



# THE AVOCET

The Newsletter of the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society

November 1998

## Bluebird Program Defies Weather, Sets Records

by Garth Harwood,  
SCVAS Chapter Manager

Another hugely successful season has been recorded by SCVAS volunteers who've spent the year tending nestboxes in parks, open spaces, and private lands across the county. When bluebird program volunteers met on October 7 to provide final reports and compare notes, all were keenly aware that the weather had been unusually cruel to nesting birds this spring, and some were probably braced for more bad news. However, the real news was stunning: somehow, through all the trials and tribulations of this El Niño season, the number of birds fledged from our nestboxes soared from 229 in 1997 to 697 in 1998.

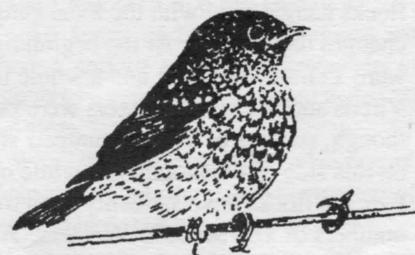
Just as importantly, this season's results indicate that the Chapter has realized its commitment to creating a conservation program that, as reported in an earlier article, "is not just a romantic recreational pastime . . . but a serious grassroots effort to restore the populations of all native cavity-nesters" (New

*vision of cavity nesters recovery program, June 1998). Nearly half of this season's birds (337, or 48%) were of species that are in even greater decline than the Western Bluebird. This compares well with the 27% (62 birds) of such species in last year's program.*

### Western Bluebirds still dominant

As seen in the table on Page 4, Western Bluebirds were once again the most common bird fledged from the 295 boxes in our trail network. The total of 274 bluebirds represented more than 39% of the total (a bluebird "trail" is simply a set of nestboxes maintained by a particular person or group, and may take any number of forms). Violet-green Swallows were the second-most common species fledged, with 25% of the total.

This year, however, the Oak Titmouse replaced the Tree Swallow as the third most common nestbox user, with 17.5% of the total. This was perhaps the most significant change of all, considering that



A fledgling Western Bluebird's speckled appearance sets it apart from the adult of its species. Illustration by Bonnie Bedford-White

last year's total for this species was a mere 5 birds, and that it has declined by approximately 35% in the past 30 years across the state. Of the remaining species on our list, the Bewick's Wren (down 49% statewide) was a very welcome addition, as was the American Kestrel, (down 44% statewide), a bird you will be hearing more about as we are now placing specialized boxes for them all over the county. As to the sad outcome of the kestrels' nesting attempts this season, they, like many other birds this season, fell prey to the bad weather and its after-effects.

*continued on Page 4*

**General Membership Meeting  
Wednesday November 18  
Sketching Birds---  
an Interactive Workshop  
with Edward Rooks  
Palo Alto Cultural Center  
Newell & Embarcadero Rds.  
7:30 Hospitality 8:00 Program**

Have you ever been frustrated by your inability to sketch a bird you've seen in the field or in your yard? Bring a sketch pad and pencil or pen tonight as we try something different---an interactive sketching workshop with local artist Edward Rooks. Ed will show slides from his collection and then describe techniques for drawing birds, both in the field and at home. Those familiar with his beautiful portraits know that Ed has certainly mastered the art of bird drawing---join him tonight as he helps us learn how to transfer what we see onto our sketch pads.

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# VIEW FROM THE OFFICE

by Garth Harwood, SCVAS Chapter Manager



FALL MIGRATION was just another dry biological fact before I became a birder. Now, it's magic. Come August, there's a period when precious little activity is evident among the landbirds, but all that changes as the month ends and the leading edge of the migratory wave begins to reach our part of the world.

This year I've been paying close attention for the first time, noticing for example how the composition of the mixed flocks hanging out with the local gangs of chickadees changes day by day. At the beginning of September, most were Yellow Warblers, and a whole bunch of Warbling Vireos and Western Tanagers were present too. Recently, though, swarms of Yellow-rumped Warblers have moved in on this side of the mountains, while on the coastside where I live, the flocks have suddenly been overwhelmed by large numbers of Townsend's Warblers. And, of course, there is a steady trickle of the bemused, hopelessly-off-course birds, almost always young of the year, that account for the exciting reports of "vagrants" found in the willow thickets and cypress groves along the coast and creeks. All attempts on my part to generate some of those reports have ended humbly, I have to admit. Those youngsters may be lost, but they've still got enough pride, it seems, to avoid having their underdeveloped markings identified by the likes of me.

\* \* \* \* \*

**VOLUNTEER NEWS:** The biggest and best bit of volunteer news, from my admittedly biased perspective, is that almost all of the dozen or so great folks who've made up the core team of office volunteers this past year are still here and going strong! However, we've recently bid a fond farewell to **Han-Yu Loo**, our regular Wednesday afternoon generalist, who has returned to school full-time. At the same time, we've had the happy experience of welcoming **Ulrike Keyssner**, a conservation biologist out of UC-Santa Cruz, and **Amy Gerard**, an experienced bluebird volunteer and biotechnology professional, both of whom have stepped into important roles coordinating special programs. Ulrike will be coordinating the revived Young Audubon program for families with young children, and attending many creek outings with City of Cupertino staff and fellow Audubon volunteer **Jim Liskovec**, while Amy will be serving as coordinator of citizen science programs such as FeederWatch (see related article on Page 10). Still another new volunteer with an educational emphasis is teacher **Marie Bacher**, who has joined the SCVAS Education Committee. We look forward to expanding several of our educational programs this year, so if you have an interest in introducing kids to birds and wildlife, please give us a call!



## AVIAN BOTULISM BREAKS OUT IN

**BAY:** A serious threat to local birds has emerged in parts of the Bay this month as traditional hotspots of avian botulism have spawned a fresh outbreak (see related story on Page 11). As of the second week of October, Wildlife Rescue in Palo Alto had received several hundred ducks and shorebirds, and had been treating as many as 100 ducks at one time. The sudden strain on thin resources has prompted an emergency call for volunteer help and donations of money and basic items such as newspapers (for lining cages), and either paper or cloth towels. Volunteers are needed even without specific wildlife experience, for such tasks as driving sick birds between facilities, clerical support tasks, etc. Thankfully, avian botulism is not contagious to humans. The success rate for birds receiving treatment is very high, so this is a case where your efforts will certainly make a difference. To help out, please contact Wildlife Rescue at (650) 494-7283.

