

El Tecolote

NEWSLETTER OF THE SANTA BARBARA AUDUBON SOCIETY



October/November 1992

Vol. 31, No. 3

The Magic Kingdom

by Jim Greaves

One of the most studied areas of Santa Barbara County, in terms of wildlife and plant species, seems to be one of the least visited by local "wildlifery." It need not be so. A two-hour drive from town, over paved and unpaved roads, brings you to the upper Santa Ynez River, east of Gibraltar Reservoir and downstream from Jameson Lake. It is one of less than a dozen "last bastions" of pristine riparian habitats in Southern California.

The area remains unspoiled because there are no adjacent agricultural, mining or land development schemes to threaten its wildlife habitats. The only threats come from rare wildfires and a water agency that wants to pipe water from the area. Yet few people visit the area because of the perceived inaccessibility.

While the Santa Ynez River is only six air miles from town, it is often described as the "backcountry," conjuring up images of long hikes through miles of dense, desert-like chaparral, with the sun beating down unmercifully. In my experiences over the past decade and a half in the area, I have found it to be mild from April to June, and only hot during the

late summer. And it is inhabited by more than lonely horned lizards, rattlesnakes, coyotes and roadrunners. I have developed a list of more than 85 birds which breed along the river and its tributaries from March through August.

The best time to visit the area is from late April to early June, when most of the birds begin their reproduction, and are most vocal and highly visible. The river and creeks are usually running steadily, creating habitat for water and land creatures alike. Access to the area is only limited by road conditions dependent on the last rains, and a true desire to learn about, enjoy, and protect the natural wonders that abound in Santa Barbara's back yard.

Starting at the Santa Barbara Mission, proceed north on Mission Street to Foot-hill Road, then east to Mountain Drive, and north to Gibraltar Road. From there it is a short trip up Gibraltar, passing Flores Flat, on a narrow roadway to East Camino Cielo, where you turn east to Romero Saddle. The breathtaking vistas of the city, ocean and islands to the south are complemented by spectacular views of the uninhabited mountains and valleys to the north. In one spot, the reservoir can be seen the way a soaring eagle might. As you look over miles of wilderness lands east of Big Pine Mountain, you can imagine seeing the Sierra to the northeast.

After a 15-minute drive (longer if you linger to see birds, flowers and scenery), you drop down the north side of the Santa Ynez Range, passing through Escondido Canyon with its babbling stream and cool

(Please see Kingdom on page 4)



least Bell's vireo

October Program

Friday, October 23

Farrand Hall, SBNH Museum

7:45 p.m. Refreshments

8:00 p.m. Slide program

"Future Prospects for the Birds of Santa Barbara County"

A vital topic pertinent to local birders, presented by **Mark Holmgren**, Curator, UCSB Vertebrate Museum.

Habitat changes in Santa Barbara County have been profound and rapid in the last 150 years. That trend will continue. Mark will show us why birding will continue to be exciting in Santa Barbara County, but different in the years ahead.

November Program

Friday, November 13

Farrand Hall, SBNH Museum

7:45 p.m. Refreshments

8:00 p.m. Slide program

"Hummingbirds — Loving, Attracting, and Photographing Them"

Hugh P. Smith, Jr., retired MD, took up bird photography as a hobby and has let it grow into a passion. Hummingbirds have become his special interest. Hugh photographs birds on his many travels, but mostly works at his home in Solvang. He has been published in *Audubon*, *Birding*, *Birder's World*, *Bird Watcher's Digest*, and elsewhere.

Activities Calendar

Saturday, October 10. Morro Bay/Central Coast

Full-day trip from Santa Barbara to Morro Bay. A fast-paced birding trip to the Santa Maria River delta, Oso Flaco Lake/Oceano, Montana de Oro Park and Morro Bay. Land and waterbirds will be abundant at our stops; mountain plovers, white pelicans, black skimmers, unusual warblers and shorebirds are all expected. Start with a carpool beside Goleta Jack-in-the-Box, corner of Hollister & Storke at 7:30 a.m. Finish at Morro Bay viewing waterbirds in the late afternoon. Bring snacks and picnic lunch. Leader: Ron Hirst (967-0138).

