

The Avocet

The Newsletter of the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society

April 1997

Education Day Sparks Birdathon Effort

Saturday March 8 was a sparkling, sunny day at McClellan Ranch Park, where SCVAS volunteers and staff hosted our annual Education Day event. Kids and parents alike enjoyed a variety of activities from bird-banding and bat biology demos to creek revegetation walks and nematode-viewing under a microscope. Red-shouldered Hawks and Violet-green Swallows displayed their graceful beauty against the crystal-blue skies over the park, while on the ground Socrates the Great Horned Owl (Wildlife Rescue's educational bird) hooted, preened and struck statue-like poses in front of fascinated onlookers.

What makes Education Day special is opening the minds of kids, adults, and seniors to the wonders of the natural world around us, and showing them how to interact with wildlife and habitat with care

and respect. In recent years, SCVAS has emerged as one of the leading environmental and educational groups in the South Bay, and we'd like to maintain and improve that profile. To that end, we've dedicated this year's annual Birdathon fundraiser to education.

Our Audubon chapter is fortunate to have not only an amazing cadre of volunteers, but two paid staff members. Chapter Manager Garth Harwood and Environmental Advocate Craig Breon would never admit to being "overworked and underpaid" since they truly love their work, but in reality these two talented stalwarts put in many hours of dedicated work well above and beyond what their job descriptions call for. Each could make a considerably higher salary working almost anywhere but where they are now, but they're not in it for the money.

That's because they're committed to protecting our local environment for birds and wildlife, and educating the public about ecosystems, habitat preservation, restoration, and where to go birding in the South Bay. Our volunteers and members have shown the same commitment to go into the community and spread the Audubon message. In order to support our staff, volunteers, educational programs, newsletter, field trips, and to pay the rent at McClellan, we must actively raise money for the Chapter. The Birdathon is a "fun" kind of a fundraiser, and here's how it works:

Teams of birders get together for a full day of birding (sometime between April 12 and May 4) and try to see and hear as many species of birds as they can. In the meantime, team members ask friends, family, and co-workers to sponsor them for a certain amount of money per bird species seen. After the "Big Day" of birding, members report back to sponsors and collect checks based on the amount x # of species formula. (Some sponsors prefer to simply give a flat amount, which is fine.)

Birdathon Coordinator Harriet Gerson has recruited eight teams for this year's event, but anyone can still form a team with their friends and participate. The list of teams is on page 7 and a sponsor form is also included. If you'd like to form a team, call Harriet at (408) 252-6244. Harriet and Les Chibana's Wry Wrentits team is a perennial leader in Birdathon money raised. Other teams vie for most species seen/heard in a 24-hour period. The official Chapter team, the Uncommon Loons, will hold its annual Birdathon field trip at Arastradero Preserve and Charleston Slough on Sat. April 26 (see Calendar, page 3).

General Membership Meeting

Wednesday April 16

"The Inner Ladakh"

with Mr. Mel Taliaferro

Palo Alto Cultural Center, Newell & Embarcadero Rds.

7:30 PM Hospitality 8:00 Program

The high desert of the Inner Ladakh in India is famed for its many mountain passes and incredible beauty. Receiving only 3 to 6 inches of precipitation a year, it seems a most unlikely place for human habitation, yet it is home to nearly 100,000 Ladakhis. Mel Taliaferro, founder of the Ladakh Fund, fell in love with this region, situated between the Great Himalaya and the Karahoram Range, on a trek in 1983 and has been visiting the local people and surroundings ever since.

Join us for this very special presentation which includes the Keoladeo bird sanctuary in Rajasthan located in western India. This unique habitat was declared a World Heritage site in 1985 where more than 425 species of birds can be observed in the 29 square mile park! We will also be treated to images of the scenery, trekking, local people, crafts and work, indigenous dance, and the art and iconography in the local Buddhist monasteries.

VIEW FROM THE OFFICE

by Garth Harwood, SCVAS Chapter Manager

A SPECIAL THANKS TO EDUCATION DAY VOLUNTEERS! A great many people contributed to the success of this year's event on March 8, including first and foremost SCVAS Board members **Elaine Gould, Bobbie Handen, and Sandy Cortright**, plus fellow Education Committee member **Allen Royer**. **Marie Gordon** was especially helpful, as were the gang of students from the **INTERACT** program at **Monta Vista High School**, and of course, our many presenters from groups all around the county!

