

\$2.2 million environmental boost

County groups gain in Shell settlement

By DENIS CUFF

Staff writer

Creeks, marshes and nature education programs in Contra Costa County are big winners in a Shell Oil lawsuit settlement that pumps \$2.2 million into restoring the San Francisco Bay environment.

Groups based in Contra Costa will get \$425,000 of the pot for seven of the 24 environmental projects the deal will fund.

The groups will use the money to make creeks and marshes a richer fish and wildlife habitat, buy wetlands, open a Delta science center, and teach people to change their habits to avert water pollution.

"It makes sense to spend the money in the area closest to Shell and most affected by the refinery," said Kathy Radke of the Friends of Alhambra Creek in Martinez, one of the groups to obtain settlement

money.

The payments are part a lawsuit settlement between Shell Oil and California Public Interest Research Group. The pact was filed Tuesday in federal court in San Francisco.

Shell officials said they settled to avoid costly litigation over selenium discharges into Carquinez Strait from its Martinez oil refinery. They denied breaking the law. Selenium is a naturally occurring substance that can cause birth defects and reproductive problems in ducks.

Shell also said it would reduce selenium discharges.

Environmentalists say they demanded and got the \$2.2 million to deter industries from trying to save money by not meeting pollution limits.

Among the projects to get funding:

■ The Martinez Regional Land Trust gets \$100,000 to buy and improve wetlands, and \$50,000 to develop a nature education and restoration program at the publicly owned Shell Marsh area.

■ The Lindsay Museum in Walnut Creek gets \$100,000 to train volunteer

creek monitors, to improve a children's wildlife exhibit and prepare a state guide to prevent storm drain pollution.

■ Friends of Alhambra Creek in Martinez gets \$85,000 to plant trees and remove weeds along the creek to make it better for spawning fish.

■ The Martinez Community Foundation gets \$55,000 for environmental improvements.

■ A planned Delta environmental science center in Oakley wetlands will get \$20,000.

■ Verde Elementary School in North Richmond will get \$15,000 to turn part of Wildcat Creek into an outdoor classroom.

Elsewhere, the settlement provides money for several groups and universities to raise fish, study Bay pollution and erect multilingual signs on piers to warn people about the risk of eating contaminated Bay fish.

Conservationists said they devoted some money to public education because it will take many years of public support to solve the Bay's stubborn problems.

Peregrine falcon thrives in California, expected to get off endangered list

By JAMES BRUGGERS
Staff writer

The peregrine falcon, once down to just two breeding pairs in California, may soon fly off the federal endangered species list.

The Clinton administration is expected to announce today that it wants to jettison the swift-flying bird of prey's endangered classification. The move was anticipated, as the number of breeding pairs in the United States has steadily increased.

Fish and Wildlife Service officials in Portland confirmed that Secretary of Interior Bruce Babbitt will make the announcement today in New York City, but they declined further comment until then.

More than 150 breeding pairs live in California, including three pairs on Mount Diablo. The Mt. Diablo State Park peregrines are believed to be the product of a reintroduction project led by Save Mount Diablo.

The group, teaming with the Lindsay Museum, Mt. Diablo Audubon Society, Santa Cruz Predatory Bird Research Group and the California Hawking Club, placed 12

Falcon

FROM PAGE 1A

chicks in prairie falcon nests between 1989 and 1992. The prairie fal-

cons adopted the young, some of whom most likely returned as adults.

"I think this is proof that the Endangered Species Act works," said Seth Adams, program director of Save Mount Diablo, noting that the law has come under attack in Congress.



Times file

TWO BABY peregrine falcons, part of an effort by area groups to aid in the bird's breeding, snuggle in a nest atop Mount Diablo.

He warned that peregrines are not "out of the woods yet." They are still having some difficulties reproducing in the wild.

In the 1950s and 1960s, when the pesticide DDT thinned their egg shells, peregrine falcon numbers plummeted across the country. At one point there were just two breeding pairs left in the state, and as late as 1975 there were just seven.

Banning DDT has been a major factor in the bird's recovery, biologists say. Breeding and reintroduction programs like those on Mount Diablo also played a big role.

Tom Cade, chairman of the non-profit Peregrine Fund in Boise, Idaho, told Congress last month that more than 5,000 peregrine falcons have been reintroduced into the wild, including Canada, and that there are more than 1,000 breeding pairs in the lower 48 states.

The birds have adapted well to city life, said Ron Jurek, a state Fish and Game biologist.

Two pairs nest on the Bay Bridge, and another pair nests in San Francisco near the Golden Gate Bridge, he said. Many others fly through.

"The cities really attract peregrines because of the abundant food supply of pigeons." Others are known to nest in Sunol Regional Wilderness of southern Alameda County.

If after a public review period the species is removed from the federal list, peregrines must be monitored for five years, Jurek said. That could pose a problem because funding will be hard to find, he said.

If peregrines are taken off the list, they will still be protected by other federal and state laws. They are classified as endangered under the state Endangered Species Act, and there is no plan to change that, Jurek said. Under that law and the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act, it is illegal to harm or kill peregrine falcons.

"It would just mean that peregrines wouldn't get as much attention," Jurek said. "But then a bird like that gets a lot of attention anyway, just because of the way they are."

Peregrines falcons can reach speeds of 200 miles an hour as they dive for prey. They are about the size of a crow and are recognized in flight by their pointed wings, narrow tail and quick wingbeats.

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page 1A.*



Shirley Ellis, a member of the Audobon Society and an accomplished birder, will discuss her hobby and "the colorful birds of Contra Costa County" at tomorrow's meeting of the Women's Fellowship at the First Congregational Church.

'Birds Of Contra Costa' Topic At Women's Fellowship Meeting

"Colorful Birds of Contra Costa County" will be topic of birder Shirley Ellis at tomorrow's program of the Women's Fellowship at the First Congregational Church, corner of Court and Susana Streets. Members and friends are encouraged to bring a sandwich to the noon meeting; Alhambra Circle will serve dessert and beverages. Violet Apparius will present devotions.

Shirley Ellis a member of the Mt. Diablo Audobon Society, has been birding

since 1976 and is one of the volunteer leaders of field trips for the society. She will show slides and talk about the many birds that can be seen in Contra Costa County and California. "In number of participants," she said, "the hobby of birding is second only to gardening in our country."

Women's Fellowship president Jean Fivash invites the public to "join us and learn to identify the birds in our backyards as these beautiful spring days bring out color of all kinds."



Environmental laws: On the chopping block

Republicans in Congress have proposed numerous changes in environmental laws. A look at what's proposed and how people from both sides defend their positions:

C.C. TIMES

Water

7-9-95



- ▶ Congress never intended to protect occasional wet areas, such as many spots in eastern Contra Costa and Alameda counties.
- ▶ The current law tramples on property rights by restricting activities in wetlands.
- ▶ The changes give industry and states needed flexibility in dealing with water pollution controls.

- Change Clean Water Act to relax protections on wetlands, including those along the edge of San Francisco Bay, in the Delta and in East Bay farm and grazing fields.
- Remove requirements that cities and states curb pollution from storm drains.

- ▶ Wetlands are among the most vital of natural resources, serving as habitat for many endangered species and acting as natural water filters.
- ▶ Roughly 90 percent of California wetlands have already been lost to farms or cities.
- ▶ Storm runoff is the nation's biggest source of water pollution.

Air quality

- ▶ The amendments cost industry and consumers money, and they do not give states enough flexibility in coming up with their own ways to reduce air pollution.

- Relax Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990, including those that require production of a new kind of gasoline that will lower vehicle emissions by 12 percent. (East Bay refineries are already converting their production facilities to make the less-polluting gasoline under a state law.)
- Reduce programs to fight acid rain, encourage people to carpool and improve state vehicle inspection and maintenance programs.

- ▶ The amendments protect the public by ensuring progress is made in fighting air pollution, especially in urban areas.
- ▶ Because California has stricter air quality laws than the federal government, stronger federal laws level the playing field and help California businesses compete.
- ▶ The Bay Area has become the largest metro region in the United States to meet federal smog standards, so why jeopardize that now?

Endangered species

- ▶ The existing law costs too much and slows development, including such projects as the Ruby Hill community under construction in Pleasanton and Los Vaqueros Reservoir being built in eastern Contra Costa.
- ▶ It prevents private landowners from doing what they want with their land, and it has become an over used tool for activists to block housing tracts and logging.

- Give broader powers to the Secretary of the Interior to decide what, if anything, should be done to try to save an endangered species.
- In another proposal, eliminate federal regulations in favor of financial incentives and voluntary efforts to guard against extinctions.

- ▶ The Endangered Species Act has slowed the accelerated rate of extinction brought on by human activities. It helped save the California gray whale and peregrine falcon.
- ▶ If it is weakened, California farms and cities could get more water — at the expense of fish and wildlife, which are already suffering from diversions.

Regulatory relief

- ▶ Change would inject sound science into government rule making and force agencies to set better environmental and health priorities.
- ▶ Would provide businesses with long-overdue relief from ever-increasing regulations.

- Order federal agencies to base health, safety and environmental laws on calculations of economic costs and benefits, instead of health-based standards used now.
- Reduce requirements that oil refineries and other industries report toxic releases.

- ▶ The change would place people, including children, at risk of contamination from pollutants.
- ▶ It would actually increase the bureaucratic red tape by requiring complicated new studies.

Property rights



A RAPTOR 'KILLING FIELD'

Stirring ill winds

Land-use conflicts, politics tarnish state's allure for turbine operations

By JAMES BRUGGERS
Staff writer

Wind energy might be taking off in other states and around the world, but in California, where the industry was born, it faces an uncertain future.

It's been 15 years since the first turbines sprang up like a crop of wildflowers on East Bay ridges. Grazing land in the Altamont Pass between Byron and Livermore was the birthplace of an enterprise that promised a clean and renewable alternative to oil, gas and nuclear power.

But after a period of rapid expansion in Alameda, Contra Costa and Solano counties, and two areas of Southern California, wind energy companies are looking beyond the Golden State for growth. The reasons are complex. There is, for instance, the perplexing problem of wind turbines killing birds, including protected species. Then there are economic concerns, land-use conflicts, fire problems and changing politics.

"The wind energy industry in California has reached a plateau in its growth cycle," said Bob Aldrich, spokesman for the California Energy Commission.

Existing power contracts between wind farms and utilities like Pacific Gas & Electric are coming to an end, he said.

"We've probably tapped out the windiest places, or the easiest of the places to get to," he said.

Workings of a wind turbine

The Kenetech KVS-33 is one of the most technologically advanced wind turbines available. It operates in wind speeds from 10 to 65 mph.

Generator

Maximum output: 410 kilowatts, enough to power about 160 homes

Rotor

Diameter: 108-130 feet
Material: laminated fiberglass

Pitch actuator

Controls rotor power by varying the blade pitch angle.

