

10-11-89

\$20 Million

11-30-89
S.F. CHRONICLE

Shell to Pay Huge Claim For Martinez Oil Spill

By William Carlsen
Chronicle Staff Writer

Shell Oil Co. agreed yesterday to pay a record \$20 million to settle damage claims from the devastating 1988 Martinez oil spill that seriously damaged 150 acres of sensitive wetlands and coated 11 miles of shoreline along Suisun Bay.

The agreement, which provides for new acquisition of 1,000 acres of Bay Area marshlands, was hailed by government officials as the largest oil spill settlement in the nation and a precedent for other environmental damage cases, such as this year's huge Alaskan oil spill.

"This agreement sends a message to all who degrade the environment that the days of mediocre settlements and weak slaps on the wrist are over," said Richard Stewart, Assistant U.S. Attorney General for Lands and Natural Resources.

Stewart added that the U.S. Department of Justice is pursuing similar environmental claims against Exxon Corp. for the Alaska spill, which he said was many times more damaging than the Martinez spill, and that they expect a "proportionately larger" result from that prosecution.

Valve Was Open

The 432,000-gallon Martinez oil spill occurred when a drain valve was improperly left open inside an oil tank at the Shell refinery in Martinez on April 22, 1988. During a period of 24 hours, the smelly, San Joaquin Valley crude oil that leaked out coated wetlands and shorelines for miles around and formed oil slicks over large portions of the Carquinez Strait and San Pablo Bay.

Hundreds of birds and mammals were killed and the spill seriously disrupted commercial and recreational fishing, staining numerous boats in nearby marinas.

A major cleanup was mounted by Shell and private groups under the direction of the Coast Guard and California Fish and Game Department. Nearly three-quarters of the spill was contained, skimmed and removed.

placed in a trust fund for restoration of all environmental damage from the spill and acquisition of 1,000 new wetland acres in the affected areas.

■ Penalties of \$4.65 million will be paid to the federal government, the state and Contra Costa and Solano counties.

■ About \$1.7 million will go to affected cities for environmental projects and cleanup costs.

■ More than \$1.3 million will finance environmental studies on the ecological impact of oil spills.

■ The remaining amount will provide a fund for future spills and for the costs of the cleanup incurred by eight governmental agencies.

Praise for Shell

Despite the strong language thrown around at the news conference yesterday, Van de Kamp and the other officials praised Shell for its quick cleanup and its willingness to negotiate a settlement.

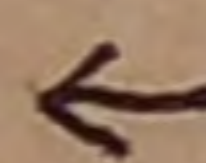
Shell has reportedly spent \$14 million already on the cleanup and on oil spill studies, in addition to the \$20 million paid out in yesterday's settlement.

State and federal government justice officials considered the possibility of filing criminal charges against Shell and its executive, but that idea was dropped during the negotiations leading up to the settlement. Van de Kamp noted that criminal fines would never be able to match the monetary damages gained by the settlement.

The settlement must still be approved by a federal judge after a 45-day period to allow for public comment before it becomes final. It does not affect private lawsuits that have been filed against Shell.

Shell spokesman Bill Sharkey yesterday called the settlement "fair and equitable" and said that it "cleared the slate" of claims by all governmental agencies.

"We said after the spill that we were committed to cleaning up and restoring the environment and with this settlement we have met that commitment," he said.



11-10-89

C.E. TIMES



Exxon spill toll: 27,000 birds, and it's rising

ASSOCIATED PRESS

ANCHORAGE, Alaska — Oil contamination from the Exxon Valdez spill has killed about 27,000 sea birds and the death toll can be expected to increase for at least a few more months, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service said Friday.

"We just don't know how long it's going to go on," said Vivian Mendenhall, marine bird coordinator at the agency's Anchorage office.

She said the numbers of dead birds being found have dropped off since the initial fatalities after the tanker struck a reef and spilled nearly 11 million gallons of crude oil into Prince William Sound on March 24.

Figures released Friday by a federal information office in Valdez show 563 of 1,326 sea birds received alive at rescue centers have been released. Nearly 600 have died at the facilities.

Fish & Wildlife Service spokesman Bruce Batten said 103 bald eagles are known to have died from the spill. Alaska's bald eagle population is about 35,000, with 3,000 of the birds in Prince William Sound and 5,000 in other areas contaminated with oil, he said.

The federal tally sheet released Friday also reported 843 otters dead.



By Michael Macor/The Tribune

After seven months, Shell Marsh is free of oil and biologists predict a healthy future.

Shell Marsh cleanup complete

By Marie Felde
The Tribune

MARTINEZ — Cleanup of the 100 acres of Shell Marsh soaked by a crude oil spill seven months ago has finally been completed. The marsh is expected to be reflooded within a week or two.

It has been the state's most extensive oil mop-up job, state Fish and Game biologist Mike Rugg said this week.

"We learned we can clean up a fresh water wetland. It hasn't been done in any other place. I'm hopeful this will set the standard," said Rugg, who has been coordinating the operation.

The Mount Diablo Audubon Society, which has been closely monitoring the cleanup, had high praise for the results. "I think it will come back and be a beautiful wetland," said the society's Kent Fickett.

The tedious task of removing the sticky black oil has not come cheaply.

Shell Oil, whose holding tank ruptured over the April 22-23 weekend and spilled an estimated 400,000 or more gallons of heavy crude oil, has spent \$9.5 million on the cleanup thus far, said

Shell spokesman Bill Sharkey.

By the time the leak was stopped, an 18-inch-thick layer of oil covered the one-mile stretch of Peyton Slough that runs through Shell Marsh. Some of the oil made it out into Carquinez Strait, fouling more than 11 miles of shoreline in Martinez, Benicia and Port Costa.

After the oil that could be vacuumed up was removed by a skimmer, a team of about 20 workers spent the summer cutting oil-coated vegetation and removing contaminated soil, said Rugg.

He credited the hand removal for keeping further environmental damage to a minimum.

"We are now awaiting the soil analysis. I'm hoping that will be completed this week. As soon as we are ready, we'll set a date and reflood it," he said.

"The real productivity of the wetlands won't be realized for a year," said Rugg. The food chain has been seriously disrupted, he said, noting that the crayfish, snail and clams that support larger animals are all gone.

But the migratory birds should return as soon as the marsh is reflooded, Rugg said.

Alaska oil spill spreads to parks

Wild coastline, animals befouled

By Paul Jenkins

Associated Press

VALDEZ, Alaska — Tar and sludge from the nation's largest oil spill has hit the beaches of Alaska's wild Katmai National Park, fouling hundreds of sea otters and birds and threatening the refuge's huge brown bears.

The damage stretches along some 260 miles of rocky, rugged coast southwestward from Cape Douglas, park superintendent Ray Bane said Monday. At its southernmost tip, the oil has spread more than 500 miles from the spot near Valdez where an Exxon tanker struck a reef March 24 and poured more than 10 million gallons of North Slope crude into Prince William Sound.

"The oil has made landfall in large quantities in Katmai Bay and Hallo Bay. There is a heavy impact. We have seen several hundred sea otters swimming in oil. The oil has had an impact on virtually the entire coastline of the park," Bane said.

Monday was Exxon's deadline to release its plan for disposing of the oil collected in the clean-up. "They (Exxon officials) are meeting this afternoon to discuss the entire package. They will meet the deadline," said Exxon spokesman Joe Tucker.

Exxon came under sharp criticism from the federal government over the time it's taking to build an otter rescue center.

Bane said "park representatives spotted gray whales and killer whales" near the oil-polluted Shelikof Strait but "there is no indication now whether they have been affected."

Bane said an aerial survey found an oil patch 10 miles wide and more than 20 miles long in the strait, which is located along the whales' spring migration route.

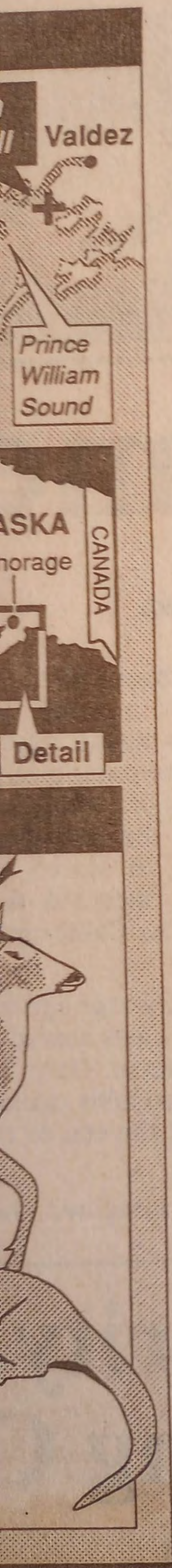
The 4 million-acre park also is a haven for brown bears, a coastal cousin of the grizzly. "A number of bears have been seen walking in the vicinity of the beaches. We have one verified sighting of a bear walking through the oil," Bane said.

In spite of the spill, state officials said they expect Prince William Sound to be open for salmon fishing when the commercial season starts May 15, and have estimated that fishermen may be able to catch 70 percent of the projected harvest.

Exxon has promised to have 300 miles of shoreline clean by mid-September but Brad Hahn, top scientist for Alaska's Department of Environmental Conservation, predicted that cleanup likely will take longer.

"I'll say we'll probably see them out there next season," Hahn said.

Clean-up crews are bringing in powerful Air Force warm water guns to clean the rocky shoreline of tarry globs of sludge and oil scum, and they appear to work better than using cold-water spray, Hahn said.



Peregrine falcon returns

Endangered species finds home on Mount Diablo

By Denis Cuff

Staff writer

Gary Beeman dreamed for more than 30 years that the fastest hunter in the sky would return to Mount Diablo.

As a teen-ager in the 1950s, Beeman watched the last nesting pair of peregrine falcons on the mountain before pesticides in the food chain nearly wiped the species off the earth.

Last month, Beeman, now a professional wildlife expert, helped return the endangered species to its old home.

Two zoo-hatched baby peregrines were placed in a rocky nest in Mount Diablo State Park in a mission that has buoyed hopes for man saving a species he nearly eliminated.

The baby peregrines were placed in a nest of wild prairie falcons, who accepted the strangers as their own.

News of the May 12 release was delayed until the young birds could fly, making them safe from human curiosity seekers.

"I waited most of my life for this,"

“The peregrines are very spectacular. The mountain hasn’t seemed the same without them”

— **Biologist Gary Beeman**

said Beeman, of Lafayette, who voluntarily coordinated the falcon restoration efforts of eight state and local agencies and conservation groups. They included the California Hawking Club, state Parks and Recreation Department, and Save Mount Diablo.

"The peregrines are very spectacular. The mountain hasn't seemed the same without them," Beeman said.

The now-banned pesticide DDT, which causes eggs to become brittle and crack, nearly ended the peregrine. California had only four known nesting pairs

in the wild two decades ago. But now the number is approaching 100 because of restoration projects like this one, according to the state Department of Fish and Game.

Adult peregrines, kept for centuries by people as hunting birds, have modest wing spans of 43 inches, but they dive faster than any other bird at speeds in excess of 200 mph. So fast, air whistles through their wings.

At birth, however, the peregrine chicks are helpless fluff balls in need of food, warmth and protection from adults.

Mount Diablo was picked for the mission because it had a nesting pair of prairie falcons to act as foster parents for the peregrine chicks.

The challenge for seven crew members was to switch the endangered peregrine babies with the prairie falcon babies fast enough that the adults accepted the newcomers.

Please see **FALCON**, Page 2A

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Please see **FALCON**, Page 2A

FALCON: Endangered bird makes comeback

From Page 1A

Carried in a wooden backpack to a cliff on the western side of Mount Diablo, the two peregrine chicks were given a snack of mashed quail by a handler from the San Francisco Zoo, where the birds hatched.

John Aikin, the zoo's avian conservation director, kept the snack light so the hungry chicks' cries for food would induce the foster parents to instinctively help them.

"I know you're hungry, but you've got to wait for the real mom to feed you," Aikin said.

Lee Aulman, an expert climber with the Santa Cruz Predatory Research Group, strapped on the backpack with the birds and lowered himself down the cliff on a rope.

The adult falcons flew around the nest and shrieked angrily, but did not attack Aulman as he made the switch.

He scaled the cliff, urging the crews to depart quickly to minimize stress to the parents and chicks. "We're all grandfathers now," Aulman said.

One person was left behind to stand guard for the next few weeks in case the babies fell out and needed human help.

Down the mountain two hours later, Aulman, Aikin and Beeman rejoiced as they saw through telescopes that the parents were warming the young newcomers — a sign of acceptance.

"I think we've got a go, she's acting like a mother," Beeman said.

Now that the young peregrines are flying, they are expected to

leave the area and wander hundreds of miles for food, Beeman said. Perhaps these falcons or others planted on the mountain in future years will return to breed and nest there, he said.

The project cost over \$3,500 and was financed by the state Parks and Recreation Department and the California Hawking Club. Other assistance was provided by the East Bay Regional Park District, Mt. Diablo Audubon Society, and the UC-Davis Raptor Center.

McAvoy Harbor owners fined

Mt. Diablo Audobon Society members Jerry and Helen Gentile of Martinez prepare for the annual Christmas Count of area birds planned for Dec. 30. One of 1500 such counts going on this month na-

tionwide, the local count will take place in a 15-mile radius of Mt. Diablo and will involve about 100 birders.

Annual Survey Is For The Birds

By HARRIETT BURT

News-Gazette Features Editor

"It's an English sparrow, it's a long-billed curlew. No! It's 25 blackbirds!"

While the 90th annual Audobon Society Christmas Bird Count, taking place in this area on Dec. 30, will not feature such frivolous cries, there will be lots of earnest calls of species and numbers from about 100 people who will be tramping over selected Central County locations from sunrise to sunset that day.

The Mt. Diablo Audobon Society's count is one of 1500 taking place nationwide on weekends from Dec. 17 through Dec. 31.

"We're trying to census the birds, how many species, how many individual birds,"

says Count co-chairman, Dr. Maury Stern of Lafayette.

The Christmas Count began in the early years of the century to counteract the custom among wealthy landed families to hold a Christmas "shoot" for sport or holiday breakfast delicacies, says Audobon Society member Helen Gentile of Martinez.

Now the count serves as a status report on bird species showing decreases and increases over time.

Assigned an area with a radius of 15 miles from Mt. Diablo, the local count shows marked decreases among such open field species as the burrowing owl and the long-billed curlew.

Reasons for the decrease are clear, Stern

says.

"They (the two species) are usually found in open land. A lot of land is being covered over for one and, for two, people are using lots of pesticides."

The decrease of those species is marked by a corresponding increase in other species such as blackbirds and English sparrows.

"They live well with people," explains Stern. "They can make do with little pieces of fluff and garbage (for nests)."

By identifying trends, the Christmas Count enables the Society to alert local officials. "We can say 'look, here's what's happening.' Nobody listens but we say it,"

See CHRISTMAS Page 2



"since Mt. Diablo was 'The Spot' for birding at that time.

"Some years ago Mt. Diablo (Audobon Society) applied with the National Audobon to extend the circle to include Martinez and its shoreline, but the re-

quest was denied." Gentile isn't sure why, but speculates that tradition may be the reason.

For more information about the Christmas Count and how to participate, call Stern at 284-5980.



News-Gazette Photo By Pam Biagi

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C.C. TIMES

1/1/90

100 brave cold to do holiday bird count

By Joan Morris

Staff writer

PLEASANT HILL — Florence Bennett pulls on a crotched hat, buttons up her jacket and briefly considers wearing mittens.

It's 37 degrees out and the sun, just risen, struggles to break through the cloying white haze of fog.

Tossing the mittens back in the trunk, Bennett pauses, then quickly turns her head to peer through the haze at a cluster of leafless, weathered trees.

Amid the early morning sounds of traffic and the waking suburbs, a shrill "chip-chip" is heard.

"That's the Audubon warbler. See it up there in the tree?" Bennett says, pulling out her notebook and writing down the name. "A lot of the time you hear them first, then you see them. You have to listen."

Please see **BIRDS**, Page 2A

BIRDERS got up early this weekend in Contra Costa to join the annual Christmasbird count. One group included Mary Jane Culver of Concord, left; Florence Bennett of Walnut Creek, Roger Fahey of Hayward, Ann Landfear of Pleasant Hill and Betty Fahey of Hayward.

BIRDS: Two ring-neck ducks in the holiday total

From Page

Bennett smiles and heads toward the trail alongside a canal. Four other bird counters join her, their binoculars ready.

Saturday, about 100 bird lovers in Contra Costa County rose before dawn and braved the bone-chilling weather to join the National Audubon Society's 90th Christmas Bird Count.

The Mt. Diablo Audubon chapter tramped the fields and marshes of Central County, hiked up and down the face of Mount Diablo and even sat in boats off the shores of Pittsburg and Concord, each one looking for birds.

Last year, the chapter, covering roughly 177 square miles, spotted 152 different species of bird.

The annual bird count was organized in 1900 by ornithologist Frank Chapman. The count was a protest of the traditional holiday "side hunt," where hunters competed to see who could kill the most birds and animals in one day.

The first bird count involved 27 people in 25 areas across North America. This year, from Dec. 16 through Wednesday, more than 42,000 people will join in 1,600 individual bird counts in all 50 states, every Canadian province, parts of Central and South America, Bermuda, the West Indies, Guam and Saipan.

