



The Avocet

The Newsletter of the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society

June-August 1998

New Vision of Cavity Nesters Recovery Program

by Carol Hankermeyer
SCVAS Bluebird Program coordinator

I am sitting at the edge of the lawn, near the titmouse box affixed to a Monterey Pine. I have been watching two Oak Titmice transport grubs and insects into the box and emerge, frequently carrying a fecal sac. The harried titmouse parents average one visit every five minutes, and I am struck by the enormous demands placed on them just to ensure that their offspring won't starve. Although I rejoice that I have been able to supply a safe cradle for them for this brief period, I recognize that their security is short-lived.

As soon as the nestlings venture forth to independence, they will face numerous predators and environmental hazards. Knowing that fledging is imminent, the Scrub Jay is lurking nearby, and a Cooper's Hawk alights occasionally in

the top of the pine. These age-old foes have always challenged the little birds, but a more recent threat to this species is the rapid loss of oak woodland habitat around the Santa Clara Valley. At the rate of an estimated 4% decline annually in the local titmouse population (drawn from local Christmas Bird Count and Summer Bird Count data which have been statistically adjusted for differences in observer effort and other variables), the survival of one or two individuals of my entire nestbox brood this season will be very good odds indeed.

Recent data from the North American Breeding Bird Survey reveal an alarming trend in the abundance of Oak Titmice and many other cavity-nesting birds. For this



Lookin' For a Home

reason, SCVAS is developing an expanded local vision of the statewide Bluebird Recovery Program. The project initially focused almost exclusively on the rehabilitation of Western Bluebirds. Our local program emphasizes that the maintenance of

continued on Page 7

Annual Potluck Dinner General Membership Meeting Wednesday June 17 6:00 PM McClellan Ranch Park

Please join us this evening for a special event at McClellan Ranch Park. The SCVAS staff, Board, volunteers and friends will celebrate another successful year of Audubon activities in the South Bay with a sumptuous potluck dinner at our Cupertino headquarters. This year's potluck assignments:

A - F Main dish G - P Dessert R - Z Salad/Hors d'oeuvres

President David McIntyre will present a brief summary of the year's accomplishments, announce future plans, and honor some of our key volunteers. Mostly we'll swap birding stories, sip beverages (provided by SCVAS) and enjoy great food at bird-friendly McClellan Ranch Park. This event is for all our members---if you haven't attended before, why not come and meet the local Audubon family, a great bunch of folks who love birds and care about protecting our local bird habitat.

Field Notes-----Page 6
Birdathon Reports-----Page 9
Contributions of
Our Elders-----Page 10

VIEW FROM THE OFFICE

by Garth Harwood, SCVAS Chapter Manager

THE VIEW FROM THIS OFFICE is, as always, spectacular. For those of you who missed the first of these columns nearly two years ago, the exceptional view here was the original reason for its title, which was to be accompanied by an illustration depicting the actual view. But all attempts at illustration have proven, aptly enough, "too busy" to fit into this space. So from that day to this, it has been my task to provide you with a word portrait of the goings-on here, avian and otherwise.

THAT SAID, LET'S TALK ABOUT BIRDS! I keep up to seven kinds of feeders here at any given time, both to benefit the birds and to ensure that visitors to our office have lots to see and talk about. I also provide as much advice, and as many examples, about bird-feeding and habitat protection as I possibly can to our members and the general public. One marvelous benefit of this procedure is that even when I'm too busy to go birding, the birds come to me! This past month, I observed no fewer than 61 species here at the park---most of them from my desk or the parking lot.

In a future column, I will review this year's breeding birds of the park, but for now I'll just provide a few details which may be enough to motivate you to spend a lunchtime hour or two along our creekside trail: the BULLOCK'S ORIOLES have built at least FOUR nests within 100 yards of the office door this season, while the HOODED ORIOLES which raised a cowbird last year have finally returned to give it another try, constructing two nests beneath the leaves of a fan palm near the office. The two YELLOW WARBLER territories I have noticed for the past two seasons appear to have been joined by another; the territorial males are usually singing from nearly the same spot throughout the late spring and early summer and, I'm now discovering, from year to year as well. This year I've noticed more WARBLING VIREOS, ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLERS, PURPLE FINCHES, and WILSON'S WARBLERS than ever in our riparian corridor, although I couldn't swear that the difference isn't a manifestation of my own growing acuity in finding the little devils. My favorite bird for the year to date was the male LAZULI BUNTING which sang energetically from the park's shrubbery for a week in late April before the damp weather returned in early May.

Fledgings within the park so far this season include those of ANNA'S HUMMINGBIRD, DARK-EYED JUNCO, CHESTNUT-BACKED CHICKADEE, OAK TITMOUSE, WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH, HOUSE FINCH, and most recently, NUTTALL'S WOODPECKER. This morning upon entering the office I was treated to seeing clumsy fledglings of several of the above competing for access to the feeders!

If you haven't already, please do come by, pick up a free McClellan Ranch Park bird checklist, and bird the park while visiting our Nature Shop and Birding Library.

continued on page 5

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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.

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SCVAS is the chapter of the National Audubon Society for Santa Clara County.

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Rare Bird Alert: 415-681-7422

June-August 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

Saturday June 6, 10 - 4. Wildlife Center of Silicon Valley "Baby Shower" ---a public event showcasing one of our region's largest wildlife rehab centers. SCVAS will be represented by members of the new Membership Committee. For more info call (408) 283-0744.

Saturday June 6 Palo Alto Summer Bird Count

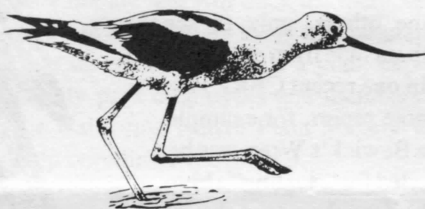
The Palo Alto Summer Bird Count is just like the Christmas Bird Count six months later. Birders comb the Palo Alto Count Circle for any and all species visible and audible in a 24-hour period. SCVAS is one of the few Audubon chapters to sponsor a Summer Count, which gives us a reasonable idea of local breeding bird activity. (The first Saturday in June is selected because migrant activity is minimal; most birds detected on this date are presumably breeders.)

We are fortunate that Chapter Manager Garth Harwood feels strongly enough about keeping this Summer Bird Count alive, and is willing to coordinate it in addition to his many other duties (hint---he would welcome a volunteer to organize the Count!) We need more counters, too, to cover the 15-mile diameter count circle that encompasses Bayside habitat from Menlo Park to Mt. View; suburban Palo Alto, Stanford, Los Altos; and bird-rich foothill areas up to Skyline Blvd. Call the office if you'd like to volunteer. A Countdown Dinner (pizza, salad, drinks) to tally the day's bird totals will be held at the Audubon office at McClellan Ranch at 6:00 PM.

