

KITE TALES

MARCH

REDWOOD REGION ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY
Vol. 10 - No. 7 SANTA ROSA, CALIF.

1976

CALENDAR OF COMING EVENTS.

March 11, Thursday, 7:30 p.m.: RROG Meeting

Glen Clifton of Angwin, an excellent photographer, will present a slide and lecture program on birds of Southern and Eastern Mexico.

March 14, Sunday: Field Trip to Sears Pt. - Tolay Creek

Our destination will be some of the brackish marshes and grass-covered hills of southeastern Sonoma County. Several unusual species have been seen here this year: Whistling Swan, Black-necked Stilt, Long-eared Owl, and Tree Sparrow (a county record). Even if the above are so unkind as to depart, the area should prove to be rich. Come prepared for some hiking. We will meet at 8:30 a.m. at "El Bend Grande", the intersection of Arnold Drive and Hiway 121 five miles south of El Verano. Lynn Stafford (833-6491) will lead.

May 9, Sunday: Bodega Off-shore aboard the "Finback".

Thanks to Mike Parmeter, this fine tradition continues. Make reservations early! Please include the \$14.00 fee with your reservation, and send to Mike (see back for address and phone).

FIELD TRIP REPORT: THORNTON AND OTHER DELTA POINTS, FEB. 22, 1976.

Nine observers, guided by Gordon Bolander, had a fine day. The day was overcast and cold, but yielded 82 species. Thousands of Sandhill Cranes paraded before the RROG group, some involved in courtship rituals (no, no, the Cranes). There were more thousands of White-fronted Geese and many Canada (all Cackling). A sad note was the finding of hundreds of dead Whistling Swans, probably the victims of disease brought on by drought-caused over-crowding.

Field trip list follows on page 2.

Thornton List, Feb. 22, 1976

Pied-billed Grebe	Common Snipe	Bushtit
Great Blue Heron	Long-billed Curlew	Wrentit
Great Egret	Greater Yellowlegs	Bewick's Wren
Snowy Egret	Least Sandpiper	Long-billed Marsh Wren
Whistling Swan	Dunlin	Mockingbird
Canada Goose	Long-billed Dowitcher	Robin
White-fronted Goose	American Avocet	Ruby-crowned Kinglet
Mallard	Glaucous-winged Gull	Water Pipit
Gadwall	Herring Gull	Cedar Waxwing
Pintail	California Gull	Starling
Green-winged Teal	Ring-billed Gull	Orange-crowned Warbler
Cinnamon Teal	Rock Dove	Yellow-rumped Warbler (Aud.)
American Wigeon	Mourning Dove	House Sparrow
Northern Shoveler	Burrowing Owl	Western Meadowlark
Canvasback	Belted Kingfisher	Red-winged Blackbird
Ruddy Duck	Common Flicker (R.S.)	Brewer's Blackbird
Turkey Vulture	Downy Woodpecker	Brown-headed Cowbird
White-tailed Kite	Black Phoebe	House Finch
Cooper's Hawk	Horned Lark	American Goldfinch
Red-tailed Hawk	Violet-green Swallow	Rufous-sided Towhee
Marsh Hawk	Tise Swallow	Brown Towhee
American Kestrel	Rough-winged Swallow	Savannah Sparrow
Ring-necked Pheasant	Cliff Swallow	White-crowned Sparrow
Sandhill Crane	Scrub Jay	Golden-crowned Sparrow
Common Gallinule	Yellow-billed Magpie	Fox Sparrow
American Coot	Common Raven	Song Sparrow
Killdeer	Common Crow	
Black-bellied Plover	Plain Titmouse	

A FAREWELL MESSAGE FROM OUR VICE-PRESIDENT.

