



THE AVOCET

The Newsletter of the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society

April 1999

Open Space---Where the Wild Things Are

by *Clysta Seney*

Santa Clara Valley Audubon members can rejoice that the Santa Clara County Open Space Authority (SCCOSA) has begun its work in the Diablo Range. Much of the Palassou Ridge and the best sycamore alluvial woodlands along Coyote Creek are contained in the fledgling Authority's \$1.5 million first acquisition, 3200 acres of the Lakeview Meadows Ranch.

If you went on the annual Chapter field trip (March 27th this year) to the Gilroy Hot Springs area you saw (besides the excellent birds) the undammed Coyote Creek floodplain which is the southern and eastern boundary of the ranch. When you drive south down Highway 101, look east around San Martin and you'll see the Palassou Ridge. The panoramic vistas of the Valley from this vantage point are stunning. Looking towards the rising sun you see ridge after ridge of oaks and madrone.

The Lakeview Meadows opportunity was presented to SCCOSA by the Nature Conservancy of California (TNC). TNC



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It's about comprehending our thresholds and allowing biodiversity to unfold.

It's about being mindful of other species and ensuring resting spots for the mystery of migration.

It's about hearing what the Beatles meant when they sang:

Let It Be, Let It Be....

Oaks on Palassou Ridge

has conducted intensive scientific research into the Diablo Range and identified this entire range as a critical sensitive habitat for native California plants and wildlife. TNC constructed a \$6.3 million purchase for the total 9,234 acre ranch. By partnering with the Authority and other agencies this land and habitat will be preserved for all time.

To support SCCOSA the average household in the Valley (in the cities of Santa Clara, San Jose, Campbell, Milpitas, Morgan Hill and in the unincorporated areas of the County not in Midpeninsula Open Space District) pays one dollar a month. Twenty cents of every dollar goes back to the five cities to use on local urban open space projects.

In the City of Santa Clara Director of Parks and Recreation and member of the SCCOSA Technical Advisory Committee Larry Wolfe reports that this year's

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General Membership Meeting
Wednesday, April 21
"Spring Birds of the Western States"
with Howard and Lynn Jameson
Cupertino Library
Torrey Ave/Town Center Lane, Cupertino
7:30 Hospitality 8:00 Program

For three weeks in May and June of 1998, the Jamesons birded their way through Nevada, Utah, Wyoming, Montana, Idaho, and Oregon collecting images of birds in breeding plumage. Visiting many of the well-known birding areas as well as sites off the beaten path, they have assembled an all-bird slide presentation that promises to be exciting. They began photographing nature underwater 30 years ago, and have since developed a passion for capturing birds with their cameras, creating a "Jewels of Nature" collection of bird portraits. Join us tonight for a new look at Western avifauna with this talented duo of bird photographers. (Meeting location is off S. De Anza Blvd, just south of Stevens Creek Blvd).

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VIEW FROM THE OFFICE

by Grant Hoyt, Editor



The view from the office is indeed beautiful this time of year, as the lush riparian foliage along Stevens Creek begins to bloom and the local titmice, chickadees, orioles, grosbeaks and warblers assume their annual nesting duties. This year, however, the view within the office is a little different, as our

ex-Chapter Manager Garth Harwood is no longer occupying his usual post.

Those of us who came to know Garth in his two and-a-half-year stint at SCVAS are truly sorry to see him leave. Garth's dedication and commitment to the job, and to the world of birds, wildlife, and their conservation has been truly phenomenal. His rapport with office volunteers and ability to spread the Audubon message to the community have helped tremendously as SCVAS has flourished during his tenure. Garth's passion for educating the public, from small children to teens and adults, has provided the kind of outreach that an organization like ours needs to achieve its goals. Garth applied his patience, knowledge, and intuitive bond with the natural world to his role as educator with great skill, care, and success.

While we are certainly going to miss Garth at McClellan Ranch, we've got to carry on---there's a busy office to manage, programs to develop, events and meetings to staff, field trips to plan, etc. All of us on the Board, committees, and various volunteer sub-groups need to bear down as we strive to keep things running smoothly while we look for a new Chapter Manager. People have already begun stepping up to help:

⇒ Board Member Leda Beth Gray has agreed to act as Interim Chapter Manager for a few months, working Monday through Thursday from approximately 10 AM to 6 PM. We are fortunate to have such a knowledgeable and efficient individual pinch-hit for us at this level---thanks, Leda Beth!

⇒ Ulrike Keyssner has recently started as Volunteer Coordinator, a 50% paid position. Already an active member of the Education Committee, Ulrike will staff the office on Fridays, and otherwise busy herself with the task of organizing the many chapter volunteers and their varied efforts.

⇒ Craig Breon, our tireless Environmental Advocate, has been invaluable as jack-of-all-trades and "Answer Man" for volunteers, new staff, and phone-callers, in addition to his ongoing duties as stalwart protector of habitat and challenger of evil developers.

So be patient with us during this time of transition. We'll muddle through this period somehow. One significant piece of good news is that Garth has gener-

ously offered to remain available to answer questions and give advice as needed over the next few months. He has also decided to stay on as coordinator of the SCVAS bluebird-recovery program, the volunteer-based project that has thrived under Garth's leadership. Finally, he has offered to write an occasional column in this space on general birding topics, geared toward beginning and intermediate birders.

So we say to Garth---from the Board, staff, volunteers, and Chapter members---a most sincere "Thank you" for your outstanding work as a staff member, and now, a volunteer. See you on the bluebird trails!

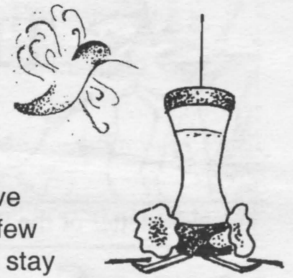
Putting together this newsletter for the months of Spring always reminds me how many events are happening during April-May-June, not to mention the great birding opportunities. We've got the Birdathon, International Migratory Bird Day, field trips, bird festivals, wildflower shows, and more. We're delighted to see the return of neotropical migrants along with the warmer weather, and we look forward to Western Wood-Pewees, Swainson's Thrushes, Yellow Warblers and Bullock's Orioles gracing our favorite haunts. But one event we never seem to acknowledge here at SCVAS is Earth Day.

