Sacramento Audubon Society

The Second 25 Years

1975-2000

A Publication of The Sacramento Audubon Society - 2003

History Project Committee:
Pete Hayes, Chair
Bill Dillinger
Dorothy Harvey
Bill Clark.

I
## Contents

Title Page ........................................................................................................... I
Acknowledgements ............................................................................................ II
Forward ............................................................................................................... IV
History 1975-2000 ............................................................................................ 1-41
Afterword ........................................................................................................... 42
Officers 1975-2000 ........................................................................................... 43-47
Code of Birding Ethics ......................................................................................... 48-49
Foreword

“Sacramento Audubon Society: The Second 25 Years” is Volume II in a venture to document the Chapter’s important conservation fights, birding high points, publishing initiatives, research achievements, and individual accomplishments between 1975 and 2000. Initiative for this project came from Elmer Aldrich, Chapter President, 1977-78, who had also provided the impetus for Volume I covering the chapter’s first 25 years, written by Marjorie Ryall. June C. Persson, Chapter President, 1993-96, also encouraged preparation of the second volume.

We greatly appreciate the valuable help on this project received from many Sacramento Audubon members, and we thank them all. We are especially indebted to Elmer Aldrich, Mary Bisharat, LoRaine Brown, Jan Clark, Joe Ceriani, Mark Cudney, Joe Ferreira, Tim Fitzer, Ed Harper, Bruce Kennedy, Cathie LaZier, Tim Manolis, Jerry Marinovich, Barbara Mohr, June Persson, John Ranlett, Andi Salmi, Mary Schiedt, Evelyn Smith, Bruce Swinehart, and Alta Tura, for their generous assistance. And we are grateful for the dedication of The Observer newsletter editors and chapter recording secretaries whose diligent efforts provided the principal sources for the volume.

The committee thanks artist Erin O’Toole for allowing us to reprint on the cover her classic illustration of Wood Duck Slough at Bobelaine Sanctuary from among her beautiful drawings in the 1994 Bobelaine Audubon Sanctuary Interpretive Guide to the Mixed Riparian Forest. Other graphics within this volume are reproduced courtesy of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Some technical notes. References to presidential terms and Chapter years parallel academic years, i.e., 1975-76 covers September 1975 through July-August, 1976, et. seq. And since common names of many bird species have changed during the period covered, we have opted for the sake of conformity to use names accepted at the time of publication, 2003.

Producing the volume has been an enjoyable exercise, allowing History Project Committee members to relive great birding trips, appreciate anew the contributions of colleagues, and to refresh memories of old friends no longer with us. It also made us realize that many good ideas on birding hot spots, fundraising projects and conservation approaches were advanced over the years, and may well be worth revisiting today.

Mission Statement
Sacramento Audubon Society

As a Chapter of the National Audubon Society, we will focus on conservation and environmental education to ensure that the Sacramento region’s natural ecosystems and diverse bird populations are preserved, restored, and made available for study and enjoyment.
"... The most momentous news in the chapter's history occurred in January, 1975, when Robert Crandall, a retired rancher of Yuba City, deeded 430 acres of the Feather River floodplain to the National Audubon Society as a wildlife refuge... The National Society leased the property to the Sacramento Audubon Society for management purposes... The rest of the story of this new addition to the roll of Audubon sanctuaries belongs to the second quarter century of the Sacramento Audubon Society's history."

With those passages, author Marjorie Ryall concluded "The Sacramento Audubon Society: The First 25 years." And now this volume takes up the story that had begun Sept. 23, 1950 when 28 nature enthusiasts met at the Girl Scout House at 2430 N St. in Sacramento to formally organize the Sacramento Audubon Society.

Charter members included William Kirsher, a photographer with the U.S. Geological Survey who was credited by Marjorie Ryall with sparking the chapter's founding and was its first president; school teachers Phyllis Thompson and her sister, Frances; Dr. Hubert B. Jenkins, professor of Life Sciences at Sacramento State College, Esther Guthrie, Science Supervisor for the Sacramento school system, and Girl Scout leaders Willie Argante (later Willie Argante Eizinger) and Muriel Kaminsky.

They were in the growing company of citizens who believe with Aristotle that "In all things of nature, there is something of the marvelous." And with that enlightenment came the natural awareness that the living space of birds, indeed of all living creatures, must be protected and even enhanced. And conservation of natural resources came to be a dominant mission of Sacramento Audubon when National Audubon turned over to SAS the management responsibility for the magnificent Feather River wildlife sanctuary called Bobelaine, 35 miles north of Sacramento near the town of Nicolaus.

Howard R. Leach, chairman of the first Bobelaine Master Plan Committee, told in a history of the acquisition of Bobelaine (a composite of the names of Bob and Elaine Crandall), how Crandall came to turn over to Audubon his two and a half miles of Feather River frontage - some of the finest remaining riparian habitat in the Sacramento Valley.

