

The Avocet

The Newsletter of the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society

December 1995

Once Along A Creek—Calabazas

by Clysta Seney

1991—I have just moved back to Santa Clara and am looking forward to the SCVAS Christmas Bird Count, a CBC with water. My sector in Arizona was arid and cactus-ridden, but my Santa Clara sector runs along Calabazas Creek between Highway 101 and 237. Our team, led by Ann Verdi, begins at the 101 point and we work our way up the creek. What a start! Pheasant, sora, and kingfisher, right in the heart of Silicon Valley next to the freeway. Further up the creek we find a Blue-winged Teal. There's nothing like a bird count around water.

Since '91, I have frequently come back to this Santa Clara treasure so close to my workplace and home. Adjacent to the creek, Mission College hosts the melodious Western Meadowlarks and the gurgling Red-winged Blackbirds. Red-tailed Hawks, White-tailed Kites and American Kestrels scour the open fields for their daily repast. Burrowing Owls peer out of their squirrel holes—first one, then two and then the whole family. I enjoy the benefits of open space in our Valley.

1995—Calabazas Creek has undergone a water project. The terrain where the pheasant had sequestered itself is bulldozed and graded. The few birds seen in the creek recently have been flocks of blackbirds and the occasional egret. A foot-thick, five-and-a-half-foot tall wall hems in the creek on both sides. Already the inside walls are graffiti-laden. Next to the creek, the City of Santa Clara has approved building the "largest cinema complex in the Valley" and the rolling fields are graded flat and smooth. Hundreds of domestic pigeons have invaded the barren field. Dozens of jackrabbits are huddled in a tiny corner of the field remaining on Mission College property, easy game for predators. Even in this unnatural habitat, I am given an opportunity to watch a natural wonder.

I gaze over the desolate field and my heart aches as a huge Red-tailed Hawk swoops across the scraped and barren land. Where will he find his meals next year, I wonder. No longer

in these fields. But now, with my binoculars focused, I gaze intently at this extraordinarily large raptor and realize this is no hawk. I hurry across the field towards its perch atop the radio tower at the college. As I approach, the bird takes flight and lands on a lightpost near my standing spot. Frozen, binoculars pressed to eyes, I am but 20 yards away.

I feel a tug and a voice says, "Lady, what is that?" A young boy, compact CD player in hand, has paused next to me. "You are so lucky," I whisper, "that is a young Golden Eagle. Would you like to see with my binoculars?" He hands me his CD player (the earphones are still installed in each ear drum) and gazes at the massive bird, who uplifts and sails down to the ground in front of us. The young man follows the eagle's flight and gasps, "He's eating something!" "Yes," I say, "he's having an afternoon feast on rabbit."

As he observes, I tell him about the field, the creek, the eagle, and the birds that used to be here. He listens, and says, "I've seen you here before, and I'm glad I stopped to talk with you, but now I have to go." He hands me my binoculars, and I return his disc player. I wonder, will he ever have a reason to pick up binoculars in Santa Clara again?

Binoculars back in my hands, I watch the fur fly as the eagle tears at the rabbit. As he does, several rabbits scurry past, putting distance between themselves and
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Chapter News

San Jose Christmas Bird Count

The time is drawing near for the annual San Jose Christmas Bird Count, to be held this year on Sunday, December 17. Plan to join us for a full day of birding adventure (rain or shine) as we canvas our count circle from the hills to the bay, from riparian corridors to urban parks, recording all our many resident and wintering birds and hopefully finding a few rarities to add some spice.

All levels of birding experience are needed, and bring your binoculars and a lunch. A fee of \$5.00 per participant covers CBC compilation and publication costs.

To participate in the count, call one of the section leaders listed below.

Section	Leader	Phone
A Alviso	Richard Carlson	415-494-3160
B Fremont Hills	Mary Simpson	408-370-2177
C Calaveras	Kepler Stone	408-263-3395
D Alum Rock	Dave Cook	408-729-7310
E Evergreen	Craig Breon	408-252-3748
F South (Central San Jose)	Clysta Seney	408-261-9431
G South Central (Santa Clara)	Mark Miller	415-967-3429
H Agnew	Grant Hoyt	415-969-7892
I Milpitas	Ann Verdi	408-749-2199
J Berryessa	Harriet Gerson	408-252-6244

Young Audubon is sponsoring section D and we are looking for young birders with lots of energy and enthusiasm. Please call Dave Cook or the office to sign up.