It's not for lack of interest. Audubon members are a decidedly earth-friendly bunch. In fact, SCVAS is recognized as one of the leading environmental groups in the South Bay, and with good reason. It's just that Earth Day, an internationally-celebrated environmental event, hasn't made it onto these pages with much regularity.

So here's a start. It's not much, but we hereby encourage you to do something nice for the planet on April 22. It can be part of a group effort, like a creek or park clean-up, or a solo endeavor for those who prefer working that way. Pick up the trash that's been annoying you at a favorite birding spot. Write a letter to the editor on that local environmental issue that's got you riled up. Plant a tree, or some native shrubs, in your yard. Get your office mates to start recycling their soda cans. Every little act is helpful.

Earth Day will be publicized in the local papers and elsewhere; Bay Area Action of Palo Alto and other groups do a better job than we do in that regard. This is our pitch for honoring the Earth on its special Day. Please do what you can.

(Next month---Garth's View From . . . ??? Watch this space!)



April 1999 Calendar

****Denotes field trip. On all trips carpool if possible; bring binoculars, field guides, layered clothing. LO = Lunch optional; HRC = Heavy rain cancels.**

****Saturday Apr. 3, 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 and then go 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; LO; HRC.

****Sunday Apr. 4, 8:00 AM.** Ed Levin Co. Park. Leader: Frank Vanslager (408)257-3647. Note Daylight Savings Time---spring forward or be late for the trip! Take Hwy 237 east, crossing I-880 and I-680 (becomes Calaveras Rd.) to park entrance 2 miles after I-680. Meet in parking lot on right of Calaveras Rd. Migrants, local breeding birds in Milpitas' prime birding spot. Entrance fee, LO.

Wednesday Apr. 7, 7:30 PM. Bay Area Bird Photographers present Mark Rauzon with bird slides from his recent trip to Trinidad and Tobago. Lucy Evans Baylands Interpretive Center, E. Embarcadero Rd., Palo Alto.

****Saturday Apr. 10, 8:00 AM.** Half day. Picchetti Ranch OSP. Leader: Phyllis Browning (650)494-6360. From I-280 in Cupertino take Foothill Blvd south as it becomes Stevens Canyon Rd. Turn right on Montebello Rd and go about 1 mile, turn left, past winery entrance to preserve parking lot. Moderate walking past orchard, pond, through oak woodland.

****Sunday Apr. 11, 8:30 AM.** Charleston Slough. Leader: David Weber (650)857-9219. Meet at Terminal Way at end of San Antonio Rd north off Hwy 101 in Mt. View. All are welcome, as usual, but trip is geared toward beginning birders.

Tuesday Apr. 13, 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: American Black Oystercatcher.

****Wednesday Apr. 14, 8:30 AM.** Half day. Almaden Quicksilver Co. Park. Leader: Shirley Gordon (408)996-9863. In San Jose take Almaden Expwy south to Almaden Rd through town of New Almaden; turn right at park entrance. Spring woodland species should be active. Moderate walking of 3 miles; LO; HRC.

****Saturday Apr. 17, 8:30 AM.** Half day. Alamitos Creek and vicinity. Leader: John Mariani (408)997-2066. From Hwy 85 take Almaden Expwy south then left on Camden Ave. Go through 4-way stop; as road bears right look for parking place just before Graystone Lane. Easy walking. Possible Red-shouldered Hawk, Common Merganser, landbird migrants.

Saturday Apr. 17. New members get together at McClellan Ranch. See Pg. 11.

****Sunday Apr. 18, 8:30 AM.** Half day plus? North Coast of Santa Cruz County. Leader: Clay Kempf (831)761-8260. Meet at Davenport Landing on Hwy 1, 12 miles north of Santa Cruz. Seabirds, coastal migrants, local breeding birds. Bring spotting scope, lunch, liquids, full tank of gas; please carpool if possible.

****Saturday Apr. 24, 8:30 AM.** Long half day. Leader: Al Eisner (650)364-3686. Meet at Gazos Creek Coastal Access parking lot, 2 miles south of Pigeon Pt. on Hwy 1. (Leader will be scoping seabirds at 7:30 on Pigeon Pt. Rd north of lighthouse---early birders welcome.) Breeding birds, marsh birds, migrants. Spotting scope helpful.

****Sunday Apr. 25, 8:00 AM.** Half day. Stevens Creek Co. Park. Leader TBA. (Call Bob Reiling (408)253-7527). From I-280 in Cupertino take Foothill Expwy south 2.1 miles, becoming Stevens

Canyon Rd. Turn left into first (Chestnut) park entrance and meet in first parking lot. One of South Bay's best riparian birding spots for migrants and local breeders. LO.

****Saturday May 1, 8:30 AM.** Full day. Mines Rd. and vicinity. Leader: Don Schmoltdt (510)547-5108. From I-580 go east over Altamont Pass to I-5, south on I-5 to Patterson exit, then west on Del Puerto Canyon Rd. Meet at first pullout (look for Don's "BAJA OWL" license). Possible Phainopepla, Costa's Hummingbird, Lewis' Woodpecker, Lawrence's Goldfinch.

****Wednesday Apr. 28, 8:30 AM.** Stevens Creek Park. Leader: Roxie Handler (408)730-1745. From Hwy 280 in Cupertino take Foothill Rd south approx. 2 miles; turn left into Chestnut parking area. Nesting birds in wonderful riparian habitat. LO; RC.

