

The Explorers Club Northern California Chapter

November 2004

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San Francisco November 19, 2004 Dr. Cagan Sekercioglu The 2004 Angolan Escarpment Ornithological Expedition

Angola is one of the most important and least known countries in Africa for birds. The country's ornithological importance is due to the combination of the Western Angola Endemic Bird Area, with its 14 restricted-range species (eight of which are threatened), and the location of Angola at the confluence of three very different biomes:

- northern Congo basin lowland forests,
- eastern Zambesian miombo woodlands, and
- southern Namib Desert.

LOCATION

Date: Friday, 19 November 2004
Place: Sinbad's Pier 2 Restaurant
Embarcadero, San Francisco
Time: 6:30 pm, no-host cocktails
7:15 dinner hosted wine
Cost: \$45 (by November 18)
\$50 (on meeting date)

Reach Steve at
nauticos@oceaneearth.org
or 925 934-1051

Reservation Form on page 5
Please reserve promptly!

Cagan, in Africa,
with his photo gear

Red-backed
Mousebird (top)

Great Birds
and Great Bird
Photos
from Africa

photos by the speaker,
Cagan Sekercioglu

Angola is home to many spectacular, and/or threatened, endemics such as Gray-striped and Swiestra's Francolins, Red-crested Turaco, Gabela Akalat, Pulitzer's Longbill, Angola Cave-chat, White-fronted Wattle-eye, Gabela Bush-shrike, Monteiro's Bush-shrike, and Gabela Helmet-shrike.

However, due to the civil war that ravaged the country between 1974 and 2002, most of what is known is based on data collected before Angola's independence in 1975. There is a dire need for more information, especially on endemic and threatened bird species. Therefore, we, with the help of Rockjumper Birdwatching Tours and Wilddog Safaris, conducted an ornithological expedition to Angola in January 2004 to do a rapid assessment of the status of Angola's endemic birds, and four globally important bird areas, after the end of 30 years of civil war. Despite having no showers for over two weeks and suffering on the worst roads on earth, we succeeded in seeing over 40% of the country's bird species, rediscovered Bocage's Sunbird, photographed some species for the first time, and set up the foundation for future ornithological visits to this spectacular country. There is still hope for Angola's unique avifauna and those who want to see it.



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Cagan Sekercioglu is a Turkish avian ecologist and nature photographer doing his postdoctoral research at the Stanford University Center for Conservation Biology. Cagan's academic web site is:

www.stanford.edu/~cagan/main.html

and examples of his photography are on

www.naturalphotos.com

Dr. Sekercioglu is also a member of the Chapter; some may have been fortunate to attend his lecture on bird photography a few years back, when a new student member.

When storms pass, it can be even more difficult—but more beautiful



Field work can be slow going, especially so in foreign lands



Migrating the Pacific Peter Pyle San Francisco

Peter Pyle is an island person. Born on Oahu, he has spent much of his life surrounded by the vast Pacific. He became interested in birds at an early age and has become recognized around the world for technologies used in ornithology,* especially ways to identify individuals to study their habits. An example, by using high-technology small loggers and satellite communications he has managed to expand our knowledge about where birds (and other marine life) go! They 'go' surprising distances! They often cross the open sea.

When studying the gooney bird (the albatross, *Diomedea nigripes*) on Midway Island he observed the chick's parents disappeared for weeks after the offspring were hatched. He was able to trace attached transmitters 3500 miles to the California coast! Upon the parents return they fed the chicks food they stored, in but a few minutes. They repeated the feat! This remarkable bird, so awkward on land, is a champion glider who hardly moves its wings

over vast distances; it soars amidst the prevailing winds.

Peter has worked upon the westernmost extremity of San Francisco for nearly a quarter century. The Farallon Islands are a teeming site for marine animal life: birds, seals, sharks, whales and a myriad of smaller species are readily observed. He and his associates spend days on end making and recording observations. The islands are on the steep continental shelf, an area unusually rich in nutrients, because of the confluence of currents and deep-sea upwelling. Thus, this coast is remarkable fertile.

