

A half-century in flight

O.C. Times 10-3-02



GREGORY URQUIAGA/TIMES

DIANA GRANADOS, right, a member of the Mt. Diablo Audubon Society, watches a young bald eagle perched on the arm of curator Jenny Papka on Wednesday at the society's aviary in El Sobrante. Nine types of birds are kept in the facility.

Mt. Diablo Audubon Society marks anniversary

By Denis Cuff
TIMES STAFF WRITER

WALNUT CREEK

Thirteen people with a love of wild birds and camping banded together in a schoolhouse here to found a society to share their passion.

Some hardly knew a pigeon from a peregrine falcon.

But they did know that the East Bay hills, marshes and grasslands were rich places for birds big and small, and they wanted to learn more about them.

"Hardly any one of us knew much about birds," recalls Harry Adamson, a respected Lafayette wildlife painter. "We were keen to have a little natural history club, and go camping with the kids and introduce them to birds."

Fifty years later, the Mt. Diablo Audubon Society has left its mark on the East Bay landscape



SHERRY LAVARS/TIMES

"HARDLY ANY ONE of us knew much about birds," wildlife painter Harry Adamson recalls of the society's beginnings. Adamson, 85, is one of the group's only surviving original members.

and the conservation movement.

More habitat is protected today, and more people know about birds through the volunteer group's half-century of en-

vironmental advocacy, research and education.

"The group has hatched a lot of environmental leadership," says Bob Doyle, assistant general

manager of the East Bay Regional Park District. "The group is such a constant. From Black Diamond (Regional Park) to Mt. Diablo to the shoreline, Audubon is always there to remind us of the importance of bird habitat."

The group celebrates its 50th anniversary 7 p.m. tonight at the Heather Farm Garden Center in Walnut Creek.

Mt. Diablo Audubon still retains much of the grass-roots spirit of its early founders. It has no paid staff, no lawyers, no headquarters, and not a lot of money.

Mt. Diablo Audubon members prefer persistence and a low profile — rather than confrontation — to promote conservation.

Audubon members are the quiet guys of the local environmental movement.

"We do not have the resources to do things a lot of conservation

See AUDUBON, Back Page

Audubon

FROM PAGE 1

organizations can. We try to pick our niches and develop them," says Mike Williams, a stockbroker turned bird store operator who is president of Mt. Diablo Audubon.

The group played a key role in protecting the 200-acre McNabney Marsh preserve in Martinez, which tens of thousands of Interstate 680 motorists see daily as they whiz by the waterfowl there.

The late Al McNabney, namesake for the sanctuary, was a Mt. Diablo Audubon leader who vigorously opposed proposals for an industrial park on the marsh before the area was acquired in 1992 with funds paid by Shell oil refinery to compensate for a 1988 oil spill.

Mt. Diablo Audubon is nearing completion of a five year project to count nesting birds in all parts of Contra Costa County. Trained volunteers devoted thousands of hours to the survey, which could influence building restrictions in areas with threat-

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Mt. Diablo Audubon Society can be contacted at 925-968-1677 or www.diabloaudubon.com

ened or endangered species.

The group, which is affiliated with the larger national group but exists primarily on dues from its own members, has donated environmental education materials to teach elementary school students about nature.

In its staple activity, Audubon has led thousands of people on trips throughout Northern California to enjoy bird-watching, one of the most popular hobbies in the nation.

Above all else, a fascination with birds and flying things is the glue that has kept the group together despite members' varied interests.

Some have spent hours sitting beneath cliffs to watch over peregrine falcons reintroduced to Mount Diablo in the 1980s.

Audubon member Bob Wise-carver of Walnut Creek builds bat

houses to offset declining habitat.

Diana Granados, a member from Martinez, founded a non-profit group that finds homes for injured hawks, eagles and other birds and brings them to classes and schools.

Adamson, 85, one of the only surviving members of the founding group, based his painting career on the birds he observed on Audubon trips as close by as Heather Farm Park in Walnut Creek and as far away as the Mexican border.

Adamson's paintings will be exhibited from Nov. 9 to March 30 at the Oakland Museum of California.

"A lot of people got a lot of pleasure out of these trips," he said.

Since its early days, society membership has expanded from the original 13 people at the schoolhouse — now site of the Andronico's Walnut Creek market store — to 1,400 people. Most are Contra Costa County residents, with a few from Alameda County.

The group also has become more politically active, taking stances on open space, development and transportation issues before county and city governments.

How far to tread into politics has been a continuing debate among members.

Williams, the society president, said it is inevitable that a group devoted to birds should grapple with habitat destruction, the dominant threat to burrowing owls, ducks, hawks and many species in California.

"Ninety percent of the wetlands in the Bay Area are gone," he said. "You cannot be interested in birds without appreciating what happens when their habitat disappears. You can't stop all development, but you can preserve some special places."

The society plans to continue its many programs and expand its nature walks in hopes of luring more young families.

To be sure, the society membership has become much grayer.

Audubon members hope to make the McNabney Marsh a prime introductory spot to birding when it opens to the public later this year.

"I can't think of a better place to learn about birds," Williams said.

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

MDAS 50th ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION - OCTOBER 3, 2002

WELCOME and INTRODUCTION: Mike Williams

MASTERS OF CEREMONIES: Jimm Edgar and Maury Stern

BREEDING BIRD ATLAS: Steve Glover

HISTORY, HUMOR & PERSPECTIVE: Shirley Ellis

AMERICAN BALD EAGLE: Diana Granados

DESSERT, CHAMPAGNE, COFFEE, TEA, PUNCH

DRAWING: Mike and Cecil Williams

OUR BEGINNINGS: Harry and Betty Adamson

QUAIL MEMORIES: Jean Richmond and Gloria Cannon

FIELDTRIP HIGHLIGHTS: Elizabeth Dickey

FAVORITE & FAMOUS SLIDES: from the files of H. Harvey, J. Lomax,
B. Murphy, J. Summerhill, D. Wight,
B. Wisecarver

BLUEBIRDS, OWLS and BATS: Don Yoder and Bob Wisecarver

NATIONAL, STATE, COUNTY & REGIONAL RECOGNITION

AL MCNABNEY & HIS LEGACY: Nancy Wenninger



PRESIDENTS

1953 Albert O. Cooperrider

1954 James Hampton

1955 Harry Adamson

1956 Norma Warner

1957 Harry Couden

1958 John Bruce

1959 Ferd Ruth

1960 Elizabeth O'Meara

1961 Beth Reynolds

1962 Dick Beitzel

1963 Jane Nemetz

1964 Bill Betts

1965 Ann Cavanagh

1966 John Davis

19?? Chris Nelson

1970 Bob McCarthy

1972 Sally Stellar

1974 Irene Hellekson

1975 Tom Lee

1976 Jimm Edgar

1977 Bruce Moorad

1979 Elizabeth Dickey

1981 Jimm Edgar

1984 Maury Stern

1986 Jimm Edgar - Acting

1987 Jimm Edgar

1988 Barbara Vaughn

1990 Jim Lomax

1996 Carol Frischmann

2001 Mike Williams -Acting

2002 Mike Williams



FIELD TRIP CHAIRS

1953	The Members as a Group
1954	Mary Smith
1955	Harry Adamson Harry Couden
1961	Jack Reynolds
1962	Harry and Betty Adamson Harry and Dorothy Couden
1963	Lynne Farrar
1965	Bill Betts
1971	Jon and Betty Williams
1973	Bob McCarthy
1976	Sally Stellar
1981	Winnie Orcutt
1982 - present	Elizabeth Dickey

Through the Years with MDAS

1953—A group of Contra Costa birdwatchers found the Mt. Diablo Audubon Society.

1955—Harry Adamson was elected president in 1955, and Betty Adamson edited the *Quail*. Harry also designed the masthead for *The Quail* newsletter, featuring a California Quail. That *Quail* editor wrote, “His design and drawing of our very lifelike Quail will give pleasure to every member with each new issue for years to come.”

1968—According to the April 1968 *Quail*, “because woodpeckers have made telephone poles near Clayton look like Swiss Cheese, five poles were put out of commission in a recent gusty wind and caused a power failure that upset several hundred homes.” Day-use fees at state parks rose to 75 cents per car.

1970—The Bay Area Council of Audubon was created to discuss rising concern about deteriorating environmental conditions in the Bay Area. President Christian Nelson realized that Mt Diablo Audubon was the only affiliate group present—all the others were Audubon chapters. He urged members to vote to join as a chapter: “Let’s face it, our generation allowed the environmental crisis to happen. . . . A \$10.00 membership cost is a small enough debt to pay in hopes that the money will be used to correct the situation for those who follow us.” The members voted 51 to 10 to becoming an Audubon chapter and paid \$12 a year in dues.

1983—Al McNabney begins writing Conservation Notes. MDAS awarded its first annual Audubon Conservation Award to County Supervisor Nancy Fahden.

1988—Carol Lutz donates the use of her original bird sketches to brighten the pages of the *Quail*.

1989—Jean Richmond’s book, *Birding Northern California*, is offered for sale. The handbook describes 72 local birding sites and sells for \$10.70. She donates the copyright to MDAS, which opens a Conservation and Education fund with the profits from book sales.

1991—Steve Glover begins writing the Observations column—a role which he still continues even now after 11 years. Cecil and Mike Williams announce the grand opening of their Wild Birds Unlimited store in Pleasant Hill.

1992—Shell Marsh is purchased and turned over to the East Bay Regional Park District. Al McNabney declares victory (see Conservation Notes story, p.2).

1994—Action taken by MDAS's Don Yoder leads to the establishment of the California Bluebird Recovery Program. This nonprofit project seeks to encourage and preserve cavity nesters, especially bluebirds, anywhere in the West. Don continues to serve as the CBRP Program Director.

1997—MDAS honors 17 of its longtime volunteers at its special dinner event, "An Evening with John James Audubon." Honorees included Al McNabney, Norah Bain, Elizabeth Dickey, Jimm Edgar, Shirley Ellis, Steve Glover, Jill Hedgecock, Jean Richmond, Maury Stern, Barbara Vaughn, Denise Wight, Mike Williams, Bob Wisecarver, Gifford and Winifred Young, Dan Van Zile, and Barbara Burek.

