



The Avocet

The Newsletter of the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society

October 1997

Exciting Bluebird Recovery Program Results

by Carol Hankermeyer & Garth Harwood

Eight species of birds found high-quality nest sites where none previously existed, as more than 30 SCVAS members and volunteers have made the chapter's first season with the California Bluebird Recovery Program (CBRP) a resounding success. In this first season, 17 new bluebird trails were established in Santa Clara County within parks, preserves and private lands to provide 170 new nestboxes.

Other bluebird lovers who already had boxes in their own back yards, or who had established trails prior to our program, have added approximately 60 boxes to our totals. An additional 30 boxes were built by families attending the International Migratory Bird Day event at Alviso on May 10, from kits pre-cut by volunteer SCVAS woodworkers. These last are presumed to be situated in various neighborhoods through-

out the county.

For the bluebird trail volunteers, placing the nestboxes was just the beginning. For months, they tirelessly monitored their trails on a weekly basis in fair and foul weather, keeping records, examining boxes, and cleaning them out when necessary. Their efforts, as well as those of people with existing boxes or trails, were well rewarded. Sixty-six boxes were used by eight different species to produce a total of 229 fledglings (see Table on page 7 for a species-by-species breakdown).

Western Bluebirds were, to everyone's delight, the most numerous and successful users of this year's boxes, with 90 fledglings. And no one was surprised by the prevalence of Violet-green Swallows and Tree Swallows, with 52 and 31 fledglings respectively. But it was a distinct surprise that Ash-throated Flycatchers

demonstrated some of the highest breeding success, with 25 fledglings, given that this species is far less common than the cavity-nesting swallows of our area. Finally, the smaller cavity nesters such as titmice, chickadees, and nuthatches were barely present in this year's program, a situation that may have resulted from the use of a single box design tailored to the needs of bluebirds. Future box distributions will include a second design for the smaller birds, featuring a smaller entry hole and floor area.

An interesting side note to volunteers' investigations was the variety of nest types they observed. Western Bluebirds were exclusive in their use of long pieces of dried grasses, while swallows mixed a healthy amount of feathers into the same material. House Wrens stuffed boxes to the brim with woody twigs. Ash-throated Flycatchers produced the most provocative nests, preferring mammal dung whenever available. Trail monitor Jennifer Lyon commented of one such nest, "The nest was primarily of coyote dung, and it stank!"

This year's results seem quite encouraging, considering that only 25% of the boxes were used. It is noteworthy that boxes which were already in place from previous years, and were monitored by CBRP methods for the first time, received the greatest usage. According to veteran

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**General Membership Meeting
Wednesday October 15
"The Bats of California"
with Dave Johnston
Palo Alto Cultural Center
Newell & Embarcadero Rds.
7:30 Hospitality 8:00 Program**

They don't suck blood from jugular veins and they're not flying mice, but bats are still a mystery to most of us. Join former SCVAS President and Youth Science Institute Executive Director Dave Johnston for an entertaining and informative slide presentation on the "other" winged creatures. Dave has studied bats extensively on several continents; tonight's talk will focus on the numerous species that reside in California's varied habitats.

**Audubon Moves to
Save Birds, Habitat
at Salton Sea**

see Page 5

VIEW FROM THE OFFICE

by Garth Harwood, SCVAS Chapter Manager

FALL MIGRATION IS WELL UNDER WAY all along the Pacific Flyway . . . and at our offices as well. A small, but highly welcome migration of new office volunteers has been underway, including longtime member **Eda Coburn** and newcomer to the chapter **Donna Ducey**. Each of these new volunteers will provide invaluable assistance one afternoon a week in the front office and shop. Welcome aboard!

* * * * *

MIGRATION TAKES MANY FORMS, from the extraordinary circumpolar migration of the Arctic Tern to the very local, but still crucial, seasonal wanderings of some of our "resident" species such as **Craig Breon**, SCVAS Environmental Advocate. The latter migrant has recently moved down the hall to a comfortable new workspace, furnished in large part by a big donation of high-quality furniture from **Cadence Design Systems**. (You'll see new furniture in all of our spaces as a result of this truckload of great stuff. Thanks, Cadence!) In recognition of his substantial accomplishments during his nearly three years with this organization, as well as the ever-increasing need for his kind of work in our valley, the SCVAS Board of Directors recently voted to increase Craig's hours to 3/4 time and rent this additional office space for his exclusive use.

