

The Avocet

The Newsletter of the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society

March 1998

6th Annual Education Day at McClellan Ranch

by *Bobbie Handen*

The SCVAS Education Committee invites you and your family to join us, at no cost, for four delightful hours of interaction with Audubon at our McClellan Ranch Park headquarters in Cupertino on Saturday, March 21 from 10 AM until 2 PM.

Our 6th Annual Education Day will feature bird and nature walks, exhibits, scavenger hunts, videos, games, and a variety of hands-on activities for children and adults. Binoculars will be available to check out from the office for the nature walks, as our guides point out some of the birds, trees and other living things that inhabit McClellan Ranch Park and Stevens Creek. We'll have some wonderful furry, feathered, and scaly friends---Socrates the

Great Horned Owl is always a big hit with kids and grownups alike---on hand as well for close-up viewing. Dozens of outstanding entries from the popular poster contest will be on display in our Nature Shop, showcasing the extraordinary talents of young wildlife artists, along with other local artists' work, plus books, T-shirts and gifts.

Other environmental and educational groups such as Coyote Creek Riparian Station, Wildlife Center of Silicon Valley, Wildlife Rescue of Palo Alto and SF Bay National Wildlife Refuge will also be in attendance. The Cupertino Historical Society will

be on hand to sell refreshments and explain some McClellan Ranch history, and Cupertino Parks and Recreation personnel will also be in attendance to help showcase the park facilities.

At 1:00 we'll present awards to the winners of the poster contest, with participants from grades K through 12 receiving recognition for their work. This year's theme is California Native Wildlife Habitat. Following the awards will be a raffle, with lots of prizes (everyone who shows up gets a free raffle ticket; others are sold at the gate).

To reach the Park, take the Foothill Expressway exit from I-280 and head west on Foothill Rd. approximately two miles to McClellan Rd; turn left on McClellan and continue to Monta Vista High School on the right, where parking is available. Shuttle buses will run continuously from the high school parking lot to McClellan Ranch Park. Parking at McClellan Ranch Park is not permitted on Education Day. In case of rain, we'll move the entire event to the Monta Vista High School cafeteria, as we did a few years ago. Nothing will dampen the spirit of this day!

General Membership Meeting

Wednesday March 18

"Golden Eagles in a Changing Landscape"

with Dr. Grainger Hunt

Palo Alto Cultural Center

Newell & Embarcadero Rds.

7:30 Hospitality 8:00 Program

Join us tonight for a very special lecture on the flight and plight of Golden Eagles here in the Bay Area. Dr. Grainger Hunt is a noted biologist from the Predatory Bird Research group at the University of California at Santa Cruz. He has been studying raptors for over 30 years, including extensive research on Peregrine Falcons and Bald Eagles. This evening he will share some of his research experiences with Golden Eagles in the Livermore Valley and surrounding Diablo Range, examining the deleterious effects of the wind turbine blades on the eagles near Altamont Pass. Dr. Hunt has had a life-long interest in the population ecology of raptors and this project investigates the birth and death rate of eagles to estimate trends in their population. Don't miss this exciting and important slide presentation on one of our most beautiful and graceful birds.

Field Notes-----Page 4

Craig's Perspective

on Floods-----Page 6

Nest box

Observations-----Page 7

VIEW FROM THE OFFICE

by Garth Harwood, SCVAS Chapter Manager

WHEW! WHAT A FEBRUARY. We're sorry for any inconvenience you may have experienced when you tried to reach us at the office during the first week of the month. Pescadero was an island for a few days there, and my neighbors and I are still digging things out and shoring things up.

Since I live alongside two creeks and work beside another, they are part of my everyday awareness, year-round. But lately it's been hard to forget about them for so much as a minute. I fear their power when they're as unruly as they've been this month; I also find them utterly spellbinding. Out our way, they've made a lot of creatures homeless this month. For example, one of the numerous homes destroyed or damaged in our neighborhood was fetched off of its foundation and carried along Pescadero Creek until it jammed against a bridge before breaking apart. On February 2, my truck was mired in the same slide that killed one man and wrecked several homes after I parked it in a "safe" place to walk the remainder of the way home (mudslides and treefall having already closed the last 2 miles of road by that evening).