Birds are not his only interest. The Great White Shark is prevalent at this site; many return year after year (he identifies them by unique fin markings.) This ancient predator does not know man, but it occasionally does mistake a human for its normal meal, the northern elephant seal. Pyle has managed to affix instruments to trace a few individuals; he has found these visit Hawaii, along the Molokai Channel, and return.

He has traced Bluefin Tuna to the Bering Straights and back and to Cabo San Lucas and back. Leatherback Turtles weight in a two tons; the same

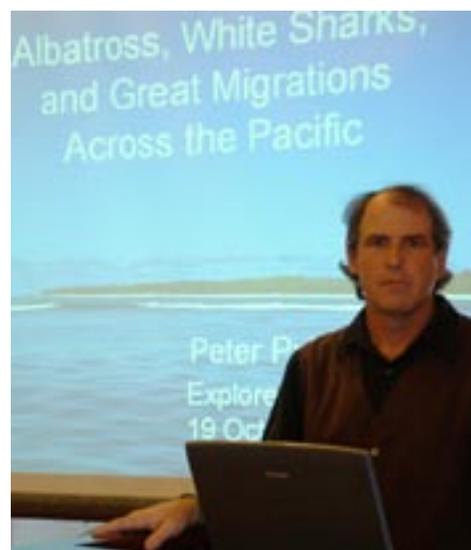
individuals have been seen in Indonesia and at the Farralones: a 17,000-mile round trip!

Peter Pyle has worked at the *Institute for Bird Populations* since 1996.

<http://www.birdpop.org/>

His wonderful photography enlightened the evening. He urged we need to protect the entire Pacific Ocean, from the danger posed by industrial fishing, to protect this marine sea life.

* Pyle P. 1997. *Identification guide to North American birds - part 1*. Slate Creek Press, PO Box 219, Bolinas, CA 94924-0219, USA. 732 pp. ISBN 0-9618940-2-4.



An Exotic Season Opener

LANGAN



Our October 19th opening meeting for the 2004-05 season was a special event in several ways: our speaker, a flag return, a visit by club President Richard Wiese, a treat by club Exotic's Chairman Gene Rurka, and the sponsorship by the Redwood Creek Winery. *The Taste of Adventure Series* is a weekly speaker event at Club Headquarters in New York; it was expanded to include the rare foods for the first such Chapter event as a celebration of our Centennial Year. The evening was a delight; the serious pairings with the wines (see below) proved helpful, lest we serve these tidbits at home. Let the photos speak. Thank you Redwood Creek!

Gene Rurka (MR'90) holding a presentation of the exotic delicacies: tarantula (pinot noir), scorpion (savignon blanc), crickets (pinot noir) and flowers (pinot grigio), Shown below: rattlesnake (chardonnay); wild boar (cabernet savignon), cariboo (syrah)



M Beebe

A selection of Redwood Creek wines offered by our hosts.

Herb Lingl (FN'02) and Steve Leslie making their choice, while an unknown hand has a bite of cariboo (lower left)

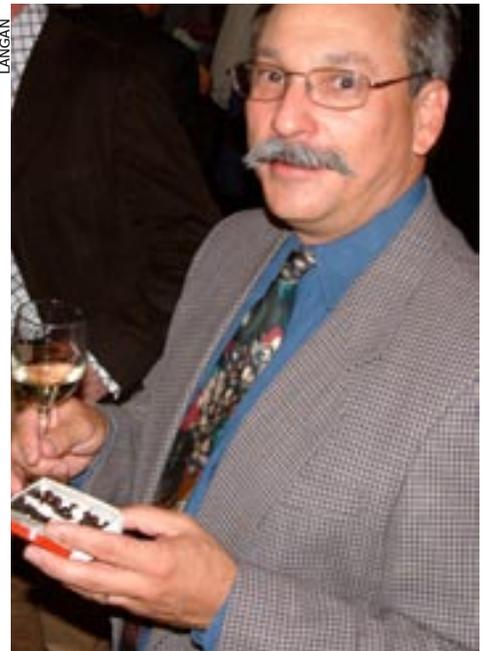
Don Bekins and Tom Hall (Fn'97) inspect before making their selection; there was ample food for the adventurous explorer (lower center).

Cal Dennison, Redwood Creek winemaker, passed around South American Ants, nutty in the Spanish peanut sense; enjoyed with his Chardonnay.