Sat/Sun, October 17/18. Monterey Pelagic & Hot Spots

A few openings may still exist for this trip to Monterey Bay. Or sign up for a possible spring trip. Call Shawneen Finnegan (967-2450).

Friday-Sunday, October 23-25. WBBA meeting

Annual meeting of the Western Bird Banding Association at Motte Rimrock Reserve, Perris, Calif. (Riverside County). Demonstrations of banding techniques, talks, and field trips. \$20 registration fee. For information call Barbara Carlson (714) 657-3111 daytime, or (714) 369-3179 at home before 7:30 p.m.

Saturday, October 24. Lake Los Carneros

A field trip for beginners. Join board member Don Rathbun (964-5521) on a leisurely birdwatching trip in the park. A great place to see ducks that have just arrived to winter in our area. Binoculars and scope provided. Meet at the Stow House parking lot at 8:00 a.m.

Tuesday, November 10. SB Natural History Museum

At 7:30 p.m. in Farrand Hall, a special program, "*Bird of Troubled Waters: Quest to Save the Least Bell's Vireo*," will be presented by Jim Greaves, Environmental Consultant. Riparian environments are like islands. In the upper Santa Ynez and Santa Clara Rivers, birds such as the least Bell's vireo have become dependent on these fragile wetland environments for survival. As increased pesticide pollution and destruction of water-filtering willows occur, the least Bell's vireo and other riparian dependent species of animals face extinction, and water supplies that even humans depend on are threatened. Join wildlife consultant and photographer Jim Greaves to learn about this endangered bird's dilemma.

Wednesday, November 11. Lake Los Carneros

A special weekday trip to accommodate your schedule. Join expert birder Shawneen Finnegan (967-2450) on an educational birdwatching trip in the park. Binoculars and scope provided. Meet at the Stow House parking lot at 8:30 a.m.

Sat., November 14. Andree Clark Bird Refuge/Harbor

Half-day trip. Join the popular educator and ornithologist Rob Lindsay (964-9514) in finding and identifying the many birds we have right in our own downtown area. Binoculars and scope provided. Meet at 7:30 a.m. at the Naval Reserve Building steps, at the foot of the Harbor breakwater.

Conservation Notes

◆ **Wetlands Conference.** Saturday, November 7, Audubon will sponsor a tri-counties education and activist training program on wetlands, their value and preservation, featuring representatives of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Fish & Wildlife, State Coastal Commission and State Fish & Game Departments. Top naturalists will introduce, in-depth, the "featured" wetlands: Santa Clara River (Ventura County), Carpinteria Salt Marsh (Santa Barbara County) and the Oso Flaco Lakes/Dunes complex (San Luis Obispo County). Senior officials of Western Audubon will give a legal and legislative overview. Top local experts and conservation activists will moderate small-group workshops to develop specific plans (with the help of our guest panelists) to preserve these tri-counties wetlands. To be held 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. at the Cliff House, UCSB West Campus Coal Oil Point Preserve. If you plan to attend one nature seminar this year on local issues and education, this should be the one. Please call the Audubon Office for information, reservations and fee details. Space is limited, as attendees will be coming from a wide area.

