THE HOOT OWL

STOCKTON AUDUBON SOCIETY

Vol 26 #1 Jan-Feb 1988

Calendar

FIELD TRIP: Sat. Feb. 6 White Slough. There is probably no nearby spot in the Delta to hear and observe rails than at White Slough. Many other marsh and water birds are to be expected and count on leader George Welch to find a rarity or two. Join George at U.O.P.'s Burn's Tower at 7:30am. More info?...call 477-9618.

STOCKTON AUDUBON MEETING. Tue. February 9th. Mt. Diablo to Cochise Head Arizona, a slide program by Art Prickett. Bring a friend to this first meeting of 1988. Meet at the United Methodist Church, 3700 Pacific Avenue at 7:30pm.

FIELD TRIP: Sun. Feb 21. Mapes Ranch. Last years visit to this rich area along the San Joaquin River in Stanislaus County was most eventfull as we were able to observe over a thousand of the endangered Aleutian Canada Geese. Many species of raptors, shorebirds and other waterfowl were also present. In addition to it being rich in wildlife, the area has received much attention in the past year as it is in the stages of being set aside as a National Wildlife Refuge. The area's biggest proponent, Eric Caine, will be our leader. In order to see the geese, white pelicans and other specialties, Eric says an early arrival is essential. Meet him in Modesto in front of the Vintage Fair Cinema at the mall just off Hwy 99 at 6:30am. Information: 527-8866.

FIELD TRIP: Sun. Mar 6. Foothill Reservoirs and Ponds. The foothill areas to our east provide scenic beauty, wildflowers and a variety of bird species including Bald Eagles, Hooded mergansers, many other ducks, and Mountain Bluebirds. There will be short walks and bring a lunch but we will be back to Stockton by 3pm. Meet leader Steve Stocking at Burn's Tower, UOP at 8am. Information: 465-2729.

FIELD TRIP: Sat. Mar 12. Brovelli Woods. This gorgeous stand of oaks along the Mokelumne River is similar to Caswell in its richness and diversity of wildlife. We all hope that it will be a nature preserve rather than a subdivision. It has become a favorite of George Welch, meet him at 7:30 at the Breuner's parking lot to carpool. 477-9618.

WESTERN REGIONAL AUDUBON CONFERENCE: March 26-29, 1988. Asilomar Calif. "Defining the Common Ground". An exploration of issues and solutions for the coming decade. Workshops on conservation issues, nature photography, and bird I.D. Fieldtrips. Registration is $30. For further information call (916) 481-5332.

WILDLIFE SERIES: 8pm. Sacramento State Univ. 8pm. Union Building (free)
Feb. 28: "Sea Otters, Friend or Foe"
April 29: "Predation & Adaptation on the Savanna"
Presented by the Sacramento Zoological Society

COSUMNES RIVER PRESERVE

As many of you are aware, the Nature Conservancy has established a preserve along the Cosumnes River in Sacramento County. Stockton Audubon Society has been asked to assist TNC by conducting regular bird counts to collect data on the various populations which are found there. On Jan. 9, John and Kathy Schick walked the preserve with TNC volunteer Bruce Handley. Over the space of 4 hours, we traversed the outer boundry of the preserve, going through grasslands, fresh water marshes, and along the rich riparian forests which make up the ecosystem there. We counted 33 different species. By far the largest group was the nearly 800 tundra swans which were observed either passing overhead or on the marsh areas of the preserve. e plan to do this walk on a monthly basis. All those who are interested are invited to contact John or Kathy at 464-7083.

The walk in February will be a chance for all volunteers to become familiar with the area. Thereafter, a schedule will be established for each month. We would like to have 3-4 persons per month to handle this task. This is a real opportunity for us to get a foothold in working in this beautiful area and watching as it develops. The plan at Cosumnes River Preserve is to reforest the area with the valley oaks which were once so prominent a part of the landscape. In the next year a few thousand trees will be planted and tended by staff and volunteers. As we keep tabs on the birds of the area we can also watch the vegetation change and grow.

The preserve in located about 30 minutes from Stockton and is about 2 miles east of the Twin Cities turn off from I-5. The area consists of almost 1500 acres and will hopefully grow in the future.

ENDANGERED SPECIES AND PESTICIDES

One of the hottest topics in agriculture right now is the Endangered Species Act of 1973. The U.S.Fish and Wildife Service has stated that some current pesticide use practices are jeopardizing protected species of plants and animals. As a result, the Environmental Protection Agency has started a process to improve pesticide labels by requiring warnings for specific states and counties where endangered species occur. If a protected species occurs in an area, use of pesticides that could impact that species will be restricted or prohibited. The U.C. Extension is charged with providing a "Pesticide Use Bulletin for Protection of Endangered Species", specific maps for the area and alternative pest control recommendations.