If you have any questions about where you would like to count or about the Christmas Bird Count in general, contact one of the CBC compilers:

Ann Verdi 408-749-2199 daytime or 408-377-8018 evenings
Kathy Parker 408-358-2832

And finally, after the long day of birding and counting, please plan to join us at the Leninger Center in Kelly Park for dinner and countdown beginning at 5:30 pm. For anyone who can help out on the dinner, please contact Jayne at the SCVAS Office at 408-252-3747. For more CBC information, see opposite page, under the Calendar.

Holiday Shopping at the Nature Shop

December 2nd will be our first Audubon Holiday Open House at the Nature Shop at McClellan Ranch Park. It is a chance to visit our facility and shop for your favorite naturalist!

You can visit us throughout December. Our hours are M-F 9 - 5, Sat 10 - 2. As always, we ask you to call ahead on weekdays (meetings & things take us out of the office from time to time). Come shopping with us and support your local Audubon Chapter!

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Chapter Wish List

Image Writer II printer for MacIntosh computers.

Phone/Answering Machine

Cheeseman Special

Through Jan. 1, Doug and Gail Cheeseman are offering \$500 per person off on their charter of an entire Russian ice ship, the Alla Tarasova, Nov. 22 - Dec. 20, 1996 to the Falklands, So. Georgia and the Antarctic Peninsula. This non-smoking expedition has a cost of \$8300 plus airfare of \$994 Miami/Ushuaia, Argentina, after Jan. 1. The Cheesemans are also leading two Monterey Bay boat trips for marine mammals and seabirds, Jan. 20 and 27, from 8 AM - 3 PM, \$50 per trip. Call (800)527-5330 for information.

SCVAS OFFICERS

President	Nick Yatsko	408/247-5499
Past Pres.	Rob Colwell	415/326-2400
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2nd VP	Mary Simpson	408/370-2177
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Rec. Secty.	Elaine Gould	408/448-0622

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Chapter Mgr	Jayne DiCandio	408/252-3747
Environmental Advocate		
	Craig Breon	408/252-3748
Office Fax		408/252-2850

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Bobbie Handen '93-'96		408/356-4263
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Steve Shunk '95-'98		408/297-3654

CHAIRPERSONS

CBC	Kathy Parker	408/358-2832
	Ann Verdi	408/266-2798
The Avocet	Grant Hoyt	415/969-7892
	Laura Lebherz	408/264-0533
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Membership	Vacant	
Hospitality	Gail Cheeseman	

General meetings are open to the public. Board of Directors meetings are open to all members. Call the office at (408) 252-3747 for times and directions.

The Avocet is published monthly (except for July and August) by the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society, 22221 McClellan Rd., Cupertino, CA 95014. Deadline is the 25th of two months prior. Send contributions to *The Avocet*, c/o SCVAS at the above address.

SCVAS is the chapter of the National Audubon Society for Santa Clara County.

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Rare Bird Alert: 510/ 524-5592

December 1995 Calendar

On all field trips carpool and share expenses. Bring binoculars, field guides, warm clothing, lunch (optional on half-day trips) and liquids.

**Denotes Field Trip

Saturday Dec. 2, 9 AM - 5 PM.

Open House at SCVAS in Cupertino. See notice on Pg. 2.

****Sunday Dec. 3, 8:30 AM.**

Half day. Sunnyvale Baylands Park. Leaders: Mary Simpson 408-370-2177 and Ann Verdi. From Lawrence Expwy go N across Hwy 237, turn right at first stoplight into park. Continue on perimeter road to end of parking area. Our first organized trip to this new venue should be good for ducks, gulls, other waterfowl, and raptors.

Wednesday Dec. 6, 7:30 PM.

Well-known Marin County bird photographer Ian Tait will present slides from home and abroad, including Kenya and the Seychelles. Lucy Evans

Baylands Interpretive Center, E. Embarcadero Rd., Palo Alto.

