

## **Saving Our Birds** **by Nikki Weaver**

(This is the first in a series of Watermark articles focusing on the efforts over the past 150 years to preserve the world's bird population.)

The worldwide celebration of International Migratory Bird month takes place each May. This year the Agua Hedionda Lagoon Foundation participated in the global festivities by hosting its 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Migratory Bird Day on Saturday May 9<sup>th</sup>. Over 250 children and adults participated in the event which highlighted the debut of the Discovery Center's latest exhibition – "*The Birds of Agua Hedionda Lagoon*." This beautiful display includes photos of 30 different migratory birds visiting our lagoon – all taken by AHLF Board member and amateur wildlife photographer Bill Kloetzer.

The International Migratory Bird Festival is the latest of many organized efforts held over the past 150 years to enhance public awareness of the plight of many of the world's declining bird species. The National Audubon Society was formed in 1886 when plume hunters were decimating North American bird populations in the interest of fashion. During that era, it was common for ladies to trim their hats and clothing with birds' exotic feathers. In fact, even entire bodies of birds including bluebirds, woodpeckers, orioles, blue jays, terns, owls and incredibly even some small mammals were used to "decorate" women's hats, proving just how bizarre women and "fashion" can become! The Audubon Society's founder, George Bird Grinnell, was not your typical animal activist. He published "Forest and Stream" a hunting and fishing journal and was himself a big-game hunter. But the senseless, unmitigated slaughter of birds for their feathers disturbed even the most avid of hunters. Grinnell was able to attract thousands of followers which led to the production of an independent publication entitled "Audubon Magazine" in honor of the renowned bird illustrator John James Audubon. Several years later influential Boston socialite Harriet Hemenway decided to take her own stand against the still-rampant practice of plume hunting. She and a cousin scoured the Boston Blue Book, an index of the city's social elite, marking names of fashionable women who dressed in plumes and inviting and persuading them to join a society for the protection of birds. Hemenway united the ladies with naturalists and amateur ornithologists; the group called itself the Massachusetts Audubon Society. By the turn of the century, the society had expanded across the country, unified under a national committee and encouraged federal and state legislation against plume hunting. The Audubon Society helped create the first Federal Bird Reservation which ultimately led to the formation of the National Wildlife Refuge System. The Audubon Society was instrumental in the passage of laws banning the sale of feathers of native wild birds and also of the Federal Migratory Bird Treaty of 1918 which enacted a widespread network of federal laws protecting birds. If not for the actions of the original Audubon Society members, countless species of birds and waterfowl would have become extinct in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including the American and snowy egrets, and many species of terns and gulls so familiar to us in the Southern California area.