Dear Members of RROS,

I'd like to take the opportunity to bid you all a fond farewell as I'm leaving for southern Arizona to take up a Naturalist position with the Nature Conservancy at the Patagonia-Sonora Creek Sanctuary. It's unfortunate that the timing of the last two RROS meetings coincided with my interview trips to Tucson, as I wanted to say good-bye personally. I've made some good friends through this group and have learned a great deal from many of you. I know some of you have birded the Patagonia area and have found it most rewarding - don't let one trip suffice. I'd like any and all of you to plan on a visit on any trip into the Southwest. I'm already countin' on it. My best to you all--keep up the excellent work this group does for our feathered allies.

Hasta luego,

Bruce Andre

WINTER BIRD RAMBLES IN THE GREAT SOUTHWEST.by Bud Gralapp

There are several good reasons for taking a long bird trip in early winter:

- 1- It is always better to be birding than not to be birding.
- 2- This is the last chance to run up your list for the year - to a figure that you can live with.
- 3- Pretty soon it is New Years. You can make a start on the next year-list by adding a bunch of species not found at home.
- 4- Christmas Counts are just over. Some pretty good birds have been staked out where you can find them.

Two days after Christmas we headed for Texas. Near Finney Lake a flight of White-faced Ibises brought us another species for California. (A flight was southwest of Mecca on our return.)

Birders we called in Tucson reported heavy action at the city sewage plant. There, within a hundred feet of each other, we found a Streaked-backed (formerly known as Scarlet-headed) Oriole and a Rufous-backed Thrush. This oriole is considered a very rare straggler from Mexico. Even Carol Peabody seemed excited about it. Lane calls this thrush (the former Rufous-backed Robin) a rare winter straggler but since 1971 its visits have been more regular, with four birds reported in 1974-75. Tucson birders are beginning to call our American Robin the Gray-backed Thrush.

From Falcon Dam we telephoned Wayne Shifflett, Manager of Sta. Ana NWR, whose office is a clearing-house of birding information for the Rio Grande Valley. We learned that Brown Jays could still be seen along the river near Roma and that birding was not too bad at the Refuge itself. Twenty minutes of prowling along mesquite tunnels produced the usual Green Jays and Altamira Orioles along with a startled javelina. Then we heard rasping cries, and twelve of the sixteen-inch jays came flapping along the river-bank.

At Sta. Ana two masked Ducks (both of them female) were playing hide-and-seek with birders near the edge of Willow Lake. In behavior they appeared less shy than impulsive, remaining motionless in plain view for minutes at a time then abruptly moving into cover. Altamiras monopolized the feeder behind Shifflett's house, but when it was not in use a Black-headed Oriole would sometimes drop in from the live-oak canopy. This bird was rarely seen after nine o'clock in the morning. Through these oaks and along the shores of the lake moved a busy feeding-flock of Black-crested Titmice. Among them we caught fleeting views of Black-and-White, Orange-crowned, and Black-throated Gray Warblers. Wind kept the branches in constant motion. The other warbler that moved with this bunch had a bluish crown, a golden throat, and a mask like a cartoon burglar. This was a Tropical Parula (male) who preferred to feed in the tree tops.

In Brownsville the Mexican Crows had moved to the new city dump at the intersection of Farm Roads 511 and 802. The gatekeeper told us to look for the freshest garbage. Among larger White-necked Ravens and much whiter gulls, they appeared to be getting their share.

In the heat of May, 1973 we had driven Highway 77 through 60 miles of King Ranch looking, without success, for Caracaras. Now, in January's chill there were two in flight - one zooming above our truck with rapid wingbeats. Then, stopping by a big mixed flock of vultures that had cleared the meat from a calf, we saw a Caracara on the ground thirty feet away. Still another came into view when the flock took off. It is tempting to theorize that these birds become less active in summer's heat - that, in winter, their need for more fuel keeps them scavenging more visibly.

