

# El Tecolote

NEWSLETTER OF THE SANTA BARBARA AUDUBON SOCIETY

HAPPY  
HOLIDAYS



December 1993/January 1994

Vol. 32, No. 3

## They Look So Innocent!

by B. "Moose" Peterson

**I**N July of this year, I had the good fortune to return two Northern pygmy-owls to the wild. The two were part of a family group that fledged at least three owlets in the Nojoqui Falls area this spring. These two owlets had gotten into a brown-sticky goo used on cow troughs to keep insects from the water. When the two innocent sweeties got to the Wildlife Care Network, they were completely coated with the goo, preventing them from flying. Treated as if covered with oil, the owls were cleaned and cared for until they got their strength back.

The pygmy-owl is small, these two barely measuring over five inches. They have a very high metabolic rate requiring them to constantly hunt, and unlike most owls, they hunt chiefly during daylight hours. They use a "surprise attack" technique to capture their prey since their flight is relatively noisy, their favorite prey being small birds (44% of the time). They tend to take small passerines such as vireos, sparrows and wrens, but have been recorded taking prey as large as California quail! Spending most of their time in the elevated perches of tree canopies, they find their prey visually then dive and glide, chasing it a short distance.

These owls are very unsociable. They barely cope with their mates during the breeding season, dispersing quickly after the young have fledged. They have "eye spots" on their napes that are believed to have social significance in possibly warding off other pygmy-owls as well as preventing surprise attacks from larger predators.

These five-inch-tall bundles sat perched in my office the morning before their release, watching me with big eyes blinking whenever I looked their way. They sat looking so innocently, I had a hard time believing what I was reading about these terrors of the forest.

On July 19th in the late afternoon, we released the two owls back at Nojoqui Park. This is when the fun really began: as soon as the door of the carrier was opened and the two owls were placed on a branch, the otherwise silent forest burst into

(See Owls on page 4)

### December Program

Friday, December 17, 1993

Farrand Hall, SB Museum of Natural History  
7:45 p.m. Refreshments / 8:00 p.m. Program

#### *"California's Birds — The Stories They Have Told Me"*

"Moose" Peterson, long-time friend of the Audubon Society, photographer, author, lecturer, and naturalist, brings a rare combination of experience, dedication, technical skill and artistic insight to his programs. From the least Bell's vireo to the Yuma clapper rail, "Moose" has seen it all, photographed it, lectured about it, and now with the publication of his new book *"California's Vanishing Habitats and Wildlife,"* has written about it. Tonight's presentation is a distillation of the best of his efforts in photographing the birds of California and their struggles, tragic and humorous.

### January Program

Friday, January 28, 1994

Farrand Hall, SB Museum of Natural History  
7:45 p.m. Tea and Talk / 8:00 p.m. Program

#### *"The Latest from the Argentine"*

Jeff Chemnick has carved out a life for himself and a treasure chest of natural history marvels for the rest of us through his life-long fascination with the natural world. Jeff's insatiable curiosity has taken him on long photographic and study trips through countries all around the world, from Panama to Australia to Thailand. And at the end of every trip he generously shares his treasures with his friends at Audubon. The last time it was South Africa; this time, Argentina. Don't miss this chance to see the flora and the fauna of this richly endowed land through the educated eyes and fascinating sensibilities of Jeff Chemnick.

## Activities Calendar

### Saturday, December 11: Lake Cachuma.

Join trip leader **Guy Tingos** for an exclusive tour of the Rancho Jocosco Ostrich Farm's wonderful lake-front habitat. Migrants, water birds, raptors, ducks, geese, etc. and maybe even an ostrich (but they don't count on your life list!). Meet at Carl's Jr., Five Points Shopping Center, at 8:00 a.m. Bring lunch, water and windbreaker. Call Guy (687-8266) for info and rain update.

### Saturday, January 1: Christmas Bird Count and Potluck Dinner.

### Saturday, January 8: Christmas Count Rarities and Greatest Hits.

Join leader **Shawneen Finnegan** for a tour of the goodies drummed up by all those who got up early on New Year's Day and could actually find and identify unusual and rare birds. Meet at 7:15 a.m. at the Andree Clark Bird Refuge. Bring lunch, beverage and windbreaker. Call Shawneen (967-2450) for info and rain update.

