



# The Avocet

The Newsletter of the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society

June-August 1996

## Birdathon Teams Run Wild Raising \$\$

The 1996 Birdathon has raised over \$6500 as of early May, with 11 teams chasing and tallying birds throughout the South Bay's bird-rich environs. Creek and Bayside habitats were naturally the most productive, with two teams, the Creek Freaks and Violent Greens, restricting their birding to riparian corridors only. Appropriately, a portion of monies raised will be donated to Coyote Creek Riparian Station's research and restoration efforts, while the majority of donations received will support SCVAS' own educational and environmental awareness programs. Here are a few first-hand accounts of local Birdathon teams in action:

**T**he "Creek Freaks", Mike Rogers, Steve Rottenborn, and Scott Terrill did their "Coyote Creek" Birdathon Big Day on April 23 and turned up an impressive (*phenomenal!—ed.*) total of 141 species of birds

found within 100 meters of the creek waters. This really underscores the diversity of birdlife that can be found in riparian habitats! The team began near the CCRS trailers at midnight and continued until after dark, returning to the starting point just before 9:00 PM. Starting out with the Q-beam flashlights at the old Coyote Creek delta the team added the day's only BLACK-BELLIED PLOVERS and DUNLINS among other waterbirds before heading on for owling in the Gilroy Hot Springs area. After finding WILD TURKEYS at dawn in Henry Coe Park, the team worked its way downstream along Gilroy Hot Springs Rd. and then to Coyote Lake and Anderson Dam. Next it was back to the Bay near CCRS for more water birds and migrants before battling commuter traffic back up to Hellyer and Shady Oaks Parks. The Ogier Ponds offered some surprises, including a stakeout female COMMON GOLDENEYE, a

basic-plumaged COMMON LOON, and a YELLOW-BREASTED CHAT! A female BUFFLEHEAD here proved to be the only species seen only outside our self-imposed 100-meters-from-the-creek boundary for the day. A stop at Silicon Valley Blvd. at dusk netted the day's last new species, a very vocal VIRGINIA RAIL. Our biggest miss was GREEN HERON. This species is easily missed on Big Days, but one would think that it would not be missed on a Big Day spent entirely along a creek!  
—Mike Rogers

**A** few weeks back, when the east hills were still green, the Violent Greens put down their copies of *the Monkeywrench Gang* long enough for their annual Birdathon. Our team this year was comprised of fearless leader Steve Shunk and Mark Strasburger, Dorothy Johnson (DJ to most of us), and Howard and Jessica

see **Birdathon**, page 5...

## Annual Membership Dinner

Our annual dinner is a special evening to meet new people, visit old friends, and to thank our chapter members for supporting us. It is also an opportunity to acknowledge all the terrific Audubon volunteers who have worked so hard this year! Please join us on Wednesday, June 19 at 6:00 PM at McClellan Ranch Park, 22221 McClellan Road Cupertino. Enjoy good food and conversation, take a walk along the nature trail, see the revegetation plots, visit the Nature Shop and Library. Please bring something to share:

A-G Main Dish

H-L Salad

M-Q Hors d'oeuvres

R-Z Desserts

We will provide beverages, plates and silverware for everyone. Please carpool if possible. Park at the Ranch or up the street on Golf Club Drive. For questions or directions, call Garth at (408)252-3747.

# Chapter News

## Welcome, Garth

SCVAS is pleased to announce the hiring of Garth Harwood as our new Chapter Manager. A Peninsula native with a outstanding background in biology, research, teaching, and working with environmental groups, Garth started full-time with us in May to learn the ropes from outgoing Manager Jayne DiCandio. Among his many interests, he places education foremost, and is eager to help the chapter maintain its dynamic educational outreach programs. He is an experienced birder who has designed and carried out riparian habitat research in Colorado, and has also taught Environmental Studies at University of Colorado.

Members are encouraged to say "hello" to Garth at the Annual Dinner on June 19, or to drop by the office some time this summer and get acquainted.

## New Chapter President

David McIntyre has been nominated as SCVAS' new President, effective June 1. David replaces Nick Yatsko, who has ably served the chapter in that role for the past two years. Clysta Seney and Mary Simpson will remain as First and Second Vice Presidents, respectively, and John McLemore and Elaine Gould will continue as Treasurer and Recording Secretary, respectively.

