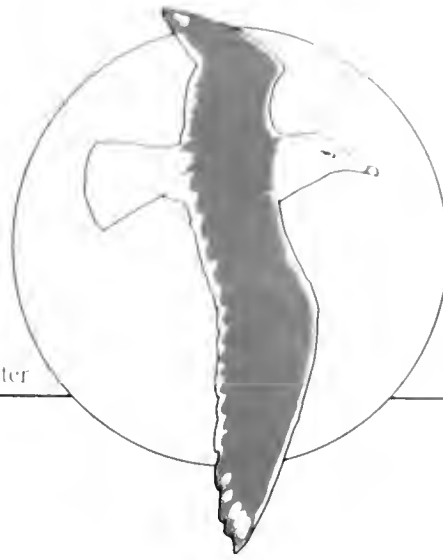


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The Gull

Golden Gate Audubon Society Newsletter



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Volume 17, No. 4, April 2000

Opportunistic Birding Down Under

Collin G. Murphy, PhD

I was privileged to spend 5 weeks during June and July 1999 in 4 different parts of Australia. I was a volunteer at a tropical research station for 2 weeks and a tourist for the remaining time. The trip was not

specifically geared to birding, except for one day on an official bird trip, so that I was often lagging behind others in my tour groups while doing as much ad hoc searching as possible. However, I managed to see (or at least hear, in 5 cases) 159 of the about 770 Australian species, 97% of which were new to me. It was truly an inspiring experience because every time I turned around, another "new" bird or 2 seemed to appear in my binoculars. I was greatly aided by *The Princeton Field Guide to the Birds of Australia*, by Simpson and Day (5th edition, 1996, Princeton University Press). I studied it before the trip and returned with a dirty, marked-upon, falling-apart book. This guide is easy to carry in a large pocket (even while scaling cliffs!) and has maps opposite the pictures, plus a useful life history handbook that indicates breeding periods for all the species. A rival guide, Pizzey and Knight, *The Field Guide to the Birds of Australia* (1997), has even more detail and excellent illustrations but, from my point of view, is more suitable for home reference use because of its larger size. Because it was mid-winter there, many birds, especially shorebirds, were not in breeding plumage, which hindered identification of some species, but it was a good time to travel through the outback because roads were not blocked by water as is often true during the "wet."

Urban Sydney provides many opportunities for casual birding. Sydney's parks offered many of my first looks at some 16 species, including the Sacred Ibis (Australian White Ibis), which often feeds on discarded food

Birders Needed to Answer Questions Coming into the GGAS Office

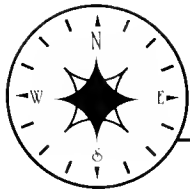
Just today we added a new member who was so pleased that GGAS President and ace birder Alan Hopkins took some time out to talk to her about a duck she saw at Stowe Lake. Alan also suggested some of our birdwalks in the future.

Excited and eager people often call the office wanting to know more about birds and to ID birds they have just seen. Out-of-town birding visitors call the office wanting to know if a local birder might be interested in taking them out birding.

Helping out these folks is an important service we provide to our members and to the public. But to do a good job at this, we need your help.

The GGAS office is drawing up a list of volunteer birders who will be willing and able to take visitors out birding or who will help us answer questions about birding, bird identification, and behavior. If this sounds like something you would like to do, please call Kathryn at (510) 845-2222. We can discuss how you would like to participate in this service to GGAS.

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Field Trips Calendar

Saturday May 6, BRIONES REGIONAL PARK, Contra Costa County.

See April Gull for details. Leader: Lillian Fujii (510) 236-4167, steveandlil@worldnet.att.net. \$

Sunday May 7, STRYBING ARBORETUM, SF.

See April Gull for details. Leaders: Allan Ridley and Helen McKenna (415) 566-3241.

Wednesday May 10, MINI-TRIP TO BRIONES REGIONAL PARK.

See April Gull for details. Leaders: Anna Wilcox (510) 351-9301, and Jean-Marie Spoelman. \$

Saturday May 13, WILDCAT CANYON REGIONAL PARK, Contra Costa County.

See April Gull for details. Leader: Malcolm Sproul (925) 376-8945. (*)

Sunday May 14, MOUNT DIABLO STATE PARK, Contra Costa County.

See April Gull for details. Leader: David George (510) 339-6848. \$(*)

Saturday May 20, AQUATIC PARK, San Francisco.

See April Gull for details. Leader: Carol Kiser (415) 556-3002, days.

Saturday May 20, GARIN REGIONAL PARK, Hayward.

Meet at 9 a.m. for this half-day walk along riparian habitat rich with singing breeding and late migrating warblers, vireos and other birds. From Berkeley, take I-880 south to the Industrial Parkway exit. Take Industrial left (east) to Mission, right on Mission, and left on Garin. Take Garin into the park. Meet at the parking lot on the left. Heavy rain cancels. Beginners welcome. Leader: Anthony Fisher (510) 658-8769. Loveisant@aol.com

Sunday May 21, LEONA HEIGHTS REGIONAL OPEN SPACE, Oakland.

Meet at 8 a.m. at the parking lot for this half-day walk featuring riparian and scrub habitat, singing Wrentit, California Thrashers, and more. From Berkeley, take Hwy 580 south to the Keller offramp (about 1.5 miles past the junction with Hwy 13). Go east (uphill) on Keller about 8/10 miles to Campus Drive. Turn left onto Campus; then almost right away, turn right onto Canyon Oaks Drive (this right turn seems like turning into a private parking lot for the Ridgemont condominium complex). Go left to the end to the parking lot. Beginners welcome. No facilities. Leader: Rusty Scalf (510) 666-9936. E-mail: rscalf@jps.net.

Saturday May 27, TENNESSEE COVE, GOLDEN GATE NATIONAL RECREATION AREA, Marin County.

Meet at 8:30 a.m. at the trailhead. From San Francisco take Hwy 101 north and exit on Hwy 1 toward Mill Valley and Stinson Beach. After about 1/4 mile, turn left onto Tennessee Valley Road and continue to the end of the road. This approximately 3-mile round-trip walk will take us through lush riparian habitat. We hope to see nesting hawks and other breeding birds, including Common Yellowthroat, Wilson's and possibly MacGillivray's Warbler. Lunch optional for this half-day trip. Beginners welcome. Leader: Bob Hogan (415) 258-0811. (*)

Sunday May 28, SIBLEY VOLCANIC REGIONAL PRESERVE, Oakland.