****Sunday May 2, 8:00 AM.** Half day. Alum Rock Park. Leader: Dave Cook (408)871-9552. From Hwy 101 or I-680 take Alum Rock Ave northeast toward hills and into park. Turn left at entrance kiosk (bottom of hill, before bridge); meet in first parking lot, near "Rustic Lands" area. Moderately strenuous 3 to 4 mile walk. Possible Rufous-crowned Sparrow, Canyon Wren. LO.

****Saturday May 8, 7:00 AM.** Half day. Birding by ear at Smith Creek. Leader: Grant Hoyt (650)969-7892. From I-680 or Hwy 101 take Alum Rock Ave northeast, turn right on Mt. Hamilton Rd. Go past Grant Ranch Park entrance, continue to Smith Creek Fire Station (allow 45 min. from Alum Rock Ave). Moderate 1 to 2 mile walk. Emphasis on identifying songs of flycatchers, wrens, warblers, grosbeaks, bunting, finches at this riparian haven.

Tuesday May 11, 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: Burrowing Owl.

Wild things---they make our hearts sing

from Page 1

“twenty percent monies” from his citizens are targeted to go towards levee trails along the San Tomas Aquino Channel and to begin the restoration of the Rancho Ulistec Open Space Preserve, 40 acres of the former Fairway Glen Golf Course. SCVAS members will recall the Chapter’s successful efforts two years ago to save this land along the Guadalupe River from development for luxury homes and condos.

This preserve will be a premier example of urban open space that benefits citizens and business employees as well as the wildlife that call the Guadalupe home and use it for migration routes. Also, the adjacent levee trails will offer public access to open space areas along the Valley’s channeled waterways.

The Santa Clara County Open Space Authority was established by the California State Legislature in 1993. It consists of seven elected Directors and a fifteen-member Citizens Advisory Committee. There are several openings on the Committee at this time. If you live in one of the five cities, I urge you to submit an application. As openings arise you could contribute your ideas on how open space could be managed. Every five years the Committee develops a plan to assist the Authority to achieve its mission.

Currently the Committee is working to recommend land management policies that 1) provide proper care of open space lands; 2) allow public access appropriate to the nature of the land for recreation; 3) are consistent with ecological values; and 4) compatible with agricultural uses. It’s an opportunity to learn and to share.

The Committee has at-large members as well as representatives from civic organizations, business, parks, agriculture, developers, trails and labor. Surely you fit into one of these categories!! If you are interested in applying contact the Authority’s offices at (408) 224-7476. SCVAS member David Poeschel serves

as representative for Environment. Dave led a team on the Christmas Bird Count this year and has a nest box route in South San Jose.

For me, the hardest part of being on the Authority is having to choose. So many opportunities are brought forward. And, a dollar a month per household only goes so far. Do we want to acquire as much land as possible now before costs go up even more, or to spend monies for the infrastructure and staff required to open up initial acquisitions to hiking trails, cycling trails, or horse trails? Providing and expanding human access can be costly both in dollars and impact. Additionally, SCCOSA’s mission includes preserving agriculture, and the Authority is assessing grazing management techniques and agricultural conservation easements. So many choices and each so important.

Some potential land acquisitions are home to endangered species like the *dudleya* plant, tiger salamander, Bay checkerspot butterfly and Western pond turtle. SCCOSA is exploring partnerships with the Native Plant Society, local universities and SCVAS to offer limited docent-led tours where sensitive habitat exists. In the case of extraordinary habitat like the pristine Coyote Creek riparian corridor or active agricultural lands, no access may be appropriate.

Landowners of hillside close to the Valley floor or agricultural properties are invited to contact SCCOSA. In addition to simple acquisition the Authority has several alternative acquisition methods that can be mutually beneficial to both the landowner and the Authority.

Another fledgling organization is the Land Trust for Santa Clara County. While SCCOSA is a public entity, the Land Trust can work with landowners privately. The newly established Trust, like the Authority, is hiring staff and will be identifying land opportunities and funding partners to continue the mission for preserving open space in Santa Clara Valley.

The Land Trust has already received startup funding from the Packard Foundation and is chaired by Jerry Estruth. Jerry was the first Chairperson of SCCOSA and he and his family have participated in SCVAS Christmas Bird Counts.

Can you count the ways to be involved with open space? In the next few months SCCOSA (with offices off of Santa Teresa in South San Jose) will be hiring a General Manager, an office manager, an accountant, and a property acquisition specialist. If you know someone with a passion for open space and talent, tell them about the Authority.

Volunteer for the Citizens Advisory Committee. Vote wisely for your district’s directors. Support the fundraising efforts. Innovate. Start up an open space stewardship company and bid on contracts to manage acquisitions in an environmentally responsible manner. Tell your friends about the incredible satisfaction of watching golden and bald eagles cavort in our county’s skies.

It will only be with civic involvement, innovative partnerships and through ongoing education that more of the Valley’s population will come to understand the benefits of open space and the differences between parks, recreation and open space. Each land use concept has a different niche in our sense of place and our sense of well-being. And each must be respected.

For me, open space is about protecting our environmental and biological underpinnings. It’s about comprehending our thresholds and allowing biodiversity to unfold. It’s about understanding our interdependence with other species and ensuring resting spots for the mystery of migration. It’s about hearing what the Beatles meant when they sang “Let It Be, Let It Be” . . .

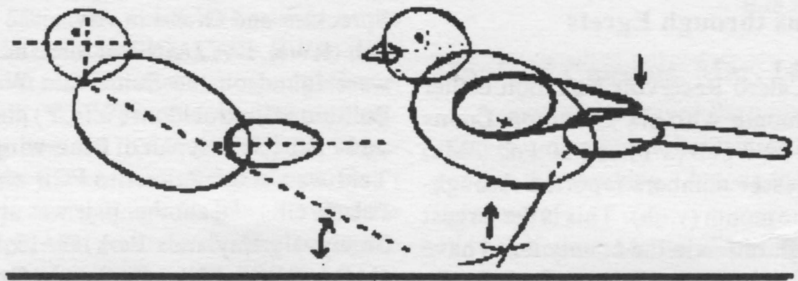
---Clysta Seney, Director,
District 3 SCCOSA and SCVAS member

Learn To Draw With Edward Rooks

Internationally-known wildlife artist Edward Rooks is offering a drawing class for SCVAS members this spring. The subject is drawing birds, and class will be taught at the Audubon headquarters at McClellan Ranch in Cupertino.

