

# SWOC TALK

Jan-Feb, 1976

Newsletter of the Southern Willamette Ornithological Club Volume 2, Number 1

## MEETINGS

SWOC will meet at 7:30 PM, April 5, 1976 at the conference room on the third floor of Science III, University of Oregon campus, Eugene. Dan Fenske will present a program on the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology's Peregrine Falcon Program, in which Peregrines are raised in captivity for later restocking back into the wild. There will also be some further discussion on the organization of a state-wide ornithological group.

## DUES

Dues for 1976 should be paid promptly. If your name is underlined in red on the back of this newsletter, you have yet to pay 1976 dues and this is the last newsletter you will receive. Dues are \$5.00 and should be mailed to SWOC, c/o Chip Jobanek, 38713 McKenzie Highway, Springfield, Oregon 97477.

### THE ALFRED COOPER SHELTON AWARD

In memory of Alfred Cooper Shelton, the eminent Willamette Valley ornithologist, the Southern Willamette Ornithological Club (SWOC) is initiating this annual award to be presented to an individual conducting an ornithological research project. Applicants will be judged on the possible contribution of their work to an increased knowledge of Oregon birdlife. The award will be made in the amount of \$75.

Interested persons should include in their applications complete details of the prospective project, including discussion of the problem being investigated, a brief outline of procedure and indication of progress made to date. Please mail applications or direct requests for information to SWOC, c/o Chip Jobanek, 38713 McKenzie Highway, Springfield, Oregon 97477. Completed applications must be received by 15 May 1976. Final decisions will be announced in June.

## Banding on a College Campus

by Don Payne

The idea of a demonstration field school in connection with the biology department of a college is not new. Its value to students is measureable in both enthusiasm and information.

Early in the development of the Lane Community College campus there have been those of us birders who have discovered the unique habitat for birds of the area. There are thick woods on two sides of the parking lots, with much space all around. The shallow valley that runs southwest is a cut-over fir-oak-alder slope; it is outside of the valley proper. Somewhere on developmental drawing boards, I am told, there are plans for supermarkets, multiple student housing units, condominiums, residences and so forth for this area. But for the present, the little used logging road that extends up the valley for perhaps a mile holds much in store for the patient birder who is willing to search a little.

There was at one time a small logging operation located near the campus. This site is at the north end of the little valley proper. It had a landfill dam which provided a log pond of some two plus acres and up to fifteen feet deep. This feature disappeared before the development of the college campus was begun. A fissure developed in the fill and has eroded until all that is left of the pond is a cattail marsh of some 400 square feet. Deer, coyotes, dogs, birds and people use the marsh for various reasons.

Beginning in 1971, the Lane Community College Biology Department, under the direction of Floyd Wetzal, erected and stocked feeders for the use of the birds. A mixture of sunflower seeds, chicken scratch, oats and walnut meats was most acceptable. It was the abundant birdlife that made the area attractive to the birders and bird-banders.

A banding program has been run since the spring of 1971. As many as seven netting lanes have been established, and while not all are in use at one time, netes are switched so as to take advantage of flight lanes. Table 1 gives the numbers of birds and species that have been banded since the program was initiated.

Table 2 gives numbers for a few of the more abundant birds in this valley. Repeats at the banding station are not frequent, but there are some from previous years' bandings. Once a bird has been taken in a net, it usually avoids a repeat experience by going over, around, or beneath the net to the watering hole. There have been no foreign returns taken at this location, that is, no captures of birds banded elsewhere in a western flyway. It is hoped that perhaps someday a bird banded in Washington or possibly Canada might be taken at our campus location. Lane County lies at the southern terminus of a long flyway that extends to and beyond Puget Sound.

The usual data taken from a bird in the hand includes its weight in grams, wing length in millimeters, the sex differences as indicated by the presence or absence of brood patch or cloacal protuberance in breeding birds. The skull is examined for the closure of the fontanelle as evidence of maturation. The molt is recorded whether in body, wings or tail and whether it is complete, incomplete or partial. If parasites are present, they are collected.

