

The Avocet

The Newsletter of the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society

April 1996

'Freaks' Plan Birdathon Blitz!

by Steve Rottenborn

In the spirit of this year's Birdathon theme, habitat enhancement and restoration, one Birdathon team will focus its efforts entirely on the birds using some of the most important habitat in Santa Clara County: the riparian corridor along Coyote Creek. From its headwaters in the Diablo Range to its mouth in Alviso, Coyote Creek runs through a variety of habitat types and itself supports several distinct riparian plant communities. These plant communities are crucial to the survival and reproduction of a number of bird species, providing nesting and roosting sites and supporting myriad insects on which many of these birds feed.

The "Creek Freaks," composed of SCVAS members Mike Rogers, Steve Rottenborn, and Scott Terrill, will focus on

Coyote Creek to demonstrate the high bird diversity supported by the creek and its associated riparian vegetation and to draw attention to the need for protection of these important habitats. On April 23rd, the Creek Freaks will attempt to identify as many species as possible along Coyote Creek. Only those species spotted within 100 meters of the creek will be counted, so the final tally, expected to top 100 species, will truly reflect the avian diversity of the creek and its floodplain.

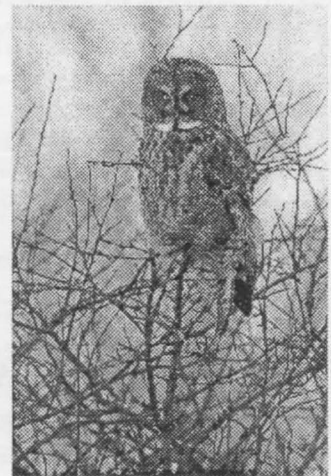
The team will begin trying to find owls and Common Poorwill near Gilroy Hot Springs in the pre-dawn darkness before heading downstream. These upper reaches of Coyote Creek might add Common Merganser, migrant warblers, and possible Hammond's Flycatcher, while Coyote and Ander-

Creek Freak continues on page 4...

Birds in the Lens An Evening of Nature and Bird Photography with Rod Planck Wednesday April 17 Palo Alto Cultural Center Newell & Embarcadero

7:30 PM coffee, cookies and conversation, 8 PM Program begins

Enjoy a guaranteed good program with our nation's premier instructor of nature photography. Rod Planck will be coming fresh from a three-day nature photo seminar at Point Reyes. With a lifelong obsession for photographing birds Rod has applied his art to such places as the remote regions of Antarctica, Alaska, Utah and Michigan. His work has been featured in *Audubon*, *Natural History*, and *Birder's World* as well as in numerous coffee table books. A fanatic gull watcher, Rod has developed a reputation for his knowledge in the identification of North American gulls, and has served on Michigan's rare bird committee. Combining his photos, travels and expertise Rod will share anecdotes about the fun, frustration and excitement of being a nature photographer and a birder. Rod is also a member of the staff for the Cheeseman's upcoming Antarctic trip. This program is a must-see!



*Great Gray Owl (Strix nebulosa)
Winter, Sault Ste. Marie, MI
Rod Planck ©*

Chapter News

Sunshine For Alviso Walk

Spring weather inspired two dozen birders to show up at the Environmental Center in Alviso on January 10. We used the new outdoor pavilion as a sort of blind to look out over New Chicago Marsh and the weedy uplands. The floating pier on Mallard Slough is always a favorite spot and it yielded a large collection of Black-crowned Night Herons waiting for the breeding season to start in the heronry.

Eared Grebes were all over the ponds and many Canada Geese rested in the marsh. We had some beginners in the group, and seven participants brought spotting scopes (including a Questar). Altogether we saw 39 species. The record for the EEC for one week is 62 species (in the summer).

The EEC will hold an open house on April 10 to dedicate the new outdoor pavilion and the remodeled offices in the main building.

— Lee Lovelady

SCVAS Wish List

Typewriter or word processor

Macintosh Imagewriter 2

Bluebird houses

A special thanks to Karin Zimmerman for donating an answering machine to SCVAS.

Nature Shop

To celebrate the return of our migratory birds, the nature shop has 10% off all bird feeders and bird seed. Come by and pick up an oriole feeder or a window feeder and enjoy some up-close birdwatching!

*A donation was made in
memory of Gaylord Androes
by Hal & Mary Plimpton*



*Great Blue Heron (Ardea herodias)
Big Cypress National Preserve, Fla
Rod Planck ©*

Wildflower Show

The Santa Clara Valley Chapter of the California Native Plant Society and the Ornamental Horticulture Department of Foothill College are co-sponsoring a wildflower show on Saturday-Sunday April 20-21 at Foothill College, 12345 El Monte Rd. in Los Altos Hills from 10 - 4 each day. A native plant sale will be held in the patio area near the bookstore, and guided walks to the campus native hill plant collection will be offered in the afternoons. For information call Alfred Butner at (415) 493-4595.

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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

April 1996 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

Wednesday Apr. 3, 7:30 PM.

Bay Area Bird Photographers. Mike Danzenbaker & Lee Hung will present a slide show on the birds of Tikal, an archeological site and national park in Guatemala. Lucy Evans Interpretive Center, E. Embarcadero Rd., Palo Alto.

Saturday-Sunday Apr. 6-7. No events scheduled. Happy Easter!

Tuesday Apr. 9, 9:30 AM.

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: Black Skimmers.

**Wednesday Apr. 10, 8:30 AM.

Half day. Almaden-Quicksilver Co. Park. Leader: Alan Thomas (408)265-9286. Drive S on Almaden Expwy to Camden Ave., R on Camden to McAbee (about 1 mile), L on McAbee and follow to the end where it intersects with Whispering Pines. Moderate walking. Woodland species. Lunch optional; rain cancels.

