vaney activities.

**BIRD LISTS CLIMB**

Mark Cudney reported good news for bird listers in 1990. His Observer article on species splits in the newly published 37th Supplement to the AOU Checklist of North American Birds described new species that birders could pursue for their lists. Brown Towhee was split into California Towhee and Canyon Towhee; California Gnatcatcher race was separated from Black-tailed Gnatcatcher and elevated to species status, and Western Flycatcher was split into two species: Pacific-slope Flycatcher and Cordilleran Flycatcher.

**ARVIL PARKER**

Arvil Parker, longtime Sacramento Audubon field trip leader and expert photographer, died March 11, 1990. A retired Courtland High School math teacher, he and his wife, Ellen, led field trips to the Thornton area and participated in many bird counts. In producing dazzling photos of hummingbirds in flight, he discovered a couple of hybrid hummers at his Courtland feeder. His finds interested University of California ornithologists and they captured the birds in order to study them more closely.

**FUNDRAISING STRATEGIES**

Sacramento Audubon's Board members were forever faced with the pressures of balancing income from membership dues, donations, and miscellaneous sources against Observer, Bobelaine, insurance, and many other expenses. The quest for additional funding met with notable successes, such as "Bucks for Bobelaine" birdathons and direct mail appeals to members.

Revenue was generated from other sources, such as the sale of Checklists and other Chapter publications, birdseed, used books, discount coupon books, and coffee mugs bearing the chapter emblem; and a raffle for a signed waterfowl print donated by famed bird artist Robert Bateman. Local artist Erin O'Toole also made a significant contribution in kind, with her wildlife drawings, layout and typing services for the Bobelaine Interpretive Guide.

And the 1990s saw a major upturn in revenue realized from donations built into the costs of the Chapter's expeditions to birding hot spots near and far. In addition to her many other fundraising projects, Mary James organized more than two dozen trips, led by such expert birders as Mark Cudney and Tim Steurer to Texas's Rio Grande Valley in 1993; Todd Easterla to Cape May, N.J., in 1997, and Dan Williams on a transect of California in 2000.

**1990 CHRISTMAS COUNTS**

Seventy-six observers braved super-frigid temperatures for the 42nd annual Sacramento Christmas Bird Count, and were rewarded with 151 species, five more than the previous record set in 1988 on a similarly cold day. Highlights were two species found for the first time on the Sacramento Count -- an Oldsquaw reported by Michael Perrone, and 21 White-faced Ibises flying around the edges of the Yolo Bypass. A total of 134,924 individual birds were reported.

Other nice finds: Eurasian Wigeon, Greater Scaup, Barrow's Goldeneye, Hooded Merganser, Bonaparte's and Glaucous Gulls, "Yellow-shafted" Northern Flicker, Common Raven, California Thrasher, Phainopepla, Nashville Warbler, and Evening Grosbeak. Compiler Tim Manolis called the Count "the
best ever.”

Folsom also had cold weather and an all-time high count—138 species with 40,340 individuals, Compiler June Persson reported. Specialties were American White Pelican, Eurasian Wigeon, Dunlin, Canyon Wren, Osprey, Peregrine Falcon, Red Crossbill, Bald and Golden Eagles, and Lawrence’s Goldfinch.

NEW INFORMATION LINE

The Board of Directors enthusiastically approved President Jose Kirchner’s request to install a new Sacramento Audubon telephone line at his own expense during his term of office. It would include a taped message with information regarding field trips, meetings and referrals to the rare bird line and would receive incoming messages.

RECORDS UNIT REACTIVATED

After being inactive for several years, Sacramento Audubon’s Bird Records Committee was back in business in 1992 to review and vote on reports of rare birds in the Sacramento Checklist Area, plus those reported on Christmas Bird Counts.

Birders were invited to submit a detailed, written description of the sighting, along with a drawing, photograph or tape recording if possible. Chaired by Tim Manolis, the Committee consisted of Bruce Deuel, Ed Greaves, Ed Harper, Jeri Langham, Brian Williams, David Yee, Ted Beedy, John Trochet, and Andrew Engilis, Jr.