### Saturday, January 29: Ventura County Game Preserve.

Leader **Guy Tingos** will take us to this remarkable haven for ducks, geese, ibis and *Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*. Meet at 7:30 a.m. at Andree Clark Bird Refuge and bring lunch, water and windbreaker. Call Guy (687-8266) for info and rain update.

### Rare Birds of October/November

Dusky warbler (1st county record – usually found in Asia!), great-crested flycatcher, ovenbird, Lewis's woodpecker, sage thrasher, tropical kingbird, painted redstart, Canada warbler, Eurasian wigeon, harlequin duck, ancient murrelet, hepatic tanager (in Rocky Nook Park for its 12th winter!).

## Conservation Notes

◆ The calls for a local California Coastal Commission meeting were successful. In January a meeting at the Miramar Hotel will cover Goleta Community Plan, Ellwood Beach, More Mesa and other issues. Those interested in coastal issues are urged to attend.

◆ A new "phone tree" has been initiated by Dave Wass. We are 16 members strong, and ready to make telephone calls regarding urgent Audubon issues. The inaugural issue was to urge supervisors to approve using \$800,000 of Prop. 70 funds towards purchase of a threatened section of Sedgwick Ranch. If you wish to join the phone tree, call Dave at 682-6962.


◆ Just out: a new study, "Historical and Current Status of Snowy Plovers in the Coal Oil Point Reserve Vicinity" by Fahy and Holmgren, UCSB. The study concludes by recommending possible protective and habitat enhancement measures. Snowy plovers once bred on Devereux Beach but haven't since the mid-1900s.

◆ A November 10 Forum sponsored by the Environmental Coalition presented facts and opinions about the proposed

Mobil Oil Corp. Clearview Project. Two drilling towers approximately 180 feet tall are being discussed for location next to the Coal Oil Point Reserve. They would drill into offshore reserves for 24 hours a day for six years, and produce oil from 60 wells for 25 years thereafter. Serious questions remain unanswered about how this sets precedents for further onshore-into-offshore drilling, neighborhood health and safety issues, consistency with county and coastal policies, environmental effects, and legality of this project.

—Ron Hirst

## Bulletin Board



An environmental group concerned with wildlife habitat preservation is developing video presentations of issues critical to local decision-making. Volunteers are wanted to help with an interesting long-term project. If you have video media experience, we need you. If you don't have video experience but would like to be part of a rewarding educational adventure, we need you. To learn more, call David Wass, 682-6962.

## President's Message

Approaching the holidays means The Bird Count for some local Auduboners. For most of us, however, it means a time of taking stock, of giving thanks, and reconfirming our commitments during a special season.

So thank you, Dave Wass (Program Chair) who got more qualifying signatures for next year's CalPAW (open space acquisition) than anyone else. And thank you Sally Walker (Vice President) for getting that initial grant which is helping restore the Andree Clark Bird Refuge — a long-time Audubon goal. Special thanks to Jim Ryerson and Bill Master (former senior managers at our County's Air Pollution Control District), who've been squeezed out of their jobs by politicians who do not appreciate our cleaner air as we Auduboners do. Cheers to Paul Lehman and Mark Holmgren for their efforts to produce and publish the definitive book on Santa Barbara County birds (our chapter is pleased to support them). Merry Christmas to Brian Trautwein and his Urban Creeks Council, for saving Mission Creek from paving, and trying to save the creeks and estuaries of the Goleta Valley from the bulldozer. Thanks to our Sacramento office, and Jack O'Connell and Gary Hart, for limiting the damage on the attacks on the Environmental Quality Act. Happy New Year to President Clinton and Governor Wilson, who (so far, anyway) have resisted the worst pressures to back away from high conservation ethics in the face of horrible recession. Conservation Chair Ron Hirst and I were able to lunch with CalEPA Director James Strock recently, and were most impressed.