The count has continued as a way of keeping track of how many birds and species are in the areas, Bennett said. Last year, a group in Santa Barbara counted the most species of birds, finding 218. The fewest birds were counted by a group in Prudhoe Bay, which spotted only 15 birds, all of them common ravens.

In Contra Costa County, the expanding suburbs threaten bird populations. With shrinking open space, dwindling natural vegetation and limited water, it can be tough for the birds.

"Everything is different from what it was 10 years ago," said Bennett as she led her group through the wilds of Pleasant Hill and Martinez. "It's nice to enjoy the little pockets that we do have."

Bennett, retired from Shell Oil Co., didn't get into birding until about 15 years ago. Many people don't, she said, until they are older and their families are more settled.

Mary Jane Culver of Concord also began birding about 15 years ago.

"I resent all those years I missed, all those years I wasted," Culver said.

Her nose and cheeks chilled a bright red and her body shivering in the cold, Culver said there is something special about birding — special enough to get



Times/Kathy Baker

THIS FLICKER and other species were spotted during the National Audubon Society's annual bird count.

her and thousands of others up before dawn and out into the winter.

"It's just the challenge. You keep seeing the same birds, but you're never sure what you will see. It's exciting," Culver said.

Saturday, Bennett's group counted three common mergansers, which are not so common in this area. The fish-eating, diving ducks have a body of snowy white feathers and the male bears a velvety green crested head. The group also spotted a pair of ring-necked ducks, also uncommon for this area.

"I have such vivid memories of the birds I've seen," Culver said. "I can remember the first time, the first place I saw my first ring-necked duck."

Birding, Bennett said, is a good hobby for everyone, even people who don't or can't get outside much. Some people join the annual bird count by posting themselves at windows to watch and count the birds that visit back yard feeders.

"It doesn't cost a lot of money and you can do it anywhere. Farmers riding on their tractors or doctors looking out their office windows can see birds," Bennett said.

The results of the annual Christmas bird count will be published by American Birds magazine in a Yellow Pages-sized book that carries the tallies and the names of those who participated.

C.C. Linn 1-25-90

Scientist tries to boost rare bird population

By Gayle Vassar Melvin

Staff writer

DANVILLE — Kamran Alavi's nesting instinct is winning cheers from San Ramon Valley bird lovers.

That's because the Danville scientist's handmade nests could boost the population of several endangered species.

Danville park commissioners approved Alavi's request at their Jan. 10 meeting to put the wooden nesting boxes at Oak Hill and Osage Station parks. Alavi also won permission from East Bay Regional Park District officials to place the nests at some regional parks, including Las Trampas.

He said he was a little embarrassed by the commissioners' unstinting praise for his project.

"I don't claim to be doing this for the birds," he said. "I have a vested interest because I like to see the world as I enjoy it, and I enjoy the beauty of the birds."

Alavi has been interested in birds since childhood. His grandfather bred exotic birds in Iran. When Alavi emigrated to the United States in 1966, he turned his attention to this country's wildlife.

He works with the North American Bluebird Society, a Maryland-based agency that protects endangered species. Two society members who live in Walnut Creek, Warren Engstrom and Don Yoder, make most of the

nests, Alavi said.

The nests will provide housing for about 10 species of birds, including the mountain bluebird and certain woodpeckers, Alavi said.

Those birds are called hole nesters, because they lay their eggs in existing holes instead of building their own nests. Overzealous gardeners frequently trim the very branches that are soft enough to develop holes, leaving the birds homeless, Alavi said.

The size and placement of the nesting box will determine what kind of bird uses it. For instance, bluebirds will nest in boxes lower than 4 feet, but starlings will not.

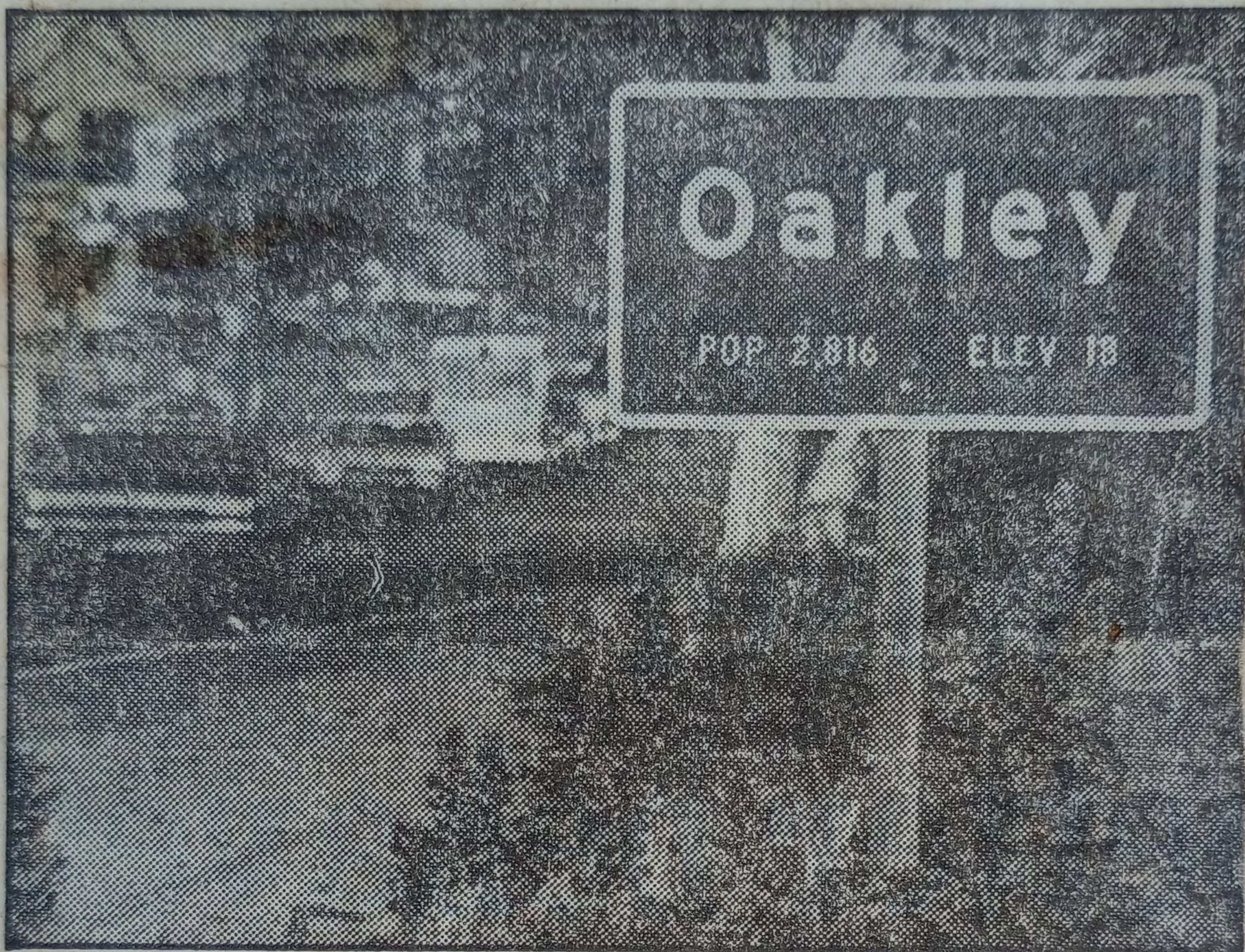
Alavi is hurrying to get 50 nests placed before mating season begins at the end of February. The birds may reject the nests this season if they appear too new, Alavi said. "But you can be sure they will use them next year," he said.

Plans to provide nests for wood ducks are on hold until he locates creekside sites, he said.

Caring for birds is proving to be a family tradition, Alavi said. Just as he once helped his grandfather, his 6-year-old son, Michael, is learning to build the wooden nests.

Persons wanting more information about endangered species or nesting boxes may contact the North American Bluebird Society, P.O. Box 6295, Silver Springs, MD. 20906-0295.

CONTRA COSTA COUNTY



1-27-90 *Tribune file photo*

Environmentalists want to keep Oakley's rural character

Environmentalists file suit vs. Oakley plan

MARTINEZ — Three environmental groups this week filed suit to block the county's new development plan for Oakley in eastern Contra Costa County.

The suit, filed by the Sierra Club, the Mount Diablo Audubon Society and the Greenbelt Alliance, says the county failed to reconcile the Oakley plan, adopted last month, with the existing East County Area General Plan and the county-wide General Plan.

The Oakley plan calls for industrial, commercial and high-density residential development in the fast-growing area where the population of 13,400 is forecast to more than double in the next 20 years.

According to the lawsuit, the county plan calls for preservation of agriculture in the area, which is contradictory to Oakley's plans for new homes and businesses.

Save Marsh Canyon *4-15-90.* *C.C. Jones*

One of the June ballot items on which Contra Costa County voters must express an opinion is the Keller Canyon landfill site.

The Keller site will, we believe, be the least costly for Contra Costa. We believe it to be the least environmentally harmful of the sites still in the running.

The Marsh Canyon Sanitary Landfill will not be on the ballot. A substantial "yes" vote for Keller Canyon should finally settle the entire issue, putting the Marsh Canyon site out of the running.

Marsh Canyon has a substantial number of old oak trees plus a wetland area. It is contradictory to be celebrating Earth Day while some urge destruction of our precious environmental resources. The destruction will surely occur if Marsh Canyon is finally designated as the solid waste site.

Marsh Creek Road, a two-lane, winding country road, is dangerous. Imagine what that road will be like if several hundred heavy trucks carrying solid waste use the route every day.

It is essential that the county finalize the solid-waste disposal matter. That will be done when voters look at the issues, costs, proponents and opponents.

The Mount Diablo Audubon Society has been working for the Keller site and will continue until the issue is settled.

A.B. McNabney, vice president
Mount Diablo Audubon Society
Walnut Creek

C.C. Jones 7-2-90

He's fighting to preserve co



AL McNABNEY, chief conservationist for the Mt. Diablo chapter of the Audubon Society, says the decline of the wetlands threatens the habitat of many birds that live in the county.

Times/Bob Pepping

By Jeanie R. Walker
Staff writer

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C.C. Jones 7-2-90

g to preserve county's wetlands



Times/Bob Pepping

lo chapter of the Audubon Society, says the
birds that live in the county.

By Jeanie R. Wakeland

Staff writer

MARTINEZ — During a stroll across the Shell marsh boardwalk last week, Audubon Society member Al McNabney couldn't identify the species of duck that landed behind him.

He can tell you that 75 species of birds live in the marsh and why that unidentified duck needs the wetland wedged between the lines of railroad tankcars and Interstate 680 in Martinez.

As the Mt. Diablo chapter's conservation expert, McNabney spends more time in public meetings fighting to preserve the county's dwindling wetlands than taking bird walks.

"People don't know how close we are to deep trouble," said McNabney, looking over the marsh sparkling in early spring sunlight. "We have just five years to turn things around. Nature is like a big jigsaw puzzle. We've been taking pieces. If we continue to take pieces out, we'll lose the picture."

McNabney attends two or three public meetings a week, representing the 1,600 members of the Mt. Diablo chapter of the National Audubon Society at committee meetings on county water policies and the county general plan. The society's No. 1 objective is to preserve wetlands, he said. It's not always a popular view.

"I went to a meeting in Oakley over an Audubon lawsuit last week. There were at least 50 people who didn't agree with us," he said wryly.

McNabney speaks softly, but doles out praise and criticism plainly. He had kind words for Mountain View Sanitary District, which maintains Shell marsh.

The marsh was inundated by a Shell Oil tank spill in April 1988, but this spring the waters look clean again, ducks are nesting and yellow flowers bloom along the

banks. Still, McNabney has a gut feeling the number of birds and ducks is fewer than before.

"If you check in some places, you'll still find some oil underground," he said. "A lot of birds were rescued. But once they're released, we don't know how they fare, if they lived for a month or a year."

McNabney praised Shell Oil.

"They were a little slow getting here (when the spill occurred), but once they did get here, they made a terrific effort. Money was no object; they brought in the best experts they could find. Not like Exxon."

He's equally outspoken about his opposition to the county supervisors' choice of Marsh Canyon as the future dump site.

"It's a terrible decision, couldn't be worse," he said. "We favored the Bay Point site. It's not even in the running. But I'm not satisfied before it's over that (Marsh Creek) will make it yet."

McNabney, a retired hospital administrator and one-time Consumer Products Safety Agency inspector, still works part time arbitrating hospital disputes.

He and his wife, Helen, moved to Walnut Creek seven years ago after five years in Australia. His birds of choice are an African gray parrot and a cockatoo. McNabney had sought a hospital job in Australia so he could study that country's parrots.

After moving to Contra Costa, he was picked to serve as Audubon's conservation expert because "I happen to know the issues and know what we're trying to achieve."

Looking around the marsh, he sees a precious resource he believes must be preserved. "To some people this looks like a big puddle, but this is where all (bird life) begins."

C.C. James 5-20-90



GALEN ROWELL, a National Geographic photographer, hangs down the side of a cliff on Mount Diablo on Thursday to photograph a nest of peregrine falcons.

Times/Dan Rosenstrauch



Times/Dan Rosenstrauch

TWO BABY peregrine falcons were relocated this week to a nest atop Mount Diablo.

The fight to save East Bay wildlife

Restoring species a growing concern

By Denis Cuff
Staff writer

MOUNT DIABLO — Lee Aulman hung by a rope from a cliff to deliver his baby birds, the latest hope for saving a species humans nearly wiped out.

Aulman unloaded two peregrine falcons into a small cave nest. The helpless falcon fluffballs — babies of the fastest bird in the skies — peeped loudly waiting for another, more common type of falcon to fly back to her nest and adopt them as her own.

The drama on Mount Diablo last week culminated efforts in the growing movement to restore rare and endangered species.

"Mount Diablo without the peregrine falcon would be a sterile environment," said Seth Adams, executive director of Save Mount Diablo, the group spearheading the peregrine reintroduction. "We have so few chances to turn the clock back

INSIDE

■ As developers argue for housing and jobs, county groups and agencies are joining to save habitat for endangered species. **11A**

■ New Forest Service rules to preserve pine woods for the endangered red-cockaded woodpeckers may put timber jobs at risk. **4B**

that when you're offered one, you have no choice but to take it."

Restoration is difficult and risky. Advocates must deal with steep costs, predators, scientific guesswork and urban development, biologists say.

Some developers complain anti-growth forces use endangered species to stop needed housing and businesses.

Please see **WILDLIFE**, Page 10A

East County leaders unanimously oppose open-space initiative

By Lisa Reynolds
Staff writer

BRENTWOOD — East County leaders said they will fight an open-space initiative that could prevent development in much of the unincorporated areas.

The East County Coalition voted unanimously Wednesday night to oppose environmentalists' efforts to get the initiative on the November ballot.

The measure's backers must collect 25,000 signatures by June 29 to qualify the measure for the ballot.

The Sierra Club, Mt. Diablo Audubon Society and Greenbelt Alliance proposed the initiative to stop growth from sprawling into open space and farm land.

Opponents said it would deprive landowners of property rights and would create a housing shortage.

Coalition leaders vowed to start a publicity and education campaign to fight the initiative drive. They intend to fight the measure, too, if it makes the ballot.

"A lot of people don't understand it," said Enrico Cinquini, an Oakley member of the coalition. He said he recently watched environmentalists ask people to sign the petition at a shopping center.

"I was amazed," he said. "They said three words and (people) said, 'Where do we sign?' There should be another booth alongside it where

we can say, 'Look at what you've done.'"

Coalition member Herbert Hern of Discovery Bay said its fight should focus on the initiative instead of other growth-control measures being devised by the county Board of Supervisors.

The supervisors have agreed to limit urban development to 35 percent of the county's 750 square miles for 15 years. They have yet to decide exactly where development will be prohibited and what limits to set on subdividing farm land.

That growth-control measure has been called an urban limit line.

"We need to get the Board of Supervisors to stall their decision until we know if the initiative goes," Hern said. "If it doesn't, we'll fight the urban limit line. If it qualifies, we may have to accept some urban limit lines."

Most coalition members represent unincorporated communities that could stop growing if the initiative is passed. Brentwood and Antioch are the only cities represented on the seven-member coalition.

Coalition members Oakley and Discovery Bay are scrambling to incorporate, partly to protect themselves from the initiative's land-use restrictions. Knightsen, Bethel Island and Byron also are represented on the group.

Greenbelt initiative ruled legal

Building industry fails in move to keep measure off ballot

By Michael Hytha
Staff writer

C. C. James
6-22-90

MARTINEZ — A building-industry effort to stop a growth-control greenbelt initiative from appearing on the November ballot was rejected in court Thursday.

Contra Costa County Superior Court Judge Ellen James dismissed arguments by the Building Industry Association of Northern California that the initiative is misleading and would violate state planning laws.

"That's not really unexpected. We felt we were right all along," said Mark Evanoff of the Greenbelt Alliance, one of three environmental groups backing the initiative.

The initiative is aimed at blocking the county's proposed general plan, which would open up the East County and Tassajara Valley to development. The measure would ban growth in unincorporated areas not designated for development under the existing general plan.

James dismissed builders' claims that a map circulat-

ed with petitions is misleading because it is not an exact copy of county maps.

"The language of the initiative makes it clear that the map may be adjusted and that the map is illustrative only, and does not contain the legally operative designations as to every piece of land in the county outside city limits," James wrote in her one-page opinion.

She also said the initiative would not violate state laws requiring a general plan, the blueprint for an area's development, to be free of contradictions.