Meet at 8 a.m. at the preserve parking lot. Sibley is a gem in the Oakland hills where birds not commonly found close to a major metropolitan area can be seen. At this time of the year, the park should be alive with

singing California Thrashers, Rufous-Crowned and Lark Sparrows, Western Bluebirds, and more. Directions: From Hwy 24, take the Fish Ranch Road exit east of the Caldecott Tunnel. Continue 0.8 miles to Grizzly Peak Blvd. Turn left and go 2.4 miles on Grizzly Peak to Skyline Blvd. Turn left on Skyline and proceed to the park entrance, on the left. A map is recommended. Leader: Bob Lewis (510) 845-5001, e-mail: Rlewis0727@aol.com.

Friday-Sunday, June 2-4, YOSEMITE'S BIRD LIFE, Mariposa, Tuolumne counties.

See April Gull for details. Leader: Dave Quady (510) 704-9353. \$ (*)

Sunday June 4, STRYBING ARBORETUM, SF.

Meet at 8 a.m. at the front gate of the Arboretum (9th Ave and Lincoln Way) for this regular 1st Sunday of the month half-day trip. The Strybing Arboretum is a delightful section of Golden Gate Park, with several "micro-habitats" attracting a varied array of resident, migrant, and vagrant birds. Beginners and all others welcome. Leaders: Allan Ridley and Helen McKenna (415) 566-3241.

Thursday June 8, POINT REYES NATIONAL SEASHORE, Marin County.

Meet at 9 a.m. at the parking lot behind the Inverness Store in Inverness for this trip, which will probably last the better part of the day. We will be concentrating on spring vagrants! Bring lunch and liquids. Leader: Ken Burton (415) 669-1847.

Saturday June 10, HAYWARD REGIONAL SHORELINE, Contra Costa County.

Meet at 10 a.m. at the Hayward Shoreline Visitor Center at the end of Breakwater Avenue for this half-day

trip. Take I-880 to Hwy 92 (Hayward/San Mateo Bridge exit). Exit at Clawiter, and cross Clawiter onto Breakwater Court. Turn left onto Breakwater Ave. There will be breeding swallows, baby stilts and avocets, and more, perhaps even Black Skimmers. Bring lunch and liquids. Beginners welcome. Leader: Bob Lewis (510) 845-5001, e-mail: Rlewis0727@aol.com.

Wednesday June 14, MINI-TRIP TO REDWOODS REGIONAL PARK, Oakland.

Meet in the park at 9:30 a.m. Take the Warren Freeway (Hwy 13), exit onto Redwood Road, and proceed east about 3 miles to Redwood Gate, southern entrance to the park. Meet just inside the small parking lot on the left. We should see Black-headed Grosbeak, Swainson's Thrush, Bullock's Oriole, and Solitary, Hutton's, and Warbling Vireos. Bring lunch. Leaders: Anna Wilcox (510) 351-9301 and Jean-Marie Spoelman. \$ (*)

Saturday-Sunday, June 17-18, YUBA PASS, SIERRA VALLEY, Sierra and Plumas counties.

On Saturday meet at 8:30 a.m. at the Yuba Pass summit parking area (Hwy 49), 19 miles east of Sierra City. Take I-80 to Truckee, go north on Hwy 89 to Sierraville and take Hwy 49 west to Yuba Summit. (Or take Hwy 49 northeast from Auburn for a slower but more scenic route.) We will bird the mountain areas for summer residents, including Dippers, flycatchers, warblers, and Calliope Hummingbirds. On Sunday meet at 8 a.m. at the intersection of Hwys 49 and 89 (by the sawmill) about 1 mile north of Sattley. See April Gull for complete details and lodging possibilities. Leader: Peter Allen (415) 892-8063. (*)

Saturday-Sunday, June 24-25, EASTERN SIERRA & WHITE MOUNTAINS, Inyo County.

We plan on covering the Ancient Bristlecone Pine Forests; Toll House Springs; Pinyon Woodland, and High Sagebrush. We will be birding the mid- to high-elevation White Mountains of Inyo County. Hoped-for species include Chukar, Gray Flycatcher, Broad-tailed Hummingbird, Poor-will, Black-throated Gray Warbler, Red Crossbill, Mountain Bluebird, Green-tailed Towhee, and Clarke's Nutcracker. We can guarantee wonderful and unique plant communities and great vistas. Group camping can be arranged. Those attending should contact Rusty Scalf (510) 666-9936 or rscalf@jps.net to reserve a spot. Limit 15.

Friday-Sunday, June 30 - July 2, LASSEN VOLCANIC NATIONAL PARK, Shasta County.

Join the Murphy family on the annual GGAS family camping excursion to Lassen. In past years, we have seen Willow, Hammond's, and Dusky Flycatchers, Black Swift, Bald Eagle, Osprey, Townsend's Solitaire, Mountain Bluebird, Calliope Hummingbird, Black-backed Woodpecker, Williamson's Sapsucker, and most of the warblers and finches that breed in the mountains. The more serious birders will meet at the Manzanita Lake Campgrounds store at 6:30 a.m. on **Friday and again on Sunday**. We will bird around the lake for 2-3 hours, return to camp for breakfast, then rendezvous again at the store at 10:30 a.m. for another outing. The **Friday** outing will be a leisurely hike of about 3 miles on one of Lassen's beautiful trails. We may climb as much as 700 ft. Wear sturdy shoes and bring lunch and liquids. Suntan lotion, a hat, mosquito repellent, and warm clothing may also be

Donations

Peregrine Falcon (\$500 or more)

Amy L. Johnson

Least Tern (\$200 or more)

Daisy Uyeda

Clapper Rail (\$100 or more)

Mignonet Montez, Martha and Craig Sprigs

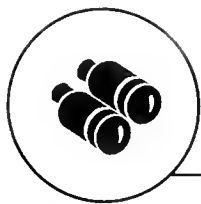
Gifts (to \$99)