MDAS initiates its Breeding Bird Atlas Survey under the direction of Steve Glover. During the 5-year effort volunteers will collect information by observation to identify all the bird species that breed in Contra Costa County. Thanks to many dedicated volunteers, the project was completed 2002. Steve is now working to organize and publish the Contra Costa Breeding Bird Atlas.

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MDAS partners with Natural Origins' Tea to support good works in Contra Costa County and in India by co-marketing pure premium teas from India.

2002—Because of policy changes by National Audubon regarding sharing dues with chapters, the MDAS initiates a new membership tier, "Chapter-Only." By having a chapter membership fee, MDAS will be able to continue publication of the Quail, to hold its general meetings and field trips, and expand its conservation activism. *Editor's Note: copies of a more detailed*

Important Events in the History of MDAS

1955

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1958

John Bruce was chapter president; Mrs. McGeehon edited the Quail.

1960

Elizabeth O'Meara was president of the Affiliate organization. The group held its first fundraising potluck dinner at the Lafayette home of Dr. and Mrs. Isadore Perlman. Dr. Perlman was recipient of the first Atomic Energy Commission Ernest O. Lawrence Award. Regular meetings alternated between Los Lomas High School and the Life Science Building at Diablo Valley College.

1961

Dues were increased to \$2 and members were charged 50 cents to come to the potluck.

1962

Ed Mize took on the task of editing the Quail and continued as editor for 11 years, turning out 12 issues a year printed in purple ink on a ditto machine.

1967

Ed Mize was president of the chapter and Quail editor. The Chapter had approximately 135 members. Four members reported seeing "a million Sooty Shearwaters milling around fishing for anchovies" off Santa Cruz cliffs.

1968

The Adamsons reported seeing a hundred thousand robins flocking at the back of Joaquin Miller Park in February.

According to the April 1968 Quail, "because woodpeckers have made telephone poles near Clayton look like Swiss Cheese, five poles were put out of commission in a recent gusty wind and caused a power failure that upset several hundred homes." Day-use fees at state parks rose to 75 cents per car.

1969

Paul Schulz took over as chapter president. Meetings alternated between the Sun Valley meeting room and DVC's Life Science Building. Ann Cavanaugh wrote Conservation Notes for the Quail, including her special interests in water issues. The chapter wrote letters to Secretary of the Interior Udall asking for better water quality in the Delta.

MDAS and the Contra Costa Park and Recreation Council sponsored a dinner. William Penn Mott, Director of the California State Park System, was the guest speaker. Mott was later head of the National Park System.

1970

Chapter president was Chris Nelson. The results of a membership survey indicated that more volunteers were needed; the chapter should consider leadership training courses and have more association with other Audubon groups. Members were interested in conservation and environmental issues but wanted to hear from both sides of issues.

The Bay Area Council of Audubon was created to discuss rising concern about deteriorating environmental conditions in the Bay Area. President Christian Nelson realized that Mt Diablo Audubon was the only affiliate group present—all the others were Audubon chapters. He urged members to vote to join as a chapter although it meant Mt Diablo would lose approximately \$524 in dues from its 144 members. He concluded his letter to members as follows:

“Let’s face it, our generation allowed the environmental crisis to happen. . . a \$10.00 membership cost is a small enough debt to pay in hopes that the money will be used to correct the situation for those who follow us.”

The members voted 51 to 10 to becoming an Audubon chapter and paid \$12 a year in dues.

Ed Mize, who had been editor of the Quail for nine years, resigned in March but was persuaded to stay on—for another two years.

1971

Bob McCarthy was chapter president.

1972

Sally Steller was elected chapter president. Jean Richmond began editing the Quail. Congress created the Golden Gate National Recreation Area in San Francisco and Marin Counties.

1974

Irene Hellekson was elected chapter president.

1975

Tom E. Lee was president; Florence Bennett was treasurer; Sally Steller was on the Board and a frequent field trip leader, and Jean Richmond edited the Quail. Subscriptions to the Quail for non-National Audubon members was \$3.00.

A featured speaker for Birding Information was Gary Bogue, “Curator of Alexander Lindsay Junior Museum,” who informed members of what to do for sick and injured birds.

1976

Jimm Edgar was elected president of the Chapter; Elizabeth Dickey was secretary. Jean Richmond, editor of the Quail, called attention to the "continued attrition of funds for [national wildlife] refuges." She wrote, there "appears to be a tendency of U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to divest itself of part or all of the refuge system. An attempt was made to transfer 3 wildlife ranges to Bureau of Land Management which would have opened these lands to mining, logging, grazing and fossil-fuel development and would have set a precedent." She urged MDAS members to lobby against such transfers.

1977

P.J. Hauser began writing "Conservation Notes" identifying conservation/environmental advocacy issues for MDAS members.

The Christmas Bird Count found 127 species and 2 races, including Marbled Godwit and Ferruginous Hawk—new sightings for the CBC. P.J. Hauser began writing "Conservation Notes" identifying conservation/environmental advocacy issues for MDAS members.

The chapter held a picnic at Larkey Park and hoped to make it an annual event.

1978

The Quail reported on the AMOCO Cadiz that spilled 68 million gallons of crude oil along the coast of France. Among the casualties were at least 500 puffins, severely impacting France's only sizable puffin colony on the Sept Isles.

Bruce Moorad was elected chapter president; Norah Bain was publicity chair; Jean Richmond and Elizabeth Dickey continued as Quail editor and chapter secretary, respectively. The incoming president expressed concern about the fate of the California Condor.

In October, Jimm Edgar reported on his efforts to see the Upland Sandpiper outside of Spokane, Washington. The sandpiper, a rare visitor to the Northwest, was nowhere to be seen. After a fruitless three-hour search, Jimm was returning in frustration to his car, when a pair of the Upland Sandpipers circled overhead and landed 20 yards from his car.

1979

MDAS member Ann Cavanagh reported on the threat of the Peripheral Canal. Elizabeth Dickey was elected chapter president. Richard Stallcup found 19 warbler species at Pt. Reyes, September 27.

1980

Jimm Edgar was elected chapter vice-president; Elizabeth, Jean, and Florence continued in their roles as chapter president, Quail editor, and treasurer.

1981

The Quail published an appeal for funds to support a lawsuit to preserve Mono Lake.

Jimm Edgar was chapter president; Elizabeth Dickey moved to being field trip chair. The annual picnic was held at Tilden Park. Meetings were held at various locations, including the Women's Club in Walnut Creek and Buena Vista School.

1982

Four birders—Ed Hase, Kevin Hints, Bob Richmond, and Jean Richmond—participated in the Contra Costa Big Day on April 24. A Big Day is a one-day search for as many species as possible by a party in constant, direct voice contact. Between 3:15 a.m. and 8 p.m. the four found 157 species.

1983

Al McNabney begins writing Conservation Notes. MDAS awarded its first annual Audubon Conservation Award to County Supervisor Nancy Fahden.

1984

Shimi Edmondson edits the Quail with contributions and help from Jimm Edgar, Al McNabney, Jean Richmond, Jy Hall, and George Finger.

General meetings are moved to the Contra Costa Jewish Community Center in Walnut Creek. Maury Stern serves as chapter president. Jon Dunn, co-chief consultant for the National Geographic Field Guide, gives a two-day, slide-based seminar on the Field Guide to North American Birds.

1986

Jimm Edgar returns for another stint as chapter president.

1988

Barbara Vaughn is elected Chapter President, serving until June 1990.

Al McNabney honored for his outstanding contributions to conservation by the Western Regional Conference of the National Audubon Society. "Al spearheaded efforts to save Shell Marsh [now McNabney Marsh in Waterbird Park] generally considered to be the most important wetlands in Contra Costa County."

Carol Lutz donates the use of her original bird sketches to brighten the pages of the *Quail*. Barbara Burek's first year as Quail editor

Mary Jane Culver organized the mailing crew who assembled and posted the finished Quail.

George Finger spotted a pair of Pileated Woodpeckers on Curry Creek Trail, Mt. Diablo. Jean Richmond reported an Olive-sided Flycatcher at her Alamo bird feeder.

MDAS joins the fight against Measure Z, which would have allowed the East Bay Municipal Utility District to build Buckhorn Reservoir between Moraga and Castro Valley.

1989

National Audubon conducted a membership survey and reported that 80% of those responding said that they were NAS members "to further my knowledge of the natural world," 76% said they joined "to support a wildlife organization," and 61% "to further my interest in birds."

Jean Richmond's book, *Birding Northern California*, is offered for sale. The handbook describes 72 local birding sites and sells for \$10.70.

A fall shorebird census conducted by the Pt. Reyes bird Observatory reported that on San Francisco and San Pablo Bays, observers found at least 320,000 shorebirds, 1900 herons, egrets and rails, 200 raptors, and 3500 White Pelicans.

Two peregrine Falcon chicks were introduced into Mt. Diablo on May 12 and fledged a few weeks later.

1990

Jim Lomax is elected MDAS president and continues in that position until 1996

1991

Steve Glover begins writing the Observations column—a role which he still continues even now after 11 years.

Cecil and Mike Williams announce the grand opening of their Wild Birds Unlimited store in Pleasant Hill.

1992

Shell Marsh is purchased and turned over to the East Bay Regional Park District. Al McNabney declares victory (see Conservation Notes story, p.2).

MDAS and the East Bay Chapter of the Native Plant Society receive the President's Award for Community Service by the Dow North America Corporation.

1993

With the help of MDAS volunteers, the Burrowing Owl Project is completed. This three-year project took a census of Burrowing Owls in Contra Costa County and the data from the project was used to list the species as endangered in California.

1994

For the annual Birdathon, MDAS fields four team led by Jimm Edgar and Maury Stern, Steve Glover, Jim Lomax, and Denise Wight.

Action taken by MDAS's Don Yoder leads to the establishment of the California Bluebird Recovery Program. This nonprofit project is sponsored by the Western Regional Office of the National Audubon Society and the North American Bluebird Society. The program seeks to encourage and preserve cavity nesters, especially bluebirds, anywhere in the West. Don continues to serve as the CBRP Program Director.

