



THE AVOCET

The Newsletter of the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society

February 1999

Big Sur's Ventana Now Condor Country

by Gloria LeBlanc

Until recently I was unaware that California Condors were living on California's Central Coast. On Sunday, January 17, Dave Cook and I drove down to Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park to see if we could find them.

First, a little background: The last wild California Condor was captured in 1987 amid controversy between those who would continue captive breeding programs and others who favored leaving the remnant population alone. The captive breeders have successfully hatched dozens of condor chicks since then, and there are now three areas in the western United States (northeast Arizona, southern California, and the Ventana Wilderness Sanctuary in Big Sur) where the birds have been released.

It was a two-hour drive from Los Gatos to the park. At a restaurant in the lodge, a waitress told us that she saw the five young condors every morning when she arrived for work at 6:30. They typically roost in a very tall pine tree opposite the restaurant's entrance. On this particular

morning, we were told that one condor had been sitting in "its" tree but had left five minutes before our arrival.

We left the parking lot and drove down a road to a picnic area, pulling into the first parking lot. We had a great view of the hills and could see several Turkey Vultures soaring in the mid-morning thermal air currents. One bird was definitely larger, had a different wing pattern, and showed noticeably "feathered" primary wing tips ---a California Condor!

We headed south on Highway 1 and soon noticed someone scanning the foothills with a spotting scope. It turned out to be a Ventana Wilderness Sanctuary member, who was eventually joined by five others from the condor team. They were monitoring a "planted" calf carcass on a hillside for the young condors to dine on. Condors don't need to eat every day and will often go for a week without eating. Those monitoring the condors' progress are unconcerned until a bird goes ten days



Sketch by Bonnie Bedford-White

without eating. On Saturday, condor #70 had eaten for an hour and a half off a calf carcass. These planted carcasses will be gradually moved toward existing cattle ranches, in hopes that the birds will ultimately survive off cattle that die on the ranches.

Of the five condors released at Ventana, four had temporarily moved to join another released group farther south, leaving only the one we saw. We were fascinated to observe the Ventana Sanctuary crew tracking the bird with telemetry equipment, and could hear the signal get stronger as the bird flew toward us. What a thrill it was to watch it soar on its nine-foot wing span!

On January 30th the condor team will be releasing another nine birds here. These folks are passionate about the condors and dedicated to the goal of re-establishing breeding condors in the rugged wilderness of central California. We in the South Bay are so fortunate to have these magnificent creatures making their bid for survival so close to us.

General Membership Meeting Wednesday, February 17 "Corbett Nat'l Park and Birds of India" with Dr. Vivek Tiwari

Cubberley Community Center Rm. H-1
4000 Middlefield Rd., Palo Alto
7:30 Hospitality 8:00 Program

Join us tonight for a photographic tour of Corbett National Park, the oldest of India's National Parks. Best known for its extraordinary mammals including tigers and elephants, the park also contains over 500 species of birds. Vivek's presentation will also take us to other parts of India as he provides information on traveling and birding in that country. Dr. Tiwari has been active in conservation issues in both the US and his home country for many years, and is enthusiastic about assisting more birders and naturalists to experience the joys of the Indian wilds firsthand.

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VIEW FROM THE OFFICE

by Garth Harwood, SCVAS Chapter Manager



THE GREAT BACKYARD BIRD

COUNT: FEBRUARY 19-22, 1999: I know there are hundreds of you in this chapter who avidly track your backyard and neighborhood birds. And like me, many of you would probably like your observations to contribute directly to the cause of bird conservation and scientific discovery. Now they can, thanks to

the technology of the Internet and data-processing super-computers. Cornell University and the National Audubon Society are sponsoring this new annual event in order to create a massive new database on the birds of North America, the better to "help make sure common birds remain common, and to help species whose numbers are already in decline."

Anyone can participate, and there is no fee or complicated sign-up process. On the big weekend, simply count up the birds you see by species, then log onto the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's website at <http://birdsource.cornell.edu>. Follow the easy instructions for entering your data, and it's done! If you lack access to the Internet but want to participate anyway, we can help you from the SCVAS office. Call (or e-mail) ahead to arrange a time to come in, and we'll assist you at our front-office computer. Our west coast observations are of special importance, since Cornell's New York location typically produces information heavily skewed toward eastern birds.

