

El Tecolote

NEWSLETTER OF THE SANTA BARBARA AUDUBON SOCIETY



April 1994

Vol. 32, No. 6

A Bird Encounter of the Very Close Kind

► Jeff Chemnick

THE cloud forests of western Panama are pristine in many areas. The most accessible tracts have long since been converted into coffee farms (called *fincas*), but most of the high montane regions are still intact and as such are excellent places to visit and study natural history. That is where I was as an undergraduate student in 1974 with two other fellows — part of a five-month field expedition driving to Panama via Mexico and Central America. The object of our study was to detail the speciation of neotropical camel-cricket and katydids and their distribution southward from the Mexican border. We teamed up with a venerable mammologist from Swarthmore, a 74-year-old who worked tirelessly from dawn to dusk in an endless effort to describe the still largely unknown rodents of Panama's cloud forest.

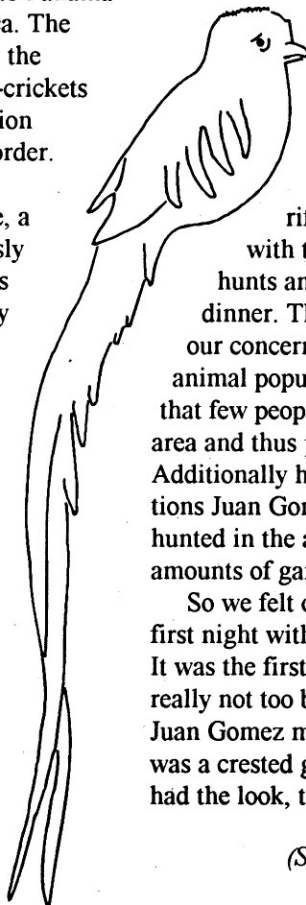
We set up camp in a crude but competently constructed hut made of palm leaves and arm-sized tree branches. The hut, the "beds," the stove, and the table were swiftly and expertly fashioned out of the nearby forest with just a machete and some twine in a matter of minutes by our resident carpenter and camp facilitator, Juan Gomez. (A word on the "beds" at this point: they were simply four to six branches lashed together

that provided some support, but no comfort unless you like sleeping on rolling pins. I'm nearly narcoleptic when tired, but that "bed" was difficult even on my then only 20-year-old body.)

Juan Gomez (everyone always used his first and last name together, like Charlie Brown) was a full-blooded indigenous San Blas Indian and had spent years in the mountains of Panama.

He worked the trap lines for the mammologist in the morning, and for the balance of the day went on long treks accompanied only by his dog Chicle and his .22 rifle. Later he would return with the various victims of his hunts and we would share them for dinner. The mammologist allayed our concerns about depleting local animal populations with the assurance that few people ever ventured into the area and thus populations were healthy. Additionally he reasoned that for generations Juan Gomez and his ancestors had hunted in the area and only for necessary amounts of game.

So we felt okay when he returned the first night with a groove-toothed squirrel. It was the first rodent I'd ever eaten and really not too bad. The next item on the Juan Gomez menu of neotropical delights was a crested guan which, when cooked, had the look, taste and texture of a small



(See Encounter on page 4)

April Program

Friday, April 22

Farrand Hall, S.B.N.H. Museum
7:45 p.m. Refreshments
8:00 p.m. Program

"Conservation Report — Right Here, Right Now"

So, you read the Audubon magazine and you know what is happening, and who is making it happen everywhere in the environmental world — except right under your nose here in Santa Barbara. This program will highlight what your chapter is doing, through the efforts of the conservation committee, led by **Ron Hirst**, to identify and meet the environmental challenges that are affecting our lives, here and today.

You will learn about the Coastal Preservation Conference, the plover projects, the next chapter in the Ellwood Shores saga, the upcoming wetlands restoration program, and the recently completed wet compost project. And you will have a chance to meet and talk to the committee members who are doing the day-to-day jobs — **Lee Moldaver, Mindy Gottsegen, Jim Greaves, Marie Dornan and Dave Wass**. Finally, you will have a chance to become a member of one of several hands-on conservation projects about to begin.

Yes, this is what is happening, right here, right now.

Activities Calendar

Saturday, April 9: International Center for Earth Concerns—Gardens and Habitat Reserve.

This will be SBAS's first visit to the incredible Foundation for environmental projects that is the work and passion of John Taft of Ojai. The property is 350 acres of chaparral and sage-scrub with beautiful rocky outcroppings. The vicinity of the Foundation is remarkably landscaped in several themes including an Australian and an African garden that are ablaze now with blooming aloes and proteaceous plants. **John Taft** himself will be our host and tour guide. Meet at Andree Clark Bird Refuge at 7:30 a.m. and carpool to Ojai. Bring lunch and we'll eat on the grounds after concluding our tour at noon. Returning to Santa Barbara by 2:00 p.m.. Cost is \$5 per person. Please bring cash or check made out to Santa Barbara Audubon Society. For reservations and info., call **Jeff Chemnick** (965-0895). And, oh yeah, we should see lots of nice local and migrant jobs as well!