A birder since his childhood days in New York state, David is a practicing attorney who also holds a degree in biology. Although relatively new to Northern California, he has been very active on the local environmental scene, chairing the SCVAS Environmental Action Committee and occupying a position on the San Francisco Bay

Bird Observatory Board of Directors. David's commitment to birding, education, and environmental action make him an excellent choice to lead the chapter for the next two years.

Our sincere thanks to outgoing President Nick Yatsko, who will remain on the Board as Past President. Nick has skillfully chaired Board meetings, organized and led field trips, staffed chapter events, and guided the chapter through some exciting (and occasionally turbulent) times, all the while handling every situation with intelligence and aplomb. Nick will continue to be active in field trip planning, fundraising, hawkwatching (of course!) and sharpening his already wicked sense of humor at other Board members' expense.

## Wings Over Cupertino

Hundreds of bird species have been observed in and around the Santa Clara Valley, and many of them occur right in your own back yard. But getting to know these masters of the wing can often be quite challenging. Join local naturalist and SCVAS Board member Steve Shunk 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 SCVAS. Pre-registration is required as space is limited. Class dates are Sat. June 22 and Sat. August 17. Call the office at (408)252-3747 to register.

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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.

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

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# Summer 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

**Saturday June 1, 8:30 AM.** Half day. Celebrate the end of the school year on our 2nd annual Young Audubon trip to Grant Ranch. Leader: Dave Cook (408)729-7310. Children, teens, beginners are all welcome. Birding basics will be stressed as we look at waterfowl, raptors, and song-birds. From Hwy 680 in San Jose take Alum Rock Ave. east to Mt. Hamilton Rd., turn right and go approx. 9 miles to gravel parking lot on left (just past main park entrance on right).

**Sunday June 2, 7:30 AM.** Half day. Stevens Creek Co. Park. Leaders: David Cook and David Cook, Jr. (408)729-7310. From I-280 in Cupertino go south on Foothill Blvd. (becomes Stevens Canyon Rd.) 2.1 miles to first park entrance on left. Meet in parking lot. Highlights: breeding birds including vireos, warblers, flycatchers, wrens.

**Wednesday June 5, 7:30 PM.** Long-time Bay Area Bird Photographers member Alan Walther will present a slide program highlighting his winter visits to Klamath Basin National Wildlife Refuge. Lucy Evans Baylands Interpretive Center, E. Embarcadero Rd., Palo Alto.

**Saturday June 8, 8:00 AM.** Half day plus. Rancho del Oso (coastal Big Basin Park). Leader: John Mariani (408)997-2066. Directions: Meet at Nature Center 1/4 mile east of Hwy 1 just south of Waddell Creek (2 mi. south of Ano Nuevo State Reserve or 7 mi. north of Davenport. Easy walking of 3 miles. Bring lunch. Breeding birds of coastal and redwood forest habitats. Limit of 15; call leader to reserve space.

**Sunday June 9, 8:30 AM.** Half day. Russian Ridge OSP. Leader:

Shirley Gordon (408)996-9863. Meet at Preserve parking lot at NW corner of Skyline Blvd. (Hwy 35) and Page Mill/Alpine Rd. Highlights include Grasshopper Sparrow and Lazuli Bunting. Lunch optional.

**Tuesday June 11, 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: Birding at the Dubois'.

**Saturday June 15, 8:00 AM.** Half day. Beginner's trip to Stanford campus. Leader: Judy Wagner (415)941-7586. Meet at the end of Palm Drive at entrance to Main Quad. From Hwy 101 in Palo Alto take University Ave. west; continue as it becomes Palm Drive on campus. Highlights include local breeding birds such as Acorn Woodpecker, Plain Titmouse, California Thrasher. Open to all participants but designed especially for beginners.

**Sunday June 16, 8:00 AM.** Half day. Arastradero Preserve. Leader: Jim Liskovec (415)969-5542. From I-280 in Palo Alto take Page Mill Rd. west approx. 1/2 mile to Arastradero Rd. Turn right and meet at parking lot 1/2 mile on right. Highlights: variety of breeding birds of oak woodland; good for raptors. 2 miles moderate walking.