****Saturday Dec. 9, 8:00 AM.**

Half day. Beginners trip to Charleston Slough. Leader: Nick Yatsko 408-247-5499. Take Hwy 101 to San Antonio Rd in Mt. View, exit N on San Antonio to Terminal Way parking area. Ducks, shorebirds, herons, egrets, etc. Emphasis on basics of birding.

****Wednesday Dec. 13, 8:30 AM.**

Half day. Grant Ranch Co. Park. Leader: Alan Thomas 408-265-9286. From I-680 take Alum Rock Ave E, turn right at Mt. Hamilton Rd, go approx 9 miles to park. Meet at Grant Lake parking area 100 yds past park entrance on left. Highlights: wintering ducks, oak woodland birds, possible Golden Eagle. Lunch optional; rain cancels.

Sunday Dec. 17, all day.

San Jose Christmas Bird Count.

Monday Dec. 18, all day. Palo Alto Christmas Bird Count.

Tuesday Dec. 19, 9:30 AM. The Eve Case Bird Discussion Group will meet at the home of Pat and Jean Dubois, 17150 Buena Vista Ave., Los Gatos 408-395-4264. Topic: Mockingbird.

Wednesday Dec. 20, all day. Mt Hamilton Christmas Bird Count.

Tuesday Jan. 9, 9:30 AM. The Eve Case Bird Discussion Group will meet at the home of Pat and Jean Dubois, 17150 Buena Vista Ave., Los Gatos 408-395-4264. Topic: Chestnut-backed Chickadee.

****Wednesday Jan. 10, 9:00 AM.** Half day. Alviso Environmental Ed. Center. Leader: Lee Lovelady 408-723-4864. Join S.F. Bay Nat'l. Wildlife Refuge Volunteer Naturalist for a walk on the trails along the Alviso Slough. From Hwy 237 going E from Mt. View, go N on First St. into Alviso, right on Grand Blvd to Ed. Center at end of road.

Mt. Hamilton and Palo Alto CBCs

The 19th Mt. Hamilton CBC will be held on Wednesday, Dec. 20. If you enjoy birding the remote areas of the county in unpredictable weather conditions, this count is for you. Long-time Santa Clara County birder Don Schmoldt is the organizer and compiler of this challenging CBC, where the terrain can be rough and the birds scarce, but the camaraderie is always high. Common valley birds like Yellow-rumped Warbler and Chestnut-backed Chickadee may be hard to find, but Diablo Range specialties like Phainopepla, Lewis' Woodpecker, Lawrence's Goldfinch and Prairie Falcon are often found. With rarities like Townsend's Solitaire and Northern Goshawk occasionally showing up, this CBC offers some intriguing possibilities.

The count dinner is at the home of Keith and Lotus Baker, who reside in the highest domicile in Santa Clara County, atop Mt. Hamilton itself. A cozy evening of potluck supper and conversation after the often grueling day's birding is always a treat, and the drive down the mountain (snow is a possibility!) is never dull. If you're intrepid enough to want to sign up for this annual CBC adventure, call Don Schmoldt at 510-215-1910.

Palo Alto?

At press time the Palo Alto CBC remained leaderless, but it is expected to be held on Monday, Dec. 18, following the San Jose CBC. Regular participants should contact their Section Leaders from last year for current information.

Whale-watching on Monterey Bay

All families are invited to join our Young Audubon sponsored whale-watching trip to Monterey Bay on Sunday, January 21. You'll have a golden opportunity to see Gray Whales at the height of their southerly migration. In addition to whales, we expect to see Sea Otters, Sea Lions, pelicans, loons and other seabirds from a Coast Guard inspected and approved commercial vessel. The trip will begin at 10:30 AM from Fisherman's Wharf in Monterey, and will last 1 and 1/2 to 2 hours. Participants should be at the wharf by 10 AM. Adults are \$10, kids 13 - 18 \$8, kids under 12 \$6. Send checks made out to Chris' Fishing Trips to the SCVAS office by Jan. 17 to reserve space. For further details call Allen Royer 408-288-7768.

