



# The Avocet

The Newsletter of the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society

January 1997

## Bluebird Recovery Program Under Way

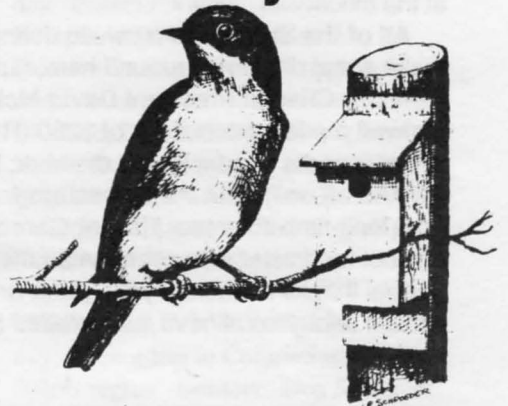
by Carol Hankermeyer

As part of our national wild heritage, the bluebirds of America have always been a symbol of hope and happiness. They are a favorite metaphor for joy and love in poetry and song lyrics. Ironically, we now see these beautiful and beloved birds slipping toward the endangered zone as populations have steadily dwindled over the last half century. Figures from the Christmas Bird Count and the Breeding Bird Survey show that the number of Western Bluebirds alone has decreased 36.4% in the last 28 years and 28.5% in only the last 15, indicating an accelerating rate of population decline. Statistics for the Eastern Bluebird are even more grim. Without human intervention this ominous trend will most likely continue.

The good news is that remedial action

to reverse population loss may be less complicated than we find with other species. Best of all, you can become actively involved and contribute to the restoration of the Western Bluebird through a recovery program just beginning at SCVAS. Understanding the habits and basic needs of bluebirds as well as the causes of their decline are key elements to the success of the program.

The Western Bluebird, like its cousins the Mountain Bluebird and the Eastern Bluebird, is an inhabitant of open grasslands with scattered trees that provide nesting holes. Herbivorous insects, many of them crop-destructive, constitute the bulk of its diet. The bluebird's preference for open feeding areas and exposed perching sites for spotting prey prevents it from seeking more protected



Reprinted with permission from *The Bluebird: How you can help fight for survival* by L. Zeleny, Indiana Univ. Press (available at SCVAS bookstore)

nesting cavities in the deep woods. These behavior patterns make it more vulnerable to the rapid changes associated with the modernization of our society. Until recent times many bluebirds could be found near human habitations in suburban and even urban areas.

To what do we attribute the unfortunate plight of the little bird people love so well? Most of the causes can be traced directly or indirectly to human activity. Broad spectrum insecticides take their toll, becoming concentrated in the bluebird's body after eating numerous poisoned insects. Destruction of habitat and nesting sites is also a major cause. Bluebirds are dependent upon ready-made nesting cavities such as decayed tree wounds or old woodpecker holes in trees and fence posts. The clearing away of dead trees and the substitution of metal fence posts for wooden ones have eliminated many possible sites. Small country farms, which in the past provided diverse

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### General Membership Meeting

Wednesday January 15

**WINGS OVER PARADISE---**

**BEGINNING BIRDING IN THE URBAN JUNGLE**

**with Steve Shunk**

**Palo Alto Cultural Center**

**Newell and Embarcadero Rds.**

**7:30 PM Hospitality**

**8:00 Program**

Did you know that over 300 species of birds have been identified right here in Santa Clara County? We all know some of the regulars, but where the heck are the rest, and when you find them, how do you tell them all apart? Bird finding and identification can be frustrating, challenging, tedious, and exhilarating all at once. Adding to the challenge, you must often be prepared for extreme conditions and have a decent pair of binoculars.

Tonight you will have the opportunity to explore beginning birding with SCVAS Board member and birding instructor Steve Shunk. Steve will discuss a wide range of topics, from the South Bay's birding hot spots to optics and field guides. He will feature slides from the 1996 Festival of the Cranes in Bosque del Apache NWR and will share samples of birding videos and recordings currently available. Bring your binoculars and your questions, and join us for this exciting exploration of the birds in our own back yards.

# VIEW FROM THE OFFICE

by Garth Harwood, SCVAS Chapter Manager

**We've been involved** in a cheerful task here in the office these past few weeks: opening up and responding to the 200+ replies to our Fall fundraising letter sent out in November. I don't know much about national averages regarding response rates to "direct-mail solicitations" from non-profit organizations, but I have a strong hunch that our response rate—about one for every 18 letters delivered—exceeds those averages by a wide margin.

On a more personal level, though, it's a heartwarming experience to see this outpouring of support from all of you for the Chapter and its programs. That so many individuals would generously send money to support the work we do is a real boost to our morale, and a vote of confidence that lets us know we're headed in a good direction. So once again, I'd like to thank each of you deeply. It's this sort of thing that brought me to work here in the first place, and that keeps me feeling fulfilled, even during the most hectic weeks at the office.