Four Saturday morning sessions of three hours each will be held on May 8th, 15th, 22nd and 29th. One session will be held in the field. Class is limited to 20 participants and will cost \$60 per person, with half the proceeds going to SCVAS. Registration must be made in advance by sending a check made out to SCVAS to: Edward Rooks, 4919 Brewster Ave., San Jose CA 95124-5448.

The first class will cover the drawing of birds using correct proportions and



The beginnings of a bird art masterpiece

capturing gestures. The second class will focus on drawing parts of birds and combining the knowledge of the parts with the gesture drawings. During the field trip, participants will practice capturing bird gestures and different habitat compositions with sketches, photographs, and notes. In the last class, students will work on drawing dynamic compositions of birds in their habitat using the references previously gathered.

Edward is a wildlife artist of considerable stature whose works are well-known in California and in his native Trinidad and Tobago. He is an SCVAS member and volunteer, and his recent bird-sketching workshop at a Wednesday general meeting was well-attended and enthusiastically received. Sign up early to enroll in this very special drawing class. (If response is positive, future classes may be offered.)

Seeking Raptor-seekers

The Golden Gate Raptor Observatory is looking for as few good people to count and track the Pacific States' largest bird of prey migration. The migration of tens of thousands of hawks, falcons, and eagles passes over the Marin Headlands each fall. Since 1983, GGRO has trained volunteers to study birds using counting, banding, and telemetry.

More than 270 GGRO volunteers---from all over the Bay Area---tracked and monitored the 1998 migration of nineteen different raptor species. New volunteers are now being sought for the 1998 training class. Volunteers must be 18 years of age and able to commit to one regular day every two weeks from August through December 1999, along with some weekend and evening trainings in July.

The 1999 informational meetings are open to the public. Come on Tuesday, April 27 or Thursday, April 29, from 7 to 9:30 PM, or on Saturday May 1 from 10 AM to 12:30 if you'd like to become involved. All meetings are held at Golden Gate National Recreation Area headquarters, Building 201 at Upper Fort Mason, San Francisco. Enter the Fort at Franklin and Bay Streets

For more information, call GGRO at (415)331-0730 or e-mail : ggro@ggnpa.org.



Sierra Nevada Field Campus

Environmental Education & Research
San Francisco State University

The Sierra Nevada Field Campus will once again be the site of the popular birding courses offered by San Francisco State University. This year's courses are:

- ◆ Birds of the Sierra Nevada, June 14 - 18, taught by Dave Shuford
- ◆ Bird Identification by Sound, June 14 - 18, taught by Luis Baptista
- ◆ Birdwatching in the Sierra Nevada, June 21 - 25, taught by David Lukas
- ◆ Intermediate Bird Banding, July 18 - 23 and
- ◆ Beginning Bird Banding, August 1 - 6, both taught by Jim Steele and Mac McCormick (both trainers for North American Banding Council)

Information regarding registration materials, food or how to contact instructors are included in brochure and information sheet available from Sierra Nevada Field Campus, S.F. State Univ., 1600 Holloway Ave., San Francisco CA 94132; phone (650) 738-1814 or (415) 338-1571. Or visit the website <http://thecity.sfsu.edu/snfc>. Bird checklist and list of nearby motels is also available on website. Sign up early as popular classes often fill up quickly.

Field Notes

by Bill Bousman

Loons through Egrets

Calero Reservoir was loon center this month with six **Common Loons** there on 7 Feb (VT) and 20 Feb (JMa) and lesser numbers reported throughout the month (v.ob). This is the largest concentration in the county that I have records for. The **Red-necked Grebe** found at Almaden Lake in December was seen regularly in early February with the final sighting on 16 Feb (JMa). Just south of the county line, 15 **American White Pelicans** on San Felipe Lake on 27 Feb (MMi) represent a scarce February record. Two or three **American Bitterns** were seen at the Ogier Avenue ponds on 1 Feb (RWR, FV) in an area where they have nested in recent years. A single bird was along Los Gatos Creek near the Campbell percolation ponds on 15 Feb (C&JC). A **Cattle Egret** at the Arzino Ranch in Alviso on 24 Feb (JAC) was the first of the year.

Waterfowl

A lone **Greater White-fronted Goose** was on the Ogier Avenue ponds on 1 Feb (RWR, FV). An immature **Snow Goose** found on Almaden Lake last month was seen there regularly throughout the month (m.ob.). Similarly, a **Ross's Goose** found at Almaden Lake in January also remained through the end of February. Both geese were observed to forage away from the lake in nearby fields with the local Canada Geese (AV). Two other Ross's were also regular during February. A bird found at the waterbird pond on Coyote Creek below Hwy 237 at the end of January was seen there regularly through 19 Feb (m.ob.). The 1st-winter bird found at the Arzino Ranch in December also remained in the local area through the month. Wintering **Wood Ducks** remained at Almaden Reservoir in February with a high count of 40 on 20 Feb (AV). A male **Eurasian Wigeon**

was seen in the Palo Alto Flood Control Basin (FCB) on 14 Feb (MJM). Another male was on the pond near Spreckles and Grand in Alviso 22–24 Feb (RWR, FV, JAC) and three males were found on the Sunnyvale Water Pollution Control Plant (WPCP) ponds on 27 Feb (NL). A pair of **Blue-winged Teal** was in the Palo Alto FCB on 12 Feb (WGB) and another pair was at the Sunnyvale Baylands Park 13–15 Feb (MJM, RWR, FV). **Barrow's Goldeneyes** have remained scarce this winter with a single male reported from Shoreline Lake on 14 Feb (MJM). **Hooded Mergansers** have also been seen less this winter (or not reported)

*Iceland Gull, a
"phantom" species,
appeared again
this winter*

with four birds at Stevens Creek Reservoir on 2 and 26 Feb (TR), a pair on Coyote Creek above Hellyer CP on 8 Feb (MJM), another pair on Los Gatos Creek at the Campbell percolation ponds on 15 Feb (C&JC), and three birds along Arastradero Creek below Foothill Expressway on 21 Feb (VT). Concentrations of 50 **Common Mergansers** on Chesbro Reservoir on 15 Feb (JH) and the same number tallied on Calero Reservoir on 20 Feb (AV) were notable.