Saturday, April 30: Lake Los Carneros and San Pedro Creek.

Join trip leader **Karen Bridgers** as she again generously shares her expertise birding this migrant-rich area of Goleta. We'll bird up a storm following Karen as she makes her rounds of this area she knows so well. Meet at 8:00 a.m. in the Stow House parking lot, 304 North Los Carneros Road, Goleta. Call Karen (964-1316) for info and rain update. Back by lunch. No charge.

Conservation Report

Our board wrote letters supporting the following:

- ◆ County Parks Dept. should be required to mitigate tree removals at similar ratios as other entities.
- ◆ The California Coastal Commission staff report findings on the ARCO golf course proposal.
- ◆ The proposed listing of the Atlantic bluefin tuna under CITES. This should help protect this dramatically declining species.

I recently attended the conference "Economic Survival in an Endangered Environment" held in La Jolla. U.S. Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt, Calif. Secretary of Resources Doug Wheeler and numerous regional officials addressed the issues of the Endangered Species Act (ESA), the California Natural Communities Conservation Planning Program, the National Biological Survey, and how to arrange for purchase of the very limited amounts of remaining habitat. San Diego County is a test case for the nation; it is anticipating a 45% increase in population and a 56% increase in housing by 2010. It has 28 ESA listed species and 130 candidates for listing.

The following day I attended a National Audubon Society board meeting in Dana Point. I spoke with six directors including former EPA Administrator William Riley, and talked with many of our NAS leaders including Peter Berle and Audubon Magazine Editor Michael Robbins. At all NAS meetings I've attended in the last eight years, I've been greatly impressed that members have accessibility to the highest level of

environmental policy makers. These policy makers are genuinely interested in what we have to say. In meetings I attended, these ardent conservationists were grappling with national issues such as the "Wise Use" movement, population policy and the funding of conservation programs.

State Senator Gary Hart spoke recently at the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History about the economy and the environment. It was clear from his talk that his priorities have been and will be protecting our natural habitats. Current priorities for him are population policy and species preservation. He presented in-depth facts about the current economic crisis in California and how environmental policies and programs may help improve our economy.

—Ron Hirst

Santa Barbara Coastal Preservation Conference

Saturday, April 16, Santa Barbara Audubon will co-sponsor a major regional conference on coastal preservation, with various departments of UCSB and the Coastal Resource Information Center. The conference will run from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Government officials from Washington, D.C. and California will exchange views with area scientists and conservationists. The goal: To create the best long-range scenario for effective coastal preservation in Santa Barbara County, based upon "realistic" financial challenges and private property rights. A key area to be explored: Does some portion of our coast between UCSB and Vandenberg AFB qualify to become a National Seashore? Personnel from Point Reyes National Seashore will speak on how such a designation actually functions. Public and private sector planners will outline other tools for land preservation (i.e. trusts, easements, transfer of development rights, etc.).

Be sure to reserve your place at this important conference and don't be left out! Remember that many were unable to get in to our sold-out Wetlands Conference in late 1992. While this year's conference will be in a larger setting, space is still tight. Call the SBAS office (964-1468) to reserve now; better yet, fill out and mail the sign-up form with your check for \$12 today to Santa Barbara Audubon Society. Reserved participants may pay at the door *only* on a space-available basis; pre-paid reservations will take priority. This should be a fabulous workshop.

- ☐ YES, I plan to attend the April 16 Conference.
Please register me (and ____ guests) at \$12 each.

Name _____ Phone _____
Address _____
City, State, ZIP _____

I am __ /am not __ interested in the optional lunch.

- ☐ NO, I am not free for the conference, but please accept my tax-deductible contribution to assure its success. Please keep me informed about creating a National Seashore in Santa Barbara.

Tricolored Blackbird Census

The California Dept. of Fish and Game's Tricolored Blackbird Working Group has taken note of the success of the January 1994 California Mountain Plover Census, especially the important role of Audubon chapters and members. As a result, they have asked National Audubon's Western Regional Office to help coordinate the first, single date, statewide census of tricolored blackbird nesting and foraging locations. The census will be held on **Saturday, April 23, 1994.**

Your participation will make an important scientific contribution in helping to determine overall numbers of birds, size and location of nesting colonies, and foraging areas. The data you gather will be used to help shape this year's research by the Tricolored Blackbird Working Group.

For further information contact Bob Barnes, Birds in the Balance Program Coordinator, at Audubon's Western Regional Office in Sacramento (916-481-5332).