****Sunday June 7, 8:30 AM.** Russian Ridge OSP. Leader: Shirley Gordon (408)996-9863. Meet at Preserve parking lot at NW corner of Skyline Blvd (Hwy 35) and Page Mill/Alpine Rd. Highlights: Grasshopper Sparrow, Lazuli Bunting. Lunch optional.

****Wednesday June 10, 8:30AM.** Half day. Russian Ridge OSP. Leader: Shirley Gordon. See June 7 listing for details.

****Saturday June 13, 7:30 AM.** Half day. Stevens Creek Park. Leader: Frank Vanslager (408)257-3647. From I-280 in Cupertino take Foothill Blvd. south 2.1 miles, turn left and meet at first parking area. Breeding birds including warblers, vireos, flycatchers.



****Friday-Sunday June 26-28. Yosemite National Park.**

Leader: Clay Kempf (408) 761-8260.

Yosemite is one of the most incredible places in the world, so it's no surprise that Yosemite birding is outstanding. We'll visit montane meadows, riparian corridors, evergreen forests, rocky slopes and even the Great Basin desert. Our target list sounds spectacular, but we should find most of the following birds, all of which will be in breeding plumage: Lazuli Bunting, Chipping Sparrow, Lincoln's Sparrow, White-headed Woodpecker, William's and Red-breasted Sapsuckers, possible Pileated and Black-backed Woodpeckers, Willow, Dusky, Hammond's and Gray Flycatchers, Western Tanager, White-throated and Black Swifts, Black-headed and Pine Grosbeaks, Lewis' Woodpecker, Pinyon Jay, Clark's Nutcracker, Blue Grouse, Brewer's Sparrow, Rock Wren, American Dipper, Sage Thrasher, Black-crowned Rosy Finch, Cassin's Finch, Common Nighthawk, and more. We always look for Great Gray Owl.

****Saturday June 20, 8:00 AM.** Half day. Charleston Slough. Leader: Nick Yatsko (408)247-5499. Beginners are particularly encouraged to join us as we study ducks, herons, egrets, shorebirds, and possibly Black Skimmers at Mt. View's prime bayside birding spot. From Hwy 101 take San Antonio Rd. north, toward the Bay. Meet inside gate at intersection of San Antonio and Terminal Way.

****Sunday July 26, 8:00 AM.** Half day. Charleston Slough. Leader: TBA. See directions under June 20 listing. Call Dave Cook (408) 871-9552 for information.

****Sunday August 9, 8:30 AM.** Full day. Ano Nuevo State Reserve. Leader: Mark Miller (650)967-3429. Coastal specialties such as Black Swift, Marbled Murrelet, and early returning migrants. Limit 20 people; call leader to reserve space.

****Sunday August 30, 8:30 AM.** Half day. Charleston Slough. Leader: Phyllis Browning (650)494-6360. See directions under June 20 listing.

Headquarters will be White Wolf campground along Tioga Pass Road. Birders are encouraged to arrive no later than mid-day on Thursday to ensure a campsite. Our itinerary includes a full day of birding on Friday, concentrating on Tioga Rd. and Hodgdon Meadow; another full day on Saturday visiting the Mono Lake Basin; and a half day on Sunday visiting Glacier Point and looking for any species we've missed. Friday's birding begins at 6:30 AM at the Chevron Station near the intersection of Highway 120 and Tioga Pass Rd. Should a heavy snowpack result in closure of White Wolf campground, check with the leader for alternate plans.

Start your summer off with Sierran birding at its finest. David Gaines' Birds of Yosemite and Beedy & Granholm's Discovering Sierra Birds are recommended texts to prepare yourself for the trip. Or, you can just show up and look forward to the surprises!

Cavity Nesters *continued from Page 1*

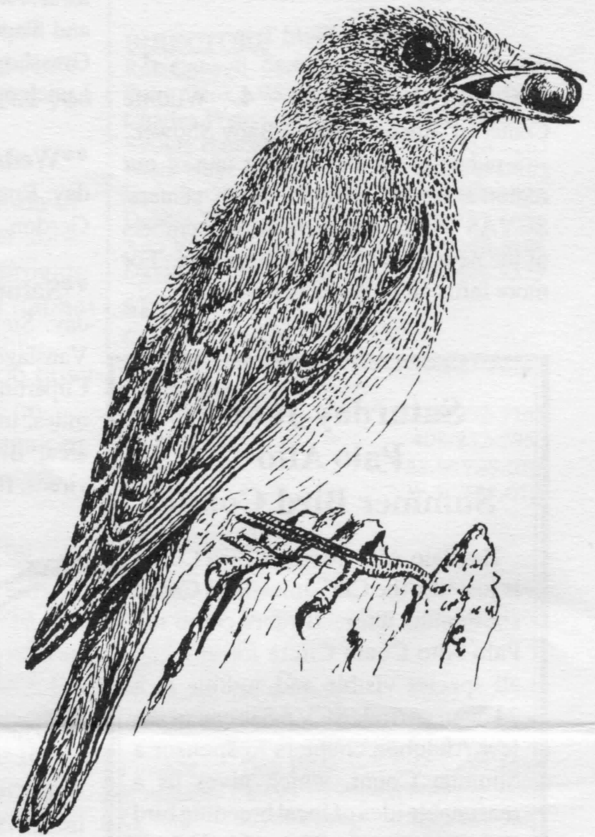
nestboxes is not just a romantic recreational pastime for people with a passion for bluebirds (and who could not have that?) but a serious grassroots effort to restore the populations of all declining native cavity-nesters. Below is a sobering review of the change in relative abundance of California's most common cavity-nesting bird species over the last 29 years:

Species	Trend	Change
Wood Duck	+6.5	621%
Mtn. Bluebird	+6.4	604%
White-breasted Nuthatch	+4.1	321%
Tree Swallow	+2.1	83%
Ash-throated Flycatcher	+1.2	41%
House Wren	+1.0	33%
Nuttall's Wdpkr.	+0.9	30%
Acorn Wdpecker.	+0.4	12%
House Sparrow	-0.3	-8%
Red-breasted Nuthatch	-0.4	-11%
Western Bluebird	-0.9	-23%
Black-capped Chickadee	-1.2	-30%
Oak Titmouse	-1.5	-35%
Mtn. Chickadee	-1.5	-35%
Violet-green Swallow	-1.8	-41%
American Kestrel	-2.0	-44%
Chestnut-backed Chickadee	-2.3	-49%
Bewick's Wren	-2.3	-49%
Barn Owl	-4.7	-78%

(Figures adapted by Hatch Graham of the California Bluebird Recovery Program from the North American Breeding Bird Survey and Analysis, Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, Sauer *et al.* 1997. Reprinted from *Bluebirds Fly*, the newsletter of the CBRP, Winter 1997.)

