



The Avocet

The Newsletter of the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society

November 1996

For The Birds---Rebugging Your Home and Garden

by Ruth Troetschler

Why do we belong to Audubon? Many of us love birds and love the chase of finding them. Others are interested in the "natural environment" and want to support an organization which strives to protect birds and their environments. Most birders are well aware that certain birds are endemic to certain habitats: chaparral, coniferous forest, high mountain meadows, etc. Other birds have a more catholic taste, and those are the ones we influence in our own back yards. As water, food, and nest sites change or disappear, birds move on to new habitats that support their current needs. So—how do you fit in?

If you plant a lawn, maintain feeders, cut a tree, add shrubs or trees, you tip the balance toward or away from the ecology of certain birds. And when you make

seemingly unrelated decisions—to build a patio, hire a gardener or a pest control service, maintain a cat—you also affect birds.

Take caterpillars, for example. You hate caterpillars on your vegetables or your trees, but they are prime bird food, and many metamorphose into your favorite beautiful butterflies or spectacular moths. It would seem that all bird lovers should love, or at least tolerate insects and spiders.

You may depend on your gardener, but behind your back he or she may be applying toxic insecticides to "solve" future problems, or preemergent herbicides to prevent seedlings from sprouting. This may seem to save work, but how do these chemicals affect birds, your children or pets? And do they solve

your problems anyway? In addition, most gardeners finish the job by blowing away the leaves, and perhaps hauling them away to the dump.

The gardener may forget that leaves shelter insects and spiders, and eventually help nourish the soil. If you've ever watched a California Thrasher digging deeply into the soil to capture insects, or the California or Spotted Towhees covering the same ground to find seeds, you begin to recognize the importance of bare ground and leaves to the birds. The gardener may not even know that blower dust will cover foliage, helping to kill the tiny parasitoids there. Parasitoids are your primary pest insect control agents (see below).

Robins and people—and sometimes raccoons—like lawns, and a Black Phoebe may use the lawn as a flycatching arena. Heavy duty chemicals are not appropriate in lawn care. Lawns treated with common lawn-care fertilizers, herbicides, and insecticides have higher pest insect populations than untreated lawns, because natural enemies—beneficial spiders, ants, predatory beetles and mites, and sometimes even birds—are killed by these materials.

Robust white grubs that feed on lawn roots occasionally attract raccoons, which roll up the turf to capture them. Non-toxic methods of lawn insect management are appropriate here. Water, then spike the lawn to impale the grubs and aerate the soil, or water in insect-feeding nematodes (round worms) to destroy the grubs. These nematodes (at 10,000

General Membership Meeting

Wednesday November 20

AFTER THE FLOOD—PAJARO RIVER BIRD STUDY

with David Suddjian

Palo Alto's Baylands Nature Center

Eastern end of Embarcadero Rd.

7:30 PM Hospitality & Business

8:00 Program

In 1995 "emergency clearing" of six miles of prime cottonwood forest along the Pajar River in Santa Cruz and Monterey counties sent waves of concerns across our local birding community. The destruction of this habitat—well-known for its high value to birds—was studied by David Suddjian, a wildlife biologist and President of the Santa Cruz Bird Club. November's program will take a look at the value of coastal riparian forests, review the findings of his study, and discuss habitat management issues related to flood control. Get the facts from a scientist and birder who has been tracking bird populations in Santa Cruz County for ten years. David is currently working on *Birds of Santa Cruz County*.

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VIEW FROM THE OFFICE

by Garth Harwood, SCVAS Chapter Manager

THE LOVE OF BIRDS provides me with a limitless source of both joy and hope. Joy, because wherever I go, I am surrounded by their friendly and beautiful presences; hope, because they so often provide a much-needed reminder that our over-developed and under-appreciated natural world is far from defeated. There is still a great deal to cherish and protect.

But as with any great love, the flip side of that joy is always risk. That which we love may be destroyed or leave forever, and that may bring pain. The recent die-off of migrating birds at the Salton Sea is bringing on such feelings for me, feelings of grief and loss, worries that we may lose a lot more before we figure out how to stop the current die-off and prevent its recurrence in the future.