\* \* \* \* \*

**OILED BIRDS? HERE'S WHAT TO DO:** The recent oil spill along the San Mateo County coast stimulated a lot of communication between agencies and individuals concerned with protecting wildlife. **Steve Hampton**, Resource Economist with the state Department of Fish and Game Office of Spill Prevention and Response, writes: "For oiled birds on the beach (which may continue for some time and outside the spill area), please report them to (916) 445-0045. This is our central dispatch—they can connect you with the appropriate oiled wildlife care center, volunteer coordinators, etc. Please report oiled dead birds as well as injured birds. If you collect any dead birds, please put them in separate plastic bags. Also, please note the time and location of finding dead or injured birds." And, I might add, please be patient with the process: my trial run at using this number resulted in a typical bureaucratic sequence of delays and transfers.

\* \* \* \* \*

## BAD NUMBER GIVEN FOR BLACK RAIL PATROL:

Last month, I wrote that volunteers are badly needed to help keep the uninformed from trampling the tiny refuge of the Black Rails during high tides at the Palo Alto Baylands. Then, I gave an erroneous number for you to call. Result: no volunteers as of press time. The need is now critical, as the sequence of high tides begins on November 3 (more dates are available into January). To volunteer, please call **Deborah Bartens**, Palo Alto Naturalist, at (650) 329-2382. No experience is needed; instructions will be provided.

# November 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 Nov. 4, 7:30 PM.** Bay Area Bird Photographers will hold its annual Members' Slides program. Lucy Evans Baylands Interpretive Center, E. Embarcadero Rd, Palo Alto.

**\*\*Saturday Nov. 7, 8:00 AM.** Half day. Moss Landing/Moonglow Dairy. Leader: John Mariani (408) 997-2066. Meet at Jetty Rd and Hwy 1 just north of Moss Landing. Terns, grebes, bay ducks, shorebirds; always some surprises. Lunch optional.

**\*\*Sunday Nov. 8, 8:00 AM.** Half day. Charleston Slough. Leader TBA. Our monthly outing to the bird-rich and birder-friendly Mt. View/Palo Alto wetlands. Herons, egrets, gulls, ducks, shorebirds and more. Recommended for beginning birders. From Hwy 101 in Mt. View take San Antonio Rd north to Terminal Way, meet in parking area.

**Tuesday Nov. 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: Brown Pelican.

**\*\*Wednesday Nov. 11, 9:00 AM.** Half day. Campbell Percolation Ponds/Los Gatos Creek. Leader: John Arnold. (650) 948-4250. From I-280 take Winchester Blvd exit, then east on Hacienda, left on Del and right into park. Entrance fee; easy 2-mile walk. Rain cancels.

Remember, on the first Saturday of each month SCVAS is offering a **Birdwalk for Beginners** at McClellan Ranch Park in Cupertino from 10 AM to noon. This month's date is Nov. 7; next month is Dec. 5. Some loaner binoculars are available. Join an experienced Audubon birder to learn more about the birds around you.

**\*\*Saturday Nov. 14, 8:30 AM.** Half day. Grant Ranch Co. Park. Leader: Alan Thomas (408) 265-9286. From I-680 take Alum Rock Ave northeast, turn right on Mt. Hamilton Rd, then approx. 9 miles to park. Meet at Hall's Valley Lake parking lot on left, just past park entrance. Fresh water ducks, oak woodland birds, possible Golden Eagle. Moderate 2-mile walk. Lunch optional, rain cancels.

**\*\*Wednesday Nov. 18, 9:00 AM.** Half day. Pescadero Marsh and vicinity. Leader: Sue James (650) 348-0315. Meet at first parking lot south of bridge over Pescadero Creek on Hwy 1. Shorebirds, gulls, grebes, terns, ducks. Lunch optional; heavy rain cancels.

**\*\*Saturday Nov. 21, 8:30 AM.** Half day. Oka Ponds. Leader: Kathy Parker (408) 358-2832. From Hwy 17 in Los Gatos take Lark Ave exit west. Turn right on Oka Rd, left on Mozart Ave and immediate right on Oka Lane. Meet at gate. Ducks, gulls, Green Heron, possible Hooded Merganser. Rain cancels.

**\*\*Friday - Saturday Nov. 27 - 28.** Full days. Sacramento Valley Wildlife Refuges. Leader: Don Schmoldt (510) 215-1910. Meet at Sacto. NWR headquarters on I-5 approx. 20 miles north of Williams. Take Norman Rd exit east from I-5, then immediately north on frontage road to Refuge. Bring scopes, full tank of gas. Allow 3 hours from South Bay. Ducks, geese, swans, cranes, raptors.

**\*\*Saturday Dec. 5, 11:00 AM.** Half day. Palo Alto Baylands rail hunt. Leader: Kathy Parker (408) 358-2832. Winter high tides bring the possibility of seeing Black, Clapper, Virginia and Sora Rails. Also possible is Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow. From Hwy 101 in Palo Alto take Embarcadero Rd east to end, turn left, drive past duck pond and park in lot near Baylands Interpretive Center.



**\*\*Wednesday Dec. 9, 8:30 AM.** Half day. Grant Ranch Co. Park. Leader: Alan Thomas (408) 265-9286. See directions under Nov. 14 listing.

## PLAN AHEAD---

### CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS

This is a reminder to mark your calendars for our annual all-day Christmas Bird Counts (CBC's) as we census resident and wintering birds in the South Bay from the bay to foothills, throughout urban Santa Clara Valley, and even atop Mt. Hamilton.

All levels of birding experience are needed, and we encourage newcomers to join us in spotting, counting and listing all the birds.

While the CBC's are enjoyable events, more importantly they serve as monitors of our wild birds and remaining wildlife habitats as our area becomes ever more congested and over-developed. Here's a chance for you to really make a difference.

