



# THE AVOCET

The Newsletter of the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society

December 1998

## The Holiday Season---Time to Count Birds!

by Grant Hoyt

Whatever your religious persuasion might be, the Christmas holiday season probably signifies something special to you. Americans whose spiritual or cultural celebrations take place during other seasons still enjoy parties, family visits, and days off from work in late December. Birders, however, have even more reason to celebrate---Christmas Bird Counts.

When a group of conservation-minded birders decided to count birds in New York's Central Park in 1900, it's unlikely they could have foreseen the outcome nearly a century later. Throughout North America and beyond, avid teams of birders deploy themselves over the terrain enclosed in 15-mile diameter circles, counting every bird seen and heard. The data collected has been tabulated and filed by the National Audubon Society over the

years and provides valuable information on winter bird populations wherever CBC's are held.

In the Santa Clara Valley, our Audubon chapter is proud to participate in three such Christmas Bird Counts. SCVAS' traditional CBC is the one centered around San Jose. The count circle extends from the urban and suburban areas in Santa Clara and San Jose, east through Alviso and the southern tip of the Bay, and up into the foothills around Alum Rock Park. We draw up to 100 bird-counters, who gather at the end of the day at Kelley Park to tally up the day's bird sightings, discuss rare birds seen (and common ones missed!), and share a hot meal. Number of species seen, always a hot topic among CBC aficionados, approaches 170 in a good year. Ann Verdi is the official

compiler and organizer, and Kathy Parker is in charge of the dinner.

Our next most-popular CBC is Palo Alto's, which extends well into San Mateo County, up to the Skyline foothills and down to bayside habitat from Redwood City to Mountain View. This CBC also draws numerous counters and often tops 160 species seen. Dinner is usually at the home a generous volunteer. Merry Haveman coordinates volunteers, and Penelope Bowen crunches the numbers for us.

Long-time SCVAS member and trip leader extraordinaire Don Schmoldt organizes the Mt. Hamilton CBC, which attracts 20 or 30 hardy souls to the eastern edge of the county where birds are scarce and the weather can be brutal. But the happy participants comb the back country for whatever is out there, meeting at the home of Keith and Lotus Baker near the Lick Observatory at 4,000 feet at the end of the day. A total of 90 species is considered pretty good for this CBC in the Santa Clara County hinterlands.

More details on the three local CBC's, including who to contact if you're interested in helping out, are listed on Page 5.



Aster Peng of Los Altos gets a scope view of baylands waterfowl on a recent Young Audubon field trip---story on Page 4. Photo by Sue Liskovec.

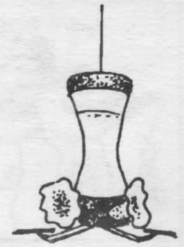
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<i>New Programs</i> -----	Page 4
<i>Field Notes</i> -----	Page 6
<i>Ogier Ponds</i> -----	Page 7
<i>Hawk vs. Dove</i> -----	Page 8
<i>Green Team</i> -----	Page 10

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# VIEW FROM THE OFFICE

by Garth Harwood, SCVAS Chapter Manager



YOU MAY HAVE NOTICED A NEW EMPHASIS in some of our activities and programs lately, an emphasis on "recruiting new members". In recent months, we've formed a new Membership Committee which has greatly increased our outreach efforts. We're present at many more community festivals and events than

ever before. And we're encouraging you to purchase gift memberships through this newsletter, among other examples.

Behind the scenes, we're working just as hard toward the same end. We're taking a twofold approach: on the one hand, increasing new-member satisfaction; and on the other, encouraging long-term retention of our current members.

First of all, we've added a new series of beginner's bird walks on one Saturday every month, to make it easier to get started as a birder (see calendar page for details). And we'll be starting a new series of classes for adult birders in 1999, designed to help birders of every level find out the things they want to know most (see page 4). Our new volunteer coordinator, to be hired this winter, will be working to refresh all of our program areas with more volunteers, and therefore more activities.

Finally, in an effort to boost retention of our existing membership, we've begun sending letters on our local letterhead inviting the scores of outgoing members of the National Audubon Society that we are asked to delete *every month*, to come back and give us another try.

So, what does it all add up to? Why are we going all out to increase our membership all of a sudden?

Well, it's pretty simple really. The SCVAS Board took a fresh look at its mission recently, and made the basic decision that it's time to translate the burgeoning population figures of this county into stepped-up efforts on our part to preserve what's left of natural habitat; to restore what can be restored, and to reach as many of our new citizens as humanly possible with our conservation message.

How shall we accomplish that? Well, there's no better way than to get our newsletter into more hands every month, to help more people make contact with nature, and to get more people involved in our conservation projects. In a word: Membership. So please consider giving a gift membership or two this holiday season.

If you have any questions about how to do so, please give me a call at (408) 252-3747.

## THE JOY OF CHRISTMAS BIRD

COUNTS . . . a long day of unrestrained birding, total concentration, access to little-known wild places (or simply the license to wander public places in the guise of a complete bird nut) . . . the sense of contributing to something huge and wonderful with thousands of like-minded souls . . . and the countdown dinner at its end, where the stories get swapped (but never, never stretched) and the rarities whispered around tactfully while leaving their formal announcement to the proud finders . . . I like this event!

I encourage birders of every level to take part in this century-old American tradition, which began as an alternative to the then-popular Christmas Shoot, where sporting types would compete to bring down as many birds as possible with their assembled friends and relatives. You don't need any special expertise to take part. As long as you're willing to be a team player, hold a clipboard, find birds, and pay the \$5 fee to cover expenses, there's a place for you on one or more of our CBCs. It takes many pairs of eyes to find all possible birds, but only one to name them, so, trust me, your help will be appreciated. Questions? Call or e-mail me at the office, 12-6 weekdays.