◆ **Santa Ynez River.** The S.B. County Board of Supervisors, in their alter-egos as the County Flood Control Agency, must decide what kind of river "cleaning and maintenance" program they will employ in our behalf in coming years. A proposal now being considered would permit mowing a 100 to 300 foot swath from river bed to river banks in the Buellton/Lompoc portion of the Santa Ynez River. Such action would be incredibly destructive to most of the flora and fauna along the river, yet it would not protect any people or homes — only the crop land of about seven agribusinesses whose cultivation has repeatedly encroached into the river's natural flood-plain and bottom land, despite admonitions against this practice from the County. S.B. Audubon supports the "Preferred Alternative" listed in the excellent EIR prepared by Dames & Moore (with Paul Lehman) which requests the seven affected agribusinesses to assist Flood Control with their own protection, via access easements and construction of a 2-foot earth levee on their own properties (with their financial participation). This Alternative would be much cheaper (because of agribusiness participation), less destructive to the Santa Ynez River, and still let County Flood Control do the necessary minimum maintenance that all flood-prone rivers need. The next meeting is on October 6. Please call or write Supervisor Tom Rogers at 568-2191 (Flood Control Chairman) to support the Preferred EIR Alternative, and oppose Option Two, large-scale Santa Ynez River mowing and clearing.

◆ **Tankering.** Thanks to our County Supervisors for standing up for safe, clean, local energy transportation at the Chevron tankering hearing in August.

◆ **Devereux Slough.** The Devereux School Foundation is proposing renovation and expansion adjacent to the Slough and Preserve by Coal Oil Point. For more information, please call Supervisor Bill Wallace at 568-2192, or Mr. Jeff Harris at Santa Barbara County Resource Management Dept.

— Lee Moldaver



Volunteers Needed! Please Help

Santa Barbara Audubon Society desperately needs the following:

Office Staff: We would like to have our office open five days a week. People are needed for morning and/or afternoon shifts Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday. Among the duties are answering the phone, researching answers to the public's questions, distributing mail, referring problems to the appropriate officer or committee chair, filing, and responding to routine correspondence. A great way to learn more about the environment and our community! To volunteer, call Joy Parkinson, 964-1468.

Public Display Coordinator: This creative individual will arrange occasional public exhibits (at the Downtown Library, for instance) of Audubon exhibits relating to wildlife and habitat preservation. Our office is filled with wonderful educational materials, books, posters, etc. that can be creatively arranged to educate and inform the public on important issues. This position requires two hours a month. To volunteer, call Joy Parkinson, 964-1468.

Hospitality Chair: This gregarious individual will coordinate hospitality volunteers to ensure that refreshments are available at the monthly Audubon program meetings (on the 4th Friday of each month) and, as needed, at other special Audubon functions such as the Christmas Count potluck. This job takes one to two hours a month. To volunteer, call Tomi Sollen, 964-1468.

President's Report

Your chapter has been working hard at many levels to preserve and protect our area's natural resources.

We are collaborating with the City Parks Department to develop and obtain funding for a docent-led public education program for the Andree Clark Bird Refuge, so that school children, organizations and the general public will be able to go on guided tours of the refuge.

Locally, your chapter has lobbied for designating 9,260 acres along the Santa Ynez River as critical habitat for the least Bell's vireo, given public testimony in opposition to Chevron's tankering proposal, supported the concept of a special open space/recreation policy for the county, and opposed disbanding the City's Environmental Review Committee as a "budget-saving measure."

Kudos this month goes to Lila Eisberg, our Audubon Adventures Program Coordinator, for making educators at a September 3 local Teachers Symposium aware of the availability of our chapter's award-winning environmental education program for grades 3 through 6.

And a big hand for our Conservation Committee members — including Lee Moldaver, Jim Greaves, Marie Dornan, Ron Hirst and Tomi Sollen — for organizing an outstanding full-day Audubon workshop for tri-county wetlands activists on November 7 at UCSB's Cliff House at Coal Oil Point. Speakers, materials, and topics are designed to give activists the tools, techniques and information they need to succeed in preserving the last remnants of California's vanishing wetlands.

— Sally C. Walker

Nature Conservancy Award

Audubon congratulates Elan A. Sutton for her extra conservation efforts. On September 16 The Nature Conservancy presented Elan with a National Award for her voluntary work at the Kern River Reserve. With the help of volunteers, 70 acres in the Reserve were planted in cottonwoods and willows; Elan helped coordinate the major planting weekends of the year.