I PROMISED YOU BLUEBIRD RESULTS in this space, and by golly I'm gonna deliver! Any day now! Honest! Actually, I do intend to keep you informed here, but there's not a lot to report yet, other than the continued hard work of such volunteers as **Carol Hankermeyer, Gus Constant, Dave Cook, Jack Cramer, and Gene Heaney**. I took on a nestbox trail at Palo Alto's Arastradero Preserve myself, and I can only tell you that there were some pretty eager-looking bluebirds hanging around close by as I put up the first boxes two weeks ago. No nests as of early March, but both Western Bluebirds and Violet-green Swallows have been scoping them out during my visits. (One or two pairs of bluebirds can usually be seen in the mornings hanging around the parking lot area at the Preserve. One of our nestboxes can be found on the back of the bathroom enclosure there.)

WHAT NEXT. . . BARN OWL TRAILS? Well, sorta . . . at this writing, we are putting our crack bluebird nestbox crew to work on a new and unexpected challenge. It turns out that the old barn at Arastradero Preserve is coming down this week after serving for decades as a roosting site for an unknown number of barn owls. Palo Alto's park staff have been enthusiastic cooperators in our bluebird program, and gave us a call regarding the possibility of placing some barn owl nestboxes to mitigate impacts on the owls. We're giving it a go, but could use any specific information that you seasoned owl-watchers may have on the preferences of barn owls.

We have nestbox designs, but which is best? How do we replace roosting sites, as opposed to nests? Are there any particular do's and don'ts regarding their placement? This might be an excellent opportunity for a specialist volunteer to adopt this project and stick with it for a while.

Considering that the scores of dedicated birders who took part in the San Jose Christmas Bird Count very nearly missed this species entirely, it would seem that the barn owl is worthy of some special attention from its human friends in this area. (The only reason the bird was eventually included on the CBC was that, about halfway through the countdown dinner, the security guard came in from the parking lot to ask us, "What kind of big, white bird would be flying around out here at night?")

THANKS, COMPUTER DONORS!!! Not one, but two high-quality Macintosh computers were donated to us in response to our request in this space last month. **Terry Maxwell** donated a Centris 610, color monitor, and color printer with oodles of software (Special note to TEACHERS: she also gave us 20 copies of her CD-ROM of educational images to pass along to educators---please let me know if you'd like one. Ms. Maxwell also has written an excellent book on making computer education work in the classroom, and would like to hear from interested teachers.)

We also received a Macintosh IIcx, monitor and software from ex-Treasurer **John McLemore** and **Cirrus Logic**. Between these two donations, we are several light years closer to the cutting edge of office technology!

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SCVAS OFFICERS and BOARD

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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

April 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

Wednesday Apr. 2, 7:30 PM.

Biologist/writer-photographer Mark Rauzon will describe his work on habitat preservation for the Hawaiian Stilt. Lucy Evans Baylands Interpretive Center, E. Embarcadero Rd., Palo Alto.

****Sunday April 6, 8:00 AM.** Half day. Ed Levin Co. Park. Leader: Dave Cook (408)729-7310. Take Hwy 237 east, crossing I-880 and I-680, to park, approx 2 miles past I-680. Meet in parking lot on right. Migrant songbirds should be returning to join local resident breeders in Milpitas' prime birding hotspot. Lunch optional.

Tuesday Apr. 8, 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: Northern Harrier.

****Wednesday Apr. 9, 8:30 AM.** Half day. Almaden-Quicksilver Park. Leader: Alan Thomas (408)265-9286. Take Almaden Expwy. south to Camden Ave., turn right on Camden then left on McAbee (about 1 mile), follow to end). Moderate walking of 2 1/2 miles. Resident breeding birds of woodland, early returning migrants.

****Saturday Apr. 12, 8:00 AM.** Half day. Charleston Slough. Leader: Ann Verdi (408)266-5108. From Hwy 101 in Mt. View take San Antonio Rd. north to Terminal Way parking area. Highlights: Breeding shorebirds, ducks, and possible Black Skimmer. Beginners welcome.

