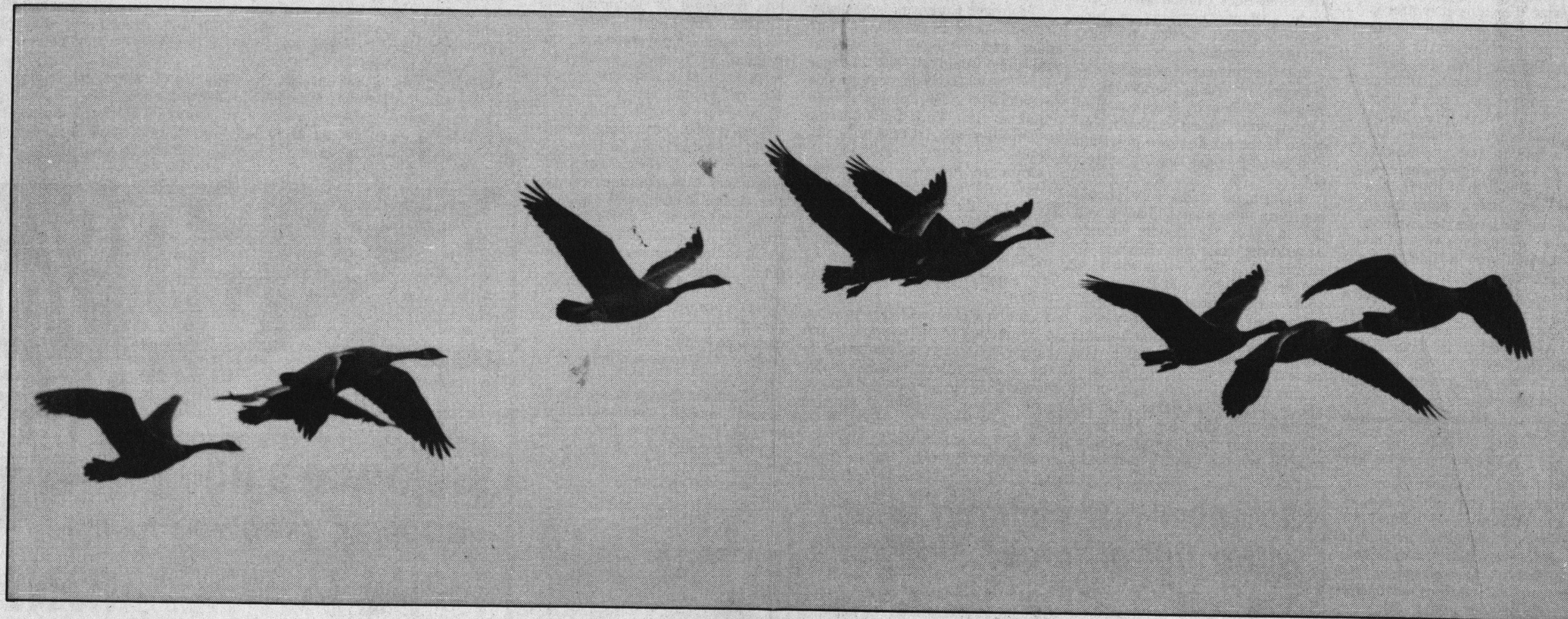


Living

Thursday, December 17, 1992



Kurt Ellison

The annual bird count will be held Saturday by the Santa Cruz Bird Club and is open to birders of all levels of experience

Birds of a species ...

In an editorial that appeared in The Audubon Society Magazine in 1900, editor Frank M. Chapman said the annual bird count was an "instructive and pleasant way to hunt birds without killing them." At that time, it was the Christmas tradition to shoot as many birds as possible during the annual winter hunt. But that year, 26 people put down their rifles and took up their binoculars to count, rather than kill, birds. Interestingly, Pacific Grove came in first place as having the largest number of species - 36 - spotted in the country.

The Audubon Society has changed the meaning of bird hunting and its yearly bird count now involves more than 40,000 people of all ages in the United States, Central America and the West Indies. Both amateurs and bird experts participate in the count, which is set locally for Saturday. A \$5 fee will be charged for each birder to help pay for publishing the results of the count. Signups will be taken at 479-9603. Following the count, a potluck meal will be held at the Eagle Hall, 306 Mission St., Santa Cruz.

Birders must literally get up with the birds - the count begins before dawn with people looking for owls, and continues until dark. Each year, the count takes place on a single day in the two-week period before and

after Christmas and encompasses a 15-mile diameter area. The Santa Cruz Bird Club has participated every year since 1954. Last year, 35 observers reported 168 species on the count, which took place Dec. 21. In 1990, 139 species were counted. An additional count in the Pajaro Valley and Moss Landing areas Jan. 2 resulted in a listing of 184 species. This was the first count in the area since 1967. Another count, centered at Moss Landing, will take place on New Year's Day this year.

The results of the counts will be published in the magazine "American Birds," which is used by students in charting the distribution of species, the rise and fall of populations, the appearance of unusual vagrants and indications of changes in environment.