**All of the donations** received during the Fall fundraiser have combined to make a real difference around here, but several "whoppers" deserve special mention. Chapter President **David McIntyre** and Mr. and Mrs. **Rob and Rita Colwell** made contributions of \$250 (Rob, of course, is a past president of the Chapter and a current Board member; Rita has a long history of work with SCVAS as well). But the biggest single donation—\$500!—has come to us from long-time volunteer **Harriet Gerson**, whom many of you know as the hotshot fundraiser who coordinated the spring 1996 Birdathon campaign. A special thanks to each of you! (*Late-breaking item---a couple who prefer to remain anonymous have just donated \$1,000!!--Ed.*)

\* \* \* \* \*

**Postscript to fundraising campaign:** The mailing of the fundraising letter provides us with a different kind of opportunity here at the office. Because of the first-class postage used, we get the undeliverable items back (unlike the newsletter, which goes out at discount bulk-mail rates, and is discarded when undeliverable.) As a result, we now have proof that about 200 of our members do not get their newsletters, even though we send them out every month. That's 200 too many lost Avocets!

Most such instances seem to involve people who've moved without sending in an address change, but in some cases we may have an error in our database. In most cases, we have no means of tracking these lost members down, so if you suspect you are one of the 200 or hear somebody grumbling about how they don't get an Avocet any more, please contact us so we can straighten things out!

\* \* \* \* \*

**And now, at last, to the birds . . .** Like people around the country, we've been enjoying the unusual profusion of montane bird species here at the park. As of early December, we've seen several RED-BREASTED NUTHATCHES, as well as one unfortunate HERMIT THRUSH, which arrived only to kill itself against the office window, despite the 5 hawk silhouettes in place.

Fortunately, there's a silver lining to that particular tragedy: thanks to the expertise of Board member **Leda Beth Gray**, that bird and several others we've acquired according to the terms of our Fish & Game "dead specimens permit" will be prepared as study skins for our environmental education programs. And thanks to Leda Beth for the most unusual bird sighting at the park lately: she and **David Drake** had a long look at a GOLDEN EAGLE in the redwood tree just outside our office door in mid-November, causing no small amount of anxiety to the usual RED-TAILED HAWK found in that spot.

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## SCVAS OFFICERS and BOARD

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Past Pres.	Nick Yatsko	408/247-5499
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Grant Hoyt '96-99	415/969-7892
Leda Beth Gray '96-99	415/424-8573

## STAFF

Chapter Manager	
Garth Harwood	408/252-3747
Environmental Advocate	
Craig Breon	408/252-3748
Office Fax	408/252-2850

## CHAIRPERSONS

Avocet	Grant Hoyt	415/969-7892
Education	Bobbie Handen	408/356-4263
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Hospitality	Gail Cheeseman	408/867-1371
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Bird Count	Ann Verdi	408/377-8018
	Kathy Parker	408/358-2832
Audubon		
Adventures	Elaine Gould	408/448-0622
BAAC Delegate	(Vacant)	

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**

# January 1997 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**

**Friday Jan. 3, 1997. Mt. Hamilton CBC.** If you are a truly dedicated (read: crazed) CBC junkie, this is the count for you. For a rugged, unusual Christmas Bird Count experience, call compiler Don Schmoltdt at (510)215-1910---he'll be happy to sign you up.

**\*\*Wednesday Jan. 8, 9:00 AM.** Half day. Campbell Percolation Ponds/Los Gatos Creek. Leader: Shirley Gordon (408)996-9863. From I-280 take Winchester Blvd. south, turn left on Hacienda, left on Dell and right at park entrance into parking lot. Or take Hwy 85 south to Winchester and turn left, then right on Hacienda and left on Dell. Highlights: wintering waterfowl. Easy 2 mile walk. Lunch optional; rain cancels.

**Wednesday Jan. 8, 7:30 PM.** Bay Area Bird Photographers will feature Les Chibana and Jay Plater with a salute to local birds. Lucy Evans Baylands Interpretive Center, E. Embarcadero Rd. Palo Alto.

**\*\*Saturday Jan. 11, 8:00 AM.** Full day. Moss Landing and Monterey. Leader: John Mariani (408)997-2066. From Hwy 17 in Santa Cruz, take Hwy 1 south to Moss Landing. Meet at Jetty Rd., a right turn just north of Moss Landing harbor. Loons, grebes, gulls, ducks, shorebirds. Bring lunch.

**\*\*Sunday Jan. 12, 9:30 AM.** Young Audubon whale-watching trip to Monterey Bay. One-and-a-half hour trip. Leader: Allen Royer (408)288-7768. Highlights include gray whales, sea otters, sea lions, pelicans, loons, and other seabirds. Boat leaves wharf in Monterey at 10:00; fees are \$12 for adults, \$10 for kids 12 and under. Call SCVAS office to make reservations.