AND, OF COURSE, THE BIRDS got stirred up too. In the wonderful quiet that rewarded our sufferings in the days following the torrent, shorebirds started showing up in my neighbors' yards. A pair of Golden Eagles hung around for a couple of days; the first I'd seen there for several years. And the shyest birds, like Winter Wrens, Fox Sparrows, and Hermit Thrushes, were suddenly much in evidence, their favorite thickets having been flattened or scoured away. The closed roads and the impossibility of leaving for distant workplaces allowed many of us to enjoy moments of unusually rich birding while resting on our shovels.

I've known for a long time that the specialized riparian habitat found along streams and rivers is, acre for acre, just about the richest wildlife habitat in western North America. It really shows right now, with all the birds and other creatures wandering about looking for new shelter. Over the years, you've probably seen more than one reference in these pages to the fact that SCVAS places a special emphasis on the protection and restoration of creekside habitats. As we're seeing this month, in the long run, it makes good sense to avoid most creekside development for the simplest of human interests, too.

* * * * *

AT MY FARM I've been witness to a lesser-known phenomenon that demonstrates the value of riparian zones in protecting streambanks and reversing--yes, reversing-- erosion. At streamside, I have a lower terrace composed of fill and rocky riprap put there after the last heavy El Niño winter (1982-83). The coarse fill was the source of some exotic weeds and grasses which have thrived there ever since, growing to waist height most of the year. I mow a long thin strip to maintain a walking trail through it, and let the rest do what it will.

During the recent flood, the coarse weedy plants on this terrace combed through the muddy waters and added up to a foot of high-quality topsoil wherever they remained high! The trail, by comparison, retained only an inch or two of fresh sediment. This rich new soil will permit a more

SCVAS OFFICERS and BOARD

President	David McIntyre	650/856-6671
Past Pres.	Nick Yatsko	408/247-5499
1st VP	Clysta Seney	408/261-9431
2nd VP	Mary Simpson	408/370-2177
Treasurer	Douglas McLendon	408/288-9254
Secretary	Elaine Gould	408/448-0622

DIRECTORS

Rob Colwell	95-98	650/949-1869
Dave Cook	95-98	408/227-4604
Charles Preuss	95-98	650/326-6451
Bobbie Handen	96-99	408/356-4263
Grant Hoyt	96-99	650/969-7892
Leda Beth Gray	96-99	650/424-8573
Debbie Thompson	97-00	408/227-4604
Ann Verdi	97-00	408/266-5108
David Drake	97-00	650/424-8575

STAFF

Chapter Manager	Garth Harwood	408/252-3747
Environmental Advocate	Craig Breon	408/252-3748
Office Fax		408/252-2850
E-mail		
Website		www.scvas.org

CHAIRPERSONS

Avocet	Grant Hoyt	650/969-7892
Education	Bobbie Handen	408/356-4263
Envir. Action	(Vacant)	
Field Trips		
Weekend	Dave Cook	408/227-4604
Weekday	Shirley Gordon	408/996-9863
	Rosalie Lefkowitz	650/494-6358
Finance	Don Price	650/327-1254
Hospitality	Debbie Thompson	408/227-4604
Library	Joyce Chang	650/965-9682
PhotoClub	Pete LaTourrette	650/961-2741
Programs	Cindy Handen	650/363-9324
Christmas		
Bird Count	Ann Verdi	408/266-5108
	Kathy Parker	408/358-2832
Audubon		
Adventures	Elaine Gould	408/448-0622
Bay Area Audubon Council		
Delegate	Leda Beth Gray	650/424-8573

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.

1998, Volume 45, Number 3

Rare Bird Alert: 415-681-7422

continued on Page 3

March 1998 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 March 4, 7:30 PM.

Bay Area Bird Photographers. Wildlife photographer Chris Humphreys will present slides from her recent 10-week trip to Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya and South Africa. Lucy Evans Baylands Interpretive Center, E. Embarcadero Rd., Palo Alto.

****Saturday March 7, 8:30 AM.**

Half day. Coyote Hills Regional Park. Leader: Frank Vanslager (408)257-3647. Take Hwy 84/Dumbarton Bridge east towards Newark. Exit right on Thornton, then go left over freeway as Thornton becomes Paseo Padre. Turn left at Patterson Ranch/Commerce Rd. into park. Meet at far end of Quarry Parking lot, 1/4 mile past park entrance. Raptors, waterfowl.

Tuesday March 10, 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: Blue-gray Gnatcatcher.

****Wednesday March 11, 8:30 AM.**

Half day. Calero Reservoir, McKean Rd. Leaders: Shirley Gordon (408)996-9863, Alan Thomas *et al.* Take Hwy 85 south, turn right (south) on Almaden Expwy; follow to end. Turn right briefly on Harry, then left on McKean to Calero. About 1 mile after boat dock, take first right turn to ranger station, where we'll meet. Waterbirds, raptors; possible Barn Owl.