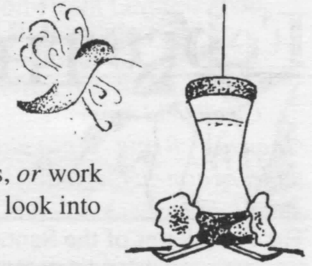
And by the way, you might want to investigate that web address for other reasons. This site is being developed to allow anyone to query the database with specific questions about which species were reported where, down to zip code. The site also has species accounts, bird images and sounds, distribution maps, and a vast amount of other information of interest to most birders.

"IT'S AMAZING WHAT PEOPLE WILL GIVE YOU . . . if you just ask for it." I was mildly offended by this insight when it was first offered to me many years ago. Though I've shunned that outlook in my personal life, I've nonetheless found it a useful truism for cash-strapped organizations, and I have no problem asking for things needed by our worthy organization. Here are a few things that we've needed around here for some time, but haven't found the money for:

—SLIDE PROJECTORS in good working condition for educational outreach programs.

—One or two more SPOTTING SCOPES for field trips and school programs (thanks to **Harlan Sethe** for being first in line to offer his trusty Swift No. 821!)

—Macintosh-compatible computer items such as a LASER PRINTER (an urgent need to increase the efficiency of Craig's advocacy work), or a SCANNER to put more graphics into SCVAS printed materials.



If you have any of these items, or work for a company that might, please look into it and let us know. Thank you!

ENJOY FINANCE PLANNING? The SCVAS Finance Committee assists the Board of Directors by convening quarterly to review the status of our organization's investments and to make important decisions regarding the disposition of our assets. One or more new members with some experience in the management of finances are now needed to fill out this key committee. If you'd like to make a volunteer commitment requiring only a small investment of time, but which has a substantial impact, this may be the volunteer opportunity you've been waiting for. Quarterly meetings are generally held at the SCVAS office at noon, and there are occasional light tasks between meetings, such as opening new accounts or renewing existing ones. If interested, please contact finance chairman **Don Price** at the number listed on the back page.

OH, THOSE OBNOXIOUS SCRUB JAYS . . . It turns out they're good for something after all! Personally, I pretty much gave up on these birds when I first encountered them robbing nests of the various songbirds around my apple orchard. Sure, I figured, they're native birds and fully protected by law, but I don't have to like them, now do I? Well, it seems that every time I take an attitude like that about something in nature that I find irritating, I end up learning something new that reminds me that it's never a mistake to respect each and every living thing.

It turns out that our local Western Scrub Jays are of great importance in the dispersal of oak trees, which as you know, are in decline throughout the state. Alone among major consumers of acorns, the scrub jays stash their harvest in the soil over a broad area---up to 5,000 acorns per bird! Most are remembered and removed prior to germination, but a small and vital percentage remain, thus spreading the oaks which are key to the survival of many other bird species---including some of those which may later be tormented by these birds in the nest.

HELP!! We need a Program Chair! After two years of organizing programs for our monthly General Meetings, volunteer **Cindy Handen** has stepped down, and we thank her for a job well done. Duties include setting up ten speakers per year, and introducing speakers at the monthly Wednesday meetings. It's a great way to meet some of the best birders and naturalists in our region, too. Please call the office for more details at (408) 252-3747. Thanks!

February 1999 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 Feb. 3, 7:30 PM. Bay Area Bird Photographers presents "Peruvian Amazon Adventure" with Dennis Sheridan, featuring the flora and fauna of the Upper Amazon basin. Lucy Evans Baylands Interpretive Center, E. Embarcadero Rd., Palo Alto.

****Saturday Feb. 6, 8:30 AM.** Half day. Arastradero OSP. Leader: Jim Liskovec (650) 969-5542. From I-280 take Page Mill Rd. west, turn right on Arastradero Rd. and meet in the parking lot about 1/2 mile on right. Moderate walking; rain cancels.

****Sunday February 7, 8:30 AM.** Half day. Western San Francisco. Leader: Alan Hopkins (415) 664-0983. From I-280 take 19th Ave into S.F., turn left on Sloat. Turn right on coast highway and go north to Cliff House restaurant, on left just after Golden Gate Park.

Tuesday Feb. 9, 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-headed Grosbeak.

****Saturday Feb. 13, 9:00 AM.** Half day. Foster City. Leader: Rose Green (650) 493-8378. From Hwy 101 north take Hillsdale Blvd east, turn right on Shell. Meet in parking lot on right past Foster City Rec. Center. Diving ducks; Hooded Merganser possible. Lunch optional, rain cancels.