Saturday Apr. 13, 11 AM -3 PM.

3rd Annual Environmental Science Fair, Sunnyvale Community Center. ESF Projects from 4th -7th grade students in Santa Clara County will be on display as well as displays and programs from local environmental groups. Call (408)730-7717.

**Saturday Apr. 13, 7:00 AM.

Half day. Early bird outing at Grant Ranch Co. Park. Leader: Grant Hoyt (415)969-7892. From Hwy 101 or I-680 take Alum Rock Ave. E, then right on Mt. Hamilton Rd., approx. 9 mi. to park. Meet at lake parking lot, 100 yds. past park entrance on left. Waterbirds, raptors, swallows, and a variety of spring migrants.

Saturday Apr. 20. Earth Day.

Do something for the planet! See notice below.

**Saturday Apr. 20, 8:00 AM.

Half day. Jasper Ridge Biological Preserve, Stanford University. Leaders: Bill and Jean Clark, Winkie Lenihan, Bob Buell. Limit 40 participants by reservation only. Call Clarks (415)424-4371. \$5 per person fee. Meet at Preserve Main Gate (not Whiskey Hill Gate). Gates open 7:40 to 8:10 only. From I-280 take Sand Hill Road west, 2 miles to main gate on left. Spring birds and beautiful wildflowers of this private ecological preserve. Moderately strenuous walking, 2-3 miles. Lunch optional. Trip goes rain or shine.

Sat-Sun Apr. 20-21. 10 AM-4 PM.

The California Native Plant Society WildFlower Show at Foothill College, 12345 El Monte Road, Los Altos Hills. For more info call Alfred Butner (415)493-4595.

**Wednesday Apr. 24, 9:00 AM.

Half day. Stevens Creek Park. Leader: Roxie Handler (408)730-1745. Meet at first parking lot (Chestnut Picnic area). From I-280 go S on Foothill Blvd. (becomes Stevens Canyon Rd) 2.1 miles to entrance on left. Highlights: Spring nesting birds.

****Saturday Apr. 27, late evening** owl walk with John Mariani at Montebello OSP. Limit 12 participants. Call leader at (408)997-2066 to reserve space.

**Sunday Apr. 28, 8:00 AM.

Birdathon! Join Nick Yatsko (408)247-5499 and Rod Norden for the annual "Uncommon Loons" big day fundraiser for SCVAS. Meet at Arastradero Preserve (I-280 to Page Mill Rd, west 1/2 mile to Arastradero Rd, right 1/2 mile to parking lot). The group will bird here and Palo Alto Baylands area until 100 species are found (or until Nick and Rod render the group helpless with their 'loony' sense of humor!) Donation suggested.

**Saturday May 4, 8:00 AM.

Full day. Mines Rd/Del Puerto Canyon. Leader: Don Schmoltdt (510)215-1910. Meet at Nob Hill Market parking lot in Livermore. From I-580, take N. Livermore Ave, go south through downtown area then llok for grocery store parking lot on left (approx 7-8 blocks). Highlights include possible Lawrence's Goldfinch, Phainopepla, Lewis' Woodpecker and spring migrants. Bring full tank of gas. Carpooling strongly encouraged!

Saturday May 11, International Migratory Bird Day. Join Audubon, CCRS and The San Francisco Bay Wildlife Refuge for a day of celebration! Look for details in your May newsletter.

Tuesday May 14, 9:30 AM. 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: Jaegers.

Clean-Up For Earth Day

SCVAS and Coyote Creek Riparian Station join forces on Earth Day, April 20, to rid Guadalupe River of plastics, tires and tossed household furniture. Meet us at the end of Foxworthy Ave at Old Almaden Rd from 9:30 - 12:30. We will be cleaning a moderately challenging site (not recommended for kids under 12). For information on nine other clean-up sites for Earth Day call the Santa Clara County Park office at (408)354-4902. To sign up for Guadalupe call Jayne at SCVAS (408)252-3747 or Karen at CCRS (408)262-9204.

...Creek Freak continued from front page

son Reservoirs should add a few waterbirds before the team leave the mountains and begins following the creek through the Valley. The portion of the creek around southern San Jose has produced a number of rarities over the years. Here the Creek Freaks will hope for Solitary Sandpiper, lingering Hooded Merganser, Yellow-breasted Chat, or Lawrence's Goldfinch, all of which have been found in this reach in spring. Will the Blue Grosbeak return for its third spring near Riverside Gold Course? Are the Lesser Nighthawks that once nested here gone forever, or might one put in an appearance for the Birdathon?

As the sycamores, oaks, and bays lining the creek in its upstream reaches give way to cottonwood, willow, and box-elder, the Creek Freaks will continue downstream into San Jose. Even in urban and suburban areas, Coyote Creek supports a very high diversity of birdlife, and it is here that the team will find its first Black-chinned Hummingbirds. These urban reaches are infrequently visited by birders, but have recently turned up species like Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Summer Tanager, and Hermit Warbler. Overwintering species may also linger in these areas, adding to the day's list. As the day winds down, the team will search for rarities on the lower portion of the creek, from the tall cottonwood

forests below Montague Expwy. downstream to Coyote Creek Riparian Station. These areas have hosted numerous vagrants in past years, and the Creek Freaks will hope for repeat performances from such species as Dusky and Gray Flycatcher, Calliope Hummingbird, or one of the many eastern vagrants recorded here. Might the Black-and-white Warbler currently overwintering at CCRS linger until the 23rd? Finally, the team will follow the creek to the Bay, adding waterbirds to the list and listening for rails in the tidal marshes as night falls.