The December *Avocet* will provide more details on sectors to be covered and the countdown dinners that follow each event. In the meantime, contacts for the San Jose, Palo Alto, and Mt. Hamilton CBC's are listed if you wish to sign up early:

•**San Jose CBC--Sunday, Dec. 20**  
contact Ann Verdi (408) 266-5108  
ann.verdi@amd.com

•**Palo Alto CBC--Monday, Dec. 21**  
contact SCVAS office (408) 252-3747  
scvas@scvas.org

•**Mt. Hamilton CBC--Tuesday, Dec. 29**  
contact Don Schmoldt (510) 215-1910

### SPECIAL SLIDE PRESENTATION ON INDIA AT McCLELLAN

Monday, Nov. 9, 7:00 PM

Nestled in the foothills of the Himalayas, Corbett National Park is one of India's largest and finest. SCVAS member Vivek Tiwari will introduce us to the birds of India through a photographic tour of the park. Also included are some birds and sights from other parts of the country. Join us for a fascinating show and discussion of India's natural history. Seating is limited to 20---be prompt.

# Cavity-nesters Defy El Nino

*continued from Page 1*

## Chickadees need you

In spite of our determined efforts to provide them with optimal nesting opportunities, our local chickadee was still not well represented in our boxes. Although it remains one of our most commonly-seen species, this popular and charismatic bird has actually declined by about half statewide in the same 30-year period. We think we have a solution, though . . . you! Although we received reports from only 7 "backyard" nestboxes this season, these produced more chickadees than all 295 boxes in the trail network (15 as compared to 13). In the coming year, we will be actively promoting the placement of high-quality chickadee nestboxes in backyards throughout the county. All of you who report results to us will be considered active participants in this program, whether or not the box came from us. (Economical nestboxes produced by star volunteer Gus Constant may be purchased at the SCVAS nature shop.)

## Tough times for baby birds - and their human monitors

In the annals of organized nestbox programs in California, the 1998 season will surely be recorded as the most difficult yet. During the nesting season, nestbox monitors were often faced with the dismal experience of opening a box to find entire clutches of dead or dying young, especially during the critical period at the end of May and beginning of June. No trail escaped the carnage, or its psychological impact. Some monitors, such as Barbara Milligan at Palo Alto's Foothills Park, lost more than half of the eggs or young in their boxes. On that trail, for example, five bluebird nests were established with a total of 19 young; ultimately, three of the nests were wiped out altogether, and only five young bluebirds fledged. (It's worthy of note, however, that no bluebirds nested in the boxes there at all in 1997, so the five birds produced this year still represent an up-swing of sorts.)

Imagine the collective sense of relief, then, when the final reports exceeded all expectations with regard to both numbers and diversity of species. Like many another group that's shared a trying experience, the volunteers present at the wrapup meetings this fall seemed to have developed more resolve than ever to persevere in the program and realize the astounding potential implied by the numbers of birds that would have been fledged had El Niño not come along when it did.

## Future direction of the program

Three important decisions were made at the fall bluebird program meetings:

First, to proceed with our commitment to species diversity in the program, and to export that concept to other nestbox programs wherever possible (SCVAS staff and volunteers have already highlighted the concept at the state level in the California Bluebird Recovery Program's newsletter.) Prioritization of our efforts

will continue to be based on the degree of decline shown by each species.

Second, it was decided to expand the program, but only within the limits imposed by our ability to continue the careful monitoring and maintenance of existing boxes---a guarantee that has been crucial in the process of gaining access from land-management agencies. By expanding carefully and with deliberate planning, it is hoped that we can bring a variety and abundance of native birds back to such places as the new Guadalupe River Park in downtown San Jose. Indeed, such floodplain areas may represent the best opportunity in existence to re-create dispersal corridors into heavily urbanized areas. Outlying areas, such as the open spaces where most of our current trails exist, will remain critically important as sources for dispersing birds.

And third, as noted above, we will continue to promote the use of good backyard nestboxes, particularly in the case of chickadees, titmice, and wrens.

## Nestbox Results 1997 - 1998

SPECIES	BIRDS FLEDGED <u>1997</u>	BIRDS FLEDGED <u>1998</u>
Western Bluebird	90	274
Tree Swallow	31	46
Violet-green Swallow	52	175
House Wren	11	18
Chestnut-backed Chickadee	5	13
Oak Titmouse	5	122
White-breasted Nuthatch	10	5
Ash-throated Flycatcher	25	17
Bewick's Wren	N/A	27
<u>American Kestrel</u>	<u>N/A</u>	<u>0</u>
<b>TOTAL BIRDS FLEDGED</b>	<b>229</b>	<b>697</b>
TOTAL TRAILS	17	20
TOTAL NESTBOXES	230	295
TOTAL SPECIES	8	10

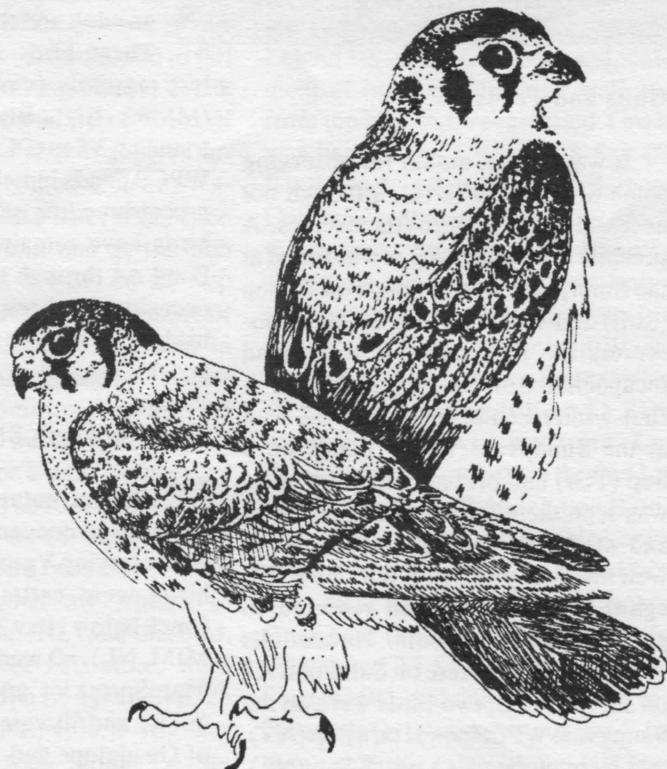
# One bluebird family's story

The nesting season began early at McClellan Ranch Park this year. Sometime in late February, two pairs of Western Bluebirds began to be seen around the park, the first seen here in years. A few weeks later, to the delight of Audubon staff and volunteers, they began to investigate the various nestboxes spread out around the park, and before long they began to carry strands of dry grasses into each of several boxes before settling in to their final choices.