Raptors through Skimmers

A typical smattering of **Ospreys** were seen this month. A single male was on the Ogier Avenue ponds on 1 Feb (RWR, FV), while two birds were seen on the Parkway Lakes on 4 Feb (SCR). Chesbro Reservoir had a single bird on 15 Feb (JH), the Santa Clara Valley Water District Pond had another on 18 Feb (JMa), and a final bird was noted at well-visited Calero Res-

ervoir on 25 Feb (JMa). **Bald Eagles** have been well reported in February, in part because of the continuing presence of an adult at Calero Reservoir. This adult was seen at Calero on 7 Feb (GL, VT), 10 Feb (JMa), and 15 Feb (JH) and a second eagle was seen there on 7 Feb (GL). Away from Calero Reservoir, a 1st-year bird was seen over Coyote Creek at Hwy 237 on 12 Feb (SBT *fide* SCR) and an immature was at Anderson Reservoir on 23 Feb (TR). Rare in any season, a 1st-winter **Franklin's Gull** was found on the San Jose-Santa Clara WPCP drying ponds on 23 Feb (NL). A probable 1st-winter **Iceland Gull** was found on the San Jose-Santa Clara WPCP drying ponds on 12 Feb (AJ, SCR), not far from where similar birds were found last winter. This bird was studied, photographed, and compared to the many pale Thayer's Gulls nearby and appears distinct. Nonetheless, no records of this species have been accepted yet in California. This bird was seen at least through 26 Feb (v.ob.). The immature **Lesser Black-backed Gull** has continued to be found at Lake Cunningham and this month was seen more regularly (v.ob.). A 2nd-winter **Glaucous Gull** was at the San Jose-Santa Clara WPCP drying ponds on 12 Feb (AJ, SCR). A 1st-winter bird was found south of Newby Island on 15 Feb (RWR, FV) and possibly the same bird was at the Fremont Lagoons north of the landfill on 19 Feb (NL). Two 1st-winter birds were seen on the dump on 23 Feb (NL). More surprising was the 1st-winter bird found inland at Almaden Lake 16–17 Feb (JMa). The **Black Skimmer** flock at Charleston Slough has remained at seven through February (m.ob.).

Owls through Orioles

A **Short-eared Owl** was seen at Charleston Slough on 21 Feb (FV) and is the first bird recorded since October. The **Eastern Phoebe** wintering in Shady Oaks Park in San Jose was seen again on 10 Feb (RWR et al.). A single

Field Notes *continued*

Violet-green Swallow over Rancho San Antonio OSP on 2 Feb (JLi) was two to three weeks early, unless it wintered locally. A **Red-breasted Nuthatch** in Los Altos on 4 Feb (JLi) was the only one found away from the Santa Cruz Mountains. The first **House Wrens** usually return towards the end of March so one found along Arroyo Calero on 21 Feb (JMa) may have wintered nearby. A valley-floor **Winter Wren** was found near the Stanford Mausoleum 11–26 Feb (AME, MMR). Two **American Dippers** were found along Stevens Creek above Mt. Eden Road on 13 Feb (MJM) and a single bird was seen along Saratoga Creek in Saratoga on 15 Feb (DJ *fide* SCR). A few **Golden-crowned Kinglets** continue to be found on the valley floor. Two were along San Francisquito Creek above El Camino on 1 Feb (SCR) and three were along the Guadalupe River at Lick Mill on 25 Feb (JH). The famed male **Black-throated Blue Warbler** remained in Saratoga at least through 4 Feb (PC). Wintering **White-throated Sparrows** at two Los Gatos feeders remained at least through 1 Feb (JD) and 25 Feb (GL). A bird in the vicinity of the Stanford Mausoleum was found more or less regularly through February (v.ob.) and is probably the same one found there earlier in the winter. Single birds were found along San Francisquito Creek above El Camino on 1 Feb (SCR) and Arroyo Calero above Harry Road on 21 Feb (JMa). In addition, two birds were captured at the Coyote Creek Riparian Station on 6 Feb (LCh) and 18 Feb (RCo). An alfalfa field northeast of San Jose provided the unusual sighting of a **Lapland Longspur** on 2 and 4 Feb and a **Chestnut-collared Longspur** 4–27 Feb (SCR). The latter is only the fourth record for the county. A female **Hooded Oriole** found along Guadalupe Creek near the Coleman Avenue ponds on 21 Feb (AV) was probably a wintering bird as returning birds are not normally noted until after the middle of March.

Field Trip Reports

Oka Ponds, Mar. 13

Today's trip was well underway when Viki Baker spotted a single Common Snipe on one of the small bare islands in the middle of Los Gatos Creek (an amazing find at such a distance using only binoculars!). While the other birders were getting 50x and 100x views of the sometimes-you-see-'em-sometimes-you-don't snipe using Frank Vanslager's Questar scope, Viki was busy finding an American Bittern flying toward the far south-eastern corner of the park.

A female and an adult male Hooded Merganser were also in the creek near the islands and most of us were subsequently able to get at least quick glimpses of a Hutton's Vireo, Ruby-crowned Kinglets and a Lincoln's Sparrow (a Bushtit was a life bird for a woman from Ohio, but then you don't want to know what kind of birds she commonly sees). A good-sized group of Lesser Scaup were in the southernmost pond on the west side of the creek.