1995

MDAS takes a major step in technology with the purchase of a HP Laser jet printer to allow in-house production of the *Quail*. That printer is still used to produce the *Quail*.

1996

Carol Frischmann is elected MDAS President, serving until 2001.

1997

MDAS honors 17 of its longtime volunteers at its special dinner event, "An Evening with John James Audubon." Honorees included Al McNabney, Norah Bain, Elizabeth Dickey, Jimm Edgar, Shirley Ellis, Steve Glover, Jill Hedgecock, Jean Richmond, Maury Stern, Barbara Vaughn, Denise Wight, Mike Williams, Bob Wisecarver, Gifford and Winifred Young, Dan Van Zile, and Barbara Burek.

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1998

Don Yoder is honored by the North American Bluebird Society for his outstanding contribution to the restoration of the bluebird population in the West. Today there are over 180 volunteers who install, maintain, and monitor bluebird boxes in western states.

Gloria Cannon takes over as editor of the *Quail* from Barbara Burek and Dan Van Zile.

With Jimm Edgar serving as compiler, 60 volunteers observe a record number of bird species—160—on Saturday, December 20, during the annual MDAS Christmas Bird Count.

Al McNabney dies May 1, leaving a legacy of more than 20 years of passionate advocacy for the environment.

1999

MDAS volunteers carry out its third annual clean up of the Julia Freeman Cox Wetlands in Antioch. MDAS introduces its first website on the Internet. Shell Marsh is renamed

McNabney Marsh and will be operated as part of East Bay Regional Park District's Waterbird Park. MDAS moves its general meetings to the Gardens at Heather Farm.

National Audubon Society holds its 100th annual Christmas Bird Count—No. 46 for MDAS.

2000

National Audubon Society began the Baylands Campaign, a 20-year effort to restore 100,000 acres—150 square miles—of Bay Area tidal wetland, seasonal wetland, and associated upland habitat.

A MDAS member survey found that “protecting and restoring wildlife habitat in Contra Costa” and “participating in environmental activism in Contra Costa County” were members' highest priorities.

MDAS initiates a second Christmas Bird Count; this one is focused on bird species of East Contra Costa. Observers spot 141 species in East County and 151 in central county.

2001

Carol Frischmann steps down as MDAS president. Vice President Mike Williams serves as acting president. MDAS partners with Natural Origins' Tea to support good works in Contra Costa County and in India by co-marketing pure premium teas from India.

The Breeding Bird Atlas has its own website at <http://www.flyingemu.com/ccosta/>

2002

Mike Williams is elected president of the Chapter.

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Yearly bird count rewards patience

12-21-03

12-21-03

C. C. Jones

■ A bald eagle and a mountain bluebird were a few of the wonders local Audubon birders spotted on holiday-season mission

By Carrie Sturrock

TIMES STAFF WRITER

Contra Costa County's birders have a lot of pluck.

Saturday's gray and soggy conditions didn't stop them from tromping around East County enumerating birds for Audubon's annual Christmas count of birds throughout the Americas.

The birders' aim is to understand how development affects birds and their habitats, but the event is also about having fun spotting winged wonders. Members of the Mt. Diablo chapter of the Audubon caught sight of a mountain bluebird, rare in these parts, plus a bald eagle and a black-throated gray warbler.

"I was extremely pleased," said Jim Edgar, a compiler of statistics with the society. "We couldn't have hoped for much better results than we had."

The group saw 142 species, the most in the four years it has been counting. Last year, participants saw 135 species and counted 80,000 to 100,000 birds.

Nearly 2,000 counts take place in the United States, Canada, Mexico, Central America and South America from Dec. 14 to Jan. 5 each year. Edgar's crew did two this year.

The Audubon studies the population trends of the birds they see, most native to the boreal forests of northern North America, and tries to discern



SHERRY LaVARS/TIMES

JIM EDGAR, a compiler of statistics with the Mt. Diablo Audubon Society, follows the flight of a barn owl.

ON THE WEB

National Audubon Society
www.audubon.org

"I was extremely pleased. We couldn't have hoped for much better results than we had."

— Jim Edgar,
Audubon Society statistician

how they are faring. Species that appear to be declining include the belted kingfisher, northern flicker, the white-throated sparrow, white-crown sparrow, purple finch, pine siskin and the rusty blackbird. Edgar's group saw the kingfisher, flicker and sparrow.

Chapter leaders send 10 parties of three to four people out in the early morning over an area 15 miles wide, Edgar said. To help ensure they don't double-

John Cain (left) and Steve Barbata stand on an old WWII barge rustin

San Francisco Chronicle

Checking out the Delta

Sept. 12, 2003

The Marsh Creek Regional Trail, which goes through Brentwood, Knightsen and Oakley, provides views of Dutch Slough just north of the Contra Costa Canal. The Dutch Slough property is to the east. For information, call the East Bay Regional Park District, (510) 562-7275.

Within the next year, access to the Delta will increase thanks to:

- Big Break Regional Shoreline, a 1,600-acre (most of it underwater) East Bay Regional Park set to open within two years. The park will have nature programs, an observation tower, a pier and water access for canoes and kayaks.
- The Delta Science Center at Big Break. This museum and learning center hopes to break ground in 2004. It will be at Big Break. When completed it will offer exhibits, nature programs, a chance to interact with scientists, boat tours of Big Break, and classes associated with Los Medanos College, Cal State Hayward and other schools. (925) 947-1473, DSCatBB@aol.com.
- Dutch Slough. This 1,200-acre marsh project, owned by the state Department of Water Resources, is adjacent to Big Break. Trails should open on portions of the site within a year. When completed over the next several years, Dutch Slough will offer opportunities for birding, paddling, and nature programs in a restored marsh. It will also provide opportunities to learn about restoration and to help make it happen. For information call the Natural Heritage Institute, (510) 644-2900.
- An Oakley city park. Also related to the Dutch Slough project, Oakley will construct a 55-acre park with active recreation, historic buildings, and access to Dutch Slough. No opening date has been set.

— Dave Weinstein

ments on the project," Cain remembers.

"All of a sudden there was a large boom," he says with a laugh,

Break and you want to protect the Delta," Cain says, "you have to pay attention to what's flowing into it."

Restored creek channels will

A GAGGLE of geese paddle around the lake at Heather Farm Park. A group of volunteers is working to restore nature areas at Heather Farm as well as Howe Homestead parks.

Oct. 14, 2004 Contra Costa Times

Restoring nature a habitat at a time

By Theresa Harrington
STAFF WRITER

In two years, visitors to Heather Farm Park and the Lime Ridge Open Space in Walnut Creek should see more wildlife, thanks to an ambitious nature restoration project that aims to attract birds and other creatures by providing native grasses, plants and trees that will enhance their habitats.

"At Heather Farm, you can see four different kinds of herons," says Brian Murphy, a Walnut Creek Open Space Foundation member who is participating in the project. "You just have to take the time to look."

A corps of volunteers from a variety of organizations includ-

TO HELP:

Contact the Walnut Creek Open Space Foundation at 925-939-6610 or by e-mail at contact@wcosf.org. For more information, visit www.wcosf.org.

ing the Walnut Creek Open Space Foundation wants to make it easier for wildlife to flourish and for visitors to see and appreciate it. They have planted native grass seeds in small containers and are looking for more volunteers to help transplant the grass in December and January.

Some grass will be planted in the Lime Ridge Open Space, adding to the area's grassland

habitat. More will be planted around the natural lake in Heather Farm Park to create small native grassland meadows.

Oak woodland, chaparral and scrub habitat areas will also be carved out alongside the lake, adding to the riparian wildlife corridor that is there. The current asphalt trail will be replaced with a soft-surface trail and new trails will be added to bring visitors into the area between the lake and the equestrian center, on the other side of a canal that runs through the property.

The city has set aside \$100,000 in capital improvement project funds for the next two years to help pay for consultants, studies and supplies for the pro-

ject. In addition, the open space foundation has acquired grants to keep the effort going.

It is a labor of love for members of the foundation, Mt. Diablo Audubon Society, Lindsay Wildlife Museum, the Gardens at Heather Farm and the Walnut Creek Rotary Club, which has already built a wooden kiosk to display information about the restoration project. Additional kiosks, bridges, overlooks and interpretive signs are planned to educate the public about the nature area and the wildlife that lives there.

"The idea is to let people see more, without disturbing the

See HABITAT, Page 18

OWL ENDANGER PLAN THWARTED



A WESTERN BURROWING OWL peers out from its home, above. Another balances on a perch, below. State biologists were prepared to tell the Fish and Game Commission that the western burrowing owl was in serious trouble and that steps should be taken to protect it.

SPECIAL TO THE TIMES/LYNN HOWE

Biologists' advice nixed, report says *C.C. Jones 2/3/04*

By Mike Taugher
TIMES STAFF WRITER

State biologists wanted to report that the western burrowing owl is in steep decline and should be considered for protection, but that recommendation never reached the state Fish and Game Commission, documents obtained by an environmental group show.

The Center for Biological Diversity said a draft report shows administrators at the state Fish and Game Department overruled department biologists to protect developers and farmers from the costs they would incur if the owl was listed under the state endangered species law.

"It's clear to me that the biol-

ogists wrote a report, and the decision-makers ... said this isn't the right answer. Rewrite it," said Jeff Miller of the biodiversity center.

In December, the four-member commission rejected the Center for Biological Diversity's request to grant special status for the owl, an 8-inch to 10-inch chocolate-colored bird with lemon-yellow eyes that once was common throughout California.

The commission's rejection was based in part on an October report from the Fish and Game Department, which concluded there was no need to review the owl's status because not enough information was available.

The October report said that,

even though owls are apparently disappearing in some areas of the state, their numbers are increasing in desert areas that are being farmed.

But an August version of the report has a far different conclusion: The owls are fast disappearing, due in large part to urban growth. In the 1980s and 1990s alone, nearly 60 percent of known burrowing owl colonies disappeared, according to the earlier version. It recommended a yearlong review to more accurately assess the owl's status.