**Saturday/Sunday June 22-23.** Yuba Pass & Sierra Valley. Leader: Clay Kempf (408)761-8260. Meet at 7:00 AM Saturday at Yuba Pass parking lot on south side of Hwy 49. Quickest route from South Bay is Hwy 80 to Truckee, north on Hwy 89, then west on Hwy 49 to Yuba Pass. Saturday will be spent exploring the Yuba Pass area where specialties including Williamson's Sapsucker, Black-backed Woodpecker, Dipper, Townsend's Solitaire, Evening Grosbeak, seven warbler species, four flycatcher species and others may be found in prime breeding habitat and in full song. On Sunday the group will bird east of the

pass in drier habitat, looking for Mountain Bluebird, all 3 nuthatches, Green-tailed Towhee, Sage Thrasher, Brewer's Sparrow and other Great Basin species, ending up in Sierra Valley for marsh species such as Black Tern, Wilson's Phalarope and Common Snipe. Hotels available in Sierra City and Downieville; camping at Wild Plum, Sierra City and Yuba Pass.

**Saturday July 13, 8:00 AM.** Half day. Beginner's trip to Charleston Slough. Leader: Bob Reiling (408)253-7527. From Hwy 101 in Mt. View take San Antonio Rd. exit north to Terminal Way and park at far east end. Emphasis on basics of birding featuring breeding waterfowl, shorebirds and their young. Possible Black Skimmer!

**Sunday Aug. 4. Half day.** Año Nuevo State Reserve. Leader: Mark Miller (415)967-3429. The annual midsummer outing to find coastal specialties such as Black Swift, Bank Swallow, Marbled Murrelet, and early returning shorebirds. Limited to 20 participants; call leader to reserve space.

**Sunday Aug. 24, 8:00 AM.** Half day. Beginner's trip to Charleston Slough and vicinity. Leader: Phyllis Browning (415)494-6360. From Hwy 101 Mt. View take San Antonio Rd. toward the Bay. Meet just inside the gate at intersection of San Antonio and Terminal Way. Trip recommended for beginning birders. Highlights include ducks, shorebirds, herons, egrets, and possible Black Skimmer!

## Warning!!

Palo Alto member Pria Graves passes on this disturbing item: The "sticky traps" used for insect control can pose a serious threat to birds and other small animals. Birds attracted to trapped insects could get stuck in the "goo," and in fact a Bewick's Wren perished in Ms. Graves' own yard in a trap set out for codling moths. Until bird-proof traps are invented, perhaps we should reconsider this approach to insect control.

# Field Notes

by Bill Bousman

## Loons through Waterfowl

A basic-plumaged **Common Loon** was found inland at the Ogier Avenue ponds on 23 Apr (MMR, SCR, SBT). Three **Great Blue Heron** young in a nest on Vasona Reservoir on 21 Apr (JD) and nest construction near Anderson Reservoir on 1-9 Apr (ECu) are both new breeding locations for this species. **Cattle Egrets** continue to be found in the vicinity of the Arzino Ranch during April with peak counts of eight birds on 3 Apr (MMR) and 7 Apr (PJM). Our old standby, the **Ross' Goose**, has remained at the Sunnyvale Water Pollution Control Plant (WPCP) in April (v.ob.) and managed to fill out a few Bird-a-thon lists. A pair of **Blue-winged Teal** on the east side of the Emily Renzel Marsh in Palo Alto on 9 Apr (RLe) may be part of the group found irregularly in the Palo Alto Flood Control Basin (FCB). The FCB birds aided a few Bird-a-thon lists and a peak of four males and two females were counted there on 22 Apr (PJM). Less expected was the single male on the Coyote Creek Riparian Station (CCRS) waterbird pond on 20 Apr (MJM, GHt, DSt) and 23 Apr (MMR, SCR, SBT). These late spring and early summer birds are tantalizing but we've no proof of breeding since 1974. Exceptionally late were a 1-2 male **Eurasian Wigeon** in Crittenden Marsh on 20 Apr (m.ob.). On 22 Apr a male and female of this species were observed in courtship there (PJM). A male **Redhead** in the Palo Alto FCB on 20 Apr (HG, LCh, GC) is very late and may oversummer.