Yaw system

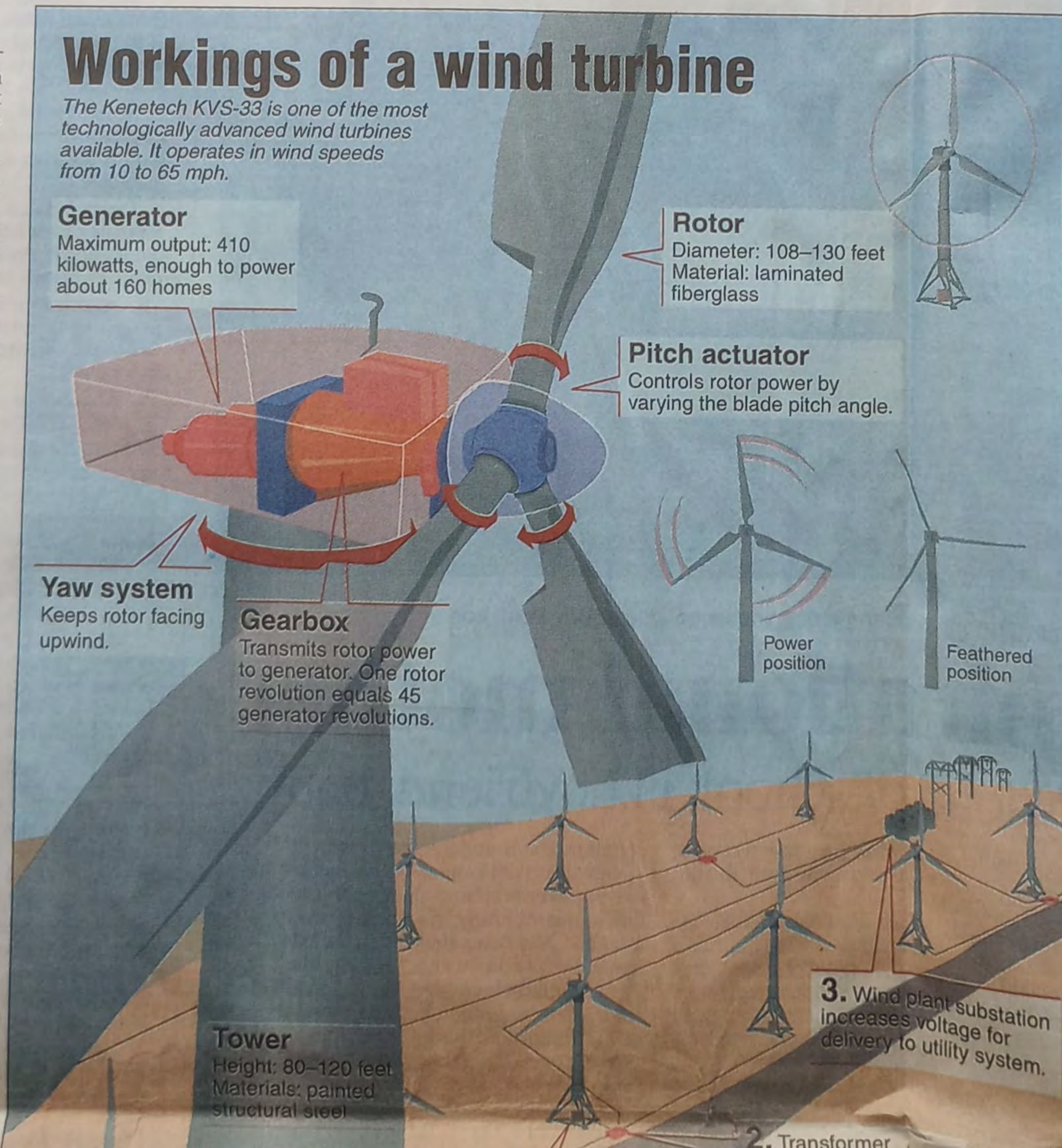
Keeps rotor facing upwind.

Gearbox

Transmits rotor power to generator. One rotor revolution equals 45 generator revolutions.

Tower

Height: 80-120 feet
Materials: painted structural steel



3. Wind plant substation increases voltage for delivery to utility system.

2. Transformer

"We are at the point today where you are going to start to see improvements," Greby said.

But there are other problems, including:

Land-use conflicts. As cities encroach farther into agricultural land, they bring people closer to wind farms or potential new sites. Many people don't want to see turbines spread across hillsides or hear them from their homes.

People in Cordelia, for example, "went ballistic" over PG&E's plan to put turbines in the Cordelia hills, said Brian Parker, a Solano County planner. The company backed off.

Fires. Wind farm operators are feeling the heat from the state Department of Forestry and Fire Protection over blazes in Altamont Pass. Causes range from electrical shorts to exposed wires to flaming birds.

"It's the responsibility of the wind companies to take steps to reduce the causes of fires," said John Elliff, bat-

alion chief of the agency's Sunshine Station in eastern Contra Costa. Some are and some aren't, he said, declining to mention names.

The biggest question mark, however, may be potential deregulation.

"Everybody is kind of in a holding pattern," Aldrich said. "We are basically at a crossroads."

The state PUC is considering ways to allow business and residential consumers to pick their energy suppliers.



DAN ROSENSTRAUCH/Times

GRAINGER HUNT, biologist, flies over the Livermore Valley on Wednesday.

Wilcox said, wind farms provide revenue to ranchers and farmers, and this helps them keep their property as open space instead of selling to developers.

"This is a real conundrum," he said.

For their part, industry officials say years of avian research is about to pay off. Ways to reduce the deaths, including painted blades, perching barriers on towers, and better electrical insulation to prevent electrocutions, are being introduced into wind farms this year.

"It is incumbent upon us to save the wildlife — to save the birds," said Clarence Greby, manager of corporate communications for San Francisco-based Kenetech, which operates nearly 4,100 turbines in the East Bay, the most of any company.

"We're at the point today where you are going to start seeing some improvements," Greby said.

For the birds, it can't happen soon enough.

With the largest concentration of wind generators in the world — about 8,900 turbines dotting the ridges of the Altamont Pass in Alameda and Contra Costa counties and the Montezuma Hills of southern Solano County — the death toll continues to mount. Wind farm operators reported 679 dead or injured birds from 1992 through January 1995, according to a Times computer analysis of records on file with Alameda County. Most were birds of prey.

The death toll includes 266 red-tail hawks, 64 golden eagles, 48 barn owls and 34 American kestrels. None of those reported dead is on state or federal endangered species lists, but all are protected by other laws. Two, golden eagles and burrowing owls, are considered species of special concern in California, meaning they are at risk of becoming endangered. Companies and individuals can be fined thousands of dollars if they kill golden eagles or any migratory birds under the Bald Eagle Protection Act and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

Even worse, the deaths have increased each year. Ten golden eagles, for example, were reported in 1992, 23 the following year and 28 in 1994.

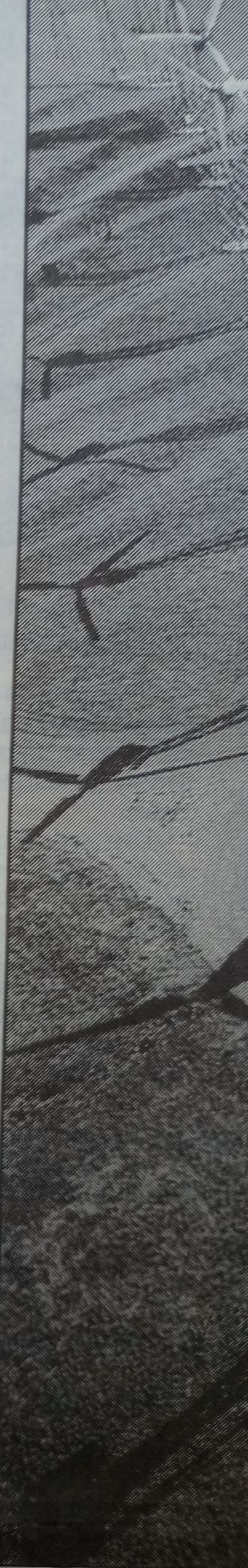
The toll on red-tail hawks climbed from 40 in 1992 to 164 in 1994.

Actual mortality is probably higher, biologists said.

The count represents only those birds that are discovered and reported to authorities, said Joe DiDonato, wildlife specialist for the East Bay Regional Park District. Others may fly off and die away from the turbines, he said. Still more may be scavenged, leaving no trace.

And the Alameda County records contained only partial reports from Contra Costa and Solano counties, which do not require companies to disclose bird deaths.

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One of the most troubling aspects of the deaths is their brutal nature.

"The types of injuries I see on carcasses out there are wings that have been amputated," Cynthia Struzik, a Fish and Wildlife Service special agent, told Kenetech's Avian Research Task Force last November. "Carcasses that are chopped in half, mid-body, (and) decapitations where the bird is decapitated mid-skull are not that uncommon."

"There are a few mortalities where . . . essentially the beak is chopped off. And you find birds in a pool of blood . . . (dead) of a fatal nose bleed."

It's the eagles, with their 6- to 7- foot wing span, that have drawn most of the attention. A 1987 study by Fish and Game biologist Ron Schlorff estimated the state population at just 500 breeding pairs.

Many experts now believe that number is higher.

"Golden eagles are not a rare bird," said Grainger Hunt, a biologist studying East Bay eagles.

Schlorff, however, said there still is reason to worry about the eagles. Reproduction is slow. Pairs, thought to mate for life, often have just one offspring a year.



CATTLE GRAZE beneath tur

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CATTLE GRAZE beneath turbines at the Altamont Pass.

Though adults can live 20 years, as many as 80 percent of the young die of such causes as starvation, Schlorff said.

The East Bay wind farms could be severely depleting the region's eagles, Schlorff said.

"Losing 30-something eagles a year in a very small area is very serious mortality," Schlorff said. "There simply has to be a way to figure out how to reduce that. Otherwise we're going to have golden eagles added to the endangered species list, and nobody wants that."

What level of mortality is acceptable? So far, nobody has an answer.

"The first concern for a lot of people is for the population — if it's healthy and stable," said Bob Thresher, director of the National Wind Technology Center in Boulder, Colo.

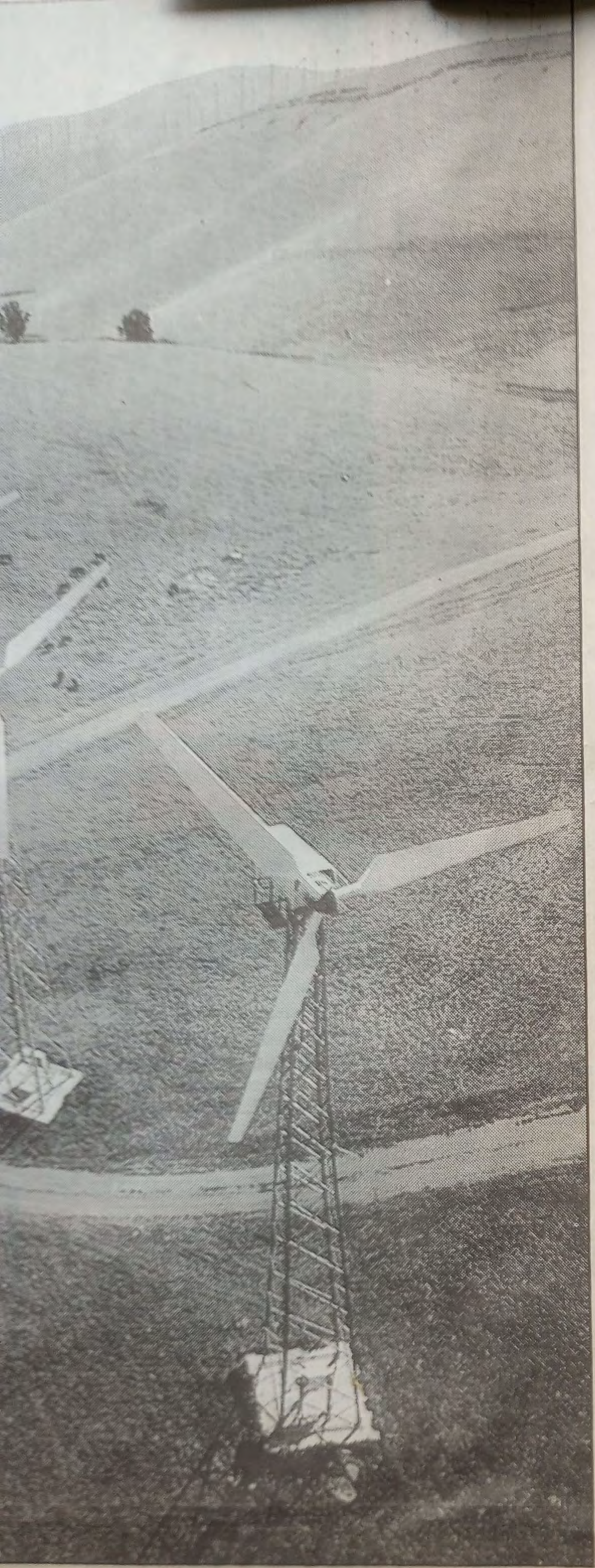
Thresher's group, part of the U.S. Department of Energy, is funding Hunt's golden eagle study through the Santa Cruz Predatory Bird Research Group.