COME IN AND SEE OUR NEW LOOK! Craig's move has inspired several other big changes in the physical organization of our shop and offices. Our library, for example, has been consolidated into the middle of our three rooms at McClellan Ranch Park, a space which now contains an expansive workspace for volunteers and library visitors. The library's move has, in turn, enabled us to expand our shop display area and our front-office workspace. We feel sure that the end result of all this to-and-fro will be a more attractive and useful combination for your convenience.

* * * * *

LITTLE-KNOWN TREASURES OF THE SCVAS ARCHIVES have been turning up as we delve ever deeper into the reorganization process. Did you know, for example, that the earliest version of the chapter newsletter was not *The Avocet* but rather *The Wren-Tit*? Our collection goes back to the earliest days of the Chapter in the late 1920s. Field notes from these early issues are occasionally reviewed by academics seeking information on the changes in local bird communities over time, but they could also make a fascinating read for anyone with an interest in local birding history.

Similarly, we have copies of the National Audubon Society's journal, known as *Bird Lore* in the early part of this century, dating back to 1900, including a facsimile copy of Volume 1, Number 1 from 1887. (Note---our collection is incomplete prior to 1920; any odd issues collecting dust in your attic might be of great interest!)

THE BIRDS OF NORTH AMERICA is another little-known and woefully underused resource carried in the SCVAS stacks. Our subscription to "BNA", as it's known to librarians, was acquired (at a cost of several thousand dollars) by the grant-writing efforts of former SCVAS librarian **Reid Freeman**, now of Eugene, Oregon (but still a faithful member---Hi Reid!). This series, which features detailed accounts of each North American bird species, is still in production, but we already have over 300-species accounts on file. The series will be highlighted in our new library layout so that it will be hard to miss. If you want to know all there is to know about a bird, this is your source!

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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

October 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

Don't forget---

Kenn Kaufman

Slide lecture and book-signing/sale 7:30 PM, Friday Oct. 3 at Foothill College in Los Altos See Sept. Avocet for details or call the office (408)252-3747

Wednesday Oct. 1, 7:30 PM. Bay Area Bird Photographers. Tonight's presentation will feature Mark Rauzon, who recently spent time surveying birds in Alaska and will present slides on June seabirds of Alaska, including Crested Auklet and Spectacled Eider. Lucy Evans Interpretive Center, E. Embarcadero Rd., Palo Alto.

****Saturday Oct. 4, 8:30 AM.** Half day. Phipps Ranch/Pescadero. Leader: Bert McKee (650)879-0977. Bird one of San Mateo Co.'s migrant hot spots with one of California's most avid and skillful young birders. Take Hwy 84 west through La Honda, then south on Hwy 1. Turn left on Pescadero Rd. and go through town of Pescadero to Phipps Ranch, about 1 mile east of town on right.

****Sunday Oct. 5, 9:00 AM.** Full day. Hawk Hill/Marin Headlands. Leader: Nick Yatsko (408)247-5499. Meet at Page Mill Rd./I-280 Park'n'Ride at 8:00 AM for carpooling to Marin. Migrating raptors may include Broadwinged Hawk. Be prepared for fog, wind.

****Wednesday Oct. 8, 9:00 AM.** Half day. Wilder Ranch, Santa Cruz coast. Leaders: Gail Cheeseman (408)741-5330 and Harriet Gerson (408)252-6244. From Hwy 17 take Hwy 1 north out of Santa Cruz approx. 4 miles to park entrance on left. Entrance fee; lunch optional.

****Saturday Oct. 11, 8:30 AM.** Half day. Arastradero Preserve in Palo Alto. Leader: Jim Liskovec (650)969-5542. From I-280 take Page Mill Rd. west approx. 1/2 mile to Arastradero Rd. Turn right and meet at parking lot 1/2 mile on right. Woodland and grassland species; good raptor variety. Two miles moderate walking. Rain cancels.

****Sunday Oct. 12, 8:30 AM.** Half day. Charleston Slough. Leader: Phyllis Browning (650)494-6360. From Hwy 101 in Mt. View take San Antonio Rd north 1/4 mile, meet at Terminal Way parking area. Ducks, herons, egrets, gulls, shorebirds; beginners welcome.