Sightings accepted by the Committee as Sacramento County “firsts,” and those who reported them, included:

— Canada Warbler. Reichmuth Park, Aug. 24-Sept. 8, 1986 (Gil Ewing)
— Palm Warbler, American River Parkway near Cal Expo, Dec. 27, 1986-Jan. 8, 1987 (John Trochet and Bruce Webb)
— Solitary Vireo, Plumbeous Form, Reichmuth Park, April 13-15, 1988 (Tim Manolis)
— Semipalmated Sandpiper, Natomas Main Drain near Elverta, Sept. 5, 1991 (Tim Manolis and June Persson)
— Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Sacramento, Dec. 10, 1991 (Tim Manolis)
— Franklin’s Gull, N. Fork, Mokelumne River between Tyler and Staten Islands, May 10, 1992 (Tim and Annette Manolis)
— Yellow-throated Warbler, Orangevale, May 25, 1992 (Dave Johnson and Barbara Mohr)
— Summer Tanager and Hooded Warbler, Reichmuth Park, Sept. 5, 1992 (Gil Ewing)

And in the first Sacramento County report in decades, a Yellow-billed Cuckoo was heard July 7, 1996 at Cosumnes River Preserve (John Trochet).

1991 CHRISTMAS COUNTS

For the first time, a “Harlan’s” Red-tailed Hawk and Rufous Hummingbird were recorded on the Sacramento Christmas Bird Count, Compiler Tim Manolis reported. They were among 144 species counted as 96 Auduboners enjoyed fair weather on the 1991 Count while tallying 163,475 individuals. Other sightings: Black-necked Stilt, 17 Bonaparte’s Gulls, Phainopepla, Townsend’s Warbler, Glaucous Gull, 9 Forster’s Terns and a Caspian Tern.
Stormy weather ushered in Folsom Count Day, but it let up after two hours and the birds came out in high numbers. Auduboners recorded 131 species among 64,195 individuals. Thanks to Bill Dillinger’s press agentry, three television stations and one radio station showed up to provide the best media coverage yet. Cathie LaZier, Diana Oretsky, Nancy Bittner and Dillinger performed well on camera, compiler June Persson reported. Fenton Williams and Gil Ewing found the birds-of-the-day: two Pacific Loons and a female Red-breasted Merganser in Folsom Lake off Beal’s Point. Also sighted: 4 Bald Eagles.

**THE BIG FIRE**

Friday, Sept. 24, 1992 was hot, dry and windy when fire broke out in bone-dry vegetation on the east side of the Feather River four miles above Bobelaine. Embers jumped the river and flames sped southward through the riparian lands and by 9 p.m. into Audubon’s prized Sanctuary.

“It was bad, bad, bad,” said Jan Clark, co-chair with her husband Bill of the Sanctuary Committee, who viewed the still-smoking scene the following morning.

About 85 percent of the 430-acre preserve’s cottonwoods, willows, oaks and box elders, were lost, she said. Except for a few green patches, the ground was blackened. She watched as a fox pursued a rabbit with no place to hide on the charred landscape.

With the Sanctuary closed and field trips canceled, the Chapter faced up to the monumental task of recovery and prevention of a recurrence of fire. Work parties under the inspirational leadership of the Clarks dragged fallen trees off trails, planted acorns and hundreds of saplings. They grubbed out weeds and non-native Himalayan berries that flourished in the sudden absence of shade. John Ranlett donated funds for a pump to help with the three-times-a-week watering of the young trees. Restoration workers included Steve Talley, Andy Engilis Jr., Robert Thomas, and Mary Schiedt.

California Conservation Corps and State Department of Water Resources crews bulldozed an 80-foot-wide firebreak at the north end of the Sanctuary. A smaller firebreak was created in the center of the Sanctuary. Grants from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and the Teichert Foundation helped with the recovery, including rental of a bulldozer. A year later, the Sanctuary was reopened to the public.