## Raptors through Skimmers

Migrant **Osprey** include one over Uvas Creek Preserve in Gilroy on 25 Mar (SK) and another over Monument Peak on 6 Apr (MMR). **Swainson's Hawk** is one of our rarest Buteos so an adult over Uvas Creek at Hwy 25 on 28 Mar (DLSu) is of great interest. Wintering **Ferruginous Hawks** normally leave by March so an immature seen at the Sierra Road summit on 5 Apr (RWR, FV) and another one

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over Monument Peak on 6 Apr (MMR) represent very late records. A **Rough-legged Hawk** over Cambrian Plaza in southwest San Jose on 29 Mar (JP) is our second record this winter of this rare Buteo. A few **Merlin** were reported in April with the latest a male at the Palo Alto Baylands on 19 Apr (SCR). Late **Peregrine Falcons** include an immature at Moffett Field on 22 Apr (PJM). The **Mountain Quail** saga continues with a number of birds heard in different drainages on Black Mountain on 21 Apr (JY, AL). Most unusual for this habitat, a bird was actually seen to scurry across the path.

Two **Snowy Plover** were seen again

*Returning Black  
Skimmers and a migrating  
Lesser Nighthawk  
highlighted the month*

north of the Alviso marina on 13 Apr (AME) and one was there on 18 Apr (MMR). A single bird was seen as well on Salt Pond A8 on 20 Apr (MJM, GHt, DSt). We have again had a banner spring for migrating **Lesser Yellowlegs**. Six were in the vicinity of the Arzino Ranch on 7 Apr (PJM), two were there on 8 Apr (SSh), and a single bird was seen on 22 Apr (PJM). A single bird was seen in the vicinity of Crittenden Marsh on 20 Apr (m.ob.). The 1st-winter female **Ruff** was still in Crittenden Marsh through the end of April and has set a longevity record for this species (m.ob.). A male, showing first signs of alternate plumage, was found next to Los Esteros and Grand in Alviso on 7 Apr (PJM). A pair of **Black Skimmers** were seen at Charleston Slough on 25 Apr (PMB), two weeks earlier than last year.

## Roadrunners through Woodpeckers

A **Greater Roadrunner** was found on

the east side of Mt. Hamilton on 28 Apr (AME). A **Long-eared Owl** heard on Page Mill Road at Monte Bello OSP on 20 Apr (MJM, DSt, GHt) suggests a pair may once again breed in this area. A **Lesser Nighthawk** found along Coyote Creek below Hwy 237 on 23 Apr (CO fide MMR) is one of our few records in the last 15 years. Westside **Common Poorwills** include at least five birds calling in Stevens Creek CP on 20 Apr (HG, LCh) and another seen in Monte Bello OSP the same morning (DSt, MJM, GHt). The first **Vaux's Swift** of the season was one over Los Gatos on 3 Apr (JD), an area where they nest. Small groups of 2-5 birds were seen in migration later in the month (m.ob.). The first **Black-chinned Hummingbird** noted was a re-cap at CCRS on 11 Apr (fide MMR) and the species has been found regularly along the creek since then (m.ob.). A male at Ed Levin CP on 28 Apr (SCR, HLR) was an migrant away from known breeding areas. **Lewis' Woodpeckers** were missing from their San Antonio Valley haunts in March and the first bird there was found on 6 Apr (CIW, ChW). Since then one to three birds have been found regularly in the valley (m.ob.). A female **Pileated Woodpecker** found near Los Gatos on 27 Apr (AW) was well away from the Santa Cruz Mountain breeding population.

## Flycatchers through Grosbeaks

A **Hammond's Flycatcher** was found at Smith Creek 12-13 Apr (MMR, MJM). An **American Dipper** was found on Stevens Creek above the Mt. Eden Road junction on 20 Apr (GC, LCh, HG) and again on 21 Apr (MJM). April birds along this stretch of creek are almost regular, but there has been no breeding here in recent years. A **Mountain Bluebird** on the Sierra Road summit on 10 Mar (AJ, DP) missed last month's report and is the only March record I'm aware of for this species. Nine **Phainopepla** were found in various spots in San Antonio Valley on 13 Apr (SCR, DW) and two were north of San Antonio Junction on 28 Apr (AME). Migrant **Nashville Warblers** include one in Henry Coe SP on 7 Apr (MJM), one at Smith Creek 12 Apr

(MMR), a bird banded at CCRS on 17 Apr (fide MMR), one along Gilroy Hot Springs Road on 23 Apr (SBT, MMR, SCR), and one on the west side of Mt. Hamilton on 28 Apr (AME). A male **MacGillivray's Warbler** was found along Del Puerto Canyon Road on 28 Apr (AME), a bit over a mile east of the junction. A **Yellow-breasted Chat** found at the Ogier Avenue ponds on 23 Apr (MMR, SCR, SBT) was quite early.

