

El Tecolote

NEWSLETTER OF THE SANTA BARBARA AUDUBON SOCIETY



September 1993

Vol. 32, No. 1

On Vireos & Flycatchers

by Jim Greaves

TWO winters of above normal rainfall benefited wildlife in our region, including one species, the least Bell's vireo, which has been monitored for 15 years in southern California. On the Santa Clara River and the upper Santa Ynez River east of Gibraltar Reservoir, the subspecies numbers have increased for the first time since 1986 when the Gibraltar population began to decline.

Numbers of females, and thus pairs formed, increased by more than 50% from 1992 to 1993 — from at least 16 to 30 at Gibraltar, and from 14 to 20 along the Santa Clara. Local productivity reached a high in 1992, when 16 pairs near Gibraltar raised more than 70 young. Comparable production occurred along the Santa Clara in 1992: 13 pairs fledged more than 46 young. As a result of such production, and a relatively mild winter, about 40% of 1992-banded young survived to breed in 1993 — nearly double previous survival rates. (Among these were a female on Arroyo Simi where vireos bred in 1992, and a female which bred successfully in 1993 at a new location, the Ventura River.)

Winter rains benefited many other species; birders have found near-record numbers of Swainson's thrushes and yellow-breasted chats. However the downside of all this bountiful wildlife has been an increase in snakes and scrub jays, probably the two most proficient types of predators of small passerines. Increases in winter food for these predators (small insects and rodents for snakes, and fruits for scrub jays),

probably increased survival of their 1992 young, which required supplemental feeding from whatever sources could be found once the 1993 breeding season began. Because of the ease with which vireo nests are found, more than half of this year's vireo nests (and presumably those of many other ground and near-ground nesting species) fell prey to snakes and jays. This was in marked contrast to the more than 90% success of vireo populations in 1992!

Among other species being monitored and for which new breeding locations have been found recently are the willow flycatcher, western tanager, Wilson's warbler, and solitary vireo. The flycatcher is a state-listed endangered species whose subspecies *extimus* is soon to be on the federal list. One pair successfully raised young near Surf, and a small group continued to breed west of Buellton.

The increase of vireo populations after decades of decline may be primarily due to the programs to trap and remove cowbirds from riparian areas around breeding vireos and from feedlots nearby where cowbirds congregate daily for food. However the willow flycatcher numbers have not responded to this particular management tool. Why? Answers may be found in the varying conditions at their wintering grounds: vireos winter in southern Baja while willow flycatchers travel to southern Central America and northern Colombia. Different survival rates by various species may reflect the differences in speed with which a species responds to management practices. For

(Continued on page 3)

September Program

Friday, September 24, 1993

Farrand Hall, SBNH Museum
7:45 p.m. Refreshments and chatter
8:00 p.m. Program

"On the Trail of Dr. Livingstone"

Charles Bragg of Pacific Palisades, photographer, writer, and conservation activist, has brought back the best of central Africa in his latest production. Join him for a photographic safari through Malawi, Victoria Falls and Botswana. Find out why you will see more purple-crested turacos than Americans in the heart of the dark continent — not to mention bustards and vulturine guineafowl, little banded goshawks, red-billed hornbills, Burchell's sand grouse, and African fish eagles.



Future Attractions

Oct 22: John Haller: *"The Natural History of the Sedgewick Ranch"*

Nov 12: Larry Friesen: *"Bugs, Part II"*

Dec 17: "Moose" Peterson:
"California's Birds: The Stories They Have Told Me"

Jan 28: Jeff Chemnick: *"The Latest From the Argentine"*

Activities Calendar

Saturday, Sept. 11: Santa Clara River mouth and estuary (McGrath State Park), in Ventura.

We'll find abundant shorebirds, early ducks, and up to five terns and six gulls. Maybe even a repeat of one year's dramatic peregrine falcon taking an avocet! Meet leader **Ron Hirst** in the parking lot at the Andree Clark Bird Refuge, Los Patos Way, at 7:30 a.m. Bring a windbreaker, wettable shoes, and a snack. We'll return for a late lunch. Call Jeff Chemnick, Audubon Field Trip Coordinator (965-0895) for information. No charge.