If these figures have any accuracy (and our advisers say they do), then we should rejoice if any of the above species (except the non-native House Sparrow) shows up in our nestboxes. Yet in the various publications of "bluebirding" groups from around the country, irritation is often expressed when other species occupy an artificial nest cavity. Of course, we are thrilled if bluebirds happen to be our nestbox tenants, but the figures reproduced above may serve as an important reminder: let's not scorn the others, only to see them fade from our skies! In one recent CBRP field note report, for example, a Bewick's Wren was berated for "stealing" a bluebird nestbox, and the demise of all their young was almost applauded as just desserts for their audacity. Yet the rate of population decline in the Bewick's Wren population is shown above to be 49% over the past 29 years as compared to 23% for Western Bluebirds.

Our attitude, then, should be primarily one of thoughtful conservation before recreation, and to achieve it, we may need to suspend our personal preferences. Our mission is to gradually but effectively counteract the downward trend of many local bird populations that have been so impacted by the pressures of urban development and environmental change. If humans insist on monopolizing the land available for habitat to all species, then at least one small thing we can do as individuals is provide more nesting habitat through safely located nestboxes and make a conscientious effort to monitor and protect them.



The Western Bluebird started it all, as bird-lovers throughout California got busy and started building nestboxes to aid bluebird breeding and survival. The "bluebirders" have had great success, and have also raised awareness of the status of a wide variety of other cavity-nesters, from nuthatches to Barn Owls. Drawing by Emelie Curtis

Helping Local Habitat

Home Bird Sanctuaries

Now that Spring is here, it's time to enjoy the birds and their nesting activities. Why not take the opportunity to officially designate your yard as a Bird Sanctuary and register it with SCVAS? Any garden or yard can easily qualify by following these simple guidelines:

- (1) Does your yard provide a source of food, water and shelter?
- (2) Are there California native plants?
- (3) Do you use safe environmental practices?

If you need assistance in creating sanctuaries, SCVAS provides the helpful brochures, Creating Habitat and Landscaping for Birds.

To apply, simply fill out an application, available at the office, and return to SCVAS with \$20 donation. Your application will be reviewed, and if it meets the stated criteria (it's not that difficult), we'll send you a framed and numbered SCVAS Bird Sanctuary Certificate.

Let everyone know that your garden is official by ordering our Deluxe Sanctuary Package, which includes the framed certificate and a lovely plaque, suitable for outdoor display, for a \$50 donation.

By taking part in this program, you'll have the satisfaction of knowing your efforts to create a safe environment are acknowledged and that your garden is "bird-friendly." Profits from the Sanctuary Program support our ongoing educational and conservation programs.

OFFICE VIEW *continued from Page 2*

NEW VOLUNTEERS GIVE LIFE TO MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE: Three volunteers who responded to our recent appeal have joined several SCVAS Board members and myself in pursuing this new approach to furthering the Audubon mission. Long-time member **Leni Silberman** says she's received so much from Audubon over the years, she felt compelled to give some of her own time in return. New SCVAS member **Joyce Taylor**, an Audubon member recently relocated from the East Coast to be closer to her grandchildren, looks forward to meeting other birders through this new volunteer niche. And **Steve Thompson** has been putting in plenty of extra effort to match stride with his wife, **Debbie Thompson**, our newest Board Member and volunteer chair of the committee. These energetic volunteers join Board members **Dave Cook** and **Grant Hoyt** in putting a firm foundation under this vital new committee. Already, members of the committee have represented SCVAS at two major community events and have begun piecing together an efficient, attractive, and content-rich display for future events.

Call or write the SCVAS office or, better yet, stop by and inspect the native plant garden right outside our McClellan Ranch Park headquarters and pick up an application from Garth.

Restoring Native Plants at Local Parks

Do you wish you could see more interesting and colorful birds close to where you live? Are you tired of manicured parks with exotic plants that are devoid of birds? Now you can help with a new Audubon project to bring birds and habitat back to a local park.

SCVAS needs volunteers to plant and maintain California native plants at a local county park. Volunteers will be responsible for taking care of these plants until they mature and will track the increase in bird life attracted by these special plants. You do not need to be a plant expert; county park employees and members of the California Native Plant Society will help coordinate the project.

This is the first year of what we hope will be a multi-year project. We will start with one park, but if the project is successful, we may try to expand it.

If you're looking for an interesting project with direct benefits for birds, now is your chance to get your hands dirty. Please call Chris Salander at (408) 246-6568 to volunteer.

From the Editor

How many times have you picked up your favorite newspaper or periodical and read the following: "Dear readers-- You'll notice a new look in [Audubon, the Chronicle] starting today . . ." etc.?

We generally regard such cheerful notices with skepticism. We don't want our comfortable, reliable formats changed. But now it's our turn to write one of these style-change announcements ourselves. Please bear with us.

The changes we implement over the summer will be noticeable, but not too dramatic. We've enlisted the aid of Bonnie Bedford-White, a professional graphic designer and long-time SCVAS member, to help spruce up the graphic content of *The Avocet*. Specifically, we'll be designing new headings for our regular features (Field Notes, Office View, etc.) without changing the content of these columns; increasing and diversifying our use of photos and original art; and revamping the Page 2 listings and Page 8 membership form.

The basic layout, type fonts, and format will probably remain, including our traditional Avocet logo on Page 1. This is not going to be a total makeover, nor an attempt to mimic some of the modern, glitzy graphic trends visible on the newsstands. We're simply aiming to make a decent publication more attractive and more readable.

Another goal for the '98-99 year (we don't publish a July or August newsletter) is to publish more 12-page issues. The 8-page format just doesn't allow us to cover all the birding field trips, conservation issues, educational opportunities, and sundry blurbs and announcements we receive each month. We need to serve our 4,000+ members more thoroughly and more regularly, so our goal is to crank out between four to six 12-page issues of the ten scheduled.

The "anchors" of *The Avocet*---columnists Bill Bousman, Garth Harwood and Craig Breon---will remain in place, so don't worry. We hope that the changes you see in September will be an improvement, not a disruption. As always, we look forward to hearing your comments and suggestions. Good birding this summer to all our readers.