As an example, the Large-flowered Fiddleneck is located in an area south and west of highway 580 in San Jaoquin County. For this area, 18 herbicides are listed as having potential impacts on the fiddleneck plants. This means that their use will be restricted or prohibited in that area.

Problems with this program are many. First, the maps have been generated without adequate detail. Location of individual farms as well as exact species ranges is difficult. Also, alternative pest control methods have not been developed in many situations.

Preserving our endangered species is important and this proposal should be followed by the Audubon Society of San Joaquin County. As new proposals or changes are made, we need to be ready to provide input. Anyone interested in working with this can contact me and I will provide information as it becomes available. Gary Hickman, 944-3711 day....462-4416 night.

THE WILDLIFE COASTAL AND PARKLAND INITIATIVE

This initiative, thanks to you and many others, has qualified for the June ballot with more than enough signatures. Hope Valley, Brovelli Woods, and many other prime areas finally have a chance to be preserved.

All of the conservation organizations including Audubon and the California Wildlife Federation plus the City of Los Angeles, the League of Women Voters, the S.F. Chronicle, 6 local Chambers of Commerce and 2 local Building Industr Associations have given their support. But the State Chamber of Commerce and the State Farm Bureau have opposed this as they have most park, river and coastal preservation efforts of recent years.

BIRDS

Except as noted, sightings are by David Yee
LSP= Lodi Sewage Ponds, OGP= Oak Grove Park,
LL = Lodi Lake. SSP=Stockton Sewage Ponds

Nov 3, 2 Franklin's Gulls, SSP by Joshua Horner, Nov 4, a Yellow-sh Flicker, a Bendire's Thrasher at Acampo and 3 Lesser Golden Plover at LSP. 11-5 a Sabine's Gull at SSP, 11-6 a Ruff at Woodbridge Road, 11-7 3 Golden-cr Kinglets at Louis Park, 11-9 a Thayer's Gull at SSP, 11-11 a Swamp Sparrow at Woodbridge Road and 11-14 a Rough-winged Swallow at the same locale. The next day George Welch observed a Pectoral Sandpiper at the same hot spot. 11-18 a single Solitary Vireo at LL. 11-20 2 Red-th Loons at SSP. 11-21 11 Cassin's Finch and a Roadrunner in the sw corner of S.J.County, and 20 White Pelicans near Tracy. 11-24 a Merlin at Woodbridge Road. 11-25 Harold Berg observed a Mute Swan, Cinnamon Teal, and Wood Duck at Palo Alto Baylands and a L.B.Curlew at Foster City. 11-28 there was an Osprey and 5 Lewis' Woodpecker at Camanche. 11-29 George Welch observed a Rusty Blackbird at White Slough. 12-3 2 Barn Swallow at LSP, 12-4 a Raven at SSP, 12-11 a Little Gull at SSP. Nancy Greenwood observed a Cooper's Hawk in her garden on Dec 5. 12-12 a Horned Grebe at Quail Lake, and on 12-20 there were 5 Chipping Sparrow at Acampo, 12-21 found an Emperor Goose at Alameda Ca.12-24 a Virginia's Warbler and a Western Tanager in Modesto, 12-24 the Stockings observed Black-bl Magpies near Jackpot Nev, 4 Rough-lg Hawks near Burley Id, Bald Eagle & C. Geese on the frozen Snake River Id and Trumpter Swans on Henry's Fork Id., on 12-26 they observed Brown Creeper, Mt Chicadee & Ravens & Pine Grosbeaks at West Yellowstone Mt. 12-25 there were 2 Swainson's Hawks on Bouldin Island, on 12-27 Mike Lippsmeier observed a Trumpter Swan on Bouldin Island. 12-31 the Long-eared Owl was back at Collegeville. 12-29 the Stockings observed Trumpter Swans, Bufflehead, Canada Geese & Bald Eagle on Henry's Fork in Idaho, on 12-30 a Marsh Hawk in the Pumpernickle Valley of Nev., and a Golden Eagle, a Kestrel hunting Junco and many Horned Larks all about 50 miles south of Winemucca Nevada. From D. Filson we received the January 10 Salt Springs Valley Report. Ann, Dick and Ben saw no Golden Eagles, but did see 15 Bald Eagles including four adults. Later that same day Doug Martin saw 13 juvenile Bald Eagles. All sightings were made from Hunt Rd. along the southwestern side of the reservoir. Dick has been observing this area every January for the past seven years and his previous high number was 12. In addition the valley supports a great diversity of other raptors and water fowl during the winter. On Sunday they saw a Merlin, Prairie Falcon, Ferruginous, Rough-legged and Red-tailed Hawks as well as many other interesting birds. Jan 14 Nancy Greenwood had a Ringed Turtle Dove and a Kestrel in her Stockton Garden. On the same day David reports a Harris Sparrow from Morada. Jan 16-17 the Stockings & Nancy Greenwood report a mature Bald Eagle from Hogan Dam and the following from Clements-Valley Springs area ponds: A. Wigeon, T. Swan, Bufflehead, Canvasback, Hooded and Common Merganser, Ring Necked Duck, Common Goldeneye etc etc. on Jan 21 the Lawsons and Stocking saw much the same at the same locations. Jan 19 L. Stocking observed a Belted Kingfisher on the Calaveras River in Stockton. Jan 24 Nancy Greenwood observed 3 Common Merganser and 10 Stilts at the Thornton Sewage Ponds and a Rough-legged and many Red-tailed Hawks on Peltier Rd. That same day the Stockings & the Heights observed Red-br Nuthatch, but little else at the Iron Mt Ski area on Hiway 88. And by Jan 21 the grand total of Bald Eagles at Salt Springs had increased to 24 as reported by Mr. Chambers of Valley Springs.