From Far Away They Come

As I noted in the December *El Tecolote*, our wintering population of black skimmers at the Santa Barbara Harbor appears to come from the Bolsa Chica nesting colony in Orange County. Banders from Cal State Long Beach had hoped to band skimmers in 1993 from all four of Southern California's nesting populations; however, the birds at upper Newport Bay and Salton Sea fledged earlier than expected and so were missed.

Now comes some interesting news. Carol Molina of the Los Angeles Museum of Natural History has been banding gulls at the Salton Sea for several years. Since skimmers and Caspian terns use the same nesting sites as the gulls, she has also done incidental banding of both these species as well. Until 1993, her birds were banded only with the silver Fish and Wildlife Service band, and thus in the field were indistinguishable from many others banded elsewhere.

This year, Carol used a color coding system for the first time. Skimmers fledged and banded at Salton Sea in 1993 have a silver band on the left leg and a plain, unnumbered red plastic band on the right leg. (To confuse the issue in the field, 1991 birds from the Bolsa Chica colony have a single band of red tape over the silver band.) On February 14, one of these Salton Sea birds was seen with the 100+ skimmers that have been wintering at the Harbor this year, and another has been at Seal Beach for a month and a half. How these birds traveled to the coast is a mystery — overland migration is one possibility, but if so, did it occur from the Salton Sea to the ocean through San Diego County? Studying this interesting species poses many questions about bird migration and distribution!

The Salton Sea bird was not seen on subsequent weekly visits, so apparently it was a short visit indeed. As an additional point of information, we've not had any birds from the San Diego colony at the Harbor this year (coded D on the yellow plastic band), but individuals have been seen as far north as Seal Beach. So when you are birding the coast, please check skimmers carefully for bands and report your sightings to Kathy Gazzaniga, 226½ Argonne Ave., Long Beach, CA 90803.

— Florence Sanchez



Audubon's Environmental Education Program for Kids

Funding is needed to enroll 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th grade students in our **Audubon Adventures** program. Classroom sponsorships are being sought at this time to bring environmental education next year into local elementary schools from Goleta to Carpinteria.

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. 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.

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

It costs only \$30 to sponsor a year's subscription for an entire elementary classroom of 32 students. Please support this good cause and send your tax-deductible gift of \$30, \$60, \$90, \$120 or more, earmarked for the **Audubon Adventures** program, with the coupon below, to the Santa Barbara Audubon Society, 5679 Hollister Avenue, #5B, Goleta, CA 93117.



Yes, I would like to sponsor _____ classes
(@ \$30/classroom)

Enclosed is my check for _____

made out to: **Santa Barbara Audubon Society**

Name _____

Address _____

City, State, ZIP _____

Telephone _____

Encounter (Continued from page 1)

turkey. The following afternoon Juan Gomez produced a red brocket, a small reddish-brown tropical deer with single spike-like antlers. Now, with each day out in the wilderness, our appetites increased dramatically, and I have to honestly report that the deer was delicious.

It was a marvel that Juan Gomez could shoot anything. The barrel of his gun was noticeably bent and lashed to what could only generously be called a stock with a piece of rubber inner-tube. But he learned to compensate and with deadly accuracy. At camp, we often discussed the various birds and mammals that we hoped to see while in the cloud forest and never considered that Juan Gomez paid us any attention. But apparently when he aimed, he aimed to please. And so we felt a peculiar combination of fascination tempered by chagrin when Juan Gomez returned the following afternoon proudly clutching the first resplendent quetzal I'd ever seen.

The field guide text states that the field mark of the resplendent quetzal is "the most spectacular bird in the New World." I've often pondered that choice of description. Imagine two birders out in the mountains of Costa Rica or Panama

who spot a male quetzal in full breeding plumage. Assume for a moment that they really are unaware of its identity, and one asks the other as he thumbs through the book, "Well, what field marks do you notice about that bird?" And comes the reply, "Looks like the most spectacular bird in the New World to me." Suddenly the guy with the field guide spots the description and declares, "Aha! Here it is! It must therefore be the resplendent quetzal!"

Well, even in death that bird's metallic green, red and white coloration was incredible. I've since seen them happily flying through the cloud forest canopy and they are quite possibly the most spectacular birds in the New World. But that day we were confronted with the problem of what to do with the bird in hand. And so the mammalogist prepared it and eventually sent the study skin to the American Museum of Natural History for whom he was working. And the meat? Why, we ate it, of course! It was a tad salty and mostly dark and stringy and not too much of it anyway, but it was okay with beans and rice. We explained to Juan Gomez not to shoot any more animals on our behalf, and that the deer he'd bagged would be plenty for the duration of the week. And happily on that trip, Juan Gomez did not fire another shot.

**Don't forget Earth Day this year: April 24,
Alameda Park from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.**

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	\$20
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 (805) 683-1079

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