-----Grant Hoyt

Field Notes

by Bill Bousman

Loons through Waterfowl

A **Pacific Loon** at Searsville Lake on 12 Apr (RGJ, PLaT) was unusual for one of our foothill reservoirs. A **Red-necked Grebe** was found regularly on Shoreline Lake in April (m.ob.) and a second bird was on the Ogier Avenue ponds on 27 Apr (SCR). Five to eight **American White Pelicans** have been on San Felipe Lake during the month which is unusual for spring (v.ob.). San Felipe Lake dries up in drought years but after this El Nino winter it has expanded so that the trees on its normal shoreline are now islands. Five to six **Double-crested Cormorant** nests were seen there 25-26 Apr (JH, MMR) for our first record of breeding by this species in the southern Santa Clara Valley. An **American Bittern** from Searsville Lake on 21 Apr (LB *et al.*) was unusual. Numbers of **Cattle Egrets** have generally ranged from one to five at the Arzino Ranch during April (v.ob.). A single bird was just over the county line in San Benito south of Hwy 152 on 29 Apr (JH). Two **Greater White-fronted Geese** that have wintered locally continued to be found this month. A bird on the Moffett Field GC was seen again on 3 and 27 Apr (MMR) and the one at the Palo Alto Duck Pond was recorded on 11 Apr (AME), 17 Apr (HG *et al.*) and 26 Apr (MJM *et al.*). One of the **Ross' Geese** wintering in Morgan Hill has remained and was seen on 26 Apr (MMR). **Wood Ducks** have been found in typical breeding areas this month, including a female with seven ducklings on Coyote Creek near Gilroy Hot Springs on 11 Apr (MMR, MJM). A pair of **Blue-winged Teal** was seen on the Calabazas ponds on 25 Apr (MJM) and one to two birds were in the Palo Alto Flood Control Basin (FCB) 26-30 Apr (MJM *et al.*, WGB). Displaced **Greater Scaup** continue to be found in the county with 29 on the Ogier Avenue ponds on 22 Apr (SCR) a high count. The female **Black Scoter** found on Shoreline Lake last month continued to

be recorded in April, at least through the 26th, when she had moved to Salt Pond A1 (MJM *et al.*). Surprisingly, a second Black Scoter was found on 11 Apr (TGr, VT), an immature male, and this bird was seen there through 30 Apr (SAG). Then, raising the surprise level an extra notch, an adult male Black Scoter was seen on Shoreline Lake on 17 Apr (HG) and 18 Apr (AW). A female **Barrow's Goldeneye** was seen on Shoreline Lake on 3 Apr (SBT *fide* SCR) and is the latest record we have of a wintering bird. Also very late were two male **Hooded Mergansers** on the ponds southeast of Hwy 85 and Almaden Expressway on 11 Apr (JDa).

*An adult Little Gull
near the Alviso
EEC was the high-
light of the month*

Raptors through Skimmers

Six reports of **Osprey** were received in April. The timing this year suggests resident birds rather than migrants. A light-morph **Swainson's Hawk** was seen just north of the county line over Dixon Landing Road on 8 Apr (SCR). It is a very rare migrant in the valley. Two **Lesser Yellowlegs** were still in fields northwest of Zanker and Hwy 237 on 8 Apr (SCR) and two more were at the Arzino Ranch on 24 Apr (MMR); both rare spring migrants. Two **Ruddy Turnstones** in Salt Pond A16 in Alviso on 28 Apr (RWR) were a good find. On 28 Apr, Steve Rottenborn found an adult **Little Gull** over the New Chicago Marsh for the second county record. It was seen by many observers here and in Salt Ponds A16 and A18 over the next three days. The first county record, a first-winter bird, was found nearby almost exactly three years ago. A scarce spring migrant,

a single **Black Tern** was seen on San Felipe Lake on 26 Apr (MMR) and another bird was on Salt Pond A16 28-29 Apr (TGr, RWR, AJ, MMR) and enjoyed by many of the observers chasing the Little Gull. The **Black Skimmers** in the Palo Alto estuary appear to have remained there until 18 Apr when 11 were counted (AW). On 19 Apr two were found on the small island in Salt Pond A1 (PMB) where they nested in 1995. Up to eight birds have been found roosting on this island through the end of the month (v.ob.).

Roadrunners through Flycatchers

A **Greater Roadrunner** north of San Antone Junction on 18 Apr (SMi) was an area where this rare cuckoo is often found. A single **Vaux's Swift** over San Antonio Valley on 12 Apr (DP *fide* AME) and two at Rancho San Antonio OSP the same day (SMi) were the first of the season. Small numbers of migrants were found through the rest of the month with a peak count of 10 at Stevens Creek CP on 24 Apr (SCR). The first **Black-chinned Hummingbird** of the season was a female banded at the Coyote Creek Riparian Station (CCRS) on 16 Apr (*fide* MJM). Birds were found near the station after that as well as along Coyote Creek above Hellyer CP 29-30 Apr (MJM), the other end of their riparian range. A male **Calliope Hummingbird** was seen at Ed Levin CP on 19 Apr (SCR, HLR); this is rarest of our regular migrant hummers. Good numbers of **Rufous Hummingbirds** moved through in April (m.ob.). The latest bird was a male over Salt Pond A16 in Alviso on 28 Apr (MMR). Two to three **Lewis' Woodpeckers** were recorded from San Antonio Valley during April trips this year (v.ob.). This is about typical for recent years. A male **Pileated Woodpecker** was seen on Table Mountain on 12 Apr (MJM) and 16 Apr (RWR, FV) for a nice treat. Good numbers of **Hammond's Flycatchers** were found along the edge of the Diablo Range this month. Five birds were found along