Coyote Creek supports the highest quality riparian habitat remaining in the south San Francisco Bay area. Nevertheless, the increasing pressures of urbanization are taking their toll on both riparian vegetation and the birds that depend on this habitat. In order to help protect and enhance riparian habitat along Coyote Creek, SCVAS will donate a portion of the proceeds from this year's Birdathon to Coyote Creek Riparian Station. By assisting other important research and conservation organizations, such as CCRS, SCVAS has been a leader in environmental education, research, and restoration. The contributions of SCVAS members to this Birdathon effort will ensure that SCVAS continues to excel in these areas.

1996 Birdathon Teams

WRY WRENTITS	Harriet Gerson, Gail Cheeseman
UNCOMMON LOONS	Nick Yatsko, Rod Norden
HUMMDINGERS	Jayne DiCandio, Sandy Cortright, Heather Rottenborn
SCREAMING KINGFISHERS	Chris Fischer, Charles Preuss, Al Jaramillo
WRONG TERNS	Bobbie Handen, Cindy Handen & Friends
VAGRANTS	Grant Hoyt, Dick Stovel, Mike Mammoser
DOWN & DIRTY BIRDERS	Brad Lowman, Pete LaTourrette
VIOLENT GREENS	Steve Shunk & Friends
SANTA CLARA SWIFTS	Clysta Seney, Ann Verdi
CREEK FREAKS	Mike Rogers, Steve Rottenborn

**Cheeseman's Trips
Benefit Chapter**

Birding Ecuador • March 5-19, 1997

Cost: \$2680, plus airfare. Limit 8. Leaders: SCVAS member Jim Danzenbaker and Juan Carlos Matheus, owner of Coeligena Expeditions and a very experienced bird guide and hummingbird expert from Quito, plus resident naturalists at Sacha Lodge in the Ecuadorian Amazon Basin. 5 days at Sacha Lodge in the Amazon rainforest, then east of Quito in paramo via the Papallacta Pass down to San Isidro and on the west side of the Andes on the Nono-Mindo Road in excellent (but wet) cloud forest birding.

Trinidad & Tobago • Jan. 18-31, 1998

Cost \$2580, plus airfare. Limit: 12. Leader: SCVAS member Edward Rooks, and resident naturalists on both Trinidad and Tobago. January in Trinidad and Tobago, a beautiful time of year, is the beginning of the dry season. Trees begin to flower, hummingbirds and honeycreepers take action; seabirds also nest at this time and non-breeding visitors from the north include a host of shorebirds and warblers. During this adventure with Edward, visit all the major habitats, including 5 nights at the Asa Wright Nature Centre with long forays to the coastal areas.

The Cheesemans will donate \$2000 for each of these trips to SCVAS—**thank you Doug and Gail!!!**

Classes, Classes

Local naturalist and SCVAS Board member Steve Shunk offers this new class for beginning birders—

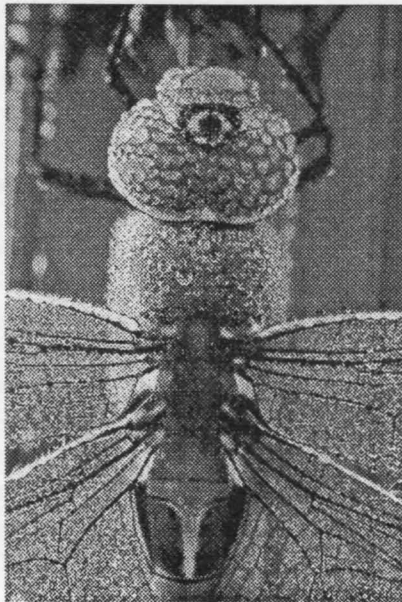
Wings Over Cupertino:

Hundreds of bird species have been observed in and around the Santa Clara Valley, and many of them are right in your own back yard. But getting to know these masters of the wing can often be quite a challenge. Join Steve for this introductory course in bird observation and identification. Steve will discuss binoculars and other birding "gear" as well as techniques to sharpen your powers of observation. Class meets at SCVAS headquarters in Cupertino's McClellan Ranch Park and will explore habitats along Stevens Creek and in the surrounding garden and woodland. *Binoculars are required, but are available to borrow for those who need them.* \$20 fee includes class materials and instruction; proceeds benefit the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society. **Pre-registration is required as space is limited. Only heavy rain cancels.**

Local bird expert Maryann Danielson is offering the following bird class through Sunbeam Ecology Explorations—

Breeding Bird Highlights:

This short class series will focus on breeding bird behavior and identification of local breeding birds. Many birds breed in the Bay Area, both year-round residents and neotropical migrants moving north from Central and South America. Bird family relationships will be reinforced with indoor, hands-on practice time. Five slide lectures on Wed. evenings, 7:30-9:30 PM, starting May 8. Register at the first class. Class fee: \$25; additional fee for three field trips. Little House, 800 Middle Ave., Menlo Park. Call 325-9349



*Close-up of
Damselfly
Dew Covered,
Summer, MI
Rod Planck ©*

for information.

South County residents may be interested in Kent Johnson's class in Santa Clara—

Beginning Birding:

This course introduces you to the common birds of town, upland, and bayshore habitats. We will begin each session in the classroom, studying slides, recordings, and other materials on about 20 bird species, then carpool to a local site and identify birds in the field. Classes meet 6 Saturdays, 1:00 - 5:00 PM, April 6 to May 18 (not April 20th). The class is offered by Santa Clara Adult Education Center and the instructor is Kent Johnson. To register for the class call (408)984-6220; for more information call Kent Johnson at (408)335-0882.