****Saturday - Sunday March 14 -**

15. Full days. Honey Lake and vicinity. Leader: Bob Hirt (408)446-4478. Outstanding winter birding in this remote corner of northeast California. The pre-dawn Sage Grouse mating dance is worth the long drive and chilly temperatures. Eagles and other raptors, waterfowl, Pinyon Jay, Townsend's Solitaire are some of the probable species. Experienced leader knows where to find the birds; call to reserve space and get directions. Limit 20 participants.

Saturday March 21, 10 AM - 2 PM.

SCVAS Education Day at McClellan Ranch Park (or Monta Vista High School if raining.) See Page 1 for details.

****Sunday March 22, 8:30 AM.**

Half day. Almaden Quicksilver Park. Leader: Ann Verdi (408)266-5108. In San Jose, take Almaden Expwy south to Almaden Rd. through town of New Almaden; turn right at park entrance. Moderately strenuous hiking through woodland, chaparral. Rain cancels.

****Wednesday March 25, 9:00 AM.**

Half day. Arastradero Preserve. Leader: Grace Sain (650)856-8839. From I-280 take Page Mill Rd. west, turn right on Arastradero Rd. (approx. 1/2 mile) and meet in parking lot, 1/2 mile on right. Let's see what El Nino has brought for Spring. Moderate walking; trails may be muddy. Rain cancels.

****Sunday March 29, 9:00 AM.**

Half day. Beginners' trip to Stanford Campus. Leader: Dick Stovel (650)856-6105. Local breeding birds should be very active, and early migrants starting to return. From Hwy 101 in Palo Alto take University Ave exit west, follow through downtown Palo Alto and into Stanford campus as University becomes Palm Drive. Meet at end of Palm Dr. at entrance to Main Quad. Heavy rain cancels.

****Saturday April 4, 8:00 AM.**

Half day. Ed Levin County Park. Leader: Bob Reiling (408)253-7527. Take Hwy 237 east, crossing I-880 and I-680 as 237 becomes Calaveras Rd. in Milpitas. Continue approx. 2 miles past 680 to just past golf course entrance; turn right into park entrance. Joint trip with Sequoia Audubon. Possible fee; rain cancels.

Tuesday April 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: Golden Eagle.



OFFICE VIEW *continued*

appropriate, native plant community to take hold on the terrace, and, unless the bank fails altogether, the recovery to a truly native community there should now accelerate.

OVER THE FULL AREA AFFECTED in this way, perhaps 20 to 30 tons of sediment were removed from the stream. These fine sediments, so valuable as topsoil, act as a pollutant in the stream ecosystem---indeed, some call it the most common form of water pollution in the West. Fine silts clog the tiny spaces between bottom gravels and deprive larval insects of habitat, and smother the eggs of many fishes such as trout and salmon, which require oxygenated water to flow freely through clean, protective gravels to survive.

Who knows what we might accomplish, through the next few globally-warmed years, with a few more "weed patches" and a few less parking lots along the streams?

Field Notes

by Bill Bousman

Loons through Waterfowl

Single **Common Loons** found on Calero Reservoir on 2 Jan (AV) and the Campbell percolation ponds on 31 Jan (CKS, JML) made bookends for the month. The winter invasion of **Red-necked Grebes** continued this month, at least on Lake Cunningham. Two birds were seen regularly in the early part of the month (m.ob.) with one bird seen through 31 Jan (AME). Amazingly, three birds were found on the lake on 8 Jan (BMcK). Few **Brown Pelicans** are found past Christmas so a bird at Shoreline Lake on 4 Jan (JMa) and another off the Palo Alto estuary mouth on 6 Jan (MMR) were unusual. Good numbers of wintering **American Bitterns** were found in January including one at the Palo Alto Baylands on 15 Jan (KCW), a second at Lake Cunningham on 16 Jan (SCR), a third at the Palo Alto Flood Control Basin (FCB) on 23 Jan (RLe, RCo), and the fourth at the Ogier Avenue ponds in Morgan Hill on 29 Jan (RWR, FV). **Cattle Egret** numbers rarely build at the Arzino Ranch in Alviso until late in the winter so three counted on 2 Jan (SCR) were of interest.