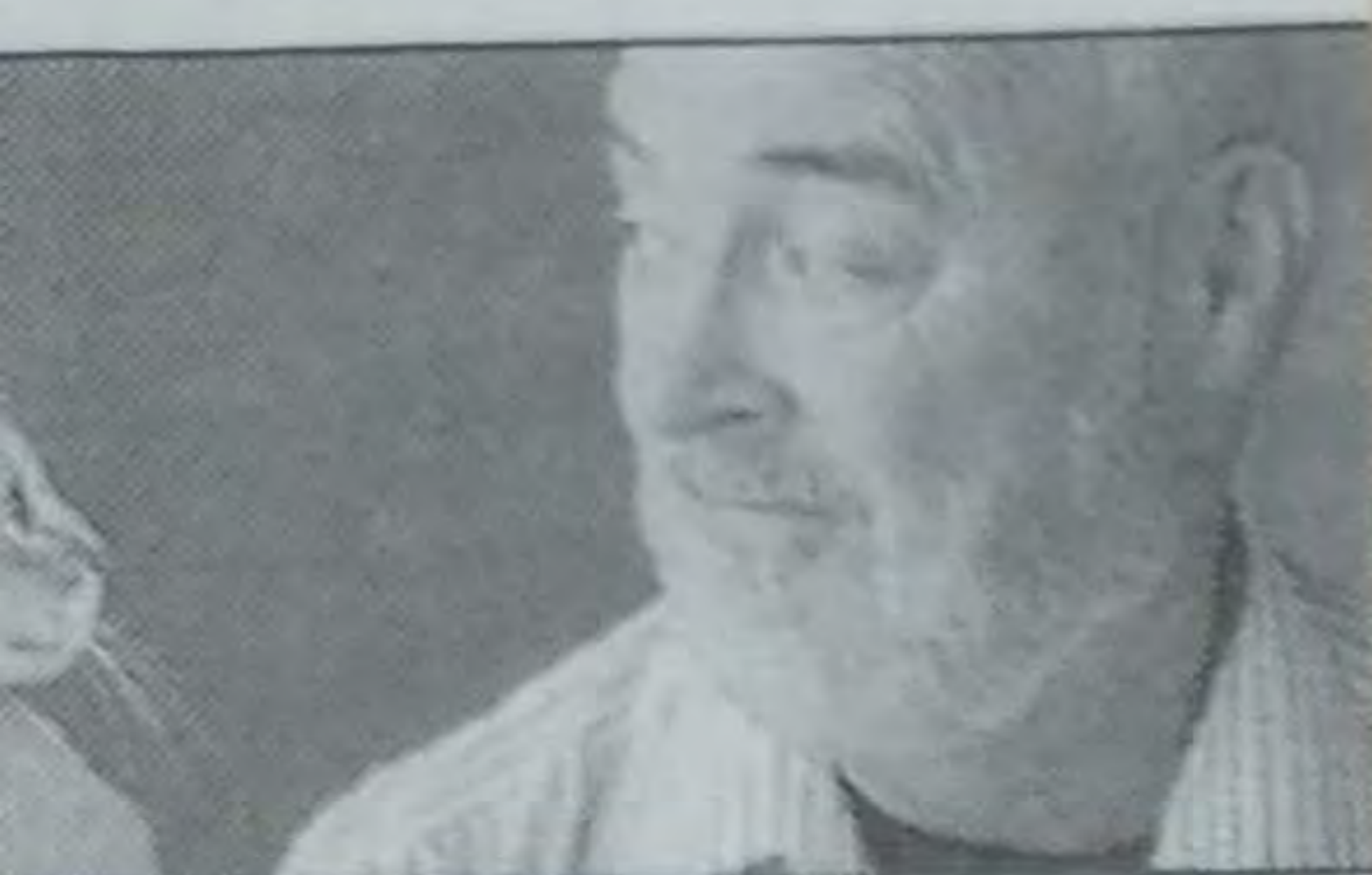
"We said up front at the (December commission) meeting



SPECIAL TO THE TIMES/PETER LA TOURETTE

See OWL, Page 4

10-04 Bird Count activities



BOGUE
columnist

to create greenways
between parks and
as," says Frank Gill,
n's director of science.
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anctuary to migratory
dent birds. Participat-
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Suit calls for turbines to become bird-safe

■ Action comes as many
wind-energy operators are
seeking renewed permits

By Brian Anderson
TIMES STAFF WRITER

A natural resources group has
accused two major wind energy
companies of killing thousands
of birds, including protected ea-
gles, hawks and other raptors, by
sidestepping laws governing the
wind turbines that dot the Alta-
mont Pass.

In a lawsuit filed Monday in
federal court, lawyers for the
Center for Biological Diversity
said the roughly 2,700 wind tur-
bines there belonging to FPL
Group of Florida and the Danish
company NEG Micon A/S are lit-
tle more than bird blenders.

One problem, said Center
spokesman Jeff Miller, is that the
grassy mouse habitat surround-
ing the Livermore windmills at-
tracts birds of prey. Birds diving
for a meal can strike the swirling
blades, Miller said.

"The most deadly turbines
tend to be in canyons and val-
leys," he said. "There are prob-
lems in other wind farms, but
none to the degree of those in the
Altamont. You literally could not
have picked a worse place."

Steve Stengel, manager of
corporate communications for
FPL Energy, said, "We haven't
seen the suit, so we can't com-
ment on it."

Stengel said in an earlier in-
terview that the company is
working to mitigate bird kills, but
he did not specify what those
measures were.

See BIRDS, Page 19

C. C. James 1-13-04



Birds

FROM PAGE 1

Miller said operators could
fence off the turbines and elimi-
nate grass around their bases to
keep prey away. In addition, tur-

prey from the tower
ment, Wiebe said in
file in U.S. District C
Francisco.

Citing 400 to 800
gles, red-tail hawks
raptors killed in cr
turbines

Birds

FROM PAGE 1

Miller said operators could fence off the turbines and eliminate grass around their bases to keep prey away. In addition, turbine blades could be raised to give diving birds more leeway, making impacts less likely, he said.

"None of those measures I mentioned is hugely costly," he said.

Operators of many of the 5,400 turbines in Alameda and Contra Costa counties are in the process of requesting renewed use permits to keep wind power flowing. A hearing on 15 of the permit renewals, covering 1,500 turbines, is set for Thursday before the East Alameda County Board of Zoning Adjustments.

Along with the permits comes the process of replacing aged wind turbines with larger ones, San Francisco attorney Richard R. Wiebe wrote in the lawsuit.

Absent from the proposed upgrades are measures to better protect at least a dozen birds of

prey from the towering equipment, Wiebe said in the lawsuit file in U.S. District Court in San Francisco.

Citing 400 to 800 golden eagles, red-tail hawks and other raptors killed in crashes with turbines over the last 20 years, Miller said the energy companies are missing a great opportunity to make their equipment safer.

"Now is the time to do it while they're doing the repowering," he said. "If they're not going to do it now, they're not going to do it."

BioResource Consultants has tallied bird deaths in the Altamont Pass for the past five years. The consultants found there were 1,189 deaths between May 1998 and May 2003.

Between October 2002 and April 2003 the death toll included: 41 red-tail hawks, 28 golden eagles, 12 barn owls, 13 American kestrels and three great horned owls.

Staff writer Mike Taugher contributed to this story. Reach Brian Anderson at 510-763-5418 or bAnderson2@cctimes.com.

Bird deaths lawsuit OK'd

■ Alameda County judge allows co-plaintiffs to sue wind-power companies, but not on public's behalf

By Ivan Delventhal
TIMES STAFF WRITER

OAKLAND — An Alameda County Superior Court judge has ruled that a lawsuit filed against wind-power companies over the deaths of thousands of protected birds may proceed.

The suit filed Nov. 1 seeks a remedy for the killings of raptors in the wind turbines of Altamont Pass in alleged violation of state and federal wildlife protection laws.

The Center for Biological Di-

versity, which filed the suit with co-plaintiff Peter Galvin, claims an estimated 880 to 1,330 golden eagles, red-tailed hawks, burrowing owls and other birds of prey have been killed each year during the past two decades by the turbines and related electrical transmission lines.

The suit seeks damages that would be used to purchase bird habitats.

Judge Ronald Sabraw ruled Thursday that while the plaintiffs were barred, due to the passage

HOW MANY

There are about 5,400 turbines on the Altamont Pass.

of Proposition 64 in November, from bringing the lawsuit on behalf of the general public, they may continue to press their claims because they, like all Californians, have a property interest in wildlife killed by the turbines.

The suit alleges that violations by wind power companies including FPL Energy, GREP, Green Ridge Power, Altamont Power, Enxco, Seawest Wind-

power, Windworks, Altamont Winds and Pacific Winds amount to unlawful and unfair business practices.

Attorneys for several of the companies named in the lawsuit did not return calls seeking comment Friday.

On a related front, on March 3 and April 7 the Alameda County Board of Supervisors will hold an administrative appeal hearing in Oakland for 29 permits covering more than 3,600 Altamont Pass wind turbines.

The Center for Biological Diversity, the Golden Gate

See SUIT, Page 4



NADER KHOURI/THE TIMES

ALTAMONT PASS wind turbines have killed as many as 1,330 raptors and other birds every year during the past 20 years, according to the Center for Biological Diversity.

Suit

FROM PAGE 3

Audubon Society and Californians for Renewable Energy appealed the permits in November 2003 and January 2004 after the county renewed them. The groups said the renewal decisions did not adequately consider



Suit

FROM PAGE 3

Audubon Society and Californians for Renewable Energy appealed the permits in November 2003 and January 2004 after the county renewed them. The groups said the renewal decisions did not adequately consider the bird deaths attributed to the turbines.

The March 3 hearing will be informational, allowing the board to be updated on the issue, followed by a vote on the permit appeal on April 7.

Jeff Miller of the Center for Biological Diversity said he would like to see the Board of Supervisors impose California Energy Commission recommendations as part of the permit process.