For those looking for more specialized instruction in a beautiful montane setting, consider San Francisco State's Sierra Nevada Field Campus offerings featuring some of Northern California's outstanding birders and naturalists—

- **Bird Identification by Sound with Luis Baptista**
- **Birds of the Sierra Nevada with Dave Shuford**
- **Sierran Bird Banding with Dave DeSante**
- **Cornell's Bird Song Recording with Greg Budney**

The campus is located alongside the scenic North Yuba River and provides an idyllic mountain forest setting for instruction and research in the environmental sciences and other creative disciplines. The nearby fresh water marsh of Sierra Valley, the glaciated Lakes Basin, the snow-capped Sierra Buttes and east slope deserts provide a spectacular variety of organisms and geological features making these field courses a very enriching and educational experience.

All courses are available to the general public. Transferable College Credit is available for all courses. For the many people who just want to increase their understanding of the environment, classes may be taken without a grade by auditing. Whichever you choose, you will agree with past students that these courses are some of the most informative and enjoyable you will ever take.

To receive information, course brochures, or to register, contact Director Jim Steele at (415)338-1571 or 738-1814.

Field Notes

by Bill Bousman

Loons through Waterfowl

February brought an enjoyable influx of loons. One to two **Red-throated Loons** have been found intermittently at Shoreline Lake from 6 Feb (RWR) through the end of the month (m.ob.). Two birds, an adult and immature, were there 25-26 Feb (KCW, MJM *et al.*). Additional birds include one on Salt Pond A2E (PJM) and on Salt Pond A3W (MJM), both on 25 Feb. One to two **Common Loons** have been found foraging on Salt Pond A3W in Sunnyvale with a single bird seen on 19 Jan (RWR, FV), and two on 11 Feb (PJM) and 25 Feb (MJM). **American White Pelicans** sometimes 'oversummer' in small numbers in the South Bay after the large flocks have started back to their breeding grounds in late December or early January, thus five birds seen on Salt Pond A1 on 24 Feb (TGr) were of interest. Much less expected were sightings of a single **Brown Pelican** at the Sunnyvale Water Pollution Control Plant (WPCP) on 19 Jan (RWR, FV) and 16 Feb (AME). There are only two previous late January or February records for this species in the county. One to two **Cattle Egrets** have been found irregularly in the vicinity of the Arzino Ranch during the month (v.ob.) with two found there on 24 Feb (MJM). Another bird has been found foraging in the vicinity of the Stevens Creek Mitigation Area next to Shoreline 22-26 Feb (SSh, MS, m.ob.).

The Sunnyvale WPCP **Ross' Goose** has continued to be found regularly during the month with his domestic buddies (m.ob.). As expected, the wintering flock of **Wood Duck** at Almaden Res. has shrunk with eight birds there on 29 Feb (SSh). **Blue-winged Teal** have been found in the Palo Alto Flood Control Basin this month with observations 10-17 Feb (m.ob.). The peak count was of four birds on 16 Feb (AME). A pair was also found on San Jose-Santa Clara WPCP sludge ponds on 26 Feb (SSh, MS). We

Oldsquaw, Ruff, and Heermann's Gull join the still-present Lesser Black-backed Gull as exceptional rarities for February

usually find **Eurasian Wigeon** in the largest numbers in late fall or early winter, but this February has provided unusually high counts. A male on the Sunnyvale WPCP ponds, found earlier in the winter, was seen on 19 Jan (RWR, FV) and 11 Feb (PJM). One to four birds were seen in the outer Palo Alto FCB 11-18 Feb (KCW, MiM, MaM, JoM) with four males on 12 Feb (KCW). Crittenden Marsh and the adjacent Salt Pond A2E have hosted between one and five males 11-25 Feb (m.ob.) with a peak count of five on 18 Feb (MJM). Finally, males on Salt Pond A1 in Mountain View include a single on 23 Feb (PMB) and two on 28 Feb (MJM). The large flock of **Redhead** winter-

ing in the Palo Alto FCB usually declines substantially in numbers in February and this year numbers were down earlier with only two seen there on 28 Jan (PJM). Interestingly, 102 birds were counted on Salt Pond A2W in Mountain View on 22 Feb (SCR) and it seems likely that this is the same group of birds as was seen in the FCB from November to January. One of our wintering male **Tufted Ducks** was seen once again on 11 Feb on the Sunnyvale WPCP ponds (PJM), and a pair was seen there on 17 Feb (MJM). Just as happened last February we had a brief visit of **Oldsquaw** at Shoreline Lake. Two were seen on 25 Feb (KCW) and a single female remained, to the delight of many observers, through 27 Feb. This is the seventh county record of this rare duck. **Barrow's Goldeneyes** have been found in fairly substantial numbers with eight counted on the Shoreline Golf Course ponds on 28 Jan (PJM) and seven on Shoreline Lake on 6 Feb (RWR). Numbers declined after that with birds often missing from the lake. A pair seen on 26 Feb (TGr) is the latest observation. A decade ago, a count of five **Hooded Mergansers** in the county was considered exceptional. This month six were found on Lexington Res. on 5 Feb (SSh), a record high of 38 was seen on Lake Elsmar on 7 Feb (DLSu), and 10 were on the Los Gatos Creek ponds on 10 Feb (RSC). A single female was found in the vicinity of Shoreline and the Palo Alto FCB 10-12 Feb (KCW) and a male on Shoreline Lake 18 Feb through the end of the month (MJM, KCW, AME).