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**NEW BIRDING STORE JOINS FLOCK:** Several years ago, I'm told, it could be difficult to locate a reliable source of good

birdseed in this area. Accordingly, semiannual birdseed sales were big business here at SCVAS, with up to 6 distribution sites around the county and lots of volunteers lugging sacks to and fro. Many people would stock up on seed to last for months at a time. Now, however, the whopping increase in birding over the past few years has been widely recognized for its enormous economic potential, and our area is blessed with several excellent stores for the bird enthusiast.

The new kid in the flock is **Pat Curtis**, whose store, "The Backyard Birdfeeder" opened along the Campbell/Los Gatos border in August. Her store joins the SCVAS Nature Shop, the Wild Bird Center of Los Gatos, and Wild Birds Unlimited of Cupertino as your local sources for a wide variety of seeds, feeders, books, decorations, gifts and et cetera. For more information on any of these stores, consult those other yellowish pages!

### MISSION STATEMENT OF THE SANTA CLARA VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY

To maintain, preserve, and protect native animal and plant habitats and to foster a greater public awareness of the environment, with emphasis on birds and their ecosystems, particularly in Santa Clara County and the San Francisco Bay Area.

# December 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 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.

**Tuesday Dec. 8, 9:30 AM.** The Eve Case Bird Discussion Group will meet at the home of Pat and Jean Dubois, 17150 Buena Vista Ave., Los Gatos (408) 395-4264. Topic: White-breasted Nuthatch.

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

**\*\*Saturday Dec. 12, 8:30 AM.** Half day. Alum Rock Park. Leader: Bob Reiling (408) 253-7527. From Hwy 101 or I-680 take Alum Rock Ave northeast toward hills and into park. Turn left just after entrance booth before bridge; meet in lower parking lot. (Note new meeting area; upper lot closed from storm damage.) Possible entrance fee. Woodland birds, possible Winter Wren, Dipper. Rain cancels.

**\*\*Sunday Jan. 3, 8:00 AM.** Full day. Post-CBC Rarities Chase. Leader: John Mariani (408)997-2066. Kick off 1999 with some coastal vagrant chasing. Bring a full tank of gas (carpooling strongly encouraged) and your traveling field guide library as the group attempts to track down some of the unusual birds seen on Christmas Bird Counts from Monterey to Santa Cruz. Meet at ranger's kiosk on Jetty Rd. just north of Moss Landing harbor on Hwy 1.

**\*\*Sunday Jan 10, 9:45 - Noon.** Young Audubon boat trip in Monterey Bay. A 90-minute excursion at the peak of Gray Whale migration. Sea otters, sea lions, harbor seals, dolphins and porpoises are all possible, as well as a variety of seabirds. Dress for cold and rain. Send your check (made out to SCVAS) to the Audubon office to reserve your place: \$12 adults, \$8 children. Trip leaves from Chris' Fishing Trips on the main Monterey Wharf on Coast Guard-approved boats in light rain or shine; no refunds.

**Tuesday Jan.12, 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: Black Phoebe.

**\*\*Wednesday Jan. 13, 9:00 AM.** Half day. Calero Reservoir, McKean Rd. Leaders: Jane Glass (408) 779-3637 and Emelie Curtis (408) 779-2637. Meet at Ranger Station about 1 mile south of boat dock. Waterbirds and raptors. Rain cancels.

Remember, on the first or second 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 Dec. 5; next month is Jan. 9. Some loaner binoculars are available. Join an experienced Audubon birder to learn more about the birds around you.

**\*\*Saturday Jan. 16, 8:30 AM.** Half day. Fremont Lagoons gull chase. Leader: Nick Lethaby (408)941-0223. From I-880 take Gateway Blvd. exit west, turn left on Fremont Ave. Park in lot at end of street. Many gull species possible, including Thayer's and Glaucous.



Follow the winter bird migration on the Pacific Flyway to Morro Bay on the central coast of California. Plan to attend the MORRO BAY WINTER BIRD FESTIVAL, co-sponsored by the Morro Coast Audubon Society and featuring over 40 field trips and workshops, in addition to natural history programs, a nature art exhibit, and vendors. The Festival takes place January 15 - 18, and is headquartered at the beautiful Bayside Inn at Morro Bay. This area, always in the Top Ten of Audubon Christmas Bird Counts for number of species seen, is the winter home for thousands of waterbirds and an exciting variety of raptors, songbirds, and others.

Field trips will include a Big Day, Rarities, pelagic trips, birding by kayak, gull identification, birding by song and calls, inland van trips to view Sandhill Cranes and a visit to Condor country. Workshops will emphasize skills in bird identification. University of California at Berkeley professor Dr. Kevin Padian will address the hot topic of the dinosaur link in the evolution of birds.

For more information, visit the web site at <http://www.morro-bay.net/birds>, or contact the Morro Bay Chamber of Commerce, P.O. Box 876, Morro Bay, CA 93443, phone (800) 231-0592.

# Exciting New Education Programs for 1999

by Garth Harwood and Ulrike Keyssner

The coming year will mark the beginning of an exciting new era for SCVAS education programs. Three new education programs were planned at an October meeting of the Education Committee, offering something for nearly everyone.

## Birding workshop series to begin

Following up on the success of the recent Beginner's Class taught by Sandy Cortright in early October, the Education Committee has decided to capitalize on the fact that within our Chapter's membership are some of the most skilled birders anywhere! Accordingly, we plan to offer a regular series of workshops on a wide variety of topics for birders ranging from beginner to expert level. Examples include Birding by Ear, Gardening for Wildlife, Ecology and Conservation of the Burrowing Owl, Identification of Difficult Species Groups (such as gulls, small flycatchers, sparrows, or fall warblers), and of course, periodic offerings of the Birding for Beginners workshop. Keep an eye out for updates in upcoming issues of *The Avocet*.