**Tuesday Jan. 14, 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: Sandhill Crane.

**\*\*Saturday Jan. 18, 9:00 AM.** Full day. Merced National Wildlife Refuge/Santa Fe Grade. Leader: Don Schmoltdt (510)215-1910. Meet at NW corner of junction of Rte. 59 and Sandy Mush Rd. From Hwy 101 in Gilroy take Hwy 152 east, past Los Banos approx. 20 miles, then north on Rte. 59 approx. 7 miles to meeting place. Allow 2.5 hrs. drive time, more if fog is forecast. Highlights include large flocks of ducks and geese; waterfowl, raptors; possible Sandhill Cranes and White-faced Ibis.

**\*\*Sunday Jan. 19, 8:00 AM.** Half day. Charleston Slough. Leader: Nick Yatsko (408)247-5499. From Hwy 101 in Mt. View, take San Antonio Rd. north approx. 1/4 mile to Terminal Way parking area. Herons, egrets, ducks, shorebirds, gulls. Emphasis on birding basics; beginners encouraged.

**\*\*Wednesday Jan. 22, 9:00 AM.** Half day. Foster City. Leader: Rose Green (415)493-8378. From Hwy 101 take Hillsdale Blvd. east to Shell Blvd., turn right and park at community center. Lunch optional.

**Maryann Danielson** will again offer her very popular birding classes this winter and spring through Sunbeam Ecology Explorations. BIRDING BASICS for beginning and less-skilled intermediate birders will meet on Wednesday evenings from 7:30 - 9:30 starting Jan. 8 for 13 weeks at a cost of \$70. FOL-LOWING BIRDS IN WINTER AND SPRING, for intermediate and more advanced birders, will meet Monday evenings starting Jan. 6 for 12 sessions at \$65. Field trips will be offered for an additional fee for both classes. Classes meet at Little House, 800 Middle Ave. in Menlo Park. For more information call the instructor at (415)325-9349.

**\*\*Saturday Jan. 25, 8:00 AM.** Half day. Sunnyvale Water Pollution Control ponds. Leader: Steve Rottenborn (415)497-9368. From Hwy 101 take Hwy 237 E, exit N on Carribbean Dr, turn right on Borregas Ave, then left to parking area. Join one of the Bay Area's top birders for a morning of duck, gull, and waterbird study. Rarities are always a possibility here, especially with Steve's amazing talent for finding them.

**\*\*Saturday Feb. 1, 8:30 AM.** Full day. Panoche Valley. Leader: Clay Kempf (408)761-8260. Meet at Paicines Store on Hwy 25, approx 11 miles south of Hollister. Mountain Bluebird, Prairie Falcon, Ferruginous Hawk, Golden Eagle are likely; other possibilities include Greater Roadrunner, Vesper Sparrow, Chukar. Bring lunch and full tank of gas.

**\*\*Saturday Feb. 8, 9:00 AM.** Full day. Raptor trip to Colusa/Sutter Buttes region. Leaders: Don Schmoltdt (510)215-1910, Doug and Gail Cheeseman. From San Jose take I-680 north to I-80, then north on 505 to I-5. From town of Williams go east on Hwy 20 to Colusa, meet at city park at Main St. and Hwy 20. Optional exploration of wildlife refuge if time allows. Raptor possibilities include Ferruginous and Rough-legged Hawks, Prairie Falcon, Golden Eagle, and more. Mountain Bluebird, Lewis' Woodpecker, Vesper Sparrow also possible.

**Tuesday Feb. 11, 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: Cardinals.

## **Birding, Whale-watching With the Cheesemans**

Doug and Gail Cheeseman have organized two Monterey Bay boat trips for viewing marine mammals and seabirds, Jan. 18 and 25, 8AM - 3PM, leaving from Monterey Fisherman's Wharf, \$50 per person. Plenty of space is available. Call the Cheesemans at (800)527-5330 to reserve space.