Using radio transmitters, Hunt has tracked most of the eagles and visitors from other states to other open spaces. The Altamont Pass is a Bay's eagles if dead, Hunt said. Any conclusion, he said.

No one knows for sure how many golden eagles and red-tailed hawks are killed by the spinning blades of the turbines.

It's thought that the turbines, like the hawks, are likely to kill eagles. In addition, the turbine towers as tall as 100 million years old, you imagine an eagle sitting on trees?"

Some species, such as the towers. Other birds



JIM KETSDEVER/Times file 1992

mont Pass.

Using radio transmitters, Hunt has determined that most of the eagles at Altamont Pass are local and not visitors from other states, living in wildland parks and other open spaces. That could spell trouble for the East Bay's eagles if deaths are concentrated among them, Hunt said. Any conclusions, however, are years off, he said.

No one knows for sure why some raptors, such as golden eagles and red-tail hawks, are more likely to fly into spinning blades than other species.

It's thought that the most abundant, such as red-tail hawks, are likely to be killed because of their sheer numbers. In addition, eagles and red-tail hawks view turbine towers as trees and land on them, Hunt said.

"In 100 million years of evolution," Hunt said, "can you imagine an eagle developing a paranoia about land-

focused on diving or prey. Whatever the reasons, Kenetech officials believe the woes of Altamont Pass are an exception and not the rule. Newer wind plant sites are carefully designed and planned to minimize bird deaths, Greby said.

"Bird mortality is a problem at every wind power site," said Brad Bortner, chief of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's regional migratory bird program. "But the level of mortality varies greatly."

In some areas, such as turbine-studded Tehachapi Pass in Southern California, migratory songbirds may be dying instead of raptors, he said.

Just as the East Bay was an embryo for the wind energy industry, so it is for the effort to resolve the problems with birds, Greby said.

Newer turbines feature tubular towers without perching areas, and fewer deaths are being attributed to them, Greby said.

Workers have begun stretching wire above the I-beams of older-style lattice towers in hopes of preventing landings. Crews are installing chain-link fencing near the tops of these towers to discourage perching. Kenetech has also improved methods for keeping birds off power lines. And later this year, the company will try out new blades painted black and white in a pattern laboratory studies suggest will be more visible to raptors.

The cost to paint nine test turbines will be \$57,000, Greby said. The perch protections have cost \$23,000 for 50 towers. At new wind power sites, the bird-safety measures will add about \$2,000 per turbine.

The company doesn't want to keep birds out of its wind farms.

"We are not trying to change the ecosystem," Greby said. "We are trying to co-exist with it. We want to reduce the mortality to as close to zero as possible."

That's what federal regulators want, too.

Since 1990, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has been investigating East Bay wind farm operators, said David McMullan, the agency's regional law enforcement chief. Agents have been collecting and freezing bird carcasses, and stockpiling information on the deaths.

The U.S. Attorney's Office, however, has declined to file charges against any of the companies, including Kenetech. Persuading a jury that the companies are intentionally violating the law would be unlikely, said Stephen Meagher, a former federal prosecutor who handled the case.

Environmentalists, reluctant to speak out against the mortality, have been protective of the industry.

"I felt like I played Paul Revere about three years ago," said Paul Thayer, who opposed a Sacramento Municipal Utility District wind energy project that was approved for Montezuma Hills. "I went to local chapters of Sierra Club and Audubon . . . Their response always was, 'Are we going back to fossil fuels?' I'd say, 'I don't know, maybe, but we've got a problem here.'"

It's been difficult to weigh the pros and cons of wind power, said Jill Shirley, a National Audubon Society lobbyist in Sacramento.

"Rather than being slow, we've been deliberate," she said. "Rather than scream and yell, we'd like to find a constructive solution."

The best approach for wind companies is to develop wind farms in phases and keep a close eye on the birds, said Ferguson of the Sierra Club.

"That's what they should have done at Altamont Pass."

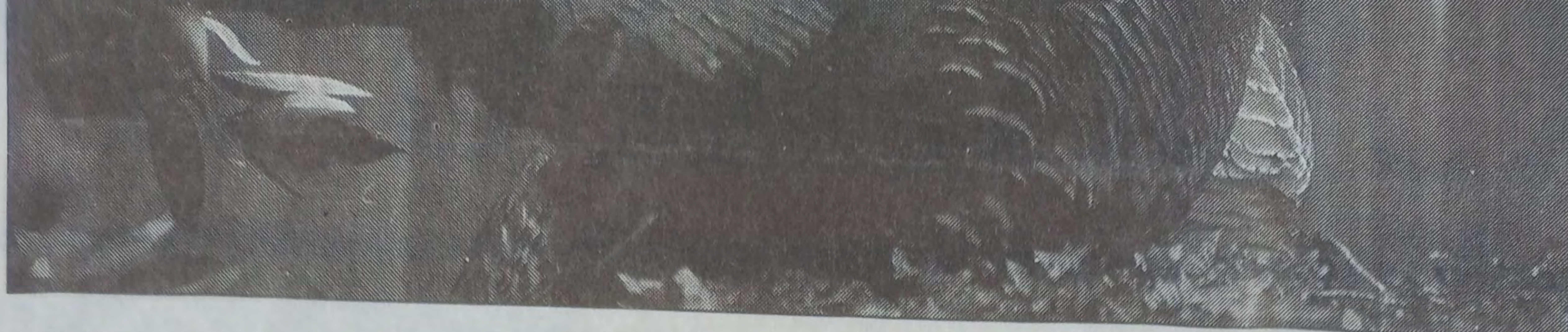
But patience in some camps wears thin.

Sierra Club leadership might have to rethink its position on wind power, said Mary Mesmer, chair of the organization's state wildlife committee.

"We've got to make some hard decisions soon," she said.

Audubon has called for a moratorium on new wind farms, raising scrutiny on proposals from the Columbia River Gorge to Maine.

The nation once thought hydropower was clean and safe but now knows it has driven some species of fish toward extinction, said Arthur Feinstein, program coordinator for the Golden Gate Audubon Society in Berkeley.



A FLOCK OF wild turkeys invades a Danville back yard in this 1993 photo. Earlier this year, residents of the Boone Hill area of Danville complained of being overrun by the birds.

JIM KETSDEVER/Times file 1993

Danville opens season for hunting wild turkeys

By LAURA BENDIX

Staff writer

DANVILLE — Residents troubled this winter by renegade turkeys are now legally allowed to take their revenge.

Turkey hunting season has begun, but police warn would-be hunters to be cautious before they strap on their shotguns and go looking for the pesky poultry.

Earlier this year, the birds created havoc in some Northeast Danville and Alamo neighborhoods. They ripped up gardens, left droppings in driveways and took an occasional swimming pool dive.

Neighbors were divided on what to do. Some said the turkeys should be taken away or shot. Others said the birds add to the area's semirural charm and should be left alone.

Hunting season began April 1 and runs through May 5.

Hunters must buy a \$25 permit with a \$5.50 "bird stamp," they may hunt only male turkeys, and they may only kill two birds a season, said Terry Palmisano, a wildlife biologist for the state fish

and game department.

Residents are also prohibited from hunting turkeys within city limits. Hunting is allowed in unincorporated areas of the county such as Alamo and Diablo as long as shooting is not done within 150 feet of an occupied home or business, said Lt. Tom Coggan of the Alamo sheriff's substation.

Mike Shimansky, Danville's vice mayor, said some of his neighbors may be interested in a turkey hunt.

"No one is against the turkeys," he said. "We just don't want there to be so many."

A state biologist counted at least 90 birds in the area behind Shimansky's home earlier this year.

Gayle Warrington, who lives nearby, said she is one of several residents who regularly feed the turkeys and hope to keep them in the area. She calls the birds her "little darlings."

"It's not a very good lesson to teach children, that just because something is a little bit annoying that it should be destroyed," she said.

"Just this morning, I saw a won-

derful, big, clumsy thing on my fence just sitting there, checking everything out," she said. "I think they're wonderful. They're part of the charm of living in this area."

The turkeys, according to local legend, are descendants of two domestic birds that escaped from their corral in 1982.

Today, the birds roaming Danville's hills are still considered domestic and may carry several diseases, including smallpox, salmonella or various forms of influenza, said Joanne Karlton, an associate wildlife biologist with the state fish and game department. However, she said, the chances of humans contracting those diseases are slim unless the poultry is improperly cooked and eaten.

Karlton is worried about a larger problem, however.

She fears the birds are becoming too reliant on humans to provide food and are losing their natural fear of people.

If the birds get too comfortable, they could become aggressive and hurt a person or child as they search for more food, she said.

Nonprofit group to launch Delta science facility

By JAMES BRUGGERS

Staff writer

Delta Environment Science Center planners have taken major steps toward their vision of an education facility on the banks of the Delta near Oakley.

They have formed a nonprofit group to build and run the center, selected a board of directors and hired an executive director.

"We've got a great dream there, and a real active, go-get-'em committee," said Contra Costa Supervisor Tom Torlakson, an early science center advocate.

As envisioned, science center buildings would be constructed on Ironhouse Sanitary District property along Big Break, a flooded former island. The center already runs ecology programs for teachers.

Last week, the center's new board picked Stephen Barbata as executive director. Barbata ran the Lindsay Museum in Walnut Creek from 1986 to 1994 during its expansion, and recently directed a Colorado land trust.

Barbata said Wednesday that he is extremely excited to return to Contra Costa County. "If we do things right, this thing has unlimited potential."

Barbata's biggest challenge will be raising money, said Ted Radke, an East Bay Regional Park District

board member who is also on the science center board. Barbata and science center board members will also have to resolve issues of parking, safety and access.

A study estimated a "world-class" science center could cost as much as \$22.6 million and attract 850,000 visitors a year. The board has not set a target date for the center's completion.

In addition to Radke and Torlakson, science center board members include Dwight Meadows, Ironhouse Sanitary District director; Bill Corey, Contra Costa Community College District director; Mark Nickerson, director of Cal State Hayward's Contra Costa Campus; Bob Hussey, Contra Costa Mosquito and Vector Control District director; Frank Hengel, superintendent of Oakley Union School District; and Al McNabney of the Mt. Diablo Audubon Society.

Others are Janess Hanson, Sierra Club Delta Group; Katherine Ripley-Williams, a University of California fund-raiser; David Jameson, research fellow at California Academy of Sciences; Beverly Lane, East Bay Regional Park District director; Oliver Holmes, former park district director; Dan Henry, biology dean at Los Medanos Community College; and Roberta Goulart, a member of the Contra Costa Board of Supervisors Water Committee.

Congress must not weaken laws on environment

A baby who puts his or her hand on a hot stove seldom does the same thing again. A new dog knows little but with repetition usually learns. If only it were so with the majority in Congress.

All last year sneak and open attacks on just every environmental law, rule or regulation were the norm.

Letters, phone calls, personal meetings and, possibly most importantly, polls strongly demonstrated the people don't want environmental laws rolled back.

They don't want sneak attacks, like defunding riders hidden away in some bill concerning other matters that if passed would have effectively done away with enforcement powers.

Defunding, changing the purposes of our nation's wildlife refuges and national parks is not acceptable.

So we have a right to ask again: Do we the people have to again write, call and fax congressional representatives to tell them that assaults on environmental laws are not acceptable?

I suggest the sleeping dog is now fully awake. Actions that imperil environmental laws or enforcement of such will be subject of close scrutiny.

A.B. McNabney
Walnut Creek

C.C. TIMES

6-3-96

Bald eagles build a nest on the shores of Del Valle

Times staff

DEL VALLE REGIONAL PARK — A pair of bald eagles has been found nesting at Lake Del Valle for perhaps the first time in the past century, East Bay Regional Park District officials said Tuesday.

District General Manager Pat O'Brien, who announced the discovery to board members, said that although bald eagles are frequently spotted in the Bay Area during winter migration months, it is unusual for them to nest here.

