



THE AVOCET

The Newsletter of the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society

May 1999

Catch the Migration Sensation!

Earth Day for the Birds

by Charles Preuss

International Migratory Bird Day (IMBD) celebrates our stewardship of birds and their habitats, just as Earth Day celebrates stewardship of our planet's environment. Held annually on the second Saturday in May, this event coincides with the flight of billions of migratory birds streaming into the United States and Canada from their wintering grounds in Mexico, Central and South America, and the Caribbean.

Partners in Flight, whose mission is to reverse the population declines of neotropical migratory songbirds, founded IMBD several years ago. This year's theme is "Catch the Migration Sensation" as IMBD '99 focuses on the critical importance of wetlands to neotropical migratory birds and biological diversity in the Western Hemisphere. Wetlands

provide nesting, overwintering, and stop-over habitat during migration for waterfowl, shorebirds, raptors, and songbirds.

The South Bay's local event for IMBD will take place May 8 from 9 AM to 3 PM at the Don Edwards S.F. Bay National Wildlife Refuge's Environmental Education Center in Alviso. Numerous activities for the whole family will be ongoing, and they're all free!

- See live birds "up close and personal" from Sulphur Creek Nature Center;
- Build a birdhouse and learn how these nest boxes, carefully constructed to exact specifications and properly located, can help our local bluebird population recover;
- Join in on a birdwatching tour for birders ranging from beginners to experts;
- Try out various binoculars and spotting scopes from the Wild Bird Center;

- Learn which seeds attract which type of birds to your bird feeders from Wild Birds Unlimited;
- See the winners of the Migratory Bird Poster Contest---beautiful, creative artwork submitted by students from kindergarten to college.

Why do certain birds migrate? Seasonal migration enables birds to avoid the physiological stresses of unfavorable climates---to exploit the brief but bountiful insect-rich food supplies of the Arctic summer for breeding and raising young, and then fly south for the winter to the more hospitable weather conditions of the southern United States, Central America, and South America. These neotropical migrants can take advantage of the more productive, less competitive habitats that exist during the summer in the high latitudes than those available in their wintering grounds. In addition, the longer daylight periods during the spring and summer farther north permit more opportunities for food-gathering.

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General Membership Meeting
Wednesday, May 19
"Bioacoustics and Conservation"
with Luis F. Baptista
Palo Alto Cultural Center
Embarcadero & Newell Rds., Palo Alto
7:30 Hospitality 8:00 Program

Luis Baptista is a treasure trove of bird sound knowledge. He is also dedicated to preserving our planet's rich biodiversity. We are very fortunate to have this opportunity again to listen to one of the most popular lecturers in our Chapter's history. Luis Baptista, Curator of Mammals and Birds at California Academy of Sciences, is author of Life of Birds and a chapter entitled "Nature and its Nurturing in Avian Vocal Development in Ecology and Evolution of Acoustic Communication in Birds." Tonight's lecture will explore the use of sounds in various conservation studies, especially to identify individuals, populations, wintering ground, and censusing of species. [Note return to Palo Alto location]

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VIEW FROM THE OFFICE

by Leda Beth Gray



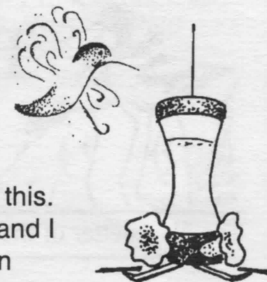
As our editor, Grant Hoyt, noted last month, I am filling in as Interim Chapter Manager until a new staff person can be found. I am really enjoying it — a lot of work but also great fun. It is a privilege for me to have the opportunity to do this, in fact, if I didn't live as far away as I do, I would apply for the position myself.

I have been receiving a lot of help from Board members and volunteers as I go around trying to figure out what I am supposed to be doing. Ulrike, our new volunteer coordinator, is also a great help, pitching in with sales in the Nature Shop as needed and illuminating the place with her enthusiasm and great sense of humor. Garth has also been very helpful and nice enough to answer my questions. He is still monitoring the bird boxes around the park until we can find someone else to take on that volunteer duty. He tells me, as of this writing in early April, that the bluebirds haven't started nesting yet which makes them quite late, probably due to the cold weather in March and early April.