The building association claimed the initiative's open-space requirements conflict with general plan provisions for roads and other services. James said the initiative properly says it would take precedence over existing plan requirements, and leaves it up to the county Board of Supervisors to make necessary adjustments.

"We're disappointed obviously," said Guy Bjerke, executive director of the 1,500-member building association.

He said the association has not decided whether to appeal the ruling, or how to campaign against it if back-

ers collect enough signatures to place it on the ballot.

BIA attorney Palmer Madden said voters who sign the petitions are being deceived because the initiative does not spell out the additional roads and development that will be required within city limits to accommodate population growth.

"They just say they're going to create all this open space, which sounds great until you run that permutation through the general plan to find out all the consequences," Madden said.

Evanoff countered: "It's really unreasonable for the citizens to go through and make every adjustment to the general plan. It's up to the initiative to set policy for the Board of Supervisors."

Volunteers for the Greenbelt Alliance, Sierra Club and Mt. Diablo chapter of the Audubon Society are in a last-minute push to collect 25,000 signatures by next Friday to qualify the initiative for the ballot.

"It's going to be real tight. But we've got a good chance," Evanoff said.

New growth-control measure proposed

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New growth-control measure proposed

By Michael Hytha
Staff writer

C.C. Jones
7-24-90

MARTINEZ — A county-backed development control measure could appear alongside a more restrictive citizens' initiative on the November ballot under a proposal unveiled Monday.

The county's proposal for urban limit lines would set boundaries on growth and guarantee that 65 percent of the county's 700 square miles remain open space.

The Board of Supervisors' two-member Internal Operations Committee — Sunne McPeak of Concord and Tom Powers of Richmond — decided Monday to send plans for the ballot measure to the full board today. The committee set an Aug. 7 date for official board action to put the measure on the ballot.

Backers of the Greenbelt Initiative, which has qualified for the November election, said they see the board's proposal as competition. The greenbelt measure

would halt virtually all growth in unincorporated county areas. It is backed by the Sierra Club, Greenbelt Alliance and Mt. Diablo Chapter of the Audubon Society.

"If the initiative has to compete head-to-head with the county's urban-limit-line proposal, then we'll have to work that much harder," said Al McNabney, vice president of the Audubon Society's conservation committee.

The board's proposal might also affect a second citizens' initiative that has qualified for the November ballot. That measure, backed by the Marsh Creek Association, is aimed at blocking the Marsh Canyon dump proposed southwest of Brentwood.

"I think it's an attempt by the board to confuse the voters," said Wil Cossel, a leader in the drive against the Marsh Canyon dump site.

County workers are studying whether a dump should be allowed in rural areas under the supervisors' committee proposal for urban limit lines.

The supervisors' plan also was criticized by some property owners, who said it would decrease their property values.

Shirlee Bettencourt Peters of Walnut Creek said her parents, 83 and 87, would be unable to sell their 45-acre farm south of Brentwood. If the plan passes, the property would be worth less and her parents would lose the bank credit line allowing them to keep it, she declared. That might force the property into foreclosure, Peters said.

"There's a lot of little people out there," Peters said.

Some developers objected to a proposal to require strict open-space requirements within the urban limit lines.

About 45,000 acres of undeveloped land is within the county's proposed urban limits. Of that, 24,000 acres might be developed and still meet the countywide goal for open space.



Mountain again home to peregrine falcon chicks

By Elena Dunivan
Staff writer

C.C. Jones
7-16-90

MOUNT DIABLO — The four baby peregrine falcons placed on Mount Diablo in May appear to be adjusting to their new surroundings, say those who spotted them earlier this month.

When last sighted July 2, the young falcons were flying and taking care of themselves, said Jim Lomax, president of the Mt. Diablo Audubon Society.

Local conservation groups are trying to return peregrine falcons to the mountain, where they once lived.

The species suffered a nationwide population crash in the 1950s because of DDT poisoning. The chemical, banned in the United States in 1970, killed some peregrines and caused thinner shells on their fragile eggs.

This is the second year of the project to reintroduce the falcons to Mount Diablo, said Diane Granados, operations manager for the Alexander Lindsay Museum in Walnut Creek.

"If this works," Lomax said, "then they'll bring other mates back with them to breed next year."

People involved in the project were encouraged when the two peregrines raised last year by adoptive prairie falcon parents were spotted on the mountain at about the same time as the four new chicks were placed, Lomax said.

They want to place three pairs of peregrine chicks next year, Lomax said. This year's project cost more than \$10,000, Granados said.

Four hatchery-raised peregrine chicks, taken from a nest on the Bay Bridge, were placed on Mount Diablo by a mountain climber on May 9. They were put in two nests belonging to the more common prairie falcon.

The prairie falcon is similar to the peregrine, but the prairie falcon eats from the ground, is lighter in color and less aggressive than the peregrine. The peregrine is gray and takes its food from the air, Lomax said.

In one nest, four prairie chicks were replaced by two peregrine chicks. In another nest, two peregrine chicks replaced the original prairie chick occupants.

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ONE OF THE PEREGRINE FALCONS, which was moved from a nest on the Bay Bridge in May, flies in its new surroundings at Mt. Diablo.

Peregrine falcon chicks now at home in Mt. Diablo nests

By Elena Dunivan
Staff writer

Outdoor lovers venturing to the summit of Mt. Diablo may spot the wings of young peregrine falcons gracefully soaring overhead.

The four babies, placed on the mountain in May, appear to be adjusting to their new surroundings, according to those who spotted them earlier this month.

When last sighted July 2, the young falcons were flying and taking care of themselves, said Jim Lomax, president of the Mt. Diablo Audubon Society.

Thanks to the cooperative effort of many local conservationist groups, wildlife aficionados may be noticing the return of the peregrines, which at one time bred freely on the mountain.

The species suffered a nationwide population decline in the 1950s from DDT poisoning. Dichloro diphenyl trichloroethane is a pesticide once used in the

United States but banned in 1970 because it was found to harm wildlife.

The poisoning, which thins the shell of the fragile peregrine egg, also killed other peregrines.

On May 9, four hatchery-raised peregrine chicks taken from a site on the Bay Bridge were placed by a mountain climber in nests belonging to the more common prairie falcon.

This is the second year of the project to reintroduce the falcons to Mt. Diablo, said Diane Granados, operations manager for the Alexander Lindsay Museum.

"If this works," Lomax said, "then they'll bring other mates back with them to breed next year."

The prairie falcon is similar to the peregrine in that they have the same nature. However, the prairie eats from the ground, is lighter in coloring and less

Please see **FALCON**, Page 2A

THE BIRD IS ON THE WING

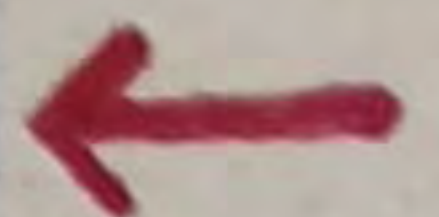
7-16-90

C.C. TIMES



Photo/James Lomax

ONE OF THE PEREGRINE FALCONS, which was moved from a nest on the Bay Bridge in May, flies in its new surroundings at Mt. Diablo.



Falcon

FROM PAGE 1A

aggressive than the peregrine, which is gray and takes its food from the air, Lomax said.

People from the Audubon Society, Save Mount Diablo, Alexander Lindsay Museum and Lafayette biologist Gary Beeman replaced four prairie chicks with two of the peregrine chicks at one site, and did the same with the other two chicks at another site on the mountain.

"The family (of prairie falcons) evidently can't count," said Beeman at the time they were placed. "Even though we took out four prairie falcon chicks, the family readily accepted the peregrines we placed."

The chicks, who aren't compatible with the prairie chicks, were monitored constantly until they reached fledgling stage last month, where they could fend for themselves, Lomax said. Differences in how they get food posed no problem, as the peregrine's instinct of capturing prey in the air took over. The other four prairie falcon chicks were placed in another falcon home.

The birds' greatest challenge comes as the migra-

tion period approaches. The falcons have a 70 percent death rate, and most of them die during the first year.

Although the peregrines can live in the climate of Mt. Diablo in winter, they instinctively migrate south, Lomax said.

It's the ones migrating to Mexico that face the greatest danger, he said. Though DDT was banned in the U.S., it has yet to be banned in Mexico, Lomax said.

As a result, the birds who return from across the border bring the poison with them, ingested through their food. The falcons in this country lack sufficient amounts of the poison to cause death, but enough to weaken the shells of their offspring, Lomax said.

But the groups involved in the ecological project found encouragement when the two peregrines raised by adoptive prairie falcon parents were spotted on the mountain at about the same time as the four new chicks were placed, Lomax said.

The groups hope to combine forces again next year and want to place three pair of the peregrine chicks, Lomax said, if they have the necessary funding. This year's project cost more than \$10,000, Granados said.

AFTER 35 YEARS, the endangered peregrines have returned to build a nest on Mount Diablo.

Peregrines return to Mount Diablo

By Denis Cuff
Staff writer

MOUNT DIABLO — Endangered peregrine falcons have returned to try to nest on the cliffs here for the first time in 35 years, providing a breakthrough in efforts to restore the fierce hunter to its ancient mountain habitat.

The peregrine, known as the fastest bird in the skies, disappeared from Mount Diablo in 1956 as it plummeted toward worldwide extinction because of pesticide poisoning.

Intense human intervention has given the falcon a comeback try in many areas. Two of six peregrines hatched in captivity and placed on Mount Diablo in nests of other wild birds have

survived, returned and are trying to start a family, say local environmentalists.

"I was elated. It was really a shock to find the birds coming back so soon," says James Lomax of Concord, president of Audubon Society's Mt. Diablo chapter, one of seven organizations working to restore the peregrine.

"This is really an encouraging start. We can't say we have a full measure of success until the falcons are breeding on the mountain," he said.

The year-old male and 2-year-old female probably aren't mature enough to reproduce this year, although the pair have been seen flying in the patterns of a courtship dance, Lomax

Please see **FALCONS**, Page 7A

S
knock other birds out of the sky for food.

Odds now are in favor of the two peregrines returning to nest next year, even if they can't produce offspring this year, he adds.

"We can't be overoptimistic. If either one of those two birds gets shot or runs into a power line, we could lose the whole thing," Beeman says. "We need to increase the numbers of falcons so we increase the chances for success."

Furthermore, pesticide in the food chain continues to make many peregrine eggs so brittle they never hatch, biologists say.

The peregrine project may be scaled back this year from four to two new babies on the mountain because of a lack of private donations.

Another \$5,000 must be raised promptly to be able to take care of a second pair of birds, and \$10,000 is needed to buy a third pair, says Seth Adams, Save Mt. Diablo program manager and coordinator of the falcon project.

The baby peregrines are planted in the nests of prairie falcons, which adopt them as their own and raise them.

Information about donating labor or money to the Mount Diablo peregrine project can be obtained by calling Diane Granados at the Lindsay Museum in Walnut Creek at 935-1983, or Save Mount Diablo at 229-4275.

Contra
Casta Jones
4-30-91

PREDATORY BIRD RESEARCH GROUP members at the Mount Diablo aerie where two peregrine chicks were placed.

Peregrine chicks get new home

Foster falcons expected to raise birds

By Andy Jokelson
Staff writer

WALNUT CREEK — Two white peregrine falcon chicks, born in captivity at the San Francisco Zoo, were transplanted Sunday to an aerie near the top of a sandstone rock on the north side of Mount Diablo.

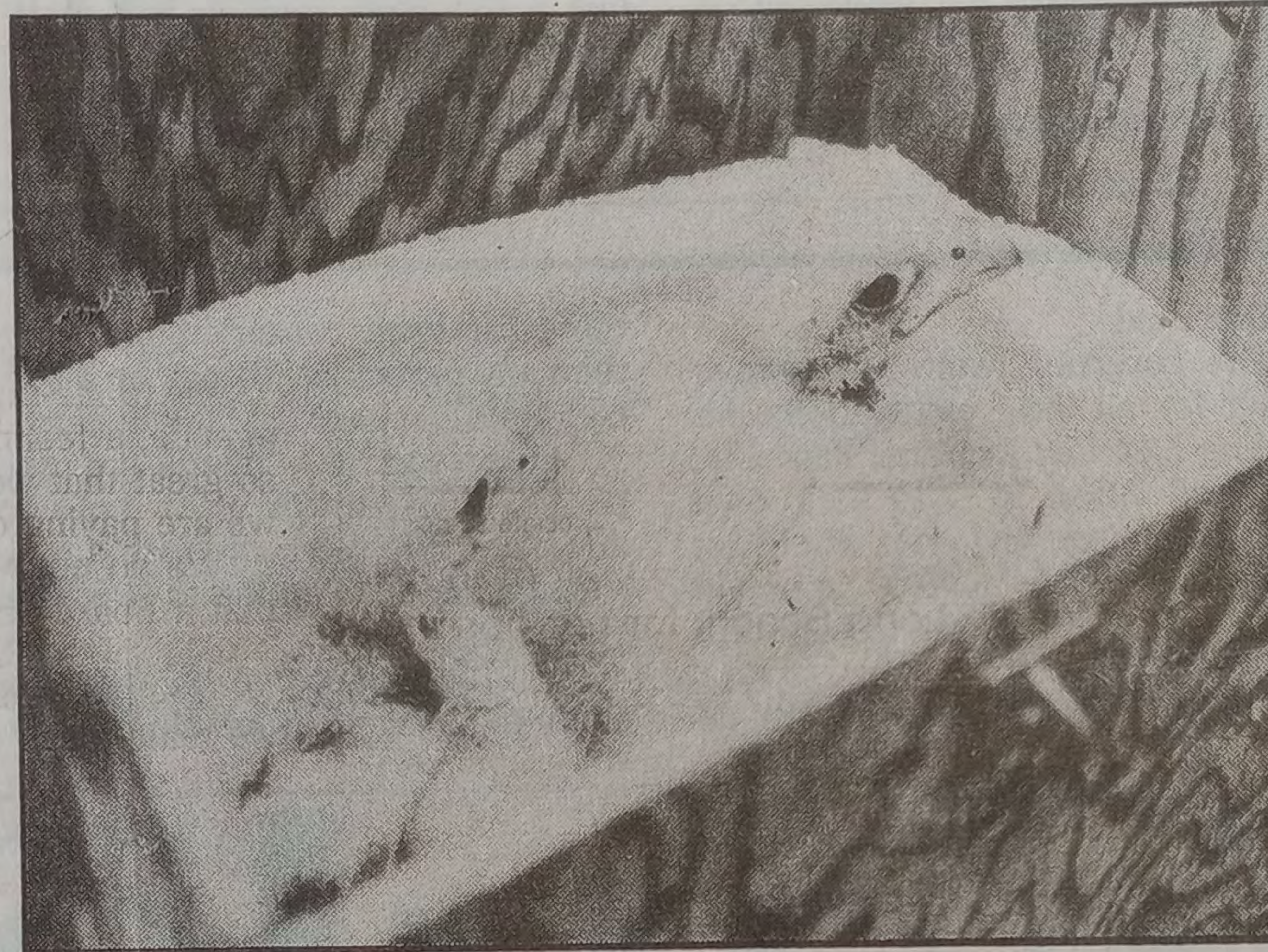
Environmentalists expect the chicks to be fed and raised by adult prairie falcons, as were others brought to the mountain in 1989 and 1990 in an effort to restore the endangered, fast-flying peregrines to their habitat.

The chicks, banded on their legs, are slightly more than two weeks old. They were placed in the aerie by Brian Latta of the Predatory Bird Research Group based at UC-Santa Cruz.

He climbed down about 15 feet to the aerie from the top of the rock by rope and found five ready-to-hatch prairie falcon eggs there, but no prairie falcon chicks. He put the eggs in a ventilated box and climbed back up with them.

Then he went back down with the peregrine chicks in another box and quickly put them on the sandy bottom of the aerie, a large hole in the side of the rock, before departing.

"So far, very good," said wildlife biologist Gary Beeman, who waited on the top of the rock. He expected an adult female prairie falcon that nests in the aerie to



TWO PEREGRINE FALCON chicks before they were placed Sunday in a prairie falcon aerie on Mount Diablo.

quickly accept and feed the peregrines and raise them as her own.

"There shouldn't be any hang-ups," said Beeman, a prime mover in the peregrine restoration effort.

"There's no reasoning process here, and she (the female prairie falcon) won't be able to control herself," said James Lomax, president of the Mount Diablo Audubon Society, who watched the placement of the peregrines in the aerie from a nearby vantage point.

Just after 3 p.m., an adult prairie falcon, believed to be a female, flew out of the aerie immediately after Latta's rappelling rope was thrown down onto the side of the rock in preparation for his first climb down.

The prairie falcon promptly screeched what Lomax described as alarm calls and continued them

periodically while circling, as did another adult, believed to be its mate.

But a half hour later, after the pony-tailed, hard-hatted Latta left the aerie for the last time, an adult prairie falcon believed to be the same female, landed on its ledge, remained there for a few minutes, then went inside.

In 1989, a pair of peregrine chicks was placed in the same Mount Diablo aerie, replacing prairie falcon chicks that were removed. Last year, another pair was placed there and a pair was also put in an aerie on the south side of the mountain.

Recently, two of those six returned to the mountain: a year-old male that had been brought there in 1990 and a two-year-old female from the pair placed there in 1989.

There's believed to be over 100 pairs (of peregrines) in the state.

