

# **A HISTORY OF THE WINTU AUDUBON SOCIETY**

## **By William W. Oliver**

### **Beginnings**

One spring day in 1975, Lou Carufel, then Wildlife Biologist with the Shasta Trinity National Forest, mentioned that he was thinking of starting a local chapter of the National Audubon Society (NAS). I was skeptical having witnessed the demise of the Lassen Bird Club, a small, informal gathering that died for lack of interest some six or eight years before. It consisted of about six cliquish, middle-aged couples meeting nine times a year. Indoor programs were alternated with field trips planned the month before during the indoor meetings. Enthusiasm for many field trips was often high, prompting impatient members to make the trip ahead of time, disappointing the field trip leader. We recognized this as a problem, and it proved fatal a year after I joined the Club.

I was even more skeptical when Lou listed all the requirements specified by NAS for a new chapter. But Lou was determined to overcome these hurdles. He, with a small band of canvassers, uncovered a great local interest in birds. They met the requirements, and we were awarded Chapter status in early 1976. The initial officers were: President - Lou Carufel; Vice President - Judy Harper; Secretary - Marguerite Lennon; Treasurer - Bruce Lennon.

The first order of business for this new Board of Directors was to pick the name of the chapter and that for its newsletter. After a lively discussion the Board came up with the following tentative list from which the membership was to select the official name at its membership meeting in May 1976: Lassen Area Audubon

Society, Wintu Audubon Society, North Sacramento River  
Audubon Society, Redding Area Audubon Society

The Board took a lighthearted approach to suggested names for the newsletter: Dust and Brush; Crow's Nest; Brown Towhee. Chirp-N-Chatter, the name for the newsletter proposed by a member, was chosen with the hope that the chatter would be worthwhile.

The May 1976 General Meeting, held in the library of Sequoia School, chose Wintu Audubon Society as the name for this Chapter of the National Audubon Society. It had a nice ring to it, and it was considered fitting for this conservation organization to be named after one of the local Native American tribes who knew that a healthy society lives within environmental confines. Several members suggested that as a courtesy we should ask permission of the tribe for the use of their name. In response to unanimous approval of the membership, the Board wrote such a letter to the Wintu Tribe. The Tribe was pleased to grant permission and expressed surprise and pleasure as seldom if ever had organizations requested such permission.

Along with the establishment of the Wintu Audubon, the Redding Christmas Bird Count, which had been sponsored by the Lassen Bird Club, was reorganized under the direction of Steve Laymon and Phil Detrich. The center of the circle of the count was moved northeast from downtown Redding to just north of Keswick Dam to include a wider variety of habitats.

## 1976-1977 The First Year

Lou Carufel, Wintu's founder and first President, moved to Anchorage Alaska to accept a position with the Bureau of Land Management. We were sorry to lose his energy and thoughtful guidance. Nevertheless, he would have been pleased with how we began. That first year could have easily been Wintu Audubon's most productive period.

A provisional charter was received from the national office. Provisions for a regular chapter status were to be based on a 10-20% increase in membership and the activities and projects during 1976-1977. This fledgling chapter easily exceeded the minimum standards set forth by the NAS with the following more noteworthy activities during that first year:

- The Second Saturday Bird Walk at Turtle Bay was established as an important component of the chapter's education program.
- Field trips to Lewiston and the Trinity Lakes, Lower Klamath and Sacramento National Wildlife Refuges; a visit to the Horr Ranch (now part of Ahjumawi Lava Springs State Park in Fall River Valley); and a 2-day trip to Honey Lake Basin with members and friends from Wintu, Altacal, Sacramento and Rogue River Chapters. The highlight of this trip for many was visiting a lek to witness the booming of 10 male Sage Grouse. Subsequent trips to the lek were held in 1981 in conjunction with the Santa Clara A.S. and with the Altacal A.S. in 2008.
- A Chapter Constitution was adopted and in accordance with that constitution, the nominating committee proposed the

following slate of officers for 1977-1978: President - Bill Oliver; Vice President, Chirp-N-Chatter Editor - Phil Detrich; Recording Secretary - Jean Belmonte; Corresponding Secretary - Muriel Weissberg; and Treasurer - Bruce Lennon. We have maintained the election of officers on one-year terms, in spite of the difficulty this occasionally creates.