Tuesday Oct. 14, 9:30 AM. The Eve Case Bird Discussion Group will meet at the home of Pat and Jean Dubois, 17150 Buena Vista Av. Los Gatos (408)395-4264. Topic: Whooping Crane.

****Saturday Oct. 18, 8:30 AM.** Full day. Carmel River and vicinity. Leader: Kathy Parker (408)358-2832. Take Hwy 1 south to Rio Rd. in Carmel; turn left then immed. right into Crossroads Shopping Center. Meet at Cinema parking lot at back of mall near river. Migrants, vagrants, rarities.

****Sunday Oct. 19, 8:00 AM.** Half day. Alum Rock Park. Leader: Bob Reiling (408)253-7527. From Hwy 101 or I-680 take Alum Rock Ave. northeast toward hills and into park. Go straight, under the bridge, and meet at the end of the last parking lot. Moderate 2 mile walk. Lunch optional. Possible fee; heavy rain cancels.

****Wednesday Oct. 22, 9:00 AM.** Half day. Windy Hill OSP. Leader: Al Huber (650)493-6854. From I-280 take Alpine Rd. west into Portola Valley. Meet at parking area at intersection of Alpine & Willowbrook roads.

****Saturday Oct. 25, 8:00 AM.** Half day. Sunnyvale Baylands Park. Leader: Ann Verdi (408)266-5108. From Lawrence Expwy go north across Hwy 237, turn right at first stoplight into park. Continue right on perimeter road to end of parking area. Highlights: Burrowing Owl, ducks, egrets, gulls and shorebirds of Calabazas Ponds. Possible \$3 fee. Rain cancels.

****Sunday Oct. 26, 8:00 AM.** Half day. Princeton Harbor and vicinity. Leader: Mark Miller (650)967-3429. Take Hwy 92 to Half Moon Bay, go north 4 miles and turn left into town of Princeton. Meet at corner of West Point and Stanford Ave. Waterbirds and coastal vagrants.

****Saturday Nov. 1, 8:30 AM.** Half day. Ed Levin Park South. Leader: Frank Vanslager (408)257-3647. Take Hwy 237 east, crossing I-880 and I-680 as 237 becomes Calaveras Rd. Continue approx. 2 miles past 680 to just past golf course entrance; turn right into park entrance. Possible fee; rain cancels.

****Sunday Nov. 2, 8:30 AM.** Half day. Grant Ranch Co. Park. Leader: Allen Thomas (408)265-9286. From I-680 take Alum Rock Ave. northeast, turn right on Mt. Hamilton Rd. then approx. 9 miles to park. Meet at Halls Valley Lake parking lot on left, just past park entrance. Fresh water ducks, oak woodland birds, possible Golden Eagle. Lunch optional; rain cancels.

****Saturday Nov. 15, 1:00 PM.** Half day. Alviso Marina. Leader: Nick Lethaby (408)941-0223. Note afternoon start time. Take Gold St. north from Hwy 237, turn left on Elizabeth St. and right on Hope St. to Marina parking area. Emphasis on gull identification (nine species of gulls possible, including Thayer's and rare Glaucous; seven species likely).

PLAN AHEAD:

Wed. Nov. 19-----Pescadero Marsh
Sun Dec. 21-----San Jose Christmas
Bird Count

Field Notes

by *Bill Bousman*

The American Ornithologists' Union has made a number of revisions to their Checklist of North American Birds in the recently published 41st Supplement; these changes anticipate the Seventh Edition which will be published soon. Quite a few of these revisions deal with the accepted taxonomic order of birds based on our current knowledge of evolutionary relationships and I will endeavor to follow that order in this column. A few changes have also been made that directly affect the birds on our local list. The Plain Titmouse has been split into the Oak Titmouse and the Juniper Titmouse. The Oak Titmouse is the coastal species and the one we find locally, while the Juniper Titmouse is found primarily east of the Sierra. Solitary Vireo has been split into three species: Blue-headed Vireo, Cassin's Vireo, and Plumbeous Vireo. Cassin's Vireo is the western vireo with which we are familiar while the Blue-headed is an eastern species and the Plumbeous nests in the Rocky Mountains. The latter two species are vagrants to Santa Clara County and represent significant identification challenges. However, we are fortunate to have good descriptions of both of these vagrants and this increases the county list by two birds to 375 species.