Joe DiDonato, a wildlife biologist with the park district, said the nesting pair was first observed at Lake Del Valle a week and a half ago.

Bald eagles have been spotted near Lake San Antonio, Calaveras Reservoir south of Pleasanton, and in the Sunol-Ohlone Regional Wilderness south of Livermore, DiDonato said. But he added that those eagles were "wintering" in those areas rather than nesting.

Officials said that the park district has assigned someone to watch the nest, look after the pair and



JIM KETSDEVER/Times file

A BALD EAGLE perches in a pine tree along the shores of Lake Del Valle in Livermore in 1990. A mating pair of bald eagles has built a nest at the lake, the only confirmed nest site in the Bay Area in the past century.

keep onlookers from getting too close.

The bald eagle is one of about 60 species of eagles. It is found only in North America and is the national bird of the United States.

It has been considered an endangered species throughout much of North America since the early 1960s. The species has been protected by federal law since 1940 in the lower 48 states and since 1953 in Alaska.

While their nesting numbers dipped to below 3,000 in the mid-1970s, pesticide bans and habitat protection have allowed that number to increase to more than 5,000 nesting birds by the late 1980s. Between 30,000 and 60,000 bald eagles are estimated to live in the United States and Canada.

Their diet consists primarily of fish, and they are usually found near lakes and ponds.



GARY BOGUE

Times columnist

C.C. TIMES

12-18-96

Watch the birdie, help gather data

Doing anything over the holidays?

AUDUBON CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

The Mount Diablo Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count will be Saturday. All members and interested guests (that's you) are invited to participate.

Every pair of eyes will be helpful in seeing birds (you don't have to be an expert birder to help). Last year 66 field observers and six feeder watchers tied the MDAS all-time high count of 159 species. A total of 31,686 birds were recorded.

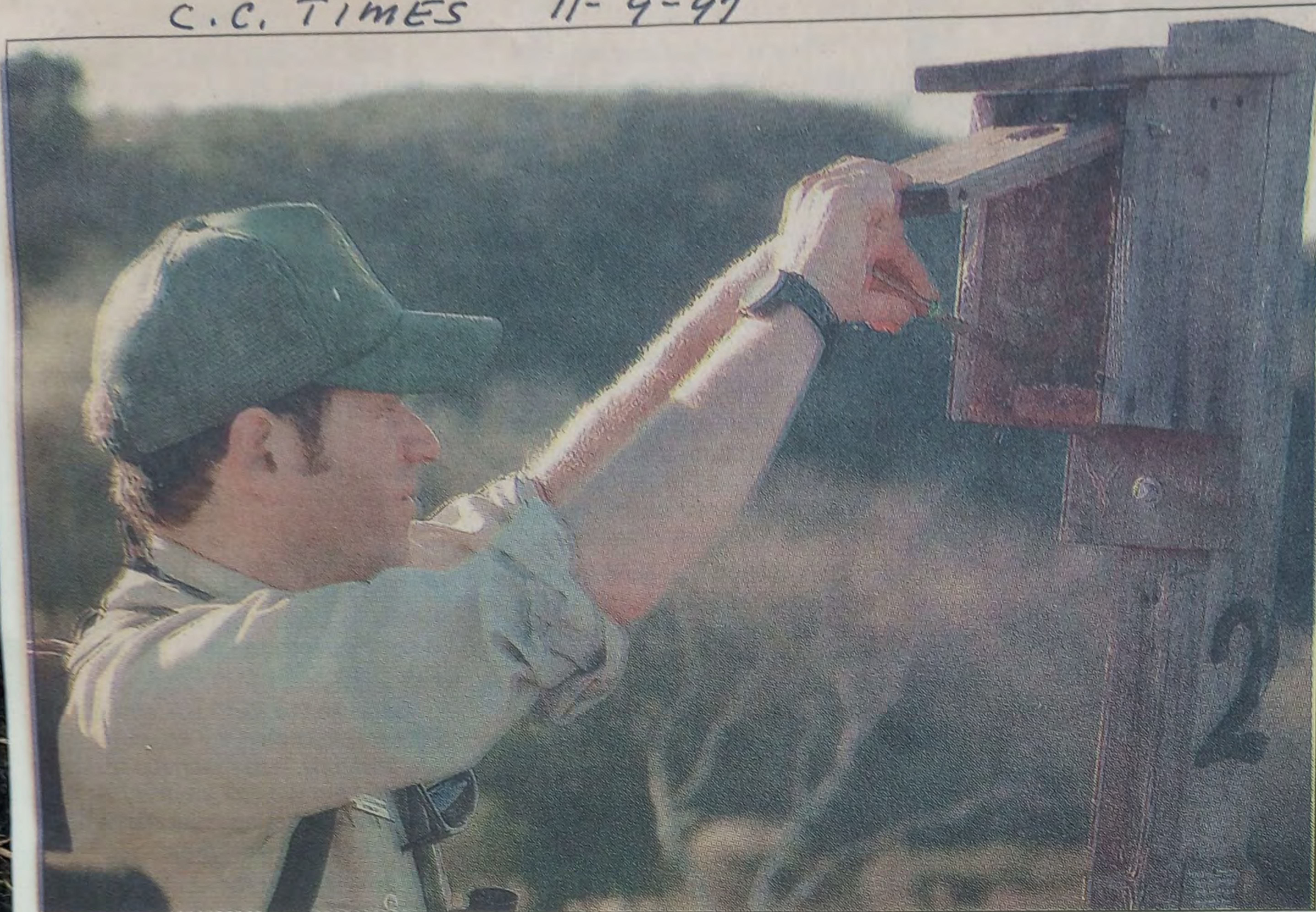
Nationally, the 97th annual Christmas Bird Count happens over a 2½ week period in December and January. There are 1,650 counts each year, covering all 50 states, every Canadian province, parts of Central and South America, Bermuda, the West Indies and Pacific Islands.

Valuable bird population and environmental information is gained from these volunteer efforts.

This year's MDAS count will cover a 15-mile diameter circle in portions of Concord, Pittsburg, Walnut Creek and Mount Diablo. As much of this area as possible is covered within the 24-hour period of the count.

The local count is open to people 12 and over who can spend Saturday volunteering. There is a \$5 fee for field observers to cover the expense of publishing the annual Christmas Count issue of American Birds. Monitoring your own feeder is also an option if it occurs within the count circle. There is no charge for feeder watchers.

If you are interested in volunteering or need more information, call Jimm Edgar at 658-2330.



JOSE CARLOS FAJARDO/TIMES

DAVE ZUCKERMANN, a naturalist with East Bay Regional Park District, cleans a bluebird nesting box during a hike along the top of Wildcat Canyon Regional Park on the Laurel Canyon Trail.

For the bluebirds

Volunteers are building boxes, setting up nesting trails to help tiny birds rebound from population declines

By Matt Weiser
TIMES STAFF WRITER

Here along the bluebird trail at Wildcat Canyon Regional Park, the work is for the sake of a small neighbor who's been all but forgotten by the bustling communities below.

High above Berkeley, with San Francisco Bay at their feet, the volunteers move from one nest box to the next. They knock first, like good neighbors should, to avoid surprising any residents.

Each box is opened and cleaned of old nesting material in preparation for

a new breeding season. Then the boxes are sealed shut again, in hopes that a new pair of showy bluebirds will find a home there in the year ahead.

On this trip along the bluebird trail, the visitors saw no bluebirds. Nor did they find any signs of an active nest. What they found instead was a cluster of tiny skeletons in one old nest — the remains of what may have been a failed bluebird brood from the prior year.

Though native to California, western and mountain bluebirds have become scarce as the human population has soared. The establishment of bluebird trails like the one at Wildcat Canyon has become a way to atone. And soon, East County will have its own nests to tend.

A bluebird trail is planned at Black Diamond Mines Regional Pre-

serve in Antioch. Volunteers are sought to help build 15 nest boxes on Nov. 22, then install them along a trail in the park later this winter.

It's all part of an expanding effort to restore the native bluebird in North America. "They need our help," said Joel Summerhill, an Antioch resident and bluebird aficionado.

"Birds in general are touchstones for the environment ... they reflect habitat loss very quickly. They can tell us what's happening with the slashing and burning of rain forests and they can tell us what's happening in the residential subdivisions of North America."

Bluebirds are not to be confused with the large, brash Stellar's jay and scrub jay common everywhere in the Bay Area. Instead of the harsh bark of the big jays, the petite bluebird sings infrequently but compensates with its showy flash of bright blue.

Bluebirds live in cavities in wood, but are unable to create their own. So they rely on old nests carved by woodpeckers, knot holes in ancient trees and standing snags — even cavities and cracks in old fence posts.



Western bluebird

BLUEBIRD FACTS

Size: About 6½ inches from beak to tail

Habitat: Open fields bordering woodlands, golf courses, open parks, farms, cemeteries, orchards

Food: Caterpillars, grasshoppers, beetles and most other insects

THE WESTERN BLUEBIRD

Color: Deep blue with a rusty-red breast; females paler

Voice: A short *pew* or *mew*; also a hard chattering note

Range: West of the Rockies from British Columbia to central Mexico

THE MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD

Color: Turquoise blue with lighter blue breast; female dull brown with touch of blue on rump, tail, wings

Voice: Low *chur* or *phew*; song is short, subdued warble

Range: West of the Rockies from Alaska to New Mexico

But there are fewer ancient trees and snags around as development has swept across open fields and grazing land.

"With the obvious development in such places as Contra Costa County, what used to be timber and cavity trees is now asphalt and shopping centers," said Don Yoder of Rossmore, founder of the California Bluebird Recovery Program. "The birds just don't have any place to go."

The bluebird has also been hit hard by aggressive foreign birds like the starling and the sparrow. Also cavity nesters, these abundant birds have taken over many nesting sites

See BLUEBIRD, Page A34



Bluebird

FROM PAGE A31

previously available to bluebirds. They also are known to actually kick bluebirds out of nests they've already established.

It is estimated that the nation's bluebird population plunged 90 percent between the 1920s and 1970s. Of the three species, including the eastern variety, the western bluebird native to the Bay Area is thought to be the least common today.

Bluebirds are not protected by the Endangered Species Act. But as with all migratory birds in the United States, killing and harassing bluebirds is a federal crime under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

Bluebird numbers have improved significantly since birders began installing nest boxes all over the United States. The boxes are built with a hole just large enough for a bluebird but too small for the starling and sparrow.

Unlike many bird species, the bluebird will readily nest in man-made boxes. In some cases, it actually prefers them.

Yoder's group, for example, recorded a jump in California bluebird fledglings from 2,210 in 1995 to 3,157 in 1996, due in part to the expansion of bluebird trail programs.

The birds have caught on with farmers and ranchers, too, who have discovered that bluebirds are an effective substitute for pesticides. Since the birds' diet consists almost entirely of insects, they can help control pests that might harm crops.

Grape growers especially have sought out the bluebird, installing bird boxes to reduce dependence on pesticides and bring nature back to the vineyard.

"I think there's a great fascination with bluebirds just because of their beauty," said Summerhill. "I think people just love to see and watch bluebirds. They're very handsome birds."

Still, only about one-third to one-half of all boxes host a nest in any given year, and not all these nests are productive. Some are preyed upon by raccoons, skunks, domestic cats and even squirrels.



BOB PEPPING/TIMES

DON YODER looks for needed repairs in a bird box. He built and placed 105 boxes last year, giving away just as many.

Walnut Creek man takes bluebirds under his wing

By Matt Weiser
TIMES STAFF WRITER

Don Yoder remembers well the moment that began his devotion to bluebirds.

He had recently retired from a career in insurance sales and purchased a home at Rossmoor in Walnut Creek. He paid a visit to the retirement community just as construction on his new home started, and found bulldozers raking over a pile of old tree stumps and tangled brush.

Flying around the pile was a group of bluebirds "going frantic" looking for their nests, which had probably been hidden in cavities in the tree stumps and smashed by the bulldozers.

"If you think that isn't a picture to remember ..." Yoder says, his voice trailing away at the memory.