About this time, I went out to photograph a pair atop one of our boxes--perhaps in hopes of illustrating these articles with it---when I happened to witness the capture of one of the females by a resident Red-shouldered Hawk as she emerged from the tall grass with a load of nesting material.

For a week or more thereafter, the two remaining males fought bitterly all over the park. Eventually, however, something basic was resolved, because for the remainder of the nesting season, both males frequented the nestbox, joined the female in tending the young, and even foraged together in apparent harmony. Finally, on the morning of May 14th, four young bluebirds fledged from the box. After ten more days of hanging around the streamside cottonwoods, this unusual family left the park for parts unknown.

It was a terrific way to start the nestbox program's season. This has been the guiding vision of the program from its outset: to bring this and other birds that were once common throughout the area back to the localities where they've been absent (or rare) for a long time. Welcome back, bluebirds!



Sketch of American  
Kestrels by Bonnie  
Bedford-White

## Kudos to our volunteers

Monitoring nestboxes is an exceptionally fulfilling activity. It has to be, because it's not always glamorous, and it can require a good deal of effort, not to mention a strong stomach. Despite the pitfalls, the great majority of volunteers who started with the program two years ago are still deeply involved. Here, for the first time, is a list of the good folks who have made this program such a robust success:

### **Bluebird Trails and their Monitors, 1998 Season**

Michael and Mary Beth Arago,  
Stanford Dish Area • Dave Cook,  
Grant Ranch County Park • Amy  
Gerard, Vasona County Park • Doug  
and Ardeth Greenquist, Villa Montalvo  
• Carol Hankermeyer and Dave  
Weber, Arastradero Preserve #3 •  
Garth Harwood, McClellan Ranch &  
Arastradero #1 • Tiffney Helgerson,  
Foothill College • Edward R.  
Howard, Redwood Estates • Jodi  
Isaacs, Russian Ridge & Monte  
Bello OSP • Jennifer Lyon,  
Fremont Older OSP • Barbara  
Milligan, Foothills Park • PC  
"Red" Pendleton, with  
Brendan Franich & 5 Scouts  
from TP33, darn close to  
everywhere • Tina  
Peterson, Arastradero  
Preserve #2 • David  
Poeschell, Guadalupe  
Oaks Park • Andy Scott  
and son Forrest, Hidden  
Villa Ranch • Ulf  
Stauber, Rancho San  
Antonio • Mark  
Sutherland, Almaden  
Quicksilver County Park •  
Dieter Thiel, IBM Almaden  
Campus • and backyard  
participants Bill Bousman,  
Pria Graves, Leda Beth Gray,  
Mike and Marla Parker, Orien  
Richmond, Jan Swayne, and  
Linda and Bill Wilson.

# Field Notes

by Bill Bousman

## Pelicans through Shorebirds

**Brown Pelicans** are commonly found in the South Bay in the fall. This year, however, the 56 seen on the Alviso salt ponds on 7 Sep (NL) and the 61 tallied on Salt Pond A4 in Sunnyvale on 10 Sep (SCR) were unusually high concentrations. Always rare, an adult **Little Blue Heron** on the Alviso salt ponds on 7 Sep (NL) was the last of the season. A female **Blue-winged Teal** at the Alviso Environmental Education Center (EEC) on 25 Sep (SCR) may represent the first of our wintering birds. We have had a smattering of late September **Osprey** sightings with single birds over Stevens Creek near the salt ponds on 28 Sep (MiF), along Uvas Creek on 28 Sep (SK), and near Coleman Road in the Almaden Valley on 29 Sep (JMa). The first **Merlin** of the fall was found at the Sunnyvale Water Pollution Control Plant (WPCP) on 9 Sep (MMR).

A juvenile **American Golden-Plover** was seen in the Coyote Creek Riparian Station (CCRS) waterbird pond on 19 Sep (NL). The peak count of **Lesser Yellowlegs** this month was nine birds in the ponds at Spreckles and State in Alviso on 3 Sep (SCR), which is low compared to recent Septembers. An adult **Red Knot** seen on the Alviso salt ponds on 7 Sep (NL) was a good find. **Semipalmated Sandpipers** not reported last month include one at the Calabazas ponds on 28 Sep (SCR) and one at the Palo Alto Baylands on 29 Sep (AV). Single **Baird's Sandpipers** include one on the Alviso salt ponds on 7 Sep (NL), one at CCRS on 13 Sep (NL), and one on the San Jose-Santa Clara WPCP ponds on 27 Sep (SCR, MJM). Although we should still find **Pectoral Sandpipers** well into October the numbers this fall have been reduced from the good flights of recent years. Five seen on the ponds at Spreckles and State in Alviso on 5 Sep (NL, PMB et al.) were considered a good count for

this fall. The fall migration of **Stilt Sandpipers** has again been excellent. One to three juveniles were on the ponds near Spreckles and State in Alviso at least through 9 Sep with the peak count on 2 Sep (SCR). An adult has also at these ponds on a fairly regular basis through 13 Sep (v.ob.) and that bird or another was on the Calabazas ponds on 6 Sep (JMa, JL). Stilt Sandpipers were absent in the latter half of the month but one was found again on 1 Oct (JH). Last month's Ruffmania tapered off with one or two adult female **Ruffs** seen through 9 Sep (v.ob.) at either the CCRS waterbird pond or near Spreckles and State.