A norther was sweeping arctic air into Texas. Brown leaves appeared in the citrus groves at McAllen. The Corpus Christi paper said that, allowing for wind-chill factor, it was really eighteen below zero. Slush ice was churning up on the beaches near Rockport. In Cape Cod weather at Padre Island Seashore we spotted a Greater Black-backed Gull in first winter plumage. One exactly like it posed for page 141 of the guide by Robbins and Braun. It diminished the Herring Gull nearby and dwarfed the Laughing Gulls a few feet away. A birder from Corpus Christi told us they "got them once in a while." He recommended the jetty at Port Aransas for Purple Sandpipers, but we found that swells were breaking entirely over it. Texans are a hardy breed.

On Galveston Island we overtook another species missed in '73 when a Sedge Wren (formerly Short-billed Marsh Wren) responded to the wiles of our tape recorder.

The norther discourage our search for Henslow's and Bachman's Sparrows and sent us southward. Near the bridge across San Luis Pass, north of Freeport, a Northern Gannet (adult) was on the wing. Lane's Guide to the Texas Coast commends this stretch for Gannet's and Blue-faced Boobies.

The storm destroyed all chance of Jacanas at Manor Lake, but the weather was once more fair and calm at Aransas. From Captain Brown's excursion boat we counted twenty-four Whooping Cranes including rusty young - all set off handsomely by flocks of Roseate Spoonbills. Playful Bottle-nosed Dolphins escorted the boat toward its moorage.

At Sta. Ana again we resumed the search for Hook-billed Kites which we had sought in vain several days before. A flock of five had established a second U.S. record near the Refuge. The birders we joined in pre-dawn fog were mostly from Texas, but Paul Sykes had flown over from Del Ray Beach, Florida. He was hoping to augment an A.O.U. list which stood above 670. After a chilly vigil of nearly an hour the thinning fog disclosed three birds in the trees across a withered tomato field. Through the scopes we were looking at chunky raptors with strongly-barred tails and decurved upper mandibles. Both red and gray-barred underparts revealed that both sexes were present. Their irises showed milky pale. The birders were happy to see the whites of those eyes (see Peterson's Mexican Birds, plate 2.)

A Clay-colored Thrush had been seen in sporadic fashion at Sta. Ana, but never on a day when we were there. In any case it was time to be heading home. For consolation we discovered north into Panhandle country where Lesser Prairie Chickens might be found. The Birding insert was right. Near a town called Plains we greeted the dawn at the edge of a cackling flock of more than a hundred.

Back home we were thinking about the birds we had seen and the ones that we had missed. Our "Traveler's List and Check List for Birds of North America" registered fourteen lifers in three weeks and 6,000 miles. But a lot of other pretty-good birds have been seen in the South Texas winter. What about the Blue-faced Booby, Yellow Rail, Double-striped Thick-knee, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Sooty Tern, the Blue and Ruddy Ground Dove, Ferruginous Pygmy Owl, Yellow-headed Parrot, Least Flycatcher, Rufous-capped Warbler, Gray-crowned Yellowthroat, and even the White-collared Seedeater. Was any further excuse required for planning another trip?

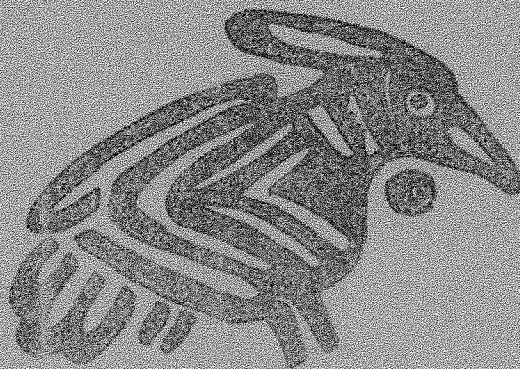
Then the press reported a newer observation. Along the Lower Rio Grande some unknown species was terrorizing the citizens. "Big Bird", they called it. Large, white with a reddish collar, black head, enormous bill - field marks much like those of a Jabiru Stork. That would be a really good bird for Texas in the winter. AND THEY SAID IT HAD A WINGSPREAD OF SEVENTEEN FEET!