Field Notes

by Bill Bousman

Pelicans through Waterfowl

A count of 650 **American White Pelicans** on Salt Pond A9 on 21 Oct is the highest number encountered this fall, but far less than recorded last year. Twenty-six **Brown Pelicans** in the same area that day was also a high count for the fall (both MJM). A belated report of a sick or injured **Pelagic Cormorant** seen along Artesian Slough on 18 Aug (VLL) is one of our few records. The bird was later found dead along the slough edge. An **American Bittern** was found again along Coyote Creek across from the Waterbird Management Area (WMA) pond near Coyote Creek Riparian Station (CCRS) on 22 Sep (RWR,FV). Another bird has apparently returned to the Mountain View Forebay as of 31 Oct (KCW). A '**Cackling**' **Canada Goose** found in Crittenden Marsh on 17 Oct (PJM) is of interest as this race is found here only in the wintertime. **Blue-winged Teal** have been observed in good numbers this month with a number of birds found regularly in Adobe Creek in the Palo Alto Flood Control Basin (FCB). A high count of five males and three females was recorded on 14 Oct (LCh) and at least one male remained through 22 Oct (MJM). A pair of birds was seen on Crittenden Marsh on 15 Oct and a single male the same day on Charleston Slough (both MJM). Four **Eurasian Wigeon** were on the Sunnyvale Water Pollution Control Plant (WPCP) ponds on 28 Oct (SCR) where they frequently winter. An imm. **Hooded Merganser** on the Coleman ponds on 22 Oct (AV)

is two to three weeks early for this rare merganser.

Raptors through Skimmers

An **Osprey** on the WMA pond near CCRS on Coyote Creek below Hwy 237 on 2 Oct (WGB) was unusual as was the single bird near the Parkway Lakes CP on 28 Oct (MMR). An imm. **Bald Eagle** along Coyote Creek below Hwy 237 on 23 Oct (RWR,FV) is early for a wintering bird and unusual along the valley floor. Early **Ferruginous Hawks** include an adult in Morgan Hill on 1 Oct and an imm. in San Martin the same day (both

Vagrant warblers and sparrows added excitement to the month.

SCR, HLR). Of the ten **Merlins** reported this month one was of the dark race, *suckleyi*, seen at Crittenden Marsh on 10 Oct (PJM). A **Black Rail** seen in the Alviso Marina on 10 Oct (CKS) was highly unusual. **Snowy Plovers** observed this month include 11 in Salt Pond A3N and another bird in Salt Pond A3E, both on 14 Oct (MJM). A single **Lesser Yellowlegs** on Crittenden Marsh on 15 Oct (MJM) and 17 Oct (PJM) was the only one found this month. **Pectoral Sandpipers** were seen on the WMA pond near CCRS during October with a peak of 22 on 22 Oct (MMR). Always rare was the **Sharp-tailed Sandpiper** seen at the Palo Alto Baylands on 14 Oct (RL). A single **Wilson's Phalarope** has remained at the WMA pond along Coyote Creek throughout the month (v.ob.),

which is quite unusual. The 1st-winter **Franklin's Gull** found at the Sunnyvale WPCP last month has stayed here throughout October to the delight of many observers. Our **Black Skimmers** spent most of the month in Charleston Slough and were last seen on 23 Oct (PMB).

Sapsuckers through Sparrows

An adult male **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** was found in Ed Levin CP on 21 Oct (SCR) and has been seen through the end of the month. This is undoubtedly the same bird that lived here this past winter. A '**Western**' **Flycatcher** found along Stevens Creek at L'Avenida on 28 Oct (CIW) is very late. Also late were **House Wrens**, with one at the Sunnyvale WPCP on 3 Oct (SCR) and one along Coyote Creek below Hwy 237 on 8 and 21 Oct (MJM). Adding to these lingerers were a **Blue-gray Gnatcatcher** at the Jasper Ridge Biological Reserve on 6 Oct (SCR,TS) and one on Page Mill Road in Los Altos on 23 Oct (MMR). A male **Phainopepla**, always rare, was found at the edge of the Santa Cruz Mountains near Uvas Canyon CP on 10 Oct (SCR).

