgio Park at 1027 Old San Marcos Road. Exit Hwy 101 at Turnpike, north to Cathedral Oaks Road, left to Old San Marcos Road, right on Old S.M. and go two blocks. Look for the Audubon sign.

Deadline for reservations — June 1. Please mail your reservations early, and use the form on page 4. Help conserve: bring your own plate, cup and flatware!

Board Election

SBAS will elect the 1992-93 Board of Directors at the Annual Picnic on June 7.

The nominating committee (Joy Parkinson and Bob Sollen) presents the following slate:

Current Directors who are willing to serve another term:

Ben Berkowitz, Ron Hirst, Everett King, Nancy King, Lee Moldaver, Marie Slaton and Sally Walker

New nominees:

Jim Greaves. Jim, a former SBAS board member and Conservation Chair, is currently serving as an environmental consultant and wildlife photographer. He has been monitoring the least Bell's vireo at Gibraltar Reservoir since 1979.

Don Rathbun. A former board member of the Shell Club, Don has also been active in Scouting for 10 years: Scoutmaster for 5 years, and Outdoor Chairman for the past 5 years for the Boy Scouts, planning camping and other outdoor activities.

Elan Sutton. Elan grew up in an Audubon bird sanctuary in Middletown, Rhode Island, and has been birding all her life. She has been working in Santa Barbara for the past 7 years, and recently earned a degree in Resource Management at UCSB.

Conservation Notes

◆ **Los Carneros wetlands.** Our Audubon chapter, along with many other local conservation and wildlife groups, has written a strong protest to Colonel Thomas of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, over his proposal to re-open consideration of development at the *very sensitive* Los Carneros wetlands without adequate public input. We'd hoped this issue had been settled almost two years ago, when the Army Corps agreed to help preserve this special location. Now a new modified proposal from private developers is giving the Army Corps second thoughts. For more information on how *you* can help, call the Environmental Defense Center at 963-1622.

◆ **Ellwood Shores.** The new, revised EIR is now drafted for the proposed residential development on the bluffs between Devereux/Coal Oil Point and Ellwood in Goleta. This threatened area is known for its vernal pools, "butterfly" eucalyptus groves, popular avian foraging area, and its outstanding location for birding. Audubon has studied for many years how best to preserve the spectacular natural areas of the site and still respect the rights of the property owners to get a fair return from their investment. If you have questions about the new report, please contact County planner Natasha Heifitz at 568-2000.

◆ **Owls, spotted and burrowing.** In an expected, but still very disappointing action, the U.S. Supreme Court moved to strike down federal protection in "old growth forests" for the spotted owl (an endangered species). The Supreme Court ruled that lower federal courts had exceeded their authority in interpreting the Endangered Species Act and the powers of the Environmental Protection Agency. Unfortunately, many northwest loggers are unaware that the raw timber prematurely ruined by heavy clear-cutting does *not* produce many jobs in processing or manufacturing any more; timber companies now ship nearly 70 percent of raw northwest logging products to Japan, Taiwan and Korea for processing and assembly. The risk to the owls is very great. Clear-cutting also inadvertently destroys yew trees, whose

bark yields one of the very few effective drugs in the treatment of breast and ovarian cancer.

A key battleground in Congress this election year will be whether, and how, to renew the Endangered Species Act. National Audubon has made renewal a *keystone* of our 1991 educational process. Ask your Congressional candidates whether they *fully support* the renewal. The fate of spotted and burrowing owls, and many dozens of other birds and animals is in the balance.

The Institute for Bird Populations (Dr. David DeSante, Director) is asking for Audubon's assistance in expanding its California habitat survey for the threatened burrowing owl. Between mid-May and mid-July volunteers will be asked to observe a 5km-square zone in this county to inventory presence of these birds. To help, call Audubon at 964-1468, or write Dr. DeSante, P.O. Box 1346, Point Reyes Station, CA 94956-1346.

◆ **Least Bell's vireo.** Audubon chapters in Santa Barbara County are trying to work with County Flood Control workers to find ways to clear or dredge flood channels and overgrown streambeds *without* destroying nesting areas of another of our area's endangered species. Some bulldozer crews have been overzealous in their clearing process.

