

CALIFORNIA GULL MONITORING INTERNSHIP

Interns needed early March through August-- The San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory seeks interns to work on a gull monitoring study related to the salt pond restoration project. Field work will include trapping, color banding and counting gulls at several salt pond locations, and monitoring nests at colonies. Interns will learn bird trapping and handling skills, gull identification skills and gain experience with bird research techniques. May require use of personal vehicle (mileage is reimbursed). We would like a 3 to 6 month commitment, 10 to 20 hours per week.

Project Description

The California gull breeding population in the South San Francisco Bay salt ponds has increased from approximately 12 nests in 1982 to over 33,000 nesting birds in 2006. South Bay gulls feed primarily on bay fishes and refuse at bay landfills, and are also predators on eggs and chicks of the Caspian terns, Forster's tern, American avocets, black-necked stilts, and the endangered Western Snowy Plover. The gulls also exclude these species from their nesting sites when competition for nesting space develops. The South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project is initiating plans to restore 16,000 acres of salt ponds into tidal marsh or other habitats, and will likely cause the largest colony of breeding gulls to move to new nesting sites and, in so doing, may displace the current populations of native breeding waterbirds. Our objectives are to use color-marked California Gulls to examine their movements among colonies and landfills, and to examine fledgling movements. Color-marking will allow us to track gull movement as changes take place in the Salt Pond Restoration sites. In particular, we will examine how and where gulls from displaced colonies disperse. Results from this study will help predict dispersal of gull colonies as a result of levy breaches, new habitat creation and gull abatement at landfills. In particular, we will address what proportion of displaced gulls disperses to other established colonies, newly created habitat, or outside of the south San Francisco Bay.

We will examine the movements of gulls to determine foraging areas and flight pathways to and from colonies. Results from this study will address the spatial use of the South Bay salt ponds and landfills by California gulls, the effect of the restoration project on breeding populations, and California gull's likely effect on other ground-nesting species.

We will color-mark (leg bands) adult California Gulls in spring 2008 at three colonies (Pond A6, Mowry, Coyote Hills). We will color mark chicks at these colonies at the end of the 2008 breeding season. We will systematically search key areas for marked adults on a weekly basis, by monitoring gulls at all known breeding sites. We will search for color-marked gulls post-breeding once a month from September 2008 to April 2008.

ABOUT THE BIRD OBSERVATORY

Mission: The San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory is dedicated to the conservation of birds and their habitats through science and outreach, and to contributing to informed resource management decisions in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Description: Since its beginning in 1981, the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory has been an authority on waterbirds and landbirds that rely on the San Francisco Bay and its surrounding environments. Birds use the Bay Area as breeding habitat, migration stopover habitat, and wintering habitat. Our programs, the Waterbird Program and Landbird Program collect crucial data that shape our understanding of the population ecology and behavior of these Bay Area birds. Through public education and our volunteer citizen scientists, our Outreach program fosters awareness amongst Bay Area residents of the sensitivity and importance of birds and their habitats to our society and natural heritage, and the value of bird conservation to our community.