We do have an active Oak Titmouse box with seven eggs in it. One of the pair is feeding the other as it incubates the eggs. They are impossible to tell apart so I don't know if they are trading off duties. Every once in a while I see one singing on the top of the box, with some sort of bugs hanging out of its beak, before popping inside to feed its mate. I'll know the chicks are hatched when I see one of the parents emerging with a fecal sac, as they are immaculate housekeepers.

I've also had fun bringing cat fur in from my fluffy white cat, Stay-Puft, and tying it on to tree branches by the window so that I can observe it from the office. Chickadees and titmice love the long white fur, and it is hilarious to see them pulling off great quantities and flying away with big balls of fur in front of their faces, or as my husband says, "looking like Santa Claus." I don't know how they can see to fly!

Anyone who would like to see Bullock's and Hooded Orioles should stop by McClellan Ranch. I have had both species in the tree by the feeder outside the Nature Shop window at the same time, sometimes 3 and 4 birds at once. Recently we had a Red-shouldered Hawk peering intently down from the pine trees in front of our office, which startled me as I came out of the building as it seemed he was looking at me! At the same time I heard a very upset squirrel scolding from some hiding place nearby, more probably the object of his interest. The hawk finally flew off across the field, calling as he went.



So as you can probably tell, I'm having a great time with all of this. During this interim period, Ulrike and I are keeping the Nature shop open from 10 to 6 Monday through Thursday, and 10 to 5 on Friday. Volunteers staff the Nature Shop most Saturdays from 10 to 2. We do have to leave at times, so I advise that if you're in the area, stop by and see if we're here, but if you're making a special trip, call first. Also, for your convenience we have a new phone mail system that allows callers to leave a message if we are on the line. No more busy signals!

We do have a few new items in the Nature shop. We now carry shelled peanuts in 5 lb. bags. These can be offered in wire mesh feeders that we already sell in the shop and are good for feeding titmice, chickadees, nuthatches and various woodpeckers. Finches may try at these peanut feeders but aren't too successful, so the other birds can usually eat unmolested. We also are offering Safflower, which supposedly most squirrels don't like. I'll be trying this at McClellan Ranch and will let you know my results (I am currently in a war with squirrels that are crashing our feeders and have recently won a battle, so this will be interesting). We also now carry window thermometers with bird illustrations on them. Stop by soon and check it out!

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VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Calling all SCVAS Members!

- * Classroom Educators at Schools
- * McClellan Birdwalks for Schools
- * Basement Reorganization

*Hello---*This is my first opportunity to introduce myself to many of you. My name is Ulrike Keyssner and I am the new half-time Volunteer Coordinator for SCVAS. I am thrilled to be working here and look forward to working with many of you in the future. I also work for the Children's Discovery Museum in downtown San Jose for their Biosite program which takes children into the field to learn about riparian ecology.

I have been volunteering at SCVAS since October, 1998 and I am on the Education Committee. Much of my volunteer work focuses on education projects. I have been working with SCVAS member and stalwart volunteer Jim Liskovec re-energizing the Young Audubon Field Trips, which encourage children in grades 3 and up to learn to love birdwatching and the outdoors. Jerry Towner, Elaine Gould, and Peg Bernucci have also helped tremendously. Thanks to all of you!

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May 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 May 1, 8:30 AM.** Full day. Mines Rd. and vicinity. Leader: Don Schmoldt (510) 547-5108. We'll start this trip in Del Puerto Canyon, working our way west to San Antonio Valley and ending up in Livermore. From I-580 go east over Altamont Pass to I-5, south on I-5 to the Patterson exit, then west on Del Puerto Canyon Rd. Meet at first pullout (look for Don's "BAJA OWL" license plate). Possible Costa's Hummingbird, Phainopepla, Lewis's Woodpecker and Lawrence's Goldfinch. Bring a full tank of gas, food & drink for full day.

****Saturday May 1, 8:00 AM.** Birdathon Field trip/fundraiser. Join the official SCVAS Birdathon team, the Uncommon Loons, for its annual outing. Loon leader Nick Yatsko will start the Big Day of birding at Palo Alto's Arastradero Preserve (see directions under May 22 listing) and finish up at Charleston Slough to rack up 100 species on the day. Easy pace, lots of birds, lots of fun. Beginners welcome! Donation to Birdathon suggested.

