

It's The Busy Season For Area Birdbanders

By Margaret Koch

The Golden-Crowns are back in town this week. So are the Goldfinches, the Warblers and the Robins. A bird in the trap is worth two in the bush and the happy murmurs of the birdbander are heard throughout the land. The great Pacific migration is in full swing; birds of many kinds, including shore birds, are winging their way from Alaska and the Arctic south to warmer climates.

The Central, Mississippi and Atlantic flyways are busy too, as are birdbanders all over the nation. There are four licensed banders in the Santa Cruz area: Mrs. Henry Washburn of 1013 Walnut avenue; Mrs. Frank Reinelt of 344 Arroyo Seco; Harry R. Smith of 1549 Escalona drive, and Mrs. Nelson Haas of Soquel.

We talked to Viola Washburn to get an idea of how — and why, birdwatchers operate.

"Spring and fall are our busiest seasons of course, when most of the bird population of the world is on the move," she pointed out.

One of the commonest questions she has run into this past week — from non-bird-acquainted friends, is: "What's that bird with the gold stripe on its head?"

They are Golden-Crown Sparrows just arrived from Alaska and British Columbia and are on their way south to Mexico and southern California. The amateur bird watcher can entice them to a garden feeding station by putting out chicken scratch and he will probably be visited by more Golden-Crowns than he can shake a stick at — they are mainly seed eaters. So are the Purple Finches or linnets, which are arriving daily.

But don't rush right out to buy a bird trap and start banding. Birdbanders are licensed by the state and federal governments for a purpose: banders supply most all the statistical information about birds, their numbers, habits and their migratory patterns, to the U.S. Department of Interior Fish and Wildlife service.

Ever hear about the passenger pigeon? Or the great auk? They became extinct during the 1800s because people destroyed them indiscriminately. Before anyone realized how the flocks were dwindling, they were gone. About 1900, the first protective bird laws were passed.

Before a person may become a licensed birdbander, he (or she) must maintain a feeding station for several years.

"A licensed birdbander came to

my station to do the banding. All I did for a couple of years was watch and learn and keep the records," Mrs. Washburn said.

In April of 1959, after completing her apprenticeship and obtaining several personal letters of recommendation from local citizens plus another from a licensed birdbander, she was ready to go to work.

"I was very nervous at first for fear I might accidentally injure one of the birds — they are such delicate creatures," she recalled.

There are special techniques for getting the birds out of the mesh traps without injuring them, and special ways to handle them while gently clamping the metal bands around their toothpick-sized legs. Mrs. Washburn has a pair of pliers made for the purpose — "they close the leg band evenly so there is no overlap and no rough edge."

Birds generally follow the same migratory pattern. How do they know when to start? And where to go? No one yet has all the answers. Some scientists believe that certain amounts of sunlight which have been found to affect birds' bodies, may be the triggering device. Recently researchers have presented evidence that birds migrating at night "steer by the stars."

Occasionally birds are blown off course by storms. Several years ago a flock of rose-breasted Grosbeaks appeared near Mendocino and were reported by an alert birdbander.

This past week a chestnut-sided warbler — rarely seen here — was trapped and banded in her garden by Mrs. Reinelt. He was thousands of miles from his usual Mississippi or Atlantic flyway pattern.

However, the bird that travels farthest is the Arctic tern which makes an annual round trip of 22,000 miles from the Arctic to the Antarctic. He usually flies off-shore.

Not everyone can qualify as a birdbander but everyone can assist with the job in one way, according to the local group.

"If a banded bird is shot or found wounded or dead anywhere, please send the band to 'Patuxent Research Refuge, Laurel, Maryland,'" is their request.

Sportsmen (duck, quail, pheasant and pigeon seasons open soon) are asked for the same courtesy. The person returning the band should also give as much information as possible about when and where the bird was shot, found wounded or dead — and what killed it.

In the meanwhile the four local birdbanders continue their work, adding to the growing fund of information about the feathered travelers of the Pacific flyway.

"I am getting to be known as the bird-woman," Mrs. Washburn said with a laugh. "Friends greet me with: 'Where are your traps?'"

Easy Does It



Mrs. Henry Washburn of 1013 Walnut avenue, one of four licensed birdbanders in the Santa Cruz area, shows how it is done with a Golden-Crown Sparrow. Holding the bird's head between her fingers and its leg

with her thumb, she closes the metal band on its tiny leg with a pair of pliers designed specially for the purpose. The leg band must close evenly so there is no overlap or rough edge to injure the bird.

Baron Smith's Organ Concert Proves Fine Musical Event

By Walter M. O'Connell, OSJ

A select and representative group of Santa Cruzans were treated to a rare combination Wednesday at the civic auditorium. Exacting showmanship and artistry combined with wit and humor in the Victor Borge vein, all wrapped up in subtle salesmanship, were served to an alert audience in the form of Santa Cruz Music Center's organ show. Given by Baron Smith, noted Lowery organ expert and organ music composer, the show was presented through the cordial farsightedness of Henry Guillory, proprietor of Santa Cruz music.

For approximately an hour and 45 minutes, Smith entertained his audience in an unusual and most refreshing manner rarely seen at any concert of such high caliber. An air of informality set the tone of the show, yet without detracting one bit from the excellence of the artistry or the compositions performed.

Dividing his talents between five organs, from the largest of the stereophonics to the smallest of spinets, Smith captivated his audience with a repertoire from Bach to honky-tonk. Without the aid of any visible props other than the organs and some imaginative lighting, he held his small but attentive audience spellbound with a projective imagination that ranged through a running di-

definitely one demonstration concert which was no mere sales pitch. Rather, it was a display of consummate skill, artistry and showmanship. If anything were sold, it was quality.

Only two things seemed to mar the evening, neither of which was the fault of the show. One was its shortness, one can listen to and enjoy a real art practically unendingly. The other was the relatively few people who attended the show. We hope that Guillory will not be discouraged and give up too easily, but will continue to bring our community just a little more culture and true beauty.

Relatives Contest \$2 Million Will

Stockton (AP). — Relatives are contesting the will of a wealthy Lodi farmer who left a \$2 million estate for maintenance of a park when he died last March at the age of 87.

Eugene Micke of Sacramento charged in a suit filed Friday that his uncle, William G. Micke, was mentally incompetent when he executed the will in 1954. Micke said he represents 30 other relatives of the farmer, who had no children.

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