SONOMA COUNTY CHECK LIST

On the following page is the supplement number 1 of the check list of the B. of So. Co. The original list was compiled from all sources known to them by Dr. Benjamin D. (Mike) Parmeter and Gordon L. Bolander as a contribution to KETE TAYES. Your comments thereof would be appreciated by the authors. Any additional records should be accompanied by clear and full supportive details. Submit to,

Dr. B. D. Parmeter
2500 Emerson St.
Napa, Cal 94558

Ed. Note: The considerable effort by Mike and Gordon on both the original list and the supplement is greatly appreciated.



A CHECK LIST OF THE BIRDS OF SONOMA COUNTY
SUPPLEMENT NUMBER 1
DECEMBER 11, 1975

This is a summary of the changes which have been made in the check list since its initial issue in 1974.

- | | |
|--|---|
| PORK-TAILED STORM PETREL (2)
Add to main list, delete
from hypothetical list | BLACK and WHITE WARBLER (4)
Now four records |
| CATTLE EGRET (1)
Add to main list, delete
from hypothetical list | MAGNOLIA WARBLER (1)
Add to main list |
| OLD SQUAW
Now more than five records | PALM WARBLER (3)
Now three records |
| SWAINSON'S HAWK (1)
Add to main list | AMERICAN REDSTART (4)
Now four records |
| PRAIRIE FALCON (4)
Now four records | ROSE-BREASTED GROSBEAK (3)
Now three records |
| WHITE-WINGED DOVE (1)
Add to main list | INDIGO BUNTING (2)
Add to main list, delete
from hypothetical list |
| SPOTTED OWL (5)
Now five records | GRASSHOPPER SPARROW (1)
Add to main list, delete
from hypothetical list |
| LESSER NIGHTHAWK (1)
Add to main list | SWAMP SPARROW
Now more than five records |
| TOWNSEND'S SOLITAIRE (5)
Now five records | LAPLAND LONGSPUR (2)
Add to main list, delete
from hypothetical list |

With these changes the main list now numbers 310 and the hypothetical list has been reduced to 15. There has been no recent sighting of any of the five "previous" species.

Bibliography of source publications:

1. AMERICAN BIRDS (Formerly AUDUBON FIELD NOTES)
2. THE AUK (publication of the American Ornithologists Union) 1956 to date
3. BIRDS OF BOHEMIAN GROVE. Maillard
4. BIRDS OF NORTHERN CALIFORNIA. McCaskie-DeBenedictis
5. THE CONDOR (publication of the Cooper Ornithological Society)
6. DIRECTORY to the BIRDS of the SAN FRANCISCO BAY REGION. Grinnell-Wythe
7. DIRECTORY to the BIRDS of CALIFORNIA. Grinnell-Miller
8. THE GULL (publication of the Golden Gate Audubon Society)
9. KITE TALES (publication of the Redwood Region Ornithological Society)

Redwood Region Ornithological Society

Organized in 1962, the purpose of the club is to encourage the study and conservation of birds, other wildlife and their habitats.

Meetings held the second Thursday of each month, Oct. through May, at 7:30 p.m. in Room 221 of Darwin Hall, California State College, Sonoma, Rohnert Park.

Membership dues are \$6.00 for a family, \$4.50 for an individual, and \$2.00 for a student. This includes the subscriptions to the KITE TALES. Dues may be mailed to Carmen Patterson, at the address below, or presented to her at the meetings.

We welcome guests at our meetings and on our field trips.

OFFICERS:

- PRESIDENT Wayne Tillay, 100 Gold Spr. Rd., Angwin 94508, 965-2978
- VICE-PRES Bruce Andre, Patagonia, Arizona
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on Thursday, March 11, 1976

REDWOOD REGION ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY
ROOM 221 - DARWIN

(Display clearly in driver's compartment of car.)