The recommendations call for a 50 percent reduction in raptor killings during the next three years at Altamont Pass and an 85 percent reduction during the succeeding three years.

They also call for wind-power companies to compensate for bird deaths by purchasing replacement habits.

"Our goal isn't to drive anyone out of business or stop the production of wind power," Miller said Friday. "We believe companies can significantly reduce bird kills and continue to make a profit."

Richard Wiebe, attorney for the plaintiffs, said studies have shown that major reductions in bird deaths during the next six years could be accomplished by permanently shutting down up to 650 of the Altamont turbines and closing down the entire operation during the less productive winter months.

Longer-term solutions, according to Wiebe, will involve "repowering" — or replacing — Altamont turbines with taller and more efficient models, the blades of which would be higher off the ground and therefore less likely to strike raptors.





SUSAN TRIPP POLLARD/TIMES

PEOPLE ARE DWARFED Wednesday next to one of the new 164 foot tall, 660 kilowatt, Diablo Winds turbines during a tour of the Altamont Pass. The new turbines are more avian-friendly.

Diablo Winds farm allows birds to fly friendlier skies

■ Larger turbines are more efficient and aimed at reducing raptor deaths

By Sophia Kazmi
TIMES STAFF WRITER

ALTAMONT PASS — Diablo Winds may hold the key to reducing bird deaths in the Altamont Pass.

The 31-turbine Diablo Winds farm there, owned by Florida Power and Light, is equipped with larger, slower-spinning yet more efficient windmills designed to be more avian-friendly than the 169 smaller eggbeater-shaped turbines, turning at 72 rotations a minute, they replaced.

The brisk winds from the north Wednesday turned the 154-foot-in-diameter rotor slowly, at about 28 rotations per minute. But that still produces more than 600 kilowatts.

"Generally, the taller ones fare better with the raptors than the smaller turbines," said Steven Stengel, a spokesman for FPL.

Some of them standing at 164

feet, others towering at 181 feet, these larger machines are easier for birds to see, Stengel said. Also, the electric poles have been torn down and the electrical lines are all underground. Not long ago, eight miles of electrical lines ran through the area.

The new technology also allows workers to control these turbines from anywhere.

"We can monitor from our Livermore office, from Juneau Beach, Fla., or from a crew member's laptop," Stengel said.

Diablo Winds, which went online in 2004, is not one of the 29 farms whose operating permit approvals are being appealed to the Alameda County Board of Supervisors. But FPL has several hundred other turbines that could be affected by the supervisors' appeal decision, expected in June.

The repowering effort — the replacement of old turbines and the renegotiation of contracts with landowners, PG&E and oth-

See WIND, Page 4

Wind

FROM PAGE 3

ers — should help cut deaths of golden eagles and other raptors, said Jeff Miller, spokesman for the Center for Biological Diversity. But it's not happening quickly enough, said Miller, who notes 880 to 1,300 golden eagles, owls, hawks and other raptors die in the Altamont each year.

"We want (companies) to commit to repowering the entire Altamont Pass" over the next five years, Miller said. His organization's goal is to reduce bird deaths by 50 percent within three years, and 85 percent within six years.

The California Energy Commission has made several recommendations on how to do that. They include removing lethal turbines or relocating them to areas where birds tend not to fly; ending a rodent-killing program and shutting down the wind turbines during the winter.

Companies are willing to comply with some, but not all, these suggestions. Operators prefer to shut down half the turbines for November and December and then in January and February shut down the remaining half.

Miller's organization is one of the environmental groups that have appealed the Altamont wind turbine permits, contending more thorough environmental study is needed.

The Center for Biological Diversity also has sued several wind energy companies, seeking restitution for the past killing of raptors. An Alameda County judge ruled this week the lawsuit cannot seek damages for the past bird killings, but can seek mitigation for future raptor deaths, Miller said.

April 1, 2005 C. C. Jones



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NADER KHOURI/TIMES

STEVE GLOVER of the Mount Diablo Audubon Society spent several days a week for five years counting and supervising other people counting species for the first comprehensive atlas of nesting birds in Contra Costa County.

3-8-04 C.C. Times

If the bird is on the wing, birders are on the way

Avian watchers' obsession no flight of fancy

By Denis Cuff
TIMES STAFF WRITER

KATHY ROBERTSON SCRAMBLED into action after computer alerts informed her that a rare visitor to California had touched down 400 miles from her Hayward home.

Luckily it was Friday. Her job didn't get in the way.

She drove her Toyota pickup from midnight to dawn through rain to line up a viewing spot before sunrise at a San Bernardino

County reservoir.

Within an hour, she had her target in her scope.

Soaring amid hundreds of birds was one little gull, a 9-inch-long gull so rare in California that sightings bring birdwatchers rushing in like prospectors to a gold strike.

Robertson savored her find for a hour, and drove 400 miles home.

A generation ago, birdwatchers like Robertson would have been as hard to find



WATERFOWL FILL THE SKY last month over the Holland Tract in Knightsen.

See BIRDS, Page 7





STEVE GLOVER OF DUBLIN looks for birds on Holland Tract in Knightsen. Glover logs perhaps 20,000 miles a year bird watching on weekends, vacations and on mornings before he starts his job in the afternoon. NADER KHOURI/TIMES

Birds *Q.C. Times* 3-8-04

FROM PAGE 1

as a duck in a desert.

But these days, hard-core birdwatchers, also known as birders, are reaching new heights of dedication, endurance and obsession.

"Am I obsessed about birding? Absolutely yes, and I'm not embarrassed to say so," said Robertson, an administrative assistant with Alameda County. "It makes me happy."

Birders, plugged into computer and pager bird alert systems, have never been so wired to bird migrations.

Examples of dedication abound.

Steve Glover of Dublin spent several days a week for five years counting and supervising other people counting species for the first comprehensive atlas of nesting birds in Contra Costa County.

Bill Chilson of Concord twice made three-week birding pilgrimages to a remote Aleutian Island where Arctic rain and gale-force winds routinely strand visitors in concrete bunkers for days. He wants to go back in two years.

Mike Williams, a bird-feed store owner and president of the Mount Diablo Chapter of the Audubon Society, already has bought his retirement home in the remote Chiricahua Mountains in Arizona because it's a



NADER KHOURI/TIMES

GREATER WHITE-FRONTED GEESE over Holland Tract in Knightsen were observed by Steve Glover of the Mount Diablo Audubon Society, who wrote the Contra Costa Breeding Bird Atlas.

good place to watch birds.

Extreme birders can log 20,000 miles or more a year driving on birding trips. Some hire out boats, seaplanes and helicopters.

Pagers, cell phones, and computer alert systems keep them wired to the bird migrations like never before.

Some birders get competitive, trying to amass huge lists of birds that they have counted in the continent, the state, the county or in a year.

A new book on an ultimate birding competition details the exploits of three American men who battled exhaustion and each other in a 270,000-mile-long

odyssey in 1998 to set the record for counting bird species in a year in North America.

The winner, New Jersey industrial contractor Sandy Komito, counted 745 and spent some \$120,000 flying, sailing, driving, hiking and bicycling around the continent, including stops in Monterey and Yosemite National Park. One of his rivals ended up sick and deeply in debt.

"It was an amazing adventure. How many people have a whole year to pursue their dream?" said Mark Obmascik, a Denver writer who chronicled the competition in his book, "The Big Year: A Tale of Man, Nature and Fowl Obsession."

While few people have the wealth, time or drive for an all-out competition, many baby boomers who like the outdoors are turning to birding, Obmascik said.

Even Tony Soprano, the tough mob boss in the "Sopranos" television drama, had a brief birding obsession when a family of ducks landed in his backyard swimming pool.

Some 3.6 million Americans can identify 40 or more bird species, according to federal surveys.

Glover, the Dublin birder, said he could not afford to roam the globe on his salary as a UPS warehouse worker and his six weeks of vacation.

He gets around, though.

He logs perhaps 20,000 miles a year bird watching on weekends, vacations and on mornings before he starts his job in the afternoon.

From 1997 to 2002, he managed 100 volunteers counting bird species in Contra Costa County for the atlas of nesting birds.

He personally surveyed about 100 square miles.

"I don't think my ability to see or hear birds is exceptional, but I do stick with it," Glover said.

On a chilly morning last month on a Delta island, Glover easily and rapidly identified birds so far away they appeared like flecks of dust in the gray sky.

"Snow goose there," he said,

putting order to a mosaic of dots in the sky. "Ross' goose there."

He spotted a Northern harrier dropping and veering over bushes.

Through years of practice and study, he has become skilled at analyzing bird shapes, sounds and velocities like a baseball batter reading incoming pitches.

He joked about the old image of birders as eccentric wimps.

"I can't tell you why I do birding, but let me tell you, the astronomers are really the strange ones."

Chilson, the Concord birder, said he paid several dollars apiece for his two ultimate birding trips to the Aleutian Island of Attu. It took nearly five hours of flying from Anchorage to get there.

Near-hurricane gales chilled humans there, but created a windfall for birders by blowing in Asiatic birds for a rare stop on Northern America.

"It's a forbidding place. It rains every day, but it's a thrill to see birds that rarely visit Northern California," Chilson said.

He acknowledged going to other extremes.

When he was a PG&E executive three decades ago, Chilson once made excuses to leave a high-level meeting of utility bosses when a buddy tipped him off about a rare bird sighting in Monterey.

"We were running down Market Streets in our suits," he recalled. "It's part of the thrill of the hunt."

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

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DAN ROSENSTRAUCH/TIMES

BOB WISECARVER, above, stands next to a brush pile for quail and lizards inside the Walnut Creek Open Space at Borges Ranch on May 27. Wisecarver, 84, and the Walnut Creek Open Space Foundation received a \$5,000 grant to improve wildlife habitats at Lime Ridge Open Space. Below, Wisecarver pauses at the ranger station.

