The **SKIMMER**

Volume 26, Number 8—August 1999

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Monthly Meeting:

Thursday, August 19, at 7:00 p.m., at Tecolote Canyon Nature Center, at the east end of Tecolote Road, off I-5.

Program: "Shorebirds in May on the Shores of Delaware Bay," by David Seay. David did some banding there this spring, and he has lots of pictures of Red Knots, Ruddy Turnstones, and Sanderlings. Plenty more shorebirds too, including possibly some from Australia.

Next month's meeting: Thursday, September 16, same time, same place. Program to be announced.

Pelagic Trip: Sunday, August 29, from 6:00 a.m. to 4:00 pm, out of Seaforth Sportfishing on Quivera Road. The price is $50. We will be on a smaller boat than usual, with only 40 spaces, so reservations will be essential. See Stan Walens to sign up. We will not be going out to San Clemente Island but will stay within 45 miles of the coast. We are hoping that by going out in August we will increase our chances of finding murrelets, storm petrels and other migrants over going out in mid-September, at the tail end of seabird migration.

Still Some NGS Field Guides Left

Stan Walens still has four copies of the new edition of the National Geographic Society Field Guide. See him at the meeting if you want one. They're $17.50 each.

Corrected E-mail Address

If you want to e-mail Mary Mosher, send your missive to:
Mary Mosher mary.mosher@juno.com

Dunn and Garrett Workshop Is Off for Now

John and Kimball decided that they did not have time to give a seminar here this year and have asked to have it rescheduled to next fall. They will be giving a 5-hour workshop on flycatchers in Los Angeles on September 22 (with a break for dinner). They will give another 3-hour workshop [topic to be announced] hosted by Sea and Sage Audubon on September 23 in Huntington Beach. It will be held at the City of Huntington Beach council chambers in the evening with a donation of $25 to ABA Field Notes.

Mystery Bird Quiz Remains a Mystery!

In spite of my nagging, only two SDFOers submitted answers to our Mystery Bird Quiz. You will remember that in June we published a bird list compiled by one of our members last spring at one of his favorite birding spots and challenged us to deduce who the birder was and where he had been birding. The list obviously wasn't local; I opined that it was somewhere along the Gulf Coast. Jim Coatsworth suggested Ding Darling National Wildlife Refuge in Florida, a worthy guess. The other entry was the joint effort of Herb Young and Mary Mosher, who guessed Dauphin Island, Alabama. They correctly identified the mystery birder as Dave King, but I haven't been able to contact him to check on the location. The remorseless logic of their entry confirms my opinion that if you want legal work done, Herb is your Man. Here is their entry:

Mary Mosher and I decided to jump into the fray and answer the Mystery Bird List quiz. Our answer to the quiz is...Colonel Mustard in the ballroom with the knife! No, wait--wrong game! But seriously, first the birds then the birder.

We identified seven indicator species from the list: Northern Gannet, Glossy Ibis, Wood Stork, Great Black-backed Gull, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Fish Crow, and Boat-tailed Grackle. From these, we concluded that the birding spot lies along a seacoast (the Gannets) between High Island, Texas, and Cape May, New Jersey. High Island is the boundary between Boat-tailed and Great-tailed Grackle. Both can be seen there, but only the Boat-tailed is found east of there. Glossy Ibis and Wood Stork keep the location well south of the Mason Dixon Line. (*How I love ya, how I love ya, my dear ol' Swanee!*) Great Black-backed Gull is found mainly along the Atlantic Coast, but we found them along the Florida panhandle. The list was compiled March 9-10; and whileall of the field guide range maps show Northern Gannet along the Gulf coast from November to April, it is still the best bird of the list.

Our editor tells us: "some of you would be able to figure out the location if you knew who [the birder] is yes, it's a he." The mystery birder addresses us as "Dear fellow SDFO'ers;" He says that he was on Spring Break when he birded the mystery location and that he has birded there many times. So he is or was a member of SDFO, and he seems to work the academic calendar. We have a lot of members, including academics, who range widely in search of birds,

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Mystery List (continued)
but it is not likely that one of them would say that he has birded this eastern spot"many times."

From there we go back to the editor's remark that we "would be able to figure out the location if (we knew who the birder is)." On the basis of that remark, we decided that the birder must live in the eastern part of the county. Dave King lives in Vicksburg, Mississippi. While he is not on the current SDFO membership list, he is entitled to consider himself a "fellow SDFOer." We seem to recall that Dave is a college teacher of some rank and therefore longs for the spring break, and he is not far from the Mississippi/ Alabama coast. This list would sound better from some point along the Atlantic coast, but we conclude that the birder is Dave King and the spot is Dauphin Island.

Possible Cave Swallow Split

John Penhallurick recently posted an item on BirdChat that may be of interest to birders who have spent time in Florida or the West Indies. It seems that a paper in the current issue of the *Bulletin of the British Ornithologists' Club* splits the Cave Swallows breeding in the Greater Antilles from the Cave Swallows breeding in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona. The latter remain Cave Swallow, *Petrochelidon pelodoma*. The Antillean birds become Cinnamon-throated Swallow, *P. fulva*. This species occurs regularly in south Florida. We'll see if the AOU picks this up in their next supplement.

Skimmings from the Literature

Heermann's Gull Nesting

Enriqueta Velarde (1999). Breeding biology of Heermann's Gulls on Isla Rasa, Gulf of California, Mexico. *The Auk* 116 (2): 513-519.

Ever wonder what happens to all those Heermann's gulls when they disappear from the San Diego coastline in the spring? Answer: they all head for Isla Rasa, a small, 120-acre island in the northern Gulf of California, where 95% of the world population breeds in one enormous colony. Velarde studied their efforts in 1980 and 1981. She found 130,240 nests on the island in 1980. Heermann's Gulls nest tightly packed together, with up to 110 nests per 100 square meters of ground. This apparently protects them from predation, primarily by Yellow-footed Gulls and Peregrine Falcons. The introduced Black Rat is also an important predator in some areas, especially the rocky hills on the island, where nesting success was much lower than in the valleys.

Isla Rasa is an ideal nesting site for Heermann's Gull. The island has not been colonized by larger predators like coyotes or snakes, and it sits in one of the richest seas on earth. Even in an El Niño year, enough tidal upwelling occurs around the island to support a large population of sardines and anchovies, so the gull chicks always have plenty to eat. On the other hand, putting all your eggs in one basket (or on one island) has its drawbacks. Velarde attributes the lower nesting success in 1981 to a single party of humans who wandered through the colony at a critical time. Heermann's Gull, like many seabird species, is highly vulnerable to human disturbance.

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Your contributions to *The Skimmer* are appreciated. Submit articles and notices by the first of the month of publication by mail to John Walters, 5552 Horse Ridge Way, Bonita, CA 91902, or by e-mail to lizandjohn@earthlink.net

JOIN SDFO

Dues for Calendar year: $10.00, including all renewals. Add $5.00 for each additional member in same household. **MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO SDFO** and mail or give check to membership chair: Mary Beth Stowe 5465 Repecho Dr. J-201, San Diego, CA 92124

For membership information, call Mary Beth at 279-5636.

Rare Bird Hotline 479-3400