For those not yet aware of the situation, it was reported in the *San Jose Mercury News* on Sept. 30 that a botulism epidemic following massive fish kills had decimated migrating birds stopping off at the Salton Sea (about 120 miles northeast of San Diego). As of that date, the counts were 7,909 American White Pelicans, 1,804 Brown Pelicans, and 3,441 birds of other species. Somewhat over 1,000 birds were being treated by rescuers, but the prognosis for most was not good.

MY IMMEDIATE RESPONSE to a situation like this is to ask, "OK, so what can I do?" The Brown Pelican has made a remarkable comeback from the days when DDT-induced egg failures brought them to the edge of extinction and onto the endangered species list. But this time the threat is not so straightforward; there's no particular chemical to ban, and there's no single regulatory solution to a toxic microbe. The conditions which have led to the Salton Sea die-off are complicated, involving natural factors such as high temperatures (causing the tainted waters to evaporate and thus concentrating all contaminants present), and human factors, such as nonpoint-source runoff (excess agricultural chemicals being the leading suspect).

It seems to me that the most effective response to this crisis (unless you're a trained wildlife rescuer) is to re-dedicate ourselves to local efforts to prevent such deadly factors from converging again, here or anywhere. Nonpoint-source pollution such as excess fertilizer and pesticides from yards, gardens, and agricultural fields must be curtailed. (It's estimated that urban residents treat their yards with such compounds at a rate 20 times greater than farmers do; and our runoff ends up in the Bay—another essential stopover for those same flocks of migrant birds.)

EQUALLY IMPORTANT, we need to prevent development pressures from requiring a very few natural areas to support the entire, airborne river of birds along the Pacific Flyway. As Bill Bousman put it in a conversation in this office the other day, "It just shows us what a vulnerable situation it is, when too many of the eggs are put in any one basket." We must not accept the argument, often put forward by development interests, that one refuge here or there is enough—even if it's a site of especially high quality, as the Salton Sea has been.

For months now, I have been drinking in the beauty of the great flocks of White Pelicans wheeling high over the Bay, and the spectacle of lines of swimming Brown Pelicans beating their way along coastal waters to drive their prey before them as they dip and thrash, dip and thrash. How many of those I've watched this year stopped off next at the Salton Sea, I wonder?

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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.

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: 415-681-7422

November 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

****Sunday Nov. 3, 8:30 AM.** Full day. Monterey Peninsula. Leader: Kathy Parker (408)358-2832. Meet at Municipal Wharf in Monterey. Take second Del Monte Blvd. exit off Hwy 101 in Monterey toward Fishermen's Wharf. Turn right at Figueroa St. and meet at base of wharf. Bring quarters for parking, lunch, and full tank of gas. Rain cancels.

Wednesday Nov. 6, 7:30 PM. Bay Area Bird Photographers meets in Palo Alto. Mike Danzenbaker will show slides from Australia. Lucy Evans Baylands Interpretive Center, E. Embarcadero Rd..

****Sunday November 10, 9 - 3.** Full day. "Paddling with the Birds" kayak trip on Elkhorn Slough or Salinas River (depending on Salinas R. water levels). Leader: Steve Shunk (408)247-3076. Try a new approach to wildlife viewing—no experience necessary. Last year's trip was spectacular. \$50 for SCVAS members, \$55 non-members. Call Eskape Sea Kayaking at (408)427-2297 to sign up.

****Sunday Nov. 10, 8:30 AM.** Half day. Beginners trip to Charleston Slough (leader TBA). From Hwy 101 in Mt. View take San Antonio Rd. exit north approx. 1/4 mile to Terminal Way parking area. Emphasis on basics of birding—everyone welcome. Ducks, egrets, shorebirds, gulls.

Tuesday Nov. 12, 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: Great Gray Owl..

****Wednesday Nov. 13, 8:00 AM.** Half day. Shady Oaks Park/Coyote

Creek. Leader: Bob Reiling (408)253-7527. Easy walking of about 2 miles. From Hwy 101 south exit on Blossom Hill, cross over freeway and turn right into parking area just after first stoplight at intersection of Coyote and Silver Creek Valley Rds. From Hwy 85 north take first exit, turn right at stoplight and immediately right to parking area. Lunch optional.

Wednesday Nov. 13. Autumn birding for the blind. Clay Kempf will present a 2-hour introductory lecture (and lead a field trip on Sat. Nov. 16) in Palo Alto for the blind and visually impaired. Learn to identify birds like the experts do—by sound. Call Linda Lloyd at (415)941-9407 to sign up.