'Batman' takes a turn for the wild

BOB WISECARVER, above, stands next to a brush pile for quail and lizards inside the Walnut Creek Open Space at Borges Ranch on May 27. Wisecarver, 84, and the Walnut Creek Open Space Foundation received a \$5,000 grant to improve wildlife habitats at Lime Ridge Open Space. Below, Wisecarver pauses at the ranger station. *June 6, 2005 Contra Costa Times*

'Batman' takes a turn for the wild

He wants his critter habitats to find a home on Lime Ridge

By Theresa Harrington
TIMES STAFF WRITER

WALNUT CREEK — Octogenarian Bob Wisecarver has spent decades nurturing birds, bats, lizards and bees.

He started building birdhouses as a Boy Scout and graduated to owl and bat houses later in life. Now 84, Wisecarver has decided to focus on his newest project: attracting lizards, plus quail and other birds, to Walnut Creek's open spaces.

"The creation of habitats — that's where I get my jollies," he said, as he trudged through the grassy open space with his 2-meter bamboo walking stick recently. "Creating habitats turns me on."

Wisecarver and the Walnut Creek Open Space Foundation have received a \$5,000 grant to improve wildlife habitats in a gully in the Lime Ridge Open Space, where they hope to create a wildlife corridor.

He started creating quail habitats seven years ago in the Shell Ridge Open Space above Borges Ranch, by fencing off a gully,



planting trees and bushes and making piles of logs and branches that quails use for shelter. He wants to create similar habitat areas along Lime Ridge, where he and other volunteers began working in a small fenced area four years ago.

Wisecarver has a knack for

figuring out what animals like and then creating habitats that meet their needs.

He earned the title of "Batman" after devoting about 10 years to perfecting the art of building bat houses. He has achieved one of the best "batting averages" in the state, by at-

OPEN SPACE FOUNDATION

More information about the Walnut Creek Open Space Foundation is available at 925-939-6610 or www.wcosf.org.

tracting nearly 70 percent occupancy in wooden bat houses that he has made or installed throughout California.

"I put up 57 bat houses, and my batting average is .666," he said.

A member of the Mt. Diablo Audubon Society, he started building barn owl houses in the early 1990s, then got interested in bat houses. More recently, he constructed two bumblebee houses in his backyard.

He installed an osprey perch at the San Pablo Reservoir a few years ago, where he regularly checks in to see if bats are using a house he built there. The thin wooden bat house is open at the

See WISECARVER, Page 4



DAN ROSENSTRAUCH/TIMES

wards inside the Walnut Creek Open Space at Borges Ranch on received a \$5,000 grant to improve wildlife habitats at Lime Ridge

turn for the wild

find a home on Lime Ridge



OPEN SPACE FOUNDATION

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Wisecarver

FROM PAGE 3

bottom, with slabs of plywood stacked inside.

The bats hang on the plywood, dropping guano, or excrement, onto wooden planks below. If Wisecarver sees lots of bat droppings, he knows the house is well-used.

Wisecarver helped Orinda students install two bat houses at their Wagner Ranch Nature Area and designed and helped build a "bat cave" at the Pardee Reservoir in the Sierra Nevada foothills for the East Bay Municipal Utility District. He put up his last bat house a couple of months ago in Oakley, as a contribution to the developing Delta Science Center.

"He's really been instrumental in figuring out what works for bats," said Rachael Long of the UC Cooperative Extension Program, who has collaborated with Wisecarver on bat houses. "You can't just put bats anywhere. They're very particular in their roosting needs."

Wisecarver found that bats like morning sun and afternoon shade and that mother bats look for warm areas to set up their nurseries.

Recently, Caltrans began designing bridges to include bat habitats that can house hundreds of thousands of the nocturnal creatures. Since bat houses can only accommodate 200 to 300 of the creatures, Wisecarver said he prefers to let the state take over bat habitat work, so he can focus on the Lime Ridge wildlife habitat project.

With the grant from Contra Costa County's Fish and Wildlife Propagation Fund, Wisecarver will extend the habitat he has begun there, in the hopes that it will attract quails, brush rabbits and other wildlife as successfully as the Shell Ridge habitat has.

To provide water for the creatures in Shell Ridge, Wisecarver rigged up troughs by connecting rubber tubes to small metal barrels that serve as water tanks.

He stacked large rocks in small heaps next to the brush piles, providing surfaces that lizards use to soak up the sun, or hide beneath. In small sand pits near the rock piles, lizards lay their eggs.

Theresa Harrington covers the Walnut Creek area.

Reach her at 925-945-4764.

California condors flock to Arizona park

By Michelle Roberts
ASSOCIATED PRESS

GRAND CANYON NATIONAL PARK, Ariz. — The South Rim of the Grand Canyon has long been a favorite of human visitors gawking at the stunning views and taking advantage of the manmade services.

As it turns out, the South Rim also is a favorite of endangered California condors — for many of the same reasons.

The large birds often gather at the South Rim to watch people, socialize with one another and drink from a leaky water pipe.

On some days, as many as 25 to 30 condors soar over the canyon area — more birds than were in existence a generation ago when officials decided to capture and breed them.

The birds, which have dull-orange featherless heads with a stubby beak and dark body feathers, were reintroduced in the wild in Arizona starting in 1996.

What began with the release of six birds 50 miles north of here has led to a flock of 53, including some of the first wild-born condors since the early 1980s.

Two of the three fledglings hatched in Arizona have survived, and three other condor pairs are nesting this year, said Chris Parish, the Peregrine Fund's condor director in Arizona. The nonprofit Peregrine Fund runs a breeding facility in Boise, Idaho, where the birds are hatched and prepared for release, and has overseen Arizona's condor program.

He and others say it's too early to call the reintroduction a success because the population



CHAD OLSON/NATIONAL PARK SERVICE 2004 FILE

CALIFORNIA CONDORS perch along the canyon's South Rim. On some days, as many as 25 to 30 condors soar over the canyon area.

ON THE WEB

Grand Canyon National Park:
www.nps.gov/grca/

Peregrine Fund:
www.peregrinefund.org

isn't yet self-sustaining. "But we finally have a foothold," he said. "I, for one, have confidence ... we're well on our way."

California condors are among the largest birds native to North America and have no natural predators. The condors, which may live as many as 60 years, were driven to near extinction by the early 1980s. Shootings, poisonings and crashes with power lines, combined with their naturally low reproductive rate, shriveled the population.

To keep them from entirely dis-

appearing, federal officials and nonprofit groups worked to capture the birds and breed them with hopes that they could be released into the wild again. Releases began in 1992 in California. Today, there are about 118 birds in the wild in Arizona, central and Southern California and coastal Mexico.

Jesse Grantham, condor recovery program coordinator for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, said the 25-year project to save the condors has taught biologists along the way. The early years of reintroduction were difficult because the young birds didn't have older birds to follow in the wild. Biologists didn't anticipate that the young condors would need mentors, but it makes sense in hindsight, he said.

Now that older birds have established patterns in the wild, it

BY THE NUMBERS

A look at California condors:

274 — condors now in existence

118 — condors in the wild

14 — founder birds used to breed the current population

4 — flocks of condors, located in Arizona, California and Baja California in Mexico

22 — birds remaining before recovery efforts started

60 years — possible life expectancy

9.5 feet — wingspan

The Peregrine Fund
and Grand Canyon National Park

has become safer for younger birds to follow.

The people in the region have also adapted to the return of the wild birds.

Some residents of northern Arizona and southern Utah were concerned about the reintroduction when it began. They feared the endangered birds would bring federal intrusion and restrictions, Parish said. But now, the locals are accustomed to the birds, and canyon visitors, who hardly noticed them at first, love them.

At least one South Rim gift shop sells condor plush toys and T-shirts bearing the condor image.

Park officials hold daily, sometimes twice daily, interpretive programs for visitors about the condors right over the South Rim location the birds use as their social hub, said Chad Olson, the canyon's raptor biologist.



MATT YORK/ASSOCIATED PRESS

TOURISTS stand at Bright Angel Point along the Grand Canyon's South Rim. California condors also like to gather at the South Rim.

"It's such a unique situation where you can show people one of the most endangered species in the world," he said.

The park is a blessing and curse for the condors, he said. It's protected and has millions of acres of habitat for the birds, which have a home-range radius of 50 to 70 miles. But there are a lot of people here, and biologists fear the condors will come to think that people are safe.

The canyon's rim is attractive to the birds, in part because there is so much activity and because

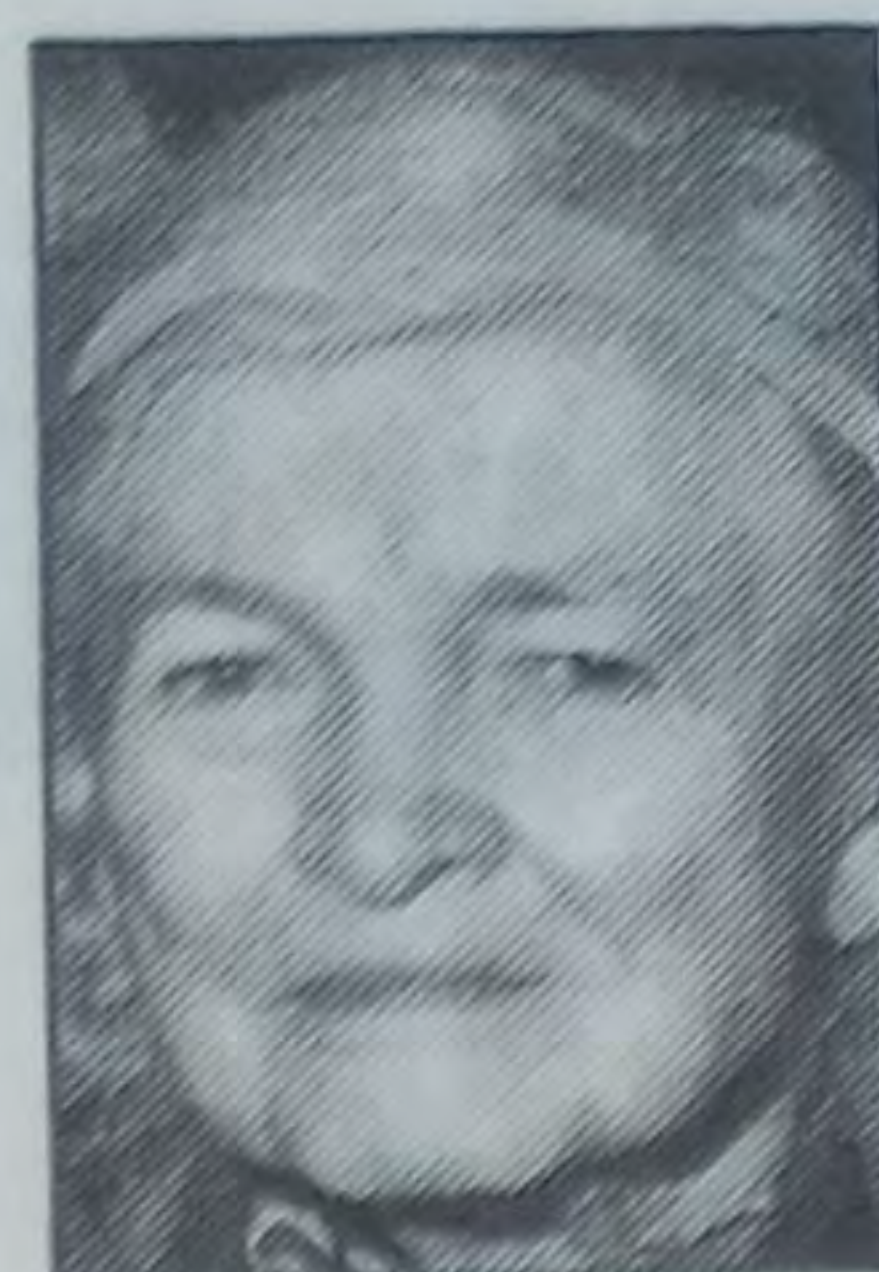
they are so curious, Olson said.