Saturday, Sept. 18: Birding Field Trip for Beginners. S.B. Botanic Garden, 1212 Mission Canyon Road.

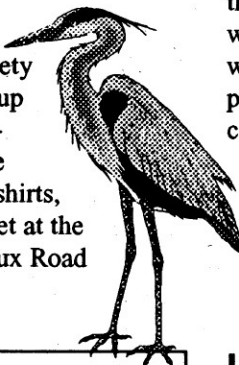
Easy stroll around the grounds. No experience necessary! Emphasis will be on what to do with a bird in the bush, binoculars in hand, and a field guide in your backpack. Binoculars and field guides will be provided if needed. Meet leader **Jeff Chemnick** (965-0895) in the parking lot at 7:30 a.m. Return around noon. Call Jeff for information and to arrange for binoculars and field guides. No charge.

Saturday, September 25: Lotusland!!!

After years of preparation, the legendary botanic garden of famed opera singer and wealthy socialite Ganna Walska, is finally opening to the public this month. Come and visit Montecito's unrivaled botanical treasure. We have reserved 20 spaces and they will be filled on a first-reserved, first-pay basis. We will spend two hours touring the 37 acre estate and compiling the first-ever bird survey of Lotusland for this time of year. Pre-paid participants will meet leader and Lotusland docent **Jeff Chemnick** at 9:30 a.m. at the Andree Clark Bird Refuge, Los Patos Way. You must call Jeff (965-0895) in advance to reserve a spot. Book early and avoid disappointment — this is sure to be a popular field trip. Charge: \$10.

Saturday, October 2: Adopt-A-Beach

For the sixth year Santa Barbara Audubon Society will adopt Coal Oil Point beaches as our clean up area. Last year's team collected a 100 lb monofilament gill net! Bags and refreshments will be provided, and give-aways such as tote bags, T-shirts, or ice-cream tokens. Mark your calendar to meet at the Coal Oil Point parking lot at the end of Devereux Road at 9:00 a.m. Call the SBAS office for details.



A Musical Celebration: "An Exaltation of Larks"

A benefit performance by internationally acclaimed pianist **Jeffrey Kahane** on Sunday, September 19 at 4:00 p.m. at 224 15th Street, Santa Monica, CA.

Enjoy works by Rameau, Schumann, Chopin and others in an intimate gathering to spotlight the Youth Education Program of the National Audubon Society. Garden Reception after the performance. \$50 per person (tax deductible). For information and reservations call (310) 574-2799.

Conservation Notes

◆ **"Birds in the Balance."** Among the most exciting and compelling new initiatives on the conservation horizon is the effort to sustain healthy and viable populations of neotropical migratory songbirds. These birds include warblers, vireos, tanagers, swallows, swifts, flycatchers, grosbeaks and buntings. Generally, they winter in Latin America, breed in temperate North America, and expend a great deal of energy migrating back and forth.

Unfortunately, they are being squeezed at every stop on their annual migration. Their wintering grounds are often tropical forests or scrub habitat in jeopardy of wholesale conversion. They may fly non-stop across the Caribbean Sea to landfall on the Texas coast only to find the historic oakmont habitats replaced by soybeans and cotton fields. These agricultural fields are of only marginal nutritive value to birds that have lost 25% of their body weight during migration. In the arid west, riparian forest woodlands following major watercourses are incredibly productive and serve as the super-highways for many migratory songbirds. But we've lost or greatly diminished 80-90% of these riparian systems. These birds then arrive at the temperate forest breeding grounds to find their habitats gone or fragmented.

It is a dismal situation for the whole suite of species, but it is not without hope. About two years ago, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation catalyzed an effort to begin focusing on these neotropical migratory songbirds. The effort resulted in **Partners in Flight**, a cooperative national program with public agency and private organizational partners working together on a solution to this issue. The Foundation views Audubon and our chapter network as the key ally in protecting habitat on which these birds depend.