## Classroom outreach program expected to reach thousands

This winter, SCVAS will strain its budget to add a half-time Volunteer Coordinator to our staff. One of the highest priorities for our new staff member will be to pull together the varied elements of our current school outreach programs into an organized docent program which will offer presentations on bird and ecology topics throughout the county. Since many schools have experienced sharp cut-backs in their ability to take kids on field trips, in-class presentations and neighborhood bird walks are in high demand.

Currently, the Chapter Manager and several energetic volunteers are only



SCVAS volunteer Jim Liskovec gives the Cub Scouts some birding pointers on the Young Audubon field trip October 18 at Charleston Slough. Photo by Sue Liskovec.

able to provide a few such programs, but scores of requests from teachers across the county must be turned down each season. The goal of this new program is to reach at least a thousand kids per season by training a dozen or more docents to bring Audubon into the schools. Please call the office if you'd like to be among them!

## Young Audubon takes wing again

A field trip organized by Ulrike Keyssner and led by SCVAS volunteers Jim Liskovec, Shirley Gordon, and Jerry Towner on October 18th at Charleston Slough marked the first of the newly-revived "Young Audubon" program. A group of children and their parents were introduced to the delights of birding and were instructed in binocular and field guide use, bird identification, and avian ecology. SCVAS binoculars were loaned out to each of the participants and the children enjoyed using them. Spotting scopes were also used. Some of the birding highlights of the trip were Great and Snowy Egrets, White Pelicans, Forster's Terns, and a perched Red-tailed Hawk only 20

feet away. The children marveled at the coots and the length of time these birds could stay under water. Some of them counted the seconds and tried to hold their breath as long!

"I really enjoy showing young people the birds I got, and still get, excited about a long time ago," says Jim. "I encourage any other Audubon members to volunteer as field trip leaders for the Young Audubon program."

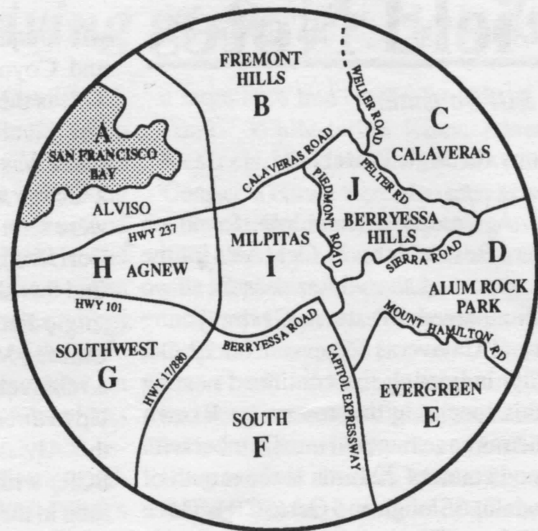
At one point, participants were startled by the boom of duck hunters' gunfire and were fascinated to learn of the blinds in the Slough. They were amazed to realize the hunters were sitting there in their boats waiting to shoot the ducks. It was explained that despite the differences between birders and hunters, both share an interest in protecting habitat.

The parent's enthusiasm for the field trip was obvious, but even more so was the excitement of the children. Despite being tired, they were still pointing out birds in the carpark! "The day was fun and exciting, and I learned a lot of new birds!" exclaimed young birder Aster Peng.

# San Jose Christmas Bird Count

This a reminder of the annual San Jose Christmas Bird Count on Sunday, December 20. Please plan to join us for a full day of birding adventure (rain or shine) as we canvas our count circle from the hills to the bay, including riparian corridors and urban parks recording all our many resident and wintering birds and maybe finding a few rarities to add some spice.

All levels of birding experience are needed, and newcomers and beginners are especially welcome to help us spot, count and list the birds. Just dress warmly, and bring your binoculars and a lunch. A mandatory fee of \$5.00 per participant covers CBC compilation and publication costs. To participate in the count, please call one of the section leaders listed below:



## SECTION

- A Alviso
- B Fremont Hills
- C Calaveras
- D Alum Rock
- E Evergreen
- F South (Central San Jose)
- G South Central (Santa Clara)
- H Agnew
- I Milpitas
- J Berryessa Hills

## LEADER

- Richard Carlson
- Craig Breon
- Kepler Stone
- Dave Cook
- Mary Simpson
- Clysta Seney
- Mark Miller
- Grant Hoyt
- Ann Verdi
- Harriet Gerson

## PHONE

- 650-494-3160
- 408-252-3748
- 408-263-3395
- 408-949-8247 (w)
- 408-370-2177
- 408-261-9431
- 650-967-3429
- 650-969-7892
- 408-749-2199 (w)
- 408-266-5106 (h)
- 408-252-6244

## EMAIL

- rccarl@sjm.infi.net
- craig@scvas.org
- kep\_stone@gasonics.com
- marysimpson@earthlink.net
- clysta@igc.apc.org
- mark.c.miller@lmco.com
- grant.hoyt@forsythe.stanford.edu
- [ann.verdi@amd.com](mailto:ann.verdi@amd.com)

If you have any questions about where you would like to count or about the Christmas Bird Count in general, please feel free to contact the CBC compiler:

Ann Verdi 408-749-2199 daytime or 408-266-5108 evenings  
E-mail: [ann.verdi@amd.com](mailto:ann.verdi@amd.com)

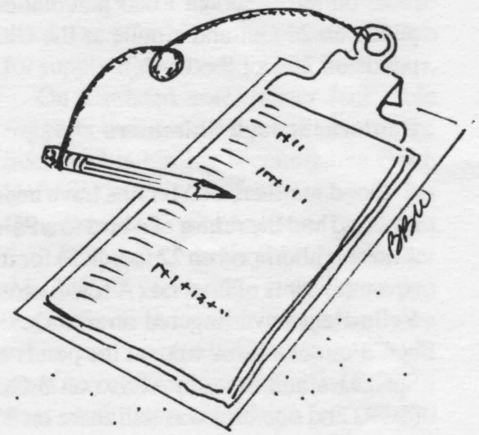
And finally, after the long day of birding and counting, please plan to join us at the Leininger Center in Kelley Park for dinner and countdown beginning at 5:30 pm. For anyone who can help out on the dinner, please contact Kathy Parker 408-358-2832. We especially need dessert donations.

