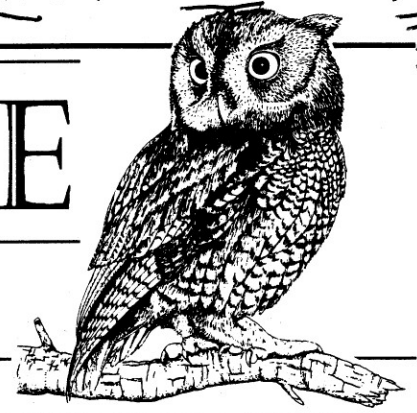


EL TECOLOTE

Newsletter of the Santa Barbara Audubon Society, Incorporated

Volume 36 Number 3

November 1997



Lumps & Splits

by Rich Stallcup

from the Observer, the quarterly journal of the Point Reyes Bird Observatory, Number 109, Spring 1997

WHATEVER HAPPENED to Audubon's Warbler, and what the heck is a Juniper Titmouse? Is there really such a thing as a Thayer's Gull? Are there going to be three species of Fox Sparrows, or eight Red Crossbills? Did White-tailed Kite and Spotted Towhee come back from somewhere, and why is the little heron just green? These kinds of questions and many more can only be answered by reviewing decisions of the panel that makes ultimate (or tentative) pronouncements about avian taxonomy.

The naming of North American birds and their elevation (splits) or demolition (lumps) to or from the rank of *species* is exclusively in the hands of the American Ornithologist's Union (AOU) Committee on Taxonomy and Nomenclature. This is a group of about ten professional ornithologists that review papers published by research-ornithologists (often graduate students) and judge the validity of the findings. Lumps and splits become official when they are published in the AOU *Checklist of North American Birds* (a really thick book, now in its sixth edition) or periodic supplements to that document, which appear in the AOU's magazine *The Auk*.

Over time, clear trends have been displayed. Lumping rules for a few years, then splitting, then lumping ... Joe Taylor, once the leading lister, claimed that he reached 600 birds in North America three times. Each time he got there, his list got lumped down. Now we are in a very strong splitting trend. If this had been happening when Joe was breaking 600, he could have stayed home and watched his list go up — a lot.

In answer to wonder as to what the changes are all about, I have often suggested jokingly to friends that the cause may not be one of true scientific classification, but one of a need for new theses topics by new generations of graduate students.

The need of science (and of humanity in general) to classify and categorize all things causes problems for systematists, because some organisms simply do not fit within our definitions.

Blue-form and white-form Snow Geese can fledge from the same nest, but adults at collective breeding sites prefer to mate with their own phenotypical sort (i.e. those with the same observable physical characteristics). These geese are not even considered sub-species — just morphologically different types of the same race. In contrast, Clark's and Western Grebes, which display a breeding strategy like the geese, are designated as different species.

Audubon's and Myrtle Warblers, now lumped into Yellow-rumped Warbler, are quite different birds, and virtually every individual seen throughout their winter range by skilled field ornithologists can be instantly and conclusively identified as one or the other. It is said that there is a large area of sympatry (closely related species which do not interbreed) during the nesting season. So where are all the "hybrids"?

Bullock's and Baltimore Orioles, known collectively for a recent-while as Northern Oriole, have been re-split even though "hybrids" at and away from the sympatric breeding zone are common. "Hybrid" Rose-breasted and Black-headed Grosbeaks are also frequent in the center of the continent, but their status as full species has not yet been broken. The case of the Lazuli and Indigo Buntings

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is the same as that of the grosbeaks.

Birders once again have to travel to seek out the three species of Rosy Finch, as they did before a 20-year lump. The recent Rufous-sided Towhee re-split into Spotted (west) and Eastern (east) opens a can-of-nematodes, since their physical appearance and vocalizations are longitudinally *clinal* across the country: this means that birds at each end of the geographic range are quite different, but the difference *graduates* through neighboring populations west to east. And where do we place the group in Georgia and Florida that has white (instead of red) irises? The 18 currently recognized subspecies of Fox Sparrow can be loosely sorted into Red, Brown, and Gray groups, and there are rumblings that each of these groups could be split out and promoted to species level. Do Savannah and Song Sparrow, Horned Lark, and Marsh Wren follow? Do the eight vocally different nomadic tribes of Red Crossbills each deserve their own, second Latin name?

Recent research shows that two races (in wildlife biology this word is used interchangeably with subspecies) of Plain Titmouse are actually full species. What will be called the Oak Titmouse is the one west of the Sierra/Cascades, and the Juniper Titmouse is that of Great Basin habitats. Some field ornithologists have always noted the differences in both their appearance and voice. They soon will be added to state and regional checklists and the new names will replace the old, Plain. The birds have not changed. The way we think of them has. Will Bushtits - which have two, similarly distinct west-side, east-side populations, phenotypes, and voices - also be separated?