Grebes through Raptors

A check of Calaveras Reservoir on 3 Aug revealed 18 Western Grebes on nests and four more nests under construction. A single Clark's Grebe was also observed on a nest (SCR). An adult Little Blue Heron remained in Crittenden Marsh at least through 1 Aug (TGr, JAC). Two Cattle Egrets at the Arzino Ranch on 15 Aug (AWa) and one there on 17 Aug (MJM) were the only ones reported.

Steve Rottenborn has been monitoring overwintering Ring-necked Ducks at Calaveras Reservoir and the Ogier Avenue ponds for a number of years. On 3 Aug he discovered three well-grown

young associating with a female Ring-neck and was able to eliminate the possibility that they were Lesser Scaup or Redhead young. This is the first breeding record for the county. Apparently this species occasionally breeds in the Northern Sierra and the northern part of the state. Five broods of Lesser Scaup were counted at the Sunnyvale Water Pollution Control Plant (WPCP) ponds on 27 Jul (PJM) which is a fairly typical count for this rare nesting species. A single brood of half-grown young was noted there on 24 Aug (MJM).

Osprey were seen in exceptional numbers this August. The first was noted on Coyote Reservoir on 13 Aug (JC fide JAC). One along the Guadalupe River near Trimble on 17 Aug (CMMacI) may very well be the same bird seen nearby

The first record of breeding Ring-necked Ducks was obtained at Calaveras Reservoir

28-30 Aug (NY, MMR). A female was seen at the Campbell percolation ponds on 23 Aug (AV), and another female was at the Coyote Creek Riparian Station (CCRS) waterbird pond also on 23 Aug (MJM, MiF, JMe). Finally, one flying north from Coyote Creek over Dixon Landing Road on 31 Aug (MiF) finished out an unusual month. Good numbers of Peregrine Falcons have been found along the bay as is typical of recent Augusts. The first Prairie Falcon of the winter season was a bird at the CCRS waterbird pond on 23 Aug (JMa).

Shorebirds through Common Murre

The adult Pacific Golden-Plover reported last month at Crittenden Marsh was seen through 4 Aug (NL, MiF). A single Snowy Plover was noted on the Knapp tract on 13 Aug (SCR) for our only

August record. Lesser Yellowlegs were found widely during the month, although not in quite the quantity of recent years. High counts included 21 on the pond near Spreckles and State in Alviso on 30 Aug (MMR) and 17 on Crittenden Marsh on 12 Aug (SCR). Turnstones made the news in August with two Ruddy Turnstones observed in Salt Pond A3N on 13 Aug (SCR), and three Black Turnstones seen briefly in well-birded Crittenden Marsh on 17 Aug (MJM). Always scarce this far down the bay, two Sanderling were seen in Salt Pond A3N on 12 Aug (SCR) and five were over the CCRS waterbird pond on 17 Aug (MJM). We had record numbers of Semipalmated Sandpipers this month---all juveniles as expected. Two were found in the CCRS waterbird pond on 2 Aug (NL) and one or two birds were found here irregularly through 24 Aug (v.ob.). A single juvenile was on Crittenden Marsh on 2 Aug and again on 16 Aug (both NL). The pond near Spreckles and Grand in Alviso hosted a single juvenile 12-17 Aug (SCR, MMR, v.ob.) and the pond nearby at Spreckles and State had two birds on 18 Aug (SCR, SBT). A survey in closed areas of the San Jose-Santa Clara WPCP ponds on 23 Aug tallied an exceptional count of six birds

(AJ). Juvenile Baird's Sandpipers have also shown up in record numbers. The first was found at the CCRS waterbird pond on 2 Aug (NL) with a repeat on 16 Aug (AME) and an amazing nine birds on 24 Aug (RWR et al.). One to two juveniles were at the pond near Spreckles and Grand 12-18 Aug (SCR, m.ob.), and 1-2 were in the Mountain View Forebay 20-24 Aug (PMB). Overshadowing these records was the total count of 14 juveniles in the San Jose-Santa Clara WPCP ponds on a survey on 23 Aug (AJ). An adult Pectoral Sandpiper was also found on the San Jose-Santa Clara WPCP ponds on 23 Aug (AJ) while single birds at the CCRS waterbird pond on 24 Aug (NL) and 31 Aug (MiF) were not aged. The adult Curlew Sandpiper found last month was seen again on 12 Aug (SCR) in Crittenden Marsh and on 15 Aug (SCR, SBT, LT) in the Stevens Creek Mitiga-

