

## WESTERN BIRD PHOTOGRAPHERS

### A PHOTO ESSAY BY RAY EKSTROM\*

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Ray Ekstrom became a naturalist, birdwatcher, artist and photographer beginning in the mid-1940s in rural Siskiyou County, California, where anyone who pursued nature study was regarded as suspect. For years Ray was a closet birdwatcher, hiding his binoculars whenever a car would pass. He began photographing his surroundings at an early age and in 1965 tried his first bird photographs.

Today considered Siskiyou County's premier photographer and certainly one of northern California's top wildlife photographers, Ray has worked mainly in central and coastal northern California, southern Oregon and the Canadian Rockies. He has exhibited at many photo shows in northern California.

Ray says, "I do not sit patiently in a blind. My method of photography is more that of an opportunist. A camera is always within reach while I bird the Klamath Basin and other spots of interest in Siskiyou County, although of late I have developed the regrettable habit of leaving it home while hiking. Photography was my number one hobby for years, but lately it has dropped to number two, with birding taking over the top rung. Many of my photos are for verification of unusual birds or for use as models for sketching, a hobby I hope to revive later in life.

"With people coming to the West in increasing numbers, hunting with a rifle or shotgun could become a sport for the affluent only. Some from the hunting camp are now buying cameras with powerful telephotos and, I'm sure, enjoying photography at least as much as, if not more than, hunting. They're finding it takes far more skill to get an attractive photograph than to simply drop the animal with a rifle shot. If there were no challenge, nature photography would not be so satisfying a hobby. How many attractive photos of flying waterfowl does one see? I see very few. Photography, unlike hunting, is not limited to seasons. There is no buck to pack out, no duck to pluck, just little specks in your transparencies to puzzle over and sometimes even to admire.

"The ratio of useable to throw-away photos is interesting. Anyone intercepting a box of my slides before it reached me would surely wonder how I could ever put on a photo display. Let's be thankful for the rejects. They are humbling reminders of our limitations and serve as examples to improve upon."

The following photo essay and the White Pelican photo on page 180 are samples of Ray's work. Two of his best color photos will appear on the covers of future issues of *Western Birds*. His equipment includes three Nikon bodies, a variety of Nikkor lenses and a Hasselblad with several lenses and a strobe flash.

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Black-backed Three-toed Woodpecker (*Picoides arcticus*), July 1977, Antelope Creek near Tennant, eastern Siskiyou County, California. Nikkormat FTN, 200 mm lens, f/8. K-64 film.



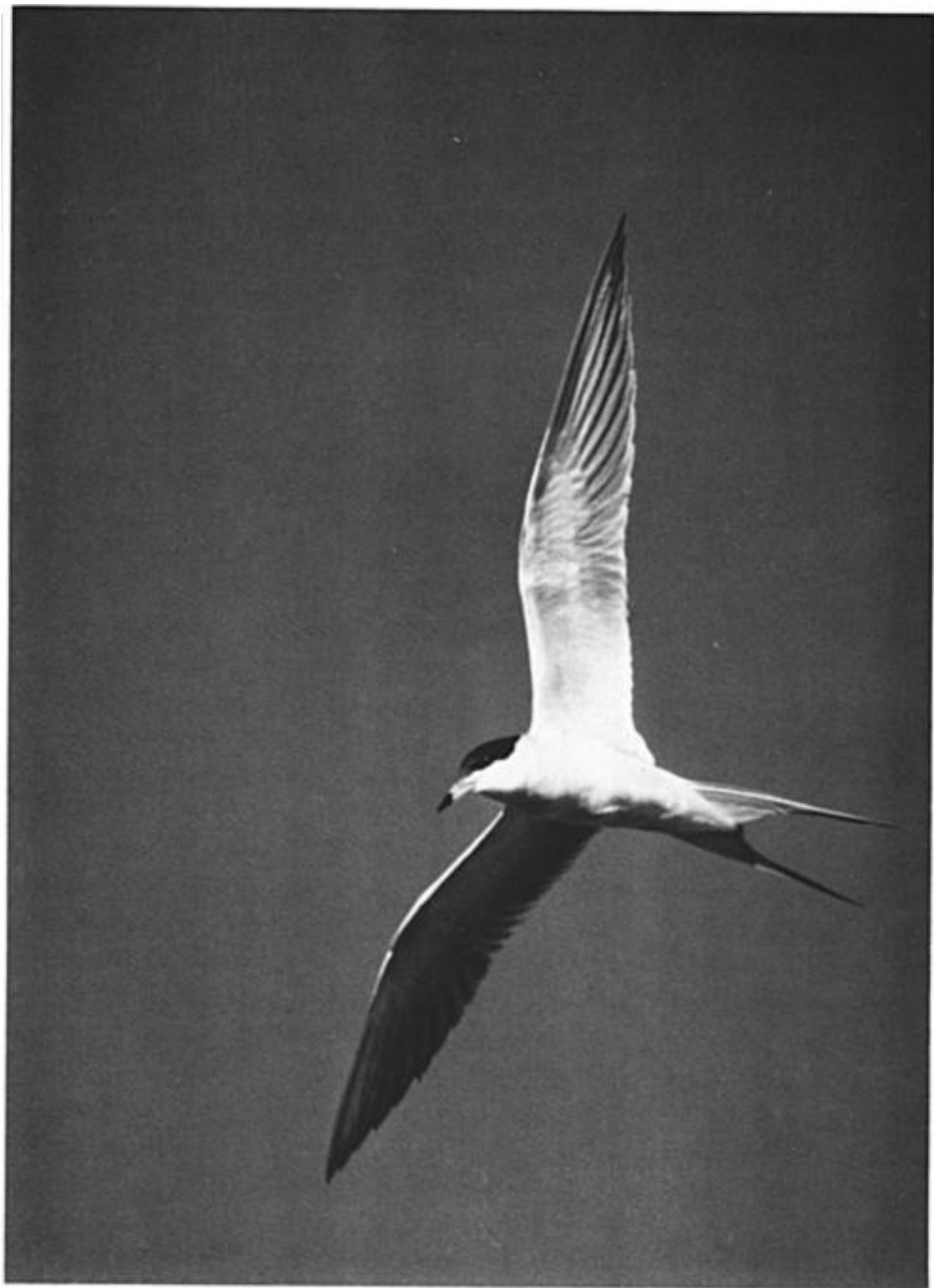
Screech Owl (*Otus asio*), autumn (probably November) 1973, Shasta Valley near Yreka, Siskiyou County, California. Nikkormat FTN, 200 mm lens with flash, f/8, K-64 film.