After settling in at Rossmoor, he began installing bluebird nest boxes in the area, eventually erecting a network of 105 boxes that have produced hundreds of young bluebirds over the years.

But his work had only begun.

He eventually discovered there was no organized bluebird population monitoring program in California. At the time, only 13 people in the state maintained boxes and reported their results to the North American Bluebird Society. Yoder found this a shockingly tiny contribution compared to East Coast residents' broad interest in the health of the eastern bluebird.

"For a state the size of California, I think that's pretty pitiful," said Yoder, 75.

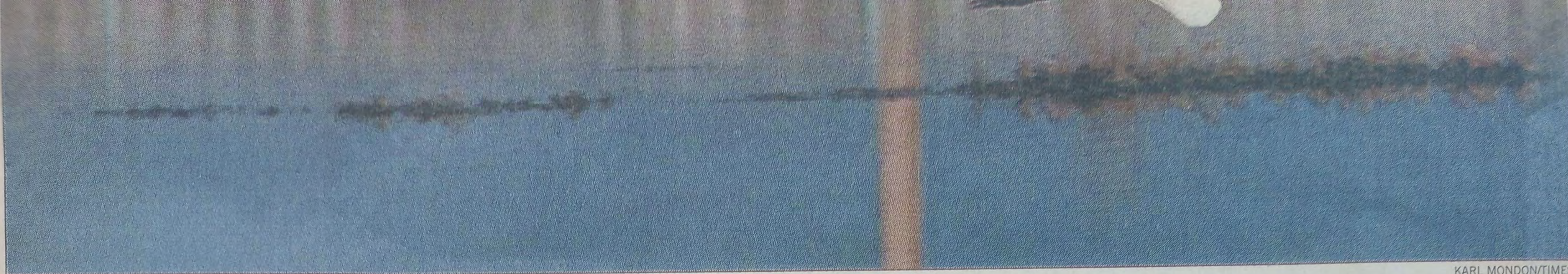
GET INVOLVED

■ Help build the Black Diamond Mines bluebird trail by joining a bird-box building class, Nov. 22 from 10 a.m. to noon. Register by calling 757-2620. Bring hammer and gloves; a \$6.50 materials fee will be charged. People are needed who can return later in the year to install the boxes along a trail.

■ Contact Don Yoder of the California Bluebird Recovery Program, 937-5974, cbrp@design-link.com, for information on building your own bluebird box and helping monitor the population.

So, in 1994, he created the non-profit California Bluebird Recovery Program and began wooing others to his cause. He gained the sponsorship of the National Audubon Society and the North American Bluebird Society, which, until then, had mostly focused its efforts on the eastern bluebird.

Today he coordinates the work of 180 volunteers throughout California — all of them counting bluebirds and maintaining a web of some 2,400 bluebird nest boxes. He publishes a quarterly newsletter on the California effort, which includes a detailed population tally every year.



KARL MONDON/TIMES

AN EGRET provides an easy sighting for volunteers who were out early Saturday to help with the annual two-week National Audubon Society's Christmas Bird Count.

O.C. TIMES 12-21-97



Spirits soar on bird count

Cemetery viewing ideal, volunteers say

By Abby Collins-Sears
TIMES STAFF WRITER

LAFAYETTE — Cemeteries aren't just for the dead and the mourning. Lively bird watchers can vouch for that.

A pack of Audubon Society members gathered at the Lafayette Cemetery early Saturday. Unlike the usual visitors who kneel before grave-stones with heads bent, they trekked on paths with heads cocked, eyes wide — on the lookout for birds.

The happy crew volunteered to assist with the 98th annual National Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count, held this year between Dec. 19 and Jan. 4.

More than 45,000 people are expected to volunteer this year from all 50 states, every Canadian province, parts of Central and South America, the Caribbean and the Pacific Islands.

Volunteers divide into groups of three to five to count and record every bird and species encountered

in a 15-mile radius during one day. The group at Lafayette Cemetery was just one of about 1,700 bird counts to be held during the next two and a half weeks.

"A habitat is anywhere there's trees and a cemetery is great for that," said Jimm Edgar, member of the Mt. Diablo Audubon Society and a bird watcher for more than 30 years. "Cemeteries are pretty sheltered and devoid of people, so the birds feel protected even though you would consider this an urban habitat."

One of the few problems with bird watching in cemeteries, however, is the noise of passing cars outside the gates. About 75 percent of bird spotting is done by sound, Edgar said. Like a pied piper, a whistling bird can lead a pack of watchers from tree to tree until it finally shows itself.

The birders point. They coo. Then up goes the binoculars above smiles. "I realize it takes a long time to

see that rare bird," said Nat Weber, 39, of Moraga. "After a while you learn to memorize their sounds." He identified a black phoebe without ever seeing it.

Between 7 a.m. and noon, the group spotted 50 birds. Some of the 80 volunteers spread throughout the county Saturday had started at 3 a.m. to spot owls.

Typically, the Mt. Diablo chapter annually records about 150 to 160 species in Contra Costa County.

The figures are included in the Audubon Society's records, the largest ornithological database in the world, Edgar said. There are about 900 species in North America.

"(Bird watching) is a nice way to get outdoors and forget everything else," said Pinole resident Larry Brassea, who's been at it for about 15 years. "You pay attention to the trees and the birds so it helps to block everything else out. It's relaxing."



KARL MONDON/TIMES

A FIELD GUIDE, top left, and binoculars are the tools of the trade for these volunteers who did their bird counting at the Lafayette Cemetery on Saturday morning. Keeping watch are, from left, Nat Weber, Larry Brassea and Jimm Edgar.

Condors going wild in Big Sur

■ Biologists say the birds are doing better than the first group released, which had more human contact

By John Woolfolk
SAN JOSE MERCURY NEWS

BIOLOGISTS WHO ARE attempting to reintroduce endangered California condors in Big Sur say the giant birds are showing signs of successfully returning to the wilderness.

It's a dramatic turnaround from their first effort early last year.

"All the birds are in the wild and doing great," said Jim Davis, executive director of the Ventana Wilderness Sanctuary. The Carmel Valley nonprofit group is working with federal wildlife officials to bring North America's biggest bird back to Big Sur.

"In the world of restoration, all this stuff is new and experimental," Davis said. "This experiment appears to be working extremely well. The condors are exhibiting wild behavior."

The Big Sur condor releases are part of a bold gamble to save the prehistoric scavengers, numbering only 134, from extinction. Biologists in 1987 captured the last wild condors and began an ambitious \$20 million program of breeding them in captivity for release in the wilderness. There are 19 flying wild in Southern California and 15 in Arizona.

In January 1997, the sanctuary released four captive-bred condor chicks in Big Sur, marking the first time in two decades that the vulturelike relics soared over the region. But things didn't go well.

The young, zoo-raised condors proved ill-prepared for life in the wild. They approached hikers, landed on rooftops and swooped into garages, offices and hotels.

Fearing for the birds' safety, the wilderness sanctuary recaptured them last April and returned them to the Los Angeles Zoo, where they

Returning to the sky

Five condors, bred in captivity and trained by a five-year-old adult condor, are surviving in the wild after being released on Dec. 12.



Sources: World Book, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

STAFF

are being bred in an effort to restore their population.

A second batch of five condor chicks was flown in to Big Sur from the zoo in September. Unlike the first group, reared by zookeepers who fed the chicks using birdlike puppets, the new fledglings were hatched and raised by adult condors, Davis said. Their only contact with humans was for two unpleasant blood samplings, he said.

The wilderness sanctuary also built a flight pen alongside its "condor-minium" deep in the Los Padres National Forest.

There the chicks are raised before their release, allowing the birds

RECOVERY FUND

Contributions to the condor recovery effort in Big Sur can be sent to the Ventana Wilderness Sanctuary, P.O. Box 894, Carmel Valley, CA 93924. For more information, call 408-455-9514.

to hone their flight skills before being turned loose.

To assist in the training, an adult bird, Xexe (a Chumash Indian name pronounced Gay-wee), was put in the pen with the birds. She proved quite a taskmaster, chasing the young birds all over the pen, Davis said.

"She was tenacious," Davis said. "She taught them the condor ways."

When the wilderness sanctuary released the young condors Dec. 12, the difference was remarkable.

Rather than heading for the highway and human settlements, the birds soared up to a mountain ridge and began exploring deeper into the wilderness, Davis said. One young female flew 25 miles south of the release point to the San Luis Obispo County border and back, he said.

The birds are also socializing and looking after one another, a trait considered key to their survival, he said.

"The bottom line is that we learned some very valuable lessons from those birds the first time around," said Robert Mesta, a biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Ventura who is working with the wilderness sanctuary on the condor restoration. "We're really happy with the results."

The condors have already demonstrated strong survival skills, fending off attacks from eagles, hawks, bobcats and mountain lions. One was even blown out of a tree during February's El Niño storms, he said.

The young birds still return to their rearing pen for food, and the last big hurdle in their release is getting the carrion-eating scavengers to forage on their own, Davis said. But there is time because condors feed their young for two years in the wild, he said.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the federal agency charged with protecting the condor, contracted with the wilderness sanctuary to restore the population in Big Sur, citing the 20-year-old organization's success in bringing bald eagles back to the region.

The move was an attempt to save taxpayer dollars in the condor recovery effort, which can cost up to \$35,000 a bird.

The wilderness sanctuary program is supported in part by grants from the Packard Foundation and Chevron, and this month is launching a donation drive in Silicon Valley, Davis said.

Weighing up to 25 pounds with a wingspan of nearly 10 feet, the California condor ranged throughout the West Coast, Southwest and even parts of Florida at the end of the last Ice Age, 10,000 years ago. But human settlement decimated its population through destruction of habitat, hunting and poisoning.

By the dawn of the 20th century, the condor was restricted to a horse-shoe-shaped range from the Santa Cruz Mountains south along the coast to Ventura and northward up the southern Sierra Nevada range.

From there, their population quickly plummeted.

The last breeding condors in Big Sur were reported in 1906, and the last time the giant bird was seen soaring over the region was in 1977, Davis said.

There were only 27 left in the wild when they were captured for the breeding program.

New technology may save birds from the blade

O.C. TIMES 3/22/98

■ Updated designs for wind turbines should cut down on avian mortality in the Altamont Pass area

By Lisa Vorderbrueggen
TIMES STAFF WRITER

A new generation of supposedly safer wind turbines can't come soon enough for birds in the East Bay, which continue to die in the powerful blades of older machines.

Since a Times computer analysis three years ago tallied 679 dead birds from 1992 through January 1995, an additional 328 birds have perished, according to reports from wind farm operators.

The new death toll includes 85 golden eagles, 36 of them in 1997.

If birds keep dying, the industry should be prepared to move away from the Altamont Pass area, which is a known migration route and hunting ground for raptors, said Arthur Feinstein, executive director of the Golden Gate Audubon Society in Berkeley.

"You cannot just keep killing 40 eagles a year," he said. "There must be areas that have a lot of wind and not a lot of birds."

The industry, however, is betting that new, specially designed turbines will solve the problem, and that wind energy production in the East Bay can rebound after several years of decline from economic and other factors.

Wind power is considered to be a clean alternative to the burning of fossil fuels, and a way to help combat the potential problems of global warming.

Tubular towers without perching areas, slower-moving blades, larger and fewer windmills, and sealed electrical components are among the avian protections being considered by three wind farm operators who have applied to Alameda and Contra Costa counties to replace hundreds of old turbines with new machinery.

"We do not want to be killing birds, and we will continue to try and reduce the impacts on our old equipment as well as our new equipment," said Sam Enfield, regional affairs manager for FPL Energy. FPL is one of the partners in Green Ridge Power, which bought 1,517 turbines on the Altamont Pass from the now-bankrupt Kenetech Wind Power.

WINDMILL BIRD KILLS

Altamont Pass,
1992 through January

Red-tailed hawks	411
Golden eagles	149
Barn owls	69
American kestrels	48
Peregrine falcon	1
Other*	347
TOTAL	1,025

* Owls, songbirds, ravens and others

Source: Alameda County Community
Development Department

been pushing for years to put an end to the high numbers of birds killed in the windmill blades.