**SQUATTER’S RIGHTS?**

Following the September fire, Jack Hiehle and Alice Stivanelli checked, cleaned and put new sawdust into 17 Wood Duck boxes at Bobelaine. None of the 17 boxes located had been burned and, unfortunately, none indicated successful use by Wood Ducks. But - surprise! - one of them contained a growling ring-tail. Jack and Alice judiciously let it lay and withdrew.

Apparently most wildlife had managed to escape the flames. Actually, in the fire’s aftermath bluebirds were enjoying the grassy meadow in the north firebreak and woodpeckers found it easier to excavate nest cavities in scorched trees.

Ten years later, Jan Clark would say, “A lot of recovery has happened. Trees are getting nice and big. It’s still very nice, even with the damage.”
ARMCHAIR ACTIVISTS

Sacramento Audubon mounted a major conservation initiative in 1992 with the “Audubon Armchair Activists” club at the outset of President LoRaine Brown’s term and carried forward in June Persson’s presidency. It was designed for those who were concerned about the environment but didn’t have the time to do the necessary research and hands-on advocacy.

For a $6 annual membership fee, members received a monthly bulletin pointing out local, state, and federal environmental issues of immediate concern. Also included were sample letters to be used as guides for letters to lawmakers to indicate Audubon’s - and the writer’s - position on such issues.

“About a half hour a month is all that’s required for an ‘Armchair Activist’ to make a meaningful contribution to maintaining/improving our environment,” Brown wrote in announcing the program in The Observer. “Can you imagine a thousand letters coming into the office of our elected officials from this area alone? That would represent one third of our total Sacramento membership.”

Bea Cooley and Barbara Alexander spearheaded the program. The Observer said Audubon letters were crucial in preventing part of the Bushy Lake area from becoming a parking lot for Cal Expo.

The program continued until 1998 when the Board of Directors voted to discontinue it after key personnel moved away and the Chapter had joined five other organizations in forming Habitat 20-20 to fight to preserve local habitat.

CECIL SMITH

Cecil Smith, who held many leadership positions with Sacramento Audubon, died Nov. 14, 1992. Smith, 70, an electrical engineer with the state, was Editor of The Observer, Chapter Treasurer, served with his wife Evelyn on the Bobelaine Sanctuary Committee, and with Evelyn led many popular field trips. He was noted for his wit, as recalled by Auduboner Cathie Lazier: “At the end of a Bodega Bay trip, he led the group to a Basque restaurant in Occidental. When we got there, one car was missing from the caravan, and Cecil said, ‘It’s not a successful trip unless you lose at least one car.’”

WALT LUKE

The Chapter lost another longtime, active member with the death of Walt Luke, 69, April 1, 1993. He was a prolific nature photographer and bird song recorder and introduced many children to local birdlife through slide shows he presented in schools as part of the Chapter’s education program. An industrial engineer at Aerojet, he led field trips and participated in many Christmas Bird Counts.

1992 CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS

Bluebird skies and minimal wind helped Folsom Christmas bird counters record 138 species, tying the previous high, and a record high individual count of 69,834. All-time high individuals were reported for several species, including 8 Bald Eagles, 655 Western Grebes, 18 Sharp-shinned Hawks and 44 Lincoln’s Sparrows.
And 30 Sacramento Audubon members participated in the Eighth annual American River Natural History Association Birdathon to raise money for the American River Parkway. A total of 110 species were counted in 10 areas along the river. New species seen were American White Pelican, Ferruginous Hawk, Western Sandpiper, Costa’s Hummingbird (at a feeder) and Red-breasted Nuthatch.

‘WONDERFUL LITTLE LAKE’

When Mather Air Force Base closed in 1992, Sacramento Audubon members and others cheered newfound access to Mather Lake with its rich, riparian habitat. Habitat for more than 65 bird species, including at least 30 nesters, the 64-acre lake was a prime bird-watching site in East Sacramento County. Fishing was productive and several vernal pools existed nearby.