On our way back upstream after having seen a pair of Horned Grebes in the largest pond, more Common Snipe and a couple of Green Herons in the creek, Frank found a male and four female Ring-necked Ducks in the pond with the scaup. Although we "dipped" on the Common Goldeneye we did find a Cooper's Hawk

Observers: Bill Bousman (WGB), Les Chibana (LCh), Jack Cole (JAC), Rita Colwell (RCo), Chuck & Joan Coston (C&JC), Pat Curtis (PC), Jean Dubois (JD), Al Eisner (AME), Jan Hintermeister (JH), Alvaro Jaramillo (AJ), David Johnston (DJ), Gloria Leblanc (GL), Nick Lethaby (NL), Jim Liskovec (JLi), Mike Mammoser (MJM), John Mariani (JMa), Mark Miller (MMi), Mike Rogers (MMR), Bob Reiling (RWR), Steve Rottenborn (SCR), Tom Ryan (TR), Scott Terrill (SBT), 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

to add to the pair of American Kestrels we had seen during the day. In all, a total of 44 species was seen.

---Bob Reiling

Stanford Campus, Mar. 14

A good group braved the threatening weather and enjoyed the Stanford Campus trip this morning. Among the highlights were:

√ An immature Merlin which, after posing for Frank Vanslager's Questar, put on a dazzling speed show;

√ The Barn Owl (reported a week earlier by John Meyer---many thanks) in the south side of the seventh palm tree north of Museum Way on the west side of Palm Drive;

√ An Anna's Hummingbird on her nest;

√ A cooperative Red-shouldered Hawk perched on the edge of a building;

√ Western Bluebirds seen in three places ---near the business school, the medical center, and at Lake Lagunita---indicating that this species is doing well on campus, probably thanks to the nestbox program of Garth Harwood and others.

---Dick Stovel

Merlie the Merlin

Stanford resident and bird enthusiast Kendric Smith has been keeping tabs on a Merlin he calls "Merlie" who has returned to a favorite perch atop a tall tree visible from Kendric's home for several winters in a row. Here is a recent Merlie anecdote from Kendric:

"I watched Merlie catch a bird the other day. I had just put my binocs on his tree when he took off really fast (normal speed) toward El Camino. When he got about there I saw another bird approaching at 90 degrees. Merlie hit it and dropped. I think he caught the bird in his talons, since I only saw one body drop. Merlie must have seen that bird coming from a long way off, and paced his speed and triangulation to catch it in a straight flight. It was impressive.

"I also had a brown Merlin (*Dick Stovel's bird from 3/14?--Ed.*) on Merlie's tree the other day, so now we have to be more careful in identification."

Directions, Please

by Pete Dunne

Birding is a source of extreme gratification---and also the cause of considerable frustrations. There are binoculars that will not focus close enough . . . field guides that never depict the birds you find . . . fellow birders eager to tell you about the bird you didn't find.

"You just missed it."

"Really?"

"Flew when you turned the corner."

"Really?"

"I've waited thirty years to see one."

"Really? I've waited forty."

But the greatest frustration a birder can be frustrated by is not the bird you missed, not the bird that has eluded you for "forty years," but the one you can't find RIGHT NOW because some direction-challenged companion cannot get you on the bird.

How many times have you stood there . . . strangling with anxiety . . . a life bird/year bird/good bird hanging in the balance . . . and had some simple, accomplished, sedated fellow birder chirp: "It's right in front of you."

I don't know about you, but I find the are encompassing "right in front of me" to be a very large place (encompassing about half the known universe). Somehow it is always my fortune to fall in with people who couldn't direct a compass needle to magnetic north and whose sense of refining detail is as discriminating as gravity.

What do I mean by this?

I mean that in response to my next "I don't see it," they will invariably reply, "It's in the tree."

I have learned to stop all inquiries at this point. Further inquiry only confirms that the tree the person is referring to is "the tree right in front of us."

"Yes, that tree."

Sometimes, however, the birds I can't find are in clouds, not trees, and it is sometimes my fortune to be with people

who are *too* specific with their directions to be helpful---people who can't see the forest for the four-sided needles, the altocumulus for the water vapor.

I recall an occasion when a well-traveled companion tried to get me on some fast-retiring raptorial speck in a cloud-filled sky.

"Do you see the cloud shaped like Ecuador?"

"Ecuador?"

"Well, the bird is in Quito."

"Where the hell is Quito?"

Uh . . . forget it. The cloud just changed into Venezuela, and the bird's



leaving Caracas for the States."

I don't have any greater fortune finding seabirds (or choosing sea-birding companions). Here's another drama in which I once played a subordinate role.

"I've got a gannet."

"Where?"

"On the horizon. One o'clock. Going right."

"I don't have it."

"Two o'clock."

"Don't have it."

"Now going left again. One o'clock."

"Still don't have it."

"Twelve o'clock . . . 11:45 . . . 11:40 . . . 11:35."

A.M or P.M.? Okay, so maybe I'm

just not good at finding birds. And maybe I should be grateful, because finding birds and getting people on them sets up a whole nuther problem---like accountability. What if your identification is wrong?

Here's a story about a bird-finding exercise that went right . . . then wrong. It involved two tour leaders, whose names will remain anonymous.

"Gyr Falcon!" the first leader exclaimed.

"Where? Where?" the group chanted.

"In the scope," the leader replied.

All of the participants took their turn looking through the scope, and then the other leader got his turn.

"I don't see it," he said, after a long, pensive study.

Surprised, the first leader looked again and announced, "It's right in the center of the scope."

Respectfully, the second leader peered into the scope again only to announce, "I don't see the Gyr Falcon."

Exasperated, the first leader commandeered the scope and looked again. "It's dead center," he announced.

Like a general sending troops into a battle that cannot be won, like a judge sentencing a friend for crimes that do not warrant punishment, the second birder returned to the scope, peered down the barrel, sighed, and asked, "Where is the Gyr Falcon in relation to the Snow Bunting?"