— Brian Latta,
Predatory Bird Research Group

They have mated and are spending their time on the south side of the mountain, but are believed to be too young to reproduce this year, environmentalists say.

"There's believed to be over 100 pairs (of peregrines) in the state," said Latta, "and to date, we've released over 600" in California, Nevada and Oregon in recent years.

They have been placed on the Big Sur coast, on Morro Rock, in Yosemite National Park and further south in California, including aeries on ledges of skyscrapers in Los Angeles and Long Beach, he said. Some have even been placed on hotel-casino towers in Las Vegas.

The pesticide DDT, now banned, has been blamed for jeopardizing the peregrine, a hunter that can fly at speeds approaching 200 miles per hour. Beeman said he last saw peregrines on Mount Diablo in 1956 until the recent restoration.

As for the reddish-brown prairie falcon eggs collected by Latta on Sunday, he promptly drove with them to Santa Cruz to incubate them. Beeman said the chicks that hatch from them will be placed on or as near Mount Diablo as possible.

cc. Lomax 5-6-91



Times/Susan Pollard

CECIL AND MIKE WILLIAMS, owners of Wild Birds Unlimited in Pleasant Hill, with hummingbird feeders.

Business may be for the birds but owners confident it'll fly

By Joyce Routson
Staff writer

The sign says "Wild Birds Unlimited," but don't expect to find any birds — wild or otherwise — in Mike and Cecil Williams' store.

There are bird feeders, birdseed and bird books, but no flying feathered friends. That's because the store specializes in accessories for birds — the outdoor kind.

While some may think that quitting a secure job to take a flyer in a bird store that doesn't sell birds is a little birdbrained, Mike Williams saw potential.

It all started when Williams, a member of the Mt. Diablo Audubon Society, couldn't find a birdhouse he liked. He thought there might be a niche for this kind of

business, and after taking a closer look, opted out of his career as a stock broker for retailing.

"Forty-six percent of the population is involved with bird watching to some extent," he said, making it one of the fastest-growing hobbies in America.

According to a 1985 government estimate, there are 60 million Americans involved in feeding birds. The industry supplying seed, houses and other accessories is approaching \$2 billion in sales.

Bird-watching has so captured the nation's fancy that Wild Birds Unlimited, based in Indianapolis, has grown from 30 franchises two years ago to 79 today. Company revenues have tripled in that time

to "well over \$10 million," according to founder and President Jim Carpenter.

Carpenter, a 38-year-old plant physiologist, started the company with one store in 1981. In 1983 he started selling franchises, which have been snapped up by dentists, lawyers and others anxious to turn bird-watching into a retail career.

Carpenter said the fact the stores address an ongoing hobby makes them successful.

"It's not real expensive and gives pleasure every day," he said. "They can bring a little bit of nature in their lives and once they do that, their yard seems empty if they don't. And birdseed is a product they do run out of."

Peregrine falcons on Mt. Diablo

C.C.
James

10-21-91

Breeding awaited to complete return

By Denis Cuff
Staff writer

MOUNT DIABLO — Swift aerial dives by peregrine falcons inspired bird watchers on this mountain until the 1950s, when the winged hunters disappeared because of pesticide contamination.

But the endangered peregrine falcon may yet soar above Mount Diablo and breed on the rocky cliffs again.

A program to put baby falcons in the wild has fared well enough in three years that sponsors say further introductions may be unnecessary for wild peregrines to breed on Mount Diablo, as they have done elsewhere in California.

"I would say the program has been a success so far," said Gary Beeman of Lafayette, a biologist and one of many local volunteers working with government agencies to return peregrines to Mount Diablo. "To be 100 percent successful, you have to actually produce young. That hasn't happened yet, but I think we have a good start on it."

Peregrines have captured the human imagination for centuries because of their speedy, agile hunting dives in which they knock out smaller birds and catch them in midair.



human imagination for centuries because of their speedy, agile hunting dives in which they knock out smaller birds and catch them in midair.

Ten baby peregrines have been placed in Mount Diablo nests since 1989 for adoption by adult prairie falcons, a more common falcon species that will accept the babies as their own.

Eight of the 10 baby peregrines survived, learned to fly and hunt, and then flew off. This raises hope that some of them will return at maturity — age 3 — to breed on mountain cliffs.

The two babies that died this spring may have fallen victim to owls seen hunting in the area, Beeman said. But eight of 10 is a much higher survival rate than the average for introducing baby peregrines to the wild, he added.

Courtship flights observed

Project organizers were further encouraged this summer when two of the Mount Diablo-reared birds returned as adolescents and made courtship flights. Although the birds were too young to mate, project organizers believe the two are good candidates to return and try again.

"We may be at the break-even point, now that we have released peregrines on Mount Diablo," said Seth Adams, program director for Save Mount Diablo, an environmental group that spearheaded the falcon project.

Peregrine project organizers are considering not planting more babies on the mountain for several years to see if breeding will occur.

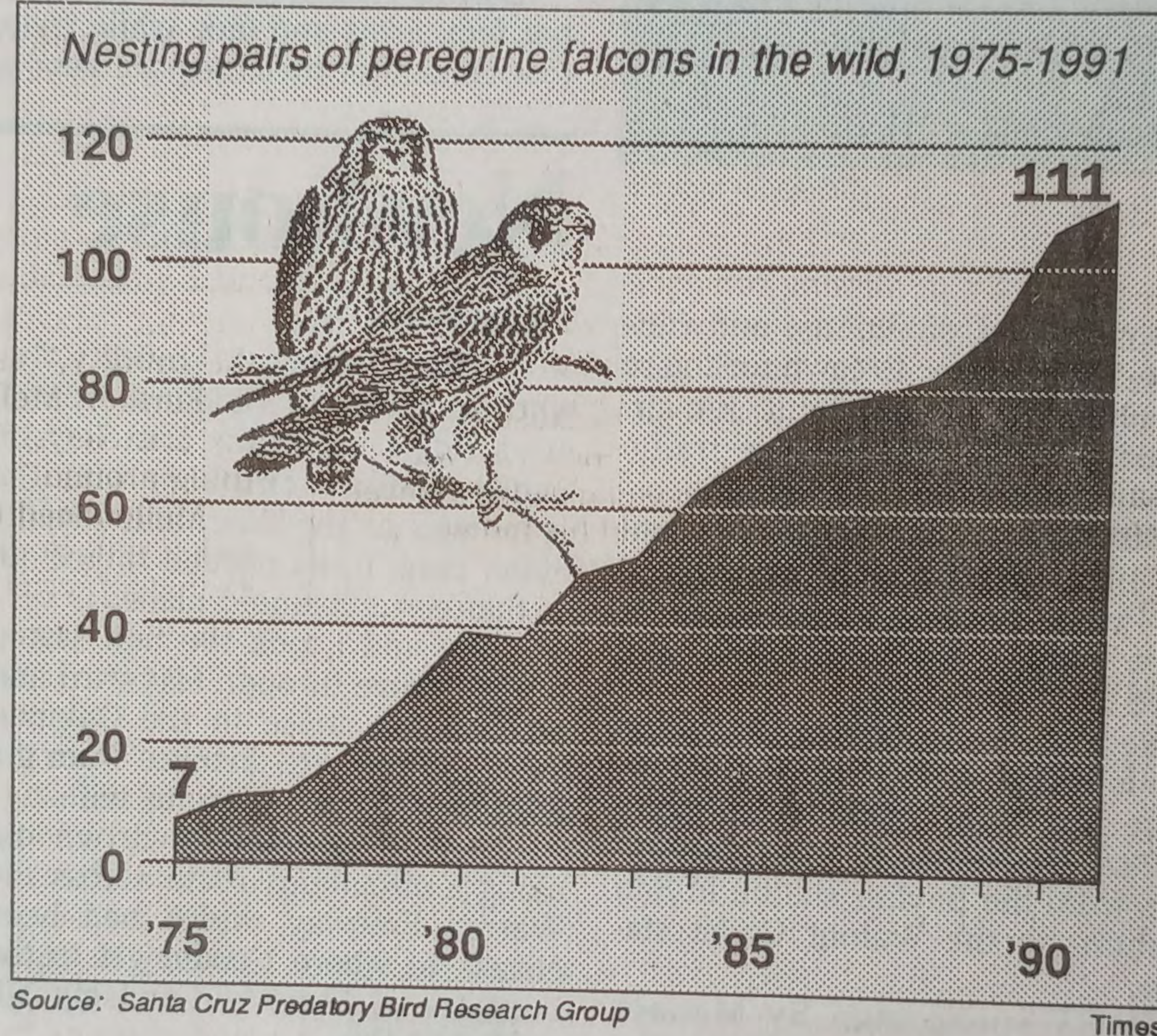
Project organizers also are en-



Times/Dan Rosenstrauch

USING A FALCON PUPPET FACE, Lee Aulman, of the Santa Cruz Predator Group Research Center, feeds baby peregrines before placing them in a nest in Mt. Diablo State Park last week.

PEREGRINE FALCON POPULATION



couraged by peregrine placements elsewhere in the East Bay last spring.

Two baby peregrines were placed in Morgan Territory Regional Preserve adjacent to Mount Diablo, and another two were placed in Sunol Regional Park, ac-

cording to a report by the Santa Cruz Predatory Bird Research Group, which supplies expert rock climbers to put the birds in nests. All four of those birds survived, according to the report.

The more peregrines in the Bay Area, the better the odds that a

pair will be attracted to Mount Diablo to nest, said Jim Lomax, president of the Audubon Society's Mount Diablo chapter.

Lomax, however, said peregrines are not out of trouble even though the number of nesting pairs in the California wilds has increased from two to 111 since 1970.

The pesticide DDT, which caused peregrine eggshells to thin and crack, was restricted in the United States in 1972. But DDT is still widely used in Latin American countries that are home to migratory birds that fly north and are hunted by peregrines in California, Lomax said. Development also has reduced peregrine habitat for nesting and hunting, he added.

"I don't want to give the impression that peregrines are out of danger," Lomax said. "The thinking is that maybe we have helped them to the point where they have a chance, and now the time and money should be spent to help other species," he said.

It costs about \$5,000 to buy a hatchery-raised peregrine falcon, and it takes long hours of volunteer labor to observe prairie falcon nests to determine the right time to introduce baby peregrines.



UP FRONT

C.C. Jones
12-15-91

Birds catch watchers' eyes during count

By Ariel Ambruster
Staff writer

About 100 dedicated bird-watchers fanned out Saturday across Contra Costa County, staking out spots in parks, reservoirs, cemeteries, golf courses and wetlands to wield their trusty binoculars and notebooks.

The occasion was the National Audubon Society's Christmas bird count, a tradition since 1900.

Members of the Mt. Diablo Audubon Society joined others across the United States, Canada, and parts of Central and South America to count birds. The coast-to-coast census is used to gather data, draw attention to environmental issues and have fun.

The Contra Costa group tallied 160 species Saturday, an all-time high, said Jimm Edgar, Christmas count compiler.

Although bird-watchers saw a great variety of birds, they didn't see as many birds in total as they've seen in the past.

That's a continuing trend, Edgar said.

"What is evident in scores and scores of species is a dramatic drop in numbers, 70 to 80 percent what they were six to eight years ago," he said. "We're losing numbers dramatically."

For example, one woman took a list from her count 10 years ago. She'd gone to the Concord Naval



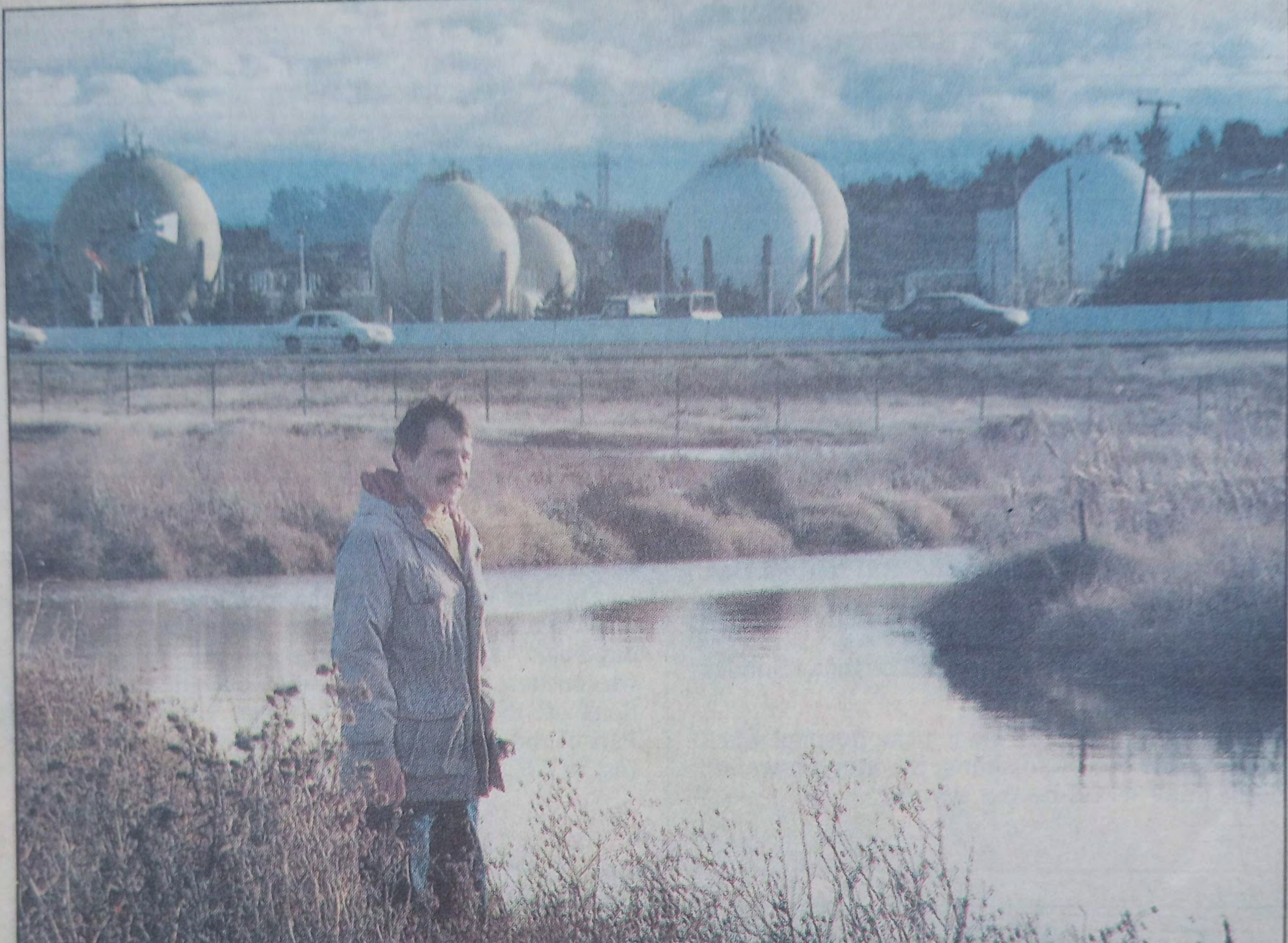
Times/Eric Rahkonen

ALERT FOR THE SIGHT of feathers or the sound of a chirp, are left to right, Jean Richmond of Alamo, Jimm Edgar of Oakland, Britta Cascio of Rossmoor and Helen Deman of Concord, who spent Saturday in the Rossmoor area counting birds as part of the National Audubon Society's annual Christmas bird count.

Weapons Station and counted 670 canvasback ducks. Saturday? Zero.

The National Audubon Society blames the decrease in birds on development, which eats up wetlands, forests, grasslands, and other bird habitat; pollution from pesticides and oil spills; and the logging or burning of forests in the Pacific Northwest and the tropics.

Birds seen Saturday in Contra Costa included 12 endangered black rails; a secretive, mouse-sized bird found only in certain types of marshes; a rare chip-ping sparrow at the Contra Costa Country Club golf course; and, for the first time, on Mount Diablo, a peregrine falcon, likely grown from the hatchlings re-introduced to the mountain more than a year ago by Save Mount Diablo and other groups.



Times/Karl Mondon

BIOLOGIST DICK BOGAERT stands in front of Shell Marsh, which could be further restored and enlarged using compensation money from the 1988 Shell refinery oil spill.

Oil spill funds to flow to wetlands

By Denis Cuff
Staff writer

MARTINEZ — Breaking new ground in environmental restoration, an interagency panel plans to buy or improve 3,300 acres of wetlands with \$12 million in compensation from a big Shell Oil Co. spill in 1988.

The six-member committee created to spend the money has picked 10 projects to enhance wetlands in and near the Carquinez Strait, including a Martinez marsh that bore the brunt of the 400,000-gallon spill, said William Travis, the panel chairman, on Tuesday.

Shell and state and federal agencies set up the trust fund in an innovative agreement to ensure Shell's money went to the environment rather than expensive lawsuits.

"Instead of trying to collect a lot of fines and put

money into litigation, we decided we would try to settle as quickly as possible to put it into restoring the environment," said Travis, deputy director of the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission. "We wanted to make a mark on the natural environment as fast as possible."

He said it's one of the largest oil spill compensation funds set up in the nation, and might pave the way for more like it.

The money will be used to buy marsh land in Contra Costa, Solano and Sonoma counties so they're protected from development.

The panel also plans to spend money to alter tidal flows, drainage and plant life to improve marsh habitat for fish and wildlife, such as the endangered salt marsh harvest mouse and an endangered herb that lives only in the San Francisco Bay-Delta estuary.