STOCKTON CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

On December 19th Stockton Audubon conducted its 18th Christmas Bird Count. Forty four participants strategically placed themselves throughout the count circle and tallied up the highest total of species ever recorded. On-

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what turned out to be a gorgeous, calm, sunny day, 138 species were observe beating last years' high of 132 by an amazing 6 ! Only a few counts throughout the country that are located away from the immediate coast go over the 140 mark To be so close to that legendary number is very encouraging and truly illustrates the quality habitat and birdlife which we still have in parts of this area. Perhaps more impressively, it shows the quality of our birding abilities and thorough coverage. All those who participated are to be applauded. The highlights included 3 new species to the count list; lesser yellowlegs and swamp sparrow along Woodbridge Road and a chipping sparrow along Acampo Road. Additional eye-pleasers included a pair of hooded mergansers, the Harlan's race of red-tailed Hawk, a willet, 3 red-breasted nuthatches, 2 solitary vireos, a white-throated sparrow, the perrenial lesser golden plover and Bendire's Thrasher, and an Amazing 8,000 Ross' Geese. Though it could not be added to the species total, a red-naped x red-breasted sapsucker hybrid was also quite a find. A total of 164,700 bird individuals were counted with only 9,000 of that total being starlings, making for one of our best totals in that category as well. The day was topped off by a warm fire and hot food provided by Sue Yee as we discussed the day's finds and tallied our totals. Again my thanks to all who helped make this one of our best ever and to the cook. See you next year. David Yee, count compiler.

WALLACE-BELLOTA BIRD COUNT

Thirty-seven intrepid birders set out on Saturday, Jan. 2 and observed 120 species of birds totaling 43,577 individual birds. Although the total species did not match our previous record of 126 a few years ago, it was still a very successful count. Coverage was better than in past years thanks tp both increased numbers of observers and the gracous cooperation of land owners. Although our numbers look good, one should realize that several species were very low or absent this year. This is no doubt due in part to the low rainfall during the past year. This should remind us all of how precious water is and why it is so politically controversial. There are some who would reserve no water at all for wildlife.

Noteable sightings included 24 Wood Ducks on the Calaveras; 4 Winter Wrens along the Mokelumne Aqueduct; 136 Mountain Bluebirds; 30 Varied Thrush; 5 California Thrashers; 1542 Common Mergansers; 3 Bald Eagles; 2 Golden Eagles; 4 Merlins; 5 Prairie Falcons; and a Tricolored Blackbird. First time sightings for the count included a Dipper near Camanche, 6 wild Turkeys along the Mokelumne ; and a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (juvenile) spotted along Shelton Road (a first county record).

Thanks to all who helped with this count. A special thanks to Alberta Lewallen who permitted us to go onto Duck Creek Ranch at the very center of our count area and to Marcus & Bonner Mendez for permitting us access to three miles of Calaveras river front on their River Ranch. I would also like to thank Kathy Schick for her significant efforts in making contact with land owners in the count area. Thanks also to Mike and Joann Lamm for their great hospitality to our gathering after the count.

Dick Filson, count compiler.

DAVID GAINS DIES IN AUTO ACCIDENT

"Mono Lake has lost its most eloquent and passionate champion." Those of you who came out when David Gains came to Stockton to push for the Mono Lake cause must realize that this is true.

One reason that David was such an effective advocate was that he was also an excellent biologist and a perceptive observer of nature. If you have his "Birds of the Yosemite Sierra" you know that already. It was not intended as a memorial publication, but you may want to order his new "Birds of Yosemite and the East Slope" for $14.50 from Artemisia Press, P.O. Box 119, Lee Vining, Ca. 93541.