It is quite obvious to those who think about such things that Glaucous-winged Gull is simply the pale, northern race of Western Gull. In the sympatric zone, mixing of the two forms is thorough, and on some breeding islands, all adults show intermediate characteristics. During winter,

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Janet Eastman, Editor
Santa Barbara Audubon Society
5679 Hollister Avenue - Suite 5B
Goleta, CA 93117
(805) 964-1468 FAX: (805) 967-7718
Deadline for submissions is the 10th of the month.



SAVE THIS DATE!!!

Santa Barbara Audubon Society

1997 Christmas Bird Count

Saturday, January 3, 1998

La Purisima Audubon Christmas Bird Count

Saturday, December 21, 1997

Please call John Ayres at 1-805-563-2905 for assignments and meeting times.

Thanksgiving Bird Count — to participate contact Dr. John G. Hewston, Natural Resources Building, Humboldt State University, Arcata, CA 95521

thousands of "hybrids" are present along the coast of Northern California and many are misidentified as other species like Herring and Thayer's Gulls. A larger percentage of the "hybrids" have white or yellow irises than do either parental type and their head streaking, mantle-shade, and primary patterns are intermediate between those of the parents. Possibly these birds have not been lumped because that would invite questions about many other species in the Herring Gull Complex that freely interbreed wherever their nesting ranges collide.

Here in California we see hybrid Glaucous x Glaucous-winged and Glaucous x Herring Gulls. Elsewhere, Herring crosses with both Great-black Backed and Lesser-black Backed are well documented in the literature.

Are Thayer's, Kumlein's, and Iceland Gulls all the same species? Are all these birds the same species - the Sea Gull? We will have to await the decisions of the AOU committee to find out.

Maybe Audubon's and Myrtle Warblers will be re-split, and maybe Spotted and Eastern Towhees will be re-lumped. Nobody now knows, but few birds at racial or specific levels of phylogeny are immune to promotion or demotion based on scientific study and data interpretation. What is certain is that the birds themselves don't care.

Rich Stallcup is a Research Associate at the Point Reyes Bird Observatory in Stinson Beach, California which promotes conservation through science.

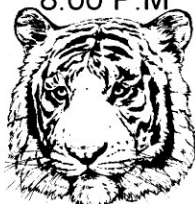
NOVEMBER PROGRAM

Tigers of the Snow

a presentation on the Siberian tiger by
Mark Stouffer

Wednesday, November 19

8:00 P.M.



Doors open at 7:30 p.m. for refreshments.
Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History
Farrand Hall
1226 Puesta del Sol
Santa Barbara, CA 93105

Santa Barbara resident and cinematographer extraordinaire Mark Stouffer will show his Emmy-award winning National Geographic Special, *Tigers of the Snow*, which he produced and directed. This was the first time that the National Geographic Society has received five Emmy nominations for a single prime-time special. In his program for Santa Barbara Audubon, Mark, who was successful in filming Siberian tigers in the wild for the first time ever, will talk about these rare tigers and answer questions following the video presentation. Mark has also produced for National Geographic Television the Emmy-award winning specials *Secrets of the Wild Panda*, *Survivors of the Skeleton Coast*, and *Braving Alaska*.

For more details on the program, call the Audubon Office at (805) 964-1468.

Central Valley Birding Symposium December 4-7, 1997

WHAT ARE KENN KAUFMAN, Kimball Garrett, Jan Pierson, Nancy Newfield, Ted Beedy, and many other world-class birders going to be doing December 4-7? They will be launching the new Central Valley Bird Club by presenting programs at a Birding Symposium in Stockton, California — home to more than 200 avian species in winter!

Join them for fascinating programs covering a wide range of birds as well as photography and field sketching. Vendors will sell books, optics, birding gear, and more. Explore area hot spots with field trips ranging from Yolo County to the Merced Wildlife Refuge.

For an informational brochure call Cindy at (800) 350-1987. Space is limited. Co-sponsored by the San Joaquin Audubon Society.

Morro Bay Winter Bird Festival January 16-19, 1998

Come celebrate the return of the wintering birds to Morro Bay — an area known for its natural beauty and over 230 bird species. The Festival, co-sponsored by the Morro Coast Audubon, offers over 35 expert guided field trips including a "Big Day," Rarities, ocean trips, kayak trips on the Bay, van trips to look for the California Condor, Sandhill Cranes, and over 20 species of raptors and many owls. There will be 20 workshops and presentations including beginning birding, bird photography, gull identification, and nest boxes. For a brochure contact the Morro Bay Chamber of Commerce, P.O. Box 876, Morro Bay, CA 93443 or call (800) 231-0592.



