

SWOC TALK

Nov - Dec, 1975

Newsletter of the Southern Willamette Ornithological Club . Volume 1, Number 6

MEETINGS

SWOC will meet at 7:30 PM, March 1, 1976 at the conference room on the third floor of Science III, University of Oregon campus, Eugene. Possible topics are further discussion of the possibility of establishing a state-wide ornithological organization and discussion of the proposed Alfred Cooper Shelton Award.

SWOC will next meet April 5, 1976 at Science III.

AN APOLOGY

As in the fourth number of SWOC TALK, an apology is again in order here. While this issue of SWOC TALK is dated November - December, 1975, it is actually being prepared well into the second month of 1976. This delay is the fault of the editor alone. SWOC TALK should again be on its bi-monthly schedule after the first two issues of 1976.

A REQUEST

While the lack of suitable material was not the reason for the delay in appearance of volume 1, number 6 of SWOC TALK, this is becoming a serious problem. PLEASE, ALL MEMBERS SHOULD CONSIDER PREPARING ITEMS FOR PUBLICATION IN SWOC TALK. Our newsletter can only survive through the cooperation of members.

BUSINESS

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For those members who are wondering why they haven't received cancelled checks yet after paying their dues in November or December, the same things that prevented SWOC TALK from appearing on time also prevented depositing dues collected. For this reason, an accurate accounting of SWOC's funds cannot be given now. Next issue of SWOC TALK (next month?) will hopefully include a complete list of our expenditures.

For those members who have not yet paid 1976 dues (and there are many), please do so soon.

Pied-billed Grebe

I watched him as he seemed to be trying energetically to live up to his sometimes names: Hell-diver, Die-dapper, Water-witch:

diving, submerging vertically, swimming, his young upon his back, his nest on a clump of vegetation half-islanded upon the lake like the Hindu myth of Projapati floating on a lotus leaf.

The Grebe, some say, is so primitive as to be less bird than feathered fish like the Jurassic Archaeornis halted between evolutions with feathers - and fingers - on his wings.

And with his voice pitched strangely high in an eerie and unearthly cry, it seemed to me that he was calling somewhere across the centuries to his other self behind the vast drawn curtains on his long-lost past.

E. B. de Vito

Thanks for the above to member Helen Matters.

Okay, So They're The Only Ones I Recognize

Bird watchers sneer
The more I cheer
 For robin, gull and dove
And humble sparrow.
My range is narrow,
 But them's the ones I love.

Margaret Fishback

The above was stolen by the editor from The Elepaio, newsletter of the Hawaii Audubon Society.

The storm of the night of November 9, seems to have packed a terrific punch. There were some of us that got our first sight of the Leach's Petrel in the hand, with a fleeting sight of one at a distance. Those examined were some that were unable to survive the exhaustion, starvation and probably lack of salt in their water.

From time to time there have been pelagic birds that have been driven inland by storm, fog, and other causes. On August 18, '61, there was a "flood" of Sooty Shearwaters that were stranded around Santa Cruz. Their problem was a heavy fog that engulfed the flock as they fed on a school of Anchovies off shore during the night. These are California Gull sized birds and were gathered up in boxes, tubs, and transported to the cliffs where they took off none the worse for the experience. Again in an August of '65, there was a great number of Shearwaters washed up on the same beach. These birds were dead and one banded Sooty was found among them. It was banded on Titi Island the location of this spot is: $40^{\circ} 53' S$ $174^{\circ} 10' E$. The report came from the Australian Fish & Game Department. This was the first recovery from the American Coast by this bird.

But a thumb nail sketch on our Petrel invasion comes from an article I read recently. The Storm-Petrels are the smallest of the sea birds, ranking in size with such land-birds as starlings, swallows, and martins. They are commonly known to seamen as "Mother Carey's Chickens", Mother Carey being a corruption of "Mater Cara," an appellation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. They are characterized by their rather slender hooked beaks, on the upper surface of which the nostrils open within a single median tube. Their slender legs are frequently very long in proportion to the size of the bird, and toes united by webs. Their wings are fairly long, but not so narrow in proportion as those of the larger Petrels and Albatrosses, and their tails are usually either square or forked. Most of them are dusky in coloring, a few gray; many have a patch of white at the base of the tail, and some have white areas on the under surface. All species have the bill and legs black, but in a few the webs are partly yellow.