****Sunday Apr. 13, 7:30 AM.** Gilroy Hot Springs Road. Leader: Bob Reiling (408)253-7527. Limit 23 participants (six cars) by reservation

only. Meet at intersection of Gilroy Hot Springs Rd. and Canada Rd. From Hwy 101 at Hwy 152 west exit go east, turn left on New. Ave. and right on Roop Rd. Bear left at the fork in the road and continue several miles to Canada Rd. Be prepared to carpool; easy walking. Highlights: breeding birds of south S.C. County.

****Saturday Apr. 19, 8:00 AM.** Half day. Jasper Ridge Biological Preserve, Stanford University. Leaders: Chip Haven and Rita Colwell. Limit 25 participants by reservation only. Call Chip at (415)321-0776 to reserve space. \$5 fee per person. Meet at Preserve gate (not Whiskey Hill gate). Gates open 7:40 to 8:10 only. From I-280 take Sand Hill Rd. west, 2 miles to main gate on left. Spring birds and beautiful wildflowers on this private ecological reserve. Moderately strenuous walking, 2-3 miles. Trip goes rain or shine.

****Saturday Apr. 26, 8:00 AM.** Uncommon Loons Birdathon trip at Arastradero Preserve/Charleston Slough. Join Nick Yatsko (and special guests?) for the annual SCVAS Birdathon blitz. The Loons bird till they see 100 species, usually at around 1:00 PM. Donation to Birdathon fundraiser suggested. Meet at Preserve parking area on Arastradero Rd., 1/2 mile west of Page Mill Rd. just south (west) of I-280.

****Saturday May 3, 8:00 AM.** Full day. Mines Rd./Del Puerto Canyon. Leader: Don Schmoltdt (510)215-1910. Meet at Nob Hill Market parking lot in

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THE SILENT AUCTION OF SURPLUS BIRD BOOKS concludes this month at the general meeting, Wednesday the 16th, where all of the books will be put on display for a final round of bidding before being sold off to the highest bidder (or in the case of books with no bids, at "extreme" discounts). See you there!

Livermore. From I-580 take N. Livermore Ave. south through downtown area then look for grocery store parking lot on left (approx. 7-8 blocks). Highlights include possible Lewis' Woodpecker, Phainopepla, Lawrence's Goldfinch and spring migrants. Bring full tank of gas & be prepared to carpool.

****Sunday May 11, 7:00 AM.** Half day. Birding by ear at Smith Creek. Leader: Grant Hoyt (415)969-7892. From I-680 or 880 take Alum Rock Ave. east, turn right on Mt. Hamilton Rd. go past Grant Ranch Park entrance, continue to Smith Creek Fire Station (allow 45 min. from Alum Rock Ave.). Moderate walking of 1-2 miles. Emphasis on identifying the songs of flycatchers, wrens, robins, warblers, vireos, sparrows, grosbeaks and buntings at this riparian haven.

Tuesday May 13, 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: Kites.

Plan Ahead for upcoming trips to: Charleston Slough---Sat. May 17 Montebello OSP---Sat. May 31 Stevens Creek Park---Sat. June 7 (details in *May Avocet*)

Shorebird Class by Boat

Learn how to identify shorebirds at Elkhorn Slough with local bird expert and long-time SCVAS member Rod Norden. View birds up close from a roomy, stable pontoon boat as it travels through the heart of the wildlife-rich slough. Detailed looks at waterbirds in breeding plumage as they pause on their northward migration.

Two classes are offered:

◆ Saturday April 12, 9:00 AM - Noon;
◆ Saturday April 19, 3:00 - 6:00 PM.
Boats depart from Moss Landing. Beginner to expert birders are welcome; scopes and binoculars are available if needed. Fee is \$35/person for 3-hour class + refreshments. Pre-registration required---call (408)424-3939 and ask for "Rod's Bird Cruise".