Some previous critics of East Bay wind farms are cautiously optimistic.

"It certainly looks like these changes could be positive for the raptors," said Joe DiDonato, wildlife specialist with the East Bay Regional Park District. "But there is a need for continued research in order to prove or disprove that these changes are going to significantly reduce the impacts on birds."

More than 1,000 birds killed

Since 1992, more than 1,000 birds have been killed or injured at Altamont Pass and a wind farm in Solano County, according to a Times analysis of industry reports filed with Alameda County. Many were dismembered or electrocuted.

In all, the tally includes 149 golden eagles, 411 red-tailed hawks, and one peregrine falcon.

Most are protected by federal laws, including the Migratory Bird Treaty and Bald Eagle Protection acts.

Peregrine falcons are on the federal endangered species list.

While most wind farms kill some birds, Altamont Pass is home to the largest concentration of nesting golden eagle pairs in the world — about 100 pairs in a 30-mile radius, said biologist Grainger Hunt with the Santa Cruz Predatory Bird Research Group.

Hunt radio-tagged 179 eagles on the Altamont Pass in January 1994 as part of a five-year study on how windmills affect golden eagles. Only 80 of those eagles are still alive. From one-third to half of the 99 deaths are



Bird counters will hatch atlas

■ Five-year survey began Saturday for Contra Costa's most detailed ever reference on the location, nesting activity and status of fowl

By Matt Weiser
TIMES STAFF WRITER

ANTIOCH — Bird lovers county-wide this spring are taking flight on an unprecedented crusade to count all the wings and beaks they can find.

The effort, which started Saturday and will last five years, will produce a Contra Costa County Breeding Bird Atlas to document the location and status of every nesting bird on the county's 514,000 acres. It will be the most detailed tally ever of local birds.

"There's no reference to tell you where birds are in this county. It's never been done thoroughly," said Steven Glover of San Ramon, who is coordinating the atlas for the Mt. Diablo Audubon Society.

Wildlife advocates say the need for a complete bird tally is imperative given that Contra Costa is the fastest-growing county in the region. Other Bay Area counties have already completed their atlases, a fact Glover called "embarrassing."

The need is especially acute in East County, home to much of Contra Costa's remaining open space and much of its development.

"There is a rapid decline of migratory songbirds because of habitat loss," said Lisle Lee, development director at the Lindsay Wildlife Museum in Walnut Creek, a partner in completing the atlas.

"These (atlases) are very important, especially in communities like Contra Costa County, because of the development which is so rampant right now that it's wiping out breeding area for birds."

For the tally, the county has been divided into 106 geographical blocks, each measuring 5 square kilometers. A volunteer assigned to each block will search for signs of breeding and nesting activity each spring and summer for five years.

In 2002, the results will be assembled into a database giving the locations for each breeding bird population. This database will be part of the atlas, as well as a detailed description of each species, its habitat and its status in the county.

Lee said it is important to track breeding birds because they are a key indicator of a healthy ecosystem. Proof of breeding includes everything from sightings of birds carry-



JOEL SUMMERHILL of Antioch surveys a section that includes part of Black Diamond Mines Regional Park. PETER BRADT/TIMES

"There is a rapid decline of migratory songbirds because of habitat loss."

—Lisle Lee,
Lindsay Wildlife Museum

ing sticks to seeing chicks in a nest.

Glover has recruited about 70 volunteers for the atlas. The museum is contributing a group of high school students who are part of a water-quality monitoring program it runs with local schools. But more volunteers are needed for unclaimed blocks.

Other partners include the Point Reyes Bird Observatory, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the San Francisco Estuary Institute.

Training is available to help volunteers learn to recognize various signs of breeding and learn how to behave around nests. For example, walking straight up to a nest is a bad idea because this may give away its location to predators.

Among the volunteers are Anti-

och residents Joel Summerhill and Gloria Cannon, who are surveying a tract that includes Contra Loma Reservoir, the city of Antioch reservoir at Lone Tree Golf Course, and part of Black Diamond Mines Regional Park.

"I've already identified 40 species of birds in my area, and we've got them in various stages," Summerhill said. "I've seen red-tailed hawks carrying sticks, so I know they're nesting. I've seen red-wing blackbird fledglings. I've seen western bluebirds acting very suspiciously."

Glover expects to tally about 150 species during the five-year survey period. Surprises are possible: During surveys for the Alameda County atlas, volunteers found bald eagles nesting at Del Valle Reservoir, where they had not been known to nest before.

But disappointment may be a more likely result of the Contra Costa project, Glover said.

An example is the western burrowing owl, classed as a species of special concern. Once present in many areas of the county, such as the site of Bishop Ranch business park in San Ramon, the burrowing owl is now limited to a few areas of

HELP WANTED

To volunteer for the Contra Costa County Breeding Bird Atlas, call Steven Glover at 925-866-1409, or e-mail him at sgloverccc@aol.com.

unincorporated East County. Glover said that by 2002 the atlas may show even these populations are declining.

"Before it's even done there are some obvious things that are disappearing pretty fast," he said. The bird atlas, however, will offer "something written down somewhere saying this bird is in big trouble and it'll be gone pretty soon if nothing's done."

This could prove vital to preserving remaining natural areas that are critical to bird survival.

To that end, the completed atlas will be a public document. It will offer consultants, developers and urban planners information on avian inhabitants of precise areas so construction plans can be modified if necessary.

"It's very important if you're going to fully understand the birds in your county," Summerhill said.

Al McNabney battled for nature in East Bay

By Abby Collins-Sears
TIMES STAFF WRITER

WALNUT CREEK — There may never be another environmentalist like Al McNabney in Contra Costa County, say friends, fellow advocates and even opponents.

The man was synonymous with environmentalism in the East Bay. He died Friday morning of natural causes.

Al belonged to more environmental organizations, projects and advisory councils than Heather Farm Park has trees, the Delta has islands or Mount Diablo has trails, he said in a January interview. He knew because he monitored them for more than two decades.

"He was a great environmental warrior," said Walnut Creek resident Steve Barbata, who knew Al for 12 years after meeting him at an environmental event.

"Even before that, I was always aware of his eminent presence," he said. "He made the environment more tolerable for all life forms."

Heavily involved

Funny thing was, Al rarely got outdoors.

In his later years, the Rossmoor resident used most of his energy to read land-use studies, attend meetings and write letters. On average, he wrote more than 25 letters a week to developers, politicians and public agencies. He also subscribed to 37 conservation publications and would read every page.

When one saw Al in action at a city planning commission or the county Board of Supervisors meeting, you would know that was no exaggeration. He would spew facts and figures at bullet speed — without forgetting to flash a smile.

"He was exceptionally competent and always very thorough," said Martinez resident Ted Radke, a member of the East Bay Regional Park District board. "He earned a great deal of respect from everybody he came into contact with, whether people agreed with him or not."

Defusing tension

Several people commented that one of Al's greatest talents was infusing dry humor into heated discussions.

"He would defuse steamy or difficult situations with humor," Barbata said. "He knew people learned better through humor than pointed criticism. He was a master of it."

EPITAPH

Allister
Baron
McNabney

Born:

Dec. 1, 1914,
in South
Dakota

Died:

May
1, 1998, in
Walnut Creek

Survivors:

His wife, He-
len B. McN-
abney



McNabney

Memorial gifts: Advocates for
Bird Conservation, 113 Fountain-
head Court, Martinez, CA 94553

"He was a great environmental warrior. Even before that, I was always aware of his eminent presence. He made the environment more tolerable for all life forms."

— Steve Barbata,
Walnut Creek resident

gan about 30 years ago with a simple affinity for a bird. Every day, he passed the pet shop near his former San Francisco home. Eventually he made regular stops to admire one bird — a green Amazon parrot.

One day the owner suggested Al take it out of the cage. It bit him. But the owner said he handled the bird very well. So he bought that parrot, and soon after, another.

Love of birds

Al then read everything he could about parrots, an interest that expanded to other birds.

He even took a job studying hospital systems in Australia so he and his wife, Helen, could spend their free time studying the country's native species.

Al and Helen were two lovebirds themselves. Even after 57 years of marriage, they still exchanged affectionate glances and coy grins. Helen matched Al's clever witticisms with her own gentle quips.

a talkative African gray parrot that he had for more than 30 years. She and Coco could never hold a conversation.

Volunteered after retiring

After retiring in the late 1970s, Al said he had nothing better to do so he volunteered with the Mt. Diablo Audubon Society. It was the beginning of his environmental work.

"They sounded like they had something to do with birds, and by then I was pretty well steeped into bird life," he had said in the interview earlier this year.

The organization made Al vice president of conservation, and he fought to maintain ecological equilibrium ever after. That involvement sprouted into other environmentally related issues, such as overseeing effects of Tosco refinery emissions, and developing the Delta Science Center, a proposed research, education and recreation facility that became his pet project the past five years.

"He called it a world-class center," said Radke, the park district board member. "He wanted everyone involved with it to think big. It was a dream of his, which will someday soon become a reality."

Many memberships

Al was also a member of the Sierra Club, CalFed, Advocates for Bird Conservation, Committee for the American Federation of Aviculture, Commission for Endangered and Exotic Species, Committee on the Conservation on International Trade and Endangered Species, and the Lindsay Wildlife Museum. Al also watched over practically every development plan proposed in Contra Costa, making him the county's environmental conscience.

He said he had lived so long that his many lives all helped in his role as an effective activist. Al was a hospital administrator for medical facilities in San Francisco and Tucson, Ariz., and he was once a labor leader and belonged to the American Arbitration Association.

Modest activist

But when asked about other accomplishments, he was always self-effacing.

"There's not a huge rush of people wanting the job and the environment is going to pot in a hand basket," he said a few months ago. "As long as I can negotiate, talk and walk, I'm going to keep doing it."

Helen said there will be no services because her modest husband



COUNT TOTALS on four species — ring-billed, California, herring and Western gulls — have dropped from 11,175 to 674 since 1980. These gulls are flying above the mountains. BOB LARSON/TIMES

Mt. Diablo Audubon Society shares tracking data

By Gary Bogue
TIMES STAFF WRITER

THOUSANDS of people think Christmas is for the birds. Every year at Christmastime, volunteers in all 50 states, every Canadian province, Central and South America, the Caribbean and several Pacific Islands head for local foothills, marshes and back yards to look for birds.

For 100 years — since 1900 — the National Audubon Society has conducted a citizen field-science project, the Christmas Bird Count. The Mount Diablo chapter has been participating since 1952.

The chapter's bird counts have always been forwarded to National Audubon to become part of the huge pool of statistics from all the Audubon chapters.

Specific data on Contra Costa birds have never been compiled and published sepa-

TO JOIN

If you are interested in joining the Mt. Diablo Audubon Society and participating in future Christmas Bird Counts, contact membership chairman Mike Williams, of Wild Birds Unlimited in Pleasant Hill, at 925-798-0303.

ately — until now. Mt. Diablo Audubon Society has given the Times species count summary sheets from the past 20 years. Information on 10 bird species has been analyzed.

Common ravens, unheard of locally just 40 years ago, are being spotted every Christmas. The golden eagle population around Mount Diablo appears to be stable. And the Western scrub jay is definitely doing well, which won't come as a surprise to scrub jay lovers — and especially the haters!

The volunteers' job is to count and record every bird they encounter on one calendar day during the 2½ week count period, then report to their "compiler."

Compilers enter their group's results at BirdSource (www.birdsource.org), a site for bird information run by Audubon and the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology.

The 100th count was done from Dec. 16 to Jan. 3. More than 1,700 teams from Audubon chapters everywhere were involved. Each team was assigned a circle 15 miles in diameter — about 177 square miles — which it covered as thoroughly as possible between one midnight and the next. Over 50,000 birdwatchers participated.

One of the teams was made up of 72 birdwatchers from the Contra Costa-based Mount. Diablo chapter. On Dec. 18, a clear

See BIRDS, Back Page



KARL MONDON/TIMES FILE 1997

A CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTER keeps a bird book handy for quick reference in the field.