# Field Notes

by Bill Bousman

## Loons through Waterfowl

The immature **Pacific Loon** at Shoreline Lake was seen regularly throughout November (m.ob.). A second bird was seen there on 4 Nov (MiF). At least three **Common Loons** have been found at Shoreline during the month as well (m.ob.) with one still there on 21 Nov (SS). A single bird on Searsville Lake on 9 Nov (RCo) is also of interest. Up to 16 **Brown Pelicans** have lingered at Shoreline Lake though 16 Nov (m.ob.). A record high count of 1200 **Double-crested Cormorants** at Shoreline Lake on 16 Nov (MJM) suggests a good supply of prey species this November. Ten **Cattle Egrets** found along Artesian Slough on 10 Nov (PB) were an unusual find for this location in November. An adult **Snow Goose** flying over Summit Ridge near Loma Prieta on 1 Nov (SCR) was a good sighting. Almaden Reservoir remains the winter **Wood Duck** capitol of the county with 60 counted there on 16 Nov (MiF). Seven **Blue-winged Teal** were on Flood Slough at Bayfront Park on 2-3 Nov (LCh *et al.*). A number of birds have been found in the Palo Alto Flood Control Basin (FCB) with a peak of eight on both 15 and 28 Nov (LCh, JY, AL). Two **Eurasian Wigeon** were seen on Charleston Slough on 3 Nov (CIW, ChW) and 9 Nov (MJM). Single birds were found on Shoreline Lake (again) on 4 Nov (MiF), on the Sunnyvale Water Pollution Control Plant (WPCP) ponds on 8 Nov (SCR), and in the Palo Alto FCB on 10 Nov (KP). Our expected wintering flock of **Redhead** in the Palo Alto FCB has not materialized with only five birds there on 15 Nov (LCh). Three to four birds have been seen fairly regularly on Shoreline Lake through the month (v.ob.), but the best count of birds has been of 12 on the Sunnyvale WPCP ponds on 8 Nov (SCR). One to two birds inland at the Coleman ponds 17-24 Nov (AV) are slightly less expected. Two male **Barrow's Goldeneyes** found on Shoreline Lake on 1 Nov (TGr) were the first birds this season and the earliest arrival on

record. Two to five birds have been seen there regularly through the month (m.ob.). A decade ago December **Hooded Mergansers** were an unusual treat and a bird in November was exceptional. Now, they're just another trash bird. The big concentration this fall has been on the Oka percolation ponds where numbers built up rapidly during the month (v.ob.) with a peak of 34 counted on 18 Nov (LCh *et al.*). Ten birds on the Shoreline Golf Course Ponds on 21 Nov (SS *et al.*) was also a good number and a pair of birds was found on the Coleman ponds on 15-24 Nov (AV)---mighty fine trash birds! Thirty **Red-breasted Mergansers** on the Alviso salt ponds on 16 Nov (MiF) are the start of the winter concentration there,

*A Black-legged Kittiwake, a female Hooded Warbler, and a Lark Bunting were unusual records that distracted us from the amazing montane invasion*

but a single bird at Shoreline Lake on 18 Nov (LCh) is less expected.

## Hawks through Owls

Single **Osprey** were found over the Calabazas ponds north of Hwy 237 on 15 Nov and the Almaden Reservoir on 24 Nov (both AV). Single **Ferruginous Hawks** include an immature along Felter Road on 2 Nov (MJM), an adult below Anderson Dam on 10 Nov (MiF), another adult at Calaveras Reservoir on 22 Nov (SCR), and an immature at the San Jose Airport on 30 Nov (MMR). Valley floor sightings of **Prairie Falcons** include one at Shoreline Park 6-9 (v.ob.) and near the Alviso Environmental Education Center (EEC) on 16 Nov (MiF) and 23 Nov (TGr). A single **Wilson's Phalarope** in Crittenden Marsh on 8 Nov (SCR) is very late and the first record I have for this species in November. We have, on occasion, found overwintering birds in December. A first-winter **Black-legged Kittiwake** was found at the Palo Alto Duck

Pond on 18 Nov (SCR) for some real November excitement. This is our fourth county record of this pelagic species. Up to five **Black Skimmers**, two adults and three immatures, have staked out Charleston Slough this month (m.ob.). Our first **Short-eared Owl** of the season was a single bird at Shoreline Park on 11 Nov (MJM). A single bird was found at the Palo Alto Baylands on 23 Nov (JM *et al.*, MiF) and two were seen foraging in the Palo Alto FCB the next day (JDa *vide* MiF). Quite surprising, however, was a single bird near Anderson Reservoir on 23 Nov (MMR)---we have few records of this species away from the bay.

## Sapsuckers through Solitaires

The Ed Levin CP male **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** has been found regularly near the Spring Valley picnic area during November (m.ob.). An immature male, found at Arastradero Preserve in Palo Alto on 3 Nov (TGr), was re-found the next day (SCR), but has not been reported since. This Arastradero bird is our 8th county record. A hybrid **Red-naped x Red-breasted Sapsucker** found near the Stanford arboretum in October was seen again on 21 Nov (SCR).

One of the more spectacular gifts of the montane invasion was **Clark's Nutcracker**. The first was found along Summit Ridge on 10 Nov (SBT) and was seen there on 11 Nov as well (SCR). Another bird was found on the county side of Castle Rock SP on 18 Nov (DLSu) with four more on the Santa Cruz side. One or more nutcrackers were heard at Castle Rock 21-23 Nov (v.ob.). These are the first birds in the county since the invasions in the 1960s and 1970s. The most obvious representative of the invasion is **Red-breasted Nuthatch**. So far this fall we have had three to four times more birds than were reported in 1990, which was the previous invasion year leader. **Winter Wrens** winter along the valley floor in small numbers and are seldom found so one on San Francisquito Creek at Tasso in Palo Alto on 25 Nov is of interest as are the two found along the

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Guadalupe River on 28 Nov (both SCR). **Townsend's Solitaires** occurred in record numbers in the fall of 1990---well, maybe that's a bit of hyperbole for only two birds. But this fall we've had five sightings already, including one on Summit Ridge on 1 Nov and another on Loma Prieta on 3 Nov (both SCR).