Field Notes

by Bill Bousman

Loons through Waterfowl

Red-throated Loons continue to be found in the percolation ponds in Los Gatos Creek CP with an adult seen on 8 Feb (MMR) and an immature on 15 Feb (TGr). A single **Pacific Loon** was in the same location on 2 Feb (CKS). Rounding out this loon triumvirate were two to four birds found on the ponds 1-15 Feb (CKS, MMR, TGr) with an adult and three immatures recorded on 8 Feb (MMR). **American Bitterns** maintained their reputation for scarcity with only a single report of a bird along the Guadalupe River below Coleman on 15 Feb (TGr). **Cattle Egrets** were found in larger numbers in February at their favored Arzino Ranch in Alviso with a peak count of ten on 15 Feb (MJM). A single **Greater White-fronted Goose**, probably the bird found locally earlier in the winter, was seen in the vicinity of New Chicago Mash and the Arzino Ranch 2-10 Feb (LCh, DP et al., SCR). Four birds were found over the Sunnyvale Water Pollution Control Plant (WPCP) on 28 Feb (TRy). The **Ross' Goose** found in December at the Moffett Field GC was still present on 10 Feb (MMR). Two birds were also found on San Felipe Lake off Hwy 152 on 23 Feb (MiF). The best place for **Wood Ducks**, as in recent winters, was the Almaden Reservoir where 25 were tallied on 22 Feb (AME). **Blue-winged Teal** have been seen reliably in the Palo Alto Flood Control Basin (FCB) this month with a peak count of eight birds on 5 Feb (WGB). A female at the Arzino Ranch on 4 Feb (SCR) was the only report away from the FCB. **Eurasian Wigeon** have also been found locally, although not quite so regularly. Single birds were in the Palo Alto FCB 1-2 Feb (LCh), in Crittenden Marsh on 2 Feb (LCh), the New Chicago Marsh on 15 Feb (MJM). The Sunnyvale Baylands Park hosted two males on 7 Feb (RWR) and two other males were in the Sunnyvale WPCP ponds on 16 Feb (MJM). This has been a poor winter for **Redhead**, for reasons known best to them. Birds were found in the Palo Alto FCB

through 9 Feb (DP et al.) with a peak count of five on 2 Feb (LCh et al.). A male **Tufted Duck** was seen on the Sunnyvale salt ponds on 9 Feb (DF) and may be our last bird of the winter. Two **Oldsquaw** were found at Shoreline Lake on 13 Feb (LCh) and seen by many observers until last seen on 16 Feb (PMB). This is the eighth county record for this species and the third year in a row it has been found on Shoreline Lake in February! Its days as the "rarest of the rare" are clearly numbered. The peak count of that regular Shoreline rarity, **Barrow's Goldeneye**, was of six birds on 6 Feb (SCR). Five more birds were found at Ravenswood Point on 21 Feb (SCR). A female **Hooded Merganser** was at the Oka percolation ponds on 1 Feb (LCh) and a male was at Shoreline Lake 15-16 Feb (TGr, PMB). Two pairs were found on Searsville Lake on 25 Feb (SCR, TRi).

Two Oldsquaws added some short-time spice to wintering rarities such as Tufted Duck, Lesser Black-backed Gull, and Hooded Warbler

Raptors through Woodpeckers

It was a good February for **Osprey** locally with singles at Parkway Lakes CP 14-17 Feb (RWR), the Guadalupe River at Coleman on 22 Feb (AME), and one at the Guadalupe Reservoir on 23 Feb (AV). A well-seen immature **Swainson's Hawk** over the Mountain View Forebay on 8 Feb (MJM) is a surprise anywhere in California as most of these birds winter in South America. This is the earliest record we have in the county for this very rare migrant. The "Harlan's" **Red-tailed Hawk** wintering along the Guadalupe River was seen 1-9 Feb (v.ob.). An adult **Ferruginous Hawk** along Felter Road in the Los Buellis Hills on 6 Feb (AME) is

probably one of the birds found in this area previously in the winter.

The February high tides brought a few good observations of **Black Rails** with three to four noted at the Palo Alto Baylands on 5-7 Feb (PLaT) and at least three there on 8 Feb (SCR). A **Clapper Rail** heard at the Gold Street Bridge over Guadalupe River mid-February (SBT) is further from the salt marsh influence than we usually encounter. The wintering **Lesser Black-backed Gull** was seen again at the Coyote Creek Riparian Station (CCRS) waterbird ponds 18-22 Feb (AJ). A **Glaucous Gull** at the Palo Alto Duck Pond 9 Feb (DP et al.) was a good find for that spot. More expected were the one to two birds found 9-22 Feb in the salt ponds north of Alviso (v.ob.) with two birds recorded on both 10 and 22 Feb (NL). Three to four **Black Skimmers** have been found at Charleston Slough during the month (v.ob.) which, I guess, makes them a wintering bird---or are they now a resident species? A **Northern Pygmy-Owl** calling at Monte Bello OSP on 15 Feb (MMR) and birds found singing in two different parts of Henry Coe SP on 23 Feb (JY, AL) are from places where believed resident. A **Short-eared Owl** at the Sunnyvale WPCP on 9 Feb (DF) was a good find. Also encouraging were the four birds counted at Bair Island during a visit there on 21 Feb (PLaT). The first **Rufous Hummingbird** of the season was a male at Ed Levin CP on 22 Feb (TGr). Four **Lewis' Woodpeckers** were seen in San Antonio Valley on 22 Feb (MJM) as is typical.