☒ **YES!**

I want to join
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wildlife habitats.

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Make check payable to and send to:

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P.O. Box 5100
Boulder, CO 80321-1000

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Local Chapter — Santa Barbara Audubon Society C13 7XCH

FIELD TRIPS

DEVEREUX SLOUGH

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 8:30 A.M.

target: Snowy Plover and other shorebirds, seabirds, land birds and water fowl

leader: Ron Hirst (805) 964-7658

From the north take 101 south to Glen Annie/Storke and take Storke Rd. south. Turn left onto El Colegio Rd., then right onto Camino Corto Lane. From the south take 101 to Los Carneros Rd. south past Hollister Ave. to El Colegio Rd. and turn right. Turn left onto Camino Corto Lane and drive south to end. Turn right onto Del Playa Dr. and drive to the end and park on the street. AAA Santa Barbara & Vicinity F-3; DeLorme p. 89 A-6 Scopes useful. Bring water. Done before noon. Rain date: Sunday

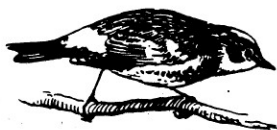
PACIFIC MISSILE TEST CENTER AT POINT MUGU NEAR OXNARD

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 23, 6:45 A.M.

target: waterfowl, rails, egrets, shorebirds

coordinator: Paul Keller (805) 968-7804

From the east take 101 north to Cabrillo Blvd. (left lane exit just past town of Montecito). Take Cabrillo and turn right onto Los Patos Way, and look for Andrée Clark Bird Refuge parking on the left. From the west, take 101 south to Los Patos off ramp (after Milpas exit) and turn right into Bird Refuge parking. AAA Santa Barbara & Vicinity E-16, DeLorme p. 98 A-7. Carpool from here. The trip will begin at Mugu's Pizza across the Main Gate off Hwy. 1 at Wood Rd. at 8:00 a.m. If you want to meet us at Mugu's Pizza, you must let me know. To reserve your space call me on November 3, 4, 5, or 6. If you get my machine, enunciate clearly and slowly, spelling as necessary, your last name, first name, middle initial, social security number, citizenship status, phone number, and if you are under 18 yrs. old, your age (must be 12 or over). Limit of 25 people. We need at least 15 participants for the trip to go, so barring medical emergency or death in the immediate family, if you sign up, you must show up. Leader will be someone yet to be assigned from the Point Mugu environmental staff who will show us around until about noon. Bring photo ID, lunch, water. Dress in layers for heat, fog, wind, or showers. Scopes useful. Cameras not allowed.



CARRIZO PLAIN, SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY

FRIDAY-SATURDAY, DECEMBER 5-6

target: Short-eared Owl, Sandhill Crane, Mountain Plover, birds of prey, Mountain Bluebird, Sage Thrasher, Horned Larks, Sage Sparrow

leader: Tom Rohrer: (805) 898-0646

Trip begins Saturday morning at Motel 6 in San Luis Obispo — \$30 double/\$46 single occupancy. Carpool drivers will appreciate gas money. Bring money for meals. Participants must call Tom for directions to motel, carpool arrangements, and other information. No gas, water, or food on the Plain. Bring food and beverage for snacks and lunch. Dress for hot, cold, and rain. To reserve your space send check with name, address, and phone to reach Santa Barbara Audubon Society, 5679 Hollister Ave, Suite 5B, Goleta, CA 93117-3402 by November 15. Trip limited to 10 participants. Those seeking a roommate may want to tell Tom their smoking and snoring habits and tolerance and their gender.

PALO ALTO BAYLANDS

DECEMBER 13-14

target: Black Rail, California Clapper Rail, Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow, water fowl

leader: Don Rathbun (805) 968-7804

Trip begins Saturday morning at a motel in or near Palo Alto. Cost not yet known but will include gas, meals, and lodging. Participants must call Don between Nov. 5 and 30th. Those near Santa Barbara will carpool to Palo Alto Friday evening. The extreme high tide on Saturday may flush target birds in view in time for some to drive home that day. Others may wish to bird through Sunday, chasing vagrants, trying again for the rail if not seen, or viewing abundant waterfowl.



next year ...

January 10 — Christmas Bird Count Area

January 31 — Ventura County Game Preserve

All field trips are open to the public. Unless otherwise noted, trips are free and reservations are not needed. If you need a loaner pair of binoculars for a trip, call the leader.

