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Trip Report – Land of the Pigeons

When John started planning our trip to Paris and Seville to celebrate our 60th birthdays, I knew birding was not going to be a top priority but I didn't expect it to become a study of pigeons. Yes, the Rock Pigeons of our parks who arrived from Europe in the late 1800's, are everywhere to the exclusion of pretty much everything else.

Paris has some beautiful parks. *Champ de Mars* stretches out from the *Eiffel Tower* and has plane trees and flowering bushes. The *Tuileries Garden* is an extensive formal garden connected to the *Louvre Museum*. There was one lonely yellow wagtail in one of the fountains and a few wood pigeons on the lawn. Wood pigeons are big pigeons, cousins of our band-tailed pigeon. All the other winged creatures were city pigeons and that was pretty much it in terms of variety of birds!

Our apartment was in the 7th arrondissement (district) and two blocks from the *Eiffel Tower*. Such an amazing structure made spectacular at night with white lights every foot all the way to the top. When the hour strikes, the tower seems to flutter and blink with blue lights for ten minutes. It's a jaw dropping sight.



We did all the "must sees" in Paris including the *Louvre*, *Musee d'Art Decrotif* where we were dazzled by their Art Nouveau and Deco displays. Then we went to *Notre Dame*, *Sainte-Chapelle*, *Conciergerie* where Marie Antoinette spent her final days, the *Pantheon* with its enormous pendulum, and the *Cluny Museum*.

Those of you who have been to Paris understand when I say that Paris is a walking city. We were close to the Eiffel Tower and it is so grand a piece of engineering that we waited in the long lines with hundreds of other people to go through the strict security and took the funicular to the second level and the elevator to the top. It was a bit hazy but quite an amazing sight. Another day we walked to *Avenue Georges V* and *Rue Montaigne* where all the fashion houses are and then onto the *Champs d' Eylees* and the *Arc de Triomphe* – most impressive.

On Sunday, we took a train out to the village where Hubert, our dear friend and faithful Saturday birdwalker for three years, had moved back to with his family. His

wife, Sylvie, their twin sons, Charles and Henry, and Sylvie's mother welcomed us to their 1870's house with a garden that went on forever. Under the outside umbrellas and listening to the magpie's chatter, we had a magnificent lunch ending with a strawberry tiramisu from the local bakery. Outstanding! The visit was such a pleasure and so relaxing. We miss them all very much.

On my birthday, we went to *Giverny*, Claude Monet's home and gardens. The gardens were charming, livable, colorful, and organized yet jumbled. There were chickens running around in their coop. The house was also colorful and livable, and all very inspirational. We went back to the *Louvre* and in the afternoon returned via the Metro. We had planned to go to a wonderful restaurant three doors down from the apartment to celebrate my 60th birthday. So much for plans...the pickpockets of Paris are as good as they say they are! We were coming up the station stairs of the *Pont d'Alma* Metro station and a young man in white shorts, white jacket, and white shoes with colorful stripes stopped in front of me to "fix" his shoe. Since I'm not a Parisienne, I stopped (I should have gone around or, in hindsight, bowled him over). In the seconds that John and I were stopped in a crowded stairwell, the accomplice behind John was able

Continued next page

Trip Report continued

to unzip his side pants pocket and remove his wallet. Forty Euro, credit card, debit card, and driver's license gone in a second! Lessons learned: carry separate cards so you are left with something; if you leave your car in a secured area – leave your driver's license with the car; don't keep your wallet in a pants pocket – keep it in your shirt or better yet, in a waist or neck pouch. Bottom line – these folks are good at what they do and have no compunction that this causes a problem for their victims. Needless to say, my 60th birthday was not quite what we had planned!

One of the most enjoyable parts of the trip was the night train from Paris to Madrid, first class no less! They utilize every spare inch and the luggage went up in the soffit above the efficiency bathroom. Later on we discovered that was quite handy for whoever was in the top berth (me)! Off we went to dinner in the dining car where the sun was setting out the window and we passed lots of French countryside.