In August 1974, Phil Simmons, then chairman of the Sacramento City Planning Commission, informed Paul Howard, National Audubon's Western Regional representative, that he, Simmons, had been named a representative of the landowner, who preferred to remain anonymous. Simmons said the owner wanted to turn over his property to an organization such as the National Audubon Society. Simmons arranged a meeting for Howard with the owner, Bob Crandall, and eventually the transfer was arranged and Bobelaine was dedicated May 31, 1975 as one of National Audubon's 73 wildlife sanctuaries.

"ANIMALS FIRST"

Leach wrote, "Bob's choice of the Audubon Society as guardian for this unique area was based on his trust that the Society would maintain the land as a place for animals first and people only if they could respect the priority of God's creatures. Several organizations were considered when the idea of the sanctuary was developed but all others were rejected by Bob once he discovered they lacked the commitment and national reputation of Audubon."

One of the first orders of Bobelaine business was to appoint a Sanctuary Managing Committee to oversee the area of cottonwoods, willows, oaks, and sycamores, dense undergrowth including poison
oak and wild roses, grasslands, ponds, and a long borrow pit that was home for nesting Wood Ducks, Common Moorhens, Pied-billed Grebes and Mallards. Subsequent surveys identified 190 bird species, 39 mammals, and 126 plants in the preserve.

A Native American burial/living site and a living site, each believed to be 300 to 1,000 years old, are on the land and registered in the California Archaeology Survey.

DON FRY'S KEY ROLE

The chapter was fortunate when former President Don Fry, who had retired as a distinguished state Fish & Game Department fish biologist, agreed to head the Sanctuary committee.

“The primary purpose of managing the sanctuary shall be to maintain the land as a natural wildlife sanctuary on which native plants and animals will thrive at near optimum levels,” Fry wrote in the Observer.

As long as they don’t interfere with the primary purpose, Bobelaine may be used as a research study area, as an outdoor classroom for the study of animals, plants and their ecology, and as an area where Audubon members and their guests can observe wildlife and enjoy an outing, Fry added.

With the arrival of the Fall hunting season, the problem of security on the sanctuary came to the fore. The committee invited Audubon members to volunteer to patrol the area and report any hunting or trespassing to the Sutter County Sheriff or State Fish & Game Warden.

The chapter held a successful two-day open house in April 1976 to acquaint SAS members with Bobelaine. Besides guided tours and prizes for bird lists, three pick-up truckloads of trash were removed from the sanctuary.

Audubon members were saddened by the death of Don Fry in March, 1976 after he had stepped down as chairman of the Bobelaine Managing Committee. He was considered the dean of State fish biologists, writing numerous technical and popular articles on salmon and other fish and receiving many professional awards. He was praised by ornithologists for his published research on the White-tailed Kite. He devoted much time and effort to Audubon, assisting in annual Bird Censuses, Condor Surveys, Breeding Bird Surveys, and in leadership of many bird and flower field trips.

And Fry showed his sense of humor on a foggy Christmas Count day when he spotted a flock of birds in a thicket and called out, “30 White-crowns.” A Sacramento Bee photographer accompanying the counters asked incredulously, “How did you do that?” “Count the legs and divide by two,” Fry replied.

Fry was succeeded by Brian Bell as chairman of the Sanctuary Managing Committee.

FREMONT CHURCH MEETINGS

Heavy Bobelaine responsibilities in the 1975-76 Audubon year did not divert members from productive birding and other nature-oriented activities during the presidency of Edward R. Warner.

Monthly meetings at Fremont Presbyterian Church included such outstanding slide programs as “Up and Down California with a Naturalist” by past president Bill Grenfell; “A Journey to the Polar Sea”
Dave Johnson reported compilation of a three-year census of birds over nearly 300 acres of the Sailor Bar area of the American River Parkway. He recorded 118 species, including Eared Grebe, Northern Harrier, Prairie Falcon, Great-horned Owl, Short-eared Owl, Hooded Oriole, Common Loon, Yellow-rumped Warbler (Myrtle form), Barrow's Goldeneye, Red-breasted Merganser, Northern Shrike, Tennessee Warbler and American Redstart.

Kathy Zedekar organized another of her popular tours for SAS members, this one in May 1975 to southeast Arizona where birders saw 171 species, including Elegant Trogon, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Rose-throated Becard, Red-faced Warbler and Summer Tanager.

CHAPTER AWARDS

Sacramento Audubon recognized the achievements of five members at the annual dinner May 30, 1975. Honored were:

— Myra Erwin, whose work for consolidation of efforts of numerous local environmental groups resulted in the formation of the Environmental Council of Sacramento (ECOS), which she chaired.