Flycatchers through Sparrows

A "Western" **Flycatcher** was found along Coyote Creek below Montague on 17 Feb (MJM) for one of our few winter records. Our earliest arriving Pacific-slope Flycatchers are found in late March. Just as rare, the **Ash-throated Flycatcher** wintering along the Guadalupe River below Trimble was seen once again on 5 Feb (CKS). **Red-breasted Nuthatches** have not been found in February like in November. Two birds were noted at Ed Levin CP 9-15 Feb (MJM) and two were

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also seen at Bowers Park in Santa Clara on 23 Feb (MiF). A **Canyon Wren** on the entrance rock at Alum Rock Park on 9 Feb (MJM) was in a place where they've been reliable in recent years. Two **American Dippers** on Saratoga Creek on 30 Jan (CF), one at Tollgate and the other below Saratoga-Sunnyvale Road are always good finds and tell us much about the health of our mountain creeks. The immature female **Hermit Warbler** found at Bowers Park in Santa Clara in December was seen once more on 7 Feb (SCR, DW). The female **Hooded Warbler** that has graced us this winter along the Guadalupe River was last reported on 2 Feb (SMi) below Trimble. The male **Summer Tanager** along Coyote Creek below Montague was found once again on 7 Feb (CKS) but has been a difficult bird to find. An equal will-o-the-wisp is the female along San Francisquito Creek, here for its third winter. It was seen on 9 Feb (DP et al.) at San Francisquito Creek and Tasso and was heard there on 23 Feb (MiF). One to two **Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrows** were found at the Palo Alto Baylands on 5-9 Feb (PLaT, MJM, CKS). A **White-throated Sparrow** wintering at a Los Gatos feeder had continued to be found through 22 Feb (JD). A singing male **Bullock's Oriole** at Bowers Park in Santa Clara on 23 Feb (MiF) is three to four weeks early and probably wintered locally. Ten **Red Crossbills** along San Francisquito Creek above Middlefield on 9 Feb (DP et al.) and eight birds at Ed Levin CP on 16 Feb (CKS) are good finds even in this invasion winter.

Observers: Bill Bousman (WGB), Phyllis Browning (PMB), Les Chibana (LCh), Jean Dubois (JD), Al Eisner (AME), Chris Fischer (CF), Mike Feighner (MiF), Dan Froehlich (DF), Tom Grey (TGr), Alvaro Jaramillo (AJ), Nick Lethaby (NL), Peter LaTourrette (PLaT), Amy Lauterbach (AL), Mike Mammoser (MJM), Steve Miller (SMi), Dave Powell (DP), Taylor Ricketts (TRi), Bob Reiling (RWR), Mike Rogers (MMR), Steve Rottenborn (SCR), Tom Ryan (TRy), Chris Salander (CKS), Scott Terrill (SBT), Ann Verdi (AV), David Wilcove (DW), and James Yurchenco (JY).

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

Birding From a Bike

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strictly speaking, illegal. One day in January I must have seen nearly every Wood Duck in the lake, a group of the locally uncommon and uncommonly beautiful Common Mergansers, and an Osprey racing past that I probably would have missed had I been in my car.

Biking has opened up new vistas in urban birding for me, too. San Francisquito Creek between Palo Alto and Menlo Park is a good example. The Belted Kingfishers' calls are infrequent enough that a person may miss them while driving past in a car. On my bike, however, I have come to realize that a lot of kingfishers live along the creek. I have started birding in city parks that I previously disdained. I was riding through Bol Park in Palo Alto

when I was treated to the sight of a Sharp-shinned Hawk harassing a Cooper's Hawk as they wheeled overhead. I find myself even paying attention to birds along residential streets on the way to birding sites, and this has paid off with unusual (to me) species such as the Purple Finch.