In their habits the Storm-Peterls do not differ greatly from their larger relatives. In the breeding season they congregate on small islands, and excavate burrows in soft soil or beneath matted vegetation, or utilize natural crevices among rocks or the burrows of other birds. For some days before the single egg is laid, both birds are found together in the burrow, but later they take turns in incubation. The egg is oval, white, frequently marked at the larger end with small red, purple, or black spots. The young bird is densely covered with gray or brownish down. When full fed it is considered larger than its parents, which then leave it, and when the feathers have replaced the down, the young fledgling follows them to the sea.

Like the larger relatives, these birds are nocturnal in their habits when on the breeding grounds. During the daytime they

may go unnoticed as thousands of them brood underground and the quiet landscape belie their presence. After dark, however, when the birds return from the sea to relieve their mates or to feed the young, various twittering, crooning or cooing notes are heard. Sometimes at sea these usually silent birds utter chirping or squealing notes when congregating to feed on some unusually bountiful supply, such as the fat from some dead whale or seal or refuse from a ship's galley.

In spite of their association with the Queen of Heaven, the appearance of Mother Carey's Chickens around a ship is regarded by superstitious mariners as foreboding a storm. It seems clear that they are more often to be seen about a ship in stormy weather, but this is probably because the passage of a ship commonly leaves an area of calmer water in which it is easier for them to obtain food. Their habit of flying to and fro across the wake of a steamer is perhaps chiefly owing to the fact that the propeller kills many small organisms which then float up to the surface, though they at times pick up small refuse of galley origin.

When flying close over the surface, especially in calm weather and when feeding, Storm Petrels often assist their progress or support themselves on the surface by patting the water with their feet. Generally both feet are brought down together and the birds spring along the surface in a series of hops, keeping their wings spread; less frequently the feet are used alternately so that they may be said to run or walk on the water, supporting the supposed origin of their name from St. Peter; occasionally one foot alone is used, the other being trailed behind. On land their legs are not strong enough to support them and the wings have to be used to support their progress.

The flight of Storm-Petrels is usually very erratic and has been compared to the flight of butterflies, bats, martins or swifts. Sometimes they seem to behave almost exactly like insectivorous birds catching flying insects, but there is no evidence that insects ever form a part of their diet. They do not often settle on the water, but when they do they float buoyantly. Sometimes they dive from the air and obtain food a short depth below the surface, but this is unusual.

Leach's Storm-Petrel (*Oceanodroma leucorhoa*)

Upper parts sooty black, wings and tail darker; wing-coverts grayish brown; upper tail coverts white, center feathers largely sooty; underparts sooty brown; a few white feathers on the flanks; tail deeply forked;

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|---------------|--------------|-----------------|
| Length; | 8.0 - 8.8 in | (203mm - 220mm) |
| Wing length | 5.6 - 6.5 in | (142mm - 165mm) |
| Tail length | 2.4 - 3.6 in | (60mm - 90mm) |
| Bill length | 0.5 - 0.7 in | (12mm - 17mm) |
| Tarsus length | 0.7 - 1.0 in | (17mm - 25mm) |

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, Number 70, 1975; 96pp.

CONTENTS:

Introduction (brief description of Jackson County, Ornithological work since Gabrielson, 1931, and sources of information for the present work)

Topography (description, and map showing localities listed in the Gazetteer)

Climate and Vegetation (description of four major plant communities with photos)

Gazetteer (descriptions of geographic localities to which references are made in the species account)

Avian Communities (discussion of species' restrictions to certain plant communities and mountain ranges)

Plan of the Species Account (terms of abundance, frequency and seasonal occurrence used in the species accounts)

SPECIES ACCOUNT (the annotated list of 259 species recorded in Jackson County)

Acknowledgements

Literature Cited

It is high time for a new publication on birds for Oregon. The accumulation of field data in the Northwest has been accelerating continually, but published avifaunal descriptions -- in the form of the annotated list -- for many of the more biotically distinctive areas (not necessarily remote), are long overdue and the few that had been published for Oregon need up-dating. This is not to suggest that the annotated list becomes obsolete. The old lists are as viable as they ever were in research and as historical records. They can suggest changes in local avifauna, give substance to assessments of environmental changes, and provide a yard stick to further research. How well the annotated list functions, depends entirely on how comprehensive it is and how well it is written.

It is clear that the annotated, regional list needs to evaluate all available information (from the literature, collections, unpublished observations, etc.) in the area prior to a specified date, and to summarize this information so that the status of the avifauna within that area might be concluded, and the unknown is exposed.