Eugenia Caldwell, Ann Cieck and Dan Hill, John Thomas Condit, Jaye Cook, Lawrence Degrassi, Virginia Evans, Takako Heinz, Martha and Karl Knobler, Gloria Markowitz, Ms Laurence Stein, Ellis Story Jr, Marr K. and John V. Wehausen

The Society Welcomes gifts in general or gifts in honor of or in memory of relatives and friends. Such gifts will be used as specified by the donor or, if unspecified, at the discretion of the GGAS Board of Directors. This includes their use of general GGAS activities or for special programs of the Society. Please send your gift in the form of a check made out to Golden Gate Audubon Society, 2530 San Pablo Avenue, Suite G, Berkeley, CA 94702. All gifts are tax deductible. The Society is also appreciative of any bequests. Such bequests should specify as recipient the Golden Gate Audubon Society, Inc. All gifts, donations and bequests will be acknowledged in *The Gull*, as well as personally on behalf of the Society by the Secretary.

necessary because the weather in the mountains can be highly changeable. On **Saturday**, we will meet by the camp store at 7:30 a.m. and caravan north to Burney Falls, Fall River Valley, and Baum Lake. Bring lunch and liquids. This all-day excursion of about 100 miles will include a 2- or 3-hour swim at Lake Britton while watching for Bald Eagles. (If you forget your swimsuit, the trails at Burney Park offer a wonderful diversion, and fishermen can try their luck in some of northern California's finest trout streams.) Because this is a long and tiring day, we suggest a get-together for dinner at a nearby restaurant instead of returning to the campstove. For the **Sunday** outing,

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Birds Like to Sun, Too

After our long, wet winter, entire animal and plant kingdoms are basking in the spring sunshine. A mere glimpse of the sun is enough to send humans out in shorts, hoping to rid themselves of that indoor pallor to which we Californians are unaccustomed. Lately, I've seen sparrows and blackbirds flaked out as they soak up the sun, sometimes on lawns, other times on quiet streets or in treetops.

Along with bathing in dust or water, most birds—up to 170 species—adopt the habit of sunning or sun bathing. A bird will flop on its belly on a warm surface, wings drooping, tail feathers fanned out, and the feathers on its crown raised. As they hunker down in a sort of trance, people are able to approach very near the bird. Sometimes a bird will pant, its eyes covered by the nictitating membranes so that one assumes that the poor bird is suffering from heat prostration and is dying. Some birds catch the rays for only a few minutes, others linger up to 30 minutes in the warmth. The amount of heat probably regulates the period of time during the activity. Someone reported that robins were seen atop a compost heap but only stayed a minute or 2 because the pile's temperature was measured at 148 degrees!

Once, I observed dozens of Brewer's Blackbirds blissfully splayed about in the sunny but busy patio at the California Academy of Sciences in Golden Gate Park. Some birds lay on their sides with one wing up to warm their flanks and under their wings. They were in such deep trancelike states that I had to take care not to step on any of them. Lately, I've seen finches on a lawn in Hawaii hunkered down and looking drowsy. I know the feeling! Some sparrows on

my street have taken to lolling about on the warm driveway at all times of day.

Why do birds sun? There are a number of possible reasons, any of which could apply. Because birds' feathers are fluffed up so that the skin and underfeathers are exposed, heat absorption by the skin and body are enjoyable. Also, this heat causes the parasites that live on birds to move toward the wings or head, making them easier to remove by scratching or preening with the beak. The ultraviolet rays stimulate the vitamin D production in birds' skin, feathers, and oil glands, a nice side benefit. And if a bird is molting, its skin becomes irritated, so it just plain feels good.

Not even the most casual bird-watcher has missed the sight of cormorants perched with wings outstretched in the sun. Cormorants spend a good deal of time under water fishing, but they are less waterproof than ducks. They become sodden and need to dry their wings frequently. They create a macabre picture as they form large groups of unmoving bird "statues." Other birds use the sun to dry the oils and moisture and fluff the feathers, thus maintaining good insulation.

Recently, results from the study of solar radiation indicate that birds probably use heat absorption to give them energy. This heat from solar radiation becomes energy. It can save the bird the energy that it requires from its food. This, in turn, can help the bird from spending a lot of precious energy while looking for more food.

In wintertime, we have the pleasure of flocks of Cedar Waxwings. They are known for finding the last rays of the winter sun and can be

found basking high in leafless trees like a large matching set of Christmas ornaments. I wonder what their heat-seeking sites are where they spend their summers in the north?

All mammals, birds, and reptiles innately seek the warmth of the sun. Luckily, the bird population need not worry about wrinkles, skin damage, and skin cancer.

Alameda Citizen's 4 Open Space

Volunteers and activists can help urban sprawl in Alameda County by circulating petitions this month to qualify a comprehensive open-space initiative for the November ballot.

This Open Space initiative would preserve the remaining hillsides, canyons, and farmlands of Alameda County by establishing urban growth boundaries around Dublin, Pleasanton, and Livermore. In addition, it would protect fragile canyonlands in the Castro Valley and Hayward areas.

New federal rulings waive residency requirements for petition circulators, so that means activists from surrounding counties can help qualify this Alameda initiative.

Citizens 4 Open Space is coordinating the petition efforts and can be reached at (510) 546-8288. More information on the initiative can be obtained by visiting www.citizens4openspace.org.

Those Deadly Telecommunication Antennas Take a Toll on Birds

—by Christopher Beaver

Each year as the great autumn and spring migrations of more than 5 billion birds unfold across the North American continent, more and more of the migrants are being killed in collisions with wireless telecommunication antennas. These include antennas for cellular phones, radio, and television.

Most of the collisions take place at night, as does much of the migration. Larger birds that generate a great deal of heat in flight, such as ducks and geese, avoid the warm temperatures and direct sunlight of daytime, while smaller birds such as songbirds choose the cover of darkness for purposes of stealth, to hide from predators. To navigate, migrating birds track the stars and gauge the shifting magnetic fields of the earth.

The problem, according to Vernon Kleen, an avian ecologist for the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, is that under adverse weather conditions, night-flying birds seem drawn to the antennas' warning lights. Such lights are required by the Federal Communications Commission for all antennas over 200 ft tall.

Surveys of the toll are difficult to conduct because the number of affected birds varies widely from night to night during the migration, and scavengers quickly carry away the victims.