In the Western Region, we are extremely excited to have funding committed to create the **Birds in the Balance** program to work with western Audubon chapters to build awareness of the plight of neotropical migratory songbirds. A primary focus will be on the conservation and enhancement of western riparian woodlands. We anticipate having grants to implement several pilot projects this year to restore critical riparian habitats in cooperation with Audubon chapter volunteers.

We see this initiative as modeled after the North American Waterfowl Plan — a similar private-public partnership — which has secured hundreds of thousands of wetlands acres for waterfowl and shorebirds since 1986.

— *Western Region Audubon News*

Letters

Dear S.B. Audubon Society:

On behalf of the residents of Vista del Monte, I want to thank you so much for the wonderful bird outings you provided for us. Rob Lindsay has gone out of his way to make our outings such a success!

Thank you also for providing us with a speaker as well. We have learned so much and thank you for sponsoring such worthwhile field trips and experiences.

Sincerely,

Ann Katz, Vista del Monte



Rare Bird Alert Numbers

Los Angeles	(213) 874-1318
Monterey Bay	(408) 375-9122
Morro Bay	(415) 528-7182
Orange County	(714) 563-6516
San Bernadino	(714) 793-5599
San Diego	(619) 435-6761
San Francisco	(415) 528-0288
Southern Sierra/ San Joaquin	(209) 782-1237
Tucson, AZ	(602) 798-1005

Our New President

Lee Moldaver, has lived in the San Roque area for more than 15 years, and divides his work between his consulting firm and fearless forays into Los Angeles. Since 1988 Lee has served on the Audubon board, working as Newsletter Editor, At-large member, Conservation Chair and Vice President. A life-long conservationist and hiker, he's traveled extensively through the parks and trails of the Four Corners states and lower British Columbia, where his vaunted skill at misidentification of rare species is still legendary; he is decent with a camera however, and is rated highly at dousing campfires correctly!

In Santa Barbara, Lee has served on and enlivened numerous civic boards and commissions, including: Transportation, County Government Productivity, City Charter Review Committee, Task Force on Electoral Systems, and Environmental Defense Center. He recently completed 13 years as director of the MTD, with an adjunct tour on the public advisory board of the National Safety Council.

A co-founding partner of the Victoria Street Theatre, Lee also has been an active volunteer and officer with the UCSB Music Affiliates, Recording for the Blind, the Citizens Planning Association, Toastmasters, and the Allied Neighborhoods Association.

Vireos (Continued from page 1)

that reason, there will be ongoing studies of vireos and flycatchers over the coming years.

The wildlife agencies responsible for the protection of these and other species desperately need help, both politically and in the form of volunteers. Information on outlying areas is needed to assess rates of dispersal as well as the numbers of birds in existence. (For instance, at Twitchell Reservoir in August, biologists found two territorial male least Bell's vireos in a portion of a vast riparian woodland probably capable of supporting 40 pairs of the species. Yet no one has reported seeing them there before, despite easy access to the area.)

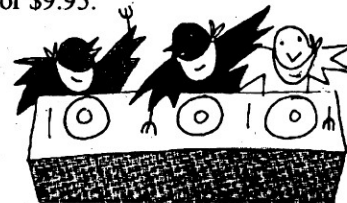
While we may exult in the recent successes of vireos and flycatchers, we should be concerned about the declining numbers of field reports from remote areas, whether or not particular rare or endangered species are found. Field notes from your local trips would give us clues to where we may search for birds now and in the future. Organizations that would be happy to receive them include your Audubon office, the Museum of Natural History, and the Vertebrate Museum at UCSB. Good birding!

Book Review

"Impeccable Bird Feeding"

How to Discourage Scuffling, Hull-Dropping, Seed-Throwing, Unmentionable Nuisances, and Vulgar Chatter
by Bill Adler, Jr.

Birdfeeding guru Bill Adler, Jr, who in his previous bestselling book *Outwitting Squirrels* took on the most pressing problems faced by those who maintain birdfeeders, now turns to cunning measures that can greatly enhance the pleasures of those who delight in watching birds just outside their windows. Included here are insider tips on mess-free nuts, seeds, and other foods; which feeders encourage neat dining; how to customize feeders to curb messy, noisy behavior — and a section that rates avian species according to their innate civility, suggesting strategies for attracting the best birds while discouraging the vulgar element. Published by Chicago Review Press for \$9.95.