Remember, on the 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 **Feb.13**; next month is Mar. 13. Some loaner binoculars are available. Join an experienced Audubon birder to learn more about the birds around you.

****Wednesday Feb.10, 8:30 AM.** Shady Oaks Park/Coyote Creek. Leader: Bob Reiling (408) 253-7527. From Hwy 101 south exit on Blossom Hill, cross over freeway and turn right into parking area just after first stoplight at intersection of Coyote and Silver Creek Valley Rds. Will the Eastern Phoebe honor us with an appearance? Lunch optional; heavy rain cancels.

****Sunday Feb. 14, 8:30 AM.** Half day. Charleston Slough. Leader: Steve Rutledge (650) 328-5097. Meet at Terminal Way at end of San Antonio Rd north of Hwy 101 in Mt. View. Trip geared toward beginning birders.

****Saturday Feb. 20, 8:00 AM.** Half day. Princeton Harbor. Leader: Mark Miller (650) 967-3429. Meet at corner of West Point and Stanford Ave in Princeton, 4 miles north of Half Moon Bay on Hwy 101. Loons, grebes, sea ducks, rocky shorebirds; some land birds. Bring your scope. Rain cancels.

****Sunday Feb. 21, 8 AM.** Half day. Shady Oaks Park/Coyote Creek. Leader: Bob Reiling (408) 253-7527. Easy 2-mile walk. From Hwy 101 take Blossom Hill east, turn right into parking area just after first stoplight at Coyote/Silver Creek Rds. Eastern Phoebe possible. Heavy rain cancels.

****Wednesday Feb. 24, 9:00 AM.** Foster City. Leader: Rose Green (650) 493-8378. See directions under Feb. 13.

****Saturday Feb. 27, 8 AM.** Half day. Jasper Ridge Biological Preserve, Stanford University. By reservation only; call Bob Reiling (408) 253-7527 for sign-up and meeting instructions. Moderately strenuous walking, 2-3 miles. Limit 24 participants; \$5 fee. Trip goes rain or shine.

****Sunday Feb. 28, 8:30 AM.** Moss Landing and Jack's Peak. Leader: Rick Fournier (831) 633-0572. Meet at Jetty Rd and Hwy 1 just north of Moss Land-

ing. Excellent variety of coastal species, plus land birds at Jack's Peak. Rarities like Laughing Gull, Grace's Warbler could still be around. Carpooling essential; park fee required.

****Saturday Mar. 6, 8:30 AM.** Half day. Coyote Hills Regional Park. Leader: Frank Vanslager (408) 257-3647. Take Hwy 84/Dumbarton Bridge east towards Newark. Exit right on Thornton, then left over freeway as Thornton becomes Paseo Padre. Turn left on Patterson Ranch/Commerce Rd into park. Meet at far end of Quarry parking lot, 1/2 mile past park entrance. Fee required.

****Sunday Mar. 7, 8 AM.** Half day. Almaden Quicksilver Park. Leader: Ann Verdi (408) 266-5108. In San Jose, take Almaden Rd. through town of New Almaden, turn right at park entrance. Early returning migrants in oak woodland/chaparral. Moderately strenuous hiking.

Tuesday Mar. 9, 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: Carolina Parakeet.

****Wednesday Mar. 10, 8:30 AM.** Santa Teresa Co. Park. Leader: Alan Thomas (408) 265-9286. Take Hwy 101 south, exit right on Bernal Rd. Continue past golf course and go up hill; go left at park sign and drive to end at big parking lot by fence. Woodland birds at start of migration season. Lunch optional.

Salton Sea International Bird Festival February 12 - 15

Imperial Valley, California

This birding festival, in one of the West's most fascinating (and endangered) wildlife habitats, has something for everyone ---tours to observe geese, cranes, hawks, ibis, specialty birds, rarities; educational seminars, crafts, kids' events, speakers, social events and more. For information call (760)344-5FLY or check their website: www.imperialcounty.com/birdfest