In January 1998, some 10,000 Lapland Longspurs were killed in a single night as they collided with a 420-ft tower in western Kansas and its guy wires. Many of them were found impaled on stubble left over from the wheat harvest in surrounding fields. The birds appeared to have flown full force into the ground.

According to Jim Cox of the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission (reported in the Tallahassee *Democrat*), the "average" tower may kill as many as 2,500 birds per year.

This past December, appealing to William Kennard, chair of the Federal Communications Commission, for help, Gerald Winegrad, vice-president of the American Bird Conservancy, estimated that "the annual killing of migratory birds from communication towers may be 4 million, to an order of magnitude above this." As astonishing as these figures may sound, they have been accepted by the American Ornithologists' Union, the Association of Field Ornithologists, the Cooper Ornithological Society, and the Wilson Ornithological Society.

"This is a real problem, and we take it very seriously," said Al Manville, a wildlife biologist for the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) in Arlington, Virginia. "Of the 836 bird species entrusted to our care, nearly 200 are already threatened."

Due to the "build out" of cellular antennas as competing phone companies struggle to provide blanket coverage, as many as 500,000 new cellular antennas will be constructed over the next decade. A separate technology, digital television, mandated by Congress for full implementation by 2003, will require more than 1,000 "megatowers," each of them at least 1,000 ft high, according to Manville.

Despite more than 100 studies in the scientific literature confirming the impact of antennas on birds, Sheldon Moss, director of government relations at the Personal Communications Industry Association, was quoted in the *Morning Star* of Wilmington, North Carolina as believing that "We're in the early stages, and clearly there needs to be more work done to determine if a problem exists and, if a problem does exist, how severe it is."

For Manville, the bottom line may be that industry will have to choose between the "carrot and the stick."

The carrot, in Manville's words: a voluntary partnership among all parties to prevent or limit "tower kills."

The stick: criminal prosecution under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1916, which states that it is illegal to kill a migratory bird "by any means or in any manner," except for "permitted purposes." The exceptions include hunting and the taking of birds for scientific research.

To date, the carrot approach has produced some results. A Communication Tower Working Group was formed in 1999, largely at the instigation of Manville and Bill Evans, an ornithologist who in turn had organized an August 1998 symposium on the issue at Cornell's Laboratory of Ornithology. With the USFWS as the sponsoring organization, the working group met in November 1999 as a first step toward establishing research guidelines for future collision studies.

Manville, who estimates that such studies would cost \$5 to \$8 million dollars and take 3 to 5 years to complete, also notes that neither his own agency, the USFWS, nor the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has the funding or the staff for such an effort.

While Manville agrees that further study is necessary to pinpoint the precise cause of the collisions, including the possibility of adverse effects from microwave radiation, he also believes that enough is known to begin taking precautionary steps.

Among these would be the gathering of antennas in centralized "co-locations," the removal of obsolete antennas; the distancing of antennas from critical habitat; and a 200-ft height limit on new antennas that would free them from FCC guidelines requiring warning lights and guy wires.

Until such measures are intro-

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Opportunistic Birding Down Under

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scraps; the Sulphur-crested Cockatoo (considered a nuisance by many residents); and Australian White Pelican. I spent some time at the very good Taronga Park Zoo aviaries studying birds I hoped to see in the wild (alas, my only sightings of Emu and Southern Cassowary were there). A note about Cassowaries: They are becoming extremely rare due to habitat loss and fatal encounters with motor vehicles (there are Cassowary Crossing signs in Northern Queensland). My advice to future travelers is to see these spectacular birds as soon as possible. I traveled from Sydney to NE Queensland, where I assisted at the Cape Tribulation Tropical Research Station. This facility pursues research related to biology and conservation of the wet tropics and was founded by its director, Dr Hugh Spencer, and supported entirely by private donations and an international staff of volunteers (website: www.austrop.org.au). A major focus of the facility is the study of flying foxes, or giant fruit bats, and the station operates an information center called the "Bat House" where visitors can meet and touch a flying fox, as well as learn about the biology of the area. Flying fox populations are decreasing in Australia due to habitat destruction (conversion of rainforest to housing developments,

canefields, and orchards) and extermination by farmers. The flying foxes kept at the station are rescued animals that could not survive in the wild. It was an enjoyable and interesting experience to handle these "tame" flying foxes and show them to tourists.

From Queensland, I flew to Darwin in the Northern Territory and toured Litchfield and Kakadu National Parks (the latter on a camping tour, strenuous but highly recommended). My last several days were spent in the Red Center south of Alice Springs on another excellent camping outing. Throughout Australia, tour guides were all extremely helpful regarding bird identification (with one exception, I was the only tourist with binoculars on these excursions), and the nonbirding tour members were happy to spot birds for me. I wish to thank naturalist Chris Dahlberg, who leads superb wildlife trips on the Daintree River in Queensland: Chris identifies an average of 50 species on each of his well-organized trips, and that morning our group saw 44 (highly recommended for all levels of birders; website: www.ozemail.com.au/~fnq/daintree/dvta01.html). Matt Wait of Northern Territory Adventure Tours in Kakadu National Park, and Robert

Howson of Red Center Sahara Safaris were also of immense help in my quest; most tours were arranged by Australian specialist Ellie Rubard of Andersen Travel in Orinda.

My "finds" were mostly of the conspicuous species, such as the Orange-footed Scrubfowl, a large mound-building megapode ("big foot") prevalent at campgrounds and picnic areas. Found in almost all parts of the continent, the Rainbow Bee-eater provides constant entertainment. As colorful as its name, this elegant bird sports 2 long paddle-shaped tail feathers, captures insects in flight, and returns to a tree branch to knock them out before eating them (I suppose they do this mainly to bees). Birding by ear was generally impossible because at first I did not know any of the calls. However, 2 spectacular night sounds were identified for me by others and were totally unforgettable: the Barking Owl, which sounds exactly like a dog, and the Red-necked Crake, otherwise known as the Mad-Woman Rail, which makes a sinister, mocking, high-pitched laughing sound. The howling of Dingoes was also a common night sound, and these coyote-like mammals visited our campgrounds ("Do not feed the dingoes").