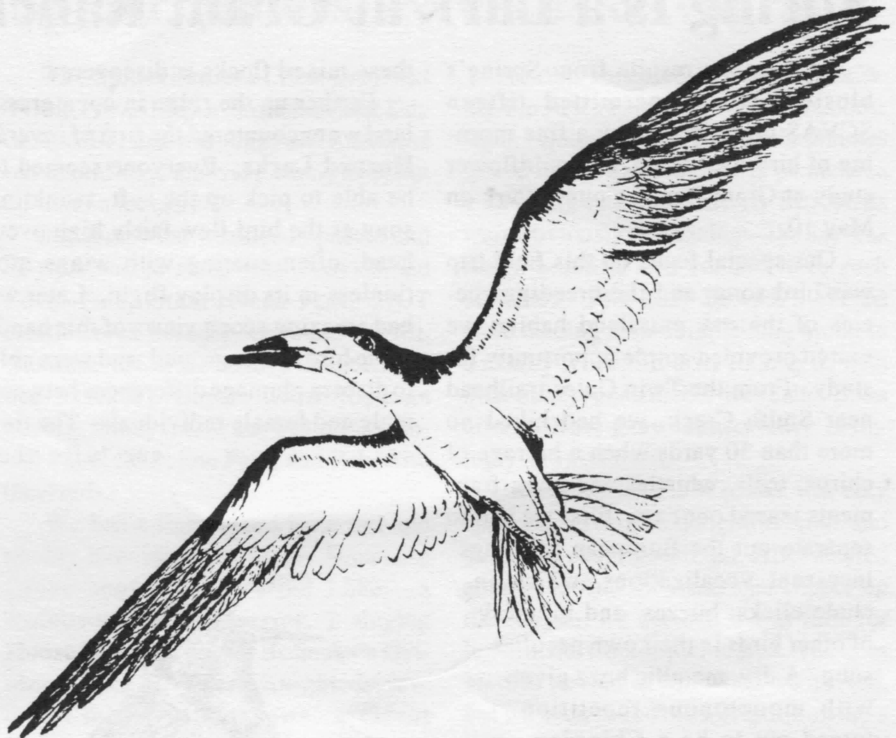
Field Notes *continued*

Canada and Gilroy Hot Springs roads on 11 Apr (MMR, MJM) and another was seen on Smith Creek the same day (SMi). Singles were found at the end of Gilroy Hot Springs Road on 14 Apr (RWR, FV), and again at Smith Creek on 18 Apr (MJM, AME, SMi) and 25 Apr (MMR, AK). Another bird was calling near Grant Lake on 25 Apr (MMR, AK). Two to three **Cassin's Kingbirds** have been found regularly along San Felipe Road this month (v.ob.). One bird was observed on 11 Apr carrying nest material to the middle eucalyptus where they nested last year (MJM).

Dippers through Goldfinches

American Dippers continued to be found above Twin Creeks through 11 Apr (v.ob.). **Swainson's Thrushes** typically arrive in the third week of April, so one singing in Stevens Creek CP on 2 Apr (PMB) was about two and a half weeks early and quite unusual. A **Sage Thrasher** at the Palo Alto Baylands on 7 Apr (BW) is the eighth for the county, but only the third in spring. Four **Phainopepla** were seen in the San Antonio Valley on 12 Apr (AME, DP) where they are resident, but a male on the Mt. Hamilton Road above east San Jose on 18 Apr (MJM) was less expected.

Most of our rarer migrating western warblers showed up this spring. **Nashville Warblers** included one on Gilroy Hot Springs Road on 13 Apr (J&MMe), one at Stevens Creek CP on 18 Apr (AW), one west of Mt. Hamilton on 19 Apr (JDa), one along Aguague Creek in Jos. Grant CP on 25 Apr (MMR, AK) and one near the Alviso Education Center on 28 Apr (MMR). A female **Hermit Warbler** was found at Castle Rock SP on 3 Apr (MJM), where they nest, but females at Stevens Creek CP on 17 Apr (HG *et al.*) and 18 Apr (AW) and two males in Henry Coe SP on 26 Apr (MMR) were obvious migrants. Migrating **MacGillivray's Warblers** included one above Ed Levin CP on 19 Apr (NL), one on Aguague Creek in Jos. Grant CP on 25 Apr (AK, MMR), and one at Stevens



A favorite Black Skimmer nest site near Charleston Slough may have been affected by high water levels. Birders should keep an eye out for skimmers over the summer---will they find enough suitable nesting spots to maintain or expand the South Bay colony? Drawing by Emelie Curtis

Creek CP on 26 Apr (SCR). Seventeen **Grasshopper Sparrows** in the Silver Creek Hills on 10 Apr (SCR) with 14 of them singing males show how plentiful this species can be in its chosen grasslands. Single birds were found at Ed Levin CP on 19 Apr (SCR) and 25 Apr (TGr) and five birds were near the Coyote Narrows on 22 Apr (SCR). A **White-throated Sparrow** banded at CCRS on 24 Apr (*fide* AJ) was a northbound migrant. **Blue Grosbeaks** have returned to Ed Levin CP! A male was singing above Sandy Wool Lake on 19 Apr (MJM) and by 25 Apr at least two males were there as well as a female (TGr). A pair of birds were there for an extended period last year but we never obtained evidence of breeding. Male **Yellow-headed Blackbirds** were found again this year at the dairy just west of San Felipe

Lake. Two were there on 4 Apr (NL) and three were seen on 7 Apr (RWR). There were a smattering of **Lawrence's Goldfinches** this month with one on Pacheco Creek at San Felipe Road on 11 Apr (AME), one west of San Antonio Valley on 19 Apr (JDa), a pair over Henry Coe SP on 26 Apr (MMR) and two males in Ed Levin CP the same day (MJM *et al.*).

Observers: Lorien Belton (LB), Bill Bousman (WGB), Phyllis Browning (PMB), Jim Danzenbaker (JDa), Al Eisner (AME), Alvaro Jaramillo (AJ), Richard Jeffers (RGJ), Harriet Gerson (HG), Steve Glover (SAG), Tom Grey (TGr), Jan Hintermeister (JH), Alma Kali (AK), Peter LaTourrette (PLaT), Nick Lethaby (NL), Mike Mammoser (MJM), John & Maria Meyer (J&MMe), Steve Miller (SMi), David Powell (DP), Bob Reiling (RWR), Mike Rogers (MMR), Heather Rottenborn (HLR), Steve Rottenborn (SCR), Scott Terrill (SBT), Vivek Tiwari (VT), Frank Vanslager (FV), Bruce Webb (BW), and Adam Winer (AW).

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

Spring Is a Lark at Grant Ranch Park

A one-day respite from Spring's blustery storms permitted fifteen SCVAS birders to enjoy a fine morning of birding, hiking, and wildflower study at Grant Ranch County Park on May 10.

Our special focus on this field trip was bird song, and the breeding species of the oak grassland habitat we toured provided ample opportunity for study. From the Twin Gates trailhead near Smith Creek, we had hiked no more than 50 yards when a barrage of chirps, trills, whistles and song fragments teased our ears. First we had to separate out the European Starlings' incessant vocalizations, which include clicks, buzzes, and mimicry of other birds in their own peculiar song. A dry, metallic buzz given with monotonous repetition turned out to be a **Chipping Sparrow**, which we finally located visually in the fresh oak leaf foliage. The diminutive "Chipper" put on a good show, throwing its head back and vibrating its entire body with each burst of song.

In the same tree, a medium-sized yellow-green bird was feeding rather deliberately, and offering no clues to its identity by remaining silent. It was finally revealed to be a migrating male **Western Tanager** with traces of red just starting to appear on its face. For plumage comparison, female **Bullock's Orioles** flew in and out of the trees giving their familiar chattering calls, and a male delivered its cheerful, bubbly song several times.

High-pitched, wheezy songs from the oak canopy were intriguing, and sure enough, a small migrant flock of warblers gave us a lovely show as they foraged actively. Several **Townsend's**, a gorgeous male (**Audubon's**) **Yellow-rumped**, and one **Orange-crowned Warbler** were spotted, but the real stunners were two **Hermit Warblers**, with their all-yellow heads and black bibs. This species is not necessarily rare during spring migration in the Diablo mountain range, but can easily be missed unless one of

these mixed flocks is discovered.