The immature **Greater White-fronted Goose** wintering at the Palo Alto Duck Pond with its domestic friends was seen regularly through the month (m.ob.). Another immature was seen at Hellyer CP on 2 Jan (SCR) and is probably the bird recorded there in the fall. A third immature was at the Moffett Field GC on 14-15 Jan (MMR, MiF). A single **Snow Goose** was seen at Calaveras Reservoir 2-3 Jan (SCR, MJM). Eight **Ross' Geese** were seen at the 'goose farm' in Morgan Hill 16-19 Jan (MJM, MMR). These were free-flying birds attracted to the local farm birds. An adult **Tundra Swan** was found at Sandy Wool Lake in Ed Levin CP on 1 Jan (CKS, JML) and remained at least until 18 Jan (m.ob.).

Eighty-nine swans were counted just south of the county border in the Bolsa de San Felipe on 18 Jan (NL). The peak count of **Wood Ducks** on Almaden Reservoir during the month was of 40 on 21 Jan (JAC). **Eurasian Wigeon** have been fairly widespread in January with one bird in the Palo Alto estuary on 2 Jan (MJM) and again on 31 Jan (SMi), one in the Sunnyvale Water Pollution Control Plant (WPCP) ponds on 12 Jan (JAC), and one near Los Esteros and Grand in Alviso on 26-31 Jan (v.ob.). **Blue-winged Teal**, on the other hand, have been found only in the Palo Alto FCB (v.ob.) with high counts of six on 6 Jan (MMR) and seven on 16 Jan (AWa). **Redhead** have also been widely dispersed with five at the Palo Alto FCB on 2 Jan (MJM), one on Salt

*Two Iceland Gulls
in Alviso were
the prize birds
of the winter*

Pond A1 on 6 Jan (SCR), three to four on the Sunnyvale WPCP ponds 16-19 Jan (SCR *et al.*, JAC), and two on the Ogier Avenue ponds on 29 Jan (RWR, FV). One male **Tufted Duck** has remained at the Sunnyvale WPCP ponds with sightings on 2 Jan (MJM), 11 Jan (DN, SMi), and 16 Jan (JMe). **White-winged Scoters** have been absent locally for the last few winters, but one was found off the Palo Alto estuary mouth on 6 Jan (MMR) and two more were found there 10-11 Jan (NL, RGJ). Fewer **Barrow's Goldeneyes** have been found on Shoreline Lake this month (v.ob.) compared with recent winters with most observations of only one or two birds. Good numbers of **Hooded Mergansers** were found early in the month on the Oka percolation ponds with eight seen there on 6 Jan (JAC) and a female still there on 31 Jan (CKS, JML). The upper pond at the

Arastradero Preserve had seven birds on 13 Jan (TGr). Some good totals for **Common Mergansers** on our local reservoirs at the turn of the year included 18 on Isabel Valley on 30 Dec (MMR, MJM), 50 on Chesbro on 31 Dec (AV), 15 on Calero on 31 Dec (AV), and 15 on Almaden on 2 Jan (AV). Calero Reservoir had 20 mergansers on 31 Jan (AV).

Raptors through Skimmers

Once a rare migrant, **Ospreys** are increasingly being seen at other times of the year. One or more birds have been seen irregularly at the Parkway Lakes at Metcalf Road or the Ogier Avenue ponds to the south this season (v.ob.) with a pair seen at the latter location on 29 Jan (RWR, FV). In addition a bird was also seen at Almaden Reservoir on 17 Jan (JMa, JL) and a male was at Guadalupe Reservoir on 25 Jan (AV). Are these truly resident birds now and can we expect nesting at one of our reservoirs in the future? A surprising count of **Bald Eagles** on the move was of two adults and a sub-adult at Hwy 101 and Scheller on 16 Jan (SG *fide* GH). An adult wintering at Calaveras Reservoir was seen again on 25 Jan (NL) and another adult was seen over the Sunnyvale Baylands on 31 Jan (VT *et al.*). The **'Harlan's' Red-tailed Hawk** found along the Guadalupe River at Trimble last month was seen there again on 17 Jan (MJM) and 24 Jan (LCh *et al.*). **Ferruginous Hawks** have been found in typical numbers in January with one east of Ed Levin CP on 2 Jan (SCR), an adult dark-morph in Morgan Hill on 20 Jan (MMR) and a typical light-morph bird along Canada Road the same day (MMR). This has been an excellent winter for **Rough-legged Hawks** with apparently different light-morph immatures seen in Rancho San Antonio OSP on 3 Jan (SCR, HLR) and near the San Jose Airport on 8 Jan (RWR, FV). Rain-driven high tides have provided the best showing of **Black Rails** on record (m.ob.) with at least six birds