My hope for the holidays is that our Bird Count will approach record levels, and that when we convene at the Natural History Museum for our fabulous potluck dinner (please come, and bring a friend), Jean Moseley and Dan Gira will be well enough to join us. Happy and Safe Holidays!

—Lee Moldaver

## Skimmer Update

ONCE again, the Santa Barbara Harbor area is hosting a large flock of special winter guests, the clown-faced black skimmers. As reported in *El Tecolote* last year, our wintering flock comes from breeding colonies further south, especially from Bolsa Chica Reserve near Huntington Beach.

The skimmer colony at Bolsa Chica is being studied by Dr. Charles Collins of Cal. State, Long Beach. For several years, juveniles have been banded with colors corresponding to the hatch year. In 1992, a system of individual numbering was established to further track the wintering and migrating patterns of these birds, which have been expanding their range northward for several years. A graduate student has been monitoring this data, and the 1992 statistics will be especially interesting to Santa Barbara birders.

A total of 64 birds were given individually-numbered bands. Five died at

the colony and one was recovered dead in Santa Barbara. Thirty other numbered birds were seen at various locations, fifteen of them in Santa Barbara. That's a very high percentage, indicating that the birds, like human tourists, like our beaches in the winter! My highest total for the entire flock during the "official" weekly survey was 117 in February, but some observers told me of finding even more.

For 1993, banders planned to expand operations to chicks from all four breeding colonies in the state: Bolsa Chica, San Diego, Upper Newport Bay, and Salton Sea. However, the birds fledged earlier than expected at Newport Bay and the Salton Sea, so only two colonies will be studied this year. 1993 birds will have a yellow band with black characters on the left leg. Bolsa Chica bird numbers run from 01 to 99 and are preceded by the letter "A"; San Diego numbers run from 01 to 50 and are preceded by the letter "D."

Color codes breakdown: 1988 – pale

yellow (which has faded to white); 1989 – blue; 1990 – pink; 1991 – red; 1992 – green (some birds have numbered bands on left leg, others have dark green tape over the FWS band on the right leg); 1993 – yellow. Some birds have only the silver FWS band. These were either not taped, or else the tape has worn off. Some of the white numbers on the green plastic bands from 1992 are wearing off.

I survey the Harbor area regularly, but if you see banded skimmers at any location, try to note the following: total number seen, number of juveniles (this will be impossible to do in a month or so, as they will look like winter adults), color of bands and number of each color, and finally, individual band numbers, if possible. Local areas that could use regular checking are Goleta Beach, Devereux Beach, Santa Ynez River mouth and McGrath State Beach. Please report data to Kathy Gazzaniga, 226½ Argonne Street, Long Beach, CA 90803.

— Florence Sanchez

## ANNUAL CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

Everyone is welcome to help Santa Barbara Audubon with the Christmas Count on **Saturday, January 1, 1994**. On the evening of Count Day, you are all invited to the compilation dinner at the S.B. Museum of Natural History (Bird Habitat Hall). The potluck dinner begins promptly at **6:00 p.m.** and the compilation at 7:00. Please bring a salad, main dish, or dessert. If your group includes out-of-towners, they can contribute drinks, bread, paper plates, etc. Please bring your own service.

This year's Count compiler will again be Paul Lehman, assisted by Joan Lentz and Pat Kelly. Please fill out the coupon below and mail it to Pat, or call her at 962-9916. **PLEASE SIGN UP AS SOON AS POSSIBLE SO WE CAN ORGANIZE THE COUNT EARLY THIS YEAR.** We will be contacting you to let you know details of the area you will cover.

Before the Count, watch for the following birds, which we often have difficulty in getting: grosbeaks, tanagers, orioles, any non-Anna's hummingbirds, unusual sparrows at feeders such as white-throated or Harris's. Other species we need: any geese, dippers, pygmy-owls, long-billed curlews. If you see any of the above, or have knowledge of any other interesting birds, please call Paul Lehman at 967-2450 or Joan Lentz at 969-4397. **THANKS SO VERY MUCH FOR YOUR HELP!**

Don't forget participants pay a \$5 fee to cover the costs of compiling and publishing the results.