Farther up the ridge in open grassland we encountered the first of several **Horned Larks**. Everyone seemed to be able to pick up the soft, twinkling song as the bird flew fairly high overhead, often soaring with wings motionless in its display flight. Later we had amazing scope views of this handsome bird on the ground, and were able to discern plumage differences between male and female individuals. The tiny ear tufts that

watched one as a **Red-tailed Hawk**, puny by size comparison, dive-bombed the huge raptor. At one point the beleaguered eagle let out a weak cry, seemingly incongruous with its massive size. The absence of **Grasshopper Sparrow**, a target species for the day, was disappointing, but other species were most obliging, including **Lark Sparrow**, which demonstrated its happy tune at several locations. Sometimes reminiscent of a wren or bunting, the Lark Sparrow's is another one of those springtime songs worth brushing up on every year.

Two of the prettier songs we heard throughout the morning were from common species, **House Finch** and **Western Meadowlark**. (We often take these birds for granted, as they are so widespread, but each delivers a song worth listening to.)

The meadowlark also has a liquid, cowbird-like rattle and a froggy "crick" note that we heard often. **Oak Titmouse**, **Western Bluebird**, **Nuttall's Woodpecker** and **White-breasted Nuthatch** were common and vocal, and of course the "wacka-wacka-wacky" **Acorn Woodpeckers** were everywhere.

Several migrating flocks of **Vaux's Swifts** gave us good looks as they zoomed by, some quite low to the ground, and a flock of **Cedar Waxwings** was a bit of a surprise. A probable **Hammond's Flycatcher** was seen well but offered no vocalization. Three noisy **Steller's Jays** emerged from the shady confines of Smith Creek and completed a five-corvid day for us (**Yellow-billed Magpie**, **Scrub Jay**, **Common Raven** and **American Crow**).

Thanks to Frank Vanslager and Gail Cheeseman for toting their Questar scopes on the four-mile round trip and giving us all amazing close-up looks at the birds. And thanks to El Nino (a Mother's Day break?) for not raining on us.

—Grant Hoyt



Western Meadowlark
by Rita Colwell

the species its name were even visible on one bird. We noted several singing birds over a half-mile stretch, suggesting the presence of perhaps five or six breeding pairs.

The sun began to emerge through lingering clouds and take the chill off as we continued hiking through spectacular, wildflower-dotted green grassland. Ruth Troetschler and Bill Lungren helped identify some of the dozens of wildflower species, which ranged in color from lavender to deep purple, pale yellow to brilliant gold.

We saw several adult **Golden Eagles** throughout the morning, and

Birdathon: Swifts, Spiderhunters, Wrentits & Vagrants

The Santa Clara Swifts (Clysta Seney and Ann Verdi) came in with a whopping total of 63 species this year—our highest ever! Bearing in mind that we cover the city of Santa Clara only, an area of increasing urban and industrial development with no bayfront, no foothills or mountains, and precious few areas of open space and wetlands, we were quite pleased with the results. One reason for the higher number was the greater variety of waterbirds seen in various ponds and seasonal flooded fields—perhaps a lingering result of El Nino. We also had several species that were “firsts” for us.

Highlights: In a flooded field behind Agnews West we found **Cinnamon Teal**, **Greater Yellowlegs**, and **Common Snipe** as well as **Mallards** with ducklings. Also seen at Agnews West were **Pacific-slope Flycatcher**, **Lesser and American Goldfinch**, and **Loggerhead Shrike**. At the Santa Clara Open Space (the old Fairway Glen at Lick Mill) we found the resident pair of **White-tailed Kites** chasing off a dark-morph **Red-tailed Hawk** and **Common Raven** (new for our count). We also saw **Bullock's Orioles**, breeding-plumaged **Yellow-rumped Warbler**, an **Orange-crowned Warbler**, a **Lincoln's Sparrow** and **White-throated Swifts**. At a retention basin at Lafayette and Highway 237 we had pairs of **Greater Scaup**, **Bufflehead** and **Gadwall**, plus a flock of **Bonaparte's Gulls** and breeding-plumaged **Ruddy Ducks**. **Burrowing Owls** were seen on signposts by the plowed fields at the Hope Rehab Center along Lafayette and on Centennial Drive by the 49ers' headquarters. By early afternoon things had slowed considerably, but we managed to find a female **Hooded Oriole** and our only **Chestnut-backed Chickadee** of the day at Bowers Park.

Even in an area where development continues seemingly unabated, we have seen that when suitable habitat is present, birds will come, as noted by this year's results. However, we are also finding that the special niches for wildlife habitat continue to diminish as Silicon Valley continues to grow.

-----Ann Verdi

The Spiderhunters (Tom Grey and Vivek Tiwari) did a Birdathon Big Day on April 11 that was soggy early, snowed out at mid-day, and very windy late, but all in all a lot of fun.

Our somewhat weather-impacted and de-riparianized route was: Alviso, Ed Levin Park, Grant Ranch Park, (NOT Smith Creek because we found the Mt. Hamilton Rd. closed above Grant Ranch due to snow), Coyote Creek Riparian Station, Sunnyvale Water Pollution Control Plant, Shoreline Park, and Palo Alto Baylands.

We had a fine reward for a wet and muddy hike up to the Magic Sycamore Grove above Sandy Wool Lake: a **Rufous-crowned Sparrow**, 2 singing **House Wrens**, a pair of **Bullocks's Orioles**, at least 2 **Western Kingbirds**, several **Lincoln's Sparrows**, a **Great Horned Owl**, and a pair of **Anna's Hummingbirds** feeding a full-grown fledgling. We had one each of **Rufous** and **Allen's Hummingbirds** down by the lakeside.

An adult **Golden Eagle** was atop a pylon along the entry road into the Environmental Education Center in Alviso, and 2 **Burrowing Owls** were found along Disk Drive. Our total for the day was 112 species. We wish to thank our sponsors Barbara Babcock, Gargi Choudhary, and Doug and Ardeth Greenquist.

-----Vivek Tiwari

The Wry Wrentits (Harriet Gerson, Gail Cheeseman, Mich Ninokata, Caroline Nabeta and June Santoro) were back again beating the bushes for the SCVAS Birdathon on April 17. At 6:00 AM in Stevens Creek Park, with the skies giving way to a faint glow and a nearly full moon hanging over the hills, the birds were beginning to greet the morning with song and our anticipation was high. It was chilly—well, cold! Donning gloves, hats and jackets we started with an accommodating **Orange-crowned Warbler** by our parked cars—a good omen. **Black-headed Grosbeaks** dominated the scene, the **Warbling Vireo** was back at its favorite nest spot and a pair of **Oak Titmice** were spotted carrying food to a nesting hole. It was Spring, indeed!