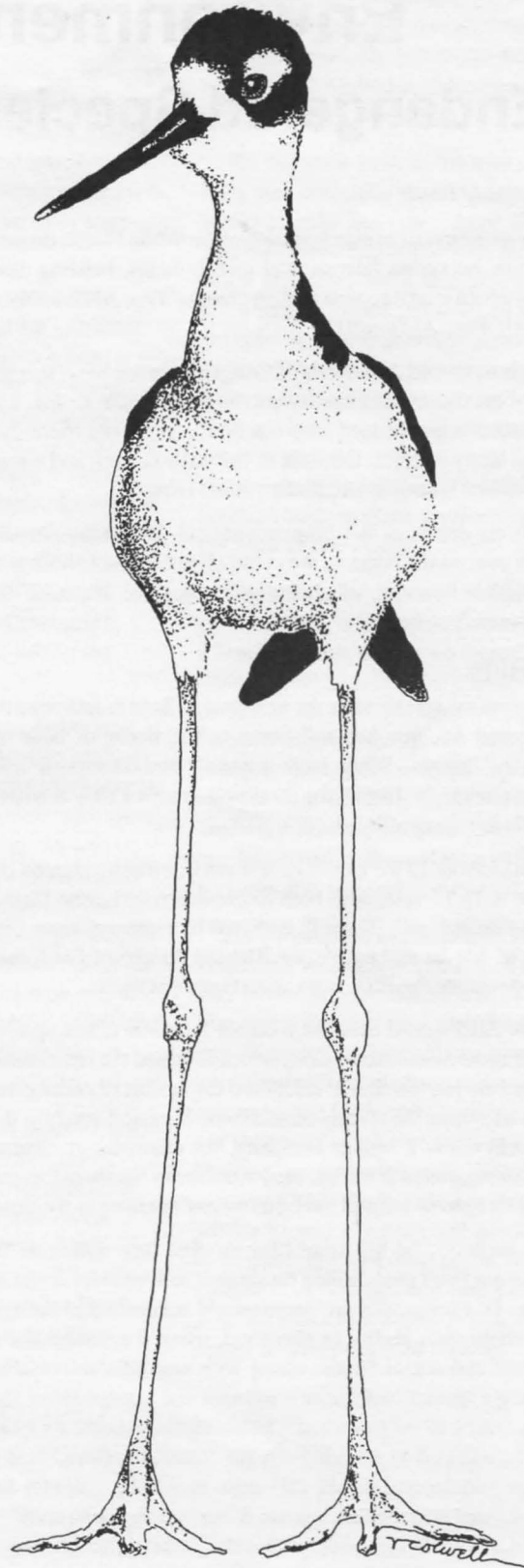
A **Yellow Warbler** in the fennel along Adobe Creek in the Palo Alto FCB on 14 Oct (MJM) was late. Among our vagrant warblers a single **Palm Warbler** was found in the Palo Alto FCB on 10 Oct (PJM). A **Black-poll Warbler** found at the Palo Alto Water Quality Control Plant (WQCP) last month was seen through 1 Oct (DSt,MJM) and another bird was nearby in the fennel patch at the Palo Alto Baylands 1-2 Oct (SCR,MJM,DSt,TGr). These represent 6th and 7th county records. It was a banner month for **Black-and-White Warblers** with an imm. at Stanford on

2 Oct (SCR) and another imm. banded at CCRS on 21 Oct (LCh) and seen there on 29 Oct (MJM) and 30 Oct (MMR). Another **Northern Waterthrush** has shown up this fall— a bird found along Stevens Creek near L'Avenida in Mountain View on 8 Oct (LCh *et al.*) has been seen on a number of occasions through 20 Oct (LCh). A male **MacGillivray's Warbler** at Stanford on 2 Oct (MJM) is always a good find for the fall passage.

An imm. **Blue Grosbeak** banded at CCRS 16 Oct (VS-Y *fide* LCh) rounds out our exceptional Blue Grosbeak year and is the latest bird we've had. It's been a marvelous *Spizella* October. A late **Chipping Sparrow** was found on the ITT lands in Palo Alto on 11 Oct (SCR). More exciting, however, was a **Clay-colored Sparrow** in the fennel at the Palo Alto Baylands on 6 Oct (SCR) and a second bird along the wastewater outfall there on 15 Oct (SCR,HLR); these are the 8th and 9th county records respectively. A **Brewer's Sparrow** was in the same fennel patch on 3-7 Oct (SCR,LCh) for the 6th county record and capped the month for this genus. Also good sparrow finds for the month were a **Vesper Sparrow** in the same fennel patch at the Palo Alto Baylands on 6 Oct (SCR) and another bird in fennel at the Sunnyvale WPCP on 10 Oct (PJM). A late **Grasshopper Sparrow** was at Jasper Ridge BR on 6 Oct (SCR,TS). Early **White-throated Sparrows** include one near Skylonda on 20 Oct (GGH), a second along Coyote Creek above Hwy 237 on 21 Oct (SCR), and a third along the creek below Hwy 237 on 29 Oct (SCR *fide* MMR).