Please see **MARSH**, back page

Marsh

FROM PAGE 1A

In keeping with its goal to help the environment closest to the spill, the committee proposes buying approximately 60 acres in the marsh where the oil flowed before entering the Carquinez Strait.

Called the Shell Marsh because the oil company once owned it, this area bisected by Peyton Slough is east of Interstate 680 near Waterfront Road, where thousands of Benicia bridge commuters can see the birds that visit there.

The Mountain View Sanitary District owns and puts treated effluent on more than 60 acres of the marsh, but also wants public ownership of an adjacent 60 acres where an industrial park plan failed to win approval.

"What goes on other areas affects our property," said Dick Bogaert, a sanitary district biologist.

Once the land is acquired through negotiations, a second project calls for introducing tidal flows to the area to grow more brackish marsh plants to support the endangered mouse, Bogaert said.

In a report, the committee said its other eight projects include:

- Restoring 36 acres of the Suisun Sand wetlands in West Pittsburg that the East Bay Regional Park District plans to buy from the Suisun Bay Sand Corporation.

- Preparing a restoration plan for the endangered herb, called Ma-

son's lilaeopsis, that lives in oil-damaged areas in the Point Edith marshes east of Martinez.

- Restoring the first 350 acres of wetlands in the planned Cullinan Ranch federal preserve on the north shore of San Pablo Bay west of Vallejo.

- Restoring tidal flow in the Tolay Creek wetlands on San Pablo Bay at Lower Tubbs Island in Sonoma County.

- Building water control structures to restore tidal flows at Camp Three Island in Sonoma County.

- Buying 500 acres of farm land along Sonoma Creek near Camp Three Island in Sonoma County to flood it for wetlands.

- Buying 252 acres of grazing land east of Suisun City to restore it to a freshwater marsh.

- Developing freshwater wetlands and nesting areas on 284 acres along the eastern edge of the Suisun Marsh that property owner Louis Garibaldi has offered to donate to the state.

Travis said even though the committee tried to plan purchases near Martinez, it recommended sites up to 19 miles from the spill site because it could stretch dollars further by buying less expensive land.

Travis said the committee rejected a proposal to buy the 245-acre Praxis Development Group property east of Martinez, because the owner wanted \$9.5 million for it. "We would have used up nearly all our money and without creating any new wetlands," Travis said.

Spill fund will help convert marsh into nature preserve

By Denis Cuff
Staff writer

6-30-92
C.C. TIMES

MARTINEZ — A marsh blackened by a huge oil tank spill in 1988 has been purchased as a nature preserve for \$3 million, providing the first dividend from money Shell Oil paid as compensation for its accident.

An interagency panel announced Monday that it acquired 60 acres of wetlands in the so-called Shell Marsh area and an adjacent 138 acres of hilly grasslands once proposed for an industrial park.

This is the first land bought through a \$10.8 million fund Shell created to settle law-

suits filed by 15 government agencies over the spill of 400,000 gallons of oil into the marsh and Suisun Bay.

"There is some poetic justice that the marsh hit the first and damaged the most by the spill will not only be protected, but restored to a more natural condition than before the spill," said William Travis, chairman of the Shell Oil Spill Litigation Settlement Trustee Committee, the panel created to oversee the fund.

The property is just east of Interstate 680 and south of Waterfront Road in an area visible to thousands of commuters daily ap-

proaching and leaving the Benicia bridge.

The marsh provides habitat for ducks, geese, otters and the endangered salt marsh harvest mouse. It is a striking contrast to the pipes and smokestacks of the nearby Shell and Tosco refineries and the Rhone-Poulenc Basic Chemicals plant.

Other Shell spill money will be used to increase tidal flows into the marsh to make it a richer environment for brackish water plants and wildlife, officials said.

"This will be the crown jewel of wetlands in Contra Costa County," said Al McNabney,

vice-president of the Audubon Society's Mount Diablo chapter. Preserving the surrounding hills is necessary as a pollution buffer to protect the marsh, he said.

About 46 acres of the marsh are owned by the Mountain View Sanitary District. With the purchase announced Monday, the entire Shell Marsh is publicly owned.

Keeneland Associates sold the 60 acres of marsh and the 138 acres of grassland. The company had proposed an industrial park on upland areas of its land, but failed to get approval from Martinez.



Page A-11
Tuesday 8-25-92 "San Francisco Chronicle"

Mt. Diablo Cattle Ban to Stay

Officials say recent blaze showed grazing isn't needed to stop fires

By Erin Hallissy
Chronicle East Bay Bureau

A blaze that blackened 180 acres of Mount Diablo last week proved that the state's wildfire management plan — which does not depend on cattle grazing to clear grassland — is adequate to protect the 19,000-acre park, officials said yesterday.

The park district and the California Department of Forestry have no plans to back down on their eviction notice to rancher Tom Brumleve and his 300 cows, which now range inside the park boundaries, Ranger Bob Todd said at a press conference held on a ridge above the burned canyon.

"The cows pretty much have to go," Todd said. "This is the only state park (in California) that still has cattle in it. This is the last battle line."

The August 17 fire, which was ignited by children playing with matches, proved that the wildfire plan works, Todd said.

The fire, which started outside the park boundaries and quickly spread up the steep slopes above Danville, was slowed as it crossed acreage that had been the site of a controlled burn about 18 months ago, Todd said.

A firebreak on top of a ridge above Emmons Canyon stopped the blaze in its tracks. Cattle do not graze on the steep, chaparral-covered canyons.

"There's nothing the cattle would have done that would have made a difference," said forestry department Captain John Elliff,

who was in charge of fighting the blaze.

Brumleve, who owns Diablo Ranch inside the park, was ordered by the state parks department to round up his cows and get them off the mountain by August 15, a deadline that the rancher failed to meet. Brumleve had a 10-year contract for grazing rights on about 7,000 acres since selling his land to

'There's nothing the cattle would have done that would have made a difference'

— JOHN ELLIFF,
FORESTRY DEPARTMENT CAPTAIN

the state in 1979, but negotiations to renew the agreement collapsed earlier this year.

Fire officials from communities that ring the park, including Clayton, Danville and the exclusive enclave of Blackhawk, have rallied to Brumleve's cause, saying the cattle that he grazes inside the park cut the risk of fire danger.

State officials disagree vehemently and are now planning a legal battle to evict Brumleve's cattle.

"The California Department of Forestry loves cows," said forestry department Captain Dick Clanton. "But there are other ways to mitigate fires."

Those ways include a 20-foot-wide firebreak that has been carved

around most of the park and a plan for controlled burning that calls for setting fires to clear deadwood and dried brush that fuel flames.

San Ramon Valley Fire Chief Mel Deardorff agreed that cattle grazing was not an issue in the August 17 blaze, but he said he still thinks cows are a good thing for the mountain.

Todd, however, said cattle are not native to the park and wreak havoc on native wildflowers and wildlife.

"We view cows as 1,000-pound exotic species," Todd said. "The cows do a lot of environmental damage. We think it's too high a price to pay for parklands."

State cowed by Brumleve

We are outraged the state legislature offered a new cattle grazing lease to Mt. Diablo State Park to Tom Brumleve. (Times, Sept. 5.)

What happened to uphold the Mt. Diablo State Park general plan of 1989? Is this protecting the natural resources of the park?

We consider Brumleve's lease a commercial use for profit.

We are appalled that this was the product of behind-the-scenes mediation by Assembly Bill Baker.

Parkland should not be used to dirty politics.

We strongly urge the state legislature consider this behind-the-scenes deal and to work for the long-term protection of the park.

There must be a way within the general plan and wildfire management plan to allow grazing to the 1,000 acres and satisfy the fire districts and



Times/Bob Larson

ENVIRONMENTAL CAMPAIGNERS Gen and Bill Sattler walk a trail at Mitchell Canyon on Friday.

Sattlers finish building a mountain

11-28-92 C.C. TIMES

Concord couple who helped found Save Mount Diablo will retire after 21 years

By James Bruggers
Staff writer

CONCORD — When Bill and Gen Sattler step down from the Save Mount Diablo board next month, they'll be retiring from 21 years of behind-the-scenes conservation work.

They are founding members of Save Mount Diablo, a conservation group formed in 1971 that has helped triple the size of Mt. Diablo State Park to more than 20,000 acres and define the region's landscape.

"It isn't that we have purchased all that land," Gen Sattler said Friday. "But we have pushed the state park to buy it."

People who know the Sattlers praise their tireless work, such as following development issues at the Contra Costa Board of Supervisors, organizing the April on the Mountain celebration, and collecting signatures for local, regional and state park bond measures.

"They've been involved in just about every single park-related bond act," said Bob Doyle, who was among the original members of Save Mount Diablo. "Between them, they've probably collected over a million signatures," said Doyle, assistant general manager for acquisitions of the East Bay Regional Park District.

"If you don't have people like them, you end up taking your natural heritage for granted," said Bob Todd, acting superintendent of Mt. Diablo State Park. "You'd end up with \$5 million homes on the ridgetops of Mount Diablo, instead of coyotes."

Todd called the Sattlers watchdogs who pay attention not only to developers but also to state park management.

The Sattlers reflected Friday on their love of Mount Diablo and how the group was formed.

Save Mount Diablo spun off from the Sierra Club when Contra Costa issues were not being addressed, they said.

A longtime friend, Mount Diablo wildflower

'If you don't have people like them, you end up taking your natural heritage for granted.'

— Bob Todd, acting superintendent, Mt. Diablo State Park

expert Mary Bowerman, would bring a map of the mountain to Sierra Club meetings. "They never had any time to listen to her concerns," Gen Sattler said.

At the time, Contra Costa was booming and some proposals, like Blackhawk south of Mount Diablo, especially alarmed open-space advocates.

Blackhawk "really got us going," recalled Bill, 83, who served as group treasurer from 1971 to 1988.

So the Sattlers joined Bowerman and 16 others, including organizer Art Bonwell, in forming Save Mount Diablo. "We really felt we were quite ignorant," recalled Gen, 77. "We didn't know how to begin."

The volunteer group secured a \$500 grant from the Nature Conservancy, launched a series of hike-a-thons and other fund-raisers and then set about their business of protecting plants, animals and landscapes of the East Bay's most prominent landform.

In addition to helping to pass park bond measures, the group raised money to pay for park expansions in Mitchell Canyon, Morgan Territory and other areas. It successfully negotiated with developers who sought to build near the park, getting builders to dedicate land as park or permanent open space.

The inspiration comes from the mountain.

"The more you see of the mountain, the more you get away from the traffic and all this stuff. ... It really is just so relaxing and refreshing," Gen said.

Bill moved to Concord from San Francisco in 1919 when he was in fifth grade. He attended a two-room school at the corner of Clayton and Denlinger roads, a site now occupied by the Concord Christian Center.

His first trip to Mount Diablo was on a school outing, he said. For a picnic, he and his fellow students and teacher hiked more than six miles into what has become the state park. The route, now the six-lane Clayton Road commercial strip, was a narrow gravel road.

He has since led or participated in countless hikes on the mountain, including a Sierra Club hike more than 40 years ago during which he met Gen.

Both served in World War II, Bill in north Africa and Gen as nurse in England. They raised four children. Bill is the retired accountant of the family's Sattler appliance business.

One of their pleasures, they said, has been going on regular Mount Diablo hikes with Bowerman, who obtained her doctorate in botany from UC-Berkeley in 1936 and wrote a book on the mountain's unique plant communities. Bowerman continues to serve on the Save Mount Diablo board.

The Sattlers said they are ready to step aside.

As the organization has grown, it has become more complex to run, Bill said. In 1988, the board hired its first paid staff member, Martinez environmentalist Seth Adams.

"It got to the point where there were so many things that (the board) wanted done," adds Gen, board secretary since 1975. "They need some new blood — some energetic and enthusiastic young people to carry on."



Special to the Times/Averie Cohen

DENISE WIGHT, center, and Norman Kirshen, left, both of Martinez, and Patty Cole of Danville scan the sky over Hidden Lakes Open Space on Saturday for the Audubon Society's bird count.

Look, up in the sky! It's a ring-billed gull, and a green heron . . .

By Mary Mazzocco
Staff writer

PACHECO — The sun peeping through the trees wasn't high enough to drive away Saturday's bitter morning chill. Frost covered the grass.

In a parking lot off Chilpancingo Boulevard, four bird-watchers had their binoculars glued to their faces. The fifth clutched the clipboard checklist for the Audubon Society's annual Christmas bird count.

"Are those ring-billed or California gulls?" someone asked.

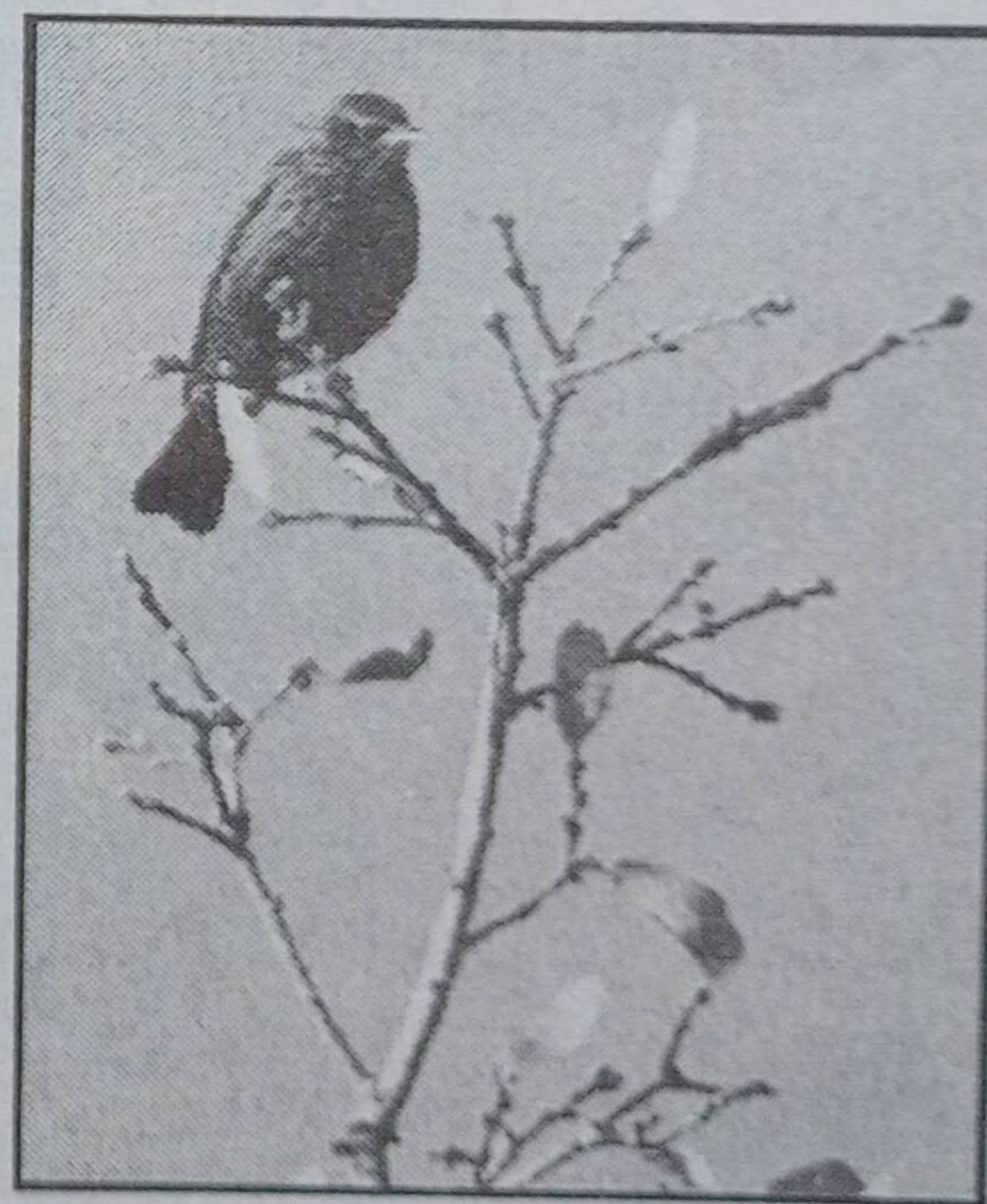
"That one's got a ringed bill," said Deborah Kirshen, a Martinez woman returning to birding after a 30-year layoff.

fly, clung to a twig beside the path.

Wight has been birding for five years and considers herself intermediate in skill. Her interest was piqued when she spotted a brightly colored bird outside her bedroom window that she was able to identify through a book as a western tanager.

"It's an obsession for me. . . . I really love to turn people on to birds," she said. "If they're novices, they're usually real excited. Plus, it gets you into the out-of-doors. You even go to sewer ponds and dumps."

About 1,600 Christmas counts



THIS RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD was spied at Hidden Lakes Open Space.

up from South America in the summer to breed.

After meeting up with another group on Grayson Creek, Wight's group headed for Hidden Lakes Open Space in Martinez. Wight said she and another birder together had seen about 130 species in the open space, out of about



Special to the Times/Averie Cohen

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"Are those ring-billed or California gulls?" someone asked.

"That one's got a ringed bill," said Deborah Kirshen, a Martinez woman returning to birding after a 30-year layoff.

Group leader Denise Wight took a closer look.