There are numerous, excellent, regional guides and lists. With these as models and with the tremendous opportunity in covering one of the most interesting and unique areas in the State of Oregon, Browning's Birds of Jackson County, etc., falls short of expectations. To be a thorough critic here, is not my intention, since I do not have personal field knowledge of Jackson County avifauna, but I think the publication deserves criticism on its own merits. It is a shame the manuscript had not been more thoroughly criticised, because the work shows many discrepancies and most seriously, it has not taken into account all available information. This is a review of what I find disturbing about the publication.

It is not apparent what is included in the "...Surrounding Areas", part of the title of the publication. References are made from all over the State, which seems a bit extreme in view of the many distinctively different physiographic areas within the State. Evidently (nowhere is it clearly stated), the work is intended to cover the birds of Jackson County only, with inclusion of only those references from "surrounding areas" which the author feels has relevance to the status of the birds within Jackson County. Over 16 additional species (for instance) in the Klamath Basin (neighboring counties) are not mentioned. It is curious that many bird references are included from points within Oregon as distant as 400 miles from Jackson County, when northern California -- with which it borders and has much in common -- is practically ignored (major reference being 1944). What is the influence of the State's political boundary on bird distribution?

The cut-off date for this publication is also not stated. 1973 is presumed -- again -- to be the cut-off date, since that is the date of the latest references cited. The bulk of the work by Browning was done during the sixties, with all of the major early works cited, but there is lack of more recent references; and, the selection of only some of these references is misleading.

In the Introduction, it is stated that Jackson County "is a small geographic area with numerous plant communities", referring to the four described in the section on Climate and Vegetation (Chaparral-Oak, Mixed Conifer Forest, True Fir Forest, and Timberline Forest). These are major plant communities adapted from A California Flora, by Munz and Keck, 1959. The plant community is not to be confused with the habitat. Habitats are more familiar designations, and generally more useful in describing bird species distribution on a local level. The "plant community" tends to define the primeval state only, whereas the "habitat" describes the altered, "unnatural" environments as well. The "habitat" also identifies the water/plant situation (open water, marsh, shore, mudflat, upland, etc.), so influential in bird distribution and practically ignored by Browning in his discussions of plant and avian communities. Thus, the Brewer's Blackbird is said to be a "very common permanent resident and breeding species in the Chaparral-Oak Community and Mixed Conifer Forest.", yet this in no way describes habitat preference and provides little information on distribution, since the species is definitely not a forest bird. Its distribution is most influenced by the availability of water and semi-open spaces provided by the forest edge; the presence of the forest itself is almost incidental.

It is disturbing to find so much misleading information in the four pages under the heading, Avian Communities. Anyone who has studied birds in Western Oregon would be surprised to find the Acorn Woodpecker "primarily restricted" to Jackson County. The discussion in this section on breeding species restricted to major plant communities is disastrous. I find it strange to read that Virginia Rail, Sora, Poor-will, Long-billed Marsh Wren, Rock Wren, Yellow-breasted Chat, Yellow-headed Blackbird, and others, are restricted as breeding species to the "Chaparral-Oak Community", when they are not so restricted elsewhere in the country. What is apparently meant, is that these species are so restricted to habitats which happen to be encompassed by the chaparral-oak community, within the Lower Rogue River Valley. Then this seems to be an arbitrary association for these species and not an ecological one as implied. The Black-chinned Sparrow is on this list of "breeding species", yet it is given the status of "accidental" in the species accounts. The same contradiction is created with the inclusion of the Black-throated Sparrow on another similar list. On this list, the black-throat is considered a summer visitor, yet it, too, is given accidental status on the species accounts. "Accidental", as defined by Browning, refers to those species which are not expected to occur again!

Species restricted to the Mixed Conifer Forest (non-Pinus) include Pygmy Owl, Vaux's Swift, and Winter Wren, which are not so restricted in other parts of the State. The same applies to Williamson's Sapsucker and Black-backed Three-toed Woodpecker assigned to the "True Fir Forest", and to the Northern Three-toed Wood-

pecker, "...restricted to Timberline Forest". The reader is even more confused when he finds that these restrictions do not agree with those described for these species in the species accounts. In the species accounts, we read that it is pine forest for the Williamson's Sapsucker instead of true fir forest; that the Pygmy Owl resides in mixed conifer forest and chaparral-oak; that the Vaux's Swift is a "common summer resident in Mixed Conifer and True Fir Forests" (underlining mine); and that the Winter Wren is a "fairly common permanent resident in the True Fir Forest", instead of being "restricted to Mixed Conifer Forest". The Northern Three-toed Woodpecker is known in Jackson County from two sight records - neither of breeding birds and one of which was not in timberline forest. These contradictions seriously weaken the report.