Field Notes *continued*

tion Area. It is now in mostly basic plumage. Stilt Sandpipers showed up again this fall in unusual numbers. An adult was found in a pond near Spreckles and State in Alviso on 20 Aug (NL) and by 24 Aug there were a total of three birds in this general area (RWR et al., ChW, CIW). Another adult was seen at the CCRS waterbird pond 24-31 Aug (NL, v.ob.) and a juvenile was in the Calabazas ponds 27-28 Aug (MMR, AV). The same juvenile (or another?) was seen near Spreckles and State on 30 Aug (MMR). A parsimonious judgment is that a total of three birds accounted for this wealth of records. The passage of Wilson's Phalarope "trailed off" in August with a good total of 1400 birds on the Knapp tract and 190 more on the Sunnyvale WPCP ponds on 13 Aug (SCR). Red-necked Phalarope numbers normally peak later and the 2350 birds counted on the Knapp tract on 13 Aug (SCR) and the 1000 birds tallied at the Sunnyvale WPCP pond on 24 Aug (MJM) represent high counts. Least Terns continued to be found in the Sunnyvale salt ponds during the month. Up to 30 birds were seen in the vicinity of Crittenden Marsh through 3 Aug (v.ob.), while 28-43 birds were in Salt Pond A3N on 12-13 Aug (SCR). Black Skimmers have been decidedly scarce this summer but 2-4 birds were found along Charleston Slough 29-30 Aug (JMa, MMR, JMe, MMe). An immature Common Murre was seen swimming in Guadalupe Slough on 29 Aug (MiF, v.ob.). Most of our records for this oceanic bird are of birds trapped at the south end of San Francisco Bay in late August.

Hummingbirds through Passerines

A survey of Coyote Creek between Capitol Expressway and Tully Road tallied 22 Black-chinned Hummingbirds on 14 Aug (SCR) which shows how plentiful this bird can be in riparian areas. The male Costa's Hummingbird at a feeder east of San Jose was still present through 26 Aug (D&JC). The passerine migration was inaugurated with the first Willow Flycatcher banded at CCRS on 24 Aug (*fide* MMR). Single birds were seen nearby on Coyote Creek on 30

Aug (MMR) and 31 Aug (MiF). A male American Redstart, in its second fall, was found along Coyote Creek near the San Jose Municipal Golf Course on 7 Aug (SCR) and was seen regularly through at least 16 Aug (m.ob.). A female MacGillivray's Warbler was seen along Guadalupe River below Trimble on 30 Aug (MMR) for an early fall record. A Grasshopper Sparrow near the CCRS waterbird pond on 19 Aug (AJ) was a dispersing juvenile. This species is seldom found anywhere on the valley floor. Always rare, a female Yellow-headed Blackbird was seen in a blackbird flock near Spreckles and State in Alviso on 27 Aug (AV). Three Lawrence's Goldfinches near Calaveras Reservoir on 3 Aug (SCR) were the only ones reported this month.

Observers: Phyllis Browning (PMB), Jack Cole (JAC), John Cole (JC), Don & Jill Crawford (D&JC), Al Eisner (AME), Mike Feighner (MiF), Tom Grey (TGr), Al Jaramillo (AJ), Nick Lethaby (NL), Chris MacIntosh (CMMacI), Mike Mammoser (MJM), John Mariani (JMa), Peter Metropulos (PJM), John Meyer (JMe), Maria Meyer (MMe), Bob Reiling (RWR), Mike Rogers (MMR), Steve Rottenborn (SCR), Linda Terrill (LT), Scott Terrill (SBT), Ann Verdi (AV), Alan Walther (AWa), Chris Wolfe (ChW), Claire Wolfe (CIW), and Nick Yatsko (NY).