"Birds of Santa Barbara County"

☛ New checklist now available ☛

Published by Santa Barbara Audubon Society, this completely new and up-to-date edition has been compiled by Paul Lehman and Joan Lentz. It lists 448 species recorded in Santa Barbara County through June 1993, and notes breeding status and seasonal relative abundance. Printed in a convenient pocket-size fold-out format, this handy checklist is indispensable for field trips and maintaining your life list. It's a nice gift idea too. Order several! The price is only \$1 per copy at the Audubon office or monthly meeting, or \$1.25 by mail order.

✂
✓ Please send me _____ copies of the checklist "*Birds of Santa Barbara County*" (\$1.25 each). Enclosed is my check for \$_____
Mail check and order form to: Santa Barbara Audubon Society,
5679 Hollister Ave, #5B, Goleta, CA 93117.

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/ZIP _____

President's Message

An old Chinese curse went "May you live in interesting times," since times of peace and plenty often seem a bit dull, and are most noticed by their absence. The passage of several seasons (and terms of office) have somehow made me Audubon chapter president this year. Our county, state, nation and the world seem to be passing through "interesting times" now. Southern California is mired in a mini-depression; Washington's paralyzed by financial crises, partisan discord, and loss of confident direction.

In such times, some may regard our love and pleasure in Nature, in the beauty of Life in clean, open spaces, as somehow less urgent, or ephemeral. I disagree. Audubon, its principles steady, its priorities evolving, its members as hearty and diverse as J.J. Audubon himself, are a tonic and shield against economic gloom. Extinction, deforestation, massive pollutions, loss of open space, continue barely abated worldwide. Too often we note the joy of a bird's song by its silence or the splendor of rare flowers by their loss. To be Auduboners in Santa Barbara is to resist such disasters from a home base of biological plenty. Yet struggle on we must: toward national reauthorization of the Endangered Species Act, and defense of threatened open space here at home.

Wordsworth said that "Any man afield a meadow in bloom of Spring is rich, whatever his station in a town." True.

And the challenge of making Santa Barbara Audubon as good as we can is made easier this year by the addition of Bob Zeman (Treasurer), Jeff Chemnick (Field Trips), and Dave Wass (Programs) to our '93 - '94 Board. Each gain, I must tell you, entails a major loss as well: Elan Sutton (so instrumental to our Wetlands Conference and Earth Day booth) and Ben Berkowitz (whose knowledge of computers AND money gave us our best treasurer ever) have retired. Sally Walker, having set gigantic standards of excellence as President, also has cut back. Words cannot tell how much we shall miss their leadership; they will continue to inspire us to work that much harder by their example and in their stead.

In the end, of course, our members and our traditions are our chapter. And in those, thankfully, we remain strong. I shall need your resources, advice and help to be effective in the days ahead. Together we can do much. As we begin a new Audubon year full of great speakers, trips and special events, do not let anyone dim your zeal for Nature, or challenge your affection for the song of birds on wing or botanics in glorious bloom. They are as worthy of respect today as they were 150 years ago when they took M. Audubon's breath clean away. They are what Audubon has always been about, and remain, in this, our chapter's 30th Anniversary Year.

— Lee Moldaver

SANTA BARBARA AUDUBON SOCIETY

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 Rare Bird Reporter: Karen Bridgers . 964-1316

Rare Bird Alert (805) 964-8240
 SBAS Office (805) 964-1468

OFFICE HOURS

Monday 11:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.
 Tuesday 11:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.
 Wednesday 11:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
 Thursday 11:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.
 Friday 11:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

MEMBERSHIP

Special new member rate \$23
 Individual \$35

Please send *only* new member applications and *El Tecolote* subscriptions to: Santa Barbara Audubon Society, 5679 Hollister Ave., Suite 5B, Goleta, CA 93117.

EL TECOLOTE

Editor: Dorin Mayes 683-1079

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