But the resource became a major habitat concern for the Chapter in the mid-90s as seasonal drought threatened to dry up the lake unless new water supplies were found. Elaine Vak, President June Person, Marilyn Evans, and Bill Dillinger, among others, pressured public officials to resist a number of development proposals and provide additional water. Eventually, American River water from the Folsom-South Canal was tapped, followed by treated, reclaimed underground water from the former air base.

Because of structural problems with Mather Lake Dam on Morrison Creek, Sacramento County officials excluded the lake from a lease agreement that was made with the Air Force Base Conversion Agency to acquire 1,500 acres as a Mather Regional Park. Once those problems were resolved, it was expected that the lake would be leased by the county along with the rest of the park.

Meanwhile, the lake remained open to the public. But Sacramento Audubon’s Wayne Blunk, who has led numerous field trips to Mather Lake, cautioned that extensive home-building plans in the vicinity could threaten lake habitat. Formal inclusion of the lake into the park, therefore, was viewed as essential.


Interestingly, A 2002 Resource Management Plan for Mather Lake prepared for the County Parks Department by ECORP Consulting, Inc., Roseville, urged the Department to pursue establishment of an Audubon Nature Center at the lake. It said such a center would “provide a tremendous opportunity to implement objectives of the department without incurring many of the costs associated with them.”

ANNUAL BANQUET DROPPED

Because annual awards banquet attendance had fallen off in recent years, the Board voted to abandon the May, 1993 Banquet. In its place, Directors decided to install new officers during the May general meeting and to present the Chapter’s annual awards at the September meeting.

Thus the September meeting opened with a potluck dinner, followed by presentation of awards to: Vickie Lee of the Sierra Club, Community Service Award for her help starting Stone Lakes NWR; Marie Freeman, Distinguished Service Award for her dedicated efforts compiling the Chapter’s computer data base of bird observations during the past decade; Jan and Bill Clark, a Double Campership for
their tireless work on behalf of Bobelaine Sanctuary, and the Teichert Foundation, an Award of Appreciation for its $1,650 grant to Bobelaine.

1993 FOLSOM COUNT

Folsom Christmas counters recorded 138 species on a cold and foggy morning that gave way early to blue skies and minimal wind. All-time highs were listed for 18 species, including 11 Bald Eagles, 15 Virginia Rails, and 59 Rock Wrens. John Ranlett’s team made the greatest area improvement, vaulting from 40-50 species to 70.

STONE LAKES NWR IS BORN

Sacramento County could boast its first National Wildlife Refuge with the establishment in 1994 of Stone Lakes NWR just 12 miles south of the State Capitol. It was a perfect sequel to the free-speech fight won 15 years before by Sacramento Audubon members Bruce Swinehart, Bruce Kennedy and Fred Styles with a developer who wanted to build a 5,400-acre Stonelake “new town” on the site (See Pages 10 & 24)

In 1988, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposed acquisition of 18,200 acres of seasonal wetlands, vernal pools, native grasslands, riparian forests, and oak woodland as a national refuge. The 13-mile long corridor extends from the Mokelumne River in the south, on both sides of Interstate 5, to Sacramento’s city limits. It is on the Pacific Flyway, and hosts a full range of migratory birds along with a cormorant and egret rookery.

Sacramento Audubon members, especially Curt Sutliff, Jim Middleton, and Del Tura, joined with other environmental groups in campaigning for congressional approval of the refuge. “We were mainly cheerleaders for speaking out on the community’s need for the refuge,” Tura said. “We met with county and state officials, had canoe trips, provided aerial photos of the area, and produced bumper stickers and refrigerator magnets saying ‘Stone Lakes Is a Wildlife Magnet.’”