****Sunday Nov. 17, 8:00 AM.** Jasper Ridge Biological Preserve, Stanford University. Leaders: Bill and Jean Clark, Chip Haven, Rita Colwell. Reservation only; limit 25 participants. Call the Clarks at (415)424-4371 to reserve space (\$5 fee per person). From I-280 take Sand Hill Rd. west 2 miles to main gate (not Whiskey Hill gate) on left. Gate open from 7:40 - 8:10 only. Moderately strenuous walking 2 -3 miles. Good variety of waterfowl and woodland birds. Lunch optional.

****Wednesday Nov. 20, 8:30 AM.** Jasper Ridge, Stanford. Leaders: Preserve docents. See description above. To reserve space on this trip, call Alberta Jasberg (493-9546).

Wednesday Nov. 20, 7:30 PM. David Suddjian presents tonight's General Meeting program (see Pg. 1) at Palo Alto Baylands Interpretive Center.

****Saturday Nov. 23, 8:00 AM.** Half day. Shady Oaks Park/Coyote Creek, San Jose. Leader: Bob Reiling (408)253-7527. Easy walking approx. 2 miles. See directions under Nov. 13 listing. Heavy rain cancels.

****Saturday Nov. 30, 9:30 AM.** Full day. Sacramento Valley Wildlife Refuge. Leaders: Grant and Karen Hoyt (415)969-7892. Meet at Sacto. NWR Headquarters on Interstate 5 approx. 20 miles north of Williams. Take Norman Rd. exit east from I-5, then immediately north on frontage rd. to Refuge. We'll tour Sacto. in the AM and then visit Grey Lodge Waterfowl Area in the afternoon. Bring scopes, lunch; carpool if possible. Approx. 2 1/2 hour drive from South Bay. Variety of ducks, geese, raptors. Heavy rain cancels.

****Saturday Dec. 7, 9:00 AM.** Half day. Princeton Harbor. Leader: Dan Keller (415)529-9088. From Hwy 92 in Half Moon Bay, turn north on Hwy 1, go approx. 4 miles to Princeton Harbor. Turn left towards coast, then bear right through town, meet at corner of Stanford and West Point. Loons, grebes, ducks, gulls. Dress warmly.

****Saturday Dec. 14, 8:30 AM.** Half day. Alum Rock Park. Leader: Dave Cook (408)729-7310. Details in December *Avocet*.

Saturday Dec. 14, 8 - 12. "Wings Over Cupertino" beginning birding class meets at McClellan Ranch Park in Cupertino. Emphasis on winter birds. Contact instructor Steve Shunk (408)247-3076 to sign up. \$20 fee.

BIRDING ECUADOR!!

Cheesemans' Ecology Safaris is offering a specially-priced birding tour of Ecuador in March of 1997. As they have done in the past, Doug and Gail Cheeseman will generously donate \$2000 of their profits from this trip to SCVAS!! The trip will be led by SCVAS member Jim Danzebaker and Ecuadorian ornithologist Juan Carlos Matheus, and will go from March 5 - 19 for \$2280 plus airfare. Participants will explore both east and west sides of Quito, with 5 days at Sacha Lodge in the Ecuadorian Amazon rainforest. Call (800)527-5330 or (408)741-5330 for information and itineraries.

Field Notes

by Bill Bousman

Cormorants through Cranes

A **Pelagic Cormorant** was found dead in New Chicago Marsh on 2 Sep (PJM) for our fourth county record. The South Bay is a dead end for this coastal species. Salt ponds or other impoundments can be enormously attractive to egrets and herons when lowered water levels expose prey species of fish. A drying abandoned salt pond north of Moffett Field hosted 133 **Great Egrets** and 660 **Snowy Egrets** on 3 Sep (MMR), both exceptional concentrations. Two adult **Little Blue Herons** on Salt Pond A9 in Alviso on 2 Sep (PJM) were the last birds noted for the season. Ten **Cattle Egrets** counted at the Arzino Ranch on 2 Sep (PJM) were a high for the month. None were reported away from that location. **Blue-winged Teal** have been reported irregularly from Adobe Creek in the Palo Alto Flood Control Basin (FCB) from 8-30 Sep (PJM, MJM *et al.*, SCR) with eight counted on 22 Sep (PJM). An oversummering male **Redhead** has been found regularly in the Palo Alto FCB during September (m.ob.). Two broods of **Lesser Scaup** were observed in the Sunnyvale Water Pollution Control Plant (WPCP) ponds on 31 Aug (SCR) and three broods were counted on 2 Sep (AME). Single female **Bufflehead** on Salt Pond A3N on 31 Aug and the Palo Alto Baylands on 3 and 27 Sep may represent one oversummering bird (all SCR). A female **Hooded Merganser** at the Palo Alto Baylands on 17 Sep (SCR) and at the Sunnyvale Baylands Park on 24-25 Sep (PJM, BM) must have oversummered locally as our winter birds usually do not arrive until early November. Six imm. **Common Merganser** on the Guadalupe River near the San Jose Airport on 14 Sep (AV, CS) and four seen between Hwy 237 and Montague on 29 Sep (MJM, CP) appear to be part

