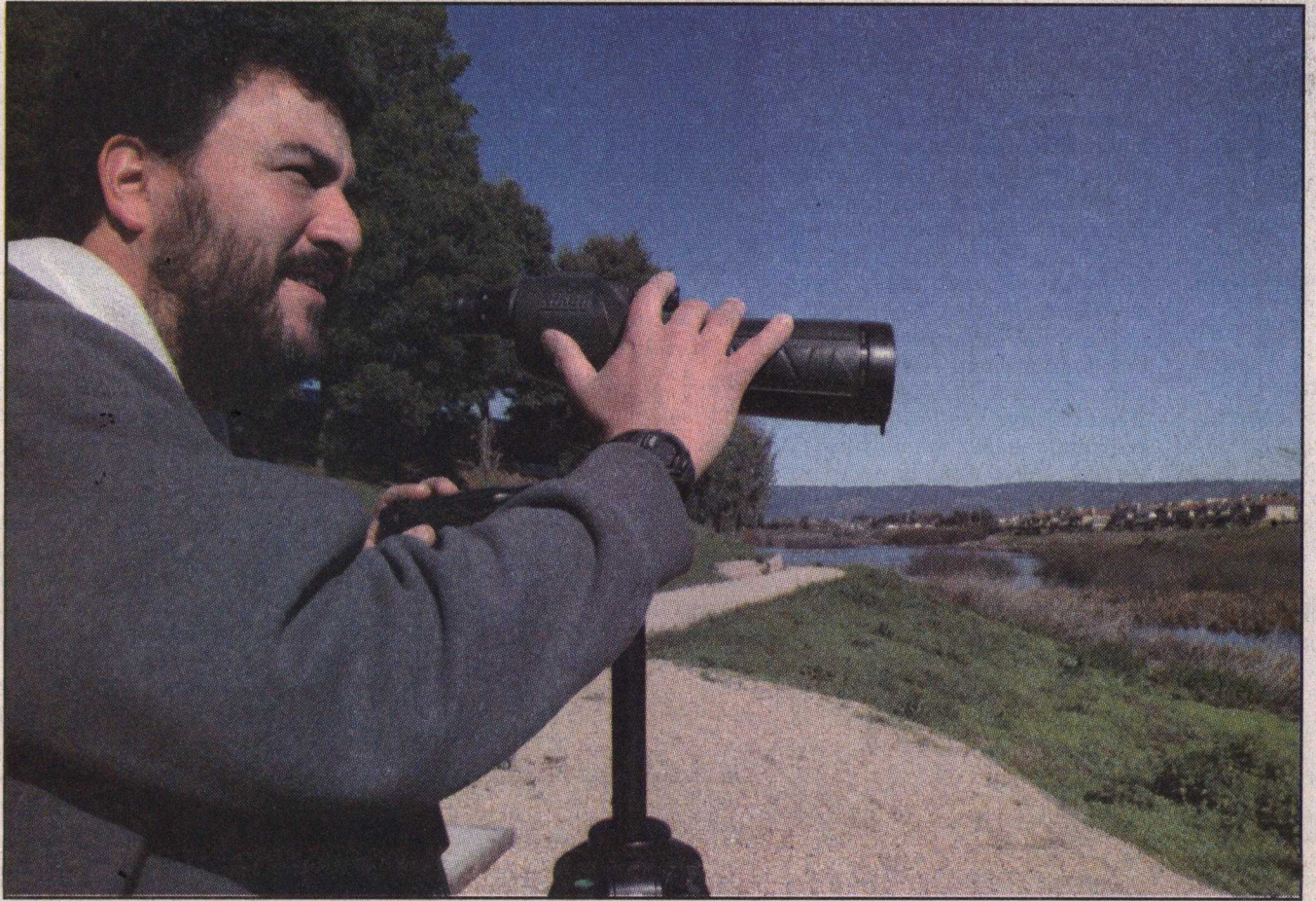


Bird club celebrates 50 years



Tarmo Hannula/Register-Pajaronian

David Suddjian of the Santa Cruz Bird Club readies his spotting scope Tuesday on the edge of Struve Slough in Watsonville while studying a group of northern shovelers. The club celebrates its 50th anniversary this week.