*It has been a good fall for vagrants: Tennessee Warbler, Chestnut-sided Warbler, unprecedented numbers of Blackpoll Warblers, and a Lark Bunting.*

## Gulls and Terns

It was a good month for observing some of our rarer larids, although not necessarily for the birds themselves. A juvenile **Parasitic Jaeger** was found at the Sunnyvale WPCP ponds on 17 Sep (SMi) and was well seen by many observers the next day. It was found incapacitated on 26 Sep (fide MJM). A first-winter **Franklin's Gull** was seen at the Sunnyvale WPCP ponds on 7 Sep (TGr) and probably the same bird was seen there through 26 Sep (v.ob.) and at the CCRS waterbird pond as well on 28 Sep (SCR, RWR, FV). **Elegant Terns** have been reported in good numbers this month. Three adults and an immature were on Salt Pond A4 on 3 Sep (SCR), two birds were on the Sunnyvale WPCP ponds on 8 Sep (AV), two were on pond A4 on 18 Sep (NL), and a single bird was over Stevens

Creek at Crittenden Marsh on 28 Sep (MiF). **Common Terns** are rare migrants in the South Bay and we clearly had more birds than usual this fall. An adult or second-summer bird was seen at the Sunnyvale WPCP ponds on 3 Sep (SCR) and this bird appears to have remained there through 8 Sep (v.ob.). A juvenile was found at the same location on 10 Sep (SCR) and possibly the same bird on 17 Sep (SMi). However, a juvenile on Salt Pond A4 on 22 Sep was clearly a different bird and an adult was also there that day (SCR). The juvenile remained at least through the next day (MMR). **Least Terns** rarely linger into September so three seen on Salt Pond A3E in Sunnyvale on 10 Sep (PMB) were unusual. A surprising number of **Black Terns** were found this month and some lingered for a few days which pleased observers. Ten birds were seen near Alviso and Coyote sloughs on 10 Sep (JS fide SCR). On 14 Sep, two juveniles were found on the Sunnyvale WPCP ponds and on 17 Sep it was apparent that there were at least four birds present: an adult and three juveniles (NL).

These birds were seen more or less regularly (v.ob.) through 21 Sep (MMR). Eight **Black Skimmers** first found on 3 Sep (SCR) at the Sunnyvale WPCP ponds indicate the formation of a post-breeding season flock. These birds have remained here or in Salt Pond A4 through the month and have occasionally been augmented as 11 birds were seen on both 12 Sep (MJM) and 14 Sep (NL).

## Swifts through Blackbirds

Recent autumns have provided some large concentrations of migrating or staging **Vaux's Swifts**. Up to 90 birds were estimated over Coyote Creek below Hwy 237 on 27 Sep (SCR, MJM, NL), 60 were counted in Alviso near Spreckles and State on 22 Sep (SCR), and 60 were over the confluence of Guadalupe and Alamitos creeks on 27 Sep (AV). These swifts were often found with large numbers of **Violet-**

## Field Notes *continued*

green Swallows. A male **Allen's Hummingbird** along Coyote Creek below Hwy 237 on 29 Aug (VT) was very late. A **Hammond's Flycatcher** was banded at CCRS on 28 Sep (*fide RWR*) for a rare fall record. Single **Red-breasted Nuthatches** at the Pichetti Ranch OSP on 26 Sep (MJM *et al.*), in Santa Clara on 27 Sep (SCR), and San Jose also on 27 Sep (BH) suggest an irruptive winter for this montane nuthatch. A **Tennessee Warbler** was found near Stevens Creek at Shoreline Park on 28 Sep (SCR, MMR) for our eighth county record and the fourth one for the fall. More expected in the spring, **Nashville Warbler** observations included one along Coyote Creek below Hwy 237 on 20 Sep (MJM), two along the Guadalupe River above Montague on 23 Sep (SCR) and one there 26 Sep (MJM *et al.*), and one found in a Los Altos yard on 28 Sep (RCO). An immature female **Chestnut-sided Warbler** was found along Coyote Creek below Hwy 237 on 27 Sep (SCR) for our second county record and is the best vagrant of the fall. **Hermit Warblers** are another of our western warblers seldom found in fall migration so one along Coyote Creek below Hwy 237 on 27 Sep (NL) is of interest. Single **Palm Warblers** include one found at the Palo Alto Water Quality Control Plant (WQCP) on 24 Sep (AME) and one at the San Jose-Santa Clara WPCP on 28 Sep (SCR). An unprecedented number of **Blackpoll Warblers** were found in September. Although this can be one of the more common vagrants at coastal locations our past records are normally only for single birds every third year or so. The first bird was one banded at CCRS on 14 Sep (*fide AJ*). Then, another bird was seen in an apartment complex off Abbott in Milpitas on 16 Sep (NL) and this bird, or possibly one or two more, were seen at this location on 17-18 Sep, 23 Sep, and 1 Oct (NL, v.ob.). Another Blackpoll was seen along Coyote Creek below Hwy 237 on 17 Sep (NL) but it was not possible to determine

whether it had been the bird banded earlier. Additional sightings at this location on 24 Sep (unbanded, NL) and 27 Sep (NL) probably represent additional birds. Filling out these records were single Blackpolls on the Guadalupe River a half-mile above Montague on 23 Sep (SCR) and along Los Gatos Creek near the Oka ponds on the same day (CJC). Depending upon how one counts these records we've had five to nine Blackpoll Warblers so far this fall which is astounding compared to the total of seven previous records for this vagrant warbler in Santa Clara County! **Northern Waterthrushes** have also been well represented this fall. Following last month's bird along the Guadalupe River one was found along Stevens Creek below L'Avenida on 11 Sep (WGB) and was seen at least through 15 Sep (m.ob.). Two birds were found together on the Guadalupe River a third of a mile above Montague on 23 Sep (SCR). CCRS was the center of the **Yellow-breasted Chat** migration with birds banded on 5 Sep (LCh), 11 Sep (JMN), and 14 Sep (*fide AJ*). Single, unbanded birds were also seen there on 12 Sep (AJ) and 13 Sep (NL). A male **Summer Tanager** in molt was found on Alamitos Creek near Leland HS on 17 Sep (JMA) and, unlike most of our vagrants, was well away from the bay. A **Green-tailed Towhee** was banded at CCRS on 28 Sep (*fide RWR*) and is our fourth fall record. Continuing the pattern of recent fall migrations, an immature **Brewer's Sparrow** was seen off Abbott in Milpitas on 11 Sep (NL) and two birds were found on an Alviso landfill on 15 Sep (SCR). A **Vesper Sparrow** was seen at the same landfill on 15 Sep as well (SCR). An immature **Lark Bunting** was found beside the San Jose-Santa Clara WPCP drying ponds on 16 Sep (MMR) for only the third county record. **Yellow-headed Blackbirds** have been found in the large blackbird flock near the Arzino Ranch with four counted on 14 Sep (SCR), three on 16 Sep (MMR), and one on 19 Sep (AME). **Hooded Orioles** have lingered later than usual this fall with the last report of two immatures at a Palo Alto feeder on 17 Sep (PMB).