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Flag 147 Returns from India

Kirk Usher Jr. (MN'98), Dr. Bob Miller and Dr. Dan Moore returned Flag 147 after their heart-rate and power-performance physiology study in India's Ladakh region with a group of ten cyclists mountain biking over the two highest road passes in the world: Khardung La at 18,360' and Taglung La at 18,100. They traversed approximately 600 miles from Leh south to Manali over 'the roof of the world.' President Richard Wiese accepted the flag; Chapter Chair Steve Smith looked on.

This book is a tale of the adventures of Dr. Thomas "Tom" Larson during 1947-1948 when he was a member of the University of California African Expedition Cairo-to-Capetown, Southern Section. This first post war scientific expedition of the University of California at Berkeley began in July, 1947, and was largely completed 15 months later. Larson has written this book at the age of 86 from his journal compiled in 1947-1948. He is the last surviving member of the expedition and the only one who has written a book about it. The expedition was promoted and organized by Wendell Phillips, a very young paleontology graduate from the University. UC paleontology Professor Charles Camp was the leader of the south African part of Phillips' expedition. Phillips had the backing of prominent attorney and University of California Regent John Francis Neylan and University President Robert Gordon Sproul along with other well-known individuals, corporations and organizations. The primary purpose of the expedition was to search for further fossil evidence of the remarkable Australopithecine man-apes first described by Prof. Raymond Dart and elaborated by Dr. Robert Broom, both of South Africa. Another important objective was a coordinated series of anthropological studies on the primitive tribes of northern South West Africa including the Ovambo, the iKung Bushmen, and the few remaining Hottentots who retained traces of their original culture. In addition, a program having to do with recent and fossil plants as well as the extensive collection of recent amphibians, reptiles, mammals, and insects was accomplished.

Raised in Minnesota, Larson had completed two years of college at the University of Minnesota, when he shouldered a backpack and travelled through 25 countries of the Americas, Europe, and North Africa as a Rover Eagle Scout. He then transferred to the University of California before enlisting in the U.S. Navy in 1941. He served as executive officer of a small ship and arrived at Pearl Harbor on December 5, 1941, two days before Pearl Harbor Day, December 7. Almost immediately he was employed on the staff of the

THE GREAT ADVENTURE, The University of California Southern Africa Expedition of 1947-1948

by Thomas J. Larson, PhD
(iUniverse, Inc., New York, Lincoln, Shanghai,
2004, \$30.95)

Commander-in-Chief Pacific, Admiral Kimmel. Soon he was assigned to the staff of the Commander South Pacific in New Caledonia, then served on Espiritu Santo, Guadalcanal, Tulagi, as Liaison Officer on HMNZS Leander (a New Zealand light cruiser), Naval Air Station Livermore, and then back to the war on the repaired aircraft carrier USS Lexington visiting Pearl Harbor, Eniwetok atoll, Leyte Bay in the Philippines, and ending the war in Tokyo Bay. He was discharged in 1945 as a Lt. Commander.

Larson spent a year of exploration and collecting animal specimens in the jungles of Guatemala before he joined the U.C. Expedition. His primary role in the expedition was to collect mammal and reptile study specimens for the University's Museum of Vertebrate Zoology. He was a relatively highly qualified 30-year-old field biologist with a B.A. in archeology and anthropology from the University.

He arrived in Port Elizabeth, South Africa, via the cargo/passenger ship *African Rainbow* in the summer of 1947. He was issued a one-ton Chevrolet pickup van which he drove throughout South Africa beginning on the beautiful Garden Route along the coast to Capetown, where he stayed for several weeks. He then drove northward to Namaqualand of the Cape Province, headed across the Orange River into South West Africa, then northward to Windhoek, to Karibib enroute to the Namib Desert, to the Kaokaveld, to Ovamboland, to the Etosha Pan, and to Oshikanga on the border of Angola. He then drove south and then through the great Karoo, through the Orange Free State, up into the Transvaal, to Krueger Park, to Mozambique, drove into the Kalahari Desert and back to Johannesburg. South Africa is roughly 1000 miles east to west and 1000 miles north to south, and Larson saw most of it.