****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 N. Pygmy Owl, Rufous-crowned Sparrow, Canyon Wren. LO.

Wednesday May 5, 7:30 PM. Bay Area Bird Photographers present John Craig with a slide show on Soth Florida's prime birding locations. Lucy Evans Baylands Interpretive Center, E. Embarcadero Rd., Palo Alto.

****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.

****Sunday May 9, 9:00 AM.** Half day. Charleston Slough. Leader: Allen Royer (408) 288-7768. Meet at Terminal Way at end of San Antonio Rd. north off Hwy. 101 in Mt. View. All are welcome, as usual, but this trip will be geared toward the beginning birder.

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.

****Wednesday May 12, 8:30 AM.** Half day. Ed Levin County Park. Leader: Harriet Gerson (408) 252-6244. Take Hwy 237 east, crossing I-880 and I-680 as 237 becomes Calaveras Rd in Milpitas. Continue approx. 2 miles past 680 to just past golf course entrance. Park is on right across from school. (Do not turn left on Downing Rd.) LO, RC.

****Saturday May 15, 7:15 AM.** Full day. Pinnacles National Monument. Leader: Rick Fournier (831) 633-0572. East Pinnacles offers some of the most diverse habitat in the park. We will spend the morning birding Cholon Creek Picnic area, Reservoir Trail and the eastside campground. The afternoon will be spent south of Pinnacles birding Willowcreek Rd., Old Hernandez Rd. and Bitterwater Valley Reservoir. Meet at the Paicines store, corner of Highway 25 and Panoche Rd. at 7:15 AM sharp. Plan for a full day and be prepared for warm weather. Moderate hiking, bring liquids and lunch. Entrance fee.

**** Sunday May 16, 8 AM.** Almaden Valley "2-4-1" Trip. Leader: Ann Verdi (408) 266-5108. The first of two short field trips will be the Almaden-Quicksilver (Senator Mines/Mine Hill Trail Loop) at 8:00. From Hwy 85 go south on Almaden Expwy, turn right on McAbee Rd. (after Coleman), follow McAbee for a couple of miles to dead-end at Quicksilver Co. Park. Moderately strenuous uphill climbing on this trip. The second short field trip will be the "flat loop trail" at Guadalupe Oak Grove Park and will start at 10 AM. Same directions, except that after going 1/2 mile on McAbee turn right on Thorntree Dr. Park entrance will be on the left. Car-pooling for both locations recommended. Breeding oak woodland habitat birds.

****Saturday May 22, 8:00 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 the right. Moderate walking; variety of raptors, songbirds.

****Sunday May 23, 8:00 AM.** Half day. Monte Bello OSP. Leader: Mark Miller (650) 967-3429. From I-280 in Palo Alto take Page Mill Rd west approx. 7 miles and meet at large Monte Bello OSP parking area on the left. Possible Lazuli Bunting, Black-throated Gray Warbler, Chipping and Black-chinned Sparrows. Be prepared for fog, cold.

****Wednesday May 26, 8:30 AM.** Half day. Arastradero Preserve. Leader: Alberta Jasberg (650)493-9546. Moderate walking, lots of birds. See directions under May 22 listing.

****Saturday May 29, 8:15 AM.** Half day. Skyline Ridge OSP. Leader: Bob Reiling (408)253-7527. Meet at Russian Ridge Preserve parking lot at southwest corner of Skyline Blvd (Hwy 35) and Page Mill/Alpine Rd intersection. Moderately strenuous walking with some elevation change. Highlights: possible Chipping Sparrow, Black-throated Gray Warbler, Western Tanager.

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May Calendar

****Sunday May 30, 8:30 AM.** Half day. Stevens Creek County Park. Leader: Kathy Parker (408) 358-2832. From I-280 in Cupertino take Foothill Expwy exit south 2.1 miles; (becomes Stevens Canyon Rd.) Turn left into first (Chestnut) park entrance and meet in first parking lot. One of the best summer birding spots in the South Bay. LO.

****Saturday June 5, 8:00 AM.** Half day. Ed Levin County Park. Leader: Frank Vanslager (408) 257-3647. Take Hwy 237 east, crossing I-880 and I-680 (becomes Calaveras Rd.) to parking lot on left at intersection of the "un-named" street and Calaveras Rd., far side of Spring Valley Golf Course (and Airpoint School), about 2 miles after I-680. LO.