Field Notes *continued*

present at the Palo Alto Baylands on 10 Jan (TGr) and 31 Jan (SMi). It has been an excellent January for **Lesser Yellowlegs** again this year with single birds seen in the New Chicago Marsh on 6 Jan (SCR), at the end of Nortech Parkway on 15 Jan (SCR), and at the Palo Alto Baylands on 17 Jan (JAC). Two **Red Knots** roosting at the Palo Alto estuary on 6 Jan (SCR) are also unusual for the winter. A single **Sanderling** off the Palo Alto estuary mouth on 6 Jan (MMR) is atypical of recent winters, but this species was found more commonly in the winters following the last large El Nino event, possibly because of beach erosion---will this happen again?

The gull event of the new year was the discovery of two first-winter **Ice-land Gulls** in the San Jose-Santa Clara WPCP drying ponds on 16 Jan (SCR, AJ, SBT, MH). No records of this species have been accepted in California as of yet. One of the birds was also seen briefly on 28 Jan (AJ). The adult **Lesser Black-backed Gull**, here for its third winter, was seen in the vicinity of the Coyote Creek Riparian Station (CCRS) waterbird pond on 12 and 23 Jan (AJ) and probably the same bird was at Lake Cunningham on 8 Jan (BMcK). The immature found in late October at Lake Cunningham was seen fairly regularly throughout the month (v.ob.). A first-winter **Glaucous Gull** was seen along Shoreline Lake on 6 Jan (SCR) and another bird was in the San Jose-Santa Clara WPCP drying ponds on 16 Jan (MH, SCR, SBT). Two different first-winter birds were also seen in the Fremont Lagoons on 23 and 31 Jan (NL). The wintering **Black Skimmer** flock at Charleston Slough has ranged from 12 to 15 birds during the month (m.ob.).

Swifts through Goldfinches

We have no winter records for **Vaux's Swifts** in the county so the six watched foraging over McClellan Ranch Park for 30 minutes on 13 Jan (GH) are exceptional. A male **Allen's Hum-**

mingbird was seen at Ed Levin CP on 25 Jan (AME) and is the first of our summer residents to return. Single **Lewis' Woodpeckers** were seen in San Antonio Valley on 6 Jan (NL, RWR, FV) and 10 Jan (MiF). The male **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** wintering at Ed Levin CP was seen on 2 Jan (SCR, SBT), but not after that. The male **Red-naped Sapsucker** found last month near the Arnold Pond in Arroyo Bayo was seen once again on 6 Jan (MMR, NL, RWR, FV). A previously banded '**Western' Flycatcher** was captured at CCRS on 4 Jan for an unusual winter record (TGo). The **Eastern Phoebe** wintering at Shady Oaks Park in San Jose was seen regularly in January (m.ob.). Both **Tree** and **Violet-green Swallows** are occasional in winter time, usually in small numbers as typified by the two **Tree Swallows** seen along Coyote Creek below Hwy 237 on 17 Jan (LCh) and 28 Jan (AJ) and a single bird at Lake Cunningham on 18 Jan (SCR). However, a flock of 100 **Tree Swallows** over San Felipe Lake east of Gilroy and the nearby hills on 19 Jan (MMR) is remarkable. Within this flock were at least two **Violet-green Swallows** as well. **Barn Swallows** are not expected in the winter at all but this appears to be changing. This month single birds were at Lake Cunningham on 2 Jan (SCR) and at the Parkway Lakes on 19 Jan (MMR). **Blue-gray Gnatcatchers** are rare in winter so one found along Stevens Creek below L'Avenida is of note (CJC). Two **Phainopepla** were seen on at trip to San Antonio Valley on 6 Jan (NL, RWR, FV), an area where they are often found. Wintering **Yellow Warblers** continue to be recorded with one on Homestead Road in Santa Clara on 4 Jan (SCR) which has been present since early November and one near the Alviso Environmental Education Center on 8 Jan (BMcK) and 16 Jan (SCR *et al.*) that has also been present since November. A male **Black-throated Gray Warbler** was found along Coyote Creek above Hwy 237 on 9 Jan and seen again at that location on 14 Jan (SBT *fide* SCR). Missed during December, November's **Prairie Warbler** was found again along the Guadalupe River below I-880 on 4