To date, the program has been able to furnish information on several birds: the Wrentit, Yellow-breasted Chat, Orange-crowned Warbler, Lazuli Bunting, Brown-headed Cowbird, Steller's Jay, and others. Pictures, sound recordings of song, abundance, young and adult ratios, and other data are all filed for reference.

This program is more successful in spring and summer as the water is used as an attraction at this time.

Table 1.

	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	Totals
Birds banded	101	141	164	123	218	747
Species banded	24	24	31	26	34	46

Table 2.

A few of the more abundant birds banded at this location include the following:

Purple Finch	204	Brown-headed Cowbird	19
Rufous-sided Towhee	76	Western Flycatcher	18
Song Sparrow	60	Orange-crowned Warbler	18
Black-headed Grosbeak	38	Western Tanager	17
American Goldfinch	35	American Robin	12
Black-capped Chickadee	34	House Finch	11
MacGillivray's Warbler	28	Bewick's Wren	10
Swainson's Thrush	25	Golden-crowned Sparrow	10

It is planned to continue the operation of this station through several years in order to gather more data for study.

Editor:

In SWOC TALK, vol. 1, no. 6, there appeared a review of The Distribution and Occurrence of the Birds of Jackson County, Oregon, and Surrounding Areas, by M. Ralph Browning, United States Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service, North American Fauna no. 70, 1975. While this review points out most of the major failings of the work several aspects of the paper were not mentioned that I feel should have been and at least a couple of obvious errors are present in the review itself. It may seem redundant to comment further on Mr. Browning's paper but I feel justified in doing this in view of the fact that ornithological literature specifically on Oregon is very meager and also that the author is presumably at work on a new book of the state's avifauna.

In the review we read the statement: "Apparently no efforts were made by field ornithologists of Jackson County to separate any of the five species of Empidonax!" However, Browning states "I have combined the available data of this genus because of the difficulty of accurately identifying these fly-catchers." This statement does not indicate, as the review suggests, that field workers did not separate Empidonax species in the field, but rather that Browning himself does not consider species-specific sight records of this genus valid, which is, as the reviewer noted, rather puzzling for at least three members of the group. The other error in the review occurs when it is stated that Browning's designation of "uncommon migrant" for the Black-throated Gray Warbler is "surprising in light of the fact that it is so abundant during spring migration in the southern Willamette Valley, where it also breeds, and it breeds in northern California!" Actually, Browning states that the species is an "uncommon migrant and summer resident" (underlining mine). I hardly find it surprising that the bird is not common in Jackson County during migration as it is entirely possible that the route the species follows, or else the habitat utilized, during migration does not bring it into the more often observed lowland habitats of the region.

In addition to the points stressed by the previous review, I find very distressing the vague and confusing accounts of many of the species. This confusion results in large part by the inconsistent usage of such terms as "accidental", "very rare", etc. Mr. Browning seems intent upon categorizing the occurrence of each species in such terms. But is such terminological promiscuity really justified in an area that has been worked by field ornithologists for such a relatively short period of time and hardly intensively or systematically during that time? Rather than stating that the Long-eared Owl or the Semipalmated Sandpiper is a "very rare visitor" on the basis of one record for the region, would it not be less confusing simply to present that one record unadorned by such decorative lingo? Even though each term denoting frequency of occurrence is carefully defined at the beginning of the species account section of the paper (though the term "straggler" is used a number of times but is not defined in the list of terms used), the system breaks down in the case of the Red Phalarope. This species is considered "rare" by Browning, rather than "very rare", largely because two individuals were present together on a single day, even though there are absolutely no other records for Jackson County; however, even if there were dozens of records for a given species the Red Phalarope would still rate as more "abundant" so long as no more than one of that given species were recorded per season for the region! Though the terms "very rare" and "accidental" refer to the