****Sunday June 6, 8:30 AM.** Half day. Russian Ridge OSP. Leader: Shirley Gordon (408) 996-9863. Meet at Preserve parking lot, 1/2 block southwest of intersection of Skyline Blvd. (Hwy 35) and Page Mill/Alpine Rds. Highlights: Grasshopper Sparrow, Lazuli Bunting. LO.

Tuesday June 8, 9:30 AM. The Eve Case Bird Discussion Group will meet at the home of Pat and Jean Dubois, 17150

OFFICE VIEW

I will be up-front and tell you that I am hoping to (gently) rope many of you in to help us with SCVAS educational programs which can be taken into local schools. Many teachers are crying out for classroom presentations of around an hour and you DO NOT need to be an expert; we will train those who participate. Ask anyone who has done this before and they will tell you how rewarding it is to inspire young children and to witness their enthusiasm. Board member Bobbie Handen and many others have contributed educational materials that now reside in the basement. I would love to have volunteers to help catalogue and organize these valuable materials into an educa-

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Buena Vista Ave., Los Gatos (408) 395-4264. Bring a bag lunch and enjoy all the birds at our house.

****Wednesday June 9, 8:30 AM.** Half day. Russian Ridge OSP. Leader: Shirley Gordon (408) 996-9863. See directions under June 6 listing.

****Saturday & Sunday June 26-27.** Yuba Pass/Sierra Valley. Leader: Clay Kempf (831) 761-8260. Meet at 7:00 AM Saturday at Yuba Pass parking lot on south side of Hwy 49. From South Bay take Hwy 80 to Truckee, go north on Hwy 89, then west on Hwy 49 to Yuba Pass. Saturday will be spent exploring the Yuba Pass area for Williamson's Sapsucker, Black-backed Woodpecker, Dipper, Townsend's Solitaire, Evening Grosbeak, seven species of warblers, four species of flycatchers and more. On Sunday the group will bird east of the pass in drier habitat where Mountain Bluebird, Green-tailed Towhee, Sage Thrasher and other Great Basin specialties occur. Last stop is the high-country Sierra Marsh, where Black Tern, Wilson's Phalarope, Common Snipe and possibly Sandhill Crane breed. Hotels are available in Sierra City and Downieville; camping at Wild Plum, Sierra City and Yuba Pass.

continued

tional resource to be used regularly, instead of collecting dust downstairs!

If you have any interest in helping out with my (and many others at SCVAS) pet education projects please contact me at the office. If you have other ideas and projects in mind please don't hesitate to talk to me.

---Ulrike Keyssner

Thanks to Dee McKean for the donation of two boxes of bird books and field guides from all over the world, and a Bausch & Lomb 60mm zoom telescope. The donations were made in memory of her late husband, John C. McKean, an Australian native who studied birds all over the world, especially southeast Asia.

Birdathon Teams On the Loose

It's not too late to sponsor your favorite Birdathon team for this year's spring fundraising event. We'll be donating this year's proceeds to the Audubon Bay Project (the eight greater Bay Area Audubon chapters' acquisition and restoration efforts to preserve the S.F. Bay ecosystem) as well as our own education outreach programs.

If you're new to the Birdathon concept, why not join the official SCVAS team, the Uncommon Loons, for a wild day of birding at Arastradero Preserve in Palo Alto and Charleston Slough in Mountain View on May 1 (see details in Calendar, Page 3). If you've got a favorite team (list below), don't forget to send them your donation. Thanks to all participants, counters and sponsors—your dollars go directly to saving local Bay habitat and educating South Bay youngsters and adults about the environment and natural world.

The Teams

Almaden Eagles

---Ann Verdi, John Mariani

Earthquacking Thrushfaulters

---Leda Beth Gray, David Drake, Ulrike

Keyssner

Hummdingers

---Sandy Cortright & friends

Pete & June's Team

---Pete Way & June Shelle

Spiderhunter

---Vivek Tiwari & friends

Uncommon Loons

---Nick Yatsko

Vagrants

---Grant Hoyt & friends

Wild Birders

---Freddy Howell & loyal customers

Wrong Terns

---Bobbie & Cindy Handen & friends

Wry Wrentits

---Harriet Gerson, Les Chibana

Of Local Interest

An occasional column on local birds and birders
by Garth Harwood

A REAL BIRDING MOMENT . . . Yesterday, as I lay abed in the first light of morning, I heard a flight of Evening Grosbeaks go over the house and settle in somewhere nearby. Naturally, I was up and out of the house in a second or two, pausing only to scoop up my binoculars and cackle to other early-rising family members about our good fortune before standing out on the deck, "scantly clad" as the newspapers always seem to put it, to gaze rapturously at one of my all-time favorite birds. My non-birding family hardly blinked at the spectacle, having come to expect anything and everything when there are good birds about.