For long periods he traveled alone, often sleeping out-of-doors in a sleeping bag. Larson describes the impres-

sive African countryside and tells of his romantic encounters as a young single bachelor, of his abhorrence of South Africa's cruel apartheid law, and of his adoption and love for a small mammal called the Cape Hyrax (*Procavia capensis*) which he called 'Dassies.'

Larson traveled widely and stopped at many locations along the way becoming acquainted with the people, their culture, and collecting animal specimens. He spent much of his time living in the field, but often lived with local South African people on their farms and in their homes. With the settlers and the native tribesmen at parties, after some liquid refreshments, he would often perform his special Sioux Indian war chant and dance which must have been quite entertaining. Besides collecting specimens he assisted Professor Camp and Professor Edwin Loeb, also part of the expedition and made a movie of 115 iKung Bushmen, which group had never been filmed before.

Larson's book is a travelog of his experiences based on his journal, giving detailed descriptions of his travel and biological investigations. He describes the tribes he encountered and their life styles, the fauna and flora of the region, the geology, and the lives and intrigue of the settlers that controlled the country at that time.

When the expedition members packed up and returned to California in the fall of 1948, Larson determined to remain behind as he had fallen in love with Africa. He had collected 2,000 study skins as well as many skulls and skeletons of recent mammals and a large number of amphibians and reptiles. Larson returned to California in late 1951. He said the time he spent in South Africa was the most interesting and fabulous experience of his life, which is a life that has been more eventful and exciting than most, by far.

Tom Larson is a member of the Explorers Club as was the Expedition promoter and organizer Wendell Phillips. The reviewer, also a UC Berkeley graduate, had the privilege as a student of knowing Professor Camp and of knowing Wendell Phillips, other expedition members, and the author as friends.

—Ronald T. Reuther (FN'74), Sep 2004.

The Chapter Chair

Dear Northern California Explorers:

It is certainly regrettable that not everyone could have attended a truly memorable evening on October 19th. On behalf of the chapter, my profuse appreciation is expressed to Morton Beebe for his coordination with National and with our sponsor, to Lee Langan for his management of the RSVP process and venue coordination, to Richard Weise for leading the evening, to our sponsor Redwood Creek Wines for their fiscal and enophilic support, and of course to our speaker Peter Pyle for a perfect presentation. My only residual regret is having missed seeing an adventurous Lee Langan actually munching on that tarantula. It was an auspicious start to our season.

On another topic, I recently received an invitation from Club Headquarters inviting all Chapter Chairs to submit an item to be included in an Explorers Club Time Capsule. The capsule will be sealed in December of this year and will be re-opened in 50 years. The items included will then become part of the permanent collection of the Explorers Club, to be studied by future members and researchers.

In order to be as inclusive as possible, the Chapter has begun to compile a CD of noteworthy documents. To this end, I am asking all members to consider contributing to this effort. Your officers will gather all copies of past chapter newsletters and other important documents that we have at hand. I would ask that each of you consider the following types of additional material: flag reports, photographs, scientific papers based on expeditions in which you have participated, letters of note, essays and transcribed histories of your

involvement in the club, or in exploration in general. Other items are welcome as well. Be creative.

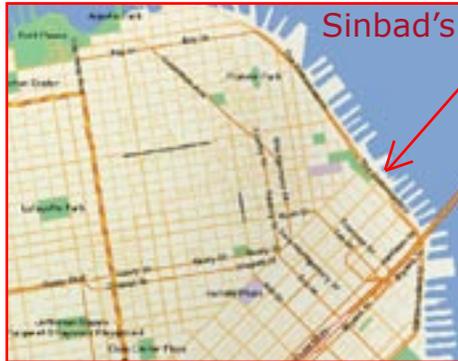
Each document should be submitted in a PDF form, preferably using the latest version of Adobe Acrobat. If you are unable to prepare such a file, contact one of us, and we will create one for you. Our webmaster, Mike Diggles, will be leading the encoding effort, so any technical questions should be transmitted to him. Ultimately we may be constrained by the storage space available on the disk. Should we exceed it, we will attempt to screen the contributions for significance and diversity.