### Palo Alto CBC:

To sign up for the Palo Alto Christmas Bird Count on Monday, December 21, call Merry Haveman at (650) 344-2146. If you would like to count birds in the same section as last year, please contact your section leader to sign up.

### Mt. Hamilton CBC:

If you're feeling adventurous and would like to spend the day counting birds in the Mt. Hamilton wildlands, Don Schmoltd (510) 215-1910 would love to have you help out. The date of the CBC is Tuesday, December 29.



# Field Notes

by Bill Bousman

## Loons through Waterfowl

A **Common Loon** was found on Calero Reservoir on 31 Oct (AV) for the first report of the winter season. Two medium-sized **Western Grebe** young were at Calaveras Reservoir on 22 Oct (SCR) indicating the continued nesting of this species at this reservoir. **Brown Pelicans** have lingered into October with a good count of 22 birds at the mouth of Guadalupe Slough on 5 Oct (SCR). Three **American Bitterns** were seen on the Ogier Avenue ponds on 23 Oct and one was still there on 25 Oct (RWR, FV). This is an area where they've nested. A wintering flock of **Wood Ducks** has built up again this year on Almaden Reservoir with up to 54 birds found there during October (AV, CKS). A male **Eurasian Wigeon** was found on Salt Pond A1 in Mountain View on 14 Oct (CJC) and at least one bird has been found there or nearby on Charleston Slough through the end of the month (WGB). The season's first male **Blue-winged Teal** were found in the Palo Alto Flood Control Basin on 5 Oct with one in Adobe Creek (PMB) and the other in the North Pond (MJM). They have been found irregularly at the latter location with three males there on 14 Oct (CJC). The first **Hooded Mergansers** of the season include a female on the Coleman Road percolation ponds on 24 Oct and a male at the Oka ponds on 25 Oct (both AV).

## Raptors through Skimmers

Good numbers of **Merlins** have been reported and the return of a bird to a Palo Alto neighborhood on 22 Oct (KS) for its seventh year is of interest. A few **Lesser Yellowlegs** have lingered on into October. Fourteen birds were at the ponds at Spreckles and State in Alviso on 8 Oct (SCR) and one bird was still there on 31 Oct (TGr). Surprisingly, a single bird was found inland at Calero Reservoir 16-23 Oct (JMa). The best shorebird of the month was a juvenile **Bar-tailed God-**

**wit** found at the confluence of Alviso and Coyote sloughs on 2 Oct (SCR). This is the second county record for this rare Siberian vagrant. A **Black Turnstone** was found at the same location on 2 Oct as well (SCR). Two **Red Knots** were seen in the Palo Alto estuary on 18 Oct (JMa); one of the more likely spots to find this shorebird within the county. A single **Pectoral Sandpiper** at the New Chicago Marsh on 5 Oct (MJM) suggests a relatively poor passage this October. Up to three **Stilt Sandpipers** lingered in the Alviso area in early October (JH, SCR) with two adults and an immature seen in the New Chicago Marsh on 5 Oct (MJM). An adult **Lesser Black-backed Gull** was found on Salt Pond A16 in

*Second county records  
of Bar-tailed Godwit  
and Red-throated Pipit  
enlivened our autumn.*

Alviso on 21 Oct (SCR, SBT) and has been seen subsequently through the end of the month. It is likely that this is the same adult that has spent the previous three winters in this area. Two **Caspian Terns** were seen at Calero Reservoir on 23 Oct (JMa) and is the latest record I have for this summer visitant that is normally gone by the end of September. This year's fall flock of **Black Skimmers** has been found in the vicinity of Salt Pond A4 with a peak count of 14 on 30 Oct (RWR, FV).

## Owls through Grosbeaks

A **Long-eared Owl** was heard along Mines Road south of the Alameda County line on 11 Oct (RH) and may be a resident bird. A **Short-eared Owl** seen along Alviso Slough on 2 Oct (SCR) is the earliest arrival date I have for a wintering bird. Late records of migrating **Vaux's Swift** include a flock of over 100

birds at Meridian and Coleman in the Almaden Valley on 3 Oct (AV) and two flocks totaling over 45 birds in downtown Palo Alto on 5 Oct (PMB). A **Western Wood-Pewee** was found along Matadero Creek below Hwy 101 on 16 Oct (AME) and is the latest fall date I have by four days. Similarly, a **Willow Flycatcher** seen on Coyote Creek near Sycamore on 14 Oct (SCR) was also a late record. A **Tropical Kingbird** was seen near East Middlefield in Mountain View on 26 Oct (KG) and was also in that area about a week earlier for the fifth county record. Extraordinarily late, a **Western Kingbird** was seen in the Sunnyvale Baylands Park on 27 Oct (SCR). A late **Bank Swallow** was seen just north of the county line in Alameda County along Coyote Slough on 2 Oct (SCR).

A scattering of **Red-breasted Nuthatches** have been found on the valley floor, continuing the reports from last month (v.ob.). The first incursion of **Golden-crowned Kinglets** was of a single bird along Stevens Creek below L'Avenida on 1 Oct (MMR, SCR). A high count was of eight birds at Ed Levin CP on 22 Oct (SCR). It will be

interesting to track these montane birds over the course of the winter. A late **Blue-gray Gnatcatcher** was seen along Coyote Creek on 17 Oct (MJM) and one was banded nearby at the Coyote Creek Riparian Station (CCRS) on 31 Oct (JMn). A **Red-throated Pipit** on the San Jose-Santa Clara Water Pollution Control Plant drying ponds on 26 Sep (NL) was our second county record for this vagrant. An immature **Chestnut-sided Warbler** was found along Stevens Creek below L'Avenida on 7 Oct (MMR) and was seen at least through 10 Oct (v.ob.). This is our second bird this fall, but only the third county record! **Hermit Warblers** are always rare in the fall so an immature at the Palo Alto Baylands on 11 Oct (AME) is of interest. **Palm Warblers** are continuing to show up this fall. One was found along the Guadalupe River above Montague on 17 Oct and two were at the Sunnyvale Baylands Park on 27 Oct (both SCR). The excep-