Now, if only I'd been second leader on this trip, there wouldn't have been a problem.

Or a story.

First published in Living Bird, Autumn 1998. Reprinted by permission.

Illustration by Jeff Stipple

Attention, New Members!

You are invited to get acquainted with Santa Clara Valley Audubon on Saturday, April 17 at 9:00 AM at McClellan Ranch Park in Cupertino. This is the first in a series of programs offered to new members to learn about SCVAS and meet other new members.

On the 17th we'll start off with a short bird walk around the Park. McClellan Ranch Park is bordered by a stream, contains an old orchard, grassy open areas, and a community garden, and provides a good opportunity to see many species of birds. Dave Cook, a Board member and field trip leader, will lead the informal walk.

Afterwards, we'll serve coffee, tea and bagels in our meeting room. Chapter representatives and committee members will be on hand to discuss different Audubon programs and hear ideas from new members. The impressive SCVAS library and our gift shop will also be open for perusal.

So grab your binoculars (or come without---we have some loaners) and spend a few hours getting acquainted with SCVAS. We're excited about meeting our new members, so please join us if you can!

---Debbie Thompson
Membership Committee Chair

The California Native Plant Society
and the Ornamental Horticulture
Department of Foothill College present
the 24th annual

Wildflower Show and Native Plant Sale April 24 - 25 Foothill College

12345 El Monte Rd.

Los Altos Hills

10 AM - 4 PM

The sale of native plants will be held in the patio area of the Student Center, near the bookstore. Books, manuals, shirts, etc. will also be sold.

Guided walks to the Foothill campus native hill plant collection at 1:00 and 2:00 PM each day.

Bring eight quarters for campus parking.

Questions? Call Alfred Butner, Publicity Chairman, at (415) 493-4595.

** Pacific Loon ** Brown Pelican ** American Bittern ** Wood Duck ** Eurasian Wigeon ** Harlequin Duck ** Peregrine Falcon **

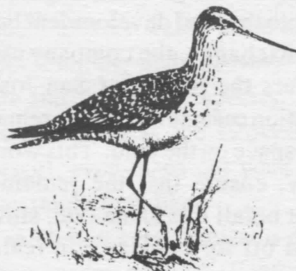
Migrate to Arcata for Godwit Days April 16-18, 1999

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arcatacy@tidepool.com Arcata is located 275 miles north of San Francisco on Humboldt Bay.
For up-to-the-minute information on local bird sightings call (707)822-LOON (5666).

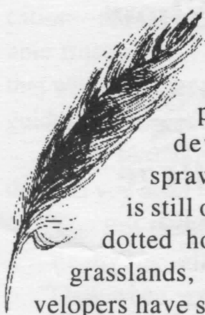
Varied Thrush ** Wren-tit ** Hermit Warbler ** Golden-crowned Sparrow ** Red Crossbill

Marbled Godwit ** California Gull ** Marbled Murrelet ** Tufted Puffin ** Barred Owl

** Spotted Owl ** Vaux's Swift ** Allen's Hummingbird ** Pacific-slope Flycatcher ** Purple Martin ** Black-capped Chickadee ** Winter Wren

A Broken Promise From IBM?

by Craig Breon
Environmental Advocate



The Almaden Valley of southwestern San Jose is poised to undergo devastating urban sprawl. The outer valley is still orchard, grazing, and dotted homes amidst rolling grasslands, but speculative developers have snapped up acre after acre, relishing the thought that the San Jose City Council will open the doors to development, rather like the Oklahoma land rush.

IBM has decided to jump the gun. Out of nowhere, IBM proposes to sell a portion of the land surrounding their Guadalupe campus to The Riding Group, a housing development company. The land lies between Arroyo Calero Creek and Santa Teresa Creek, both beautiful tributaries to Los Alamitos Creek, one of the best riparian areas left in the Valley.

This may sound like the typical Valley development scenario, but there's a twist. This IBM land was promised as open space to the people of San Jose nearly twenty years ago. Now IBM hopes that time will have erased memories of those promises so it can reap millions in profits from forgetfulness and deceit.

The Background

Here's the story. In the late 70's IBM asked the City of San Jose to allow it to build a corporate campus in an area nobody had imagined---the foothills above the Almaden Valley. At the time, their 580 acre site was home to two ranches, not only well beyond the sprawl of San Jose but outside the San Jose city limits, in rural Santa Clara County.

Traditional planning would have led to a denial of IBM's proposal. The area was not planned for any urban development, let alone a corporate campus, which typically would be located closer to population centers and public transit.

One factor sealed the deal for IBM's approval. The company offered the city 550 acres of open space in exchange for annexing the land to the city and providing it with urban services (water, utilities etc.). The land would be zoned "Private Open Space," meaning not accessible to the public, but nonetheless the open space would provide protection for a beautiful swath of land highly visible from the valley below.

The Original Deal

Just in case anybody doubts the solidity of this pact---and most likely IBM would want you to---here's some quotes from the records on this project. In a 1979 letter from IBM's attorneys to the San Jose Planning Department urging approval, the attorneys noted that, "The proposed IBM use will preclude residential development of this area," and would "offer an opportunity for private preservation of open space or agriculture." The project's 1979 staff report repeats these assertions, noting, "There would be no more pressure for residential development on these 580 acres." These words clearly demonstrate that this deal was meant to stand in perpetuity, with IBM granted a development permit that otherwise made little sense, and the people of San Jose getting valuable open space in return.

Despite these solemn words, IBM now wants to renege on their promise and get into the land development business. In exchange, the company cynically offers the people of San Jose a conservation easement over the remaining open space on the land. This would, in theory, ensure that the remainder could not befall this same fate, slowly portioned off for housing. In reality, it's a promise to do less than they already promised two decades ago. In other words, a gimmick.