THE SPECIES ACCOUNT

Nomenclature follows the AOU Check-list (1957) and the 32d Supplement (1973), yet only some of the common names are in accordance with the Supplement. There would be no purpose in retaining some of the old names, so it was probably not done deliberately. (The old names, "Common" Egret, Shoveler without the "Northern", "Pigeon Hawk", "Sparrow Hawk", Yellowthroat without the "Common", were retained; whereas, "Northern" Oriole, "Common" Flicker, "Dark-eyed" Junco, "American" Robin, "Yellow-rumped" Warbler, were some of the names accepted from the recent revisions in the 32d Supplement).

The omissions of Spotted Owl, Flammulated Owl, Swainson's Thrush, and others from the Species Account, is unforgivable. A nesting record of Spotted Owl in Jackson County is given by Gabrielson and Jewett in Birds of Oregon (1940), not to mention the additional records. Records of Flammulated Owl were evidently ignored, and the omission of the Swainson's Thrush was probably an oversight. The White-tiled Kite (present all year at Medford, 1973) and the Indigo Bunting (Medford, April, 1972) are not included. The Eastern Phoebe records (1964, 1966, and a nest at Pilot Rock south of Ashland, 1967) which are so unusual, are unabashedly ignored. The Black Swift could have been mentioned as a hypothetical, for it very likely migrates over the area. The category of "hypothetical" is not used in the publication.

For the Species Account, "Important literature is cited and records outside Jackson County, especially from west of the Cascade Mountains in Oregon, are mentioned." (p.21) There are frequent references to the Willamette Valley, but in fact, few records cited are more recent than Gullion's of 1951. For many species the status has changed significantly since then, mostly because of additional field work. The fact that there has been no major publication on the avifauna of the Willamette Valley since Gullion's is no excuse for the exclusion of more current information, since most of it is available in American Birds, The Murrelet, and various local papers. I fail to recognize the purpose of even including the old records outside Jackson County, when the more recent literature, which would indicate more current status of the species, is ignored. This makes the species accounts sadly out of date, at least as far as the Willamette Valley is concerned. (I wonder also, about Jackson County records). The author offers no explanation for his selectivity. Examples of this incomplete coverage are numerous.

For the Red-necked Grebe, a record of young birds at Howard Prairie Reservoir June 22, 1969, is considered the "...only breeding record." Yet the Audubon Field Notes (19(5)) mentions two young at this location on June 23, 1965.

For the Green Heron, the latest reference for Western Oregon (outside Jackson County) is Evenden's Corvallis record of 1947. This is also the only location cited for the Southern Willamette Valley. Even Gullion's numerous breeding records are ignored, not to mention others. The Green Heron has been a noted permanent resident in Western Oregon for some time. The choice of only one reference -- and an old one -- to indicate present status, is very strange. The omission of winter records for the Green Heron in Jackson County is also strange, as individuals have been recorded on at least two CBC's at Medford; yet the "Common" Egret gets recognition of twice appearing on Medford's CBC's.

The American Bittern -- according to Browning -- "... should be considered a rare migrant" west of the Cascades, "...on the basis of available records." (p.25). Yet the available records certainly indicate otherwise. The bird is fairly common as a breeder in large marshes in Western Oregon, and it is occasionally found in winter in Western Oregon including Jackson County. The author does not indicate this.

Apparently the five Rough-legged Hawks which appeared on the 1973 Medford CBC were not included because the record was not published until April, 1974, after the presumed 1973 cut-off date. But then, neither were all of the earlier records included among the three mentioned.

The Osprey is given the status of "uncommon permanent resident", without qualification. Ospreys do occasionally winter at this latitude, but it is considered unusual, or at least, noteworthy. The status of permanent resident is inappropriate. In spite of this designation the author offers only nesting records (except for one in November) and no winter records.

The status of Black-bellied Plover has changed in the southern Willamette Valley since Gullion's paper of 1951 -- most recent source cited by Browning for this area. There are also more recent records for Long-billed Curlew, Solitary Sandpiper, Pectoral Sandpiper, and American Avocet, and there is a status change for Baird's Sandpiper.