Observers: Bill Bousman (WGB), Phyllis Browning (PMB), Les Chibana (LCh), Tom Grey (TGr), Valarie Layne (VLL), Rosalie Lefkowitz (RL), Mike Mammoser (MJM), Peter Metropulos (PJM), Bob Reiling (RWR), Mike Rogers (MMR), Heather Rottenborn (HLR), Steve Rottenborn (SCR), Chris Salander (CKS), Vicki Silvas-Young (VS-Y), Tom Sisk (TS), Dick Stovel (DSt), Frank Vanslager (FV), Ann Verdi (AV), Clark White (KCW), and Claire Wolfe (CIW).

RARITIES: Please drop me a note – Bill Bousman, 321 Arlington Way, Menlo-Park, CA 94025



Black-necked Stilt by Rita Colwell

Environmental Action News

Endangered Species, Endangered Values

by Craig Breon

Environmentalists march in front of the White House, dressed as salmon, peregrine falcons, and grizzly bears, hoisting aloft banners which read the same as their chants, "Free Al Gore! Free Al Gore!! Free Al Gore!!!"

Meanwhile, in the bowels of Congress, rumor has it that the future of the California gnatcatcher, the San Joaquin kit fox, and blunt-nosed leopard lizard may rest on the years-old friendship between Terry Maples, Director of the Atlanta Zoo, and a man named after a harmless amphibian, Newt Gingrich.

Ah, the drama of Washington politics! With a presidential election year on the horizon, we could all just sit back in front of CNN with a beverage of choice and enjoy the show....if the stakes weren't so high.

The Bills

Sometime shortly after the new year, bills to reauthorize the Endangered Species Act will come to the floors of both the House and Senate. While teeth gnashing and backroom deals may yet change the face of the proposals, here's a look at what's currently being considered.

On October 12 the House Resources Committee cleared HR 2275 by a 27-17 vote, with both Republicans and some Democrats voting in favor. The bill, authored by representatives Don Young of Alaska and native son Richard Pombo of California, would devastate the ESA from several perspectives.

HR 2275 would overturn a recent Supreme Court opinion (known as the *Sweet Home* case) which affirmed the responsibility of private landowners to safeguard the habitat of endangered species as well as the species themselves. If passed into law, this bill would allow a timber company, for example, to clearcut known nesting sites of the marbled murrelet in Northern California and Oregon so long as the birds weren't nesting at the time.

In addition, the bill would for the first time authorize the government to set goals falling far short of full recovery for listed species. In a sense, this provision would acknowledge outright the government's ability to play God, using a combination of economic and social factors along with scientific information regarding a species to determine whether and to what extent that species ought to be protected. Bald eagles and grizzly bears could be allowed to vanish from the lower 48 states because remnant populations would still exist in Alaska. Winter run chinook salmon in the Sacramento River and the Delta could be allowed to slowly diminish so that the water rights of Central Valley farmers could remain largely intact.

Under the bill, private property rights would be given greatly enhanced status. As covered in the *Avocet* previously, the bill

would require the government to compensate a landowner if any part of their property were reduced in value by %20. In a time of shrinking federal budgets, this provision alone could render the ESA ineffective.

On the Senate side, Idaho Senator Dirk Kempthorne has introduced a bill which, despite being touted as a more compromising position than Young/Pombo's, nonetheless contains many of the same provisions. The bill, S 1364, and two companion bills would provide tax incentives for landowners to conserve species. This notion has long been supported by environmentalists as a way to ease the burden of species protection on small landowners. However, the remainder of the bill focuses on procedural and substantive changes to the ESA which, like the House bill, would hasten the demise of hundreds of species. As environmentalists have described them, the Young/Pombo bill is "unmitigated disaster" while the Kempthorne bill is simply "mitigated disaster."