Eleven members of the heron family were seen, with a special look at the rare and elusive Great-billed Heron on the Daintree River; there is only one published photograph of this bird, and only 8 nests have ever been found (3 of them by Chris Dahlberg). On a single branch overhanging the river were perched a Royal Spoonbill, a Little Pied Cormorant, and a Darter (sister species to our Anhinga). The Jabiru, or Black-necked Stork, a symbol of Kakadu National Park, was found a few times along riverbanks, as was the Brolga, a large Crane with a dewlap under the chin. Here we also saw the Comb-crested Jacana walking



Australian White Pelican surveys the Sydney Fish Market.

- Photographed by Dianne Fristrom

on the lily pads. The Esplanade along the beach in Cairns, south of Cape Tribulation in Queensland, was an excellent site for shorebird species and boasted a pair of Pied Oystercatchers.

The oddest-appearing raptor was the Pacific Baza, or Crested Hawk, a mainly insectivorous bird with a large crest and a horizontally striped breast that resembles a "jailbird" costume. The White-bellied Sea Eagle was seen on its nest and snatching fish from rivers and the ocean. Many Wedge-tailed Eagles were observed dining on road-killed kangaroos in the Red Center. Whistling and Black Kites, much more numerous than in the wet season, were common at campgrounds and in towns of the Northern Territory.

Pigeons and doves (Columbiformes) are generally decorated much more interestingly than their North American relatives. Australia boasts 26 species in this family! The "best"-looking bird of the 9 species identified was the Wompoo Fruit-Dove, with its bright purple breast, emerald green wings with golden wing bars, and bright yellow abdomen. The Spinifex Pigeon, named for the spinifex grasslands of Central Australia, was also a handsomely marked bird, with bare red skin around the eye and a tall, erect crest. The Northern Territory provided excellent looks at the Red-tailed Black Cockatoos, and Major Mitchell's (Pink) Cockatoo, which raises a spectacular white, red, and yellow-banded crest when alarmed. Rainbow Lorikeets of 2 subspecies were widespread and as colorful as their name implies. The Australian Ring-neck, a large green and blue parrot, was abundant in one of the campgrounds in the Red Center. The Daintree River guide pointed out 3 Papuan Frogmouths, large (about 50 cm) nocturnal insectivores, well camouflaged on a tree (I never would have discovered them).

The Laughing Kookaburra may be

the most famous Australian bird, but I was unprepared for its large size (45 cm.). (My first one was sitting on a gum tree!). It was wonderful to discover 6 other members of the kingfisher family during my travels (Australia has a total of 11), the smallest and most uncommon of which was the Little Kingfisher (12 cm.). Several Little Kingfishers were seen on the Daintree River tour. One of the several birds nesting during the Australian winter was the Yellow-bellied Sunbird, a nectar-eating species (Australia has no hummingbirds). A pair of these was building an elongated, fragile-looking nest outside the research station. They have wonderfully pointed, down-curved bills and bright yellow breasts, with a metallic blue upper part in the male. The Fairy-wrens are exquisite birds, of the family Maluridae, apparently unrelated to the North American wrens (Troglodytidae), although they have typical wrenlike, upturned tails. The male Lovely Fairy-wren is a study in blues, chestnut, black, and white, and the Red-backed Fairy-wren male is all black except for its flashy bright red back. The Dusky Grasswren is in an earth-toned subfamily of the Maluridae and is chestnut brown with many white streaks over its head, back, and breast.

The nectar-eating niche in Australia is largely filled by the 67 species of honeyeaters. These birds have a down-curved bill and a long, brush-tipped tongue used to collect nectar by capillary action. Honeyeaters of several varieties were common in most places, and 14 of them were identified. Identification of many of these provides a challenge because they move quickly through the flowers (often of gum trees), and their field marks, usually on the head, neck, or throat, are often immersed in the blossoms. Several Australian flycatchers are beautiful, especially those of the genus *Myiagra*. In 4 of the 5 *Myiagra* flycatchers, the females are the more brightly colored sex, with

reddish-orange or chestnut markings. The Pied Monarch is a smaller, black and white flycatcher endemic to the Daintree region of Queensland, one of 13 endemic birds residing there.

The Yellow Oriole was commonly observed in Queensland, as were the Olive-backed Oriole and the Figbird. These are the only 3 species of oriole in Australia, and they are considered to be unrelated to the North American orioles, belonging to the family Oriolidae, not to the Icteridae. I had hoped to see several of the famous Bowerbird species, but only on the last day of the trip did I get a good look at one, the Western Bowerbird, which is large (about 30 cm.) and vociferous, having brown and white plumage with a distinct pink spot on the nape. Because starlings have had a lot of bad PR in North America, I should put in a good word for the Metallic Starling. This iridescent blue-black fruit eater has startling bright red eyes and is an important agent of seed dispersal. They operate in well-coordinated flocks in the tropical forest, all going to one tree, then suddenly taking off simultaneously with snapping wings.

This is only a sampling of the great variety of birds I was able to experience over a wide area. Although perhaps more species would have been found on a focused bird tour, the thrill of hiking through the rugged and wonderful landscape and the opportunity to learn about Australian geology and botany was certainly satisfying. Australia has to be one of the prime birding areas in the world, with approximately 85 families, a larger number than any other avifaunal region in the world, and 15 families are endemic. Many prize species must await a return trip, including the Lyrebird and most of the parrots. South Australia was not on my itinerary but in the winter boasts visits by Antarctic species migrating to the warmer north. Surely an incentive for future visits!



January 30-February 29, 2000

The period bridging the spring equinox brought songs of White-crowned Sparrows, Song Sparrows, and Purple Finches, among many others, around the area of Tilden Park where I visit almost every day. Cedar Waxwings and American Robins continued their lush feast, and hummingbirds adorned the treetops. Encouraged by a warm week during the middle of the month, lupine, poppies, and paintbrush began to color the hills. A relatively slow month ended with reports of spring migrants on the upswing.