Field Notes

by Bill Bousman

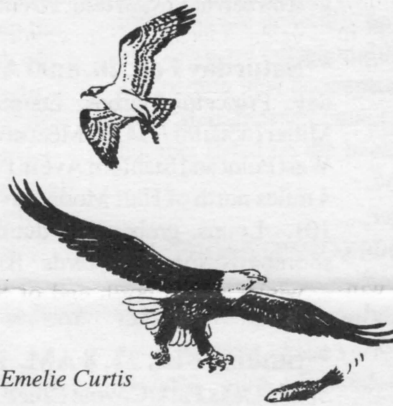
Loons through Egret

A **Pacific Loon** on the Sunnyvale Water Pollution Control Plant (WPCP) ponds on 12 Dec (SCR) was our second bird this winter. The **Common Loons** found at Calero Reservoir last month tapered to two by 6 Dec (AV) and only one was found on 7 Dec (JMa). Two were once again there on 29 Dec (TR) and stayed through the end of the month. An immature Common Loon was on the Sunnyvale WPCP ponds and nearby Salt Pond A3W 12-21 Dec (SCR, v.ob.). Last winter's invasion of **Red-necked Grebes** is not likely to be repeated soon. However, a single bird found on Almaden Lake on 25 Dec (JMa) harkens back to last year. **Brown Pelicans** have stayed in good numbers again this winter with 10-12 birds at the Sunnyvale WPCP ponds and Salt Pond A3W 12-21 Dec (SCR, MMR, v.ob.). **American Bitterns** have shown up in fairly typical numbers in December. An inland bird on the Guadalupe River below the Santa Clara Valley Water District offices on 9 Dec (TR) was unusual. More expected were single birds along Coyote and Alviso sloughs on 12 Dec (MMR, MJM) and 1-2 birds in the Mountain View Forebay 16-24 Dec (BE, MMR). A single **Cattle Egret** was at the Arzino Ranch on 29 Dec (SCR) and the only one reported this month.

Waterfowl

Goose watching has been productive in the South County this month. Nine **Greater White-fronted Geese** were seen flying north with a large flock of Canada Geese over the Ogier Avenue ponds on 9 Dec and later two adults were seen foraging with the Canada flock at Bailey and Santa Teresa (SCR). Two white-fronts were nearby at the Parkway Lakes on 14 Dec (TR), and an adult was seen again with the Canadas at Bailey and Santa Teresa on 20 Dec (SCR). A single **Snow Goose** was at the Parkway Lakes on 14

Dec (TR), where two were found in November. Four Snow Geese were found on Calaveras Reservoir on 20 Dec (JT et al. *fide* AV) and an immature was in the Alviso salt ponds the same day (MMR, SCR). The immature Snow Goose seen in the Palo Alto area earlier in the fall was found again on 21 Dec at Byxbee Park (J&MMe, MMR). Finally, three birds were seen south of Hwy 152 on 30 Dec (SCR), very near the county line. **Ross's Geese** were also well represented with three birds with the Canadas on the fields at Bailey and Santa Teresa on 20 Dec (SCR), an immature at the Arzino Ranch on 20-29 Dec (RC *fide* SCR, SCR), and three south of Hwy 152 on 30 Dec (SCR).



Drawing by Emelie Curtis

The rarest of our rare geese, however, was a **Brant**, found in the vicinity of the Sunnyvale WPCP ponds 12-15 Dec (SCR, v.ob.). There are no previous records from November to January. Although the numbers of **Wood Ducks** wintering at Almaden Reservoir have been variable, a count of 120 on 6 Dec (AV) was a record high. Three to six **Eurasian Wigeons** were found on the Alviso salt ponds 12-20 Dec (MMR, MJM, SCR) but stayed out of the San Jose count circle. Palo Alto had no better luck as a male at the Sunnyvale WPCP ponds 12-15 Dec (SCR, v.ob.) was not seen on count day. Both counts did better with **Blue-winged Teal** with a pair in the vicinity of the Sunnyvale Baylands on 20 Dec (PS, DMcI *fide* AV) and two pairs in the Palo Alto Flood Control Basin (FCB) on 21 Dec (J&MMe) and another male in Flood Slough in Menlo Park the same day (MJM). '**Eurasian**' **Green-winged Teal** were seen on Salt Pond A9 in Alviso on 12 Dec (MMR,

MJM) as well as along Stevens Creek near the mitigation area on 21 Dec (WCa). The only **Redheads** for the month were three on the Sunnyvale WPCP ponds on 21 Dec (MMR) and three more on Charleston Slough on 24 Dec (MD *fide* MMR). For the sixth winter, **Tufted Ducks** turned up along the bay with a male and female found on the Sunnyvale WPCP ponds on 12 Dec (SCR) and the male, at least, seen through the end of the month (m.ob.). One to two male **Barrow's Goldeneyes** have been found regularly at Shoreline Lake in December, at least through the 24th (MD *fide* MMR). Seven **Hooded Mergansers** on Felt Lake on 21 Dec (AME et al.) were from a location where they are now expected, but a female in the Isabel Valley on 29 Dec (MMR, MJM, AK) was from a high elevation in the Diablo Range where they are still considered very rare.

