Hunter changes sports to become avid bird counter

By Carlos Alcalá, Sacramento Bee

Tim Fitzer is one busy bird counter.

During the Audubon Society's annual Christmas counts this year, Fitzer is doing eight all-day counts in locations ranging from the Suisun marshes to the Sierra and from Lincoln down to Stockton.

Some folks last only half a day on counts, said Ed Harper, another prominent local birder. Three is the upper limit for most.

Eight? "That's quite a few," Harper said.

A single count – especially in areas where waterfowl gather – may turn up more than 80 species and tens of thousands of birds.

But Fitzer's relationship with birds started with shooting, not counting.

Fitzer, the duck hunter, was sitting in a blind in the early 1970s when a common yellowthroat flew up beside him.

Read the whole story

Vehicle registration fee may

fund Calif. state parks

By Jim Sanders, Sacramento Bee

California motorists would get free year-round admission to all 278 state-owned beaches and parks under a proposed new ballot initiative, but here’s the catch: It would cost them.

The contradiction stems from a carrot and stick approach â€“ motorists’ annual vehicle registration fees would rise by $18 but they no longer would be charged for day use of parks.



Cross country skiing is a favorite winter activity in Tahoe area state parks. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Much of the $500 million expected to be generated each year would be used to bolster park funding and maintenance.

Read the whole story

History lesson on KTHO radio

Learn a little history about Lake Tahoe by listening to KTHO AM-590/FM-96.1 on Saturday at 10am when local historian Dave Borges talks all things history. It’s also online at www.kthoradio.com.

Lake Tahoe ski report, Jan. 1



Happy New Year! Here is the ski report for the first day of 2010 from Curtis Fong, the Guy from Tahoe.

Olympic torch runner gearing up for historic honor

By Susan Wood

Few people would admit to improving their skiing ability without the use of their legs.

But Bill Bowness isnâ€™t just anybody. The 51-year-old disabled skier from Truckee turned a tragic car accident in 1977 that rendered him a paraplegic into an opportunity â€“ a journey of sorts in the building of personal character and a

rewarding career.

â€œIâ€™m a much better skier than I ever was standing up,â€ he said of his accomplishment. â€œItâ€™s hard to know what my life would have been like (if not for the accident).â€



Bill Bowness

He runs the adaptive skiing program at Alpine Meadows, where he started as a student, later a volunteer and now serves as an instructor. His latest venture involves being asked to run the commemorative torch from his home ski resort to the base of Squaw Valley, which is marking its 50th anniversary of hosting the Winter Games with a slew of activities for Olympic Heritage Week.

The torch relay slated for Jan. 8 starts at Sugar Pine Point State Park and is scheduled to arrive at Alpine about 1:15pm. It ends at the Olympic Village at the base of Squaw Valley at about 3:30pm, when an Opening Ceremony is set to commence.

Bowness told *Lake Tahoe News* he plans to cherish the 1.5-mile run. He figures it will last 10 minutes.

â€œThis is another huge milestone in my life. As it gets closer, I expect to get very excited,â€ he said.

This isnâ€™t the first time the Winter Olympics have placed Bowness in the spotlight. The paralympian represented the United States in Lillehammer, Norway, during the 1994 Games. He took home three medals in the four events he competed in: downhill, giant slalom, slalom, and super-G.

â€œThat was an awesome experience,â€ he said.

Bowness insists heâ€™s never missed the Winter Olympics â€“ even though he enjoys summer sports, too. He and his wife split their time between Truckee and a small town near Jackson, Miss., where he teaches at a water ski school. Unlike many snowbirds, the couple leaves the Lake Tahoe region in the summer because they prefer it here in the winter.

â€œItâ€™s white gold around here,â€ he said.

Although Bowness knows his work involves play, heâ€™s not afraid to get down to business when he needs to. He lives up to his commitments with zeal and looks forward to the latest â€œhonorâ€ that is in some respects quite nostalgic.

â€œIâ€™m looking forward to giving back to a sport that has taken care of me,â€ he said, adding even more affection for his Truckee community.

Bowness and all the spectators arenâ€™t the only ones enthusiastic about the upcoming festivities.

Linda Williams, project manager for the Squaw Valley Ski Museum Foundation and Olympic Heritage week executive producer, sounded giddy when she pointed out how the commemorative torch participants â€œwill each be carrying a replica of the 1960 Olympic torch.â€

More details on the activities will be featured in an upcoming article focusing on the Olympic Heritage Week organized by Squaw Valley and affiliates.

Publisher’s note: *Read about Olympic hopeful Andy Finch on Jan. 3.*

Wunderlust returns to Squaw

Wanderlust 2010 has been officially scheduled for July 29-Aug. 1 at Squaw Valley.

Opportunities to study with with great teachers will be expanded.

Yoga and music lineup will be announced this month, with tickets on sale shortly thereafter.

For more information, click here.

Guided snowshoe on South Shore

Explore Tahoe and Tahoe Rim Trail Association join forces for a guided snowshoe hike.

When: Jan. 8 at 9am

Where: Kingsbury North trailhead at the end of Andria Drive off Kingsbury Grade.

What: Easy to moderate 3-mile loop to Castle Rock lookout.

Who: Adults and children over 10 years (must be accompanied by an adult).

Cost: Free. Refreshments provided.

All participants must bring snowshoes.

Sign up: www.programs@tahoerimtrail.org or call Explore Tahoe

at (530) 542.4637.

Winter camping skills class

Tahoe Rim Trail Association is hosting an overnight trip to learn winter camping skills. The weekends are Jan. 16-17 or Feb. 27-28, weather permitting.

The trip will teach winter travel methods and considerations, hazards and snow-camping techniques, specifically packing for snow travel, basic orientation skills and winter travel hazards.

Must be 21 or older. The group will be limited to 12 people.

For more information, call(775) 298-0238 or email programs@tahoerimtrail.org.

Alphabet soup of new California laws

By Steve Wiegand, Sacramento Bee

Here’s an alphabet soup look at some bills that become law on Jan. 1, whether we like them or not:

A is for alligator. SB 609 will extend from 2010 until 2015 a law that allows the importation of products made with alligator and crocodile parts.

B is for bicycles. SB 527 allows the operation of bikes without seats on state roads, as long as the bike was built that way on purpose.

Read the whole story

Supes consider BMX track in Placerville

By Cathy Locke, Sacramento Bee

A Placerville skate park’s growing popularity among bicyclists has spawned a move to create a separate BMX facility on El Dorado County’s west slope.

BMX riders, however, said they’re surprised and skeptical of the park idea, launched by skateboarders and El Dorado County officials.

Read the whole story