Historian to present slide show at anniversary meeting

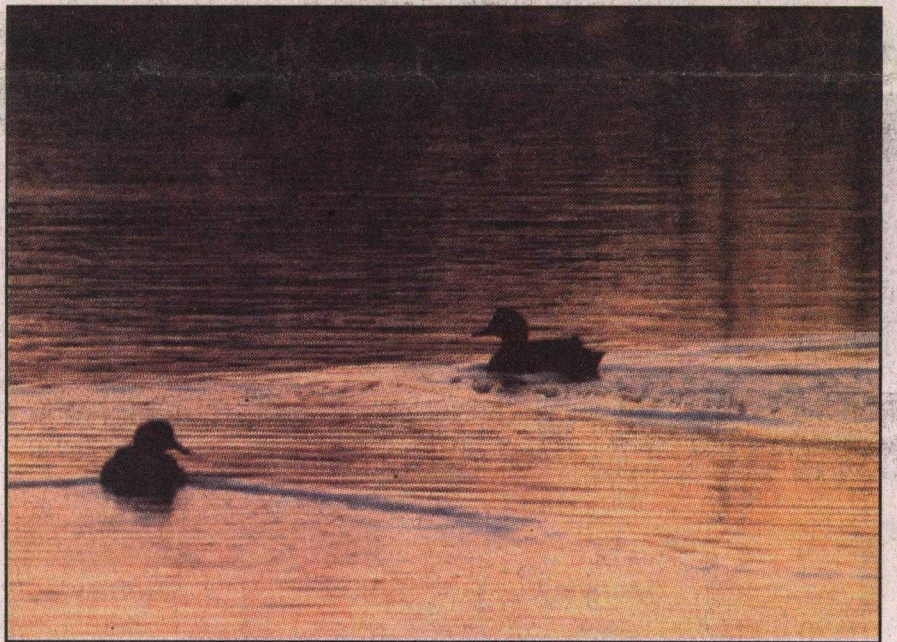
By TARMO HANNULA
OF THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

Members of the Santa Cruz Bird Club will mark five decades of existence this week. With a current membership of about 300, the club, which has always been open and free to the public, has offered 1,325 field trips and 450 evening programs.

"That's quite impressive, especially when you think that the club is entirely run by volunteers who simply share an interest in birds," said David Suddjian, the club's record keeper and historian.

The club was founded in 1956. The first meeting was organized by Elaine Reinelt, a local birding enthusiast, on Jan. 13 of that year. It was held at the Santa Cruz Public Library. Eighty-nine people attended the first meeting and 82 of them joined and paid dues, according to the bird club Web site.

Early pelagic trips were made on Malio Stagnaro's ocean-going fishing



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A pair of mallards cruise the waters of Struve Slough at sunset Monday.

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boats out of Santa Cruz. The boats went 12 miles out to the rock-cod fishing grounds.

The club currently meets on the third Thursday of each month between September and May at 7:30 p.m. at the Santa Cruz Natural History Museum, 1305 East Cliff Drive, Santa Cruz.

"The bird club has always served as a great place for folks to meet one another and share ideas with people that have similar interests," Suddjian said. "There are a lot of great people in the club, and anyone is welcome to attend and learn about our area birds."

The club not only focuses on birds around the Monterey Bay, but also, through a rich list of field trips, branches out to such distant

spots as Klamath Lakes, the Salton Sea and into the Sierra.

The first Monterey Bay Birding Festival helped draw attention to the wide array of bird species in the area, especially around the Watsonville slough system, Suddjian said.

"Though I wasn't able to attend (the festival), I heard attendance was very impressive," Suddjian said. "The trail system has definitely opened up access to sloughs in Watsonville."

On Tuesday, Suddjian said he spotted several northern shovelers, a pair of nesting gadwalls and

some buffleheads and heard the call of a sora of the rail family while touring Struve Slough off of Westridge Drive. A golden eagle was also spotted near the slough earlier in the month. College Lake, the Pajaro River corridor, Sunset State Beach and Harkins Slough are common hotspots for local birders, Suddjian said.

Two recent high points for birders were the Moss Landing (and Pajaro Valley) bird count, which listed 190 species of birds, and the Santa Cruz Christmas bird count, which tallied 183 species on Dec. 17.

"These numbers put our area in the top 10 bird counts in all of North America," Suddjian said.

More information about the Santa Cruz Bird Club can be found at www.santacruzbirdclub.org. The club also puts out a bimonthly newsletter, "The Albatross."

On Thursday, at the special 50th anniversary meeting, Suddjian will present a talk and slide presentation titled "Our Birding History" that showcases five decades of people and birds. The public is invited to attend the 7:30 p.m. event at the Santa Cruz Natural History Museum.



A great egret soars close to the water surface at Struve Slough on Tuesday afternoon.

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