— Bill Grenfell, executive director of the Sacramento Science Foundation and Junior Museum, who as SAS president sparked a surge of chapter membership; he teaches college-level natural history courses and is a skilled nature photographer and producer of the movie “Western Everglades” about the Delta area.

— Charter member Frances Thompson and her sister, Phyllis, for working tirelessly on various committees, including heading the Decorations Committee for the National Audubon Convention in Sacramento in 1966.

— J. Martin Weber, natural science consultant for Sacramento County schools, promoted development of nature areas on school grounds, provided leadership to reforestation of native oaks, and developed student participation in the Ancil Hoffman nature area.

1975 CHRISTMAS COUNT

The chapter carried on the annual Christmas Bird Count with the 1975 Sacramento count, which drew a record 118 participants who scanned the area within a 15-mile diameter circle. They recorded 133 species with two additional races, and 106,108 birds altogether, Count Chairman Elmer Aldrich reported. The lower-than-usual count was attributed to seasonal dry conditions that reduced waterfowl counts, and fog on the count day. Best birds included Black-chinned Hummingbird, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Black-throated Gray Warbler, Townsend’s Warbler, Wilson’s Warbler, and White-throated Sparrow. Willie Argante’s group topped the 10 area teams, recording 99 species.

Meanwhile, the Sierra’s excellent crop of Pinon and Jeffrey Pine nuts contributed to a record 72 species seen on the Woodfords-Markleeville Christmas Count, Walt Luke reported. They included a Rusty Blackbird, four Oak Titmice, a Cedar Waxwing and four Bohemian Waxwings.

The Board of Directors approved a request to relinquish 140 SAS members living in Sierra foothills communities to a new Audubon chapter that was being formed, to be called the Sierra Foothills Audubon Society in Auburn. The members were from Bowman, Penryn, Lincoln, Newcastle, Pilot Hill, Colfax and Applegate.
After the board heard that the wildlife film series was $1,000 in the red, directors voted to tap the General Fund to cover the deficit and cancel the 1976-77 series.

SAS By-laws had provided for election of the president to a two-year term limit; at the annual meeting in April, 1976, members approved revision of the By-laws to elect the president to a one-year term with no limit on running for re-election.

Cora Baker and Camilla Gunderson were presented appreciation plaques at the annual dinner in May, 1976 in recognition of their many contributions to the society. Baker, a charter member, had been SAS secretary, organized field trips for the National Audubon Convention in 1966, helped as Observer Seasonal Observations editor and, noted the Observer, “is a fine example of the kind of people who make Sacramento Audubon Society the great success it is.”

Gunderson had served as Observer editor, corresponding secretary, and was co-editor of “The Outdoor World of the Sacramento Region” field guide. As an outstanding supporter of conservation education, she gave many school programs in the nature interpretation area of Ancil Hoffman park.

BATTLE FOR BUSHY LAKE

In 1976, at the urging of Sacramento Audubon, Save the American River Association and other environmental organizations, Governor Jerry Brown signed the Bushy Lake Preservation Act. The SAS Conservation Committee headed by John Anderson was instrumental in this campaign, which capped 15 years of controversy over use of the floodplain between Cal Expo and the American River. But it didn’t end the fight to preserve it as a natural area.

When Cal Expo was first established in the 1960s, the Bushy Lake area was slated to be a golf course, and some land contouring was done, including the dredging of the borrow pit that became Bushy Lake. The golf course project was never completed but various other proposals were offered over the years, including a motocross course, a polo field and an overflow parking area for the State Fair.

Sacramento Audubon and others opposed all of these ideas and ultimately the 1976 Preservation Act supposedly decided the issue. Then in 1994, Cal Expo officials resurrected the idea of a 40-acre parking lot between Bushy Lake and the River, on the American River Parkway, triggering another fight with environmental groups. Enabling legislation for the project was approved in the Senate but died in the Assembly.

Meanwhile, largely from natural causes, the lake level has dropped, and it has become more of a marsh, except when heavy winter rains refill it with storm water, according to Auduboner Joe Ceriani, who has birded the area regularly and led trips there for the past 25 years. (Save the American River Association President Frank Cirili credited Ceriani with helping rally opposition to the 1994 parking lot plan by leading influential groups on inspection tours of the area.)

Marsh or pond, Bushy Lake has remained an excellent birding area, Ceriani reports. He has seen 151 species of birds there, plus River Otters, Beaver, Muskrats, and an occasional Deer. Birds range from Wood Ducks and Pied-billed Grebes to nesting Red-tailed and Red-shouldered Hawks, Cooper’s and Sharp-shinned Hawks, White-tailed Kites and Northern Harriers. There have been nesting egrets and Great-horned Owls. In the drier area between the lake and the river, there have been flocks of goldfinches and other small birds.