A **Lazuli Bunting** along Uvas Creek above Hwy 25 on 28 Mar (DLSu) was about two weeks early. Returning **Grasshopper Sparrows** include six at the mouth of Kirby Canyon on 6 Apr (SCR) and two to three birds at Ed Levin CP the same day (MMR). A **White-throated Sparrow** was banded at CCRS on 11 Apr (fide MMR) while birds coming to a Los Gatos feeder remained through at least 21 Apr when three were counted (JD). Two **Chestnut-collared Longspurs** on the Sierra Road summit on 5 Apr (RWR) were the last ones seen this spring. **Lawrence's Goldfinches** were found in fairly typical numbers in the San Antonio Valley and Henry Coe SP during the month (m.ob.). A male **Evening Grosbeak** over Stanford on 5 Apr (SCR) was a good find.

**Observers:** Phyllis Browning (PMB), Gail Cheeseman (GC), Les Chibana (LCh), Emelie Curtis (ECu), Jean Dubois (JD), Al Eisner (AME), Harriet Gerson (HG), Grant Hoyt (GHt), Alvaro Jaramillo (AJ), Sue Kruse (SK), Amy Lauterbach (AL), Rosalie Lefkowitz (RLe), Mike Mammoser (MJM), Peter Metropulos (PJM), Chris Otahal (CO), Dave Powell (DP), Joan Priest (JP), Bob Reiling (RWR), Mike Rogers (MMR), Heather Rottenborn (HLR), Steve Rottenborn (SCR), Steve Shunk (SSh), David Suddjian (DLSu), Dick Stovel (DSt), Scott Terrill (SBT), Frank Vanslager (FV), Alan Walther (AW), David Wilcove (DW), Chris Wolfe (ChW), Claire Wolfe (CIW), and James Yurchenco (JY).

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

From **Birdathon**, front page...

Friedman. We challenged ourselves, and limited our area strictly to the drainage of Penitencia Creek from Cherry Flat to the Bay. Early morning at the perc. ponds gave us HOODED ORIOLE, GREEN HERON, and 3 SPOT-TED SANDPIPERS. Alum Rock Park was alive as always, featuring LA-ZULI BUNTING, CANYON WREN, RUFIOUS HUMMINGBIRD, both accipiter hawks and all the expected flycatchers. Fortunate access to Cherry Flat Reservoir yielded such highlights as WOOD DUCK, COMMON MER-GANSER, and more "spotty's". The trees above the spillway presented YELLOW, WILSON'S, and TOWNSEND'S WARBLERS, a pair of WEST-ERN TANAGERS and a HAMMOND'S FLYCATCHER among others. En route to the CCRS waterbird pond we flushed a SOLITARY SANDPIPER from a stagnant pool. The main pond featured GREEN-WINGED TEAL, BONAPARTE'S GULL, NORTHERN PINTAIL, peeps and others. In all, we ended the day with a final tally of 105 glorious spring birds. Now, as the hills turn brown, the eco-swallows return to their perch to protect the precious valley for all avifauna and their friends. Happy Birding!! —Steve Shunk

**O**n Sunday April 20 the Wry Wren team canvassed the Stevens Creek Park from before dawn to noon, then went to the Mt. View and Palo Alto bayside habitats for the afternoon. Gail Cheeseman and Harriet Gerson noted that this was the most relaxed Birdathon they could remember without the anxious dashing about to find more species. Our more deliberate pace paid off, as we bested last year's 120 species with 124 this year, ticking off more rarities than I had expected. After early BARN OWL and COMMON POORWILL, we were treated to an incredible dawn chorus at Stevens Creek—BLACK-HEADED GROSBEEK, ORANGE-CROWNED and YELLOW WARBLER, WESTERN TANAGER, BULLOCK'S ORIOLE, and HUTTON'S, WARBLING and SOLITARY VIREO. CASPIAN TERNS criss-crossed the skies above us. One of our best sightings was the AMERI-CAN DIPPER upstream from Camp Costanoan. Finishing up at Crittenden Marsh in late afternoon, with such goodies as REDHEAD, BLUE-WINGED TEAL, and THAYER'S GULL already tallied, we found a EURASIAN WIGEON. Harriet scanned across an unusual sandpiper, which Gail identified as a RUFF! I had put this bird out of my mind because of the lack of recent reports, but fortunately Gail's familiarity with this species from her foreign travels made it an easy ID for her. Then the LESSER YELLOWLEGS ran in fron of the Ruff and the pieces of the puzzle dropped into place for me!