of an increasing local population using our urban creeks. An injured female **Red-breasted Merganser** was seen in Stevens Creek above Crittenden Lane on 2 Sep (SCR, HLR) and again on 8 Sep (JMe, MMe). This may have been the bird found earlier in August in the Sunnyvale salt ponds. September usually brings a few migrating **Osprey** and this month there were reports of singles over Crittenden Marsh on 2 Sep (PJM), the Guadalupe River at the airport on 14 Sep (AV, CS), at Vasona Res. on 19 Sep (JD, PLN), Coyote Creek below Hwy 237 on 25 Sep (JDa), and over Halls Valley on 28 Sep (MJM, GHt, DSt). A flock of 30 **Sandhill Cranes** flying northeast over Mt. Hamilton on 27 Sep (WGB) were once again on course for their wintering grounds in the Central Valley.

Shorebirds led the excitement this month including Wandering Tattler, Black Turnstone, and Sharp-tailed and Stilt Sandpipers

Shorebirds through Skimmers

A juvenile **American Golden-Plover** on the Coyote Creek Riparian Station (CCRS) waterbird pond on 9 Sep (AJ) and 28 Sep (SCR, MJM, GHt, DSt) may have been the same bird. A single **Pacific Golden-Plover**, its congener, was seen over Charleston Slough on 21 Sep (MMi). The passage of **Lesser Yellowlegs** tapered off in September with a peak count of 20 on Salt Pond A2E on 2 Sep (PJM) while by the end of the month birds in single digits were found at the best spots (v.ob.). A **Wandering Tattler** over Moffett Field on 2 Sep (PJM) is only the 10th record for the county. Two **Black Turnstones** were found on separate salt pond in Sunnyvale on 8 Sep (PJM) and one or both may have been holdovers from August. One to two juvenile **Baird's**

Sandpipers were in the vicinity of Crittenden Marsh and Salt Pond A2E 2-9 Sep (MMR, SCL, HLR, JMe, MMe). The first juvenile **Pectoral Sandpipers** showed up on 2 Sep in Crittenden Marsh and the New Chicago Marsh (PJM) and after that birds were found in local impoundments only in twos and threes into mid September (v.ob.). Sixteen to twenty birds on the Sunnyvale salt ponds 22-25 Sep (PJM) were the harbinger of significant concentrations near the San Jose-Santa Clara WPCP and the CCRS waterbird pond from 25 Sep when 48 birds were counted (JDa) to 30 Sep when 135 were recorded (MMR). This is the best flight year for this species since 1991. As sometimes happens, the great flocks of Pectorals bring in their rarer cousin and a juvenile **Sharp-tailed Sandpiper** was found 28 Sep (AJ) and seen through 30 Sep (SCR, MJM, MMR). A **Stilt Sandpiper** was found (or re-found?) on a pond near Lockheed on 20 and 21 Sep (MMi, JMe) and this or another bird move to the vicinity of the Mountain View Forebay and Adobe Creek in the Palo Alto FCB by 25 Sep (PJM). Two birds were found in Adobe Creek on 27 Sep