Raptors through Skimmers

An **Osprey** on Coyote Reservoir on 1 Dec (EGC, JG) was seen to lose its fish catch to a **Bald Eagle**. A single Osprey was at the Parkway Lakes on 9 Dec eating its prey without competition and two more birds were seen at the Ogier Avenue ponds (SCR). Additional Bald Eagles include single adults in the Isabel Valley on 29 Dec (MMR, MJM, AK) and on Calero Reservoir the same day (TR). For the third winter a '**Harlan's**' **Red-tailed Hawk** has been found along the Guadalupe River near Trimble with observations on 10 Dec (TR), 12 Dec (MJM), and 20 Dec (ADeM *fide* AV). The high tides brought out one to two **Black Rails** at the Palo Alto Baylands 2-6 Dec (v.ob.) and two were there on 31 Dec as well (*fide* MMR). The only **Snowy Plovers** found this month were a single bird on the northwestern side of Salt Pond A14 in Alviso on 20 Dec (MMR) and two birds north of the Alviso Marina on 24 Dec (MJM). Record numbers of **Lesser Yellowlegs** were found in December. Single birds were at the Mountain View Forebay on 12 Dec (PC et al.) and a construction pond south of the Stevens Creek Mitigation Area on

Field Notes *continued*

the San Jose-Santa Clara WPCP ponds (RC, GO *fide* AV). Finally, on 30 Dec, on Bloomfield Road in the South County area, three birds were in a wet field (SCR). A **Ruddy Turnstone** at the mouth of San Francisquito Creek, in both counties on 21 Dec (MMR), was unusual. A single **Red Knot** at the southeast corner of Salt Pond A18 in Alviso on 20 Dec (CJC *fide* AV) was completely unexpected as there are few winter records in the county. Fourteen birds on the San Francisquito Creek delta just over the county line in San Mateo on 21 Dec (MMR) were from a location where they have been found regularly in the past. Three **Sanderlings** were found on Salt Pond A13 in Alviso on 20 Dec (MMR, SCR) and the next day, single birds were on Salt Pond A3N in Sunnyvale and at the San Francisquito Creek delta in San Mateo County (both MMR). A remarkable concentration of **Common Snipe** was found on 26 and 30 Dec (AME, SCR) along Bloomfield Road with a total of 220 on the latter date (SCR). A surprising **Little Gull**, in adult winter plumage, flew by an Alviso window on 31 Dec (SBT *fide* MMR). This fourth county record was certainly a grand way to wind out a year. The adult **Lesser Black-backed Gull** wintering in Alviso was seen on 8 Dec (SCR), but not found at typical locations during the rest of the month. Of great interest, the apparent 2nd-winter Lesser Black-backed Gull found last year at Lake Cunningham, was seen there again on 20 Dec (SCR *et al.*) and 27 Dec (MMR). A 1st-winter **Glaucous Gull** has been found fairly regularly from 12 Dec on (NL, v.ob.) at the Fremont Lagoons just north of the county line in Alameda. On 20 Dec an adult was seen in the New Chicago Marsh (SCR), and most surprising was the 2nd-winter bird found inland at Almaden Lake on 25 Dec (JMa). The **Black Skimmer** flock at Charleston Slough has remained at 12 during December (m.ob.).