Before I started birding from my bike, I had thought that the Merlin was perhaps fictitious; surely the name suggests something unreal. But now I have seen one three times in as many weeks during February along Shoreline Lake and the Bayshore Freeway frontage road. The Merlin's amazingly powerful flight does suggest magic, but now I know the bird really exists. If you get on your bike, perhaps you too can change some of your wish-list birds from imagined to real.

Chapter News

Backyard Bird Sanctuary Program

Does your yard provide food, water, and shelter for birds? Was your landscaping done with birds' needs in mind? Have you created a habitat for birds in your yard? If so, SCVAS wants to recognize your work!

We'll certify your yard or garden of any size as a Bird Sanctuary if it meets our simple criteria. Your yard must provide birds with food, water, and shelter; some of your plants need to be California natives; and you must use safe environmental practices in maintaining your garden. We have brochures on creating habitat and landscaping for birds in the office to assist you.

All you have to do is fill out an application and send it to SCVAS with a \$20 donation, and if it meets the criteria we'll send you a framed Bird Sanctuary Certificate. For \$50 you can get a Deluxe package which includes a handsome Bird Sanctuary plaque for display in your garden.

Money raised from the Bird Sanctuary Program goes toward supporting SCVAS education and conservation activities.

Volunteer Needed

We're looking for someone whose daily schedule brings them near McClellan Ranch Park. Our bird feeders and bird bath at the SCVAS office need regular maintenance. This activity is a very important aspect of presenting a good example to the public and we need to find someone (or two or three people) who will enjoy taking on this role. If you're interested call Garth at the office.

Wildlife Watchers are Big Spenders

More than 76 million Americans watched, photographed, and fed birds and other wildlife in 1991, spending \$18.1 billion, according to a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service report. This spending generated nearly \$40 billion in total economic activity across the country, supporting 766,000 jobs and resulting in \$3 billion in state and Federal tax revenues.

Wildlife watchers spent \$7.5 billion on travel-related goods and services. Of this amount, 40 percent was for food and drink, 35 percent was for transportation, and 19 percent was for lodging. They also spent \$2.2 billion on cameras, film, and developing and \$1.5 billion on wild bird food.

Restore Habitat, Restore Yourself

by Craig Breon

I have recently been engaged in personal and regional restoration projects, and I heartily recommend both the concept and the practice of restoration for all. As any reader of my last two summer *Avocet* articles on gardening will know, I believe there is a profound link between our personal interactions with the natural world, our attitudes towards that world, and what we get done on behalf of our communities and the world around us.

San Luis Refuge

Near the small Central Valley town of Los Banos, Dennis Woolington and friends are designing their own wilderness. Dennis is Director of the Refuge, which has doubled in size in the last seven years, incorporating both "native" lands and lands that have been leveled and farmed for years. Former corn fields are now going primal with the help of about \$1.3 million in grant funding and a passel of volunteers. Go out there and Dennis will show you the aerial photos, with overlays of where riparian forest and wetlands will be coming back to the land, where they have canals to carry water to the restoration sites, and where their next acquisitions may be.

I went with a friend to the Refuge for a weekend to plant trees. Lots of trees. Thousands of black willow and cottonwoods on 60 acres near the lower San Joaquin River, which was still flooded by releases from the dams upstream.

The work was wonderfully satisfying. Outside on a nice day, my feet shushing through foot-high rye grass and vetch being used as a cover crop. Dig a small hole, put in a tree cutting, pack the dirt around, shield it from harm with a white plastic tube, stake the tube to the ground, move on to the next tree. About twenty volunteers working the field (they had sixty the weekend before): good people, many of them knowledgeable about wildlife. Our five-hour workdays went quickly, with cheerful conversation and simple physical labor.

Days as good as those are rare for me, but they shouldn't be. I find myself asking, "Why don't I do this kind of thing

more often?," or thinking, "I can't believe that last Sunday I watched television for four hours."