President June C. Persson presented the Chapter’s annual awards at the September, 1994 general meeting. The awards: Community Service, Marilyn Evans, for her effective fundraising for open space and habitat preservation and her work to preserve Mather Lake; Distinguished Service, LoRaine Brown, for her leadership as Education Committee chair for three years and as 1992-93 Chapter President, and the Campership, Karen Kluge for her many dedicated hours as editor of The Observer for four years.

After holding monthly meetings at St. Mark’s United Methodist Church for 12 years, the Chapter avoided sharply increased rents by moving in 1995 to the Shepard Garden and Arts Center in McKinley Park. The first meeting there featured a memorial exhibition of beautiful nature photographs by Cecil Smith, longtime Sacramento Audubon leader, by his friend, Truman Holtzclaw.

1995 CHRISTMAS COUNT

Sacramento Christmas Bird Counters registered 145 species, a record for the 46-year-old event, Compiler Mark Cudney reported. Highlights included a Swamp Sparrow seen at the entrance to the Conaway Ranch in Yolo County and a hybrid Allen’s-Rufous Hummingbird feeding on nectar from red eucalyptus flowers in the backyard of a participating birder.

A Long-tailed Duck and Glaucous Gull were special visitors to the Folsom area Christmas Count,
which recorded a record 143 species.

CHANGE IN BYLAWS

In a move to bring greater flexibility to SAS governance, the Chapter in 1995 approved changes in the bylaws covering numbers and terms of Board of Directors members. Board membership was reduced from not more than 21 members to not more than 11. The new board included elected officers, who are the President, Vice President, Treasurer, Recording Secretary, and Corresponding Secretary; the immediate past president, and five elected directors serving staggered terms of four years. All officers, who had been limited to one term, may be re-elected.

NEWSLETTER STABILITY

A newsletter is crucial for holding a nonprofit group together because it regularly reminds members of the benefits of belonging. Sacramento Audubon has enjoyed newsletter stability, thanks to a series of dedicated editors. In 1977, SAS President Elmer Aldrich recruited his River Park neighbor, Betty Hill, to succeed Cecil Smith, who was winding up a long editorship. Hill served until 1981 when she was succeeded by Joan Stead, followed by Diana Oretsky, then by Karen Kluge. Betty Hill returned in 1995 and held the editor’s post through 2000 and beyond.

Newsletter size fluctuated between four and eight pages over the years, usually reflecting Chapter budget constraints. More than half of the Chapter’s budget is earmarked for The Observer, but Hill noted that there have been meaningful savings with the advent of desktop publishing in which computer-generated typesetting and layout replaced work done by commercial print shops.

A noticeable change in the newsletter’s appearance was a handsome new nameplate/logo featuring a White-tailed Kite, the Chapter’s emblem bird, superimposed on a spotting scope. It was drawn by Tim Manolis.

Between 1993 and 1996, it could be said that Sacramento Audubon members enjoyed a virtual “newsletter within a newsletter.” During that period, The Observer carried President June C. Persson’s wide-ranging column enlightening, rallying, advocating, deploring, and appreciating issues and individuals affecting the Audubon mission.

Whether it was a bluntly-worded demand that members step up and fill vacancies on the Board, a rap on the knuckles for congressmen bent on gutting the Endangered Species Act, a call for preservation of Natomas habitat for Swainson’s Hawks, or giving a pat on the back for Bobelaine volunteers, Persson’s column was a “must read” for anyone who wanted to stay informed on who we are, what we do, and what we should do.

MANY OTHER PUBLICATIONS . .

The 1990s saw notable Chapter achievements in other publication areas. An Interpretive Guide to Bobelaine Sanctuary featuring 80 of artist Erin O’Toole’s splendid wildlife and plant drawings plus informative text by Cathie LaZier aided by Diana Oretsky came out in 1994, a real “keeper.” O’Toole not only provided the artwork, but designed the layout and typed the text. Others with a hand in the project were Karen Kluge, Bill Dillinger, Jack Hiehle and Dave Johnson.

The Third Edition of “Birding in the Sacramento Region,” published in 1998, was an invaluable