Owls through Phainopepla

Just as last year, a **Long-eared Owl** was heard on Mines Road just south of the Alameda County line on 29 Dec (RJR *et al.*) on the Mt. Hamilton CBC. More

surprising, a **Northern Saw-whet Owl** was in the same location (RJR *et al.*)—its status in the Diablo Range is poorly known. **Lewis's Woodpecker** has largely withdrawn from areas along San Antonio Valley Road, but 12 were counted in the Isabel Valley on 29 Dec (MMR, MJM, AK). A hybrid sapsucker, probably a **Red-naped X Red-breasted Sapsucker** was at Alum Rock Park on 30 Dec (MMR). These hybrids may be as common or more so than their Red-naped parent. The **Eastern Phoebe** spending its sixth winter at Shady Oaks Park in San Jose was seen again on 11 Dec (MJM). A **Cassin's Kingbird** was found along San Felipe Road just north of Pacheco Creek on 30 Dec (SCR). This recent invader has attempted to nest in this area in the last two years. Occasional in winter, **Tree Swallows** were found in large concentrations this month. High counts include 19 on Lake Cunningham on 20 Dec and 35 over San Felipe Lake on 30 Dec (both SCR). Unusual in winter, a **House Wren** was seen in a Menlo Park yard on 12 Dec (GO) and a surprising bird was found for its 4th winter at the north end of San Antonio Valley on 29 Dec (RJR *et al.*). **Golden-crowned Kinglet** numbers appear to have declined in December although seven in Isabel Valley on 29 Dec (MMR, MJM, AK) and six in Alum Rock Park on 30 Dec (MMR) were good totals. **Phainopepla** totals on the Mt. Hamilton CBC on 29 Dec include two in Isabel Valley (MMR, MJM, AK) and three in the San Antonio Valley (NL).

Warblers through Evening Grosbeak

More regular in recent winters, single **Yellow Warblers** were found at Lake Cunningham on 20 Dec (SCR *et al.*) and along Geng Road near San Francisquito Creek on 21 Dec (BMcK). Unusual numbers of **Black-throated Gray Warblers** have also been found this month with one at Arastradero Preserve on 6 Dec (TGr), one at McClellan Ranch on 8 Dec (GHa), and one in Vierra Park in Santa Clara on 20 Dec (SMi *et al.*). A **Wilson's Warbler** in Berryessa Creek Park on 12 Dec (AV) is slightly less expected. A female **Western Tanager** was found at the Stanford Medical Center on 4 Dec (DSt) and a male

was along San Francisquito Creek near University on 23 Dec (MD *fide* MMR). A **Vesper Sparrow** was found in the flock of sparrows and larks on Sierra Road summit on 20 Dec (SCR). A **Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow** on 5 Dec at the Palo Alto Baylands (*fide* KPa) was the only report of this high-tide specialty. Also on the high tides, single **Swamp Sparrows** were seen at the Palo Alto Baylands on 3 Dec (MMR) and 31 Dec (RCo, MMR). Surprisingly, another bird was found at the north end of San Antonio Valley on 29 Dec (NL, RJR *et al.*). **White-throated Sparrows** have been well reported this month with at least five birds at feeders and an additional five birds found during the Christmas counts. Yard feeders have also been the source of our only wintering orioles. A female **Hooded Oriole** was at a Santa Clara feeder on 14 Dec (GM *fide* GHa) and a **Bullock's Oriole** was at a Milpitas feeder 14–17 Dec (RL). Mt. Hamilton CBC totals for **Lawrence's Goldfinch** on 29 Dec included 22 in the Isabel Valley (MMR, MJM, AK) and 29 in various parts of San Antonio Valley (WGB, NL). A male and female **Evening Grosbeak** were in a Menlo Park yard 12–13 Dec (GO) and a single bird was found in Mission City Cemetery in Santa Clara on 20 Dec (MMi *fide* AV).

Observers: Bill Bousman (WGB), William Cabot (WCa), Richard Carlson (RC), Rita Colwell (RCo), Chuck Coston (CJC), Emelie Curtis (EGC), Pat Curtis (PC), AlDeMartini (ADeM), Matthew Dodder (MD), Al Eisner (AME), Bill Eklund (BE), Jane Glass (JG), Tom Grey (TGr), Garth Harwood (GHa), Alma Kali (AK), Nick Lethaby (NL), Randy Little (RL), Mike Mammoser (MJM), John Mariani (JMa), David McIntyre (DMcI), Bert McKee (BMcK), Georgeann Meadows (GM), John & Maria Meyer (J&MMe), Mark Miller (MMi), Steve Miller (SMi), George Oetzel (GO), Kathy Parker (KPa), Bob Richmond (RJR), Mike Rogers (MMR), Steve Rottenborn (SCR), Tom Ryan (TR), Paul Saraceni (PS), Dick Stovel (DSt), Scott Terrill (SBT), Jerry Towner (JT), 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

Radicalized by Reality---My 5-year Anniversary

by Craig Breon
Environmental Advocate



I acknowledge it was Lenin who said, "We must be as radical as reality."