(LCh) and careful study showed that one was in basic plumage while the other retained a few juvenal feathers (SCR). One or both birds were seen through the end of the month (v.ob.). A juvenile **Ruff** was reported from the CCRS waterbird pond on 8 Sep (NL). Another juvenile (same?) found on 28 Sep (AJ) at the same location was seen through the end of the month and determined to be a female (MJM, v.ob.). Always rare, an adult **Sabine's Gull** was found on Salt Pond A3W in Sunnyvale on 2 Sep (PJM). A single **Elegant Tern** was over the Palo Alto estuary on 20 Sep and one to two birds were in the vicinity of Salt Pond A1 and Charleston Slough 27-30 Sep (all SCR). Single immature **Common Terns** were found at the Sunnyvale WPCP 14 Sep (PJM, DSh, MJM) and the CCRS waterbird pond on 26 and 29 Sep (AJ, MJM). The last **Least Terns** of the season were

four seen on Salt Pond A2E on 2 Sep (PJM). **Black Skimmers** were found regularly at Charleston Slough at the end of September (m.ob.) with up to three birds present.

Swifts through Goldfinches

The fall migration of **Vaux's Swifts** was, for the most part, marked by small numbers in widespread locations. However, upwards of 100 birds counted in the Alviso area on 2 Sep (PJM) were unusual. There appears to be at least a limited fall movement of **Red-breasted Nuthatches** with single birds in Los Altos 8 Sep (GHt), in the Jasper Ridge Biological Reserve on 10 Sep (SCR), and at Stanford on 21 Sep (PJM). A **Nashville Warbler** in fennel at the Sunnyvale WPCP on 22 Sep (PJM) was the only one reported this month. An **American Redstart** found near the Palo Alto Water Quality Control Plant (WQCP) on 12 Sep (SCR) appeared to be a first-year male. Another vagrant, and somewhat more rare, was a secretive **Ovenbird** found along Stevens Creek below L'Avenida on 29 Sep (SCR) for our 8th county record.

MacGillivray's Warblers came through in record numbers for September with 15 found in various places in the county. A **Brewer's Sparrow** was found in fennel at the Palo Alto Baylands on 7 Sep (MJM). An immature was banded at CCRS on 29 Sep as well (*fide* MJM). A very early **Vesper Sparrow** was at Crittenden Marsh on 2 Sep (PJM). An adult **White-throated Sparrow** banded at CCRS on 25 Sep (*fide* AJ) is the earliest fall arrival I have records for. An immature male **Yellow-headed Blackbird** was found near the Palo Alto WQCP on 13 Sep (MMR). This species is found less frequently in the fall than the spring. Twelve plus **Lawrence's Goldfinches** seen in Henry Coe SP on 22 Sep (JY, AL) are lingering fall birds.

Observers: Bill Bousman (WGB), Les Chibana (LCh), Jean Dubois (JD), Jim Danzenbaker (JDa), Al Eisner (AME), Grant Hoyt (GHt), Alvaro Jaramillo (AJ), Amy Lauterbach (AL), Nick Lethaby (NL), Mike Mammoser (MJM), Bev McIntosh (BM), Peter Metropulos (PJM), John Meyer (JMe), Maria Meyer (MMe), Mark Miller (MMi), Paul Noble (PLN), Charles Preuss

(CP), Mike Rogers (MMR), Heather Rottenborn (HLR), Steve Rottenborn (SCR), Clysta Seney (CS), Dave Shuford (DSh), Dick Stovel (DSt), Ann Verdi (AV), and James Yurchenco (JY).

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



AMERICAN BIRDING ASSOCIATION CODE OF ETHICS

*Respect wildlife, its environment,
and the rights of others*

1. Promote the welfare of birds and their environment.

Support the protection of important bird habitat.

Avoid stressing birds or exposing them to danger.

Limit methods of attracting birds.

Remain well back from nests, roosts, display areas, and feeding sites.

Keep habitat disturbance to a minimum.

2. Respect the law and the rights of others.

3. Ensure that feeders, nest structures, and other artificial bird environments are safe.

Maintain and clean feeders and nest structures regularly.

Keep birds safe from predation from cats and other domestic animals.

4. Group birding, whether organized or impromptu, requires special care.

Respect fellow birders. Share your knowledge, especially with beginners.

Document unethical birding behavior, intervene if prudent, and notify appropriate individuals or organizations.

Leaders should teach ethics through word and example.

Limit group impact on birds and their environment, and others using the same area.