When we returned from our wonderful dinner, the cabin was made up for the night. I was able to hop up to the upper bunk by way of the stairs that folded down from the wall. So many sensible and logical "infrastructure" items made things easy. To hold the glass of water, there was a gimbal mount ring by each bed next to the light. To hold the water bottle, there was a elastic strap. The sheets were like an envelope and the bed very comfortable. Breakfast was fruit, toast, juice and croissant (couldn't hold a candle to those in Paris).

The first class pampering didn't stop when we arrived in Madrid. After transferring to *Escasion Atocho* we boarded the train to Seville. It was as

if we were on an airline of old where we were given hot towels to wash our hands, water, and a lovely lunch.

Once we reached Seville, we had to decipher how to use the pay phone and call our apartment agent. Our taxi took us into the old part of Seville through very narrow cobblestone streets. Isabelle, the agent, met us and explained the apartment amenities and the surrounding area. The apartment was newly remodeled, quite modern, and very comfortable. Because of the heat, shops in Seville are closed from 1:30 to 5:30pm and then stay open until 9:30. We went out at 6:00pm and I finally decided to ask an older women pulling a shopping cart where the grocery store was because we couldn't find any market, "Por favor, donde esta el mercado?" The reply came – "no speak English." Oh dear, we are in trouble. "No, No, supermercado?" I tried again. "Oh, comida?" she said lifting up the cover of her cart. "Si, si, comida (groceries)." Hand signals and the fact that we needed to turn left at the Burger King, which we could see, helped us find our way. The market was at *Plaza de Armas*, a refurbished train station made into a mall. There was a fabulous full service market with everything we needed.

During our time in Seville we visited the *Alcazar Palace* (originally built as a Moorish fort) that had outstanding tile patterns. The *Seville Cathedral* is where Columbus is buried. His tomb is very different. Six larger than life, exquisitely defined figures are carrying his coffin and they look as if they could walk right off the dais. One interesting thing about Seville's pigeons, about 20% of them

were white. And again, pigeons were everywhere with only a few European house sparrows, starlings, and nothing else.

We took a train to Cordoba for a day trip to see *El Mesquite* (see photo), a Moorish mosque that had a Catholic cathedral built in the middle of it.



There were many other areas of Cordoba that were fascinating. Now, wherever we went, about 50% of the pigeons were white! We saw one gentleman sitting on a bench with a huge bag of bread pieces feeding

a hoard of pigeons, most of which were white.

On John's 60th birthday, we visited *Palacio de Condesa Lebrija* that housed a wonderful collection of Roman tiles and the *Flamenco Museum* where we learned about the dance's history. For lunch we stopped at a tapas bar named *Bar Europa* where we had a tasty lunch and saw the best bird of the trip. It was 98 degrees and up in the shadow of the *San Salvador Church* were two Lesser Kestrels. They are a bit bigger than ours and have a gray head with no black sideburns. What a treat! Luckily I had my binoculars with me and I was able to see three more kestrels flying above the church hawking bugs.

We took the train back to Madrid and spent our last afternoon at the *Prado Museum* which was the perfect cultural ending. Velasquez, Goya, El Greco and the triptych *The Garden of Delights* by Hieronymum Bosch were such feasts for the eyes and the soul. Still, the only birds in the surrounding parks were pigeons, though, this time, they were back to all gray!

Change in Feeding for the Wet and Cold Season

Serving suet, seeds with shells, and adding baffles/rain guards will help keep the birds well fed during the cold and wet season and reduce the waste of seed due to mold. If you have tube feeders, only fill them **half as full** so they rotate through the seed quicker, and fill them **twice as often** and the birds will thank you. When you do refill the feeder, be sure to empty out the leftovers in the bottom. Moldy seed can cause problems if ingested and also clumps together preventing the free flow of the seed above. A product that can help keep the seed dry is called **Feeder Fresh**. Put a little at both the top and bottom of the feeder and it will absorb excess moisture and is not harmful to the birds if eaten. Monitoring the seed

is especially important if you use any of our “hulled” seed or mixes. Since the seed doesn’t have a shell covering, it is very susceptible to absorbing moisture.

Another way to protect the seed from the rain is with a weather dome or squirrel baffle. Granted this only works when there isn’t any wind with the rain, but the birds like the protection.