As always, only you can prevent forest fires or radical anti-environmentalists. Writing or calling your local representatives is a good start. While most of our reps vote consistently for endangered species protection, constant reminders help to focus their attention on an issue. In addition, the two most important points of influence for us may be Senator Feinstein and President Clinton, both of whom have wavered on endangered species issues in the past. Finally, we always welcome new members to our Armchair Activists program. This service gives you all the information needed to write one effective letter per month on the latest environmental issues. To sign up, simply leave your address with our Environmental Advocate at (408) 252-3748.

The Endangered Species Act has been a resounding success at slowing the rate of habitat degradation for the last two decades. It remains unique amongst environmental legislation in that it acknowledges the rights of non-humans to exist and even flourish alongside us. Like the Emancipation Proclamation or the 19th Amendment to the Constitution (giving women the right to vote) before it, the ESA stands as a milestone in our humanity.

Special Reminder

On December 15 there will be a special election for the 15th Congressional District. The area includes Santa Clara, parts of west and south San Jose, Saratoga, Campbell, Los Gatos and half of Santa Cruz County. This seat was formerly held by Norm Mineta, a strong environmentalist. While the Audubon Society does not endorse specific candidates, we encourage you to think about the conservation issues at stake and, above all, VOTE!

Paddling With The Birds

by Steve Shunk

It was a gorgeous morning and the colorful kayaks painted a rainbow across an obscure little beach on the Salinas River. The biting coastal breeze had given way to a warm sun, and we shed our warmest layers early. We knew we were in for a good day when suddenly the Red-tailed Hawk, which we swore was a mimic Steller's Jay, became two red-tails that launched from their hidden perch in the cypress beneath the trestle. Their awesome greeting was a sign of the day ahead.

Twelve of us gathered on Nov. 5 for an Audubon kayak and birding adventure into the Salinas River National Wildlife Refuge. Roger and Jan of Eskape Sea Kayaking were our hosts. As we carried the boats to the river, two adult Black-crowned Night Herons watched from the opposite bank and a Belted Kingfisher chattered its way up and down the corridor. While the more seasoned kayakers quickly regained their "sea hips," Roger and Jan instructed the new paddlers in the fine art of kayak entry. Three onlookers crossed the trestle above us and flushed a roosting Barn Owl; it quickly vanished into the willows. We paddled in circles for a bit, and two immature night herons flushed from their secret spot. Once all the boats were afloat, the flotilla paddled downstream. As we rounded the first bend, a fierce wind reminded us we were at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.

The breeze successfully strung us out into a quarter mile caravan. Up front, we gathered ourselves on the marshy bank. We rested our paddles and waited with our fists anchored in the thick pickleweed. On the small islets of sand and marsh flora, Willets and Marbled Godwits sat silently with a couple of Dunlins. They chose not to compete with the clamor of the local Killdeer clan. As our party gathered again, we watched a White-tailed Kite defend its claim to a scouting female Northern Harrier. It was a valiant and acrobatic show, but the kite retreated

and the harrier went about her business. A Northern Flicker propped itself on a tall post across the river, and a Red-shouldered Hawk soared low to our north. As we passed them by, the birds began to thicken, and our eyes were glued to the river.

The foraging gulls proved to be more than we bargained for. In front were the Bonaparte's, with winter's black spot behind the eye, foraging ravenously on surface-floating invertebrates. Quickly we picked out Herring and Ring-billed Gulls with wintering Mews and young Westerns. Common Loons were truly common this day with Horned, Eared and Pied-billed Grebes scattered about. Brown Pelicans flaunted a wide range of plumages, with the stunning adults taking the prize.

A couple of us became distracted with a group of Black Scoters trailing some female Red-breasted Mergansers, and we noticed other birders with their binoculars raised intently. As we turned their direction we immediately spotted a Peregrine Falcon, but this was not just your standard fleeting glimpse of the swift, powerful falcon. Over the next hour, we would spot it on one of four good snags, scoping the marshland for snacks, and even ripping into an occasional catch.