Don't read too much into my starting this piece with that quote. It's just that, as of January, I have worked for SCVAS and you, our members, for five years now. What I have experienced in that time has shaped me considerably. I thought I would share a few thoughts with my comrades.

An example might suffice to begin. I'm sitting in a standard meeting room, with local government staff people and perhaps development representatives, discussing a medium-sized housing project. I suggest that if the housing units were rearranged and perhaps a small portion of them removed, we could preserve enough room near the local creek to better protect wildlife. Lo-o-ong pause. Others around the table start looking at me as if I had two heads. I eventually leave the meeting wondering if I am some tree-hugging radical living in a world of make-believe. Only when I get back to the SCVAS office and discuss my position with a volunteer or board member or fellow environmentalist do I hear statements like, "Well, that seems reasonable," and I realize that I am not quite as crazy as the meeting room stares implied.

Rebel with a cause

While my job has certainly taught me about the realities of what our organization can ask or expect from conservation efforts, my own personality still rebels at those limitations. I seem to have developed a somewhat different world view. I've learned that my view is shared by a great number, probably the majority of our membership. Nonetheless, that world view seems barely comprehensible to so many others I encounter during my working days, and those people make most of the decisions.

Terms like "radical," "conservative," and "liberal" have begun to lose their meaning for me. If an individual with

enormous wealth squandered their nest egg in order to live as ostentatiously as possible, he or she would be called a libertine, a spendthrift, irresponsible. If, on the other hand, a person or company espouses a philosophy that says despoiling forests, fields, or rivers in the name of free market economic progress is not only permissible but admirable, we call that person a conservative. How can the word "conservative" have strayed so far from the concept of "conservation"? How can the majority of an entire country with 5% of the world's population consuming more than 20% of the world's resources not realize that something is amiss? Am I somehow wrong in thinking that your average 27 year-old computer programmer with no children and few plans to go backpacking probably doesn't need a sports utility vehicle? Do others actually find malls aesthetically pleasing?

Just the truth, please

I have become increasingly aware of this gulf between my sensibilities and those of the development community. I have occasionally begun to use the phrase, "Speak the Truth and Shame the Devil." I may make it my motto. OK, I acknowledge that it may be arrogant to think that I have a direct line to the truth, but we environmentalists have generally been labeled sanctimonious, so why stop now?

I adamantly believe that: a) the way we as a country treat our natural resources is WAY out of whack, with Silicon Valley being an excellent poster child for this mentality; b) this will come back to haunt us if it hasn't already (sat on Hwy. 880 at 5:30 lately?); and, c) we here at Audubon are urging reasonable measures to begin to reverse the trend.

With those beliefs firmly in mind, how should we conduct ourselves? First, with honesty towards ourselves and those we deal with. Make few if any excuses for what others may perceive as radical opinions or suggestions. At the same time, bear in mind that we represent only one of the important interests in society, and that compromises must be made (but that currently we make far too many).

Second, with tactics appropriate to the circumstances. For example, the Santa Clara Valley Water District is making an honest attempt to incorporate an ethic of conservation, so we work cooperatively with them whenever possible. Meanwhile, several city councils in the region are hell-bent for pavement, and in facing them we should consider using every possible tool.

Breon's bird blockade?

Thus, we have entered into litigation three times in the last two years, and occasionally been more directly critical of whole councils or individual council members. By and large, they deserved it. I'm thinking we should next get into the business of "direct action"---blockades, protests, spectacles. OK, I'm kidding, but primarily because the Audubon Board of Directors would (wisely) not let me go there; if left to my own devices, I'd try to round up egrets and herons into some bizarre, feathered version of San Francisco's "Critical Mass" bicycling extravaganza.

Third, with realistic expectations and humor. For all the excellent victories we have had and will have, we still lose a lot. A few years ago, I heard an environmental activist from India relate his experience this way, "Like you, I get the feeling sometimes that we are just beating our heads against a wall. But while we'll no doubt get bloody heads, I think we may have some effect on the wall also." Enough said.

Finally, with appreciation for those around us who keep us sane. Mainly, I mean rocks, trees, flowing water, birdsong, and the occasional glimpse of a bobcat or gray whale. I also mean the kind words and camaraderie of so many Audubon members, volunteers, and friends. The best compensation I get for this job is the heartfelt thanks and the hard work from those who believe as I do. Thanks for a good five years. Please urge me to work harder and better, as I will you.