## Birds Thriving at Ogier Ponds



tional fall passage of **Blackpoll Warblers** continued into October with single birds at the Palo Alto Duck Pond on 10 Oct (SCR, MJM) and along Coyote Creek above Hwy 237 on 18 Oct (MJM). A **Northern Waterthrush** seen along Artesian Slough at the Alviso Environmental Education Center (EEC) 19 and 20 Oct (SCR) added to the good numbers we've had this fall. A **Chipping Sparrow** was also seen at the Alviso EEC on 19 Oct (SCR). **Clay-colored Sparrows** are much less likely than the Chipping Sparrow, so one found near Spreckles and State streets in Alviso on 22 Oct (SCR, SBT) was a good find. It was also seen in this location 24–27 Oct (v.ob.). Then, a second bird was found at the Sunnyvale Baylands on 27 Oct (SCR) and seen again on 31 Oct (MJM, NL). A late immature **Grasshopper Sparrow** was banded at CCRS on 23 Oct (*fide* AJ) and an even later bird was found on Sierra Road halfway to the summit on 31 Oct (MMR). Early **Swamp Sparrows** include one on the Guadalupe River above Montague on 4 Oct (SCR) and two along Coyote Creek below Hwy 237 on 17 Oct (MMR, NL). The first **White-throated Sparrow** of the season was one at a Milpitas feeder on 1 Oct (NL). On 28 Oct, a bird returned to a Los Gatos feeder for its fifth year (JD). Single birds were found along Alviso Slough in Alviso on 6 Oct (SCR) and 16 Oct (DSJ, SCR, SBT), Coyote Creek below Hwy 237 on 9 Oct and 30 Oct (both NL), and the Guadalupe River above Montague on 11 Oct (MJM). An immature male **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** was found along Stevens Creek below L'Avenida on 7 Oct (WGB) and was seen irregularly through 15 Oct (m.ob.). Most of our records of this eastern species are of spring or summer birds rather than fall migrants. Two male **Yellow-headed Blackbirds** were at the end of Nortech Parkway in Alviso on 5 Oct (MJM) and are apparently the last of the small group found there this fall. A male **Evening Grosbeak** along Skyline Boulevard west of Table Mountain on 31 Oct (LCh) was the first of the season.

On Sunday, October 25, most of the 34+ birders who had started the SCVAS field trip at Ogier Ponds were along the southern edge of the pond bordering the Model Airplane Park. Model airplanes were buzzing overhead when suddenly an **American Bittern** burst from the reeds and flew the length of the pond (and the birders) providing excellent, in flight views of the bird at distances of less than 30 feet. Earlier as the group assembled near the pond immediately south of the entrance (I'll call this West Pond) a **Sora** was found feeding in open water several feet from the reeds. After prolonged views of this bird a second, much closer Sora, also feeding in open water, seemed anti-climatic to some.

In the pond on the north side of the entrance road (North Pond?) a pair of **Wood Ducks** mixed in with hundreds of **American Coots**, **Gadwall**, **Double-crested Cormorants** and **Canada Geese**. Later, as the group cautiously approached the point where Coyote Creek empties into "West Pond" a small group of **American Pipits** seen there were an unexpected surprise that was soon surpassed by a very cooperative, bobbing, **Common Snipe** seen feeding on the edge of the creek. A somewhat more expected, tail dipping, **Spotted Sandpiper** was nearby. An adult male **Osprey** then flew in and perched in



*Observers: Bill Bousman (WGB), Phyllis Browning (PMB), Les Chibana (LCh), Chuck Coston (CJC), Jean Dubois (JD), Al Eisner (AME), Ken Goss (KG), Tom Grey (TGr), Jan Hintermeister (JH), Ralph Hunter (RH), Alvaro Jaramillo (AJ), David Johnston (DSJ), Nick Lethaby (NL), Mike Mammoser (MJM), John Mariani (JMa), Jennifer Matkin (JMn), Bob Reiling (RWR), Mike Rogers (MMR), Steve Rottenborn (SCR), Chris Salander (CKS), Kendric Smith (KS), Scott Terrill (SBT), 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

a large bare tree on the far side of West Pond. **White-tailed Kites**, **American Kestrels**, **Red-tailed Hawks** and a **Cooper's Hawk** were also seen as well as a distant **Golden Eagle** soaring over the hills east of the ponds. Northern Harrier was a big miss for the day.

Seven **Common Mergansers** were in the pond nearest the freeway (I'll call this East Pond). Although migrating ducks had not yet reached Ogier Ponds in numbers; we did see **Gadwall**, a small flock of **Ring-necked Ducks**, **Mallards**, a few **Ruddy Ducks**, a couple of **Cinnamon Teal**, a couple of **Green-winged Teal**, a single female **Northern Pintail** and a single female **Northern Shoveler**. A **Ring-billed Gull** in North Pond was a single representative of the hundreds of gulls that will, later in the year, bathe in this pond. Despite high winds during most of the morning a respectable total of 54 species was seen. As some would say, it was a case of quality over quantity.

-----Bob Reiling

### Wanted for Publication: Your Field Reports

Thanks to Bob Reiling for another excellent trip report. Bob has agreed to take over as Field Trip Committee chair, succeeding Dave Cook, who has spent two years planning and organizing SCVAS' weekend field trip schedule. It can be a frustrating job at times, trying to come up with trips every weekend---we'd like to thank Dave for his stellar efforts and Bob for supplying new energy and fresh ideas.