Contra Costa Times

2/13/2000

Contra Costa Times, 2/13/2000

Birds

FROM PAGE 1

day, they logged an average of two hours and 20 minutes apiece.

The chapter's count circle is centered near the intersection of Treat Boulevard and Clayton Road in Concord. It includes parts of the Carquinez Strait, the Pittsburg marshes, Mount Diablo, Alamo, Rossmoor, Lafayette, Briones Regional Park and Martinez — and covers everything in between.

The Mount Diablo birders spotted 73,083 birds and identified, in a

preliminary estimate, 155 species.

Jimm Edgar, of Oakland, has been the chapter's compiler since he joined in 1974.

"I did the count that year, 25 years ago, and I haven't missed a year since," he said.

National Audubon claims that the annual count is more than a much-anticipated holiday event; the results are vital for assessing the status and health of continental birds as well as the general state of the environment. Birds are among the first animals affected by threats like pollution and habitat destruction.

"The count captures in a single day what the grass roots of Audubon

is all about: the birds," Edgar said. "The society tracks environmental issues, but at its very grass roots, it tracks birds."

The count is required of every Audubon chapter, every year.

"It's the longest-running database on birds in the world," Edgar said.

The annual bird counts are not without their detractors. Many scientists and professional ornithologists don't believe in the count results because they are compiled by amateurs.

"In my experience, scientists and professionals in the Bay Area reject CBC data as having any useful and scientific value," said Bill Bousman

of Menlo Park. He has been writing the monthly bird observations column, "Field Notes," for the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society for more than 20 years and maintains their count records.

Bousman agrees with scientists that the "only truly suitable analysis of avian population health is to perform a long-term monitoring program based on accepted scientific protocol and carried out by professional scientists."

But he also says that, since proper data don't exist, the best alternative is to use data from the annual counts.

Steve Glover of Dublin, a regional editor of "North American Birds,"

has been participating in counts with Mt. Diablo Audubon Society for 11 years. "Amateurs are taking on work that ornithologists used to do. Where the birds are has been left to the amateurs," he said. "The pros don't have the funds to do this work."

Glover works late afternoons and evenings for 25 hours a week with United Parcel Service so he can have his days free for birding. He thinks the Christmas counts are useful, especially for locating big trends.

"Our data is best for birds whose numbers have either dropped or risen dramatically. If a conspicuous, reasonably easy-to-identify bird like a common raven or a red-shouldered

hawk was completely unrecorded in past years, and is now recorded annually, then it is safe to say something has changed," he said.

Glover feels that trying to interpret the changes is the hard part.

"Frankly, we don't have the expertise to do anything beyond state in the dark," he said. "Urbanization and fragmentation of habitat are certainly the cause of some declines, but this has contrarily resulted in the increasing numbers of other species."

C.C. TIMES
OCT. 7, 2000



PENNY DE LOS SANTOS/SAN JOSE MERCURY NEWS

A HARVESTER pours salt into train cars at the Cargill Salt Co. ponds in Newark. A proposed plan would return nearly 19,000 acres in the South Bay to the state they were in during the 1800s.

Bay reclamation plan to hinge on land buy

■ Environmental groups, government agencies and Cargill Salt Co. all want to return 18,800 acres of the South Bay to a natural state

By Aaron Davis
SAN JOSE MERCURY NEWS

Cargill Salt Co. and environmental officials teamed up Friday to discuss the restoration of 30 square miles of salt flats along the South Bay to pristine, 19th century conditions.

The project would dwarf any similar effort on the West Coast. It calls for doing away with salt ponds that have stifled wildlife and plant life from San Mateo and San Jose to Alameda over the company's 150-year presence on the bay.

"This project is the Florida Everglades of the West Coast, no doubt about it," said Dan Beard, senior vice

See RESTORATION, Back Page

Salt marsh restoration

Cargill Salt Co. proposes to continue producing salt in the tidal marshlands near its Newark plant. It would make 18,800 acres it controls in five counties available for restoration.



Map does not include 1,400 acres along the Napa River in the North Bay or approximately 600 acres of tidelands and submerged properties in the South Bay.

Source: Cargill Salt

SAN JOSE MERCURY NEWS

fields in the North Bay — that could be returned to marshlands that would rise and fall naturally with the tide.

In one swoop, the Cargill deal could sew up a third of the total —

any amount for it," said Delia Hitz, an associate manager at the nonprofit Bay Institute.

For Hitz and many others it has been hard, in recent months, to separate the Cargill project from the

And they don't have much time to broker the deal. Cargill officials say the company likely won't wait more than a year or two before selling the land to developers.

estoration

PAGE 1

Restoration

FROM PAGE 1

president of the National Audubon Society, which along with other environmental groups persuaded Congress to pay for a huge wetland restoration project in South Florida.

"San Francisco Bay is one of America's treasures and I would call the Cargill restoration project the linchpin to ensuring the future of this area."

The state recently made a down payment of \$25 million to buy the salt ponds, and Congress may soon follow with matching funds. But the deal hangs on whether the company and the government can agree on a price for the property — a process that has been complicated by the fact that Cargill land is in the geographical heart of the Bay Area's red-hot real estate market.

Should land removed from development be priced as if it were going to be developed? Ultimately, how the government decides the value of this environmentally sensitive land could prove to be a precedent-setting, public-private deal.

And they don't have much time to broker the deal. Cargill officials say the company likely won't wait more than a year or two before selling the land to developers.

"We're ready to sell," said Bill Britt, Cargill vice president. "If we are unable to reach an agreement with government agencies in a reasonable time frame, we will have to consider other options."

Cargill Salt Co. set a ball-park value for the restoration land at \$300 million two years ago when the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service began discussing the purchase.

That figure went unquestioned until this summer when the state Legislature — prompted by San Francisco International Airport and San Francisco politicians — decided to set aside \$25 million toward the purchase of the land.

The federal appraisal of the Cargill land is expected in early December.

Environmentalists and other critics have worried that the deal would allow the airport to extend runways two miles into the bay.

"(Cargill) came up with this plan because they know the airport and the state are ready to pay just about

any amount for it," said Delia Hitz, an associate manager at the non-profit Bay Institute.

For Hitz and many others it has been hard, in recent months, to separate the Cargill project from the runway expansion proposal. Airport officials have said they may want to use the restored Cargill land to offset the environmental damage they would create if they built new runways out into San Francisco Bay.

But it appeared Friday that Cargill officials want nothing to do with the airport.

"Is there a relationship between us and the airport runways? The answer is no," Britt said. "Our project started years before theirs and it stands on its own. We're not linked with the airport at all from our perspective."

Environmentalists said Friday they are lobbying hard in Washington and elsewhere to make sure the government and Cargill reach a deal.

At stake, they say, is nothing less than the master plan to revitalize an estuary that has shrunk dramatically in the face of development.

In March 1999, a team of scientists identified 65,000 acres — mostly salt ponds in the South Bay and hay-

fields in the North Bay — that could be returned to marshlands that would rise and fall naturally with the tide.

In one swoop, the Cargill deal could sew up a third of the total — a task environmentalists thought would take decades to achieve.

Among the benefits:

- The Bay's tidal marsh habitat would balloon by nearly 50 percent, returning bay lands to conditions not seen since the 1800s.

- The project would be a boon to endangered species such as the California clapper rail bird and the salt marsh harvest mouse — two species unique to the Bay Area.

- The thousands of additional acres of marshland would provide sheltered nurseries for a vast array of marine life.

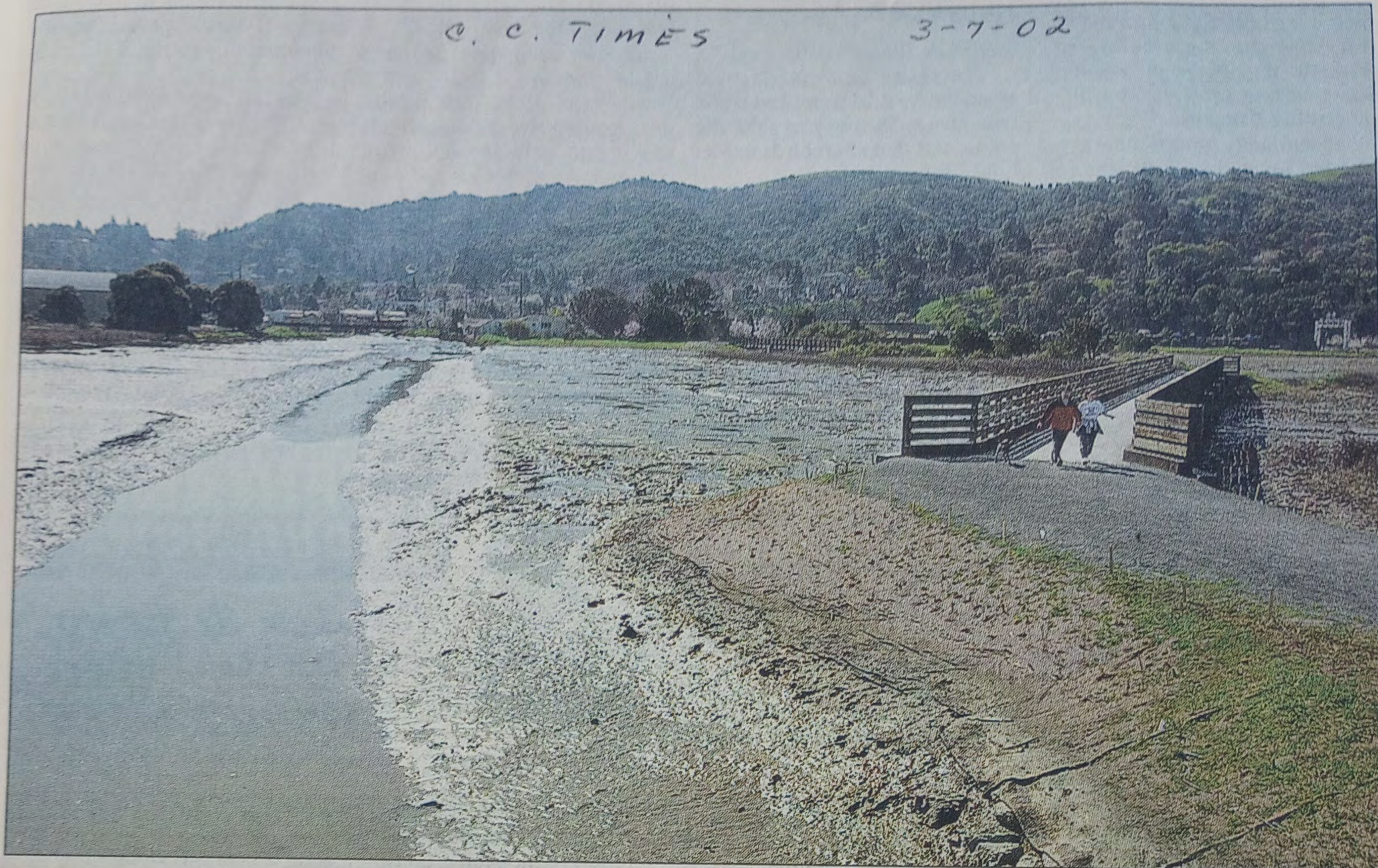
- The newly created marsh would filter storm run-off, in effect purifying water throughout the South Bay.

The project is a West Coast version of the massive Everglades restoration project, which is repairing the damage done by a 1940s flood control project that inadvertently dried up hundreds of square miles of critical wetlands.

fallen 3 percentage points any of the two-thirds vote it needed to said David Howell, district board president. only 55 percent of the vote to pass, not the two-thirds required couldn't relax until I knew over half of the precincts had been

O. C. TIMES

3-7-02



JOSE CARLOS FAJARDO/TIMES

EDDIE INOUE and Nancy Gruessing, both of Martinez, take their dog Pring out for a walk along the trails at the Martinez Regional Shoreline Park on Sunday. The East Bay Regional Park District will finish a \$3.3 million restoration project this month.