As we gathered on the sand-barred mouth of the river, the peregrine launched and we landed for lunch. A short hike over the dune produced Sanderlings and a strange looking Long-billed Curlew which we briefly tried to turn into an ibis. After lunch we headed down to the beach for a

closer look at a gull flock, which produced a large number of California Gulls and our only Glaucous-winged of the day; we wished Rod Norden was there to ID the immatures!

On the walk back to the boats, yours truly was searching through another group of gulls and noticed one of them was different. All white with hidden black primaries and a nice plump breast . . . a Ross' Goose! As if it had just completed a thousand-mile journey, it preened like mad and never budged from its ankle deep spot on the brackish river's edge (the ocean floods the sand bar at high tide). From several angles we watched the awesome Anatid put its feathers back in place until we had to get back in our boats.

Exploring our only unpaddled parcel of the refuge, we picked up avocets and a female scaup, and as we turned to head up-river, an Osprey graced the overhead airways. A White-winged Scoter was seen among the Surf Scoters. The return offered superb comparisons of Clark's and Western Grebes, a fleeting accipiter, and eye-to-eye looks with stilts and both yellow-legs species.

As we paddled to the launch site, the kingfisher welcomed us back. The sun was lower, and the breeze had calmed. The secret kayaker's handshake closed the afternoon, and we all knew we had been treated to something special. We had expected birds and kayaking, but not the treats we shared from our floating viewing platforms. We went our ways with the Pacific sun setting at our backs and a really good day came to an end. We will do it again, this Audubon kayaking thing, and I hope you can join us next time. You won't regret it. Happy winter birding.

Palo Alto Bird Classes

The city of Palo Alto is offering winter birding classes starting this January. Classes are \$65, which includes 10 evening sessions plus some weekend field trips, and are held at Palo Alto High School. Les Chibana is the instructor. Introduction to Birding starts on Jan. 11 and runs on Thursdays; Intermediate Birding starts on Jan. 9 and runs on Tuesdays. Both classes will focus on winter birds of No. California, using slides, literature, recordings, and electronic resources.

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this unexpected predator, but there is no place left to hide. Then my ears perk up—I hear a harsh, repetitive cry and recognize the call of the Red-tailed Hawk. I scan the area, following the sound. Atop a nearby building I spy the red-tail, formerly the king of all he surveyed, protesting the usurper eagle to no avail.

In the pit of my stomach I feel a kinship to the red-tail. Change is coming, it's in the air. And he is the one who must change. I recognize the feeling. It occurs in my workplace and my community. Downsizing, rightsizing, resizing, reinventing, progress, development—whatever you call it, it is change. And for what?

I recall a land use a few miles up the Peninsula. I remember going there in the late 70's. A huge cinemplex in Mountain View. You could take in a little jazz over brunch at Bourbon Street and then shop and go to the movies. I went there a year ago. A couple of movie houses were still open for two-dollar shows, but acres of empty, litter-laden parking lot was the signature piece of that land use.

Today that asphalt-riddled land collects water that cannot percolate through its surface. The water must then

distribute itself through the storm drain systems emptying into our creeks. This process causes the water-carrying capacity requirements of our creeks to increase. This, in turn, results in the kinds of water projects that eliminated the pheasant and kingfisher along Calabazas Creek.

As Joni Mitchell once sang: "You don't know what you've got till it's gone; pave paradise, and put up a parking lot." Today, I make a point to know what my community offers in terms of wetlands, creeks and open spaces. With others who care we work at conserving, preserving and restoring these important bird habitats. I already miss the pheasant, the kingfisher, and the sora on Calabazas Creek. I hope the Santa Clara community continues to keep a gentle and benevolent eye on those Burrowing Owl families left at Mission College.

Thanks to Clysta for this eloquent account of a birder's concern for bird habitat protection in her own back yard. If you share Clysta's passion for birds and their diminishing local habitat, please consider joining like-minded members of SCVAS' Environmental Action Committee. Contact the office at 408-252-3748 for information.—Ed.

Membership: We invite your membership in the National Audubon Society/SCVAS. To join, please complete and mail this form with payment to SCVAS, 22221 McClellan Road, Cupertino, CA 95014.

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