OFFICE VIEW

from page 2

I'D LIKE TO THANK ALL OF YOU WHO PICKED APPLES at the SCVAS benefit held at my orchard in Pescadero last month. This year, for the first time, we've donated a third of the crop to the Second Harvest Food Bank, which will probably become a tradition. But what becomes of all those "wormy" ones you and the other pickers left behind? Well, that's one of the rewards for us, actually—seeing the procession of wildlife species that use this old orchard. The apples get soft after the first good freeze, and it's amazing how many birds, such as Red-breasted Sapsuckers, will snack on the sweet pulp of an overripe pippin. And the quail! We must have provided a nursery for nearly a hundred this year. So once again, thanks . . . for leaving a few behind, too.

Audubon-California Responds to Wildlife Crisis at Salton Sea

Audubon-California has begun a campaign to save the Salton Sea, an inland body of water that is dying because of increased pollution and salinity. Located in Imperial and Riverside Counties, the Salton Sea is the largest lake in California and is an internationally important area for many bird species, including the threatened California Brown Pelican. Audubon members and bird enthusiasts come from all over the country to witness the wildlife spectacles at the Sea. Today, they are witnessing another massive die-off of birds.

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service employees report the loss of hundreds of birds including pelicans, three grebe species, loons and cormorants in recent weeks. Avian botulism has reached epidemic proportions and there is not enough money or manpower to save the birds. A recent California Dept. of Fish and Game decision to reduce its previously heroic role in recovery efforts has made the situation worse. "We call on the federal government and the State of California to find the money needed to protect California's wildlife in this hour of need," said Audubon-California's Executive Director Dan Taylor.

Audubon-California has begun its campaign to save Salton Sea by making a major donation to the Pacific Wildlife Project, the organization working to save the sick pelicans, and has called upon its network of 53 chapters statewide to do the same. In addition to donations, the National Audubon Society intends to offer volunteers to help with pelican recovery efforts. "We are witnessing another wildlife crisis at Salton Sea," said Taylor. "Sadly, in recent years we have experienced Salton Sea bird die-offs of oil-spill dimensions. If this were happening in a major urban area there would be a hue and cry across the nation. We must fix this problem. Not just for today, but for the future."

Salton Sea Wildlife Refuge Manager Clark Bloom agrees that only long-term solutions will suffice. "Up until last year the California Brown Pelican had recovered enough to be considered for de-listing as an endangered species. That is no longer the case . . . the possibility exists that we could wipe out the California Brown Pelican," said Bloom.

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

The Oddest of Dilemmas

by Craig Breon

If you follow the Mercury's editorial page, you may have noticed a recent lead editorial entitled "Too Much Fresh Water." If you were taken aback by the thought that in summer any part of California could have too much fresh water, you weren't the only one.

The article related the curious tale of how the San Jose/Santa Clara Water Pollution Control Plant (i.e. the sewage treatment plant) is putting so much treated fresh water into the South Bay that we are losing important tidal salt marsh wetlands near the mouth of Coyote Creek. These wetlands are of high value to all sorts of wildlife, and are a lifeline to two endangered species: the California Clapper Rail and the Salt Marsh Harvest Mouse.

Protection of the habitat and particularly these species led to a 1990 order for the plant to reduce its flows to 120 million gallons a day (mgd). Well, the current levels are 135 mgd, and there's been further wetland losses, and that's causing quite a stir. And, you guessed it, SCVAS is in the forefront of this fray.

Seeing this coming down the road, a group of wetlands activists from around the Bay gathered last year to formulate a position. It came down to this: further conversion is unacceptable because these wetlands are too valuable, particularly for the Clapper Rail, with estimated numbers hovering around 600. If San Jose can't get their flows down on their own, and fast, then they should be forced to by the authorities. This could be done by a partial or total moratorium on sewer hook-ups.

Of course, that's not exactly how San Jose, which runs the plant, views the issue. To them, the loss of wetlands is acceptable ("We'll just build new wetlands somewhere else," they say), but a moratorium on sewer hook-ups is out of the question. As with so many environmental issues, it comes down to business. A moratorium would slow, for awhile, the growth of the region, and would hurt the business climate.