There will likely be two key players in this decision before the San Jose City Council. Councilwoman Pat Dando represents this portion of the

city, and newly elected Mayor Ron Gonzales could set a pro-development or pro-open space tone with his treatment of the issue. Dando is a mixed voter on environmental issues, so this decision may be a tough one for her. She has worked well with Friends of Los Alamitos Creek, a citizen's group dedicated to creek protection and restoration projects. In addition, she opposed the Boulder Ridge Golf Course, which was nonetheless approved by the County Board of Supervisors. During her recent run for mayor, Dando ran ads depicting herself as a foe of large developments generating excess traffic in the region. Still, she has over time cast several votes which would cast that claimed reputation in doubt.

Mayor Gonzales was endorsed during the election by the League of Conservation Voters. Still, his previous votes on the County Board of Supervisors and positions taken during the election are unclear as to his environmental leanings. His position on the IBM issue could be an important indication of votes to come.

Setting precedence

Perhaps the most worrisome part of this development controversy---besides the broken promises---is the precedent such an approval could set. Similar open space dedications occur throughout much of San Jose and some other cities. In San Jose alone, important open spaces have been preserved in this manner in the Evergreen area, the Santa Teresa Ridge, the Berryessa Hills and elsewhere. With land values through the roof, what's to stop other landowners who made similar promises to the city to see this as a golden opportunity for extra profits at the expense of habitat and our regional quality of life. Already, we have heard rumor that another landowner along Sierra Road is considering a similar maneuver.

For San Jose residents, calling the offices of Dando and/or Gonzales to voice your opposition would help a lot.

continued next page

Broken Promise *cont'd*

Even if you don't live in or visit the Almaden Valley, this decision could affect open space near you. Councilwoman Pat Dando's # is 408-277-5251; Mayor Ron Gonzales' # is 408-277-4237.

Turning the Tables

Like many troubling issues, IBM's broken promises also present us with an opportunity. The simple fact that the city would entertain such a proposal shows that the process for dedicating open space throughout the city is flawed, but could be corrected. San Jose can turn this into a winning proposition by: a) declaring its intent to hold all landowners with previous open space dedications to their word; and b) demanding that all future open space dedications be backed up with conservation easements offered to the Santa Clara County Open Space Authority, the Santa Clara County Open Space Trust or other similar conservation organizations. This would ensure that promises made would be promises kept. Councilwoman Dando and Mayor Gonzales have the opportunity to turn this issue around and allow it to become a strong statement of the importance of open spaces to this community. Let's hope they seize that opportunity.

For more information about this issue or to get involved, you can contact Chris Mossing of the Woodside Homeowners Association (a local group opposed to the project) at 408-997-7226 (cmossing@earthlink.net). In addition, you can always contact me at the office: 408-252-3748 (craig@scvas.org). Remember, eternal vigilance is the price of freedom . . . and open space.

The Golden-crowned Sparrow

A Winter visitor seven months long,
In Spring we hear his lovely song.
To the north flies the Golden-crowned
Sparrow.
To forest? tundra? Point Barrow?

---Jim Liskovec

Birdathon to Fund Bay Project, Education Programs for Kids

It's that exciting time of year when once again bird enthusiasts are found racing all over the Bay Area (and beyond) to find as many bird species as they can. Yes, it's the annual SCVAS Birdathon fundraiser!

If you have never experienced a Birdathon first-hand, this is the year to be a part of this event. Contact friends or neighbors and form a team with a creative name (Wrong Terns, Uncommon Loons, Wry Wrentits---get the idea?). The number of people on a team may vary from one to as many as you like. Getting sponsors is the next step. Sponsors may pledge a certain amount per bird species identified, or a fixed amount to the team of their choice. Pick an area to bird on a particular day---some teams go to local parks, while others bird their back yards.

This year the proceeds from the Birdathon go toward two important efforts. The first is an exciting partnership between the Bay Area Audubon Council (BAAC---a coalition of all eight chapters around the Bay Area) and Audubon California. It's so new it doesn't even have an official name yet, but for now is being called the Bay Project.

Recently an important scientific document was released mapping out what habitats the Bay would need in the future to restore many of its ecosystem functions: cleaner water, more recreational opportunities, and recovery of several rare and endangered species. The document, known as the Ecosystem Goals Report, even maps out what a restored Bay might look like.

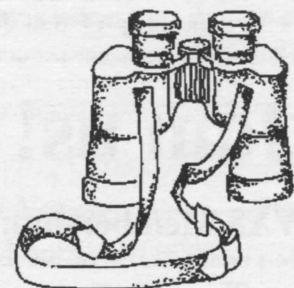
Audubon's Bay Project is designed to begin implementing the Ecosystem Goals Report through both advocacy and securing local, state, and federal funds for the acquisition and restoration of key sites. To begin with, SCVAS and the other Audubons will coordinate the launch of this new effort with the release of the final

draft of the Ecosystem Goals Report. So look for more information in the media soon; this is just the beginning of what will be many years of work.

The second target for Birdathon receipts is our own local education projects. We are all aware of the need to educate young people from all over Santa Clara County about the importance of bird habitat and teach them to appreciate the splendor of our feathered friends. SCVAS puts much effort into providing school children with Wetlands Education field trips and other hands-on experiences with birds, wildlife and their habitat. Saving the planet is a multi-generational effort!

Most Birdathon teams will be holding their big day of birding in the last week of April, but the date is flexible. The most important thing for SCVAS members and their friends to do is make a pledge or go out and join the fun by forming their own Birdathon team and raising money for these worthy conservation causes. We are very interested in back yard Birdathon teams as well as those who choose to wander afar.

Call Birdathon coordinator Bobbie Handen at (408) 356-4263 if you have any questions about how to form a new Birdathon Team.



Form a team, get some sponsors and grab those binoculars . . . for a great cause!

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 22221 McClellan Road
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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 95104. Deadline is the 25th of two months prior. Send submissions to The Avocet, c/o SCVAS at the above address.

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

1999, Volume 46, Number 4

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

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