MORRO BAY BIRD FESTIVAL

A Prairie Falcon diving on a Golden Eagle, thousands of Brant flying noisily about your silent kayak, or a rare warbler flitting through the oaks in front of you—these are just some of the sights you may see at the first annual MORRO BAY WINTER BIRD FESTIVAL to be held over the Martin Luther King Holiday weekend, January 17 - 20, 1997. The Festival, co-sponsored by the Morro Coast Audubon Society will include over 25 expert-led field trips to see: raptors on the Carrizo Plain, Bald Eagles at San Antonio Lake, California Condors in Los Padres National Forest, pelagic birds out of Morro Bay, wintering rarities, over a hundred species on a "Big Day," beginning bird trips for identification of waterbirds and other species, bird banding, bird photography, owling, etc. The Saturday Banquet will feature Arnold Small (author of California Birds) speaking on the last 50 years of birding in California.

The central coast area has over 230 wintering species of birds, including Mountain Plover, Mountain Bluebird, Pacific Golden-Plover, Black Rail, Eurasian Wigeon, Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow, and 24 species of raptors including California Condor and Peregrine Falcon. The Festival features workshops, children's environmental activities at the County Environmental School (allowing adults to be free to bird), box lunches for trips, van transportation for longer trips, bird art show, free admission to the Central Coast Natural History Museum, and more. At least eight trips are wheelchair-accessible. Contact Suedene Nelson, Morro Bay Chamber of Commerce, PO Box 876, Morro Bay, CA 93443 for a brochure or call (800) 231-0592.

Rebugging Home and Garden

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nemes per square foot) are equal or better than potentially dangerous lawn insecticides—chlorpyrifos, carbaryl, diazinon, isazophos, or bifenthrin—in controlling white grubs.

Most of us can't stand aphids. They cause curled leaves or other injury to plants, and excrete that nasty, sticky honeydew which drips down on the car and the plants beneath. You may not have noticed that tiny insect feeders such as bushtits, titmice, and chickadees relish aphids. Aphids have many insect natural enemies as well. Syrphid fly larvae, soldier beetles, aphid mites, ladybird beetles and their larvae, and miniwasp parasitoids help control aphids.

Indeed, the greatest factor that tips the balance toward aphid success, is destruction of their natural enemies with broad-spectrum insecticides. You can make matters worse by improper cultural practices. Aphids are attracted to stressed plants. Sun-lovers growing in shade, or plants receiving too much water or nitrogen fertilizer, respond with the lush growth favored by aphids. If you truly need supplements to control aphids, insecticidal soaps and oils are effective, but cause minimal harm to natural enemies.

Believe it or not, you won't go wrong if you believe that wasps are essential to human interests. Their usual food is other insects. Only a few—the yellow and black striped 'yellowjackets'—can be considered 'pests'. And even they are insect predators. Yellowjacket numbers are the problem. In early spring, a founder female constructs a few cells to raise her young larvae. She feeds them the masticated meat of caterpillars or other large insects. By fall, this colony may have grown to 14,000 cells. It's no wonder that yellowjackets may visit your fall picnic seeking meat. Yet in one study wasps removed 90% of the caterpillars staked out in a forest—the large wasps located insect larvae before other predators could find them.

Most tiny wasps are parasitoids. They use their stinger/ovipositor to pierce aphid, caterpillar, insect eggs, or similar hosts and deposit their eggs within. Adult parasitoids are sustained by nectar from

tiny flowers, or by that maligned honeydew. Their larvae mature within their prey. Most insects are kept in check by these parasitoids. Since they attack only one or a few hosts, parasitoids provide *selective* natural insect control.

You can help nourish miniwasp parasitoids by planting flowers of buckwheats and carrot family plants, such as dill or parsley. Middle-sized wasps and syrphid flies relish allysum and certain daisies. You can also augment natural enemy populations by releasing *Trichogramma* or other commercially available parasitoids. Maybe, working together, you and the birds can rebug your home and garden.

Ruth Troetschler is a co-author of the book, *Rebugging Your Home and Garden*, which is available at the SCVAS store at McClellan Ranch Park in Cupertino.

Now May Be a Good Time to Trim Trees

by Leda Beth Gray

It is clear that for the sake of wildlife, October through early December is the best time for pruning trees which could be nesting sites for birds and squirrels. Nesting times for local birds vary, possibly starting with late December for Anna's Hummingbirds. The nesting season probably peaks in spring and early summer, but it extends all the way to late August for multi-brooded species such as Northern Mockingbirds and Mourning Doves. Add to this the fact that squirrel nesting may go into September and it doesn't leave much time for pruning. Although it may be necessary to remove diseased wood, pruning is otherwise no longer seen as vital to the health of most trees.