The author was probably not aware of Semipalmated Sandpiper photos taken at Fern Ridge (Lane County) in 1970, nor of coastal sightings, when he recommended keeping the species on the Oregon hypothetical list. In light of a recent article by Phillips in American Birds (Vol.29,no.4: 799), on the species identification, it might be wise to do so, however, until specimen determination is made.

There are other inland records for Western Gull besides those taken from Gabrielson and Jewett. There is no historical information given for Franklin's Gull, a species which has extended its breeding range into Oregon since 1940.

Nesting record(s) of Long-eared Owl in Western Oregon were missed and an important 1967 nesting record of Burrowing Owl in Jackson County was not mentioned.

The Williamson's Sapsucker is a known breeder in the pine forests of the Cascades, not a probable breeder.

Apparently no efforts were made by field ornithologists of Jackson County to separate any of the five species of Empidonax ! With the exception of Hammond's vs. Dusky, the species are reasonably distinct, especially during the breeding season. Certainly, drawing from the "unpublished notes of countless individuals..." (p. 1), there must be some idea of relative status for these species within the area.

The Mockingbird receives six reports from all over the State outside Jackson County, but none of the Lane County records are included. For the Veery, the latest reference is Gabrielson and Jewett, 1940, for eastern Oregon. The Red-eyed Vireo records from southern Willamette Valley (where it breeds locally) are not mentioned. What is cited is the AOU Check-list (1957), which gives northern Oregon as the southern limit of its range.

The "uncommon migrant" designation 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!

The American Redstart records at Davis Lake -- which appeared in American Birds -- were evidently missed by the author. (He does mention the Blue Mountain district as a "possible" breeding site.)

The Brown-headed Cowbird account is sadly out of date for Western Oregon, its status having changed so drastically since it was a straggler in 1940.

As expected, the Grasshopper Sparrow records do not include those of Lane County. The latest Lane County records of Tree Sparrow are omitted, but the early records are mentioned. Absence of summer records of White-crowned Sparrow is surprising (it is given the status of "very common winter resident"). The 1968 Swamp Sparrow record at Eugene is included (from Audubon Field Notes).

Thus, with the numerous contradictions and skimpy references, the worthiness of this publication is seriously reduced. Five to seven species were entirely omitted from the Jackson County list without explanation. Out of 259 species listed, I found at least 45 with incomplete references, inconsistent treatment, or otherwise misleading information (there may be more). There is no list of hypotheticals, and no such category. Some incompleteness is understandable, since there has been no major paper on avifauna in Western Oregon since 1951 and no statewide work since 1940, but most of the recent information is available through scattered sources. The section on plant communities is unsatisfactory as it relates to bird distribution, and the discussion on avian communities is practically meaningless. It is my conviction that the author has responsibility in acknowledging all references and other reports, even if he does not accept them all, and as deliberately as he can, to make his work effective as a research tool.

I am particularly aware of the ease in criticising a work relative to the difficulty in creating the work. This criticism on the Birds of Jackson County, etc., is not an attack on Mr. Browning. Much of the same basic criticism can be made of Gabrielson and Jewett's Birds of Oregon. I am interested in understanding bird distribution and particularly in the avifauna of the northwest, and in the quality of published material covering the area. Since Mr. Browning is presently working on a book of the birds of Oregon, I am concerned that this new work gets better treatment than did the work on the birds of Jackson County.