### Vireos through Grosbeaks

Despite the attention placed on the montane hordes, November birding along the riparian corridors and the valley floor has been enormously productive. A **'Blue-headed' Solitary Vireo**, one of the eastern races, was seen along the Guadalupe River on 28 Nov (SCR). This is the first record of this race in the county. A **Nashville Warbler** at an office building on Hacienda in Campbell on 14 and 20 Nov (CW, SF) is probably wintering in the vicinity. A **Yellow Warbler** was found near the Alviso EEC on 24 Nov (AME) and possibly two birds were seen there on 27 Nov (MMR). Another yellow was found along the Guadalupe above Montague on 28 Nov (SCR). A **Black-throated Gray Warbler** near Stanford on 2 and 4 Nov (J&MM) is late for a migrant and may be overwintering. A good find near the Alviso EEC was a **Northern Waterthrush** on 24 Nov (AME). Along the Guadalupe River above Montague, a spectacular vagrant was the female **Hooded Warbler** found on 28 Nov (SCR) and seen the next day as well for the fourth county record. The returning **Summer Tanager** reported last month along San Francisquito Creek was heard there again on 1 Nov (MiF) and observed on both 2 Nov (J&MM) and 12 Nov (KP). A female **Western Tanager** was seen along the Guadalupe River on 29 Nov (MMR). A **Black-headed Grosbeak**, probably an immature female, showed up at a Los Altos feeder on 27 Nov (RCo) and has remained through the end of the month. A female or immature male **Indigo Bunting** seen along the Guadalupe River above Montague on 28 Nov (SCR) is a rare find. More spectacular yet was the **Lark Bunting** found at the edge of the Shoreline overflow parking lot on 8 Nov (SCR) and seen repeatedly (v.ob.) through 13 Nov (MMR). This is the second county record for this prairie species. The first high tides of the season brought sightings of **Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow** at the Palo Alto Baylands on 22

Nov (TAC *fide* JM) and 23 Nov (JMt, JM *et al.*). Three to four **Swamp Sparrows** were found at the Palo Alto Baylands on 26 Nov in the weeds on the old dredge spoil and another was along the Guadalupe River above Montague on 28 Nov (both SCR). **White-throated Sparrows** include one at Almaden Lake on 2 Nov (SCR, HLR), an immature on Matadero Road in Palo Alto on 11 Nov (SCR, HLR), and one at Ed Levin CP on 16 Nov (MJM). A single bird returned to a feeder in Los Gatos on 9 Nov (JD) and has been seen regularly since then. The finch component of the montane invasion has been led by **Cassin's Finches**. A single male was found on Summit Ridge on 3 Nov (SCR, FV, RWR) and again on 11 Nov (SCR) and at least two birds were there on 12 Nov (DLSu, MMR). Two birds were found at a feeder in San Jose on 10 Nov (SBT) and a male was there again on 23 Nov (SBT *fide* MMR). Two more birds were heard on the Santa Clara side of Castle Rock SP on 18 Nov (DLSu). **Red Crossbills**, which have been scarce and irregular since the late 1980s, have also been part of the invasion. Along Summit Ridge 1-30 birds were observed 1-12 Nov (v.ob.). At Ed Levin CP 8-20 were seen 3-15 Nov (LBG, AWa, SCR). A single bird was heard at Lake Ranch Reservoir on 10 Nov (MJM) and about 20 were noted within the county at Castle Rock SP on 18 Nov (DLSu). One to five **Evening Grosbeaks** found along Summit Ridge 1-12 Nov (SCR, MMR) rounded out the montane crew.

*Observers: Peg Bernucci (PB), Ted Chandik (TAC), Les Chibana (LCh), Rita Colwell (RCo), Jim Danzenbaker (JDa), Jean Dubois (JD), Al Eisner (AME), Mike Feighner (MiF), Shirley Furtado (SF), Leda Beth Gray (LBG), Tom Grey (TGr), Amy Lauterbach (AL), Mike Mammoser (MJM), Jennifer Matikin (JMt), John & Maria Meyer (J&MM), Joe Morlan (JM), Kathy Parker (KP), Bob Reiling (RWR), Mike Rogers (MMR), Heather Rottenborn (HLR), Steve Rottenborn (SCR), Susan Stout (SS), David Suddjian (DLSu), Scott Terrill (SBT), Frank Vanslager (FV), Ann Verdi (AV), Alan Walther (AWa), Claire Wilson (CW), Chris Wolfe (ChW), Claire Wolfe (CIW), and James Yurchenco (JY).*

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

## NAS 'WatchList' Documents Species in Decline

Ninety bird species---fully 14 percent of all American breeding bird species---are in decline or danger, according to National Audubon Society President John Flicker. This alarming deterioration in the numbers of American breeding avifauna has been documented by the first-ever "WatchList," an annual count of birds undergoing unnatural population declines or rare birds suffering loss of habitat.