—Les Chibana

**T**he ReTern of the Wrong Terns Part V—Our first stop was Jasper Ridge. What a privilege this was for us! Rita Colwell and Allen Royer identify-ing birds and their songs was certainly a high point in the birding career of the Wrong Terns. On behalf of our team (Cindy Handen, Elaine Gould, Eileen Bowden, Allen Royer and Betty Parsons) I want to thank Rita for her skill and patience with our motley group of birders. (Rita had a hard time convincing some of us that the GREEN HERON was not a penguin!) Food is always important to this group and we basically ate one big meal that started with Eileen's bagels at 7:30 AM and continued throughout the day. We stopped (birding, but not necessarily eating) at 3:30 with a total of 77 species. Thanks to all our supporters who have faith in our now established reputation as "jock-birders" and who believe in our worthwhile cause. Because of your help we are able to continue the School Wetlands Program, restore habitat along our creeks, and contribute to SCVAS' other important environmental causes.

—Bobbie Handen

See **Birdathon**, back page...



# Environmental Action News

## Digging Deeper

All this new stuff goes on top  
turn it over    turn it over  
wait    and water down.

From the dark bottom  
turn it inside out  
let it spread through, sift down  
even.

Watch it sprout.

A mind like compost.

— Gary Snyder

By Craig Breon

About three years ago I built a compost pile at the house where I live in the foothills of the Peninsula. At the time, I thought I was building my pile for utilitarian reasons. First priority—the elimination of waste. This house set two garbage cans out on the curb nearly every week, despite only having two occupants. The cans were mostly filled with grass clippings, raked oak leaves, and the sundry pieces of bush and tree that seem to constantly throw themselves to the ground.

I realized that by building a compost pile and availing ourselves of the four days a year that our town sponsors yard clean up days, we could certainly get away with one can a week. In fact, we soon will be moving to a single “mini-can” weekly. Goal number one realized.

Second, I knew that a successful compost pile can largely eliminate the need for all chemical fertilizers and most pesticides as well. By growing healthy plants in the right combinations, nature seems to balance out good and bad bugs on the land, and slowly you find yourself going organic. We now have a productive garden and small orchard, our camelias seem to bloom forever, the hydrangia flowers come up in robust whites, reds, greens and violets, and our roses grew so well that our land became a major fast food joint for the local deer. Goal number two achieved.

Still, as I worked in my pile the other day, I realized that these good results had over time taken a back seat to the truest satisfaction of composting—the joy of making good dirt.

I love my dirt. I show it to houseguests. I occasionally deliver a load to a friend building a garden. I sent some in the mail recently. I smell it regularly, taste it now and again, run it through my fingers. When I dig through the top, half-composted layers of my pile towards the new dirt beneath, I speculate on its texture and color, anticipating the squash or irises that it will become.

In last year’s summer edition of the *Avocet*, I wrote an editorial urging people to “Grow a Healthy Outlook” by planting a garden. This year I hope to convince you to take that a step further. Go deeper into the land. Make your own dirt!

If my enthusiasm strikes you as odd, here’s a few more reasons to compost.

It teaches you about one of the most fundamental ways life perpetuates itself on this planet. Nature is composting all around us, from banana slugs oozing along the forest floor to the leaf that drops into a creek and is carried downstream, only to become life sustaining dirt in a wetland near the Bay.

As a corollary to the last point, composting drives home the reality that worms are, in the geologic time scale scope of things, far more important than people.

Composting can not be justified through typical cost-benefit analysis. Most of us make enough money to drive down to the nursery, throw a plastic bag of potting soil in the back seat next to the dog, and return home ready to landscape. By such standards, composting is a waste of time, taking months sometimes to make good dirt. All the more reason to do it. When you feel the hectic pace of life closing in around you, there’s little better tonic to slow you down than watching dirt grow.