The condors, though raised in captivity by humans using bird-shaped puppets to feed them, are also perhaps drawn to the Grand Canyon by instinct.

Olson rappelled to a nesting cave that a pair of condors tried unsuccessfully to use to mate in 2002 and 2003. The biologists couldn't figure out why the birds failed, but they did find bones in the cave. It turned out that the bones were those of condors and condor prey some 10,000 to 15,000 years old.

Mary Bowerman – helped start Save Mount Diablo

S.F. Chronicle
8/25/05



Mary Bowerman wrote her doctoral dissertation on the flora of Mount Diablo.

By Erin Hallissy
CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

Mary Bowerman, who wrote her doctoral dissertation on the flora of Mount Diablo decades before she co-founded the organization dedicated to expanding and preserving its open spaces in 1971, died Sunday at her Lafayette home. She was 97.

Through her impassioned efforts with Save Mount Diablo, Miss Bowerman was instrumental in helping expand the state park's boundaries from 6,788 acres in 1971 to more than 20,000 acres today.

"She had a passion for the mountain," said Warren Westrup, land acquisitions chief for the state parks department. "I can't even give you the words to describe how tenacious and passionate she was about the need to protect the mountain."

"She was definitely pushing to get her vision done. I don't think you'd recognize (the mountain) today without the efforts of Save Mount Diablo."

Miss Bowerman's leadership earned her numerous honors, including her induction in 1998 into Contra Costa County's inaugural class of its Women's Hall of Fame.

Seth Adams, spokesman for Save Mount Diablo, said Miss Bowerman leaves a great legacy.

"In Contra Costa, Mary had the biggest effect of anyone in terms of preserving land and deciding what the future of this place would look like," he said.

But she was modest and even objected when a fire trail on Mount Diablo was named for her.

"She was just a real lady," said Bob Doyle, a longtime friend and assistant general manager for the East Bay Regional Parks District. "She was humble and gentle and shy and private, but she had a laugh that when she laughed, her whole body shook."

Miss Bowerman was born in Toronto in 1908 and moved with her parents to Pasadena when she was a

teenager. Her parents moved with her to Berkeley when she enrolled at UC Berkeley, where she eventually earned a doctorate in botany in 1936. They later moved to Lafayette in 1954, to the same house where Miss Bowerman died.

While in graduate school, Miss Bowerman studied the flora of Mount Diablo for a master's thesis, but later informed her professor, the late botanist Willis Linn Jepson, that the study would be for her doctorate. It was published in 1944 as "Flowering Plants and Ferns of Mount Diablo." Until May, when the Mount Diablo buckwheat was rediscovered by a Berkeley graduate student, Miss Bowerman in 1936 had been the last person to see the rare pink flower.

In 2002, a new edition of the book was published with Barbara Ertter, curator of Western North America Flora at the UC Jepson Herbarium, as the lead co-author with Miss Bowerman.

"The enthusiasm that she had, still being able to go hiking and collecting... well into her 90s, was absolutely awesome and certainly inspirational," Ertter said. "Its only been in the last few years that she's started slowing down."

Miss Bowerman and a small cohort of conservationists began Save Mount Diablo when Contra Costa County had a population of just 558,000, compared with the 1 million who live there today. Doyle, who was among the founders, said some were puzzled about the group's mission.

"People would say, 'What do you need to save it for? Nothing's being done up there,'" Doyle recalled.

Galen Rowell recounted in a 1997 book, "Bay Area Wild," a conversation he had with Miss Bowerman about the first meeting of Save Mount Diablo.

"I stated my dream that the whole of Mount Diablo, including its foothills, should remain in open space," she told Rowell. "With the rapid population growth in Contra

Costa County, we need to include all the lower slopes of the mountain before they're developed and lost forever."

Westrup said Miss Bowerman would grow impatient with the slow state bureaucracy in expanding the park's boundaries, which in 1971 did not even include both of its distinctive peaks.

"For Mary, we could never work fast enough," he said.

Doyle said Miss Bowerman's scientific background cemented the group's credibility with legislators because she always advocated expansions for "good botanical or biological reasons."

"Her advocacy was based on really solid arguments," he said. "She had no false designs on thinking she was a great conservationist or that she was going to save the world. She was just focused on saving Mount Diablo one piece at a time."

A memorial service will be held Oct. 9 at Mitchell Canyon in Mount Diablo State Park. Memorial contributions may be made to Save Mount Diablo, 1196 Boulevard Way, Suite 10, Walnut Creek, CA 94595.

Celebration of life to be held for Larry Maatz

CHRONICLE STAFF REPORT

A celebration of life will be held Sunday for Larry Maatz, a retired police reporter for the old San Francisco Examiner who died of cancer earlier this month at his home in Martinez. He was 68.

The gathering will be at 3 p.m. at the Point San Pablo Yacht Club, 700 West Cutting Blvd., Point Richmond.

The family suggests memorial contributions be sent to the American Cancer Society, P.O. Box 102454, Atlanta, GA 30368-2454.

Bird-watching perches to honor wildlife artist

■ Two structures in a state wildlife area will afford views of the bird life Adamson has spent his own life portraying

By Denis Cuff
TIMES STAFF WRITER

Harry Adamson has used his painter's brush for more than six decades to connect Californians with wild places and wildlife.

His scenes of falcons diving

after prey and pintail ducks landing in tawny, rain-soaked fields have inspired many people.

His donated paintings and reprints have raised a small fortune for waterfowl habitat protection groups.

Now the 88-year-old Lafayette painter has motivated his fans and friends to come up with another way of bringing the public closer to nature.

In a tribute to the painter, his friends plan to create two large observation buildings that will

each allow 20 or so people at a time to view ducks and geese in one of California's premier bird-watching spots.

The two buildings, called hides, are planned for a sanctuary in the Gray Eagle State Wildlife Area near Gridley in the heart of the Sacramento Valley's duck country.

"These hides are going to be very unusual. I can't think of another place like them in California — at least in our refuges," said Bob McLandres, president

of the California Waterfowl Association. "Harry has given a lot. Now people are giving back to him."

Most public viewing areas in California refuges are open and exposed.

The new hides will provide sheltered hiding spots, making it easy for people to get close to birds for viewing, painting or photographing them, say planners of the project.

See ARTIST, Page 32

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Artist 6/26/05

FROM PAGE 29

Adamson said he can appre-
ciate the value of the hides after
traveling the globe for decades
to view birds.

"We saw hides like this in
England," he said in a recent
phone interview from his
Lafayette home. "You can get
right on top of them there. And
you don't get soaked in the rain."

Adamson has visited the Gray
Lodge area for decades to sketch,
paint and lead bird-watching
trips for the Mount Diablo chap-
ter of the Audubon Society.

Since he was a boy growing
up in Hayward and Oakland,
Adamson has had a passion for
art and the outdoors.

His commercial career as a
painter started slowly, though.
He relied for years on his wife,
Betty, to support him. A serendip-
itous event gave his career a
boost several decades ago.

An Oakland dentist and duck
hunter persuaded Adamson to do-
nate an original painting for auc-
tion at a fund-raising dinner in
Orinda for Ducks Unlimited and
the California Waterfowl Associ-
ation. To the struggling artist's
surprise, hunters eagerly bid.

His colorful winter scenes of
raw marshes, ponds, and fields
resonated with hunters' and bird
watchers' experiences.

Adamson's popularity grew. He
donated more work and his paint-
ings graced magazine covers. The
value of his work climbed.

One large painting sold in re-

cent years for \$35,000.

"After a while, we couldn't af-
ford to donate original paintings,
but we contributed prints,"
Adamson said.

The combined value of work
donated to several conservation
groups easily exceeds \$1.5 million,
estimate leaders of several groups.

Sale of 1,600 prints of a 1979
duck painting raised more than
\$550,000 through Ducks Unlim-
ited events across the country,
according to John Tomke, former
president of the group.

When Adamson's friends ap-
proached him in the last year
about a tribute, the painter said
he didn't want a plaque or object
to glorify himself. But he ac-
cepted the suggestion of the
hides for the public to use.

In a dinner at the Blackhawk

Museum during May, several
habitat and conservation organi-
zations teamed up to raise
\$100,000 for the hides, said
Claude Grillo of Walnut Creek,
coordinator of the event.

Grillo said the hides may be
finished in time for the duck mi-
gration season this winter. Adam-
son was touched by the honor, as
were his friends.