A few observations on the value of such days. I and the people with me were laboring not so much for our own pleasure or gain, not even primarily for the public's gain as there is limited public access at the refuge, but rather for the betterment of the lives of other species. A wonderful thought. Additionally, I am already looking forward to going back next year, and the year after, watching the riparian forest to which I now have an intimate attachment grow and thrive. I'll see a little passerine there five years from now and think about how I helped create her lunch or overnight accommodations.

My Ivy Vendetta

I live in the hills of the Peninsula on a piece of property that has been slowly overrun by English Ivy. It climbs the oaks and madrones, slowly sapping their life; it crowds out the few native plants we have left, smothering them beneath a uniform mass; it offers little in the way of wildlife habitat, so the quail that surely use to inhabit the property are rarely seen.

For four years now, I've lived there and said, "Some day, that ivy has got to go. Some day. . ." The week after my experience at the San Luis Refuge, I started uprooting vines. I figured that if I was willing to drive two hours to better the habitat of the Central Valley, I should get serious about bettering the habitat around my home.

In one place where the ivy came out, I've planted a Flowering Currant, a native that should attract hummingbirds. I figure that the day all the ivy is gone and natives are flourishing on our land, I will have reached a higher plane.

The Chapter

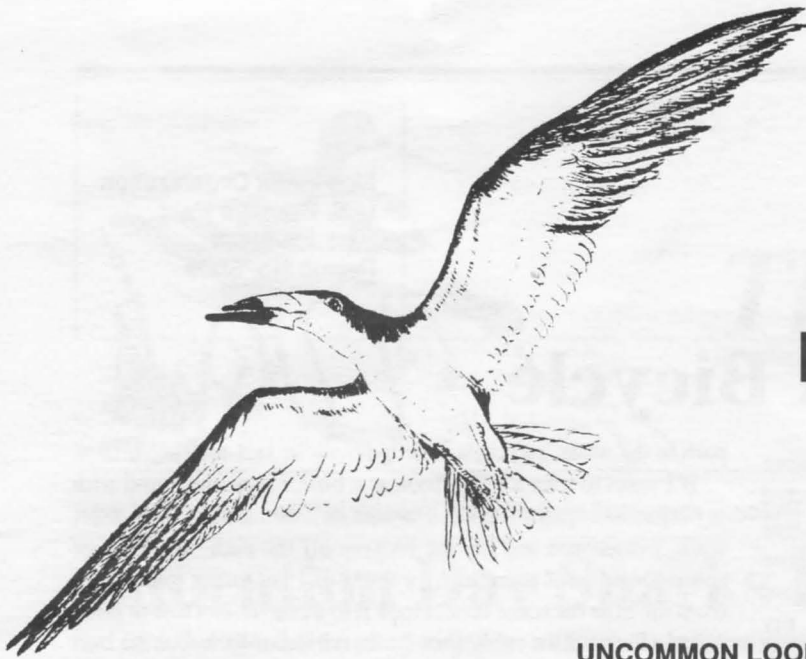
As Advocate for the chapter and you, our members, in a booming Silicon Valley, my work often focuses on reducing the extent of destruction around us. Not always an inspiring task—at times down-

right wearying. I do this with passion and a modicum of diligence in the hopes that our collective consciousness is evolving, albeit over what seems geologic time (only when viewed from a myopic individual lifespan). As that shift occurs, we will turn increasingly to restoration, and I'd like there to be enough raw material left out there to work with.

To our credit, SCVAS already works on a number of restoration efforts. On the site we helped preserve in Santa Clara we are now creating a restoration plan. We have a small-scale creek revegetation effort going with local high schools. I am working with a County-sponsored group called The RIVER Project (Riparian Values Education Roundtable), designed to increase the habitat values of creeks in rural County lands with the cooperation of the Farm Bureau, Cattleman's Association, County Parks, and the Water District. If you want to help with any of these efforts or would like to get in touch with other restoration projects such as the San Luis Refuge, call me at the office.

Santa Clara Open Space Cleanup

On April 26th, the Saturday after Earth Day and, coincidentally, John James Audubon's Birthday, our chapter will co-sponsor a clean-up of Santa Clara's new forty-acre open space preserve. Like many neglected sites, there are old tires, clothes, couches, and other trash out there. We will provide the necessary equipment and refreshments if you come enjoy the site and help begin its transformation to a park and preserve. We will meet at 9 AM at the Lick Mill Park parking lot, about 1/4 mile south of Tasman Blvd on Lick Mill Boulevard near the Guadalupe River in Santa Clara.