On a related note, reader Jack Cole suggests that *Avocet* subscribers may be interested in birding accounts like Garth Harwood's "Warblerland" story of his Canadian vacation or Ann Verdi's "Salton Sea Adventure," both published earlier this fall. If you have a field report you might like to share with our readers, give me a call at (650)969-7892; e-mail grant.hoyt@forsythe.stanford.edu. We'll start with medium-length (500-1000 words) accounts---depending on response, we can expand this as a regular feature of varying length and frequency.

-----Grant Hoyt

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# A Shattering Experience in Almaden Valley

## *(Feeding Birds May Be Hazardous to Your Health)*

It is not rare for a bird to accidentally bump into your glass window, be stunned, and then fly away or expire. When a Cooper's Hawk chases a Mourning Dove into your large kitchen window while you are on the other side it becomes a different story. Here is my "tail."

Last month [October] while doing dishes, I heard a BOOM!, not unlike the sonic booms of old. "Oh my God," I screamed, and in the split second when I looked up, I saw a large bird, the dove, careening away as my picture window began to break away in large jagged pieces coming toward me. I haven't seen that much shattered glass since the earthquake of '89 when cabinet doors opened, spilling loads of unnecessary glassware. The partially unrolled bamboo shade on the outside of the window, which I believe the bird hit, may have cushioned the impact somewhat and saved me from physical harm.

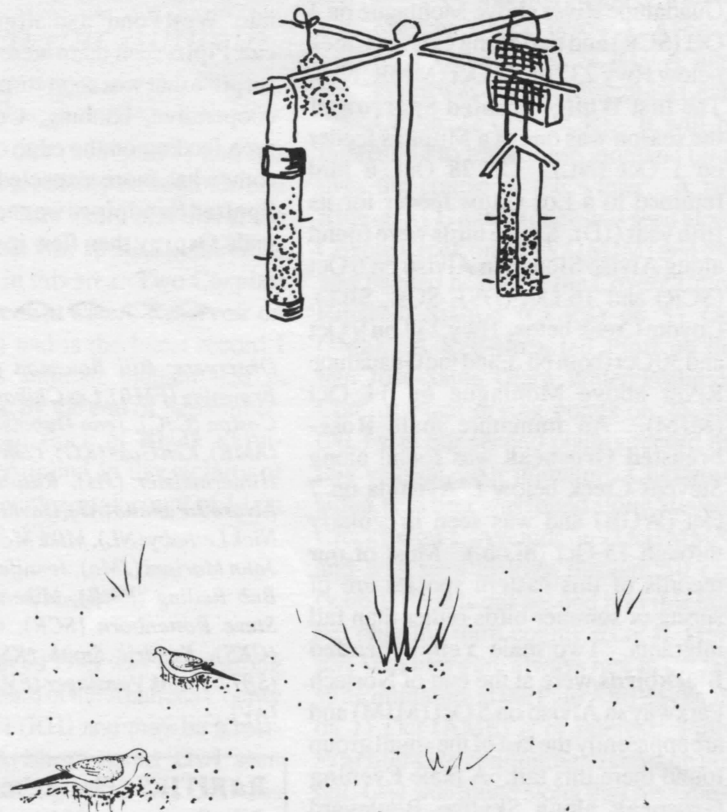
My first inclination, after calming down, led me to clean up glass—not my favorite hobby. Later, when I walked into the backyard, I found the telltale evidence of HAWK KILL—a mass of plucked feathers on the lawn.

I have several feeders placed around the yard, and on this particular day, I had a scattering of seed on the patio itself. Lesson learned—do not put ground feed so close to the house during hawk migration.

For the past five years or so as our trees in this part of the Almaden area have matured, I have recorded several hawk incidents. Our yard has large pine, juniper, and deciduous trees which serve as hawk lookouts. We also have a large open area below us and we abut the Santa Cruz foothills. I have photographed Sharpies (Sharp-shinned Hawks) perched on my fence less than eight yards from my kitchen window. Last year my husband and I watched as a Cooper's picked up a feeding dove and flew off with it about ten yards from where we sat. Many times I have found the telltale area of plucked feathers in which, one time, the legs of a large bird were present. Another photo opportunity—a Sharpie devouring its meal of dove, aware of my presence not ten yards away. What nerve!

It is always entertaining to observe the hawks. I am suspicious of their presence when the usual birds are totally absent at a normal feeding time. Hawks are beautiful creatures and masterful flying machines. Eighty dollars for a new window is small price to pay for their company. Bring on the hawks!

---Barbara Harkleroad  
Almaden Valley



Sketches on both pages by Bonnie Bedford-White



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## Cooper's Hawks Finding Food, Shelter Bountiful in Bay Area Suburbs

Barbara Harkleroad's story is the most dramatic one of its kind I've heard yet. But here at the Audubon office, I do get quite a few calls about incidents of predation on backyard birds by hawks. Almost always, the hunter is an accipiter: either a Cooper's Hawk, or in winter, its smaller look-alike, the Sharp-shinned Hawk.

The regular presence of accipiters in residential areas is a new thing. Although local Christmas Bird Count data indicate no pronounced trend of increase or decrease since the 1950s, the behavior of Cooper's Hawks appears to have undergone a remarkable change, according to our Field Notes and Santa Clara County Breeding Bird Atlas editor Bill Bousman.

"Cooper's has made a transition in the last ten years to an urban nesting bird. The first report I had was in 1989 in the Willow Glen area of San Jose. After this, there were increasing reports from many residential areas on the valley floor. Interestingly, the Marin and Monterey County breeding bird atlases were both published in 1993 and describe this species as a furtive nesting species of remote forest areas. Since then, the Cooper's has started to nest on the Monterey Peninsula.

"When Alameda County started its atlas in the early 1990s I told Bob Richmond about our Cooper's transition. From his experience, there was no equivalent use of urban areas in Alameda County at that time. However, within a year or two he reported that they were now commonly using urban areas."