"Harry is probably the No. 1
waterfowl artist in California, but
he is very humble about it,"
McLandres said. "You sense
there's a certain contentment to
Harry, that he's satisfied with his
work and sharing his passion for
waterfowl with others."

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New wind farm restrictions are designed to reduce the number of birds that turbines kill each year, which is about 4,700.

ALAMEDA COUNTY

SF Chronicle

8161 26E 526 Sept. 23, 2005

Wind farms to spare the birds

2,500 turbines in Altamont Pass to stop for winter migration

By Jim Herron Zamora
CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

Half of the 5,000 windmills in the Altamont Pass will be closed for three months this winter to protect migratory birds under a plan that Alameda County supervisors adopted Thursday, over protests from environmentalists who said all the turbines should be closed for the season.

The move marked the first time during a 24-year dispute at the world's largest wind farm that the county board and windmill owners have agreed to shut down some of the wind turbines to protect birds.

The board had approved an earlier version of the plan in July.

On Thursday, supervisors voted 4-1, with Supervisor Gail Steele opposed, to renew the operating permits for the wind farms, but only under new restrictions designed to reduce the number of birds that turbines kill each year, which is about 4,700.

The new plan is a compromise that will close half the turbines every year during the winter migratory season, when more birds are traveling through the Altamont Pass. The winter months are also when the least wind is generated, operators said.

"These are creative and meaningful

conditions," said Supervisor Scott Haggerty, whose southeast county district includes the Altamont Pass. "These new conditions go further than anyone would have thought. This is fair place to start coming up with a balance."

Under the plan, half the turbines will not be spinning from Nov. 1 through the end of February. About 2,500 windmills will be shut down in November and December, then turned back on while the other 2,500 will be closed down in January and February. Between 100 and 200 older turbines that are considered the worst offenders will be turned off permanently.

► **TURBINES:** Page B4

2,500 windmills to stop for bird migration

► TURBINES

From Page B1

The county and the wind power companies also agreed to conduct a series of studies to see which turbines kill the most birds and see how they can reduce deaths.

The Altamont wind turbines, first erected in the 1970s, provide enough energy to power about 120,000 homes. But the turbines also sit along the Pacific Flyway — the main route for the winter migration of birds.

More birds are killed at Altamont Pass than any other wind-power area in the nation. These include about 500 raptors such as golden eagles, red-tailed hawks and burrowing owls, according to studies by the California Energy Commission. The hills and mountains near the pass are one of the world's largest nesting grounds for golden eagles, a federally protected species.

Wind turbine operators said

"It's great that the board is finally doing something. But the question is: Is this enough? We don't think it is."

JEFF MILLER
Center for Biological Diversity

they are willing to live with the new restrictions even though it will cut their revenue by 10 percent, said Rick Koebbe, president of Altamont Winds Inc., one of the larger producers.

"This will affect our business, but we are happy to work to reduce bird deaths," Koebbe said.

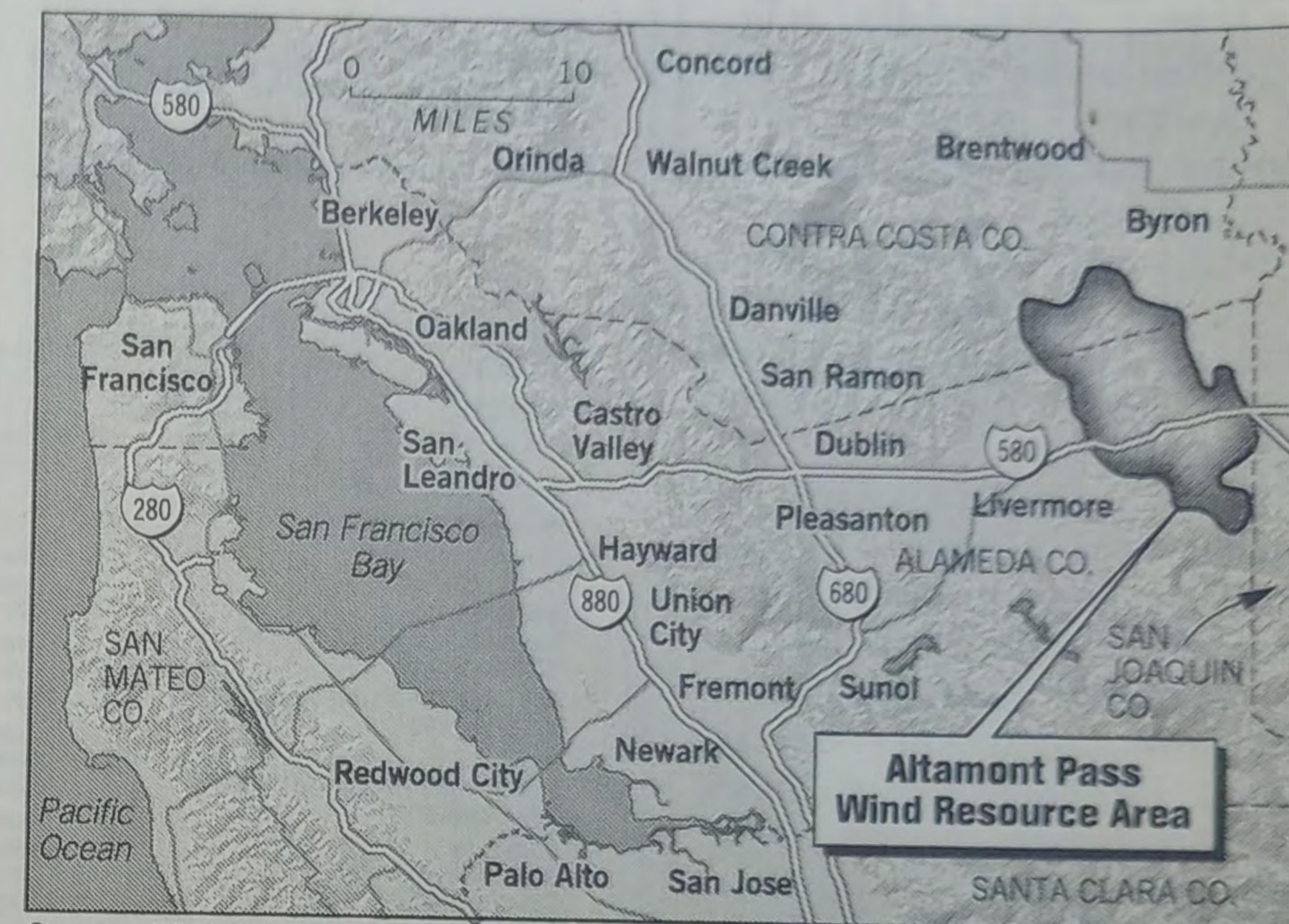
But environmentalists and state Attorney General Bill Lockyer wanted the board to go further and shut down all the wind turbines from November to February until they can be replaced by newer models that are less likely to kill bald eagles and other birds.

"After 20 years of doing nothing,

we needed the board to hit a home run. Instead, they hit a bloop single," said Jeff Miller of the Center for Biological Diversity. "It's great that the board is finally doing something. But the question is: Is this enough? We don't think it is."

Miller's group is one of several environmental organizations that have a lawsuit against the wind farm operators that is pending in Alameda County Superior Court. Lockyer agreed to review the underlying legal issues at the request of Judge Ronald Sabraw, who is presiding over the lawsuit.

In July, Lockyer's office wrote



Sources: ESRI, GDT, USGS

The Chronicle

a letter urging the board to go further and adopt many recommendations to reduce bird deaths proposed by the Center for Biological Diversity and the Audubon Society. No representative from his office attended Thursday's board meeting, and no one was available for comment afterward.

Environmentalists said they may sue the county over the new regulations, which they said are

in violation of state laws governing planning and wildlife.

"Altamont Pass never would have been built if we had known how critical that site is," said Elizabeth Murdock, executive director of the Golden Gate Audubon Society. "That project never would have gotten through the approval process."

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MIKE DALEY, left, of the Sierra Club, Jimm Edgar of the Mt. Diablo Audubon Society, David Reid of the Greenbelt Alliance and Seth Adams of Save Mt. Diablo gather in an open space in Concord across from the ridgeline that developer Albert Seeno hopes to use to extend the Pittsburg urban limit line. KRISTOPHER SKINNER/TIMES

CC Times Sept. 29, 2005

Activists team up to fight growth plans

■ Greenbelt Alliance, Audubon Society, Save Mt. Diablo, and Sierra Club ask voters in East County to reject two ballot measures

By Kiley Russell
TIMES STAFF WRITER

A coalition of environmental groups kicked off a campaign Wednesday to defeat two developer-sponsored growth initiatives in East Contra Costa County.

Calling the initiatives the biggest threat to the county's environment in a decade, representatives from the Greenbelt Alliance, the Sierra Club, Save Mt. Diablo and the Audubon Society urged voters in Pittsburg and Antioch to oppose the ballot measures.

"They promise growth control but what they achieve is thousands of new homes in beautiful places," said David Reid of the Greenbelt Alliance.

Measure P in Pittsburg is

sponsored by the Seeno family, influential developers who want to expand the existing growth boundary around the city to include 2,400 acres in four areas.

The Seenos own 600 acres in the southwestern San Marco Hills area, which they propose to move inside the urban limit line. Land outside the line is off limits to large-scale development.

If voters approve Measure P in November, Pittsburg could be in store for up to 4,000 new homes, Reid said.

Both cities' projects would worsen the already abysmal traffic mess in East County and destroy valuable open space, environmentalists said.

"I hope (voters) see through this wolf in sheep's clothing," said Seth Adams of Save Mt. Diablo.

The environmentalists made their announcement at the Lime Ridge Open Space along Ygnacio Valley Road, with the hills east of the Concord Naval Weapons Station clearly visible

in the distance.

The ridgeline of those hills would be covered with homes if Measure P passes, Adams said.

"(The Seenos) want to grade and build from Pittsburg across the top of the Kirker Hills overlooking the Naval Weapons Station. That's just crazy," he said.

Seeno spokesman Sam Singer accused the environmentalists of inflating the number of homes Measure P would allow.

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