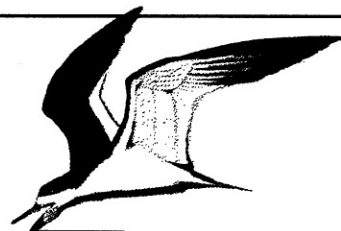
— Lee Moldaver

President's Message

It has been an extremely rewarding second term as your president. Thank you all for the support and inspiration you provided, in words and deeds. I'm very excited about the prospects for new leadership in our group and urge you to give them an even higher level of support. I plan to continue on as Field Trip chairperson—so look forward to some exciting trips.

— Ron Hirst

Black Skimmers in Santa Barbara



BIRDERS have noted with pleasure the large number of black skimmers present in the Santa Barbara harbor area this past winter. Many of these birds have been banded with a single band on the right leg. With some help from Paul Collins at the Museum of Natural History, I was able to locate the researcher interested in this data, Dr. Charles Collins of Cal. State University, Long Beach, and find out more about our wintering skimmers.

Our birds are apparently from the colony that was established at Bolsa Chica in Orange County in 1985. Approximately 350 pairs now nest on the artificial islands, along with elegant terns, least terns, and a recent addition, five pairs of royal terns. A satellite colony has developed at Upper Newport Bay. Time will tell if additional colonies will be established further north. The lack of suitable protected habitat may deter further expansion, except possibly at Pt. Mugu Naval Air Station.

The color of the bands indicates the hatch year: yellow (fades to cream) = 1988, blue = 1989, violet (looks pink) = 1990, red (hard to see) = 1991.

Blue has been the color most frequently observed in our wintering flock. A few birds have plain silver bands, which means that they weren't taped or that the tape has worn off. For 1992, Dr. Collins plans to try to track individual birds by using larger bands with unique letter-number combinations. It's hoped that observers will be able to read them.

If you see banded skimmers on any of our local beaches, please report your sightings to: Dr. Charles Collins, Department of Biology, California State University, Long Beach, CA 90840.

— Florence Sanchez

Hummingbirds (Cont. from page 1)

After courtship and mating, the female prepares a delicate nest that is only two inches diameter (the male plays no part in its construction, and may not even know where the nest is!), then she lays and incubates just two tiny white eggs.

Care and feeding

◆ **Feeders:** Hummingbirds appreciate a supply of sugary-water dispensed from a "nectar" feeder. The best style is a glass bottle that hangs upside down, with a red plastic bottom, three or four upturned outlets and small perches. Keep feeders immaculate to prevent mold-formation. Clean them at least twice a week with hot water, and brush crevices that may harbor mold with pipe-cleaners, bottle-brushes or Q-tips. If black mold forms, remove it by soaking the glass section in water with a drop of bleach and rinse thoroughly with fresh water.

◆ **Fluid formula:** Discard any pre-mixed "nectar" packet included with your feeder, and don't buy the formula sold in pet stores; it's easy to make your own. Boil together four cups of water with one cup of sugar. Stir immediately to prevent burning on the bottom. Use no red food coloring, no saccharin, no Nutra-sweet, no brown sugar, and no honey which may make the birds sick or cause a fatal fungus disease. When cool, store the syrup in a covered container in the refrigerator where it will last a couple of weeks.

Sugar syrup can ferment easily in a few days in outside feeders, so dispense only a couple of inches at a time and replace frequently.

◆ **Garden flowers:** For information on flowering garden plants that hummingbirds appreciate, refer to such books as *Attracting Birds* (1990, Sunset Books).

—Kathleen Mayes

Annual Picnic Reservation

Sunday, June 7th, 1:00-4:00 p.m.

Name _____

Please reserve _____ Tri-tips, _____ Vegetarian loaf

Adults — \$6 each, Children — \$4 each

Make check payable to: Santa Barbara Audubon Society
and mail with this coupon, before June 1, to:

Ron Hirst, 555 Camino de la Aldea, Santa Barbara, CA 93111

SANTA BARBARA AUDUBON SOCIETY

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President: Ron Hirst 967-0138
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Secretary: Nancy King 687-2079
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SBAS Office (805) 964-1468

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EL TECOLOTE

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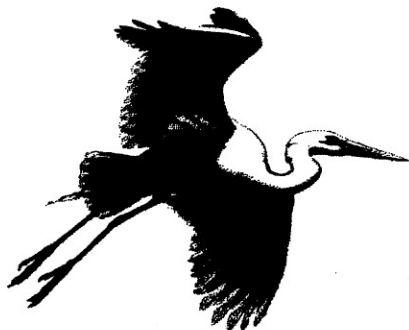


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