A MATTER OF PERSPECTIVE . . . In this inaugural column I'll need to take up some space declaring the perspective from which I'll write. The essence of that perspective is, I think, evident in the paragraph above. Although I'd been a biologist for some time already, working at the Audubon office for nearly three years gave me a reason to devote my attention to birds and the birding community for the first time. I have by now completely given in to it, and I no longer mind accepting whatever social stigma may be attached to wandering about with binoculars in public. However, my background and leanings may occasionally cause me to stray into other categories of wildlife or even (gasp!) the plant kingdom. I take it on faith that people who are passionately devoted to any aspect of nature will also appreciate knowing more about our living community as a whole.

There is also a social perspective to be cultivated here. In this column, I seek to provide items of interest to every sort of birder, but especially to those of you who consider yourselves beginning or intermediate-level birders, and those of you whose interest is not just in bird identification, but in understanding more about the natural world as seen through the lives of birds. Another of my goals is to include you in this process in as many ways as possible: as contributors, subjects, critics, advisors and whatever else crops up (see contact information at the end of this column). Naturally, however, I'll reserve the right to pick and choose each month's emphasis, or hog the show with my own priorities. But I'll count on your feedback, good or bad, to keep me in line. General questions are also welcome.

In keeping with what I've just said, I will also maintain a geographic perspective somewhat broader than just Santa Clara County. Like the SCVAS field trips calendar, I'll include information on birding from a region roughly extending as far as a reasonable day trip from our part of the world, with rare excursions to locations further afield. Since I live here, I'll forewarn you that Pescadero birds will show up with regularity. Though only an hour from Silicon Valley, there's a hefty list of birds you can see much more easily on this side of "the hill".

And finally, there's a moral perspective to introduce. Aleksandr

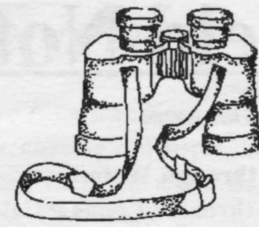
Solzhenitsyn once wrote that "sentiment without action is the ruin of the soul." It's an expression I've been reflecting on for years. I've found it applicable to my own passions, and it will help to explain some of the material I'll include in future columns. Simply put, I think it's important for every one of us to do something specific to give back to the planetary ecosystem. For me, it's living simply, providing nestboxes, writing about nature, leading field trips, and making small donations to the groups doing the work closest to my heart. Political activism isn't my strong suit, but my personal list of heroes is stacked with those who engage in that struggle year in and year out. Anyway, I'll often give examples of ways to get involved.

CHICKADEE AND TITMOUSE ALERT: Our local Bluebird Recovery Program has met with great success in its campaign to meet the needs of diverse cavity-nesting bird species (see photo and text in the May/June issue of *Audubon* magazine). In fact, the statewide totals for the 1998 season are now in and Santa Clara County volunteers produced at least half of the state's total of Chestnut-backed Chickadees, Violet-green Swallows, and Bewick's Wrens, and nearly a quarter of all Oak Titmice. All of these species are in even greater decline than the Western Bluebird. Now that's hands-on activism making a difference!

Now, we need your help. Chickadees, Bewick's Wrens, and titmice have proven to be common users of backyard boxes. Chickadees seem to be even more inclined to nest in the suburbs than in rural boxes. Do you have a backyard birdhouse? If so, please contact me with your location and results (that is, species and number of young reaching maturity). It will not cause nest abandonment to conduct a brief check of the nest once a week or so to count the young, and your information will permit us to get better and better at helping bird populations recover. These species should be about ready to fledge when you receive this newsletter, so don't delay!

NEXT COLUMN: Please send a description of your favorite Unlikely Birding Destination, near or far. With luck, we'll change a few vacation plans!