San Jose has instead proposed a series of actions designed to reduce flows, including water recycling, conservation (you

may have heard the radio ads), and perhaps "stream augmentation," which means putting the water upstream in the creek system. They are proposing to spend a large amount on these projects over the next five years—\$125 million. Unfortunately, they are as yet unwilling to take some of the tougher measures—such as mandating conservation and use of recycled water for some water users—that may be necessary to reduce flows quickly and keep them down. SCVAS and the environmental community hope their plan works, but we worry that their projections are overly rosy and some of their plans, like stream augmentation, may not work.

Curiouser and Curiouser

If someone told you that these flows to the Bay from the treatment plant are directly influenced by the Santa Clara Valley Water District's policy on importing water from the Delta, would you say, "Huh?" Well, that may be the case.

San Jose claims that a large part of their problem is from "extraneous flows." In relatively plain English, that means water seeping into the sewer pipes from the groundwater basin. This does not mean we have leaky pipes, at least not in the traditional sense. Oddly, our sewer pipes are designed so that sewage doesn't leak out (which seems wise) but are not designed to prevent water from seeping in.

A few years ago the Water District's policies on groundwater changed. They began drawing less water from the groundwater basin, and substituted imported water from the Delta instead. As a result, our aquifer may be so full and pressurized that groundwater is forcing its way into the sewer system. San Jose claims, though we have not verified the numbers, that these extraneous flows amount to 15-20 million gallons a day.

If those numbers are correct, the scenario of waste goes something like this: The Water District pays for expensive water from the Delta, contributing to the problem of too little water in the Delta for

fish and wildlife. This water is then pumped over from the Central Valley and put into local reservoirs. The reservoirs then release the water into the groundwater recharge system (i.e. creeks and percolation ponds), where it goes into the aquifer beneath us. So much water is in the aquifer that pressure builds up and 15-20 mgd escapes into the sewer system. This water then is treated by the sewage treatment plant and from there flows to the Bay, where it is harming endangered species habitat.

Water users pay for the Delta water, pay for the systems that move the water around, and pay for the sewage treatment plant to treat it. What do we get for our money? Harm to the habitat and wildlife of the Delta, harm to the habitat and wildlife of the South Bay, and additional expenses associated with reducing the flows from the treatment plant into the marshes. What a deal!

To be fair to the Water District, they currently dispute the accusation that so much of their groundwater is escaping to the sewer system. If they are right, then San Jose may be looking for a scapegoat, hoping to deflect the wrath of the environmental community and regulators. The District and San Jose will likely fight over the issue for awhile.

What We're Doing

As mentioned above, SCVAS has been involved in this issue from the start. We are currently negotiating with the City of San Jose over what actions the City will take to reduce flows. In addition, we are writing comment letters to and speaking before the Regional Water Quality Control Board, the regulatory authority over the issue, trying to get them to take a tough stance on protecting the South Bay's wetlands. Finally, we are keeping wetlands groups around the Bay informed about the issue and coordinating their efforts to influence the Regional Board.

In the end we are, as always, working hard to protect the natural heritage of our region.

Bluebirds *from page 1*

the greatest usage. According to veteran bluebirder Clarie Hollenbeck, it is not unusual for newly-sited boxes to require more than one breeding season for the birds to accept them as nesting sites. Volunteers who experienced the "empty nest syndrome" will hopefully not lose heart; their work, and the information gained from their observations are very important to the Recovery Program as a whole. Next season a higher rate of occupancy is expected for the boxes placed this year.

And what about next year? SCVAS Chapter Manager Garth Harwood envisions an emphasis on "maintenance of boxes already established, with careful expansion at a rate that can be matched by ongoing volunteer commitment." This aspect is key to a successful recovery program, he explains. "During the early stages of establishing the program, some park managers were reluctant to give their approval, because they'd had nestbox trails set up and then abandoned, creating management problems for park staff." SCVAS coordination of the program ensures that proper maintenance of each trail will take place even when a volunteer leaves the program, and that each box will continue to yield valuable data to help understand the value of our efforts.

In the future, others who have been nurturing back yard bird reproduction on their own are encouraged to associate their efforts with the SCVAS program, thereby extending our database and giving us a broader range of information on the breeding dynamics of local cavity-nesting species. To cite just one example of the potential importance of



Western Bluebird by Emelie Curtis

such information, there is a deplorable lack of breeding information on the Chestnut-backed Chickadee, one of our best-loved local songbirds. Despite this species' local prominence, they were represented by only 19 of the 5,077 birds fledged statewide in CBRP nestboxes last year, and by less than 50 nationwide!