Jan (SCR) and was seen a number of times during the month (v.ob.). This bird is clearly wintering in this area. Last month's **Palm Warbler** in Fair Oaks Park in Sunnyvale, here for its third winter, was seen regularly during January (m.ob.). A male **Western Tanager** calling in a San Jose yard on 23 Jan (RWR) was a good find for the winter season. A **Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow** was seen again at the Palo Alto Baylands 9-10 Jan (*fide* AME, TGr). Two **Swamp Sparrows** were seen at Lake Cunningham on 2 Jan (SCR), a single bird was found at the Palo Alto Baylands on 11 Jan (NL), and a first-winter bird was banded at CCRS on 18 Jan (*fide* AJ). A **White-throated Sparrow** at a San Jose feeder has continued to be found through January (JD). Two birds were found on Hwy 152 near Mt. Madonna CP on 1 Jan (JMa, JL). A **Lawrence's Goldfinch** at San Antone Junction on 6 Jan (NL, RWR, FV) was found in an area where they are often found wintering in small numbers.

Observers: Les Chibana (LCh), Jack Cole (JAC), Rita Colwell (RCo), Chuck Coston (CJC), Jean Dubois (JD), Al Eisner (AME), Mike Feighner (MiF), Tom Goodier (TGo), Tom Grey (TGr), Stephan Gunn (SG), Garth Harwood (GH), Matt Heindel (MH), Richard Jeffers (RGJ), Jolene Lange (JL), Jeanne Leavitt (JML), Rosalie Lefkowitz (RLe), Nick Lethaby (NL), Mike Mammoser (MJM), John Mariani (JMa), Bert McKee (BMcK), John Meyer (JMe), Steve Miller (SMi), Dave Nelson (DN), Bob Reiling (RWR), Mike Rogers (MMR), Heather Rottenborn (HLR), Steve Rottenborn (SCR), Chris Salander (CKS), Scott Terrill (SBT), Vivek Tiwari (VT), Frank Vanlager (FV), Ann Verdi (AV), Alan Walther (AWa), and Clark White (KCW).

RARITIES: Please drop me a note: Bill Bousman, 321 Arlington Way, Menlo Park, CA 94025, or: bousman@merlin.arc.nasa.gov

Confession: I'm a Big Fan of Floods

by Craig Breon

SCVAS Environmental Advocate

I know people have water standing two feet in their homes. I know their cars may have floated down the block. I know it took them two and a half hours to get to work. And, of course, I feel sorry for anyone injured or killed, and those who know them. Such true problems aside... I really enjoy floods. I'm also willing to bet that a good portion of our readership feels the same.

Big weather and natural phenomena in general, and flooding in particular, are, for me, what the O.J. trial was or any given edition of the television newsmagazine "Hard Copy" is for your average couch potato. I can't get enough news of reservoirs spilling, what types of mud and landslides are occurring where, how many roads are closed, or how many inches of rain dumped on Boulder Creek (those poor folks, they might as well be in Seattle).

Why? Lots of reasons. First, the processes are incredible to watch. Get to know your local creek in all stages: trickle to flood. Notice where the eddies form, where pools develop, where erosion tends to occur, what happens to the course of a stream when a tree falls into it or a mudslide hits it at a perpendicular angle. Have you ever noticed that after flood waters recede (in a relatively natural system) the pebbles, cobble, and boulders left behind are often arranged by size, with the largest ones closest to the main channel? This is because the energy of a river is generally greater towards the center, and thus it can carry along heavier objects, while waters that spread out over a floodplain progressively lose their energy, and thus only the smallest silts are generally found furthest from a river.

Next is lurid fascination, pure and simple. I love to see Mother Nature mess with people. Here's where I'm vulnerable to the charge that I've never had it happen to me. Largely true, though ask me sometime about my 24-hour bus ride from hell in the highlands

of Sichuan Province in China during a torrential downpour. Further, let me declare right now that if I had to choose between death by being swept away in Corte Madera Creek and dashed against a half-submerged coast live oak, or death by collision with the 12B bus at the corner of Homestead and Wolfe in Sunnyvale, I'd take the former. Dulce et decorum est, pro quercus mori.*

Third, floodridden days are a great time to rethink the landscape. Yes, we're destined to hear cries for more and more flood and erosion control

Our fearless Advocate professes to favor a thrilling demise at the hand of Nature over a humdrum bus wreck in the midst of Suburbia

throughout the State. That's exactly why we have to take advantage of such times as these to remind those around us that we've not done so well with our past course of action and should think about changing tactics.