Martinez shoreline restored to 1880s glory

■ The East Bay Regional Park District project has removed silt and widened Alhambra Creek, thrilling bird-watchers

By Yvonne Condes
TIMES STAFF WRITER

MARTINEZ — The restoration at Martinez Regional Shoreline Park offers a glimpse into the past.

The city and the East Bay Regional Park District have attempted to turn the marsh back into the ecological gem it was in the 1880s.

"It's just amazing," said Bill Nichols, who supervises shoreline parks for the East Bay Regional Park District, which owns the land.

The restoration will be completed later this month with the

addition of some new plants. Already, hundreds more birds, including marsh wrens and sparrows, are making the refuge home. Park officials estimate the number of birds at the marsh has tripled since the area was returned to a more natural state.

The \$3.3 million project was paid for mostly by Caltrans to make up for fish habitat that will be lost by replacing the Carquinez Bridge, said Richard Pearson, Martinez transportation projects manager. That project will displace four acres of habitat used by the threatened delta smelt.

To revive the marsh, crews removed 30,000 cubic yards of silt and refuse from the Martinez shoreline, widened the Alhambra Creek channel and tried to turn the marsh back into what it

See SHORELINE, Page 4



TIMES

SEE BACK

Parks acquire Pacheco marsh

CONTRA COSTA TIMES 3-20-02

■ The East Bay Regional Park District is teaming up with two other agencies to restore the site in Martinez

By Yvonne Condes

TIMES STAFF WRITER

PACHECO — Four decades after being diked and used as a dump for dredge spoils, 123 acres of shoreline property near Martinez has moved one step closer to restoration.

The East Bay Regional Park District board unanimously voted Tuesday to ally with the Contra Costa County Flood Control district and the Muir Heritage Land Trust to buy the property formerly known as the Pacheco marsh.

The land, which is at the mouth of the Walnut Creek Channel, was once a salt-marsh habitat but was diked in the 1960s and filled with dredge disposal material.

In the early 1990s, property owners tried to build a business park but met with opposition from public agencies and conservation groups because of endangered plant and animal habitat.

The owners let the land go into

foreclosure and stopped paying taxes on it.

The property was put up for auction in 2000, but no one made an offer.

The Trust for Public Land is providing \$617,000 of the \$632,000 needed to acquire the land. The park district will pay the remainder.

The trust awarded the money for the project with lawsuit settlement funds from a Unocal oil spill.

"It's an unusual position for the Trust for Public Land to be in," said Tim Wirth, the trust's senior project manager. "Normally we're on the other side of the table asking for funds."

The area is ideal for wetland restoration, said park district land acquisition manager Nancy Weninger. The property sits between the Bull Head Marsh and Point Edith Wetlands, and near the McNabney Marsh.

The park district plans to construct a staging area and a trail segment that would connect the Iron Horse Trail to the San Francisco Bay Trail, she said.

The Contra Costa County Flood Control and Water Conservation District plans to restore the



DAN ROSENSTRAUCH/TIMES

THE PACHECO MARSH sits at the mouth of the Walnut Creek Channel in Martinez. It is to be re-established as a salt-marsh habitat.

Pacheco marsh as mitigation for widening the Walnut Creek Channel, said Kevin Emigh, senior civil engineer in charge of watershed planning.

The flood control district would build ditches and canals to get water back into the marsh and re-establish the salt-marsh habitat.

Later this month or early next month, the county supervisors will vote on joining the partnership.

The flood control district then will conduct a general evaluation report that could take two to three years.

Emigh said it could be about seven years before the marsh is

restored and the creek is widened.

Once restored, the area will be suitable for the salt-marsh harvest mouse, the Suisun song sparrow and the California clapper rail.

Yvonne Condes covers Martinez. Reach her at 925-977-8432 or ycondes@cctimes.com.

Peregrines' progress is feather in fans' cap →

C.C.

James

By Denis Cuff
TIMES STAFF WRITER

6-15-02

WHEN HE MOVED near Mount Diablo in 1958, falcon enthusiast Bill Swearingen was fired up by the chance to see the fastest bird in the world soar over its ancient home.

He waited nearly four decades.

First he waited for scientists to discover that the peregrine falcon, ruler of the skies, was on the brink of extinction from the pesticide DDT.

Later, he waited to see if efforts to bring the birds back would work.

About 12 years ago, after DDT had been banned but while the birds were still a rarity, he helped reintroduce a few young raptors to the steep rocky roosts on the mountain.

No one knew if they would thrive.

"There were times I wondered if I'd ever see these magnificent hunters back on Mount Diablo," said the 72-year-old Lafayette falcon buff.

Last week, he watched four young peregrines diving and soaring as they learned to fly.

"This is the best year for that nest. Four young peregrine falcons in an aerie (nest) is as good as you can get. It's as good a sign as any that the peregrine falcon is back and stable here."

The decline and rebound of peregrine falcons on Mount Diablo mirrors the fate of the storied aerial hunter across California and the nation.

See **FALCONS**, **Back Page**



DAN ROSENSTRAUCH/TIMES

BILL SWEARINGEN of Lafayette watches the birds Thursday from the comfort of a hillside near Castle Hill Ranch near the park.

6-15-02

Falcons ^{C.C.} *James*

FROM PAGE 1

As recently as 1970, the year the bird was put on the federal endangered species list, there were only two known breeding pairs left in California, and none in the entire eastern United States.

"I think the lesson here is how a few people can stop the accidental problems caused by millions of people," said Brian Walton, a raptor expert who has guided falcon-reintroduction programs on Mount Diablo and throughout the West.

For thousands of years, the species had prevailed in its narrow niche as the top gun of the skies.

Diving at speeds approaching 200 miles per hour, peregrines snatch ducks, songbirds and pigeons in midair, or knock them out and capture them before they hit the ground.

"I was captivated by peregrines from the moment I saw one dive and snatch a duck when I was hunting as a boy," Swearingen said. "Their speed is amazing."

For centuries, royalty around the world valued peregrines as prized possessions.

Egg collectors risked their lives to climb steep cliffs to snatch eggs.

Before the turn of the century on Mount Diablo, falcon egg collectors waged gunbattles to try to scare each other away from the nests.

Despite raids on nests and shooting of raptors, peregrines managed to hold their own until their populations suddenly plummeted in the 1940s and 1950s.

The cause was DDT. Pesticide built up in the food chain left peregrine eggs too thin to hatch. The federal government banned the chemical in 1972, two years after the decline in peregrine populations landed the bird on the endangered species list.

Still, peregrine nests across the country remained barren.

Falconers and conservation groups stepped in to rear peregrine chicks in captivity and introduce them to nests in the wild.

Peregrine falcon

(*falco peregrinus*)

Peregrine falcons were nearly wiped out by DDT. In 1970, there were only two known breeding pairs left in California and none east of the Rockies. Today, biologists estimate that there are well over 200 pairs of peregrine falcons in California.

Range: Throughout North and Central America

Food: Pigeons and game birds

Life span: 25 years; they mate for life

Reproduction: 3 or 4 eggs annually

Population: Estimated 200+ nesting pairs in California

Wingspread: 41 inches

Length: 16 inches



6-foot man

41-inch wing-spread

Sources:
The Peregrine Fund; The World Book Encyclopedia; Stokes Field Guide to Birds; The Sibley Guide to Birds; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Built for speed

The peregrine falcon is the fastest animal on earth. When it tucks its wings back its rocket-shaped body reaches speeds of more than 200 miles per hour.

Man running: 20 mph

Peregrine falcon: 200 mph

Robin: 30 mph

Race horse: 45 mph

Cheetah: 70 mph

Golden eagle: 120 mph

JONI MARTIN, CHUCK TODD/TIMES

Adults reared in captivity by falconers provided much of the early breeding stock.

Mount Diablo's time finally came in 1989 with the first of several reintroductions, according to Save Mount Diablo, the group that coordinated the many organizations and volunteers involved in the rescue project. In all, twelve peregrine chicks were reintroduced over a four-year period.

The Santa Cruz Predatory Bird Research Group provided the birds, among approximately 1,000 peregrine chicks the group helped introduce to the wild in California.

Raptor experts tricked a pair of prairie falcons into adopting the precious chicks.

An expert mountain climber placed the fluffballs in the prairie

falcons' nest, where the surrogate parents unwittingly reared them as their own.

Nature was not always so kind.

The next year, two peregrine chicks starved to death when the adoptive parents failed to feed them.

"It was a big disappointment," recalls Seth Adams, Save Mount Diablo's programs manager.

It was a kind of setback faced by other falcon rescuers around the state. A peregrine hatched on the Bay Bridge drowned in the water; another hatched there was flattened by traffic.

"Peregrines require a vertical environment. But that can create problems if your first flight is from the top of a 30-story skyscraper, or from a ledge over a

river or bay," said Doug Bell, an assistant professor of biology at Sacramento State University.

On Mount Diablo, the recovery project reached a milestone in 1994 when a pair of adult peregrines produced the first chicks hatched on the mountain since the 1950s.

Peregrines since then have nested on at least two spots on the mountain with varying results, hatching one, two, or three chicks in different years.

The four chicks on the western slopes of Mount Diablo this year marked a high point.

"The peregrines have stabilized," says Adams of Save Mount Diablo. "It's a symbol of the success of preservation efforts on Mount Diablo."

The peregrine has prospered elsewhere, building nests on several Bay Area bridges and on high-rise buildings in downtown Los Angeles and San Francisco.

The federal government took the peregrine falcon off the endangered species list in 1999.

While the peregrine remains on the upswing, the same is not true for many other birds of prey, even in the raptor-rich East Bay hills and open space, biologists say.

Peregrines are somewhat less vulnerable to the habitat-loss problems of many birds because they feed entirely on birds snagged from the sky.

Development of houses, offices and other buildings can be expected to shrink the habitat for eagles, hawks and many other birds, biologists say.

"Most of these species can be expected to feel the effect of urban sprawl and the impact upon land, water and other resources," says Walton of the Santa Cruz Predatory Bird Research Group.

Swearingen says the threats to raptors makes him appreciate them all the more.

"It gives (me) a thrill to see the peregrine doing its acrobatic moves in the sky," says the former pilot. "There's just nothing like them."

Reach Denis Cuff at 925-943-8267 or dcuff@cctimes.com.



**WATERBIRD
REGIONAL PRESERVE
AL MCNABNEY MARSH**

DEDICATION

Saturday, November 2, 2002

WELCOME

Pat O'Brien • General Manager, East Bay Regional Park District

MASTER OF CEREMONIES

Ted Radke • Board of Directors, East Bay Regional Park District

DIGNITARIES

The Honorable George Miller • U.S. Congress, 7th District

The Honorable Joe Canciamilla • California State Assembly, 11th District

The Honorable Gayle Uilkema • Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors, 2nd District

Will Travis • Executive Director, Bay Conservation and Development Commission

Mike Rugg • California Department of Fish and Game

David Maggi • President, Mt. View Sanitary District Board of Directors

Christina Batt • Executive Director, Muir Heritage Land Trust

Nancy Wenninger • Board Member, Mt. Diablo Audubon Society

Aamir Farid • General Manager, Shell Oil Products U.S.

CLOSING REMARKS

Ted Radke

CEREMONIAL REHABILITATED BIRD RELEASE

Courtesy of Representatives of Lindsey Wildlife Museum

A GUIDED HIKE

Please join EBRPD and Mt. Diablo Audubon Society immediately following the dedication ceremony

Waterbird Regional Preserve consists of 197 acres of marshland and uplands, with abundant bird life. The marsh is named in honor of Al McNabney, a longtime environmental advocate and Audubon Society member. The land was purchased at

a cost of \$3.35 million. Funds were provided by the Shell Oil Spill Trustee Committee as part of mitigation for an oil spill in the area that occurred in the early 1990s. The mitigation settlement was overseen by the Shell Marsh Trust, a committee

that included representatives of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, California Department of Fish and Game, State of California Lands Commission, Bay Conservation and Development Commission and the East Bay Regional Park District.



East Bay Regional Park District