Audubon's Environmental Education Program for Kids

Classroom sponsorships are being sought at this time to bring environmental education next year into 255 local elementary classrooms — from Goleta through Carpinteria — with Santa Barbara Audubon Society's Audubon Adventures program.

Last year, generous donations from Audubon members and two foundations, combined with our chapter's private resources, made it possible for us to fund Audubon Adventures subscriptions for 107 classrooms for the 1992 school year.

This special environmental education program — the only one of its kind in our area — provides each student with a colorful, educational bimonthly newsletter on plants, animals, biology and natural history.

Teachers appreciate the subscriptions which supplement their limited school budgets. And, since a helpful detailed teacher's guide is included with each issue, they are able to build entire science classes around Audubon Adventures.

Funding is sought to enroll 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th grade classrooms next year in south Santa Barbara County. It costs only \$30 to sponsor a year's subscription of Audubon Adventures for an entire elementary classroom of 32 students.

Bringing nature appreciation into young children's lives allows them to understand, relate to and eventually make wise choices regarding the protection of our environment. Fourth grader Sara Leton at Peabody School writes, "All year I have enjoyed reading Audubon Adventures. Now I'm sad it's over."

Please dip generously into your pocket for this good cause and send your tax-deductible gift of \$30, \$60, \$90, \$120 or more to the Santa Barbara Audubon office, earmarked for the Audubon Adventures program. For further information, call Lila Eisberg, Audubon Adventures Program coordinator, 963-4886.

— Sally C. Walker



Kingdom (Continued from page 1)

shade. Eventually you arrive at Juncal Campground, where in 1992, several male Kentucky warblers and a male hooded warbler spent the summer — a birding event that will not likely be repeated in our lifetimes. Following the river downstream, you pass Pendola Guard Station and P-bar Flat, a location in which up to six Kentucky and one or two Northern parula warblers spent the summer of '92.

In less than an hour from Juncal, you will reach Mono Campground, the "jumping-off" spot to visit the upper end of Gibraltar Reservoir and the adjacent Santa Ynez-Blue Canyon area, scenic Mono Creek and Mono Debris Basin. Much of this area is now "canopied" with mature cottonwood, willow and oak forests, bordered by chaparral-covered slopes, while long stretches of riverine habitats remain open or sparsely vegetated. It is in this area that the northernmost population of least Bell's vireo has survived, breeding since at least as early

as 1978, when it was rediscovered. Densities of breeding flycatchers, warblers, swallows, wrens and finches exceed those found in any comparably-sized location in the county. There is no other known location in the United States where four vireo species — Hutton's, Bell's, solitary, and warbling — have been reported breeding together in the same habitats in overlapping territories, one more example of how birds reflect the health and tremendous diversity of habitats and their complex vegetative mixes available in such a small area.

Santa Barbara's wildlands provide places for us to revitalize tired spirits, to know ourselves, and to learn truths which steel and concrete never breed. Contrary to the old adage, familiarity does not breed contempt — rather, it fosters respect for life and a desire to conserve childlike values for future generations to enjoy and protect. When you've entered the kingdom by the lake, old thoughts flow away like the river itself, replenished by new freshets and young wildlings. That's the magic of Santa Barbara's "outback."

Critical Habitat Proposed for the Least Bell's Vireo

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service is seeking "critical habitat" status for about 48,000 acres of land in Southern California — known nesting areas of the least Bell's vireo. Included are 9,260 acres along the upper Santa Ynez River in Santa Barbara County. Public hearings are planned, and comments from the public will be accepted through October 31, 1992. Please support this plan by writing to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service at 2730 Loker Avenue, Carlsbad, CA 92008.

SANTA BARBARA AUDUBON SOCIETY

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EL TECOLOTE

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