Finally, we arrive at the conservation part of this article. There's an interesting new flood management report out on San Francisquito Creek in the northern part of Santa Clara County. It notes several possible options for reducing damage from flooding. Included is a plan to purchase part or all of several occupied and unoccupied parcels of land along the creek from El Camino downstream to Highway 101. This is the type of flood management we advocate---moving the people away from the water, where possible. Little or no cement, rip rap (a.k.a. riff-raff), or gabions (a.k.a. rock jails). If you're interested, a copy of the report---or at

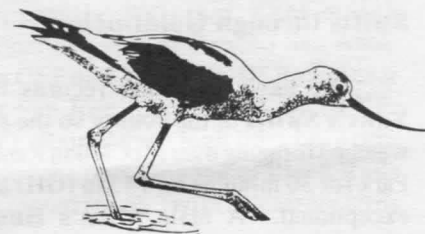
least the executive summary---can be had from the San Francisquito CRMP group at (650)962-9876.

In Saratoga, the City is considering a creek protection policy. If you're a Saratoga resident, write your City Council and urge them to support a policy that does the following: sets back new or redeveloped land uses from the creeks; inventories the creeks for restoration potential and begins funding restoration projects; calls for progressive flood and erosion management rather than traditional flood control; and reduces stormwater pollution. The address to write is: Mayor Don Wolfe and Council Members, 13777 Fruitvale Ave, Saratoga, CA 95070.

San Jose has recently received a small grant from the Regional Water Quality Control Board to survey many creeks for restoration potential. This was called for nearly four years ago in their landmark Riparian Corridor Policy. Better late than never. There may be an action item on this for San Jose residents in the future, so keep an eye out.

P.S. This article was written with Stevens Creek raging not 80 feet away from my office. It's flowing at a rate of about 1000 cubic feet per second, flooding the lower portion of our field. Beautiful!

**Craig has taken a famous quotation and slightly altered the wording to exemplify his point. 'Quercus', the Latin word for oak, has been substituted for 'patria' (country). Now does it make sense?-----Ed.*



Reader Offers Anecdotes, Advice On Back Yard Nest Boxes

Dear Editor:

In response to the interesting article about birdhouses (January *Avocet*), I have had several [nest boxes] up for many years. My homemade ones are usually 4" by 6" by 9" high, with a 1 and 1/8" entry hole about 7" above the bottom. I have never seen a sparrow in my yard, but Nuttall's Woodpeckers regularly enlarge every hole to about 2" in diameter. Our roof overhang has 2 1/2" holes on the underside for ventilation, every one of them now screened with hardware cloth because the woodpeckers have enlarged almost all of them. I have finally resorted to nailing 1 1/4" metal washers over the nestbox entry holes to keep them from being enlarged. This has worked very well. The chickadees and titmice don't seem the least disturbed by the washers. While I, too, clean out the boxes after every use, I don't bother with wood shavings. A pair of Bewick's Wrens use one box regularly. It has a 1" entry hole about 4" from the bottom and a thin piece of wood nailed to the side as a perch. The wrens use the perch before entering the box, but it is too fragile to support jays.

Despite plenty of nest boxes, the one nailed directly under the roof overhang, totally safe from jays, squirrels or any intruder except small birds that can fly into the entry hole, has been the scene of many fights. The chickadees regularly drive off the wrens who usually begin to nest first, and who usually then move to the wren box with its 1" entry hole (too small for the chickadees). The titmice and chickadees settle for whoever gets there first, although fights occasionally occur.

My boxes, however, are never in direct sun except in early morning or evening. Even with ventilation holes near the roof, the boxes get very warm inside. I keep the squirrels, jays and raccoons off by putting 2" nails every inch or so in a piece of wood the same size as the roof, protruding upward, then attaching the wood to the original roof. Nothing can sit on the roof nor reach into the entry hole from whatever the

box is attached to. (What to do when a pair of juncos nest in a hanging basket of plants exposed to jays and other predators is beyond me, other than to quit watering the plants.)

My story about watching fledglings depart a nest box occurred on a grey, drizzling morning on May 1, 1996. While having a late breakfast, we watched a pair of titmice flying back and forth, chattering constantly. Finally, one head of a youngster popped out, then in and out of the hole several times until it launched itself out of our view. The same for youngster number two, then three. Number four's head went in and out for at least 10 minutes before it finally took off. Then number five appeared and departed, followed by numbers six and seven. All seven titmice were in a 4" by 6" by 9" box. When a parent went in to feed them, that meant eight birds occupied that space. We finally decided they must have been stacked vertically in order to fit!