According to a new brochure put out by Wildlife Rescue in Palo Alto, *Living With Wildlife*, "the best pruning is none at all." The brochure notes that research in tree care has shown that pruning can actually harm trees through trauma, making them susceptible to disease. Sunset's Western Garden book observes that a plant may be the wrong choice for the location if it requires

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continual pruning. Check with local experts in your area if you think you need to have pruning done on trees in your yard and, if at all possible, see if you can have it done between October and late December. Encourage your city's landscaping department to do the same. Remind them that the Migratory Bird Treaty Act actually makes it illegal to harm or remove active nests of all migratory and native birds.

If you must prune or remove a tree during nesting season, make an attempt to locate any existing nests before pruning begins and try to wait until that particular nesting activity is over. If the nestlings are close to fledging you might only have to wait a few days. It can be difficult or next to impossible to visually locate bird nests in trees, especially nests of hummingbirds, so it is best to avoid pruning during nesting season if at all possible. Please spread the word by sharing this information with friends and neighbors. You may be saving them the heartache of taking injured nestlings to Wildlife Rescue or the Humane Society!

Field trip reports

Marin Headlands Hawk Migration

I can't believe that only seven people showed up for the hawk-watch! Saturday, Sept. 27th was one of those days that hawk watchers pray for: weather that cooperates and LOTS of raptors. Prior to the 27th, things had been relatively quiet on Hawk Hill. However, the storm-doors (hawk-doors?) opened as the fog began to lift at about 10:00. Between 10 and 2, when the fog began to come back in, we saw over 400 hawks and vultures, including 75+ Turkey Vultures, 7+ Northern Harriers, 140+ Sharp-shinned Hawks, 90+ Cooper's Hawks, 25+ unidentified *accipiters*, 25+ Red-shouldered Hawks, **11 Broad-winged Hawks**, 95+ Red-tailed Hawks, **1 Ferruginous Hawk**, 2 American Kestrels, 3-4 Merlins, and 1-2 Peregrine Falcons.

Other non-raptor migrants were few and far between. We had 30 Band-tailed Pigeons, two Red-breasted Nuthatches that foraged all day in the small conifer at the lookout—no doubt intimidated by the numbers of passing hawks that would consider them a rather tasty snack, several "red-shafted" flickers, two unidentified warblers, and four Western Meadowlarks. (This is the first time I have not seen any swifts passing by the headlands on a hawk-watching day!) It is always a gamble to pick a weekend on the headlands with little fog and good wind conditions, and for the eight of us who went out on Sept. 27th, it was well worth the gamble. Hope to see you next year!

—Don Schmoldt

Phipps Ranch

Vagrant-wise, the Sept. 22 trip to Pescadero's Phipps Ranch was a bust, but none of the 30 SCVAS birders who joined Dan Keller on this gorgeous morning seemed to mind. The quaint, birder-friendly fruit and vegetable farm just east of the town of Pescadero is known as a magnet for migrating passerines, but perhaps the relatively bland weather contributed to the dearth of unusual warblers, vireos and flycatchers that fall into coastal riparian oases, often around storms. Our group enjoyed a leisurely walk around

the ranch, observing resident bird species, a few migrants, and a phenomenal variety of herbal and arboreal vegetation.

We started at 9:00 AM by missing the Indigo Bunting that the Santa Cruz Bird Club had found along the road, but we did find the day's most unusual passerine—an immature Hooded Oriole, uncommon in coastal San Mateo Co. The well-developed riparian habitat along Pescadero Creek had a few songbird flocks, including numerous Yellow Warbler migrants and returning Townsend's Warblers among the Chestnut-backed Chickadees. Both White-crowned and Golden-crowned Sparrows foraged in loose groups as they recovered from just-completed migratory flights from northern climes. A large, hungry Cooper's Hawk darted through a berry patch and scanned for unwary ground-feeders, but flew off almost immediately. Two adult Golden Eagles soared over a grassy ridge to the north, not a common sighting in a region where a pair is believed to nest but an exact site is yet undiscovered.