Peterson Field Guide to Warblers of North America

Jon Dunn and Kimball Garrett

FINALLY, HERE IS THE FIRST complete guide to one of the most challenging and interesting groups of bird in North America. *A Field Guide to Warblers* (out October 15; \$20.00 paperback) is the first true guide to some of the most sought after birds, employing the famous Peterson Identification system that indicates exactly what to look for to tell one bird from another

Each of the sixty warbler species is described in detail, from its field marks to its mating habits and every plumage is beautifully illustrated in color — in both paintings and photographs. Precise range maps show where each species can be seen at different times of the year.

The *Field Guide* is illustrated by Thomas R. Shultz and Cindy House. Shultz has specialized in painting avian subjects for over 20 years and has contributed illustrations to the National Geographic Society's *Field Guide to the Birds of North America*. House, an artist with a degree in wildlife biology, has illustrated several bird books and is a member of the Society of Animal Artists.

Jon Dunn is an editorial consultant for *Birding* magazine and chief consultant for the National Geographic Society's *Field Guide to the Birds of North America*. Kimball Garrett is an ornithologist at the Los Angeles County Museum and the book review editor of *Birding*.

For more information contact Peter Strupp at Houghton Mifflin Trade & Reference Division, (617) 351-3240 or Peter_Strupp@hmco.com.



About Solicitations ...

If you are bothered by solicitations from National Audubon Society, you can have your name removed from their appeals list. Just drop a line to the membership department stating your wishes. If you include one of the mailing labels from the magazine, it will speed up the process. Write to: Membership, National Audubon Society, 700 Broadway, New York, NY 10003-9562.

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

Santa Barbara Audubon Society extends a warm welcome to all new members. We look forward to seeing you at upcoming Audubon meetings and field trips. We're glad you're part of the growing number of local supporters for Audubon's efforts to excite people about birds and the preservation of their habitat. Thank you for joining:

Ms. Patricia K. Ahlman	Claudia Knudson
Noel Alander	M. Larsgaard
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Brooke Anderson	Kristin Maravilla
Ms. Andromache Angelides	Ms. Bess G. Marsh
Mrs. Susan Ayres	Margie Mason
Bobby Bennett	Berkeley Meigs
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Mr. William J. Green	John Thorngren
Ms. Barbara Hinman	Jenette Tryon
Mr. Dieter Hornemann	Anil W. Ubale
Polly Hjortland	Mr. Janes Ummel
Kurt Hoeffliger	Miss Michelle Vono
Susan P. Horne	Wynn Wasinger
Thomas Jacobs	Annie Webb
Ernest H. Jones	Mr. & Mrs. Jack Wilson
Nathan Kandus	Ms. Irene B. Winsauer
G.B. King	J. Winslow-Howard
Nathan Kandus	Mr. John D. Wilson
	Mrs. William K. Ziegler

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Saturday, November 8	Central Coast Council Meeting hosted by Conejo Valley Audubon Society - 439 San Pablo, Camarillo
Thursday, November 13	Santa Barbara Audubon Society Board Meeting — all invited
Saturday, November 15	Devereux Slough field trip
Wednesday, November 19	November Program: <i>Tigers of the Snow</i> at the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History 8:00 p.m.
Sunday, November 23	Pacific Missile Test Center - Point Mugu field trip
Thursday, November 27	Seventh Annual Thanksgiving Bird Count
Thursday-Sunday, December 4-7	Central Valley Birding Symposium in Stockton
Friday-Saturday, December 5-6	Carrizo Plain field trip
Friday-Saturday, December 12-13	Palo Alto Baylands field trip
Sunday, December 21	La Purisima Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count
Saturday, January 10, 1998	Santa Barbara Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count
Tues.-Fri., January 16-19, 1998	Morro Bay Bird Festival
Saturday, January 31, 1998	Ventura County Game Preserve f.t.

SANTA BARBARA AUDUBON SOCIETY

Officers and Committee Chairs
September 1997 - August 1998

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Vice President: Lee Moldaver.... 682-2120
Secretary: Everett King..... 569-2307
Treasurer: Chris Walden 969-4256

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Education: Elan Sutton..... 683-1143
Field Trips: Paul Keller..... 968-7804
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RARE BIRDS: Karen Bridgers..... 964-1316

AT LARGE

Darlene Chirman 692-2008
Don & Florence Stivers 967-3690

Officers and Committee Chairs meet the second Thursday of each month. Members are welcome to attend. Please call the office to verify dates and times at (805) 964-1468. FAX (805) 967-7718.

PEN & INK DRAWING ON COVER BY DARYL HARRISON

EL TECOLOTE

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