"In the winter, the California gulls can look like they have a ring," she said. "That one's a California gull; see, it's got a darker back. . . . OK, that one's a ring-billed. It's got a yellow eye."

Louise Yinger of Concord, a novice bird-watcher, shook her head. "Who'd ever think you'd go birding in the Kmart parking lot?"

Wight's group spotted 13 species in the lot, including a Nuttall's woodpecker. A stroll along a nearby section of Grayson Creek added mockingbirds, mallards and a green heron to the list. An Anna's hummingbird, too cold to

fly, clung to a twig beside the path.

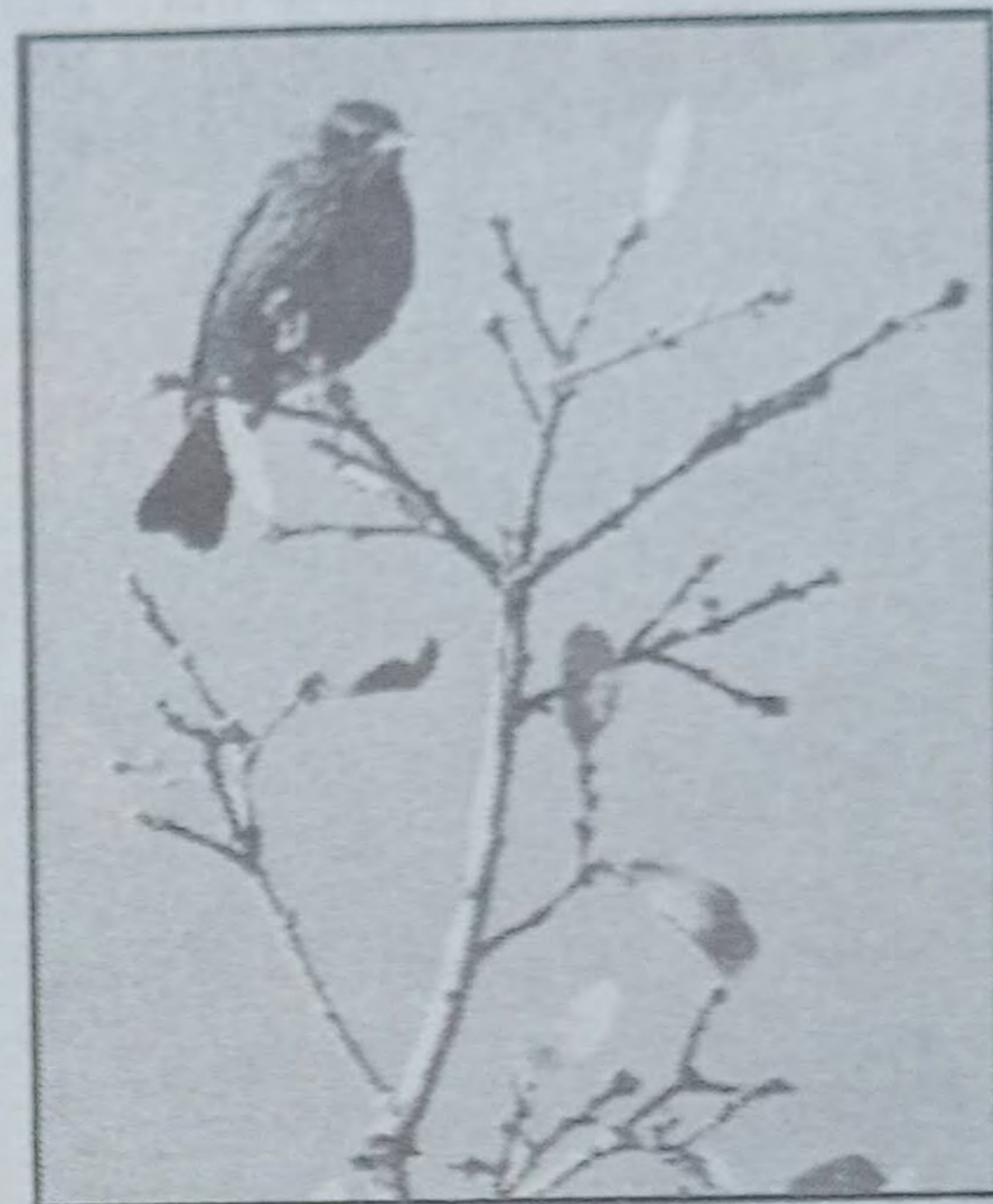
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About 1,600 Christmas counts were done nationwide this year. The Mt. Diablo chapter of the national society is responsible for the 15-mile-diameter circle around Treat Boulevard and Cowell Road.

During a potluck dinner following the count, groups like Wight's and individuals who had kept an eye on their backyard feeders brought their tallies to compiler Jimm Edgar. The national totals are published in the society's "American Birds" quarterly and help bird-watchers keep track of which species are growing and which are in decline.

The count takes place in winter to tally resident birds, as opposed to the flashy transients who come



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The sun by now had melted the frost, leaving trails muddy and slick. Within minutes, the group had spotted a group of coots, dozens of red-winged blackbirds, a red-tailed hawk and a loggerhead shrike. Kirshen and her husband, Norman, were sent over one hill to look for a Say's phoebe, a modest-looking bird with a mournful call.

Yinger stopped briefly to talk to a couple walking their aging Labrador retriever. "Dogs are my first love," she said.

"This is pretty mellow," Wight said. "When you're out with serious birders, there's no time to talk."

Peregrine falcon efforts take wing on Mt. Diablo

By Catherine Hedgecock
Staff writer

MOUNT DIABLO — Dorothy Brownold, a 69-year-old grandmother from Davis, spent four weeks camping out and hiking daily to a secluded nest to watch two transplanted peregrine falcon chicks grow up in a foster nest.

The chicks successfully flew from their nest about three weeks ago, and preservationists hope they will return as parents in the spring.

"It's certainly an experience I just treasure," said Brownold. "It was awesome."

Brownold is one of scores of volunteers who have worked since 1989 in the program to reintroduce peregrine falcons, considered an endangered species, to Mount Diablo. The project is sponsored by the Mount Diablo Biodiversity Restoration Project, a coalition of 15 groups from Alameda and Contra Costa counties that has provided funds and volunteers.

Over the four years of the project, 12 peregrine falcon chicks have been placed in prairie falcon nests, and 10 of them successfully "fledged," or grew up and flew from the nest. None, however, has nested or have become parents at Mount Diablo.

Brownold was equipped with a pager and a cellular phone at her remote location on the south side of the mountain. She stayed in a tent during the week, relieved by another volunteer on weekends, to take notes on the peregrines' health and activities. She hiked from her tent across a steep meadow twice a day to observe the birds until they fledged June 18 and 19.

The peregrine chicks were cared for by the Predatory Bird Project at UC-Santa Cruz for their first 3½ weeks. Generally, the birds are fed by their parents or by humans wearing falcon hand puppets so they don't identify with humans.

Then they were brought to a Mount Diablo prairie falcon nest to be raised by the similar-sized falcons as foster parents. Three prairie falcon chicks were moved to another prairie falcon nest nearby, Brownold said.

"Within half-an-hour after the exchange, I could see them feeding the chicks," Brownold said. "It was fabulous."

'It's certainly an experience I just treasure. It was awesome.'

— Dorothy Brownold,
wildlife volunteer

The peregrines need parents to feed them and protect them from predatory birds like owls, said Kathy Hobson, a biologist with the San Francisco Zoo's Avian Conservation Program. Hobson said the prairie falcons probably don't realize the new chicks aren't theirs.

There were once 100 to 300 pairs of peregrines nesting in California. But the use of the pesticide DDT beginning in the 1940s nearly wiped them out. DDT caused the birds to lay eggs with thin shells that broke before the chicks hatched. The last peregrines were seen on Mount Diablo in the 1950s. By 1970, only two actively nesting, or breeding pairs, could be found in the state.

Captive breeding programs, like the one at UC-Santa Cruz, have been largely responsible for a dramatic comeback of peregrine falcons. Although still endangered, there are about 125 pairs of nesting birds in California.

Now the wait is on for the spring nesting season. Peregrines return to their birthplaces to breed, said Stephen Barbata, executive director of the Lindsay Museum in Walnut Creek, which is a Biodiversity Project member.

"We've been putting peregrines in nests for four years," Barbata said. "It's time to stop and take inventory."

At least three peregrines, a male and two females, have been seen at Mount Diablo in the past two years, but they have not nested. Mount Diablo is one of the most important nesting sites in Northern California because it has isolated cliffs that peregrines like and it is protected from development because it is a state park.

Volunteers like Brownold will be back to track the peregrines and observe any nests they create. Peregrines are secretive birds and seek privacy, so their nests aren't always easy to observe.

"Most sites I couldn't get into because I'm not a rock climber," Brownold said.

Along with its peregrine chick reintroductions, Barbata said the Biodiversity project has been successful in bringing its groups together to work toward a common goal.

"It's amazing that 15 groups — private, public, government — can come together and work together for the public good," Barbata said.

Biodiversity Project members are the California Hawking Club, California Native Plant Society (East Bay chapter), Mount Diablo Interpretive Association, Mount Diablo Audubon Society, Save Mount Diablo, Sierra Club (Mount Diablo Regional Group), Lindsay Museum and Walnut Creek Open Space Foundation.

Associate members of the coalition are California Department of Fish and Game, California Department of Parks and Recreation, city of Walnut Creek open space division, Concord Naval Weapons Station, Contra Costa Water District, East Bay Regional Park District and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.



DAN ROSENSTRAUCH/Times

INTERIOR SECRETARY Bruce Babbitt enters the Martinez adobe at the John Muir National Historic Site on Tuesday, where he is greeted by Rep. George Miller, left, and open-space advocate Hulet Hornbeck of Martinez.

6-2-1993

Babbitt tours Muir home

Interior secretary promotes ecosystem management

By JAMES BRUGGERS

Staff writer

MARTINEZ — Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt brought his whirlwind tour of the West to Contra Costa on Tuesday, meeting with Rep. George Miller and a group of environmental, political and business leaders.

"I come to pay homage to John Muir and George Miller, and not necessarily in that order," said Babbitt, introducing himself and his trademark wit to a gathering at the John Muir National Historic Site.

Babbitt is the first interior secretary to visit Sierra Club founder Muir's home, which is run by the National Park Service, an arm of the Interior Department, said site Superintendent Phyllis Shaw. Miller, D-Martinez, chairs the House Natural Resources Committee and is one of Congress' key environmental leaders.

Since Babbitt's appointment earlier this year by President Clinton, he has been on an extended fact-gathering mission. He's visited ancient forests of the Pacific Northwest and grazing lands in the desert Southwest, meeting with loggers, ranchers, miners and environmentalists. He was scheduled to camp out in Sequoia National Park on Tuesday night.

The result, observers say, will be new natural resource management policies that are expected to take a significant turn from those during 12 years of Republican administrations. Interior Department disagreements during the Reagan and Bush presidencies often were marked by confrontation.

Mixing humor with tough talk, the former Arizona governor and one-time presidential candidate fielded questions on a variety of topics. But Babbitt kept returning to his main theme: ecosystem management.

"As the West fills up, as the empty

INSIDE

Clinton's national service program for young people will begin at Treasure Island, Babbitt announces. **8A**

spaces disappear, you can't confine the environment to fences around parks," he said. "Nature doesn't work that way."

He wants the government to manage land and water resources as entire ecological systems, not just threatened or endangered species. The concept arises as the Endangered Species Act, one of the nation's toughest and most divisive environmental laws, comes up for reauthorization in Congress. The law is due for renewal this year.

With proper forest management, Babbitt said, there might never have been a bitter battle in the Pacific Northwest over the threatened northern spotted owl. Protection of the owl has stalled logging in old-growth forests.

"The spotted owl is just a symbol," he said. "It's a marker for an endangered ecosystem."

The United States needs to "get ahead of these train wrecks," Babbitt said. "We want to intervene before the eleventh hour."

Clinton will soon unveil his plan for managing Northwest forests, Babbitt said. "It will dictate a timber cut that is compatible with the sustainable use of that ecosystem."

Ecosystem management implies a measure of compromise. It is not certain that every species can be spared, although that is the goal, Babbitt said.

Babbitt compared plant and animal protection to triage, which is a system of assigning priorities based on medical urgency and likelihood of survival. "There are some very difficult cases," he said.

For example, one particular kind of salmon in the Pacific Northwest is down

to five fish.

At the same time, he said he hopes no species needs to be sacrificed for economic reasons.

Babbitt's views have been warmly embraced by many environmentalists, and Tuesday was no exception. "I think Babbitt has come up with a direction that is diametrically opposed to what we've had for the last several years," said Al McNabney, vice president of conservation for the Mt. Diablo Audubon Society. "Babbitt is trying hard to go in the right direction."

McNabney said, however, the possibility of environmental compromise worries him. With 90 percent of California wetlands already lost and about the same percentage of Pacific Northwest old-growth forests gone, there is little room for trade-offs, he said. The loss of just one species could trigger a significant environmental problem, said McNabney. "Nobody knows how all these things fit together."

Commercial interests are also optimistic, with some saying they see Babbitt as a pragmatist who has deep family ties to the ranching industry and understands Western economic needs.

Contra Costa developer Ken Hofmann said he believes Babbitt and Miller can work together to resolve the conflicts, to end the arguing and legal battles. He urged them to get private landowners more involved in slowing the loss of wetlands.

"I think his chances (of success) are excellent," said Ron Butler, president of the Contra Costa Water District board, which has concerns that the Delta smelt protection might block the planned Los Vaqueros Reservoir. "He has excellent environmental credentials, but he is a pragmatist. He is sufficiently middle of the road so maybe he can get some things done that can both improve the environment and still allow people to have jobs in business and industry."

Thursday, Oct. 7, 1993. "S.F. Chronicle"

Timber Group Wants State Owls Off List

Industry counts thousands in California forests

By Elliot Diringer
Chronicle Staff Writer

Saying the spotted owl is not only surviving but thriving in California forests, the timber industry asked the federal government yesterday to revoke the bird's "threatened" status everywhere south of the Oregon border.

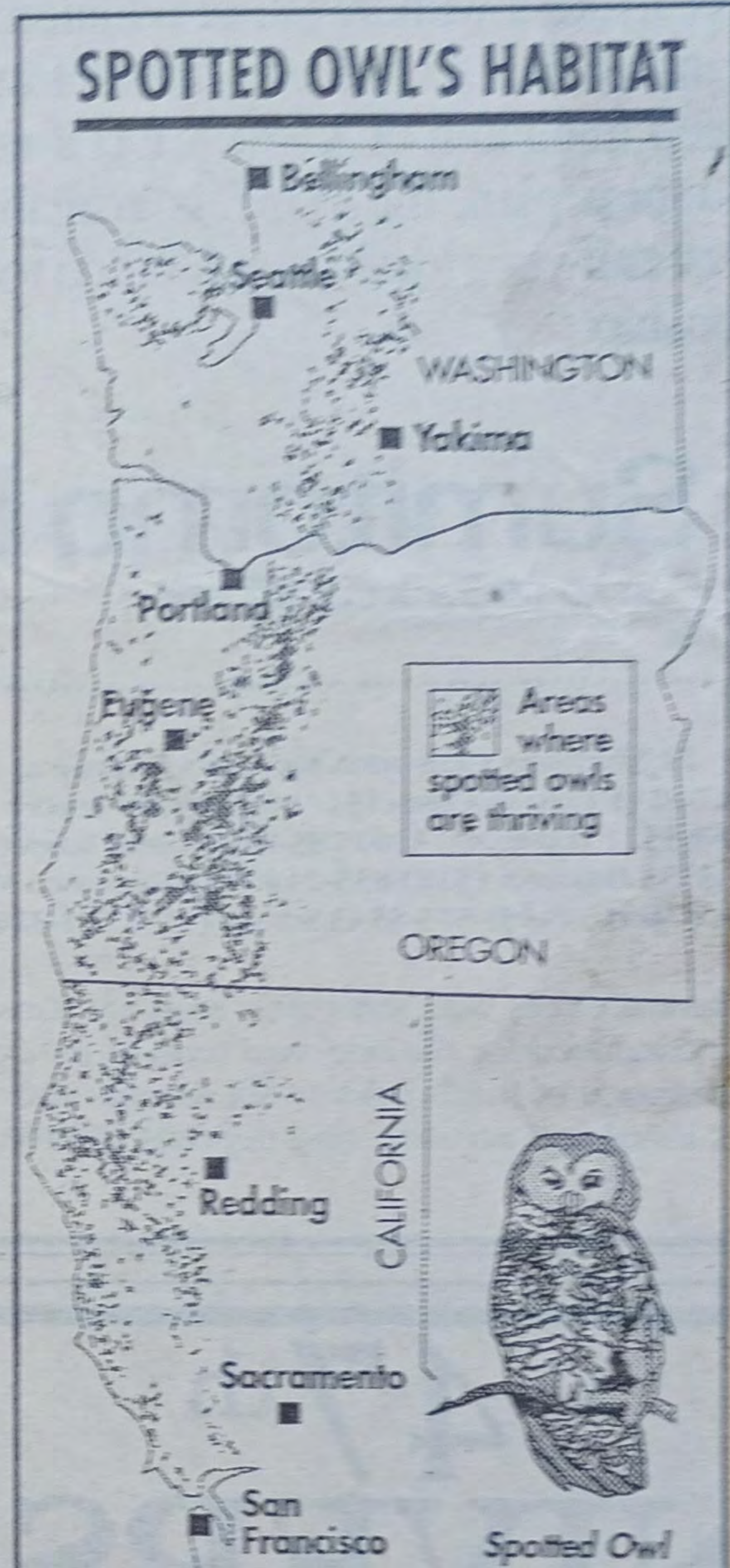
In a petition to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the California Forestry Association said the agency had used "oversimplified and misleading" data in declaring the species threatened, and a closer look finds "the forests of Northern California . . . completely packed with (owls)"

Although the government estimated that there were as few as 5,000 owls throughout the Pacific Northwest when it granted the bird protection in 1990, the petition says newer field studies, most sponsored by the industry, suggest there could now be as many as 8,500 in California alone.