When the bird observations lagged, the diverse flora of Phipps Ranch sparked considerable interest among the participants, many of whom were certainly up on their herbs, flowers, and native plants. Some experts were even pointing out, and properly naming, butterflies and insect larvae! Dan Keller is not only an excellent birder but also knowledgeable about plants, insects, and ecology in general, so we were able to look and learn about all kinds of living things in the idyllic setting of the ranch. A pleasant stroll back through pick-yourself berry patches (we did), an apple orchard, and the petting zoo/exotic bird aviaries concluded the outing, though many of us lingered to purchase farm-fresh produce at the store before heading home. (If you enjoy legumes, the Phipps Ranch store has an amazing variety of peas and beans, many of which you've probably never heard of.)

It's quite likely that all who attended this field trip would agree that despite the lack of avian rarities, it was a most enjoyable morning.

—Grant Hoyt

San Jose CBC

On Sunday, December 22, why not avoid the Christmas rush at the shopping malls and join SCVAS for a full day of birding on the annual San Jose Christmas Bird Count? We'll be counting in ten different sectors representing the many diverse habitats where we live—Alviso's wetlands, Diablo foothills and woodland, riparian corridors and suburban neighborhoods—all important areas to be canvassed.

Everyone is welcome to participate, including newcomers. December's *Avocet* will provide more details. If you'd like to sign up early or have any questions, contact CBC Compiler Ann Verdi at home (408)377-8018 or work (408)749-2199. If you're able to help with the countdown dinner, held at Leininger Center in Kelley Park after the birds are all counted, call Kathy Parker at (408)7358-2832.



You'd be lucky to see a Northern Pygmy-owl while counting birds on a Christmas Count, but they do live in the County and are often active by day. This individual was photographed by SCVAS member Alan Walther, who captured the diminutive raptor posing with a hapless vole.

Santa Clara Valley
Audubon Society
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Fall is for Birds---and Fundraising

Autumn is certainly an exciting time for South Bay birders, given the richness and diversity of our wintering waterfowl populations, and the chances of finding those odd vagrants that seem to pop up unpredictably but frequently in Santa Clara County. SCVAS Board members, however, are known to experience pangs of anxiety around this time of year.

That's because they've got to come up with another catchy, inspiring theme for the annual Fall Fundraiser, and send out letters to each and every SCVAS member asking for financial support for the Chapter. This year is no different, and the Fundraising Committee is still working on that "perfect" slogan that will, without sounding too pushy, silly, or contrived, convince members to send us a check.

One fundamental sentiment did emerge from a brainstorming session, and it's worth mentioning here—SCVAS is committed to putting its time, energy, and money into bird habitat protection right here in Santa Clara County. This fundraiser will support local programs in education, public outreach, and conservation aimed at keeping our local environment a healthy one for birds and wildlife. We're the local Audubon chapter—this is what we should be doing. But are we effective?

National Audubon thinks so. Each year, local chapters of the National Audubon Society (NAS) are required to earn their right to another year of NAS certification by accom-

plishing a minimum number of standard activities. Here is a breakdown of some highlights from those requirements compared with SCVAS' numbers:

<u>REQUIREMENT</u>	<u>MINIMUM</u>	<u>SCVAS</u>
General Meetings	6	9
Newsletter	6	10
Board Meetings	5	11
Field Trips	4	69
Recommended Activities*	4	13
Envir. Education**	5 classrooms	98 classrooms

*includes whole program areas in conservation projects (Craig Breon's work), Wetlands and other large-scale school programs.

**Audubon Adventures program.

Needless to say, we received another year's certification. In a letter dated September 30, Jill Shirley of the California Field Office wrote, "SCVAS . . . is to be commended on its outstanding environmental education and outreach programs, enticing monthly programs, an impressive field trip schedule, and a list of conservation activities too long to mention."

We're grateful for the accolades. But we can't keep up the pace without the continued support of our members. As a large chapter in a thriving urban setting, we need to make sure our feathered allies continue to thrive as well. When you receive your letter (catchy slogan as yet undetermined) soliciting a donation to SCVAS later this month, please consider a generous gift. Thanks.

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.

Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society Subscription: Check one:

Subscriber \$12 Supporter \$25 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.

Donation: SCVAS greatly appreciates your tax-deductible donation. Your gift helps fund the Chapter's birding, education, conservation and research programs.

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