With mesh Nyjer/thistle feeders, shake the seed up and down in the feeder on a daily basis when it’s raining. This moves the seed around and gets air into the feeder. Another tip for Nyjer/thistle



feeders is to increase the number of feeders to spread the birds out. Our American and Lesser Goldfinches and Pine Siskins that flock onto the Nyjer/thistle feeders are quite numerous this time of year. Because of this flockiness, they are susceptible to diseases like salmonella. By spreading them out to several feeders you can reduce the spread of disease. Also, it is important to clean up any seed that accumulates under the feeder to prevent ground feeders from getting sick. We now carry a new product, **Seed & Hull Digester** – new from Care-Free Enzymes, that makes all the discarded seed and hulls disappear. Remember, we clean feeders (see below.)

Services Available from the Los Gatos Birdwatcher:

- **Feeder Cleaning** – Monday and Thursday asking only a donation to one of four charities (Wildlife Center of Silicon Valley, Wildlife Education and Rehabilitation Center, Nike Animal Rescue Foundation, and Friends of San Martin Animal Shelter).

- **Frequent Buyer Program**, buy 9 bags 20# or higher of the same seed and get the 10th one free. This program is still in effect and will continue with the new Point of Sale system.

- **Seed Delivery** in the local area, free for over \$40 total, \$4 charge for under \$40 total, available on Tuesday and Friday.

- **Monthly children’s nature programs** at the store and children’s programs for pre-schools through 3rd grade. For more information, ask for our new **Educational Programs Insiders Info Sheet**.

- **Outreach to community organizations** about birding. We have birding and “Show and Tell” programs ideal for gardening and other service groups.

- **Backyard Bird Consulting Program** - Freddy will come out and see what you have, what you want and what might work. The consultation is about an hour and the cost is \$20, which will be applied to any purchase of new feeders, baths or hardware.

- Birthday parties with **Build a Seed Feeder workshop**. Bring 11 of your friends to the **Los Gatos Birdwatcher** and build a birdfeeder. Learn about the different birds that are likely to come to

the small hopper feeder that you construct from a pre-cut wooden kit. (Includes a packet of seed, use of tools, and instruction.)

Cost: \$15 instructor fee + \$10/child

- For the fast approaching Holiday Season, we offer **Gift Certificates** and our popular “**Drop a Hint**” cards that allow you to choose a selection of gifts you would like (wish list) to be considered and when the gift giver comes in with the list we know exactly what you want.

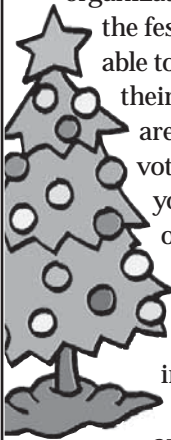


- During the holidays, spend \$100 or more and receive our new **reusable canvas tote** with royal blue handles – quite spiffy! The tote is also for sale for \$2.99 and would make a good “wrapping” for a holiday gift.

Festival of Trees at King's Court

The 2010 Festival of Trees at King's Court kicks off on Saturday, December 4th with entertainment and other festivities. Every year selected local schools and community organizations vie for cash prizes by decorating trees at the shopping center. All the organizations will be attending

the festival kick-off and will be able to answer questions about their missions. The winners are determined by your votes. Until December 19th you can support these local organizations by voting for your favorite tree at the **Los Gatos Birdwatcher** and all the other retailers in the center. The **Peoples' Choice Awards** will be announced on Dec. 22nd.



SCVAS Christmas Bird Counts for 2010

The Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society (SCVAS), in conjunction with the National Audubon Society, is conducting four local Christmas Bird Counts (CBC). CBC's have been taking place throughout the country since 1900. These bird counts add to the body of bird research and knowledge about birds across the country through time at a specific time during the year. It is fun and exciting and only costs \$5 to join.

All experience levels are welcome and needed. Bird identification skills are great but other skills are important too, such as spotter and tallier. The habitats are varied within the counts so talk to the compilers and see where you would be most comfortable. You can choose to count birds for a few hours or the entire day.

Details are on the SCVAS website www.scvas.org.



LOOK WHAT FREDDY FOUND!



Rain Gauges and Thermometers
- Find out what's going on with the weather.