Canada Geese (*Branta canadensis*), spring (April or May) 1976, Grass Lake on Highway 97, Siskiyou County, California Nikon, 400 mm lens, f/5.6 at 1/500 sec., K-64 film



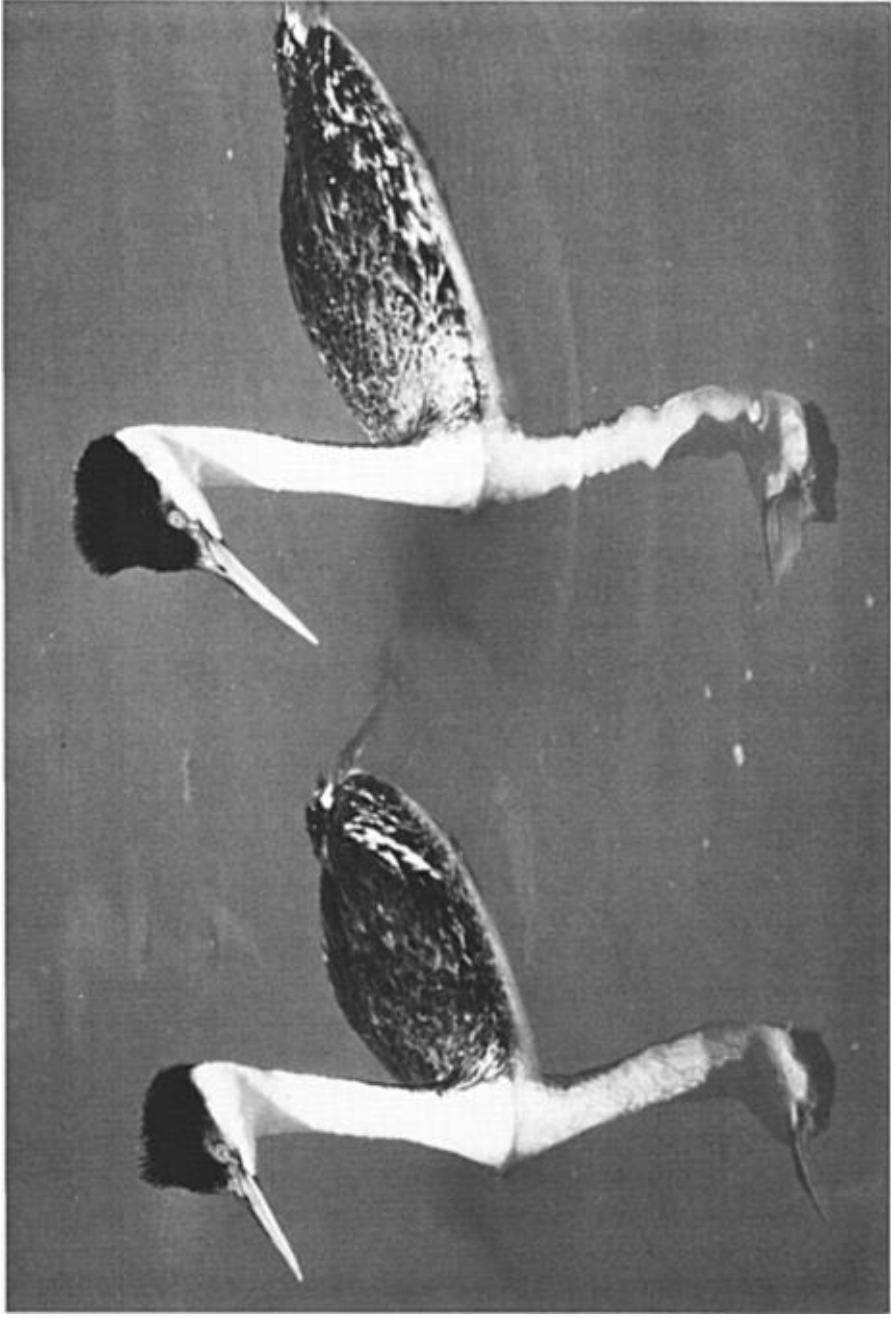
Pied-billed Grebes (*Podilymbus podiceps*). 6 February 1976. Lower Klamath NWR, Siskiyou County, California. Nikon, 400 mm lens, f/5.6 at 1/250 sec., K-64 film



Forster's Tern (*Sterna forsteri*). 27 May 1975. Lower Klamath NWR, Siskiyou County, California. Nikon, 400 mm lens, f 5.6 at 1/500 sec., K-64 film.



Yellow-headed Blackbird (*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*), 16 June 1977, Lower Klamath NWR, Siskiyou County, California. Nikon, 400 mm lens, f/5.6 at 1/250 sec., K-64 film.



Western Grebes (*Aechmophorus occidentalis*), 17 May 1975, Lower Klamath NWR, Siskiyou County, California Nikon, 400 mm lens, f/5.6 at 1/250 sec, K-64 film