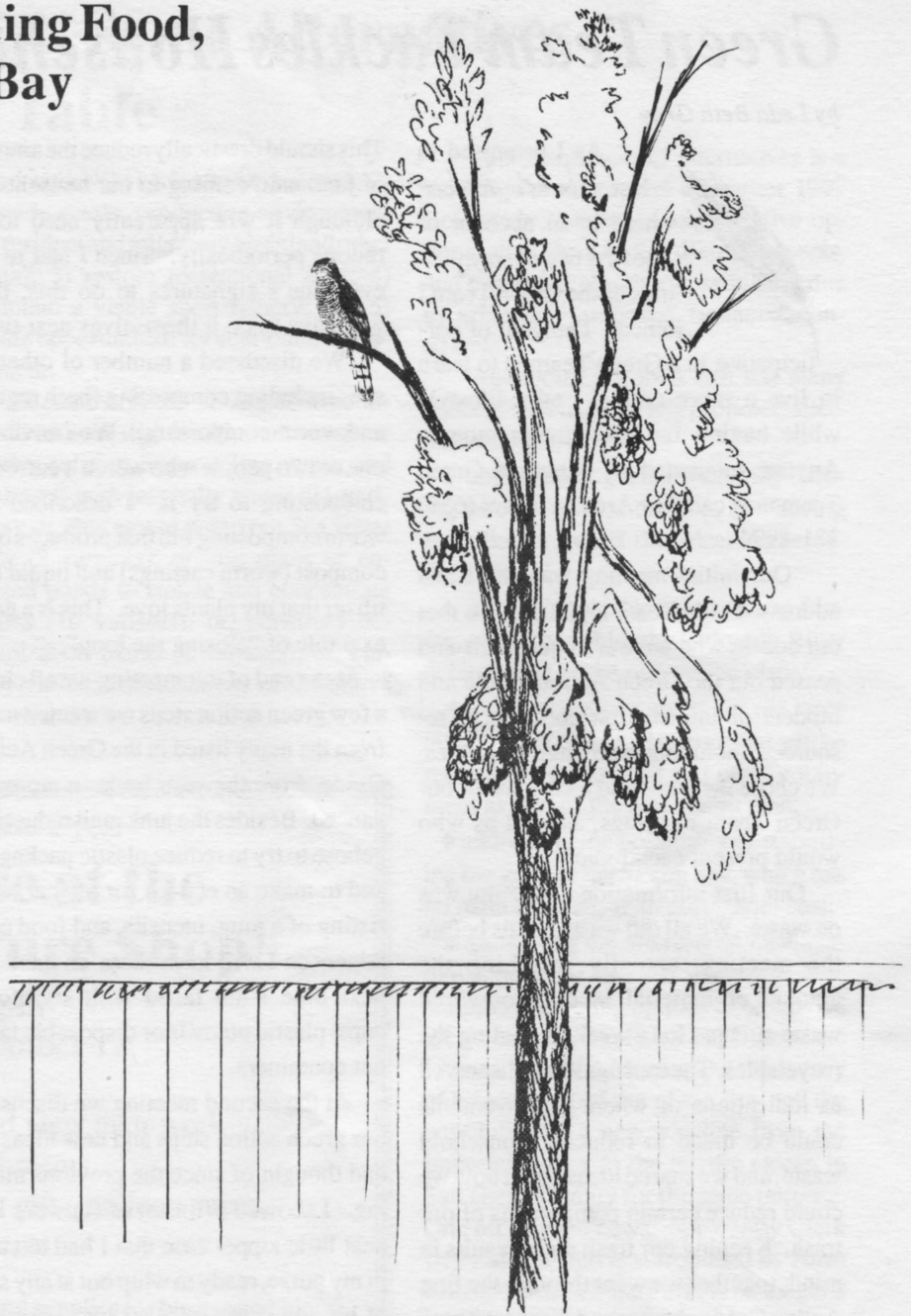
People seem to be unsure about how to respond to the presence of a bird-hunting hawk in their own back yard, especially if they've worked hard to create a large concentration of birds there by providing food, water, and shelter for songbirds. Hence the calls to me at the Audubon office.

What do I tell them? Well, after a bit of grief counseling for those who feel the losses most keenly, I encourage callers to think of the return of natural predators to our urban landscape as a very hopeful sign that *the ecosystem is still working*. These hawks are one of the important forces which have shaped the evolutionary destiny of local birds since time beyond mind; without them, the survival skills of backyard birds would be oddly warped toward such urban threats as speeding cars and feral cats. Of course,

if the experience is just too traumatizing, one can simply take down the feeders for a while, and close-range encounters will probably diminish substantially.


And finally, of course, I encourage everyone who has a resident accipiter on the prowl in their neighborhood to enjoy the show! Of the dozens of callers I've spoken to regarding this phenomenon, every one has found the experience uniquely thrilling... even at the price of a kitchen window.

---Garth Harwood



# Green Team Tackles Household Waste, Toxics

by Leda Beth Gray



As I promised in last month's *Avocet*, here is an account of the first two of six meetings of the Green Team I joined. The goal of participating in a Green Team is to learn to live a more earth-friendly lifestyle while having fun and saving money. Anyone interested in joining a Green Team may call Bay Area Action at (650) 321-1994.

Our initial meeting was short and addressed only Team logistics. We met our coach, who answered questions and passed out the Green Action Guide and binders of information about local resources, including web page addresses. We chose the dates and locations for our Green Team meetings, as well as who would present each topic.

Our first informational meeting was on waste. We all did waste audits before the meeting, actually weighing the amount of material in our household waste streams for a week, including the recyclables. The trash audit results served as indications of where improvements could be made in reducing household waste, and we shared ideas about how we could reduce certain components of our trash. Keeping our trash audit results in mind, together we went through the first Action Guide chapter and discussed how suggested activities might affect our own waste reduction efforts.

Even though all of us on the team felt we were pretty knowledgeable about recycling, we did find that we all had some room for improvement. One area of frustration for all of us was the large volume of junk mail we were all receiving. I chose as one of my 'green action' steps to write the mailing list clearing houses and ask them to remove all of our names and addresses from their lists.