abundancy and frequency of a species, two slightly different categories, it is weird to find that the Semipalmated Sandpiper, Long-eared Owl, Long-billed Curlew, Black-bellied Plover, and others, with one record apiece are designated as "very rare" or "very rare visitor", while species such as the Black-chinned Sparrow, Black-throated Sparrow and Hooded Oriole for which several records exist, are listed simply as "accidental". And the term "uncommon" hardly seems appropriate for the status of the Great Gray Owl in Jackson County, considering that only a handful of records exist for the area; yet "uncommon", as used by Browning, is supposed to mean six to twenty-five records per season. Such terms, drawn from three lists of words indicating for the most part three presumably distinct temporal qualities, are used and not used throughout the species' accounts with little apparent pattern or consistency except possibly in accord with the author's whim. The confusion thereby created is a major problem when the paper is scanned for meaningful information.

A critique of this work listing all the errors, inconsistencies, inadequacies, etc. would fill many too many pages and would be rather pointless. Rather it seems more meaningful to simply say that the paper is extremely poor in a number of respects and great care should be used when any of the information presented is utilized in research. Why should this be necessary? One reason that does stand out is that no one intimately familiar with the state and its avifauna was chosen to review the work (with dood reason?). Anybody currently familiar with western Oregon birdlife could never agree with Browning's statements that the Acorn Woodpecker is primarily restricted to Jackson County and that the American Bittern should be considered a rare migrant west of the Cascades in Oregon; and such a person would certainly object to the many out of date summaries of the statewide or nearby regional status of various species which are included in quite a few of the accounts. Such statements indicate to me that the author is out of touch with Oregon birdlife, and has little regard for careful and thorough research. Mr. Browning is writing a book on the state's avifauna; I sincerely hope that it will be of much better quality than the rather dubious effort he has put forth on the birds of Jackson County.

Tom Lund  
P. O. Box 3105  
Eugene, Oregon 97403

This issue of SWOC TALK was prepared by Chip Jobanek and was printed on March 25, 1976 by the Quick Copy Center of the University of Oregon, Eugene.

When Tom Lund mentioned to me that he would like to comment on Larry McQueen's review of M. Ralph Browning's paper on Jackson County birds and make additional critical comments on Mr. Browning's paper, I welcomed the idea. For the most part, I am in total agreement with Tom's review; however, statements near the close of Tom's letter border on libel. Only after considerable thought did I decide on publishing the letter. Readers should remember that a balanced review of Browning's Jackson County paper has not yet been written.

Statements by both Larry McQueen and Tom Lund prompt me to make some brief comments on Browning's paper. In discussing the breeding distribution and status of several species, it is often unclear whether Browning is commenting on the species' status in Jackson County or its status state-wide. For example, Browning says that the Varied Thrush "possibly breeds in the Cascades." I assume that what is meant here is that the Varied Thrush possibly breeds in the Jackson County Cascades; it without question breeds in the Cascades elsewhere. Browning does not make this clear. The same vagueness exists in the accounts of the American Bittern and the Williamson Sapsucker. Both McQueen and Lund chastise Browning for describing the American Bittern as a "rare migrant" in western Oregon. Perhaps what is meant here is that the American Bittern is a rare migrant in Jackson County, breeding elsewhere in western Oregon; the records Browning presents seem to validate this interpretation of occurrence (though see McQueen's review for records Browning did not present). Likewise, McQueen replies to Browning's statement that the Williamson's Sapsucker might breed in the pine forests of the Cascade and Siskiyou Mountains by emphatically declaring that it does breed in the Cascades, referring no doubt to the Cascades outside of Jackson County. I strongly suspect that Browning intended to refer only to the Jackson County Cascades. This failure to be exact in discussing distributional status is a major error, and will surely cause misinterpretation of the information presented in the paper, just as two reviewers of the paper have already done.

My major complaint, however, is that Browning did not submit his paper to competent Jackson County field ornithologists for review. I am sure that even a cursory reading by Otis Swisher or John Sullivan would have revealed many of the errors noted by reviewers. I am concerned that Mr. Browning's proposed book on Oregon birdlife, when finished, receive more careful review than was given to the Jackson County paper.

Chip Jobanek