Coasters
- Absorbent and birdy all at the same time.



Home Décor
- Nature's Journey goes Christmas. Lots of home décor items with the ever popular cardinal.



Felt Wreaths
- Birds, Butterflies, Cats, Dogs, and Squirrels.



Socks, Socks and more Socks
- Chanukah, Christmas, non-slip, festive, and fun.

HAPPY HOLIDAYS TO ALL!



Fun yet useful Kitchen Towels

- Dogs and Cats, Birds and Nests, and Chickens (everyday and holiday). Great gift for hostesses and co-worker gifts.



Games and Puzzles

- Jigsaw, Opoly games, Bingo games, Fundanas.



Coffee and Mugs

- Shade grown coffee and bird species mugs - Great gift for the coffee drinker on your list.



Ornaments Galore

- Vintage, cloisonné, glass, birds and nests, great for any tree.



Birdhouses

- Just in time for the spring nesting season. Painted, Rustic, Simple.



Pillows

- Dogs and Cats, Cardinals and Quail, and Squirrels.



New mesh feeders

- Chickadees, goldfinches, and house finches love to cling. These new mesh feeders come in a Snowman for the winter, a ball, and a new tube that allows feeding at three different levels. Suitable for black oil sunflower and some mixes.



Edible Ornaments and Seed Birdhouses

- Dress up your yard and feed the wildlife. Colorful seed ornament garlands, seed covered birdhouses, and ornament balls. Pick up our new **Edible Ornament Insiders Info Sheet**.

Why Are There So Many Rats and Mice Around?

Last winter and spring were very rainy, the seventh rainiest on record if I recall. In the rodent mind that meant an abundance of food and, because of that, they had multiple broods of babies. At the same time, rodent predators, such as owls, also knew the very rainy season meant that there would be more rodents and, therefore, they had two broods instead of the usual one.

I find it so interesting that birds and animals can judge the weather and decide how many more or fewer offspring to have. Many wildlife rehabilitators have said that this is the first year in a long time that they have seen second brood barn owls come in. Unfortunately, the rodents seem to be out-producing the owls. Even though the owls are having more babies than usual, their numbers aren't high enough to take care of all their prey because of habitat loss.

Here are some suggestions for mitigating the rodent proliferation. Taking feeders in at night is one solution even though some rodents have been seen during the daytime. They are still much more active at night. If the birds and squirrels are not eating up the seed kickout from a mix fast enough, switch to a single seed. For example, if you are using Birder's Choice or Pure Patio Mix, which are both designed as all purpose mixes (one with shells, one without), consider switching to Black Oil Sunflower or Hulled Sunflower. Another good mix is Songbird because very little is kicked out. Another solution is a tray or seed catcher attached to the feeder – provided this doesn't allow the rodents easier access. It's always something!

I know this can be very frustrating; however, please do not use poison. Poison can harm more than the intended victim. If an owl or hawk catches a poisoned slow moving rodent, they will also die, which is not the desired effect on the food chain. Stick to traps that dispatch rapidly and that are placed away from family pets.

Young Audubon Adventures

Offered by Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society

Winter Whale Watching in Monterey Bay – MLK weekend, Monday, January 17th and **Elephant Seal Walks** at Ano Nuevo State Park – President's Day weekend, Monday, February 21st.

For details, times, and to sign up, call Toby Goldberg at SCVAS 408/252-3740.

Kid's Corner

Reservation
Required

Call 358-9453 to reserve your space.

Duck Discovery

For ages 3 to 9: Thursday, January 20, 4-5 PM \$8/child

Go adventuring with Freddy on the trails around Oka Ponds in search of ducks. Conduct a simple experiment to discover how the ducks stay dry and float so well. Make your own binoculars to help you scout out ducks diving, dabbling, flying, bathing, and quacking too!

We will meet at the gate at the end of Oka Lane. Take Lark Avenue to Oka Road and follow it under Highway 85 to the end. Turn left on Mozart and take an immediate right on Oka Lane. Go to the end of the road and park along the street.