## Phipps Ranch Oct. 4

On the SCVAS trip to Phipps Ranch Sunday, Oct. 4 nearly 40 birders mobbed the few birds lingering in the streamside vegetation. The bright, unseasonably warm weather seemed to have a dampening effect on the numbers of fall migrants, although diversity remained fair. There were several scores of **PINE SISKINS** in the alder tops—the first significant numbers I've seen this fall on the coastside. **RUBY-CROWNED KINGLETS** were similarly omnipresent (some in full song, another effect of the weather, no doubt). Good views of such common but elusive birds as **FOX SPARROW**, **TOWNSEND'S WARBLER**, **WARBLING VIREO** and lingering **SWAINSON'S THRUSHES** were had by most, and the resident pair of **RED-SHOULDERED HAWKS** put on a much-appreciated display. Singleton **YELLOW, ORANGE-CROWNED**, and **YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLERS** rounded out the migrant list although the **WHITE- and GOLDEN-CROWNED SPARROWS** present everywhere would probably like to be included too.

Sadly, the **VARIED THRUSH** calling from treetops adjacent to the parking lot just before the outing did not linger for the crowd, and a small group of **CEDAR WAXWINGS** spotted earlier was also missed by the larger group. Several smaller groups followed up by visiting nearby migrant hotspots such as Gazos Creek, but by noon the chickadee flocks had reverted to near-purity, with only the occasional Townsend's or Ruby-Crowned mixed in for eye relief. ---Garth Harwood

*Observers:* Phyllis Browning (PMB), Bill Bousman (WGB), Les Chibana (LCh), Rita Colwell (RCO), Chuck Coston (CJC), Al Eisner (AME), Mike Feighner (MiF), Tom Grey (TGr), Barbara Harkleroad (BH), Jan Hintermeister (JH), Alvaro Jaramillo (AJ), Sue Kruse (SK), Jolene Lange (JL), Nick Lethaby (NL), Mike Mammoser (MMJ), John Mariani (JMA), Jennifer Matkin (JMN), Steve Miller (SMi), Bob Reiling (RWR), Mike Rogers (MMR), Steve Rottenborn (SCR), Jeff Seay (JS), Vivek Tiwari (VT), Frank Vanslager (FV), and Ann Verdi (AV).

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

# Local Perspective on National Audubon's Population and Habitat Campaign

by Leda Beth Gray



As a child I used to think, "oh brother" when older people would say, "When I was a kid, things were different . . ." or "When I was young we used to . . .". Okay, so now I feel like a codger when I tell people that when I was a kid growing up in Sunnyvale in about 1962, there were orchards and farmers' fields, and we felt like we were driving through the country when we drove down Maude Avenue, bumping along past trees and fields. I remember my mother buying vegetables from a farmer with a stand at the side of the road. One time when he was out of what she wanted, he jumped on his little tractor and went out and picked it for her. As everyone probably knows, today this area is now part of the heart of Silicon Valley, paved under concrete and covered with business buildings which house software companies, electronics firms, and others.

Now as a member of the SCVAS Environmental Action Committee (EAC) I am worried about protecting some of the little remaining valley floor native wildlife habitat. But disappearing farmlands and wildlife habitat are not our only problems. Santa Clara County suffers air pollution, clogged freeways, overcrowding in schools, and ground water pollution. Cities in Santa Clara County are continuing to approve industrial and housing developments without apparent regard to the local balance between the two, to the infrastructure needs of these developments or to the wildlife values of the land.

I was elated to learn that National Audubon has initiated a Population and Habitat Campaign to address the root problem of too many people consuming too many resources and making too much pollution. This campaign, as with all of Audubon's campaigns, was selected not by the national board of directors, but by the members of National Audubon in a national vote. It is designed to address problems on a local level, such as those I have described above, as well as on na-

tional and international scales.

On the international level the aim of the Population and Habitat Campaign is to increase awareness and support of Americans for international population assistance. Many people throw up their hands in frustration when this subject arises, but in reality successes through these types of programs are possible and have already taken place. According to National Audubon's Population and Habitat Fact Sheet, due to U.S. leadership in population assistance, the Dominican Republic's total fertility rate has been cut in half in the last 20 years. Further, according to the fact sheet, in the last 25 years Mexico has cut its growth in half with foreign assistance. These are very encouraging trends, but every year it is a fight to get family planning assistance funding out of Congress. Opponents to these programs play games by placing troublesome riders on the population assistance funding bills in an attempt to neutralize the implementation of the programs.

International population and family planning assistance is not only extremely important, but very appropriate to come from the United States and other developed nations in order to reverse a number of worldwide trends (from National Audubon's fact sheet, "Why Population Matters"):

- Migration of people to developed countries spurred on by difficulty in getting jobs and environmental degradation, both of which often accompany rapid population growth;
- Over-fishing of the world's oceans;
- Human-induced changes to the Earth's atmosphere and climate;
- Disappearing wildlife habitats worldwide---in the case of Mexico, and Central and South America, this affects us in our own back yards as many of our migratory birds depend on winter habitat in these areas;
- 90 percent of the world's population growth is occurring in developing countries;

• It took all of human history up to the year 1800 to reach 1 billion people and only until 1960 to reach 3 billion.

• World population currently numbers about 5.8 billion and is growing by 85 to 90 million per year!

World population growth is clearly everyone's problem!!

On a national level, the goal of the Population and Habitat Campaign is for the U.S. to establish a national population policy that addresses both population growth and resource consumption in the United States. The U.S. is the third most populous country in the world, constituting roughly 5% of world population but consuming roughly 33% of the world's resources. We are the fastest-growing developed nation on earth. Interestingly, less than one-third of this growth is due to immigration. The Population and Habitat Campaign supports a humane and just immigration policy, but doesn't advocate particular immigration levels. Instead, the Campaign promotes addressing the immigration problem internationally by extending population assistance to developing countries, and by addressing the two-thirds of the growth that results from U.S. fertility rates. Another aspect of population policy that needs to be addressed is U.S. internal migration. For example, Florida and many western states such as Arizona and California are experiencing dramatic growth rates that they are unprepared to handle.