An **Ash-throated Flycatcher** catching the first rays of sun was a welcome sight. Soon several **Bullock's Orioles** joined in. At the Villa Maria picnic area a stunning pair of **Western Bluebirds** were obviously romancing—the day was really beautiful and conducive to such activities. Two busy **Bewick's Wrens** were feeding their complaining brood in a nearby woodpile, after fooling us with their buzzy, gnatcatcher-like calls. Soon after, a **Blue-gray Gnatcatcher** obligingly showed itself.

Our namesake, the **Wrentit**, was very apparent, giving us delightful looks and gathering nesting material. After a failed attempt to find the American Dipper up the canyon, we decided it was time for lunch at the Cooley picnic area. The trees seemed devoid of life when we arrived, but we soon found ourselves following a **Wilson's Warbler**, then a gorgeous pair of **Townsend's Warblers**, and a surprise—a **Hermit Warbler**! By now we had six warbler species, including **Yellow** and **Yellow-rumped**.

With our list close to sixty, we headed over to McClellan Ranch to get the **White-breasted Nuthatch** Garth promised. This was done, with a few additions including **California Thrasher** and **Downy Woodpecker**, then we were off the the Palo Alto Baylands and Shoreline Park in Mountain View. By taking Palm Drive we added a handsome **Hooded Oriole**.

The duck pond in Palo Alto gave us our gulls and ducks. The **Greater White-fronted Goose** was waiting to be counted—thank you very much! The tide was out at the Yacht Harbor, giving us more species. Ten **Black Skimmers** took flight—so elegant in the air, awkward on land, giving us a show as they skimmed a narrow channel. The **Black-bellied Plovers** were living up to their name and several “black-bellied” **Dunlins** were trying to outdo the plovers. The **Bonaparte's Gulls** had on their black bonnets and a **Forster's Tern** rounded out the view.

The real treat was waiting for us at Shoreline Lake. Close by the dock a fleet of **Horned Grebes** was all dressed up for spring. What a sight—but then the **Red-**

continued on Page 11

The Contributions of Our Elders

by Craig Breon

I have a confession to make. On the last night of the Audubon Western Regional Conference at Asilomar in early April, I was up until one in the morning, sipping a screwdriver with an older woman. In fact, she was 68 years older than me, and I'm 32.

Hazel Wolfe, the grand dame of Audubon in the Pacific Northwest, reached age 100 earlier this year. She came down from her home in Seattle to Asilomar, where she's been a fixture since the conference started decades ago. She was one of the panel speakers in a session on reaching out to diverse audiences. She could occasionally be heard giving a hard time to the speakers in the main hall in the evening. To top that, she hosted late evening get-togethers in her room—not once, but twice.

A group of about a half dozen youngish Audubon employees—the others worked for National Audubon in either New York or DC—knocked on Hazel's door about 11 PM. We had heard she was waiting up for company. There she was with her granddaughter, who had accompanied her from Seattle. She showed pictures from one of her many recent birthday celebrations. We discussed the conference and her participation. As several of the other guests began talking amongst themselves, Hazel and I settled into a long conversation about our work.

It was almost surreal. I would mention something that happened in San Jose two years ago, and she would reply with something about Seattle in the 1940's. As I had learned previously, Hazel is responsible for having started many if not most of the Audubon chapters in Washington. She has founded six new chapters since her 80th birthday. Lately, she works out of her Seattle apartment, where she lives alone. Her latest project is to build an endowment, named after herself, for reestablishing Junior Audubon programs in Seattle schools. I believe she said they had raised three or four hundred thousand dollars so far.

Around 1 AM Hazel started to nod off, so the rest of us returned to our rooms. I felt utterly honored by the privi-

lege of being able to talk to someone who had been in the conservation movement since before the word "environment" was in the dictionary. I look forward to Asilomar 2000 and another late night rendezvous with this remarkable woman.

[I write of Hazel Wolfe and Al McNabney (*see below*) to pay tribute to the older people who contribute mightily to Audubon in particular and the conservation movement in general. There are many of us out there who never truly retire; they are simply too involved in their communities not to keep working. Hopefully someone will someday say the same thing of me. God willing and the creeks don't rise, after a few more decades of work, I hope to be an elder statesman of the cause. In the meantime, I'll continue to look up to those who are.]



In Memoriam

Al McNabney died in early May. I think he was in his late 80's. A stalwart leader of Diablo Audubon for years, Al had become a friend through our work together with the Bay Area Audubon Council (BAAC) and our shared concern for the Delta.

Al's demeanor at BAAC meetings was a thing of beauty. Always sitting towards the back of the room, Al rarely spoke on an issue until numerous other voices had been heard. When he did speak, it seemed he was accorded a different sort of listening from the gathering—a higher level of attention. He would often start with a self-effacing comment such as, "Well, some of you know a lot more about this subject than I do, but . . .". He would then proceed to offer highly original and well-spoken thoughts.

He believed in his own opinions, and I grew to believe many of them myself. Clearly those opinions came from decades of working with politicians, our opponents, and our compatriots. He could be highly critical of a position

Audubon or other conservation organizations had taken, but his criticisms were well-founded in the reality of the world around us. I never got the sense, as I do at times with myself and others, that his ego was in the way of his arguments.

Despite my relative youth, Al treated me as a peer, and we grew to enjoy each other's company as well as admire each other's work. One of Al's many projects was working towards creation of the Delta Science Center near Brentwood. I could see that he was at times frustrated with the lack of progress toward that goal, but I could also see that his determination had been pivotal in moving the project forward. It's good to know that the Center now has its own Board of Directors who will see it to fruition.

At Diablo Audubon's June general meeting (the evening of June 4 at the Lindsay Wildlife Museum in Walnut Creek), there will be a memorial for Al. Our deepest condolences go to his wife, Helen. I will miss his words and deeds dearly.

-----Craig Breon

Birdathon Reports *continued from Page 9*

necked Grebe came into view, also showing spring color. But the icing on the cake was a fully mature male **Black Scoter** so close that the bright orange-yellow knob on the bill was plainly seen without binocs—spectacular! We couldn't believe our luck.

The Coast Casey Forebay had **Semi-palmated Plovers** and **Common Moorhens**, including, hidden along the shore and barely visible, four downy, newly-hatched moorhen chicks with bare red heads, yellow and blue facial skin—ugly but cute! A final look at Adobe Creek ended our 12-hour day with a lone **American Wigeon** and a pair of richly colored **Cinnamon Teal**, bringing our total to 120 species—not bad!

We thank our generous sponsors who helped make our day so successful. Their generous contributions are helping Audubon protect wildlife habitat and promote environmental education. What we do today makes a difference for our tomorrows.
—Harriet Gerson

Green Heron, Vaux's Swift, Belted Kingfisher, Hairy Woodpecker, Rock Wren, Townsend's Warbler, and Lazuli Bunting were all species found by SCVAS Birdathon teams—except ours. Despite these exasperating misses, **The Vagrants** (Dick Stovel, Grant Hoyt, Mike

Mammoser) tallied 149 species seen and heard in Santa Clara County on April 26.