Albatross to Ducks

Four Black-footed Albatross were sighted on a Monterey Bay whale-watching trip Mar. 4 (MPRBA), and another 2 were seen from El Jorro, SCZ, Mar. 10 (DSu). Unusual inside the bay, a Pelagic Cormorant was reported off Emeryville, ALA, Mar. 4 (ES). California Condors were in the news again this month, with 6 more scheduled for release at Big Sur, MTY, on March 5. This event would add to the 9 birds already in the wild in Central California. One hopes that they will breed in the wild so that spotting them will become a common occurrence. A Greater White-fronted Goose was at the Las Gallinas Sewage Ponds, MRN, Mar. 12 (SD), and a coastal Snow Goose and up to 5 Ross's Geese were seen at Moro

Cojo Slough, MTY, Mar. 11-14 (MPRBA). Unusual for its location was a Brant near Arrowhead Marsh, ALA, Mar. 5 (CP), possibly the same bird as spotted at the Alameda Refuge, ALA, Feb. 27 (JL).

At least 14 Eurasian Wigeons were reported over Alameda, Contra Costa, Colusa, Humboldt, Marin, Monterey, and San Francisco counties. The female Tufted Duck first reported in December was still at Lake Merritt, ALA, Mar. 11 (ES). Four single male Tufted Ducks were reported: 1 continued from Feb. 2 until at least Mar. 12 at Las Gallinas sewage ponds, Mar. 12 (SD); 1 at Sutter Bypass, SUT, Mar. 11 (JS); 1 at Hayward Regional Shoreline, ALA, Mar. 22 (BRi); and another on Borax Lake, LAK, for at least 3 weeks before Mar. 30 (JWh). Another of that species continued from Feb. 13 until at least Mar. 23 around Bolinas Lagoon, MRN (RZ, BH, MT). A female Harlequin Duck flew past Pigeon Point, SM, Mar. 4 (RT); a male continued at the Coast Guard Pier, Monterey Harbor, Mar. 14 (MRPBA); and a 3rd was seen off Chimney Rock, PRNS, MRN, Mar. 25 (MD). Eight Oldsquaws (aka Long-tailed Duck) were found during the period. The wintering bird continued in Moss Landing Harbor, MTY, Mar. 3-22 (MPRBA, BR); another was seen at the Richmond Marina, CC, March 5-12 (LF, DF, SHy, Mob); 2 were off Crissy Field, SE, Mar. 10-12 (KM, MM);

1 was at Tyee City, HUM, Mar. 7 (ABB); 2 were at Arcata, HUM, Mar. 16 (ABB); and 2 were off the Fish Docks, PRNS, MRN, Mar. 22 (KW). Only a few Hooded Mergansers were seen: 2 at Orick, HUM, March 4 (ABB); 3 at Clam Beach, HUM, Mar. 8 (ABB); and a pair at Olema Marsh, PRNS, MRN, Mar. 25 (MD).

Hawks to Skimmers

A Northern Goshawk was discovered at Black Diamond Mines Regional Park, CC, Mar. 7 (SG). Five Rough-legged Hawks were reported: 1 near Pescadero, SM, Mar. 4 (RT); 1 near Sir Francis Drake Blvd, MRN, Mar. 6 (KB); 1 at West Pinnacles, MTY, Mar. 12 (MPRBA); 1 near the Fish Docks, MRN, Mar. 13 (FB); and 1 near Beatrice, HUM, Mar. 23 (ABB).

Pacific Golden-Plovers numbered 6 at the Spaletta Plateau, PRNS, MRN, Mar. 13 (FB). Up to 2 Rock Sandpipers were off Redondo Beach Rd, SM, Mar. 17-27 (RT, AJ, CL, AE), and another was seen in its normal location at MacKerricher SP, MEN, Mar. 24 (DT). The **Lesser Black-backed Gull** (*Larus fuscus*) remained at Lake Cunningham, SCL, Mar. 26 (KK). Up to 3 Glaucous Gulls were reported at Half Moon Bay, SM, Mar. 9-24 (RT, JW); 1 flew past Pigeon Pt, SM, Mar. 12 (RT); and single birds were seen at Bodega Bay, SON, Mar. 8-11 (LS, DN); near Schoellenberger Park, SON, Mar. 12 (AW); at Moss Landing, MTY, Mar.

Bar-B-Que For The Birds

The Marin Audubon Society will hold its 45th Annual Mother's Day Bar-B-Que at the Audubon Canyon Ranch's Volunteer Canyon on Sunday May 14, 2000.

Along with a great barbecue, par-

ticipants will be able to hike from Volunteer Canyon to ACR to view the magnificent nesting egrets and herons.

The cost is only \$15 per adult and \$10 for children under 10. All pro-

ceeds help fund ACR educational programs and the Marin Audubon Society.

For more information, call (415) 454-5469.



22 (MPRBA); and at Gazos Creek Mouth, SM, Mar. 26 (AE). Ten Black Skimmers were on their usual island on Charleston Slough, SCL, Mar. 22 (PM).

Owls to Wood Warblers

A Barred Owl, not often observed, although a resident of the northernmost counties, was seen near Hiouchi, DN, Feb. 25 (ABB). A Costa's Hummingbird was spotted at the University of California, Santa Cruz Arboretum, Mar. 21 (BW). A Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, a rare winter visitor that breeds in the eastern United States and in Canada, was found at Black Diamond Mines Regional Park, CC, Mar. 7-19, reportedly a 4th county record (SG, JL, MOB). Interestingly, the same location hosted a Red-naped Sapsucker on Mar. 4 (JSu), and another was at Byrne Forest Reserve, SCZ, Mar. 1 (DSu).

A Least Flycatcher was at Arcata, HUM, Mar. 3 (ABB), and a Hammond's Flycatcher was found at the PRNS Headquarters, MRN, Mar. 6 (RS). Behind the Carmel River Inn, MTY, was an Eastern Phoebe, Mar. 22-26 (CL, MPRBA). The Lake Merced, SF, Tropical Kingbird extended its stay (which began in early January) through at least Mar. 25 (KM, MM, MOB). Unusual on the coast, a Cassin's Kingbird was seen at Moon Glow Dairy, MTY, Feb. 28-Mar. 8 (RFo, MRPBA). The **Thick-billed Kingbird** (*Tyrannus crassirostris*), seen through at least Mar. 27, has now been at Ocean Colony, Half Moon Bay, SM, for more than 3 months (RT, JW, FB). It was also seen off Redondo Beach Road, SM, Mar. 25 (AJ). Unusual for the coast, 4 Yellow-billed Magpies were reported along Sutro Heights Ave, SF, Mar. 14 (AC), and another was south of Half Moon Bay, SM, Mar. 25 (MMi, RT). The Sage Thrasher first seen Jan. 4 was found

again at Miller-Knox Regional Shoreline, CC, Mar. 5-7 (CL). Unusual wood warbler reports remained scanty (see chart).