- The first meeting of the Northern California Audubon Council sponsored by Audubon California and hosted by Wintu Audubon, was held in Redding in September 1977. The 30 attendees from nine Chapters, along with 10 Wintu Audubon members, shared information on Chapter activities and conservation issues. Glenn Olson, then assistant regional representative of Audubon California, pointed out that this is the prime purpose of these regional conferences, to foster communication among Chapters. And, in fact, most of the delegates did take away good ideas from this first exchange. Wintu Audubon hosted the Council again in 2010 and 2015.

### **Continuing Activities**

The wide variety of speakers at the general meetings were kicked off most notably by David Gaines, prominent California birder and author. David's subject was the Birds of Mono Lake and their uncertain future.

The new slate of officers was installed at the last regular meeting in May before the summer hiatus. For the first three years a no-host dinner was held at local restaurants, then potluck dinners, followed in a few years by picnics at the Tower House in Whiskeytown NRA.

*A Checklist of Birds of Turtle Bay and Vicinity* was issued in 1978 and revised in 1981. Subsequent checklists were enlarged to *Birds of Shasta County, California* in 2005 and revised in 2016 and 2021 by a committee headed by Bob Yutzy.

An annual joint campout at Lassen Volcanic National Park began in 1981. Altacal, Redwood Region, and Redbud Audubon Chapters among others have participated.

Wintu Audubon has been a regular participant in the following local science and natural resource fairs:

- Beginning in 1978 with a booth and display at the Redding Downtown Mall.
- The annual *Return of the Salmon Festival* at the Coleman National Fish Hatchery.
- Booths and activities at the Watershed and Natural Resource Festival on Earth Day beginning at the Mt. Shasta Mall in 2006, relocated to Caldwell Park the next year, and then to the Redding City Hall grounds. Children and adults were instructed by Dan Greaney in making quail calls from a wooden clothes pin. Larry Jordan supervised the assembly of Bluebird houses. Materials were provided by Wintu Audubon.
- A Community Expo was held at the Mt. Shasta Mall in 2008. Wintu Audubon won 1st Place for its booth decorations.
- At the Shasta District Fair in 2006, Wintu Audubon won 2nd place for its booth and 2nd place for its demonstration garden.
- The construction of thousands of artificial nest boxes (birdhouses) has fledged billions of cavity nesting birds of several species. Wintu Audubon monitors five separate

“bluebird trails” consisting of seventy nest boxes. Each year those boxes produce many Oak Titmouses, Tree Swallows, Violet-green Swallows, Ash-throated Flycatchers, House Wrens, White-breasted Nuthatches, and of course Western Bluebirds.

### **Collaboration With Other Organizations**

- Burrowing Owls are listed as a “species of special concern” in California due to decreasing available habitat. This prompted Larry Jordan, with financial assistance from Audubon California and volunteers from Wintu Audubon and Altacal Audubon, to construct three artificial Burrowing Owl habitats. The one at Tuscan Preserve in Tehama County, built in 2010 with eight nesting chambers and expanded to twenty-four in 2017, has produced several offspring.
- Tehama Wild Care donated the cost of installing an Osprey nesting platform built by Larry Jordan of Wintu Audubon and installed by the City of Anderson in Anderson River Park in 2018. Ospreys successfully nested that first year.
- Snow Goose Festival of the Pacific Flyway - field trips to Lema Ranch were led in 2008 through 2010.
- An information table was staffed at the California Native Plant Society, Shasta Chapter’s annual garden tour *Natives in the Landscape*.
- After several bird walks along Oregon Gulch, a wild area within south Redding, Wintu Audubon, along with Shasta Environmental Alliance, successfully promoted the preservation of the area by the Redding City Council.
- After several years enjoying the hike up Dye Creek in The Nature Conservancy’s Dye Creek Preserve, Wintu Audubon

volunteered to monitor the response of the bird community to the development of the planted trees and shrubs along the lower stretches of Dye Creek. Surveys were conducted several times a year from 1996 to 2014. Results were used by The Conservancy in presentations to the Los Molinos Public Schools and others.

- Similar surveys were conducted seasonally from 2016 to 2020 for Lake California at their newly constructed Rio Alto Wastewater Treatment ponds. These ponds and surrounding vegetation were the final stage in the treatment of waste water allowing it to percolate into the soil rather than flow into the Sacramento River. Results were used by management in reports to the State office to support the efficacy of this new treatment method.

Lou Carufel's expectation of a latent birding interest in the Redding area was certainly justified. The requirements to become a chapter of the National Audubon Society was swiftly met and the structure of the chapter established. Over these 45 years Wintu Audubon has participated in environmental fairs, teamed up with sister organizations to preserve wild areas and to construct nesting sites for birds. Lou would be proud.