Last year, we had only one pair of chickadees attempt to nest here in Palo Alto, but we had to close the box because of some urgent house repairs. At our summer cabin in the northern Sierra, not a single box was used, and we saw so few birds both in quantity and number of species at our feeders that we, and numerous bird-feeding neighbors, wondered if *Silent Spring* had indeed arrived. Have others here had similar experiences?

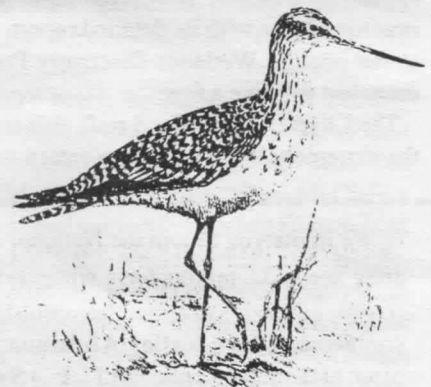
-----Diane Conradson
SCVAS member since 1960

Migrate to Arcata For "Godwit Days" Festival

The City of Arcata, CA in Humboldt County is sponsoring the Third Annual "Godwit Days" birding festival April 17 - 19. Field trips to view Ruffed Grouse, Spotted Owl, and Marbled Murrelet will be offered, along with boat excursions to see shorebirds, wading birds and waterfowl. Workshops on photography, nature illustration, hawk banding, and many more are also scheduled. The birding around Arcata is excellent, and with spring migration in full swing, visitors can expect to see good numbers of breeding-plumaged shorebirds heading north to Alaska, as well as a wide variety of local breeders that are uncommon or absent in the Bay Area.

Arcata is located 275 miles north of San Francisco on Humboldt Bay. For more information call (707)822-3619 or (800)908-WING or E-mail arcatacy@tidepool.com.

Godwit Days



April 17-19, 1998

Birders Sought for County Parks Inventory

Santa Clara County's Environmental Resources Agency is looking for volunteers to do comprehensive bird inventories in County Parks during 1998-99. Duties will include bird identification and map locations of nest sites, with particular attention to species of special concern. This sounds like a great opportunity for local birders to contribute their skills to a worthy conservation project. Volunteers are also being sought for riparian area surveys, faunal inventory (mammals, fish, reptiles, amphibians, insects), and removal of exotic plants (yellow star thistle, vinca, pampas grass, etc.). For information call Volunteer Coordinator Christopher Crockett at (408)354-6583.

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

AUTO***5-DIGIT 95014
AUDUBON SANTA CLARA VALLEY
22221 MCCLELLAN RD
CUPERTINO CA 95014-4030



Fundraiser a Smash, Thanks to You

A heartfelt THANK YOU goes out from the Board of Directors to all those members and friends of Santa Clara Valley Audubon who responded so generously this year to our annual Fall Fundraiser! That generosity enabled our chapter to set a record this year: \$22,784 dollars received to date from a total of 336 separate donors, a figure that goes well beyond our target of \$19,000. The special contributions of those 52 donors who gave \$100 or more are especially appreciated. These donations help support the many programs that our chapter offers its members and the general public---from our rapidly expanding Bluebird Trail program to our award-winning *Avocet* newsletter with its detailed reports of local bird sightings to our popular Wetlands Discovery Program for school children, just to name a few.

The Chapter's board and staff also are particularly proud of the extremely low expense-to-return ratio that we have been

able to maintain in conducting this fundraiser---this year, an amazingly low 13¢ was spent for every dollar contributed. We could not achieve such an impressive figure---matched, we believe, by few other not-for-profit organizations of any kind---without the assistance of many dedicated volunteers (including several Board members) who put in long hours engaged in such tasks as hand-addressing and stuffing envelopes, preparing thank you letters, and updating chapter database records.

So, to all who gave this year, both with their pocketbooks and with their time, thank you once again for helping SCVAS continue to grow and prosper as it approaches its 80th year of serving the birding and environmental community in Santa Clara Valley.

Gratefully,
David C. McIntyre,
President, SCVAS

We invite you to join the National Audubon Society and its Santa Clara County chapter (SCVAS). To join, please complete and mail this form with payment to: **SCVAS, 22221 McClellan Road, Cupertino, CA 95014.**

Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society Membership: (Check one)

Subscriber \$12 Supporter \$25 Donor \$35 Patron \$50 or 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 Audubon's birding, education, and conservation programs.

NAME _____ GIFT FROM _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

PHONE _____

7XCH

C14