Raptors through Woodpeckers

Two **Osprey** were found at the Sunnyvale Baylands Park on 9 Feb (MiF) and a single bird was at the Ogier Avenue ponds on 12 Feb (DH). An adult **Bald Eagle** was seen at Calaveras Res. on 11 Feb (MJM) where at least one bird has wintered. Two **Ferruginous Hawks**, an adult and an immature, were seen along the Pajaro River east of Hwy 129 bridge on 8 Feb (DLSu). An adult **Rough-legged Hawk** over the foothills east of San Jose on 26 Feb (EA) is our only report this winter. Good numbers of wintering **Peregrine Falcons** continue to be found along the bay shore this month. An immature at the Los Gatos Creek percolation ponds on 10 Feb (RSC) was less expected. A **Wild Turkey** in Saratoga on 29 Feb (HG *fide* LCh) suggests an expansion (or wandering) of the population introduced in the Santa Cruz Mountains.

Lesser Yellowlegs are normally very rare in the South Bay in winter so the presence of a number of birds locally is a surprise. A single bird was found on 19 Jan (RWR, FV) at the Sunnyvale WPCP. A bird has been seen regularly at Crittenden Marsh 11-25 Feb (PJM, m.ob.). A bird found along the Alviso Slough Trail north of the marina on 17 Feb (AME) and 22 Feb (SCR) could be the January Sunnyvale bird, but the one in the Mountain View Forebay 25 Feb (KCW) is, perhaps, different from the Crittenden bird. Two **Sanderling** north of the Alviso marina on 25 Feb (AME) are unusual for the South Bay. The shorebird surprise of the month is clearly the **Ruff** at Crittenden Marsh from 11 Feb through at least 25 Feb (PJM, m.ob.). Detailed descriptions of the bird (PJM, MJM) suggest a first winter female. This is our first record between late December and late April for this bird so recently added to our local avifauna. Al-

though common along the coast, **Heermann's Gull** is very rare in the south bay and a 2nd-winter bird in the Palo Alto FCB on 12 Feb (SG *fide* MMR) is our first February record. The adult **Lesser Black-backed Gull**, present since October, was found once again on 7 Feb (MMR) in Salt Pond A13 at Alviso. Rounding out our rare gulls, an adult **Glaucous Gull** was a treat on Salt Pond A13 in Alviso on 7 Feb (MMR) and a more-expected 1st-winter bird was on Salt Pond A2E in Sunnyvale on 25 Feb (PJM). An immature male **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** was found on 7 Feb (MMR) on Malovis Road at Agnews for our 6th county record. A **Pileated Woodpecker** was heard along Morrill Road above Los Gatos Creek on 7 Feb (DLSu) where this bird has been found on a number of occasions. How soon will it be before the expanding Santa Cruz Mountain population spills over into Santa Clara and provides us our first breeding record?

Flycatchers through Sparrows

The **Eastern Phoebe**, back at Shady Oaks Park in San Jose for its third winter, was seen once again on 11 Feb (MM). A **Canyon Wren** was singing in Alum Rock Park on 17 Feb (AME) and 27 Feb (MMR), where they are occasionally found. A **House Wren** in the same area on 27 Feb (MMR) was believed to be a wintering bird rather than an early arrival. There is no more sensitive indicator of the health of our mountain and hillside streams than **American Dipper** so the report of one on Los Gatos Creek near the Wrights Site on 7 Feb (DLSu) and along Swanson Creek in Uvas Canyon CP on 19 Feb (JG) is of great interest. A **Yellow Warbler** in the vicinity of the Alviso Environmental Education Center on 2 Feb (SCR) and 11 Feb (PJM) is believed to be the bird that has been wintering locally. It has been

an exceptional winter for **Hermit Warblers** in the Santa Cruz Mountains and along the coast (*fide* DLSu) and, thus, it appears that a male along Morrill Road below Summit Road on 7 Feb and a female along Los Gatos Creek the same day (both DLSu), plus a female along Charcoal Road in Upper Stevens Creek CP on 13 Feb (MMR) are part of this winter concentration. A **Black-and-White Warbler** found along the Pajaro River near its confluence with the San Benito River on 8 Feb (DSL) was a good find indeed of this very rare vagrant. A **Grasshopper Sparrow** north of the Pajaro River and east of the Hwy 129 bridge on 8 Feb (DLSu) is only our third winter record for the county. A **Sharp-tailed Sparrow** at the Palo Alto Baylands on 18 Feb (JoM, MaM *fide* LCh) was found on the high tide. **White-throated Sparrows** have been well reported this month with a bird at Stanford 25 Jan-8 Feb (PJM), one in Stevens Creek CP 4 Feb (JH), at least two birds at a Los Gatos feeder through 25 Feb (JD), and three at a Palo Alto feeder 24-29 Feb (K&MS *fide* LCh).

Observers: Ernie Abeles (EA), Phyllis Browning (PMB), Roy Cameron (RSC), Les Chibana (LCh), Jean Dubois (JD), Al Eisner (AME), Mike Feighner (MiF), Harriet Gerson (HG), Jane Glass (JG), Steve Glover (SG), Tom Grey (TGr), Don Helms (DH), Jan Hintermeister (JH), Mike Mammoser (MJM), John Meyer (JoM), Maria Meyer (MaM), Mike Meyer (MiM), Mark Miller (MM), Peter Metropulos (PJM), Bob Reiling (RWR), Mike Rogers (MMR), Steve Rottenborn (SCR), Steve Shunk (SSh), Kendrick & Marion Smith (K&MS), Mark Strasburger (MS), David Suddjian (DSL), Frank Vanslager (FV), and Clark White (KCW).

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

Bird Observatory's 15th Year

by Janet Tashjian Hanson,
Executive Director

This year marks San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory's (SFBBO) 15th year of educational and research activities on the Bay's bird populations. Founded in 1981 by Dr. Richard Mewaldt, Mike Rigney, Peg Woodin, Susan Formenti and others, the Observatory was among the first in a type of organization that has been duplicated all over North America. As a long-time cooperator with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, SFBBO collects, provides and publishes data on local bird populations on the San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge, Cargill Salt lands, Bair Island and other properties. These data are used by land managers and policy makers who make decisions regarding land use and restoration efforts. We educate volunteers who may then become field observers on any of our several long-term or short-term research projects.