Rejecting the conventional wisdom that northern spotted owls thrive only in virgin forests, the industry contends that in California at least, the birds do quite well in areas once heavily logged, particularly among the moist, fast-growing redwoods of the North Coast.

David Klinger, a Fish and Wildlife spokesman in Portland, said it is unclear whether the higher numbers coming out of California reflect a true recovery or simply the fact that people are looking harder.

"Does it mean the species has increased . . . or that our numbers were not that good three or four years ago?" said Klinger. "I don't think the scientists are really comfortable giving you one explanation for that phenomenon."



Northern Spotted Owl

- Scientific name: *Strix occidentalis caurina*.
- Wingspan: 42 inches.
- Height: 16 inches.
- Coloring: Dark brown with white spots on head and neck and white mottling on abdomen and breast.
- Feeding habits: Preys on small mammals, birds, reptiles and insects.
- Other characteristics: Mostly nocturnal, monogamous and apparently unafraid of humans.

Sources: California Department of Fish and Game, California Department of Forestry

CHRONICLE GRAPHIC

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Who's responsible?

"It was a mistake. We should have gone out and measured it," said Walnut Creek's city engineer, Frank Kennedy. Those words were spoken (Times, Sept. 13) about the recent devastating drainage of the nature pond at Heather Farm in Walnut Creek.

The pond is posted as a wildlife refuge. Ho, ho. The recent botched action in draining the pond indicates it is being treated as quite the opposite.

Among the many birds suffering

C. C. TIMES 9722-93

loss of habitat are great blue, black-crowned night and green-backed herons, and belted kingfishers. Can they wait for rain to fill the pond?

Another sign on the same post at the pond reads: "\$500 reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of anyone damaging wildlife."

If I can figure out who is responsible for this sad situation, I wonder when I can expect my reward.

Shirley Ellis
Walnut Creek



Audubon Society shows the way

Setting an example for other East Bay environmental and community groups, the Mt. Diablo chapter of the Audubon Society has offered the first donation — \$1,000 — toward construction of a Bay-Delta Estuary interpretive science center. The center would promote scientific research into and public understanding of a water system that ranks in world importance with the Nile Delta in Egypt and the mouth of the Amazon in Brazil.

But in this era of recession and tight public budgets, the visionary center cannot be built without massive private donations to offset a multi-million-dollar construction costs and a million-dollar annual operations and maintenance bill.

That's why the Audubon Society's donation of seed money is so important. It sets both a precedent and a challenge to the rest of the East Bay to help make the Delta center a reality.

C.C. TIMES

9-21-93



EDITORIALS

A Delta science center

East Bay facility needed, but so is private funding

There's no doubt about the need for an interpretive science center along the Bay-Delta Estuary. Ron Russo, the chief naturalist for the East Bay Regional Park District, correctly describes our Delta system as one of world significance, ranking in importance with the mouths of the Nile River in Egypt and the Amazon in Brazil. There should be a permanent center where residents, visitors, students and scholars alike can gather to learn more about the Delta's unique ecosystem and the reasons it must be preserved.

That's why a coalition of local school districts, Los Medanos College, the Audubon Society, Ironhorse Sanitary District and the park district should be supported in its plan to build such a center. It would be located on a 3-acre wetlands site, next to a sanitary district facility, at Big Break northeast of Oakley.

The group's plans call for a 13,500-square-foot center with an exhibit

hall, auditorium and boardwalks into the Big Break wetlands. It would be directed principally at students from kindergarten through junior college.

The only drawback is the usual one — money. Under the best of circumstances, none of the public agencies involved likely could generate the several million dollars needed to build the center nor \$1 million-plus in annual operating and maintenance costs. And it's impossible in the midst of the current recession and in the wake of the state property tax grab that has left local government reeling.

That means funding must come from private sources. And what better private sources than regional organizations like Greenbelt Alliance and national environmental groups like the Sierra Club, Environmental Defense Fund or Natural Resources Defense Council?

Such groups, in the name of protecting it, have been fighting to stop growth in the Delta and surrounding environs for years. Here's a golden opportunity for them to put their money where their mouths are.

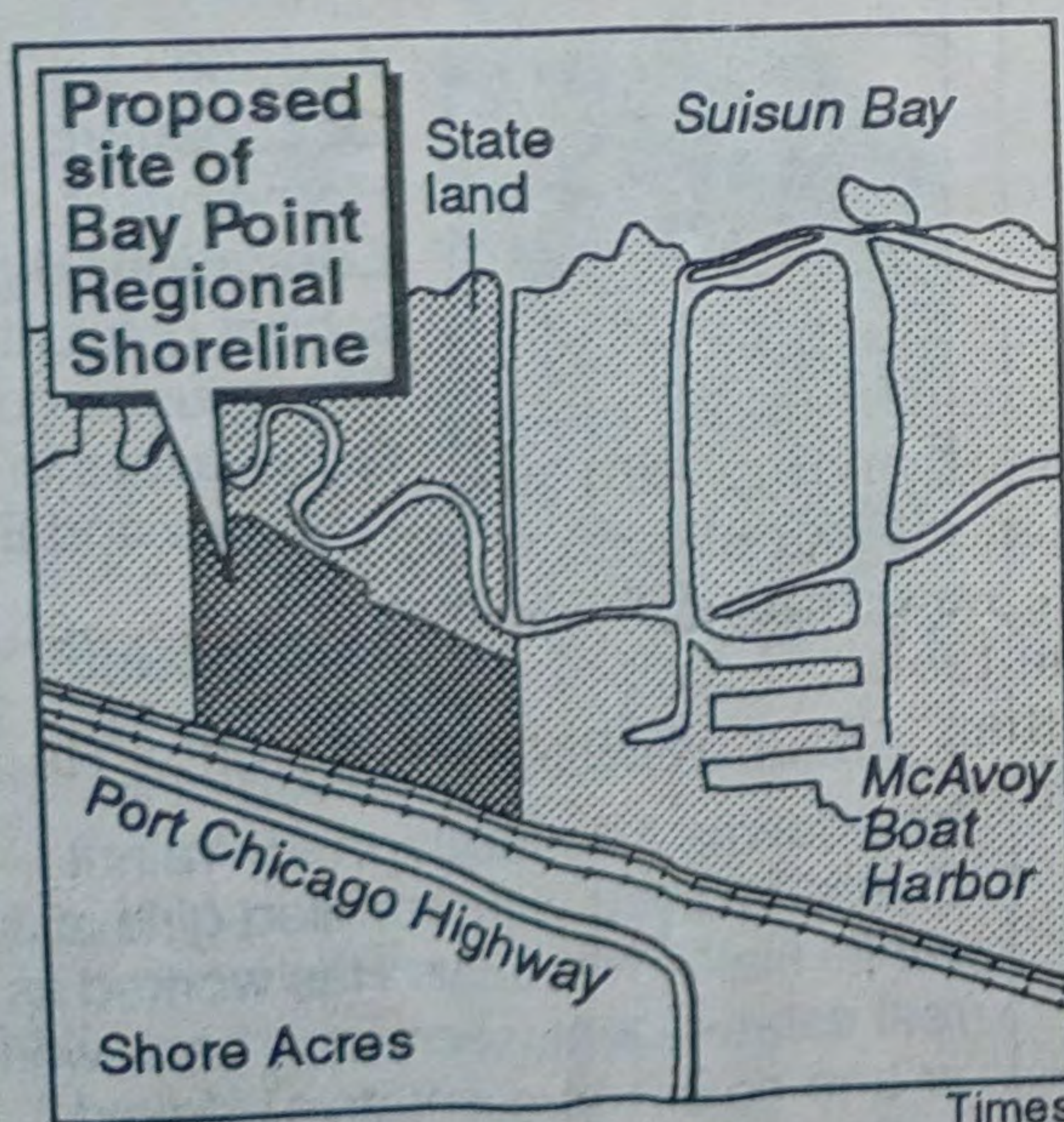


A VIEW from the property the East Bay Regional Park District plans to buy to create a regional shoreline park.

SUSAN POLLARD/Times



A GREAT BLUE HERON stalks fish on the shore of the proposed park site.



Wetlands park in works

Pollution fines to help buy Bay Point marsh

By **DENIS CUFF**
Staff writer

Environmental agencies are pooling \$1.1 million in money from taxes and pollution penalties to buy a former dumping ground for Bay mud as a wetlands park in Bay Point.

The East Bay Regional Park District announced plans this week to acquire 51 acres as the first piece of the proposed Bay Point Regional Shoreline.

The park board simultaneously authorized a condemnation lawsuit to acquire the land from Richard Farrell of San Francisco.

The private land will be combined with adjacent state marshland and improved to make it a richer habitat for fish, birds and other wildlife. A shoreline trail also is planned for public fishing and nature study.

"We need to protect these places for the birds and wildlife. This also will provide a place for the public to appreciate them," said Bob Doyle, park district assistant general manager.

To buy the land, park officials have a commitment of \$800,000 in water pollu-

'We need to protect these places for the birds and wildlife. This also will provide a place for the public to appreciate them.'

— **Bob Doyle**, park district

tion penalties paid by two Contra Costa industries.

The district will get \$500,000 from a \$12 million fund Shell Oil Co. established as compensation for spilling 400,000 gallons from its Martinez refinery in 1988. An interagency panel acting as guardian for the spill fund has approved spending the money on the shoreline park.

The regional park district also has \$300,000 lined up from USS POSCO in Pittsburg. The San Francisco Regional

Water Quality Control Board permitted the steel company to put the money in trust as compensation for having excessive toxins in its wastewater for 83 days in 1990 and 1991.

The district plans to get the other \$272,000 of the land's appraised value from a park tax East Bay voters approved in 1988.

Park officials and environmentalists say it's fitting that penalties for polluting Contra Costa wetlands should be used to protect and restore them.

The Farrell property has few plants because of the saltiness of the Bay mud and silt that was dredged from shipping channels and dumped there by a previous landowner. Rocks and other debris litter the site.

"This property is formerly wetlands, badly degraded. It can all be rehabilitated," said Al McNabney of the Audubon Society's Mt. Diablo chapter.

Park officials say they will clean up the area and study whether levees can be breached to restore tidal action to some of the Farrell land and adjacent state property.



UP FRONT

C.C. TIMES 12-19-93

Hawk-eyed bird-watchers up for count

By CATHERINE HEDGECK
Staff writer

BLACK DIAMOND MINES REGIONAL PRESERVE — Four avid bird-watchers stared through the Saturday dawn into a tangle of branches. A barn owl stared back.

Barn owls are known for the mask-like feathers around their large eyes.

Bird-watchers are known for the binoculars in front of their eyes.

The two species regarded each other silently, the human group held in place by a sense of wonder.

Moments before, the owl took flight from its previous tree perch to relocate among denser foliage. "Beautiful" and "fantastic," the bird-watchers exclaimed as the cream-and-brown owl flew by a few yards away.

"See why we come out in the cold?" asked Marge Irwin, 67, of Napa.

Irwin was among more than 75 volunteers who rose early to look for birds and tally their numbers for the 94th annual Mt. Diablo Audubon Society winter bird count Sat-

urday.

The local chapter is among more than 1,500 groups that hold bird counts throughout the United States and Canada, parts of Central and South America, Bermuda, the West Indies and Pacific islands.

An estimated 43,000 people worldwide count birds to determine which species are declining or growing and which may be moving to new locations. The counts are held between Dec. 17 and Jan. 3. The National Audubon Society publishes the results and studies the trends.

Although bird counts provide only estimates — some birds may be counted twice and some not at all — they gather valuable bird population data that can show which birds are becoming endangered.

One that's in trouble is the black rail, a skittish 2-inch-long bird that lives on marshy Delta shoreline near Pittsburg, said Jimm Edgar, who is in charge of compiling bird numbers from Saturday's count.

The black rail thrives on pickleweed, a specialized plant that requires a delicate mixture of fresh



KEVIN SQUIRES/Special to the Times

MT. DIABLO AUDUBON SOCIETY member Jill Hedgecock of Walnut Creek looks at a bird perched along a ridge in Black Diamond Mines Regional Preserve in Antioch on Saturday.

and saline water. If pickleweed dies back, or if marshlands are built up or even trampled, the black rail population can drop.

"It's a fine balance of habitat," Edgar said. "The bird has become totally dependent on it."

The black rail is so reclusive that bird-watchers who sought to count it Saturday had to rely on their ears. In such cases, bird counters play a

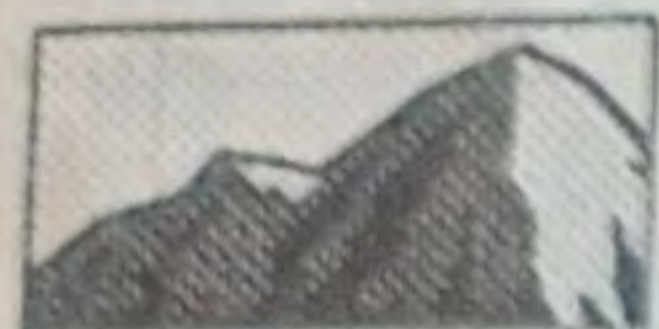
tape recording of a black rail's cry of alarm and count birds that respond to it, Edgar said.

To see a black rail "you'd have to endanger the bird," he said. "You'd have to tramp through the grass to force it out."

The local black rail count is usually the largest in the nation. Saturday was no exception. The group saw eight.

Spotting or hearing birds is a skill bird-watchers say they develop over years. In the seeming solitude of Black Diamond Mines Regional Preserve near Antioch, the bird-watchers spotted constant movement.

Most birds were easily recognized by the experienced eyes that watched them, but a few were identified by majority vote.



CONTRA COSTA

District takes step for a park in Delta

By JAMES BRUGGERS
Staff writer

The dream of a large, regional Delta recreation area and science center moved a step closer to reality this week.

East Bay Regional Park District directors agreed Tuesday to pay \$100,000 for a one-year option on about 1,000 acres of prime wetland habitat at the former Big Break island. The property, adjacent to 3,500 acres owned by Ironhouse Sanitation District, can be bought for \$938,000, officials said.

"It's potentially the first purchase of Delta shoreline property in East County," said Bob Doyle, a park district assistant general manager.

"This is a critical acquisition," said Director Ted Radke of Martinez, whose ward includes East County.

Eventually, public lands in the immediate vicinity could total more than 6,000 acres, said Dwight Meadows, an Ironhouse Sanitation District board member. For three years Meadows has been developing the idea of a Delta science center on Ironhouse property.

Park district acquisitions in the region "really go hand in hand" with the planned science center, he said. As envisioned, the center would be a cooperative effort of several government entities, including the park district, sanitation district, Contra Costa County and Los Medanos Community College.



BOB LARSON/Times

DWIGHT MEADOWS inspects some of the 1,000 acres of wetlands the East Bay Regional Park District is planning to buy. Meadows is on the board of the Ironhouse Sanitation District.

"You can't have the science center without having the wetlands to interpret," Doyle said.

The district could buy the parcel now, but placing option money to hold it allows the agency to seek matching funds, Doyle said. That helps stretch district acquisition funds further, he said.

The option can be extended for a second year for an additional \$100,000, with all option money going to the purchase price, Doyle said.

The Big Break acquisition eventually would be linked by recreation trails to several cities, including Brentwood, Antioch and Pittsburg, Doyle said.

About 90 percent of the property, now owned by Porter Estate Co., is shallow water with algae, fish and aquatic invertebrates. It is extensively used by migrating waterfowl.