Ginger Seed House Kits

Ginger Seed House kits will be available to take and make on your own on November 22nd. A sample will be available in the store to provide inspiration. For \$25 we provide all the basics; seed block for the foundation of the house, matzo for the roof, ice cream cone for the chimney and lots of different seeds for the decoration. All you do is supply a cookie sheet, the peanut butter and your imagination! Ginger Seed House kits make great gifts for families. (We can make special "no peanut" kits upon request, just call to order.)

Ginger Seed House Workshop \$25/ house

For the whole family:

Friday, November 26th, 3-4:30 PM

15% discount for those that pre-pay by November 20th (sorry, no refunds) Join our after-Thanksgiving tradition. Don't miss this special family activity as we build festive houses together out of seeds for the birds and squirrels in your neighborhood to feast on. Wear clothes that you don't mind getting grubby. A great opportunity to create this masterpiece without having to fuss with the mess! (Please let us know ahead of time if there are any peanut allergies.)



Los Gatos Birdwatcher
King's Court Center
792 Blossom Hill Road
Los Gatos, CA 95032

#C1210

/ 2010

Pay to the order of Our Loyal Customer

15% Off One Item

Memo: Expires 12/31/10

One Coupon per customer, please.
Excludes sale items, excursions and optics.
Not to be combined with any other offers

Field Trips & Outings

Saturday Morning Local Bird Walks

Join us every Saturday morning for an enjoyable meander looking for birds. Call the store Friday nights after 7pm to find out where we are going the next morning. Except for our once a month all-day field



trips, we go on a local bird walk from 8 to 10 am and return for bagels and shade grown coffee. Some of the nearby places we go to are Oka Ponds, Guadalupe Oak Grove Park, Belgatos Park, Almaden Lake Park, Shoreline and Charleston Slough.

No Charge.

Sunnyvale Audubon walks

First Wednesday of the month

Dec 1, Jan 5, Feb 2 - Noon to 1pm

Bring your binoculars (loaners are available) and meet Freddy at the **Sunnyvale Pollution Control Plant** where Borregas and Caribbean meet off of 237. After entering the plant turn left at the first stop sign and continue to the end of the parking area. We will see raptors, shorebirds, and lots of ducks.

No Charge.

Let's Go Birding to Merced National Wildlife Refuge

Saturday, January 15, 8:00 Am – back by 6:00 PM

Join Leader Myers of Let's Go Birding on a trip to Merced National Wildlife Refuge that was a huge success last year. The Refuge includes 10,262 acres of wetlands, native grasslands, vernal pools, and riparian area. Established in 1951 to attract wintering waterfowl, this refuge is a winter wonderland for birders. According to refuge manager Richard Albers, "The Refuge plays host to the largest wintering populations of lesser Sandhill cranes and Ross's geese within the Pacific Flyway." Wintering geese and cranes migrate to the area each fall to make the Refuge home for six months. We'll get to compare snow geese to Ross's geese and we'll look for blue morphs of each. We had blue morphs in both last year! We will also be able to find many shorebirds and wintering raptors during our day.

Fee: \$25 plus share of gas

The Mountain Lion

South Bay Community Meeting hosted

by **Felidae Conservation Fund**

Friday, November 19, 2010, 6:30-8:00 PM

**De Anza College – Kirsch Center,
21250 Stevens Creek Blvd., Cupertino**

Zara McDonald, Felidae Conservation Fund's Executive Director will discuss mountain lion ecology and history, and the challenges of sharing the habitat with mountain lions. She will also discuss the ground-breaking research and educational work of the Bay Area Puma Project, the first major study of mountain lions in the Bay Area.

Fee: No Charge





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Look What Freddy Found
on Page 4 & 5!!!



Printed on
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Sage Advice...

Remember to relax and hang out with friends during the holidays.



Sage and co-worker Anna hang out!

Dates to Remember

Closed Thanksgiving
Closed Christmas Day & New Year's Day
Closing early 4:00 PM Christmas Eve
Closing early 4:00 PM New Year's Eve

11/25 Thanksgiving (closed)	12/21 Winter Solstice
12/2 Chanukah Begins Sundown	12/25 Christmas (closed)
	1/1 New Year's Day 2011 (closed)

Store Hours

Monday – Saturday: 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.
Sunday: 12 noon to 5 p.m.
Phone: 408-358-9453