— Joan Lentz



### SANTA BARBARA CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

*Saturday, January 1, 1994*



Yes, I(we) want to join the Bird Count team!

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Preferred area? If yes, where \_\_\_\_\_

Would like to work with: \_\_\_\_\_

Optional: ☐ Dinner, ☐ Leader, ☐ Feeder count

Please complete this form and return to:

Pat Kelly  
554 Litchfield Lane  
Santa Barbara, CA 93109  
(805) 962-9916



## Owls (Continued from page 1)

noise. The canopy had been devoid of life, but what seemed to be every passerine, sparrow and hummingbird for miles around showed up to harass the two owls.

The pygmy-owls flew to the top of the canopy where, from down below, they appeared to be as small as those mobbing them. From their high perch, they looked about as if sizing up their next meal. True to form, the two owls separated, setting the gathering flocks of mobbers into a frenzy.

The younger pygmy-owl just sat while hummingbirds, vireos and wrens dived in and out of the canopy to harass it. It didn't blink or flinch, but rather took time to preen its ruffled tail feathers and scan the crowd for possibly a quick bite. The gathering of birds was enough to set any birder's heart racing!

Its sibling, the older of the two, was

fifty yards away being mobbed by a second group of harassers. It was the funnier of the two as it turned and bobbed its head while watching all the commotion. Little Hutton's vireos were perched right next to it, screaming at the owl who just blinked its eyes and bobbed its head. The noise was incredible from the two groups of mobbers as they tried everything to get those two little owls to move!

It's always a great feeling to rehab and release wildlife back to the wilds after their collision with civilization. But getting a front-row seat to watch bird ecology at its best is an unexpected treat. I can't help but look up and search every time I hear a commotion in the canopy, and wonder if I'm being watched. So if you venture to Nojoqui Falls and hear a commotion overhead, look up with keen eyes because those innocent little owls might be watching you.



## Last Chance To Sign-Up New Members!

Our Membership Drive ends January 1, 1994. Sign-up or sponsor new members and win valuable prizes. Memberships are only \$20 (special) and make great gifts. Audubon helps our local and national programs in Endangered Species, Wetlands, Ancient Forests, and Clean Air and Water. Make sure you call the Audubon office with names of people you have signed up, or send the office your \$20 subscription requests today.

**Grand Prize:** Pelagic birding trip out of Monterey by Shearwater Journeys; **2nd Prize:** Whale-watching trip on the 'Condor'; **3rd Prize:** \$25 gift certificate from Pacific Travellers Supply; **4th Prize:** Butterfly kit for children from The Nature Company; **5th Prize:** "Great Birding Trips of the West" by Joan Easton Lentz.

**Santa Barbara Audubon Society**  
5679 Hollister Avenue, Suite 5B  
Goleta, CA 93117



**Dated Material  
December 1993  
Please Expedite**

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

## SANTA BARBARA AUDUBON SOCIETY

### OFFICERS & COMMITTEE CHAIRS

President: Lee Moldaver .....	682-2120
Vice President: Sally Walker .....	569-5388
Secretary: Everett King .....	962-0883
Treasurer: Bob Zeman .....	964-5731
At-Large: Jim Greaves .....	966-3948
Chris Lange .....	968-5743
Conservation: Ron Hirst .....	967-0138
Education: Don Rathbun .....	964-5521
Programs: David Wass .....	682-6962
Field Trips: Jeff Chemnick .....	965-0895
Membership: Nancy King .....	964-4741
Hospitality: Tomi Sollen .....	966-4836
Publicity: Betty Bazzi .....	967-5200
Bird Refuge Census: Helen Matelson .....	966-3217
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

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
---------------------------	----------

*El Tecolote* is published 8 times a year by the Santa Barbara Audubon Society. Members are invited to submit articles, announcements, letters, photos and drawings for publication consideration. Copy deadline is the 10th of the month prior to publication. Non-member subscription is \$10 per year.



Printed on recycled paper

or current resident