San Francisco Bay is particularly important for waterbirds, both resident and migratory. SFBBO's Colonial Waterbird Monitoring Project, in its 15th year, tracks the success of breeding colonies of herons, egrets, gulls, terns, some shorebirds (including

Snowy Plovers), and most recently Black Skimmers. Our heron and egret work in the four South Bay counties is done in cooperation with Audubon Canyon Ranch, whose volunteers cover the four North Bay counties. We continue to monitor the California Gull colony in Alviso, now second in size to the colony at Mono Lake. A highlight of 1995 was our colorbanding of the skimmer chicks, both in Hayward and Mountain View, so that we may understand their dispersal and document their possible return to nest here.

Our Shorebird Surveys take place three times a year, to census wintering populations, plus spring and fall migration peaks; and to document roosting areas. San Francisco Bay has been recognized as a shorebird staging area and stopover point of global importance; during the spring peak, there may be more than one million birds here at one time, as they pause on their way north to their breeding grounds. This underscores the vital importance of the habitat the birds utilize during their stay, which includes mudflat, tidal and diked marshes, and the extensive system of salt ponds and their islands. The survey, in its second year, employs around 50 volunteers per survey and includes aerial surveys of inaccessible areas. The data will

enable us to study long-term population trends and the relative importance of roosting areas during high tides.

During the summer we utilize our large Yukon (inflatable boat) to patrol the South Bay's sloughs for signs of avian botulism. This disease can spread to epidemic proportions if not controlled by the timely collection of diseased or dead birds. Volunteers enjoy a view of the sloughs not readily obtained from the existing trail system.

SFBBO offers classes in advanced birding, including shorebirds, gulls, owls, pelagics and raptors. These sessions cover identification and in some cases instruction in behavior and field techniques. This year we are also sponsoring a trip to Costa Rica in August, led by Dan Keller and offered at an exceptionally good price. We publish a quarterly newsletter, *The Stilt*, that details our activities and offerings. And oh yes, this year's Annual Meeting on September 14th will feature guest speaker Dave Shuford of Point Reyes Bird Observatory, speaking on the Pacific Flyway Project. Dave is also author of the Marin County Breeding Bird Atlas. All are welcome to help celebrate our 15th Anniversary! For more information on any of SFBBO's activities, please call (408) 946-6548.

Audubon On A Roll

The National Audubon Society's Strategic Plan implementation is off to a great start. Ten implementation committees were created last fall with Chapter, Staff and Board representatives. Of those committees, three finalized Action Plans which were approved in December.

The first approved Plan is from the Campaign Implementation Committee. Each Chapter will be asked to help select National Audubon's priority campaigns in the coming months. A selection process has been designed which involves the input of Chapters, councils, staff and NAS Board. Audubon campaigns will have a bird, wildlife and habitat focus, and the criteria established emphasizes this core focus as well as organizational expertise, leadership, impact on issue, fundability, and scientific basis of campaign. Pilot selections for priority campaigns will be completed by the National Convention in June.

The second Action Plan approved is from the Grassroots Implementation Committee. The two major components of

the plan revolve around: Developing an Audubon Leadership Training Program for Audubon's volunteer network, and; Developing a broader base of Audubon Advocates through creation of a pyramid structure with Grassroots Advocates, Volunteer Leaders, and Staff Recruiters.

In the Human Resources Action Plan approved by the Board, a Human Resources Task Force was established to explore and develop ongoing personnel strategies. The plan also highlighted a comprehensive training and professional development program at Audubon as well as orientation process for staff and board.

The most exciting part of Strategic Plan implementation is that as we see these plans completed, they bring fundamental changes in how Audubon operates and focuses its energies. The actions outlined in specific plans are now part of Audubon's structure and will be updated and monitored by the Board, staff departments, and chapter leaders as we move forward into the next century. Audubon is an evolving and growing institution whose greatest resource is people working together.

Once Along A Creek—Saratoga

by *Clysta Seney*
(third in a series)

In November's *Avocet* we looked at the impact of remote development on riparian corridors on Calabazas Creek. Last month we discussed the impact of losing a riparian corridor along San Tomas Aquino Creek to a transportation corridor (San Tomas Expressway). On both creeks habitat loss was profound and we wondered: what happens to the birds and other wildlife who use these creeks? How do you identify a homeless bird?

One way to understand what we have is to census the habitat. In 1993 and 1994 Santa Clara Valley Audubon members volunteered to help conduct a bird inventory of Saratoga Creek sponsored by the Environmental Protection Agency and the Santa Clara Valley Water District through the auspices of Coyote Creek Riparian Station (CCRS). Teams surveyed 34 points, 500 meters apart, from Pierce Road in Saratoga down to where Saratoga Creek joins San Tomas Aquino.

As the Creek Bird leader I was able to walk all the points and participate in surveys at most points. Each of us participating in this survey learned a great deal about the urban impact on our creeks as we surveyed four times a year: Winter, Spring, Summer, Fall.

In the City of Santa Clara houses edge right up to the creek—so do you or don't you count the mockingbird perched on the back fence? What about all those starlings and Rock Doves (pigeons) perched along the electric towers and wires that line the creek? Are those birds using the riparian corridor or the back yards and the power lines? We birders left it up to the scientists to determine how to categorize what we saw while we noted in our records what birds were seen and where. The biologists are still compiling, analyzing and reviewing the data.