This should drastically reduce the amount of junk mail coming to our households, although it will apparently need to be redone periodically. Since I had to get everyone's signatures to do this, they will have to do it themselves next time!

We discussed a number of other issues including composting (both regular and worm-composting). We convinced one or two people who weren't currently composting to try it. I described my worm composting bin that produces both compost (worm castings) and liquid fertilizer that my plants love. This is a good example of "closing the loop".

At the end of our meeting we all chose a few green action steps we wanted to try from the many listed in the Green Action Guide, from the very basic to more advanced. Besides the junk mail reduction, I chose to try to reduce plastic packaging and to make an eco-kit for my car, consisting of a mug, utensils, and food containers so I will have these on hand the next time I am faced with styrofoam cups, plastic utensils or disposable take-out containers.

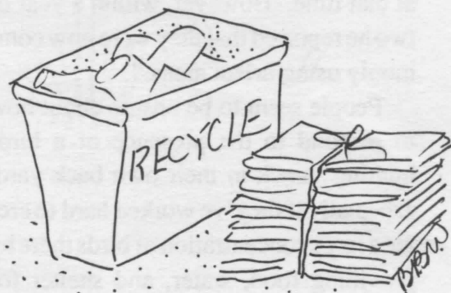
At the second meeting we discussed our green action steps and new ideas we had thought of since the previous meeting. I showed off a set of flatware in a neat little zipper case that I had to carry in my purse, ready to whip out at any sign of birthday cake or other plastic utensil event. We also talked over waste-reducing ideas for the holidays, such as cutting up last year's holiday cards for use as gift tags, re-usable gift wrapping, and creative re-use of materials such as bags for wrapping. Gifts of food, meals, and services all use a lot less material resources and would be good "green" holiday presents.

Next we moved on to the chemicals chapter. Our homework had been to do a household chemical audit. We went

over many of the various materials we found in our homes and whether they were toxic, and how to dispose of them. We discussed car care and household cleaners, and found that it is confusing to try to figure out which products are "environmentally friendly" and which are not. Unfortunately, there is no requirement that each chemical in a product has to be listed on the label, making products difficult to evaluate. We then discussed safe alternatives for getting rid of insect pests around house and garden.

The green action steps that I chose for the chemical chapter were to find an environmentally laundry soap (which I thought I already used but will now evaluate more carefully), to properly dispose of a car battery I had sitting around (I should have exchanged it), and to check labels on personal care products such as soap and lotion to see exactly what I have been using.

So far I have really enjoyed the Green Team and participating is giving me the opportunity to look into things I've wondered about and discuss them with others. Our group is good at coming up with ideas and suggestions to solve each others' problems. In fact, the discussions are so stimulating that we have more to talk about than our planned time limits permit! Watch this space for more on the Green Team in February's *Avocet*.



# Salton Sea: At Last, Some Alternatives Are Placed on the Table

by Phil Pryde, Chair  
Audubon-CA Salton Sea Task Force

After several months of getting organized, the Bureau of Reclamation (BoR) and the Salton Sea Authority (SSA) have put forth a collection of alternative approaches for stabilizing salinity and restoring the ecological health of the Salton Sea.

The alternatives were presented at public workshops in early October in San Diego and in the Imperial and Coachella Valleys. In all, a total of 38 variants have been selected to undergo more detailed analysis.

These alternatives must respond to the five goals of the Salton Sea Improvement Plan, which are to 1) maintain the Sea as

a repository for agricultural drainage; 2) provide a safe, productive environment for resident and migratory birds [and other biota]; 3) restore recreational uses; 4) maintain a viable sport fishery; and 5) create opportunities for economic development.

In summary, the 38 alternatives include variants that would: remove some of the existing hyper-saline water and replace it with less salty water (21 variants); or, that would pump out Sea water only (2 variants); or, use dikes or enclosed ponds to isolate and concentrate brines (10 variants); or, construct desalinization plants (2 variants); or, employ various combinations of the above (3 variants).

This assortment of alternatives is a vast improvement over an earlier 1997 BoR study that only looked at five options, all of them in-Sea diking concepts, and discarded all other possibilities due to arbitrarily imposed financial constraints.

Audubon California still has many concerns about the newly proposed alternatives, including:

- ◆ understanding what is actually causing bird die-offs at the Sea, and having remedies as part of the selected alternative;
- ◆ improving the New and Alamo Rivers, and if possible, the Colorado River delta as part of the restoration plan;
- ◆ finding benign sources for the large quantities of electrical energy that will be required to run pumps and other equipment as part of the restoration plan;
- ◆ addressing the possibility of stabilizing the level of the Salton Sea, which has no natural outlet, at an acceptable cost;
- ◆ protecting the interests of local Native Americans near the Sea.

Some interesting options to be studied are the use of either Palen Dry Lake or the Laguna Salada in Mexico as a repository of brines pumped out of the Sea, and the possibility of a new pipeline from the Imperial Valley to the Pacific Ocean in San Diego County for the same purpose. One bit of good news: apparently Clark Dry Lake, which is surrounded by Anza Borrego Desert State Park, is no longer a candidate for receiving these brines, as it had been in earlier reports.

Of equal interest to Audubon is the ongoing debate over massive water transfers of "conserved" agricultural water. We must also monitor environmental documents for canal lining projects and the water transfers themselves for their impacts on the Salton Sea.

This latest proposal obviously requires much study, both by agencies and conservation groups such as National Audubon. The Task Force will make every effort to keep members informed. The BoR's website is [www.lc.usbr.gov](http://www.lc.usbr.gov) (look for "Salton Sea Project.")

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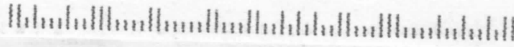
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SCVAS is the chapter of the National Audubon Society for Santa Clara County.

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