The remaining portion is most-

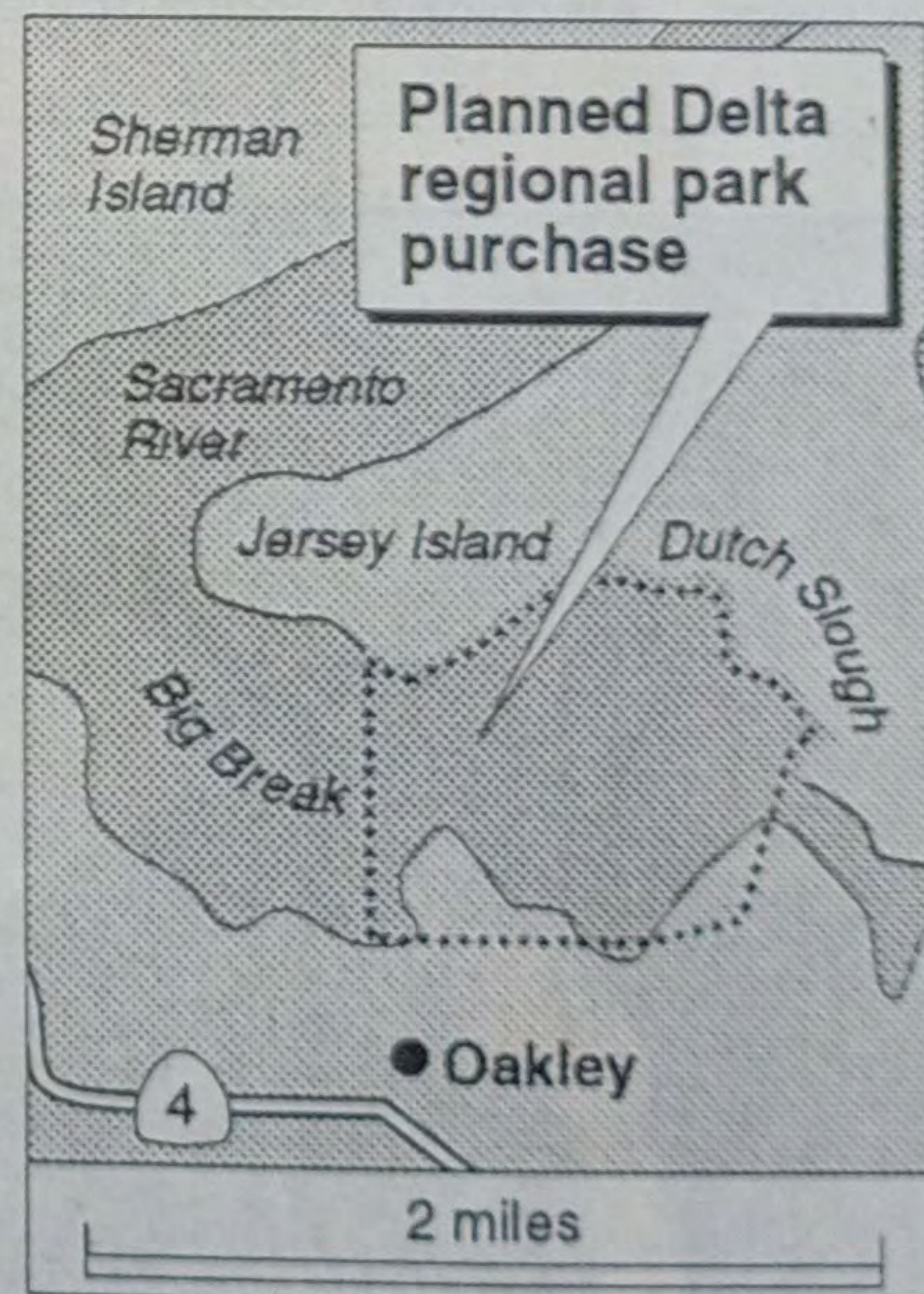
ly marsh with about 3 acres of dry ground. The property provides potential habitat for several sensitive species, including the Delta smelt, the greater sandhill crane and the giant garter snake, officials said.

It is considered some of the highest quality wetlands in Contra Costa County, Doyle said.

Big Break island was flooded decades ago when levees gave way.

Over the years, there have been proposals for a water-oriented Discovery Bay-style development in the area, Doyle said. When the Big Break deal is completed, the property will be controlled by the public, providing environmental protection, recreation and nature study, Doyle said.

In recent years, the park district has increased its activities in far East County, primarily building new trails. The district expanded to include the Liberty Union High



Times

School District in 1981, but did not collect property taxes. Residents of the area began contributing to district coffers in 1992, after the park district formed a landscape and lighting assessment district.

Bird lovers donate \$1,000 to Delta science center fund

By JAMES BRUGGERS

Staff writer *C.C. TIME 9-16-93*

Using money raised from a guide for bird lovers, the Mt. Diablo Audubon Society has made the first donation to a proposed Delta science center in eastern Contra Costa.

Group members say they want their \$1,000 contribution to trigger interest and other donations for the project, which will cost millions.

"I hope this gives people the idea that here's something worth contributing to," said Jean Richmond, who wrote "Birding Northern California" and donated the book's proceeds to Mt. Diablo Audubon. "At least this is the opening salvo in an effort to get the needed money."

Advocates of the center will meet at 10 a.m. today at Los Medanos College to discuss forming an organization that would build and operate the facility. Participants include East Bay Regional Park District, Ironhouse Sanitary District, Los Medanos College and county Supervisor Tom Torlekson.

The science center would be constructed on Ironhouse Sanitation District property near Oakley, said Dwight Meadows, a district board member. It would provide science programs on water quality and the Delta region for students, professional research opportunities and a public interpretive center, he said.

A partnership of several agencies, called a joint powers agreement, will be needed for the project to get beyond the conceptual stage, said Ron Russo, park district chief naturalist.

The Audubon donation is only a small fraction of the anticipated costs, but it represents an important

start in the effort to raise money, Meadows said. Eventually, donations will be sought from foundations, businesses and individuals, he said.

Science center advocates say they want to build a world-class facility that would explore the special characteristics of a delta ecosystem.

"I'm so convinced that this is going to be for wetlands what the Monterey Bay Aquarium is for the ocean," said Al McNabney, conservation chairman of Mt. Diablo Audubon Society. "The only thing that disturbs me is that it doesn't go fast enough."

Meadows said he's been developing the idea for three years.



4-11-94

C.C. Jones



CHRISTINE BAKER/Special to the Times

DON YODER of the North American Bluebird Society shows one of the 94 box nests he placed on the hills around Rossmoor. The wire on the outside is to keep raccoons from killing the birds.

He's making sure bluebirds have place to nest in suburbia

By **JOHN BOUDREAU**
Staff writer

4-11-1994

Humanity is a home wrecker.

In Contra Costa County, development weaves through the region's rich natural landscape to make an uneven tapestry. In the rush to build more homes, humans have destroyed the habitats of birds such as the western bluebird. With no place to nest, the winged creatures disappear.

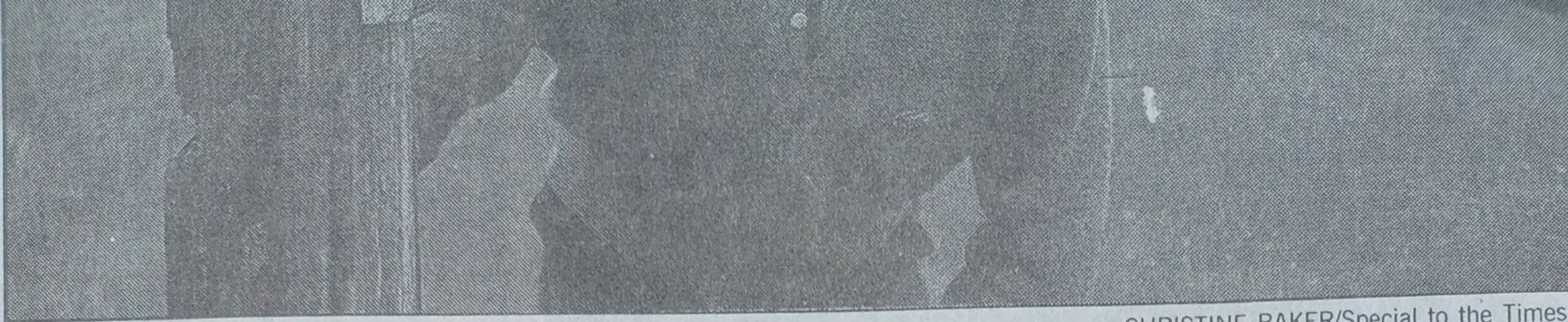
That's the view of Don Yoder, who watched in dismay as fruit orchards were bulldozed to make way for Walnut Creek homes like his. Since he moved to Central County in 1971, he has devoted much of his free time to building and posting box nests for migrating bluebirds.

at next Sunday's Earth Day Festival at the Concord Pavilion. He will give a lesson in bluebird survival and distribute plans on how to construct box nests.

When perched in a tree, the western bluebird appears round-shouldered and dumpy. It is slightly larger than a house sparrow. The bird's head, wings and tail are blue; its breast and back are rusty-red.

It is a shy bird, a loner that doesn't like the ruckus of human activity. The bluebird feeds primarily on insects and berries and is an ideal companion for organic gardeners. Indians hung gourds as nest sites to attract bluebirds, which acted like a natural bug repellent.

"They are such a small bird," says Karen Rowley, Earth Day youth activities coordinator. "By weight, they are getting a lot of pesticides. That can make



CHRISTINE BAKER/Special to the Times

DON YODER of the North American Bluebird Society shows one of the 94 box nests he placed on the hills around Rossmoor. The wire on the outside is to keep raccoons from killing the birds.

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That's the view of Don Yoder, who watched in dismay as fruit orchards were bulldozed to make way for Walnut Creek homes like his. Since he moved to Central County in 1971, he has devoted much of his free time to building and posting box nests for migrating bluebirds.

He is part of a small army of volunteers around the country trying to rebuild bird homes overrun by advancing human communities.

"That image will never leave me," says Yoder, recalling his first spring in Walnut Creek. "The bluebirds were swarming over the piles (of dead trees), looking for their nest."

Like other birds, bluebirds have suffered from loss of trees and posts in which to build cavity nests. They often move into nests once occupied by woodpeckers, which punch holes in dead trees.

At the time, Yoder erected six rectangular wood nests. Now, he oversees 94 box nests in the Rossmoor area. "To me, we are one big family together. The trouble is, the humans are killing off the other half. And they can't fight back. If we don't have an upsurge in housing construction, we are in a slump."

Yoder is not calling for the retreat of humanity. But he wants to form a bluebird house-building brigade across the county. Box nests placed in certain wooded and grassland areas can provide a home for a pair of bluebirds, which can produce two broods of about five birds during the March-August mating season.

The eastern bluebird population is believed to have declined by as much as 90 percent since the 1930s. Western bird-watchers, too, have marked significant drops in bluebird populations.

Yoder, a director with the North American Bluebird Society, is taking his message to schools. He and a handful of young people will operate a booth

at next Sunday's Earth Day Festival at the Concord Pavilion. He will give a lesson in bluebird survival and distribute plans on how to construct box nests.

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"They are such a small bird," says Karen Rowley, Earth Day youth activities coordinator. "By weight, they are getting a lot of pesticides. That can make them have thinner and fewer eggs. When they are weaker, they are susceptible to parasites."

Rowley is involved with a program that taps students from several schools to help restore a healthy population of bluebirds in Contra Costa. The county's Earth Day Committee donated wood to Orinda Intermediate School, where students built more than 50 houses. In February members of the Concord High School Earth Club posted 18 of them on Old Borges Ranch in Walnut Creek. And students from Northgate High School in Walnut Creek will monitor the wood nests for at least 10 years and garner data for bluebird research.

Those who post the nests are asked to regularly monitor them, as often as once a week, to make sure predators aren't attacking the birds. People are also asked to clean out nests after bluebirds have flown away. This prevents spread of parasites. Monitors also keep wasps from taking over the box.

The information they gather, such as how often birds nest in the box and how many offspring survive, will help bird-watchers understand the decline or growth of bluebirds in the region.

Yoder believes bluebirds are migratory. Those found in Contra Costa might fly in from the northern Rockies, he says. And some fly south. They also shift locations regionally, moving to the cooler Berkeley hills when Contra Costa heats up during the summer.

It's harder to keep track of bluebirds as their numbers dwindle. "They are in trouble," Yoder says.

Rare bird: Peregrines reproduce on Diablo

6.11.94

By JAMES BRUGGERS

Staff writer

C.C. TIMES

Peregrine falcons have produced young on Mount Diablo for perhaps the first time in 38 years.

Looking through a spotting scope Friday, biologist Gary Beeman watched a nesting peregrine pair and two offspring soar through the sky above a sun-drenched Diablo.

"It was like my birthday, Christmas and everything all rolled into one," said Beeman, biologist for a Diablo peregrine reintroduction project that began five years ago.

Between 1989 and 1992, 12 baby peregrines were placed in nests for adoption by prairie falcons, a more common raptor.

Adult peregrines have been observed on the mountain the past three years, Beeman said.

One pair was seen in 1991 trying to nest in 20,000-acre Mt. Diablo State Park. The raptors did not produce any chicks, probably because they were not mature enough, said Beeman, a Lafayette consulting biologist and registered falconer.

The discovery Friday is exciting because it confirms that a pair has reproduced, Beeman said.

Though it's not certain where the pair came from, Beeman said it is highly likely they were among the 12 chicks placed by hand into the prairie falcon nests.

Peregrine falcons, though endangered, have rebounded through such efforts. In California there are now more than 150 nesting pairs. Breeding-and-release programs in the state ended in 1992.

The story was different in the 1950s and 1960s, when the pesticide DDT thinned falcon-egg shells. Their recorded numbers plummeted to two breeding pairs in California.

Peregrine falcons can reach 200 mph as they dive for prey. Their chicks, however, are prey to golden eagles and great horned owls.

Please see **PEREGRINES**, back page

An Ironhouse San board member who h ing hard for a Delta is being honored by Audubon Society.

Dwight Meadows the group's Environm Year award at its m according to a news award will be pres group's regular me Pleasant Hill Senior

Science co

Times staff

C.C. TIMES

Representatives from five ties have signed an agreeeme planning for a Delta science Break area of East County.

Participating are the Iro District, Cal State Haywar Community College Distric County and the East Bay Re trict, said Ron Russo, park di ralist.

The agreement establish raise funds and oversee a fea

At a ceremony Friday in O refinery was honored for cont toward the study. Mt. Diablo



Peregrine

FROM PAGE 1A

As many as 70 percent o grines don't survive their firs Beeman said.

Park officials were plea hear Beeman's news.

"The recovery of native



Peregrines

FROM PAGE 1A

As many as 70 percent of peregrines don't survive their first year, Beeman said.

Park officials were pleased to hear Beeman's news.

"The recovery of native species is an important part of our resource management, here at Mount Diablo and throughout the state park system," said Larry Ferri, park superintendent.

To protect the falcons, Beeman and park officials will not publicize the location of the nest.

Beeman said he last saw a breed-

ing pair on the mountain in 1956.

Since 1989, several government agencies and organizations participated in the peregrine project. They include Save Mount Diablo, the Lindsay Museum, Mt. Diablo Audubon Society and the Predatory Bird Research Group at UC-Santa Cruz.

The effort broadened, becoming the Mt. Diablo Biodiversity Project. It seeks to bring back a variety of native animals and plants to the park and adjacent areas.

"This should be a real boost to Mount Diablo," Beeman said of the discovery Friday. "We're trying to restore the ecosystem, one critter at a time. We'd like to see it back as natural as possible."

C.C. TIMES

6-11-94



DANIEL KRAMER/Special to the Times

BARBARA HOLWAY of Lafayette points out a bird to other counters at Ruth Bancroft Gardens in Walnut Creek on Saturday.

12-18-1994

Sky's the limit for Audubon bird counters

Mt. Diablo chapter tracks species, adds to data bank — and enjoys the view

By ABBY COLLINS-SEARS

Staff writer

WALNUT CREEK — It was cold and wet and foggy.

Not exactly the sort of day to be bird-watching.

But that's exactly what dozens of bundled volunteers were doing Saturday during the Mt. Diablo Audubon Society's 95th annual Christmas count. They were as tenacious as mail carriers. Neither rain, nor sleet, nor ...

You get the idea.

Bette Wentzel of San Ramon said she discovered bird-watching was worth fighting the elements, no matter how cold it gets.

"This is a great reason to be outside," Wentzel said. "I just wear so many clothes now that I can't feel anything. As you get older you get wiser and never underestimate the worth of hand warmers in your gloves."

It was 40 degrees as volunteers trekked a 15-mile radius centered near Treat Boulevard and Cowell Avenue in Concord and in areas around Mount Diablo, Black Diamond Mines Regional Preserve, Heather Farm Park and several creeks.

But if the cold bothered them, they didn't let on.

"I thought it would be colder, but the fog is probably the biggest obstacle today," said John Luther of Oakland, who explored dew-covered Mount Diablo with six other birders.

The goal was to count every species in the search areas. With binoculars hanging from their necks, knit hats on their heads and hiking boots on their feet — and dressed in up to five layers of clothing, group was on a mission to find a rufous-crowned sparrow near the Buckeye area of the mountain where it was spotted last year.

"It's so enjoyable to seeing how things change from year to year," said Pat Gordon of Hayward. "The best part is at times we even find things that are extremely hard to track."

By midafternoon the group had recorded 50 species. They began at 7 a.m. and planned to end about 5 p.m. Other die-hard bird-watchers were out at 2 a.m. trying to spot owls and other nocturnal species.

Last year the Diablo chapter recruited 84 participants who counted 156 species and more than 33,000 birds. This year 161 species were identified. The total number of birds hadn't

been tallied.

The survey is done over 24 hours, and each of the 1,600 chapters in the country picks a day over a three-week period in December to hold the count.

Phil Gordon, a biology teacher and avid bird-watcher for the past 15 years, said that near the turn of the century hunters had a tradition of seeing who could shoot the most birds on Christmas Day. A countermovement began in 1899, when people decided to see how many birds they could count. The tradition stuck and now contributes to the largest data bank on wildlife in the world, he said.

Results will be published in Audubon Field Notes, an annual publication that outlines every bird species sighted in the United States, Canada and other member countries.

Marilyn Emery of Walnut Creek said she enjoys the intellectual challenge of bird counting, but what prompted her involvement were the beautiful views.

"I remember seeing my first northern oriole, and it was absolutely the most beautiful thing I ever saw. Then you wonder what else is out there. You take some binoculars and you're hooked."