Please send your contributions as soon as possible, but certainly no later than the third week in November. Items can be brought to our Nov. 19th meeting, sent electronically or by standard mail. (See the masthead of the newsletter for addresses.)

I hope that each of you will consider donating a representation of your involvement in exploration and the Explorers Club. Please contact one of us if you have any questions. Thanks in advance for your participation and I look forward to seeing you (contributions in hand) on November 19th.

—Stephen E. Smith, FN'96

Sinbad's is JUST south of the Ferry Building! Parking available; BART access.



NOTE: THIS IS A DIFFERENT LOCATION THAN OCTOBER.

Please reserve _____ spaces for November 19, 2004, at Sinbad's, San Francisco. Cost \$45 each; \$50 on meeting day. Prospective members are very welcome.

Contact Steve (right) to assure a reservation so we can advise the restaurant.

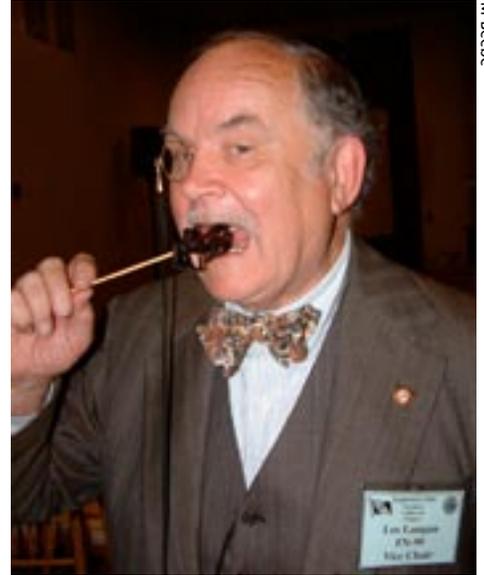
Name: _____

Address (if changed): _____

Guest: _____

Evolution

@ The Explorers Club



M Beebe

Ah ha! A picture can speak a thousand words; I have been asked to verify that the stated tarantula was eaten; take my assurance and, the closeup (below) is certified not to have been created by any PhotoShop tricks. The meat was tasty (a bit 'porky'), the sauce succulent, the pairing with Redwood Creek's 2001 Pinot Noir delicious.

The meetings for speakers later in the year, noted 'open' in last month's column, are now all filled; we have not completed all of the arrangements. You will have another exciting year of exploration reports!

—Lee Langan, FN'99



M Beebe

Please mail this form to:
Dr. Stephen E. Smith
402 Via Royal
Walnut Creek, CA 94596
or, preferably:
nauticos@oceanearth.org
or call 925 934-1051

meal choice (please circle):
meat - fish - vegetarian

Northern California 2003-2004 Event Calendar

(Mark the dates! Venues will be identified at time of event.)

October 19, 2004 Peter Pyle
The City Club, San Francisco

"Birds on the Farrollons & Across the Pacific"

**November 19, 2004 Cagan Sekercioglu
Sinbad's Restaurant, San Francisco**

"Angolan Ornithological Expedition 2004"

December 17, 2004
Sinbad's Restaurant, San Francisco

open

January 28-30, 2005 Krist Jake
San Francisco

"The Ocean Film Festival"

February 25, 2005 David Moyer
San Francisco

Operation Deep Freeze

March 19, 2005 ECAD
Waldorf Astoria, New York

101 Years of The Explorers Club

March 25, 2005 Andrew Urbanczyk
San Francisco

Transpacific Raft Expedition (A Guinness World Record)

April 2005

open

May 2005

Gene & Sibyl Boudreau Northern Kenya Exploring

Sebastopol

June 18, 2005

Chapter Picnic

Contact Anders Jepsen to help: <ajviking@aol.com>

Angel Island

**Please note venues and dates with care.
November 19th is a FRIDAY meeting at
Sinbad's Restaurant in San Francisco**

In full and lively color!
To experience this newsletter in color,
see the 'pdf' version at our web site.

(When copying the URL addresses be sure to keep them all on one line; most are also available as links on our Chapter web site.)

November 2004

Dr. Stephen E. Smith
The Explorers Club
Northern California Chapter
402 Via Royal
Walnut Creek, CA 94596