By participating in the CBRP, SCVAS has joined a nationwide network of other Audubon chapters, organizations, and individual bluebird enthusiasts in a commitment to restore declining populations of all three species of bluebirds, as well as all other native cavity-nesting species. Most, if not all such species have exhibited a gradual decline in population for many years, owing to the familiar combination of habitat loss, predation by cats and other human commensals, and competition with introduced species such as European Starlings and House Sparrows. For those wanting more information on the conser-

vation of bluebirds and other cavity nesters, the SCVAS library and bookstore are well-stocked with books on their biology, behavior, and nestbox preferences. The library also carries subscriptions to the CBRP newsletter and to *Sialia*, the journal of the North American Bluebird Society.

WHY I TRAVEL THE BLUEBIRD TRAIL

by Dave Cook

It's a late summer afternoon, and I've worked a long day. But my birds are growing without me, and I must see how they are faring. So I make my way up Mt. Hamilton Road to Grant Ranch, where I monitor 30 nesting boxes scattered about the park.

I've been fortunate enough to have birded in faraway places, to feel the excitement of the chase. But nothing has come close to the satisfaction of really making a difference in the lives of birds.

By putting up and monitoring a nesting box, I become an intimate observer of their struggle for life and survival. I once again become a caretaker of new lives; but, instead of development taking years as in the case of my children, it unfolds and concludes in three weeks.

I have observed their first few moments of life outside the egg: trembling, featherless, blind. And I have exulted at the fledging: A young bird poised to fly. . . ready, but not ready. Then, responding to some secret signal, it flies!

I also see the dedication of the bluebird and swallow parents, their vigilance, their tireless efforts to feed and protect. In quiet moments, I reflect: Am I as good a parent?

The nesting season is over, but my thoughts turn to next spring. Can I monitor more boxes? Now that my nestbox trail is established, will some parents raise two broods? Spring won't come soon enough for me.

Editor's Note: In addition to establishing the largest SCVAS bluebird trail to date, Dave Cook is a versatile Audubon volunteer who helps coordinate the field trip committee, among other contributions. He is pursuing a grand plan to re-establish the Western Bluebird and other formerly-common cavity-nesting birds throughout the urbanized portions of the greater San Jose area by placing extensive nestbox trails along natural dispersal corridors such as the Guadalupe River.

SPECIES	BOXES USED	FLEDGED
Western Bluebird	22	90
Violet-green Swallow	21	52
Tree Swallow	9	31
Ash-throated Flycatcher	6	25
White-breasted Nuthatch	3	10
House Wren	2	11
Chestnut-backed Chickadee	2	5
Plain (Oak) Titmouse	1	5
TOTAL	66	229

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SCVAS HAS A WEB PAGE!!!

It's true---surf on by and take a look. The address is www.scvas.org. You'll find lots of information about SCVAS programs and activities, how to get involved with Audubon and much more, including, of course, the all-important field-trip and event calendars.

We owe a great debt of gratitude to our Webmaster Peter LaTourrette for a superb job on design and layout, as well as writing and editing some of the text and helping Garth troubleshoot our internet software in the office. The web page has a design feature that I especially like—as it loads, an image of a silvery flock of winter-plumaged avocets flickers on screen, then becomes constant and remains to form the backdrop for

the main page. Very elegant, and also most appropriate for our Chapter.

I have really enjoyed researching all the varied aspects of SCVAS and writing some of the text of the web page. I found that I didn't know as much as I thought I did! Having the experience of helping to draw all this information together really emphasized to me how much SCVAS accomplishes. It also makes me proud to be part of the effort and all the more grateful for the assistance and participation we receive from members.

I look forward to assisting Peter in keeping the page current. I hope you learn something new and enjoy our new web page.

-----Leda Beth Gray

Membership: We invite your membership in the National Audubon Society/SCVAS. To join, please complete and mail this form with payment to: **SCVAS, 22221 McClellan Road, Cupertino, CA 95014.**

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Members receive *The Avocet* newsletter. Make check payable to SCVAS.

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

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