"With 90 species listed, including many birds familiar to most Americans, the WatchList is nothing less than a warning cry," said Flicker. "We fervently hope that the list will serve as a rallying point for millions who want to take action before these once common birds disappear."

Compiled by Partners in Flight and Audubon through the work of scientists and the observations of volunteer citizens, the WatchList documents non-cyclical drops in bird populations and pinpoints rarer species whose habitats are threatened or disappearing. While not yet on the Endangered Species list, WatchListed birds could soon join those less fortunate species. It is significant that even the Gray Catbird, Yellow-headed Blackbird and Bobolink, birds that up until now have been thought of as common and abundant, are among the species listed.

"Millions of Americans enjoy birds, but take their presence for granted," said Frank Gill, Senior Vice-president for Science of NAS. "Birds are an indicator group and many on the WatchList show abnormal declines. We hope this accounting serves as a wake-up call to all people who are concerned about the health of the environment, not only for birds, but for themselves and their children. We further hope that American families will get a chance to see these increasingly rare birds both now and in the future."

The WatchList will be published in the fall edition of Field Notes, Audubon's quarterly ornithology journal, and an article on the list appears in the November/December edition of Audubon magazine.

# Something bigger than ourselves

by Craig Breon

SCVAS Environmental Advocate

Mussolini once said that an individual is not made lesser by joining an army, but rather made greater by the experience of being part of a larger movement and sense of purpose. Much as I don't generally agree with fascist ideology, this rings true of my experience with Audubon (and of course he did get the trains running on time, so that's two for Benito).

One of the most rewarding aspects of working or volunteering for our chapter is realizing that we are part of a larger whole. At our general meetings, it's evident that our membership cares about many of the same issues and shares a passion for wildlife. At our Board of Directors meetings, while each Board member works on one or more aspects of the chapter (wetlands field trips for children, bookkeeping, letter writing on conservation issues, leading bird trips), each also supports the others, and the outcome is a chapter that gets a lot done.

I thought I would take this space to relate some of the ways our chapter interacts with other aspects of Audubon. When it all works out as planned, these interactions allow us to cover an issue—for example, wetlands restoration—from small, local projects to nationwide policies.

## The Bay Area Audubon Council (BAAC)

BAAC is a loose affiliation of the eight Bay Area Audubon chapters, which range in size from Golden Gate Audubon at more than 5000 members (we have around 4000), to two or three chapters with less than 1000 members. Representatives of the eight chapters get together every other month to discuss issues of common interest and to share experiences.

Much of the time BAAC is focused on conservation activities. Often, however, topics will range from "how to get an effective newsletter out" to "recruiting teachers into environmental education projects."

Recently, BAAC hired a media representative. There were two main goals to his hiring: 1) to raise the awareness of Audubon's conservation and education activities Baywide, and 2) to focus on the

acquisition of Bair Island off Redwood City. After nine months of work, progress has been solid. In October, a full page add in the New York Times asked the Kumagai Co. in Japan to "Let Bair Island Go Back To Nature." The article was signed by numerous environmental leaders and carried pictures of the island, the endangered California Clapper Rail, and Mr. Kumagai himself. The media person also coordinated a small demonstration at Bair Island.

The resulting attention came on both sides of the Pacific, in both print and on TV. In Japan, wetlands conservation and birding organizations have joined our chorus in asking the company to negotiate a price for the 1600 acres of restorable wetlands on Bair Island with governmental agencies and nonprofit organizations.

BAAC allows Audubon to speak with a unified voice on issues of concern to the entire Bay, such as Delta restoration or the regional Habitat Goals Project nearly completed by the San Francisco Estuary Institute. Perhaps more important than that, it allows the chapters to learn from each other's successes and failures. Going to a BAAC meeting, one comes away with a strong sense of connection to the other parts of the Bay and to good people around the Bay working towards shared goals.

## Audubon California

"Finally Hatched!" is what it said on the cover of a recent publication from Sacramento. Audubon California is born of the old Western Regional Office. The change was part of the restructuring of National Audubon; the idea was to put the State organization in closer contact with the 53 Audubon chapters in California.

To date, our relationship with California Audubon hasn't changed greatly. They still come down to the BAAC meetings to give updates on State conservation issues, fundraising efforts, and to conduct workshops on a variety of topics. Perhaps the most important interaction we have with Sacramento is through John McCaull, Audubon's legislative advocate for the State. Our chapter contributes to his salary, and in return we help set his agenda.

