

# KITE TALES

MARCH

REDWOOD REGION ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY  
Vol. 12 - No. 7 SANTA ROSA, CALIF.

1978

## CALENDAR OF COMING EVENTS . . . . .

March 9, Thursday, 7:30: RROS meeting

This month we'll have a mystery program. Gerry's had problems with program cancellations. There will be a meeting - but right now the program has not been determined. Anybody care to wager?

March 11 and 12: Field Trip to Honey Lake

Field trip leader Mike Parmeter will meet participants at the Honey Lake Wildlife Management headquarters between 1:00 and 2:00 p.m. on Saturday afternoon. Heading north on Highway 395, turn right on Wendell Road, just north of the town of Litchfield, then look for refuge signs. If you're interested in carpooling call Melanie Perry at 887-1876 as soon as possible. If you want to meet Mike earlier (he's going up Friday night), call him prior to this week-end at 255-6757.

March 24, Friday: Deadline for KITE TALES contributions.

April 13, Thursday, 7:30 p.m.: RROS meeting

Now that we've asked you to drag out your slides - we'll ask you to carefully edit them! Birds and plants should be identifiable and the number of slides should be limited to 10-20 per person.

May 7, Sunday: Pelagic Trip

Get ready for another trip aboard the "Finback" from Bodega Bay. The cost will be \$18.00 per person payable to RROS and mailed to Treasurer Adeene Nelligan.

## FEBRUARY FIELD TRIP REPORT . . . . .

Saturday February 18, 1978 turned out to be a beautiful, warm sunny day. Approximately 20-25 birders showed up to the soon-to-be Stuart Canyon Preserve, in Glen Ellen. We walked about 3.5 miles

along trails leading to chaparral covered slopes with beautiful vistas and along Stuart Creek to a 100-foot waterfall.

We were lucky to see both the Sage Sparrow and the California Thrasher during our wanderings.

Gail Scott

The following species were observed:

Turkey vulture  
 Red-tailed Hawk  
 California Quail  
 Rock Dove  
 Anna's Hummingbird  
 Red-shafted Flicker  
 Acorn Woodpecker  
 Nuttall's Woodpecker  
 Black Phoebe  
 Steller's Jay  
 Scrub Jay  
 Chestnut-backed Chickadee  
 Plain Titmouse  
 Common Bushtit  
 White-breasted Nuthatch  
 Brown Creeper  
 Wren  
 Winter Wren  
 Bewick's Wren  
 California Thrasher

Robin  
 Varied Thrush  
 Hermit Thrush  
 Western Bluebird  
 Ruby-crowned Kinglet  
 Hutton's Vireo  
 Yellow-rumped Warbler  
 Western Meadowlark  
 Red-winged Blackbird  
 Brewer's Blackbird  
 House Finch  
 Pine Siskin  
 Lesser Goldfinch  
 American Goldfinch  
 Rufous-sided Towhee  
 Brown Towhee  
 Sage Sparrow  
 Oregon Junco  
 Golden-crowned Sparrow  
 Fox Sparrow

BIRD OF THE MONTH . . . . .

Gail Scott suggested that we institute a Bird-of-the-Month column and volunteered the first month's contribution. With volunteers like Gail we can keep the column going - please volunteer. That means you!

THE RED-TAILED HAWK

The Red-tailed Hawk, Buteo jamaicensis, is one of the most widely distributed and well-known hawks of our region. This raptor is a buteo or soaring hawk. It is able to soar by using its large, broad, rounded wings to catch the updrafts and its fan-like tail as a rudder. The adults are easily recognized by their characteristic red tails. The immature Red-tailed Hawks are like the adults in general pattern. The tail, however, is a grayish brown, not reddish, and crossed with several evenly spaced darker bars.

The Red-tailed Hawk, a common predator of our valley grasslands, may also be seen in wooded or mountainous regions where there is sufficient open country nearby.

"Red-tails" feed on a wide variety of prey, utilizing whatever food is available in their territory. These hawks are known to take squirrels, gophers, moles, meadow mice, brush rabbits, hares, quails, snakes, lizards, and insects. Some studies have found that wherever ground squirrels occur, these are the favored prey; sometimes to the exclusion of other prey, especially during the hawks' reproductive period (Beebe, 1974).

When hunting, Red-tailed Hawks use a variety of tactics. The most familiar hunting method is soaring high above a meadow or open field watching for movement below. They may also look for prey while perched on a fence post or high in a tree. Once prey is spotted they may soar in the direction away from their intended prey only to turn back and take advantage of an obstruction that affords them the element of surprise. In the actual capture of ground squirrels and reptiles, the Red-tailed Hawk often uses a confrontation tactic rarely used by other species. Instead of attempting a direct surprise strike from the air, it maneuvers to land in a position between the prey and its burrow. Refuge-oriented animals such as snakes and ground squirrels usually make no attempt to flee under these circumstances (Beebe, 1974). Instead, these animals may rush the predator in an effort to reach the safety of their burrow only to meet with the fate of the waiting hawk.

Since raptors are often early nesters, we should be on the look out for courting couples. Red-tailed Hawks may begin their courtship displays as early as January or February. Their courting tactics may begin with both male and female soaring around each other issuing a screaming call. When this preliminary maneuver is completed, the male soars above the female and makes a series of stops and dives at her. The female may roll over in the air and present her opened talons to the male. The displays may vary. I myself have seen one peculiar courtship maneuver. The two adults came together in the air facing each other. They whirled around as if fighting or grappling, resembling the blades of a helicopter. As they whirled, they began to fall downward. Just before reaching the ground, they broke apart and resumed their soaring.

Some pairs of "Red-tails" may have already begun building their nests by February. Look for a large stick nest in a tall tree, frequently the tallest tree in a woodland area. The female lays 2-4 grayish-white to white eggs. The eggs often are lightly covered with brown blotches. Incubation, which is shared to some degree by both the male and female, lasts about 30 days.

The male supplies the female with almost all of her food from the time of the courtship display flight until the young are about two weeks old. The young hawks attempt to fly when they are around 45 days old. For another 60 days the noisy fledglings are still fed by their hard-working parents. This feeding is gradually reduced until the immature hawks are left for several days without food, at which time they are forced to hunt for themselves.

Gail Scott

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

Membership dues, payable in May, 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 Adeene Nelligan at the address below, or presented to her at the meetings.

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

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