What I'd like to share with you here are some simple observations about Saratoga Creek using our experiences during the census. First of all, we noticed that "fence-lined-top-of-bank" creek habitats offered the least diversity of species with the largest population of birds. Here you'd find lots of Scrub Jays, Rock Doves, European Starlings, Northern Mockingbirds, Common Bushtits, American Robins,

House Sparrows, House Finches and Mourning Doves—pretty similar to what you see in your back yard.

Then we noticed that two of Santa Clara's four Saratoga Creek parks, Bowers and Central, were included in the census points. Here the species diversity would increase to include Mallard, Nuttall's Woodpecker, Black Phoebe, Chestnut-backed Chickadee, Cedar Waxwing, Northern Oriole, Western Tanager, and Lesser and American Goldfinch.

Finally, we observed that in areas where the riparian corridor was somewhat preserved and inaccessible, the number of species seen increased dramatically—threefold compared to the fence-lined, top-of-bank scenarios. These vegetated areas were the refuges where Pacific-slope Flycatchers, Olive-sided Flycatchers, Western Wood-pewees, Swainson's Thrushes, Bewick's Wrens, Wrentits, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Orange-crowned Warblers, Townsend's Warblers, Yellow Warblers, Rufous-sided Towhees, and Song Sparrows were found.

In this article we answer the question raised in the second article—how can you tell a homeless bird? The answer is: You can't. The birds either go someplace else or their populations decline or, in worst cases, they become extinct. With over 90% of California's wetlands and riparian habitat gone, there's not very much "someplace else" left!

So in order to know what's happening to our bird populations, birding enthusiasts need to collect records, like we do with Christmas Bird Counts, checklists and County Records, as well as support hard scientific research. And we need to plan for refuges for birds and wildlife, as well as for man, along our precious riparian corridors.

As we move forward in Santa Clara County to create creek trails and to resolve our transportation pressures, it is imperative that Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society continues to speak for the wildlife that use these corridors to ensure that our creeks are not only thought of in terms of man's use, but also in terms of other legitimate users such as migrating and native birds. And we need to respect their need for privacy as much as we value that need in our own species.

Environmental Action News

Eco-Lawyers Convene In Eugene

by Craig Breon

Call this reporting on assignment. I'm sitting in a cafe in Eugene, Oregon where for the next four days I'll be immersed in the University of Oregon's Public Interest Environmental Law Conference. A yearly pilgrimage of lawyers, law students, and activists from around the country—and increasingly from around the globe—come to discuss a dizzying array of issues, from "Environmental Law in Central and Eastern Europe" to "Hemp: Food, Fuel and Fiber for the Future."

There aren't many pretenses towards balanced debate here. Few, if any, corporate representatives are invited to speak, though there have always been rumors that they come incognito to check up on the competition. Participants tend to range from slightly left of your average concerned citizen to those who really do seem to advocate devolution towards Stone Age lifestyles. By Saturday, when the conference peaks at near 2000 people, this area of town swarms with the badges of irreverent environmentalism: homemade sweaters, Birkenstocks of every imaginable hue, and enough beards to make you wonder if there's a contest afoot.

I first came here six years ago, in the midst of my first year of law school. Slightly bored and annoyed at my schooling, I considered dropping out to return to environmental education and organic farming. The conference helped change that. It showed that good work was out there to be had, with or without a law degree. The stories of individual and group efforts inspired and amused. I recall an Indian (Asian) attorney speaking of his struggles to implement a small section of the Indian Constitution that says every citizen has a responsibility to foster a nurturing relationship towards nature. He was mildly successful in his efforts. Generalizing from his experience in a keynote address, he remarked, "No doubt many of you feel that we are simply beating our heads against the wall. I too often agree. In the end, no doubt our heads will be bloodied, but I think we will also have some effect on the wall."

Some of what I'll do here has a direct relationship to my work as Advocate for the chapter. There will be discussions entitled "The Future of the Endangered Species Act," "Influencing Local Officials," and "The U.S. Army Corps Wetlands Policy."

Mainly, however, I come north for the rejuvenation. After sitting through meetings in Silicon Valley (formerly the Valley of the Heart's Delight), where my job calls for reasonableness in the face of those who preach the panacea of perpetual growth, it's nice to sit in a room and feel

relatively conservative.

Day Two

Last night I met a Sierra Club activist who worked in Davis when I was in school there. He has spent the last several years trying to get the Club to take harder-line stances on several issues. Success may be at hand, with a ballot initiative being mailed to all 560,000 members soon asking the question (paraphrasing here), "Shall the Sierra Club advocate for an end to all commercial logging on public lands?" He claims that was John Muir's vision for public lands: no logging, mining, or grazing. Our local Sierra Club chapter, Loma Prieta, has endorsed the initiative. Win or lose, he claims a second initiative is already in the works: "Shall the Sierra Club advocate for the removal of the O'Shaunassey Dam in the Hetch Hetchy Valley and a flow-through breach of the Glen Canyon Dam on the Colorado?" Evidently Hayduke lives.

Perhaps this leads to a cohesive point for this piece of reporting (I, too, was wondering if there was one). Try telling someone or some group of people how you really think things should be. Venture forth with thoughts like, "Maybe the suburbs were a bad idea," or "What if we just started ripping up the concrete in our creeks?" Perhaps you'll find a kindred spirit or two. (*You'll certainly spark a lively discussion or two—Ed.*)

Remember, the Audubon Society began with a few housewives saying, "Maybe we shouldn't wear dead birds on our heads." Think about it.

Audubon Changes Tack on CESA

Speaking of speaking our minds openly, the following just came in from John McCaull at the California Field Office of National Audubon:

For the past two years Audubon has been involved in negotiations with a host of California business, environmental and government interests over the future of the California Endangered Species Act (CESA). During the Fall of 1995 environmental representatives involved in the negotiations traveled around the state meeting with grassroots activists to discuss a specific legislative proposal to amend CESA. The response from Audubon chapters and other groups was "NO!"