For the 1997 legislative session, John will be working on increased funding for the Department of Fish and Game and for

acquisition of parklands and wildlife refuges. Our chapter is working with other organizations in the County to seek state funding to acquire more than 1000 acres above Los Gatos near Lexington Reservoir, so perhaps John can help us there. In addition, he'll be working to see that the current wildlife refuges owned by the State maintain habitat as their primary concern, rather than leasing their land to cattle grazing or agriculture as occurs now.

John often works closely with our chapter, letting us know when to contact our local representatives on key bills, and in turn taking our priorities to Sacramento. It remains to be seen how the changes at the State level will affect our chapter in other ways.

## National Audubon

As reported in last month's *Avocet*, Audubon's national wetlands campaign called on our chapter in addition to all the others around the country to help stop Nationwide Permit 26, a proposed Army Corps regulation that would have doomed many smaller wetlands in California. We responded with phone calls and letters, which along with thousands of others evidently caught the attention of President Clinton, who "suggested" changes to the Corps. The new Permit 26 will look very different, and will eventually be an improvement on current policies.

That kind of victory really shows how well a decentralized, chapter-based Audubon can work with national coordination. In addition, at the most recent BAAC meeting, a woman from the national headquarters in New York came to talk about recruiting new members and getting existing members more involved in chapter programs. That's part of the new commitment from the restructured National Audubon to provide services to individual chapters.

I'm sure you're getting the idea by now. There's no way, even for a chapter of our size and strength, to keep track of what's happening on the banks of the Guadalupe River, the Sacramento River and the Potomac simultaneously. Only through the connections we make with the other Audubons out there can we see the kind of results we do.

# Bluebirds *from Pg 1*

habitats with their orchards, pastures, and woodlots, have been largely replaced by huge commercial farms devoted to monoculture crops and virtually devoid of wildlife habitat.

Another leading cause of unsuccessful reproduction is disadvantaged competition with introduced species for the remaining nesting sites. Two of the main contenders are the European Starling and the House Sparrow. The ousted bluebird is invariably the loser in fierce battles to claim these sites. House sparrows may even attack whole families that are already established, killing both nestlings and defending adults, then claim the nest for themselves. The bluebird has no defense against the starling either, but nest box holes can be made small enough to prevent this aggressive competitor from entering a box.

SCVAS has recently initiated an active program to help restore the bluebird in this area as part of the general California Bluebird Recovery Program (CBRP) sponsored jointly by Audubon-California and the North American Bluebird Society. Serving as the Santa Clara County Coordinator of the statewide CBRP, we intend to provide hundreds of new nest sites for the next several breeding seasons. At present 40 completed boxes are ready to be installed. In addition to promoting bluebird recovery, this program promises to benefit many other cavity-nesting birds impacted by the scarcity of nesting sites. For example, Violet-green Swallows have already used boxes currently in place at McClellan Ranch Park.

In parks and private lands of the Santa

Clara Valley, SCVAS plans to establish bluebird "trails" in favorable nesting habitat. A bluebird trail consists of a series of nest boxes placed strategically along a path, road, or fenceline to allow for easy monitoring. They should be at least 100 yards apart to eliminate territorial problems between individual birds. The Audubon project involves several steps: (1) coordination with Bay Area parks to locate suitable nesting sites, (2) construction of nest boxes to specification, (3) placement of the boxes, and (4) monitoring them throughout the breeding season to collect data as well as to provide protection from competitors, pests, and predators. Nest boxes need to be in place by the end of February so they are available for bluebird males already seeking to establish their territories. Bluebirds can potentially raise two or three broods a season, which may last from March through mid-September.

If you would like to become involved in any phase of the Bluebird Recovery Program, the Audubon Society would greatly appreciate your help. SCVAS envisions a large scale volunteer commitment. In particular, we need contact with people who know of, own, or have access to private lands with good habitat and would be willing to have bluebird trails established on them. We also have a special need for "trail leaders", who will commit to overseeing the installation and monitoring of a bluebird trail. Without needing specialized knowledge or experience, you can participate in this project, which offers very rewarding results. Please contact Garth at the SCVAS office (408) 252-3747.