Tanagers to Grackles

A pleasant surprise for birders in the East Bay was a Summer Tanager at the Tilden Regional Park Nature Area, CC, Mar. 26-30 (KP, BB, GG). There was an American Tree Sparrow at Patterson Pass Road, ALA, Mar. 4 (DSc), and a dead member of this species was found at Redwood Regional Park, ALA, Mar. 16 (RA). A Clay-colored Sparrow was seen at Purisima Creek, SM, Mar. 4 (RT). One Swamp Sparrow was found at Arcata, HUM, Feb. 28 (ABB), and another was near Lake Merced, SF, Mar. 10-18 (RF, CL, MM, MOB). A White-throated Sparrow was at Freshwater, HUM, Mar. 1 (ABB); 2 were at Sutter Bypass, SUT, Mar. 11 (JS); and single birds were seen at Tilden Regional Park, CC, Mar. 18 (LC); on the Dipsea Trail of Mt Tamalpais, MRN, Mar. 26 (KB); and in a yard in El Cerrito, CC, Mar. 27 (LT).

Four Harris's Sparrows were reported during the period: 1 at Garberville, HUM, Feb. 27 (ABB) (too late to be included in the previous column); 1 continued at Moss Landing, MTY, Mar. 1 (MB); another continued at Grizzly Island Refuge, SOL, Mar. 12 (MM); and 1 was at McKinleyville, HUM, Mar. 12 (ABB). Browning Road, COL, had 2-7 McCown's Longspurs Feb. 27-Mar. 15 (SG, GC, SH, MOB). Eight Chestnut-collared Longspurs were near the intersection of Roads 90B & 16, YOL, Mar. 4-30 (SH, RFw, EG). A cooperative Dickcissel, a bird of the midwestern United States, found in a private yard in Santa Cruz, SCZ, Mar. 12 through the end of the period, created a flurry of excitement among birders (HD, BD, DSu, MOB). Those

Wood Warbler Sightings

Tennessee Warbler

Mar. 6 Harding Park, JC
(cont'd L. Merced, SF
from Jan. 17)

Nashville Warbler

Mar. 11 Eureka, HUM ABB

Palm Warbler

Mar. 17-19 Lake Merced, SF RF, DvN,
ME

Mar. 18 San Pedro Creek, SM DS

Mar. 18 Arcata, HUM ABB

Black-and-white Warbler

Feb. 29 Noble Gulch, DSu
Capitola, SCZ

Mar. 5-11 Mountain Lake, SF AR, KM,
CL

Mar. 24 Soquel Creek, SCZ DSu

Northern Waterthrush

Mar. 2 Arcata, HUM ABB

Abbreviations for Observers: RA, Ruth Anderson; FB, Florence Bennett; MB, Marjorie Bourret; BB, Bob Brandriff; KB, Ken Burton; GC, George Chaniot; JC, Josiah Clark; AC, Alfredo Contreras; LC, Lew Cooper; SD, Sheila Dickie; MD, Matthew Dodder; BD, Bruce Donald; HD, Heidi Donald; ME, Mark Eaton; AE, Al Eisner; RF, Rick Ferrick; RFo, Rick Fournier; RFw, Rob Fowler; LF, Lillian Fujii; DF, Dorothy Furseth; SG, Steve Glover; GG, George Griffith; EG, Ed Greaves; SH, Steve Hampton; SHy, Steve Hayashi; BH, Bob Hogan; AJ, Al Jaramillo; KK, Keith Kwan; CL, Calvin Lou; JL, John Luther; MOB, Many Observers; MM, Matthew Mattiessen; KM, Kevin McKereghan; PM, Peter Metropulos; MMi, Mark Miller; DN, Dan Nelson; DvN, David Nelson; CP, Courtenay Peddle; KP, Karen Peterson; BR, Bob Reiling; BRi, Bob Richmond; AR, Andrew Rush; DSc, Don Schmoltdt; DS, Dan Singer; RS, Rich Stallcup; JS, John Sterling; LS, Lang Stevenson; ES, Emilie Strauss; DSu, David Suddjian; JSu, Joel Summerhill; RT, Ron Thorn; DT, Dorothy Tobkin; MT, Marilyn Trabert; LT, Larry Tunstall; JW, Jerry Weinberger; KW, Kaynor Weishaupt; AW, Alan White; JW, Jerry White; BW, Bea Whitney; RZ, Raymond Ziamo.

Abbreviations for Counties and Others:

ALA, Alameda; ABB, Arcata Bird Box; COL, Colusa; CC, Contra Costa; DN, Del Norte; HUM, Humboldt; LAK, Lake; MRN, Marin; MEN, Mendocino; MTY, Monterey; MPRBA, Monterey Peninsula Rare Bird Alert; PRNS, Point Reyes National Seashore; SF, San Francisco; SM, San Mateo; SCL, Santa Clara; SCZ, Santa Cruz; SOL, Solano; SON, Sonoma; SUT, Sutter; YOL, Yolo.

Great-tailed Grackles are certainly persistent: 5 of them continued at Roberts Lake, Seaside, MTY, where they successfully nested last year, Mar. 11-14 (MPRBA); and another was seen as far north as Arcata, HUM, Mar. 21 (ABB).

Field Trips Calendar *Continued from page 3*

we will meet at 10:30 a.m. to drive through the park, making frequent stops for birding. We should reach the south entrance around 1 p.m., depending on how long we play in the snow at the summit. For this final event, bring warm gloves, a plastic trash bag for a mini-toboggan, and a camera.

Stop at our campsite for further information. We will have a campfire every evening beginning at 8 p.m. Bring your own chair (and a cup of wine, if you choose). We will provide hot water for tea or coffee. **Check the campground bulletin boards or the office at Hat Creek Resort for our poster, campsite number, and any last-minute changes in the schedule. Directions:** From the Bay Area, drive north on I-5 to its junction with Hwy 44 in Redding. Go east on Hwy 44 to the northwest entrance of Lassen Park. **Camping facilities** are available at

Manzanita Lake. Lodging is available about 15 miles north of the park at Hat Creek Resort, Old Station (530) 335-7121. Other information can be obtained from the park headquarters, Mineral, CA 96063. Leaders: Dan and Joan Murphy (415) 564-0074. E-mail: murphsf@worldnet.att.net. \$ (*)

Plan Ahead: 1) July 29, 30, Yosemite Alpine Ecology, leader: George Peyton (510) 433-2600, days. 2) August 25-28, Lassen backpacking trip, leaders: David Rice (510) 527-7210 and Robin Pulich.