Finally, I’ll toss in the whole “web of life” thing. The more we realize the patterns of interrelationships between various elements of nature and between ourselves and those elements, the better environmentalists we become. Once you sift through your pile to get at good dirt, take that dirt to your garden to feed a green pepper, pick a spinach plant for dinner, then take the extra spinach bits out to the compost, you’ll understand better the connection between car exhaust, phytoplankton in the Pacific Ocean, global warming, and the people inhabiting the lowlands of Bangladesh.

Have a great summer—make it a dirty one. Can you dig it?

# When Old Friends Change Names

It's not easy keeping up with all the changes in ornithological nomenclature these days. After reverting back to White-tailed (from Black-shouldered) Kite and Green (from Green-backed) Heron, the conscientious birder must often pause during current outings, as the brain and tongue struggle to break old habits. As a hot-headed teenager, I remember being outraged at the American

stone, though—they may experience further transformations as the DNA gods determine that chickadees are really vultures, storm-petrels and ant-shrikes are congeners, and all birds are descended from Rock Doves.

•It finally happened—SCRUB JAY is split into three species: ours will become WESTERN SCRUB JAY, the Santa Cruz Island population off Santa Barbara, CA will be known as ISLAND SCRUB JAY, a n d

your old friend GRAY-CHEEKED THRUSH is split, with the new BICKNELL'S THRUSH offering new identification challenges (and a new "tick" too!)

•Hooray! We in the West get our BULLOCK'S ORIOLE back (I never liked NORTHERN ORIOLE); Maryland baseball fans welcome the return of BALTIMORE ORIOLE; and somebody somewhere gets BLACK-BACKED ORIOLE (3-way split).

•RUFIOUS-SIDED TOWHEE is no more—it's now SPOTTED TOWHEE for our red-eyed friend, while it's EASTERN TOWHEE in the Eastern U.S. (I think we bagged the better name).

•You're birding Palo Alto Baylands in late December. That's not just a SHARP-TAILED SPARROW any more—better do your research to determine if it's a SALTMARSH or a NELSON'S SHARP-TAILED SPARROW.

Space limitations prevent us from listing all recent changes here, though you'll be thrilled to know that *Saltator albicollis* has been split into LESSER ANTILLEAN SALTATOR and STREAKED SALTATOR, and—yes, it's official—Skylark is now SKYLARK. Suffice it to say that species name changes, while annoying to amateur birders, usually represent the best efforts of ornithological taxonomists.

Ornithologist's Union for changing the name of my beloved Sparrow Hawk to American Kestrel in the mid-'60's, but I eventually got over it. To this day I'll occasionally blurt out "Marsh Hawk" when I see a Northern Harrier, even though I readily accepted that re-naming years ago; on the other hand, I seldom stumble over Pacific-slope (old name: Western) Flycatcher, even though I detest the new appellation. Funny how the mind works.