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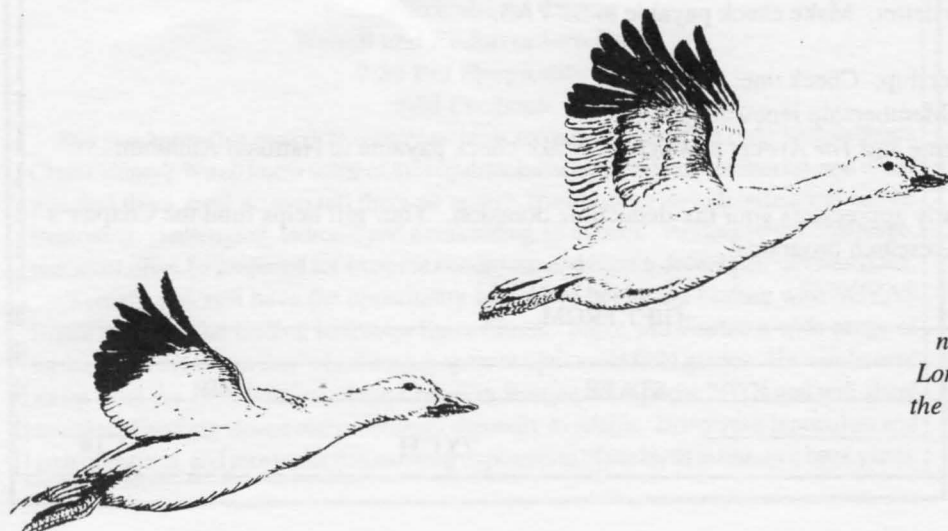
## Join the Bluebird Crew

Although the first bluebird boxes are yet to be installed in our new recovery program, several people have already been at work laying the foundation for a successful program. We now have almost 40 nest boxes ready to install, thanks to the efforts of **Jack Kramer** and **Gene Heaney**, who have been building away almost every Friday morning since last summer. More recently, **Gus Constant** has added his time and table saw to our efforts, doubling our output. **Jim Lundstrom** and **Dick Elliot** have also assisted with different stages of the construction effort.

Within the past month, the campaign has taken wing with the efforts of two program coordinators, **Carol Hankermeyer** and **Dave Cook**. They are contacting local parks and open space personnel to prepare the way for the installation of bluebird trails in each cooperating site. At this point, everything is in place except for the volunteers we're counting on to actually install and maintain the trails at area parks and open spaces (see Carol's article). You can serve as either a trail leader, taking primary responsibility for a group of nest boxes, or as a member of a trail team coordinated by someone else. Call us at the SCVAS office and we'll get you started!

—Garth Harwood

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*Snow Geese, like these drawn by Emelie Curtis, flew over the Sacramento Valley wetlands in huge flocks on the Nov. 30 SCVAS trip to Gray Lodge and Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge. Northern Pintails and Tundra Swans were also found in larger-than-normal numbers. Three day-roosting Long-eared Owls were an exciting find in the willows on the way in to Gray Lodge.*



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## Audubon creek & wetland programs draw raves

SCVAS has a growing commitment in the area of environmental education for young people through Audubon Adventures, Wetlands Field Trips, Education Day, Young Audubon trips, Creek Restoration and individual classroom programs by Garth Harwood. The following letters received in November from Graystone School in San Jose Unified attest to the success of those programs:

"Dear Board of Directors:

The second and fifth grade students have had excellent experience over the past two weeks thanks to the generosity of the Audubon Society. All five of our second grade classes had hands-on science labs with Garth Harwood. Garth brought rocks, creek water, and an assortment of invertebrate inhabitants to our science lab. He was extremely knowledgeable and related extremely well to the students. I liked the way he allowed the children to explore and then provided them with some identification information. I also like Garth's enthusiasm for his job and his field of interest. He explained very well the connection between creek habitat and bird health. Garth's lab tied in well with our second grade nature walks to our local creek.

A fifth-grade class and a 4/5 combination class had an opportunity to visit the wetlands in Alviso on Wednesday this week. Our contact person for this activity was Elaine Gould. The students were so excited with this adventure. They identified birds, saw very special ecosystems, and traced food chains by seeing prints in the mud and observing brine shrimp. I know they have acquired

an appreciation for this very special land. The field trip was a wonderful culmination of our unit on S.F. Bay estuaries and oceans. The students were pleased to know they could return [to Alviso] with their parents.

These activities have also broadened my knowledge of birds, habitat, and the importance of community groups working with schools. Thank you for providing a wonderful opportunity for our students, our classroom teachers, and for me."

---Karen Beth Traiger, Science Resource Teacher

"Dear Audubon Society,

Thank you for coming to science. I had a great time. My favorite bird is a bluebird. I did not know that roly-polys [aquatic sowbugs] are in the family of crayfish. Thank you for teaching the class new things. Your friend, Taylor Feezor (Grade 2)"

"Dear Mrs. Gould,

Thank you for guiding us through a part of the wetlands in Alviso. I learned a lot there, and saw plenty of birds you pointed out. I also got to see pickleweed and tules for the first time. It really caught my interest to see a great brown mass of millions of tiny [brine shrimp] eggs. Seeing a salt pond and a salt marsh was also neat. The slough was interesting how it went in and out with the tide . . . thank you for giving up some time to show my class the wetlands."

---Caroline Nguyen (Grade 5)

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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