1997 BIRDATHON

THE TEAMS:

Be sure to check Charleston Slough on your Birdathon route for the graceful Black Skimmer. This former rarity has expanded its breeding range to the South Bay in the last few years. Drawing by Emelie Curtis.

UNCOMMON LOONS

Nick Yatsko & friends

WRONG TERNS

Bobbie & Cindy Handen

HUMMDINGERS

Sandy Cortright

VAGRANTS

Grant Hoyt, Dick Stovel

DOWN & DIRTY BIRDERS

Pete LaTourrette, Brad Lowman

SANTA CLARA SWIFTS

Clysta Seney, Ann Verdi

SCREAMING KINGFISHERS

Chris Fischer

WRY WRENTITS

Harriet Gerson, Les Chibana

YES! I'll sponsor the _____ team for

\$_____ per species seen, or the flat amount of \$_____

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY, ZIP _____

Clip and return this pledge form to: BIRDATHON
SCVAS
22221 McClellan Rd.
Cupertino, CA 95014

OR—form your own team; see how many bird species you and your friends can find in a 24-hour period, and how much \$\$ you can raise for the Chapter!!

*****All money raised from the Birdathon will be dedicated to local SCVAS education and conservation programs.**

Santa Clara Valley
Audubon Society
22221 McClellan Road
Cupertino, CA 95014

Non-Profit Organization
U.S. Postage Paid
San Jose, CA
Permit No. 5869

Birding From A Bicycle

by Ralph Hunter

I retired a couple of years ago and have started birding more than I had done for many years. At the same time, I started bicycling more, mostly for exercise. It was not until my car was in the shop that it dawned on me that I might be able to combine birding and biking. I have found the combination to afford many pleasures. Maybe, I thought, I should describe my experiences for others who may be no more quick-witted than myself in seeing new possibilities.

My bike is an old ten-speed. The newer mountain bikes may be even more advantageous for a birder, but I have some objections to riding bicycles on some of the wilder trails where I see mountain bikes being used. I have biked only on roads and wide, smooth paths, but I have not felt this to be a disadvantage so far.

I'm no expert on biking safety, but I've learned a few things to do and not to do in birding from a bike. Perhaps I should emphasize that I do not actually look through my binoculars while riding! If I am riding fast on my way to a birding site, I keep my binoculars in their case in my backpack. When I am riding a little slower with some expectation of seeing birds, I wear my binoculars with the strap around my neck and under one arm, so the glasses don't swing wildly. When I am at full alert for birds, I ride very slowly, sitting erect rather than hunched over, with my binocular strap only around my neck. I feel safe riding like this only if I am going slowly enough that even a sudden stop could not throw me from the bicycle. If you are riding this slowly, you will not be a danger or annoyance to walkers, but you should try not to wobble from one side of the

path to the other, or you will be a danger to fast-moving bikers.

If I want to take a quick look at a bird, I stop and stand with my legs straddling the bike. For a more extended look or a short walk, I dismount and lay the bicycle off the path. (Beware of thorns capable of puncturing a tire!) If I am going to be away from the bike for some time, I lock it to a convenient tree or post, using a lock with a cable (not the best kind of lock, but the best locks won't fit around trees). Don't do what I did once early in my birding-from-a-bike-career: I locked my bike to a good stout post but realized later that the post was only three feet high!

Carrying a spotting scope is a problem on a bike. I have had moderate success using my scope without a tripod, balancing it in my hands or bracing it against a tree. I believe I could rig my tripod with a sling and carry it on my back, but I haven't tried that yet.

I have found birding from a bike to be better than either walking or driving a car in places where I might want to stop virtually anywhere along a route of several miles. Using a bike is much faster and less tiring than walking. At the same time, I am much more aware of every bird movement and sound than I would be in a car. Besides, making frequent stops in a car is hard on the engine and wastes a lot of gas.

Many places in the Bay Area offer a biking birder tempting targets. One example is Gazos Creek Road on the San Mateo County coast, where there are only two or three good pulloffs in a distance of two miles. Another example is the road along Almaden Reservoir, where pulloffs are few and parking is

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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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