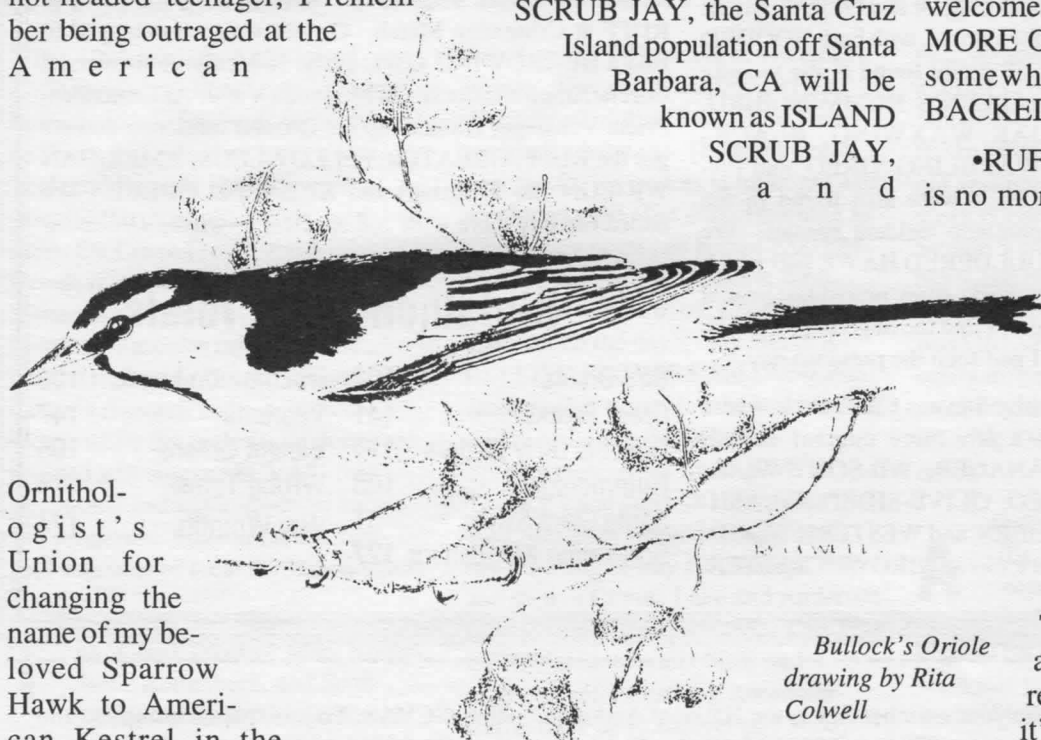
Here's a partial list of some recent AOU bird species name changes that will affect local birders. Better not etch them in

Florida's as FLORIDA SCRUB JAY.

•For you southeast Arizona travelers, MEXICAN JAY returns as the name of the species briefly known as GRAY-BREASTED JAY.

•While you're down in AZ, you can reclaim GILDED FLICKER, split from NORTHERN FLICKER; Red-shafted and Yellow-shafted remain as races of NORTHERN.

•For East Coast transplants,



*Bullock's Oriole*  
drawing by Rita Colwell

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Audubon Society  
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From **Birdathon**, page 5...

**T**he tail end of the SCVAS Birdathon teams went out on Saturday, April 27 for a real "Hummdinger" of a birding/fundraising day. The team of Sandy Cortright, Jayne DiCandio, Heather Rottenborn, and Frank Vanslager, AKA the Hummdingers, started off their day of birding at SCVAS' McClellan Ranch Park headquarters in Cupertino. We got BARN OWL in the parking lot and GREAT BLUE HERON in Stevens Creek for starters, with both HOODED and BULLOCK'S ORIOLES easily found in the vicinity of our Audubon office. ALLEN'S HUMMINGBIRD, PURPLE FINCH, CEDAR WAXWING, BLACK-HEADED GROSBEAK, WARBLING VIREO, and PACIFIC-SLOPE FLYCATCHER were also found in the park besides other more common resident species. We had a peek at the RED-SHOULDERED HAWK pair which had been courting in recent weeks (they nested last year at Blackberry Farm). We couldn't find the lingering WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW I had seen the previous day.

Our next stop was nearby Stevens Creek Park, where we were able to pick up a few more migrant arrivals including WESTERN TANAGER, WILSON'S WARBLER, SOLITARY VIREO, OLIVE-SIDED and ASH-THROATED FLYCATCHERS, and WESTERN WOODPEWEE. We also had great looks at a BROWN CREEPER.

We left Stevens Creek with just under 60 species and headed for Palo Alto Baylands and Charleston Slough.

The tide was low so we were able to pick up most of the expected shorebirds, but no rails and surprisingly few raptors. We then ran into Les Chibana who told us the BLACK SKIMMERS were back, which became our one-hundredth species of the day. We decided to try for the RUFF at Crittenden Marsh. On our way we managed to find a BURROWING OWL at the suddenly-controversial Garcia/Amphitheatre site in Mountain View. At Crittenden, Frank Vanslager cranked up his Questar telescope and we got the RUFF, GREATER YELLOWLEGS, AMERICAN WIGEON (no Eurasian) and an EARED GREBE. We ended our day there with 108 species. —Jayne DiCandio

### Birdathon Team Totals

Bird Brains	102	Uncommon Loons	100
Creek Freaks	141	Vagrants	147
Down & Dirty Birders	114	Violent Greens	105
Hummdingers	108	Wrong Terns	77
Santa Clara Swifts	51	Wry Wrentits	124
Screaming Kingfishers	127		

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