In California, Audubon has a Population and Habitat Campaign state coordinator, Mike Sellors, who works on legislative and policy issues at the state level, as well as providing assistance to Audubon chapters on programs and activities to address population growth and its effects in local areas. Mike travels around the state to different chapters, giving presentations and training sessions for population activists. He made a presentation to the SCVAS Environmental Action Committee in May of this year to help us kick off our own Population and

*continued next page*

# Audubon Tackles Population Issues in State

Habitat activities. Mike also works with other conservation and agricultural preservation groups around the state and travels to various locations to testify before planning commissions and legislative hearings on policy and legislative issues of concern to the campaign and local chapters.

Here are some of the disturbing statistics that Mike passed on to me about California:

- By the year 2020, assuming 1995 fertility levels and rates of international and interstate migration, California's population is expected to reach 54 million; it now stands at about 33 million.

- Californians represent 12% of total U.S. population; i.e., one in every eight Americans resides in California. While global population is doubling every 46 years, California's population is doubling every 30 years.

- More than 100,000 acres of California farmland are lost to development each year, and non-sustainable irrigation practices that result in soil salinization ruin an additional 6,000 acres annually. The American Farmland Trust projects agricultural land loss due to population growth and development at 480,000 acres by the year 2010 in the Great Central Valley alone.

- Compared to historic, pre-Columbian levels, California has lost 99% of its native grasslands, 89% of its riparian woodlands, 80% of its coastal wetlands, and 94% of its interior wetlands.

- Nine of the twenty worst air quality districts in the nation are in California.

- At present, 32.3 million acre-feet of water can be delivered each year to California water users with normal precipitation without overdraining ground water. However, water consumption in 1990 totaled 34.7 million acre feet. Twenty-five million more Californians will require approximately five million additional acre-feet to meet domestic and agricultural water demands.

On the local scene, we took a big step in addressing these problems when SCVAS brought Craig Breon on board 4 years ago as our Environmental Advo-

cate. Craig not only leads the fight against policies and development that are harmful to wildlife, but he has gradually formed positive working relationships with a number of local agencies and commissions such that they often call him early for advice. Of course they know he will get involved anyway!! This is an invaluable sort of working relationship for SCVAS, however it is not the case with every agency or every issue. Craig has to

be ever vigilant and we are trying to come up with new ways to support him in his valiant efforts to protect local wildlife habitat.

Please read on for details of some of our new and ongoing Population and Habitat activities. Individuals not only can have an impact, but often have the type of impact we need. We even have activities with small time commitments for people who are already very busy.

## *Get Involved in Population and Habitat Activities---Do a Lot, or Do a Little*

### **Activism**

- **Audubon Community Advocates.** Are you interested in the future of your city? At SCVAS, we have found that we get the best results in our work with city councils and planning commissions when we have local community members involved. That is why we are looking for volunteers for two different community activities.

- 1) If you would like to help us choose which issues and projects to focus on in your town, we would ask you to spend a little time each week in your own home or with other volunteers reviewing the city council and/or planning commission agendas to identify items of interest.

- 2) If you want to add your name to a list of people who will be willing to occasionally attend city council or planning commission meetings we will notify you when important issues come up, either on a rotating basis with other volunteers, or for issues of interest to you. If you choose to volunteer for number two, chances are you will have an opportunity to see Craig Breon in action, making a presentation on behalf of SCVAS. Volunteers for either activity will receive instructions and/or training, so anyone with an interest in the environment can participate.

- **Audubon California Population and Habitat Legislative E-mail Alert Network.** California Population and Habitat Campaign Coordinator Mike Sellors is orga-

nizing an e-mail alert network that will sort people by state legislative and senate districts. Network participants will then be alerted about twice a month to issues of importance in their own districts and statewide from curbing population growth to preserving open space, so that they choose to can write, call, or even visit their local legislative representative or senator to express their opinions. If you want to sign up for the alert network, you can e-mail Mike Sellors at msellors@audubon.org.

- **Armchair Activist.** For those not on e-mail, many of the issues selected by the Armchair Activist Program are relevant to the Population and Habitat Campaign. Each month, Armchair Activists are sent information on an issue of environmental importance, along with a short sample letter that can be modified by participants and sent to local legislators. Time commitment only amounts to one hour per month. This program has been proven effective for SCVAS, demonstrated by the fact that Craig has been contacted about some of the issues by local legislators or up to Senator Dianne Feinstein as a result of receiving letters from Armchair Activists. We just need a few more people to sign up and we'll have 100

*continued on Page 10*

# How You Can Battle Population Problem

Armchair Activists!! To sign up contact Cynthia McLaughlin (650) 938-7817.

• Population and Habitat Update. This is the newsletter of the Population and Habitat Campaign, sent out to subscribers on a bimonthly basis at no charge. Population and Habitat Update contains population related information on the international and national fronts along with legislative alerts and updates from selected states, including California. The latest population statistics for the world and the nation are cited in each issue. To sign up, e-mail (population@audubon.org), call (303-442-2600), fax (303-442-2199) or write: 3109 28th Street, Boulder, CO 80301, the Population and Habitat Campaign Headquarters. The campaign also has a website located at <http://www.earthnet.net/~popnet>. The website can also be accessed through the National Audubon website at <http://www.audubon.org>.

## Education

• Population and Habitat Posters for Schools. The Population and Habitat Campaign, with help from the Boulder County Audubon Society, has produced a colorful new educational poster, available in both English and Spanish, for use in middle and elementary school classrooms. The poster has a number of activities designed to teach kids about concepts such as carrying capacity, the basic needs

of humans and wildlife, how populations grow and change, and human impacts on wildlife habitat. The poster also looks at human population distribution worldwide and encourages kids to consider how human activities affect wildlife and to think of ways to preserve native wildlife habitat. Copies of this poster are being distributed in National Audubon's Audubon Adventures, which is sent out each year by SCVAS to approximately 32 schools in Santa Clara County. Any teacher or parent desiring a copy of this poster for a class may request it from Leda Beth Gray (650-424-8573). Posters are free of charge.