THE SAN JOAQUIN-SACRAMENTO DELTA (part two)

The controversy over the Peripheral Canal stirred interest in the Sacramento San Joaquin Delta in the 1970's. This conflict, although in abeyance, continues today as one of the water issues of the Delta.

The fresh water of the Delta is both an essential resource for the rich farmlands of the Delta Islands and a necessity for the remaining wildlife of the fresh-water marshlands. The peat soil, which made the islands so rich, came from the decaying tules, reeds, cat-tails, and ferns and developed before the lands were reclaimed. The peat was many feet deep at first, but has either blown away or oxidized. This peat was formed under a great freshwater marsh, which developed where the Sacramento, San Joaquin, and other smaller rivers come together before they enter the San Pablo, San Francisco, Suisun Bay complex. The marsh was once much more extensive. There were originally some 300,000 acres of peat land, all close to or below sea level. In the late 1800's levees were built and islands drained leaving less than 40,000 acres of tidal marsh and flooded islands.

The lines of oaks, White Alder, Fremont Cottonwood, and smaller trees which lined the riverbanks are mostly gone now--as the sloughs were st raightened and the banks covered with rock rip-rap. Wild grapes, blackberries, wild rose, Buttonbush, and Brown Dogwood once formed extensive thickets. As man has changed his environment to support his numbers the wildlife habitat has mostly disappeared.

First, the larger animals were eliminated, the Tule Elk, the pronghorn, the deer and the Grizzly Bear. Many were heavily hunted in gold rush days, but the loss of prime habitat was their downfall. The smaller animals, Beaver, mink, River Otter, Gray Fox, Muskrat, Striped Skunk, squirrels, Raccoons, mice, shrews, and others had to retreat to the small berms which were not developed. We don't miss the historic hordes of mosquitoes.

These remnant marsh areas are threatened by proposals which would lead to private ownership of many of the vegetated berms along the sloughs. These now belong to the State, but a bill defeated in the legislature each of the last several years, would transfer title of these remaining natural places to neighboring landowners. That land could then be drained and added to farms or developed as marinas. Another threat to these areas may be the proposals to deepen the Mokelumne River and strengthen levees in the north Delta area.

Many birds and other smaller forms of wildlife depend on these rapidly disappearing areas for their livelihood. Where there were vast seas of tule, reed, fern, cat-tail and other plants, there are now cultivated fields. Some plants, such as the beautiful California Hibiscus, have become rare, and others greatly restricted in their distribution. There were vast colonies of Yellow-headed Blackbirds, mostly gone now, and flocks of White Pelican. Heron and egr ets in rookeries, rails, American Bittern, Marsh W ren, Black-crowned Night Heron roosting in trees and terns over the open water all can still be found in a few areas. The Delta is still a wintering area for hundreds of thousands of Pintail., Mallard, Spoonbill, teal and other ducks, swans, Canada, Snow and White-fronted Geese. The flocks feeding on some of the islands are a sight to behold and often nearly stop traffic. Sandhill Cranes, second in size to the Whooping Crane, are now protected here in the Delta. Some of their habitat has recently become vineyard, some is slated to become part of the Peripheral Canal, but the Fish and Game Department recently purchased an old duck club on Woodbridge Road to protect part of their wintering range. There has been much change, but salmon are no longer being gillnetted, riparian trees are not being cut to fuel the steamboats, and no longer do market hunters slaughter the elk, deer, ducks, and geese. Other areas, such as the meadows near Locke, need to be further protected as a boater oriented park, but funds are limited for such development. SUPPORT THE PARKS BOND ACT ON THE JUNE BALLOT.

The King Salmon and Sturgeon are native to the Delta, but most other game fish, such as the popular Striped Bass, are introduced. A 1985 survey of young Striped Bass showed them to be at their lowest level since surveys began in the 1950's. Their numbers rebounded somewhat in 1986, but are down again in 1987. The reasons for the decline may be several, including pesticides, low food supply, low egg production by females, overfishing, power plant destruction of eggs and young, and general environmental deterioration. Salmon numbers are way down from historic levels-particularly in the San Joaquin System. This is because of dams and reservoirs replacing most of their spawning beds. Eighty percent of the salmon runs have been lost.

The Delta is still a great resource for agriculture, recreation and wildlife. What is left of the natural habitat should be protected and restored, not allowed to deteriorate further. We should be able to watch the Red-winged Blackbirds nesting along Trapper Slough, the Black-crowned Night Herons on Disappointment Slough and the antics of the Sandhill Cranes off Woodbridge Road. S.K. Stocking 1987 Great Valley Museum Field Notes