As a result of our "tapping the popular sentiment," the National Audubon Society and Sierra Club California have secured a sponsor for a 1996 CESA bill which will clearly define what the environmental community is looking for in the way of "reform" of the law.

At our request, longtime environmental champion Milton Marks has introduced SB 1751, which would plug all the major loopholes which have been carved into CESA in recent years. SB 1751 will do the following:

Ensure that habitat is protected under CESA's prohibition against the "take" of a candidate, threatened, or endangered species

Mandate that any permit to "take" a protected species must include steps that ensure a "net conservation benefit" for all affected species

Strengthen California's Natural Community Conservation Planning (NCCP) Act to ensure that sweeping "habitat coverage" plans in Southern California for the coastal sage scrub ecosystem do not leave out science or actual conservation benefits for the species that inhabit the land

For the first time, require recovery plans for newly and

previously listed species under CESA

Provide a clear set of legal standards for citizen enforcement of CESA's basic conservation standards

SB 1751 is in the final drafting stages, and anyone is welcome to review a copy of the draft language. It is imperative that we support this bill with phone calls and letters to State Assembly and Senate members now!! Please address letters to:

The Honorable _____
California State Assembly
State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable _____
California State Senate
State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

Weekend Field Trips

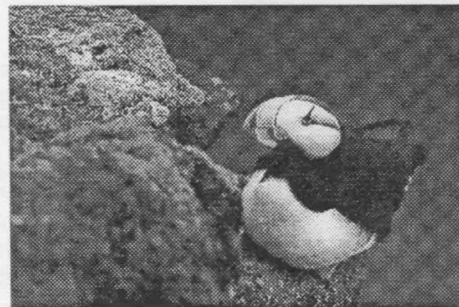
The revitalized weekend Field Trip Committee held its first meeting in over a year on Feb. 27, welcoming new Committee Chair Dave Cook back from an extended Ecuadorian field trip in time to discuss new ideas for 1996 bird outings. Members present were Dave Cook, Jayne DiCandio, Grant Hoyt, John Mariani, Kathy Parker, and Nick Yatsko.

The first order of business at an SCVAS Field Trip Committee is traditional—we all start talking at once about our recent birding exploits. Dave set the tone with glowing reports of birding Ecuador, which prompted other members to recount their own neotropical birding experiences. Then it was down to more pressing business—planning trips for April and May. Once this was accomplished, we went over the inner workings of the Committee, including how often to meet, how to assign scheduling of trips, how to handle mailing, publicity, etc. It was agreed that each member would be responsible for one or two months worth of trips (depending on number of committee members), and that trips would be scheduled well enough in advance to permit announcement in the Avocet two months prior, since the newsletter doesn't reach all members in a reliably timely fashion.

As we moved to an open discussion, we talked about our beginners' trips, and whether we should continue offering a monthly trip to Charleston Slough. It was decided that, if possible, we would alternate Charleston Slough trips with beginners' trips to other locations. Suggestions were made to offer more long-

distance trips, to popular places like Arcata, Morro Bay, Kern River, and Yuba Pass/Sierra Marsh. New locations like Ventana/Big Sur were suggested, and linkage with other local birding groups was proposed as a means of finding new trip leaders.

Everyone agreed that new leaders, new venues, and new Committee members were needed to help revitalize the weekend field trip program. Any SCVAS member interested in our weekend outings may join the Committee; all that's needed is enthusiasm for weekend birding and a willingness to make a few phone calls. We've slipped in recent months from our policy of having at least one birding field trip per weekend, and under Dave's leadership we expect to re-establish that schedule. If you're interested in joining a fun committee that meets only 3 or 4 times a year, call Dave Cook at (408) 729-7310.



Horned Puffin (*Fratrercula Corniculata*)
St. George, Pribilof Islands, Alaska
Rod Planck ©

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Burrowing Owls Need Help!

Every spring many empty fields are disked for fire prevention. But mowing may be as effective without the risk disking presents to Burrowing Owls, a species struggling to survive in Santa Clara County. We need to alert county officials to the presence of owls before disking starts. Volunteers are urgently needed to survey vacant fields for Burrowing Owls and their burrows in Campbell, Milpitas, Morgan Hill, Palo Alto, San Jose, and Santa Clara. Please contact Penelope Delevoryas at (408) 249-6755 (h) or 263-1814 (w) for more information. Thanks for your help!

Editor's note: The beleaguered Burrowing Owls of Santa Clara County face additional problems besides disking, particularly the outright destruction of their habitat. The City of Mountain View is presently considering a



private development project which would significantly impact the Burrowing Owl population adjacent to Shoreline Park on the last undeveloped parcel of the North Bayshore area. At a city Environmental Planning Commission meeting in early March, several SCVAS members spoke out on behalf of Burrowing Owl habitat conservation, and a letter from SCVAS Environmental Advocate Craig Breon was also presented arguing the owls' case. According to Les Chibana, an SCVAS member who is spearheading citizen opposition to the city's zoning changes and subsequent development, the commission went ahead and passed the zoning change recommendation to the City Council in spite of public opposition. More detailed coverage of this sensitive habitat protection issue will appear in

the May Avocet.

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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 Subscriber \$10 Supporter \$20 Donor \$35 Patron \$50 and more
Members receive *The Avocet* newsletter. Make check payable to SCVAS.

Or

National Audubon Society Membership: Check One
 New members \$20 Membership renewal \$35
Members receive *Audubon* magazine and *The Avocet* newsletter. Make check payable to National Audubon Society.

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