• New Video, "Who's Counting". The Population and Habitat Campaign has also put out a terrific new informational video about population growth and its affect on wildlife and habitat. When I watched it I was relieved to find that it didn't go overboard in showing scenes of environmental devastation which generally get me discouraged. Rather, it demonstrates the relationship between human population growth and wildlife habitat through interviews and case studies showing problems and solutions. The video lasts for about 25 minutes and comes with a discussion guide that is appropriate for high school or college classes, as well as any community group that would like to make use of it. Videos can be requested from Leda Beth Gray

(650-424-8573) while supplies last.

• Fact Sheets and Activist Guides. We will have supplies of fact sheets and other publications of the Population and Habitat Campaign available for individuals to pick up in our Chapter Office at McClellan Ranch in Cupertino, including "Population and Habitat in the New Millennium, a Handbook for the Environmental Activist".

## Reducing Consumption

• Green Teams. I just recently heard about Green Teams, a program that Bay Area Action is promoting from the Green Team Project in San Francisco. This program organizes small groups of Bay Area neighbors and co-workers to learn to live a more earth-friendly lifestyle through the support of our Green Action Guide and a trained coach. Through 6 meetings over 3 months, participants learn to reduce their solid waste, home chemicals, energy, water and auto fuel consumption while having fun, building community, and saving money. The program costs \$25 per household, and this includes a copy of the Green Action Guide. By the time this issue goes to press I will be participating on a team, and plan to report back through the *Avocet* on my experiences. For people who want to join teams, call Bay Area Action at (650) 321-1994. New teams can be started at any time!

-----Leda Beth Gray

# Participants Wanted for Project FeederWatch

Project FeederWatch is a program designed to collect information to track changes in the abundance and distribution of bird species that use feeders in the winter months. The program, which was started in 1987 by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology in New York, utilizes the help of amateur birdwatchers nationwide to provide data that is used to address a number of important issues.

Participants in the program are asked to monitor and record the number and species of birds visiting their feeders from

November through March. The flexible schedule requires a small time commitment on one or two days every two weeks.

Bird populations are an important indicator of the present and future health of the environment. By gathering data on winter bird populations in North America, Project FeederWatch scientists can monitor changing bird populations, track changes in bird migration, identify critical habitat features, and detect range expansions or declines of common birds.

The data, which is collected and stored

in computers at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, is used to prepare an annual report that is made available to scientists, interested ornithologists and participants in the program.

The Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society is interested in supporting this worthy program and encourages your participation. For more information on how to join, please send an e-mail to Garth Harwood, SCVAS Chapter Manager at: scvas@scvas.org. Those without e-mail may call (408) 252-3747.

-----Lily O'Brien

## **Membership Drive Launched--- We'll Reward You for Recruiting!**

SCVAS is currently offering a special incentive to our members for signing up new members. We call it "1-for-5" and it works like this: If you purchase an SCVAS gift membership for a friend you will receive a five-dollar coupon redeemable at the Audubon Nature Shop. The coupon will also be honored for any merchandise on sale at the monthly General Meetings, and can be used any time throughout 1998 and 1999.

The 1-for-5 offer does double duty in solving those gift-giving problems we all encounter this time of year. You can give a gift membership to a special friend and then use the coupon to purchase a gift for another friend. Of course, you can also use the coupon to buy that item you've had your eye on for yourself!

A gift membership is a great idea for friends, family, or for the office gift exchange. You can choose to give a gift membership to our local SCVAS chapter or to both SCVAS and National Audubon. The gift membership keeps giving throughout the year when *The Avocet* newsletter arrives in the mail describing all the great activities going on at SCVAS for the month. If you choose to give the National Audubon Society membership your friend will receive *The Avocet* and also *Audubon* magazine.

The best part of the 1-for-5 offer is that you are supporting all the environmental, educational, and birding programs SCVAS sponsors.

You'll also receive a special gift membership certificate you can deliver to your friend informing them of the membership that has been entered in their name.

The coupon and gift membership certificate will be sent to you when you return the form below. You'll receive one coupon for each paid membership you give. There is no limit to the number of coupons you can receive. Use the application below (make copies if giving multiple memberships) to give the gift of Audubon this holiday season! Offer expires December 31, 1998.

I would like to give a gift membership to: (check one)

SCVAS only (\$12 check to SCVAS)

National Audubon Society (\$20 check to NAS)

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

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## **Avian Botulism Strikes South Bay Waterfowl**

An outbreak of avian botulism has killed more than 420 birds at the Fremont area's Coyote Creek Lagoon as of early October. More than 700 sick birds have been transferred to local rehabilitation facilities for treatment.

This latest local outbreak of a widespread and recurrent disease of waterfowl affects many marsh areas in the western U.S., including the Salton Sea and several other National Wildlife Refuges.

The U.S. Geological Survey's National Wildlife Health Center in Madison, Wisconsin has diagnosed avian botulism as the killer of more than 300 ducks, gulls and shorebirds in the South Bay. Northern Shovelers are the hardest hit species. Waterfowl are especially vulnerable to the rapid spread of this disease where they concentrate in large numbers.

Avian botulism, or Western duck disease, kills waterfowl after they ingest a toxin produced by the botulinum bacterium, which is widely distributed in soil. Warm weather, fluctuating water levels, and an abundant food source encourage rapid growth of the bacteria. As birds ingest the toxin in the normal course of

feeding, they become paralyzed and die. The carcasses produce more medium for bacteria growth and more toxin is produced. The cycle of disease is broken by quick removal of dead and sick birds. This type of botulism is not contagious to humans.

Staff from the San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge are conducting daily pickup of sick birds and disposal of dead ones. Sick birds are being cared for by Wildlife Rescue of Palo Alto and International Bird Rescue Research Center of Berkeley.

---Janet Hanson  
San Francisco Bay  
Bird Observatory

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**GENERAL MEETINGS** are held on the third Wednesday of each month except July, August and December and 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.

## RARE BIRD ALERT: (415) 681-7422

SCVAS welcomes gifts, including those made in honor of or in memory of friends or relatives. Such gifts will be used at SCVAS' discretion for its programs and activities unless specified otherwise by the donor. Tax-deductible donations may be made in the form of a check made out to SCVAS and sent to our Cupertino address. In addition, we gratefully accept bequests, which should specifically identify Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society as recipient. Gifts and bequests will be recognized by the Chapter in *The Avocet* unless the donor prefers otherwise.

*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 9

# Join us!

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

**SCVAS 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.

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