Owling at Stevens Creek Park seemed like a good way to start but proved sketchy, as we couldn't even get a Screech Owl to respond to our tapes. A **Common Poorwill** was more obliging, and then we scored big-time with a **Northern Saw-whet Owl** responding to a tape on Redwood Gulch Rd. way up Stevens Canyon. I got my life look at this elusive species, as we felt wings against our cheeks and then found the perched bird in our flashlights. We enjoyed a brief, but satisfying, 30-second observation before departing—no reason to continue agitating the little fellow. We didn't find another owl until I discovered a **Great Horned Owl** nest with mom and downy youngster in a eucalyptus on Stevens Canyon Rd., easily visible in the early morning light.

As always, Stevens Creek Park yielded most of the expected woodland species, although we missed Townsend's Warbler, Hairy Woodpecker and Vaux's Swift, all seen by other birders there in recent days. **Caspian Tern**, **Red-shouldered Hawk**, **Western Tanager**, **Purple Finch**, **Black-throated Gray Warbler**, and **Hooded Oriole** (at McClellan Ranch) were good pick-ups before we left for Ed Levin Park.

Mike's scouting paid off as we nailed **Golden Eagle**, **Allen's Hummingbird**, **Western Kingbird**, **Blue Grosbeak**, **Rufous-crowned Sparrow** and other east-side goodies, including a surprising **Sharp-shinned Hawk** and **Lawrence's Goldfinch** pair. Alas, no Grasshopper Sparrow where we had one staked out in '97. A time-consuming drive up Sierra Rd. yielded **Horned Lark** and **Lark Sparrow**, but no Rock Wren (Alan Walther had several of 'em just minutes before we arrived!).

Alviso was next, and we tallied **Burrowing Owl**, **Cattle Egret**, and **Barn Owl** (thanks Peg at SFBBO) plus a variety of beautiful alternate-plumaged shorebirds. At Sunnyvale Baylands Park, we scored with **American Wigeon** and **Green-winged Teal**, two ducks that can be elusive as summer approaches, and one of the day's several **Ring-necked Pheasants** squawked loudly. Palo Alto Baylands provided some toughies such as **Wood Duck**, **Gr. White-fronted Goose**, **Thayer's Gull** and both scaup, plus more shorebirds (many Semipalmated Plovers) in the Yacht Harbor mudflats.

The Flood Control Basin had a gorgeous pair of **Blue-winged Teal**. We then headed for Shoreline Lake, where Mike's diligence enabled us to tally **Black Scoter** and **Black Skimmer** after his considerable legwork; meanwhile Dick and I puzzled over the strange-looking leucistic **Horned Grebe**. We wrapped things up Bayside with a return trip to the P.A. Baylands, picking up **Clapper Rail**, **Long-billed Curlew**, **Savannah Sparrow**, and finally, a **Greater Yellowlegs** fly-by as we were bemoaning the possibility of missing this species for the first time in ten years of Birdathons!

Hungry for a few more species, we notched **White-throated Swift** at a Stanford stake-out and **Western Screech-Owl** on Old Page Mill Rd. At this point, we decided to pack it in with a respectable total of 144. A morning-after re-count revealed that we had 149; had we known it at the time we would have certainly made the trek up to Montebello OSP for the guaranteed Virginia Rail and possible Pygmy Owl to hit the nice, round number of 150. Oh well—there's always next year.

-----Grant Hoyt

Endangered Species *continued from Page 12*

Therefore, under a new policy—the US Fish and Wildlife Service's listing priority guidelines—the Service will make it a priority to delist and downlist more than two dozen birds, mammals, fish, and plants that have achieved or are moving toward recovery.

"Some proposed delistings," noted Babbitt, "like the Gray Wolf, Peregrine Falcon, or Bald Eagle, embody symbolism and capture the public imagination. Others—the elusive Virginia flying squirrel or the lowly Missouri bladder-pod—are less charismatic but just as ecologically essential."

The Clinton Administration does not view adding species to the list as a sign of success, but of failure to meet the needs of species before they reach the crisis stage. Under Babbitt, the US F & WS has begun work with landowners using incentives to protect private land as habitat than can aid

in the recovery of species.

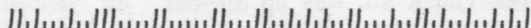
Babbitt said the delisting action may alter how the Endangered Species Act reauthorization debate is framed: "For the first time we can get past the rhetoric and see the light at the end of the tunnel. For the first time we can focus time, money and attention on ounces of preventative medicine rather than pounds of emergency room cure.

"Will Congress reauthorize the Act this year? Maybe, maybe not. That's up to the Hill," said Babbitt. "But they should take note: This is just the beginning. Now, on my watch, this Administration will continue to focus our efforts on creative, responsible ways to get and keep these species, and many more, off the list and back to safe and healthy habitat and robust population levels once again."

-----US Fish & Wildlife Service

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Babbitt Announces Endangered Species "Delisting"

With a backdrop of two nesting Bald Eagles raising their three week-old chick near Gill, Massachusetts, Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt announced in early May a seemingly minor new policy with major implications: The Clinton Administration will make it a priority during the next two years to propose delisting or downlisting close to two dozen endangered species that are healthy and thriving once again.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service signed the policy, which sets in motion the legal process of moving roughly two dozen species, including Bald Eagles, either off the Endangered Species Act list or to the less critical "threatened" category during the next couple of years. Removing recovered species from the list enables officials to redirect funds and manpower to species with greater needs.

"Our new policy, to emphasize delisting, could alter the terms of debate over the future of the landmark 1973 conservation law," said Babbitt. "For we can now finally prove one thing conclusively: The Endangered Species Act works. Period."

Critics of the Act often claim that once a species is placed on the list, it stays there forever, citing that as evidence that the Act is ineffective and should be weakened or even repealed. With future delistings, their argument becomes moot.

Bald Eagles, initially declared an endangered species in 1967, recovered to the point that they were upgraded to threatened status three years ago. Today more than 5,000 nesting pairs live in the lower 48 states.

"In the near future," says Babbitt, "many species will be flying, splashing and leaping off the list. They made it. They are graduating. They're coming back to their native American soil, water and wind."

Adding species in need of the Act's protections to the list remains a high priority for the Service, particularly species facing high immediate risks that require emergency listing. Currently, 1,135 species (466 animals and 669 plants) are on the Federal list. Under this Administration, the Service has placed an average of 85 species on the list each year.

A serious backlog of listings resulted from the April 1995 one-year Congressional moratorium on adding species to the list and major rescissions of the listing budget. When the moratorium was lifted and funding restored, 243 species were awaiting final listing determinations. The progress since then in reducing the backlog now allows the Service to allocate resources to delisting activities for the first time in almost three years.

continued on Page 11

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.**

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