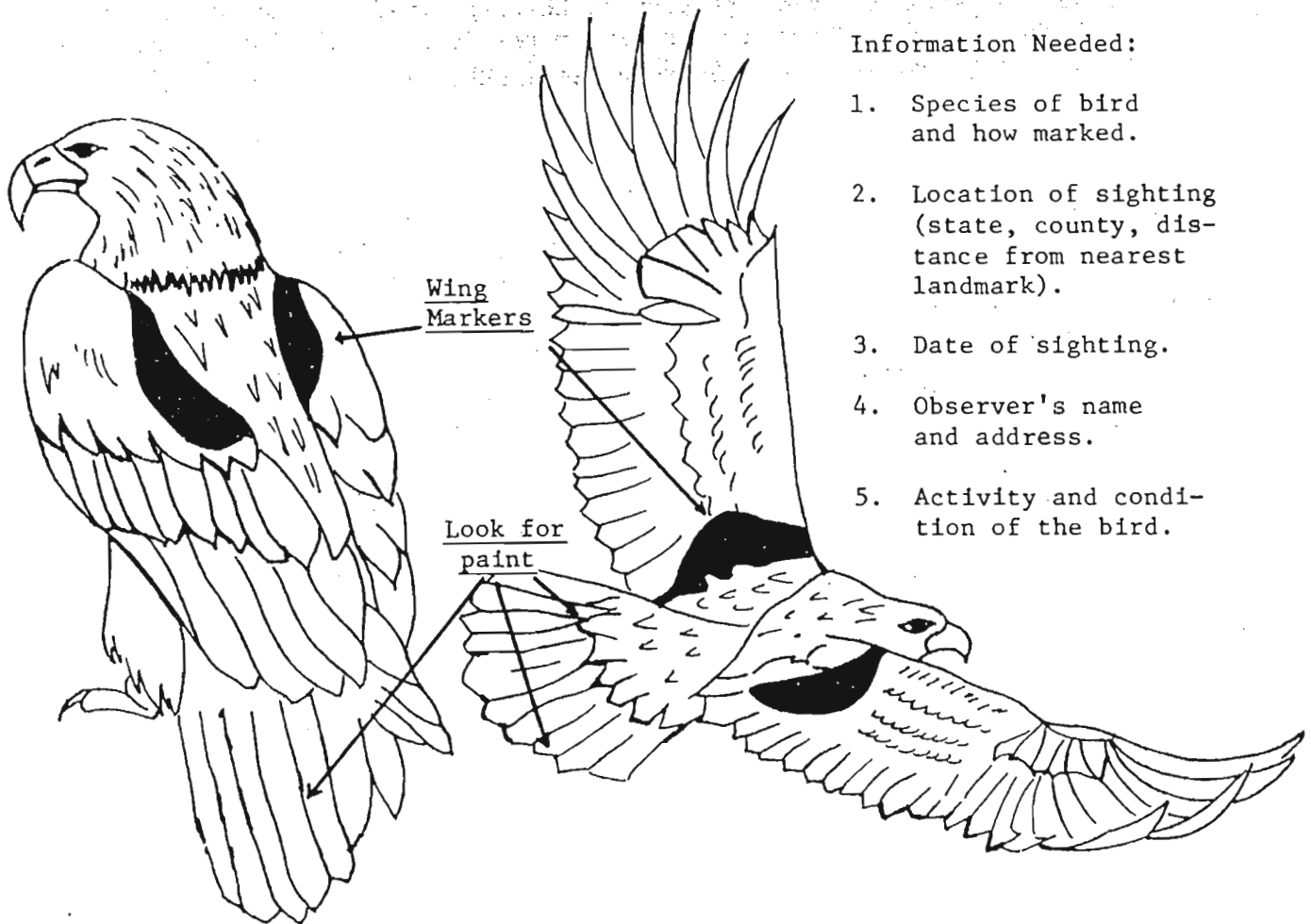
WANTED

ALIVE

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INFORMATION NEEDED ON COLOR-MARKED BIRDS OF PREY

Research personnel at the Snake River Birds of Prey Natural Area would like your help in recording birds-of-prey movements. We have placed color-coded vinyl wing markers and/or yellow "paint" on juvenile birds of prey to help determine post-fledgling movement. Wing markers and tail paint, as illustrated, may show only on the dorsal surface of the birds. Ninety-three birds (golden eagles, prairie falcons, red-tailed hawks and ravens) were marked this year and the program will continue until 1980.



Information Needed:

1. Species of bird and how marked.
2. Location of sighting (state, county, distance from nearest landmark).
3. Date of sighting.
4. Observer's name and address.
5. Activity and condition of the bird.

Please send to:

Dean Bibles, District Manager
Boise District, Attn: Mike Kochert
Bureau of Land Management
230 Collins Road, Boise, Idaho 83702

Phones:

Commercial - 208-342-2711,
Ext. 2582
FTS - 208-342-2582

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

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The Southern Willamette Ornithological Club, or SWOC, is an organization representing the interests of bird students in the southern Willamette Valley. The goals of SWOC include:

- Conduct monthly meetings of ornithological interest
- Act as the coordinating body for local projects
- Participate actively in local governmental planning
- Act as a "sounding board" for new ideas and information pertinent to the study of Willamette Valley birdlife
- Distribute this information through the form of a newsletter and papers

Quite simply, SWOC is an informal discussion group which deals with the problems of Willamette Valley birds. We need your participation. Please consider joining SWOC and playing an active role in any of these stated goals. Address all letters to "SWOC, c/o Chip Jobanek, 38713 McKenzie Highway, Springfield, Oregon, 97477."