Trips marked with a (\$) go to parks or other sites that require an entrance fee.

Carpooling arrangements will be attempted by leader for trips marked with a (*).

Problems, etc: If you need information about a trip and have difficulty reaching a field trip leader, call Anthony Fisher (510) 658-8769. Loveisant@aol.com

Birding Class Reunion

In honor of 25 years of teaching bird-watching classes for the Fremont Adult School, Alice Hoch is having a reunion of the students of those classes.

It will be held Saturday, May 6th from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Central Park in Fremont. Our tables will be behind the (old) community center at 40204 Paseo Padre Parkway (at the end of Mission View Drive). In case of rain, the reunion will be at Noll School, 39600 Sundale Drive in Fremont.

Come and renew old friendships and make new ones. Trade stories. If you want, bring your lunch and beverage.

Please alert other alumni.

If you have questions, call Alice at (510) 657-0475 or the adult school at (510) 791-5841.

New Explainers' Program at Heron Colony in Golden Gate Park

Since 1993, Great Blue Herons have been nesting at Stow Lake in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park. The heron colony is highly visible and provides a remarkable opportunity for children and adults to observe these birds as they raise their young.

To inform the public about the colony, Golden Gate Audubon Society is sponsoring a new program: The Heron Explainers' Project at Stow Lake. The project—directed by Nancy DeStefanis—trains high school interns from the California Academy of Sciences to staff an information booth at Stow Lake. The explainers will be on site at the

colony to draw visitors' attention to the herons, answer questions, and operate spotting scopes for folks to better observe the daily activities of the parent birds and chicks.

The program runs Saturdays and Sundays, April 22 through June 25, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. The booth is located on the path near the 1893 stone bridge, a short walk from the boathouse at Stow Lake.

Come out to Stow Lake and observe these beautiful and charismatic birds; bring a picnic and dine with the heron chicks!

Nominations to the GGAS Board of Directors

The GGAS Board of Directors is pleased to present you its nominations to the GGAS Board of Directors for 2000/2001. Please fill out the ballot below and send it to the GGAS Office, 2550 San Pablo Avenue, Suite G, Berkeley, CA 94792.

Position	Nominee	Yes	No
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East Bay Director	Anthony Fisher	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
West Bay Director	Nancy Smith	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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New Curriculum Takes Flight

By Tim Augon

This spring adult and high school volunteer environmental educators (docents) introduced a new curriculum to third-grade public school classrooms in the city of Alameda. The new curriculum, *Flight Adaptations*, focuses on the evolution of different birds and how the birds have adapted for flight, including the adaptation to a lighter skeletal system for easier flight.

The volunteers led slide shows and interactive activities. The activities included the students dressing in bird wings and simulating flight patterns while the others guess what kind of bird is being imitated.

A bone activity was developed so the children could feel and see how the skeletal structure of birds differs

from that of other animals, and an origami activity was used to ensure safety for flying birds. The finished origami are hung on window surfaces so that birds will notice them and not accidentally fly into the window.

Thanks to the excellent preparation, hard work, enthusiasm, and dedication of the environmental education volunteers, the adaptations program has gotten off to a flying start.

For information on becoming an environmental educator, please contact the Golden Gate Audubon Society's Education Program at (510) 769-2074.

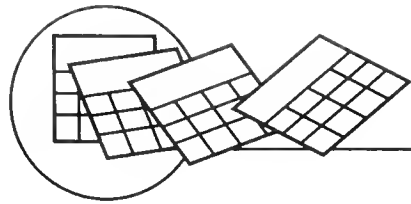
Tim Augon is a student at Sonoma State in Environmental Studies. He works as an intern about 20 hours a week with the GGAS environmental education program.

Those Deadly Telecommunication Antennas...

Continued from page 5

duced, the issue is not whether more birds will be killed. The issue is whether we are one step closer to achieving the nightmarish world of "Silent Spring": with the calls and songs of migrating birds silenced by the twittering of cell phones and the din from hundreds of new digital television stations.

Christopher Beaver is a documentary filmmaker. He has been investigating the environmental and public health effects of wireless telecommunications for the past 3 years. For more information on his work, go to www.idgfilms.com.



May Meeting

"What's in a Name?"

You can tell the Say's from a Black Phoebe, but do you know anything about Mr Say? Our local Black Oystercatcher is the species *bachmani*. Want to wow your friends when you tell them WHY it has that Latin name? Nuttall, Steller, Hutton, Bewick, Bullock—who WERE those guys? And how did Anna and Allen get their names on our humming-birds? Did you know a Berkeley man was instrumental in discovering the Thayer's Gull? Know about the woman who wrote the first American field guide for birders not carrying a shotgun? Join us this month to meet Harry Fuller, who will bring us great stories from the history of American birding along with his slide presentation.

Harry has been birding seriously for a decade and was the proud last-place finisher in the 1998 San Francisco Big Year contest, with 208 species inside the continental limits of San Francisco. He is also one of

Thursday, May 18, 2000

**7:00 p.m.
Refreshments/Doors open**

**7:30 p.m.
Program**

**Northbrae Community
Church
941 The Alameda,
Berkeley**

only 3 admitted survivors of the 1998 contest participating in the 2000 Big Year as well. Harry writes the "Early Birds" articles for the Gull, which allows him to indulge his interest in the history of US birding. He leads field trips for GGAS and is on the advisory committees of Audubon Canyon Ranch and the Trust for Public Land. Come enjoy this entertaining evening of bird lore.

▲ "This is the GGAS Annual Membership Meeting Please make every effort to attend" ▲

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

As a member of National Audubon Society, you are automatically enrolled in the local chapter, Golden Gate Audubon Society. Chapter benefits include receipt of *The Gull*, access to field trips and programs, and the opportunity to volunteer. Call the office if you have any questions.

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