Green Team Update

by Leda Beth Gray
(Second of three installments)

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 can join a Green Team, either by putting together your own team of about 6 households or by getting on a list at Bay Area Action and joining with others who do the same. Either one or two people from each household can participate. A series of six meetings are held about every two weeks or as the team decides to schedule them, each meeting covering a different topic: waste, chemicals, energy, transportation, water, and community. Participation costs \$25 per household, which includes a copy of the Green Action Guide as well as a binder of environmental information specific to your area. Anyone interested in participating on a Green Team or getting further information may call Bay Area Action at (650) 321-1994.

Choosing your chemicals

Our team's third meeting was on energy, and was hosted by my husband Dave and myself at our house in Palo Alto. We began with a follow-up on the chemicals chapter. I had chosen to investigate laundry detergent and other household cleaners, to find out how to evaluate them in terms of household and environmental safety. I found that although companies are not required to list ingredients, some of the cleaners that claim to be environmentally safe actually do list their ingredients. I selected laundry detergent, toilet bowl cleaner, and others that listed specific ingredients that I knew, or listed "plant-based" or "soy-based" ingredients on their labels. Many mass-market cleaners are petroleum-based.

We also discussed specific pest control measures found not to involve harmful chemicals, such as a spray containing chile peppers that repelled earwigs from plants. Other safe pest control solutions are found in books such as *"Rebugging Your Home and Garden, A Step-by-Step Guide to Modern*

Pest Control" by Ruth Troetschler and others (Ruth is a member of our team). She set us straight on pest control and added information to the Green Team book.

We had all done energy audits as homework for this meeting, answering a simple questionnaire that surveyed energy usage, insulation, appliances and our habits. The energy audit had us investigate our water heaters, and some of us were surprised to learn about the settings for various levels of heat, including a "vacation" setting to use when leaving for an extended period. As hosts of the meeting, Dave and I led the discussion and made notes on what activities team members selected. One of the Green Team members who was renting said she had drafts coming in around her front door, and we encouraged her to install some inexpensive weather-stripping to solve the problem. Another couple had made (previous to the Green Team) insulating covers to put up in their large windows at night, hidden by blinds and discreetly impeding heat-loss.

The activities Dave and I signed up for were: wrapping the pipes coming from the water heater; setting the heater on "vacation" when we went away for extended periods; checking temperature in our refrigerator; checking our refrigerator door seal for air loss; checking places in the house that needed caulking and weather-stripping; and lastly, turning lights out when not in use. It is easy to neglect the latter, and we can certainly use improvement.

Clean those fridge coils

At the next meeting we did a follow-up discussion on the energy-saving measures we had decided to take, and I checked off the activities people told me they had completed. Many were still in progress, but that's okay. I proudly displayed a special apparatus that I had made for cleaning refrigerator coils that are under the refrigerator. It consists of a wooden dowel with thick-wall rubber tubing attached with duct tape. The dowel allows you to poke into various locations under the refrigerators. The tubing is held to the



end of the vacuum cleaner hose with your hand, and you don't really need to worry about making a perfect seal as plenty of suction comes through the small tube. Not fancy, but it works really well!

The next chapter was on transportation. We had done fuel audits and estimated our distances driven per week. We discussed ride-sharing, public transit, walking or biking, and other issues such as making sure your car is in tune, combining several errands into one trip and purchasing food that is grown locally, all measures that reduce air pollution. There was also discussion of alternative fuels and conversion of cars from gas to electric. Our Green Team coach showed us a sports car that he helped to convert to electric as a project for Bay Area Action.

Dave and I selected several activities for the transportation chapter: researching transit options; walking or biking once a week; unloading weight out of our car (we had a bunch of stuff in the trunk); correcting our tire pressure; and favoring locally grown and produced items when shopping. Some of these activities had been weighing on our consciences--- now we're going to get credit for doing them!

Credit consists of a check mark on a piece of paper and the admiration of your teammates. People seem to feel good when they can come back to the group and say that they completed something and then get credit. They like getting the check mark. We actually had discussions about getting credit for tasks, such as whether you could get part credit if a task was partly done. Join a Green Team and you can get credit, no matter what level you're at. There are activities for every level.

Next month: water usage, community involvement

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