Garth Harwood, M.A., M.B.S., has graduate degrees in experiential education and restoration ecology, and serves as Santa Clara County coordinator for the CA Bluebird Recovery program. He can be contacted at <GarthHar@aol.com> or at 5901 Pescadero Rd., Pescadero, CA 94060.



Field Notes

by Bill Bousman

Loons through Waterfowl

Red-throated Loons at Calero Reservoir 9-21 Mar (SCR, JMa) and on Mayfield Slough in the Palo Alto Flood Control Basin (FCB) on 13 Mar (MD) were of particular interest as none has been found previously this winter. The **Common Loons** wintering at Calero stayed until early March with three found on 9 Mar (SCR) and one still there on 13 Mar (JMa). A few **American White Pelicans** continue on San Felipe Lake, just south of the county line in San Benito, with observations on 24 Mar (RWR, FV) and 28 Mar (WGB). These birds are either lingering quite late or overwintering. **American Bitterns** were found sporadically at sites where they have appeared before this winter. One bird was in the Mountain View Forebay on 6 Mar (PMB), one was found near the Oka percolation ponds on 12-13 Mar (RWR et al.), and three were in the Ogier Avenue ponds on 29 Mar (RWR et al.). Four **Cattle Egrets** were over Los Esteros Road in Alviso on 21 Mar (SCR). A **Greater White-fronted Goose** was found with the Canadas at Arzino Ranch on 25 Mar (SCR). The immature **Snow Goose** and **Ross's Goose** at Almaden Lake were found through 9 Mar (JMa, MJM, AV). The immature Ross's Goose at the waterbird pond along Coyote Creek below Hwy 237 was seen at least through 27 Mar (SCR, AJ).

Small numbers of **Blue-winged Teal** have been found in ponds at the Palo Alto FCB in March (v.ob.) with a high count of seven on 24 Mar (GH). One to two birds were also found in the Mountain View Forebay on 6-7 Mar (RLe, PMB, MD). A male **Green-winged Teal** of the Eurasian race was next to the Stevens Creek Tidal Marsh on 26 Mar (WGB). **Hooded Mergan-**

ser reports continued into March with four found near Gunn HS in Palo Alto on 6 Mar (MD) and at least three at the Oka percolation ponds on 12-13 Mar (RWR et al.). Three birds were found in a small pond on Arastradero Preserve on 13 Mar (RC) and at least two remained there through the end of March (v.ob.).

Raptors through Skimmers

A male **Osprey** was seen at Stevens Creek Reservoir on 5 Mar (RWR, FV). Single birds were also seen along Uvas Creek on 23 and 25 Mar (SK) and a female was flying north along Coyote Creek at Silicon Valley Boulevard on

*Late March brings
the first of our summer
residents but also
includes a surprising
Wilson's Phalarope*

27 Mar (MJM). An immature **Bald Eagle** was over San Felipe Lake on 26 Mar (RWR), just south of county line. A single **Wilson's Phalarope** on the San Jose-Santa Clara Water Pollution Control Plant (WPCP) ponds on 27 Mar (SCR et al.) is most unusual for early spring and the only March record I have. The **Lesser Black-backed Gull** at Lake Cunningham, now in 3rd-winter plumage, was seen again on 9 Mar (SCR) and 14 Mar (MJM). There have been reports of one or more 1st-winter **Glaucous Gulls** in the Palo Alto-Mountain View area with one on Salt Pond A1 on 5 Mar (PMB), one in the Palo Alto FCB on 7 Mar (VT), and one in Crittenden Marsh on 13 Mar (WCa). The major concentration, however, has been in the Fremont Lagoons area just over the line in Alameda County where

at least five 1st-winter birds were seen on 27 Mar (MMR), and three on 29 Mar (RWR et al.). Six to seven **Black Skimmers** have been found regularly in March on Charleston Slough (m.ob.). Interestingly, 12 were there on 13 Mar (MD) for the first time since December. It seems likely that the additional five birds have wintered separately, but the location of this second flock during the last three months is unknown.

Roadrunners through Lawrence's Goldfinches

A **Greater Roadrunner** was seen in Kirby Canyon on 22 Mar (*fide* SCR) for our only report this month. A vocal and cooperative **Northern Pygmy-Owl** was found on a SCVAS field trip to Alum Rock Park on 20 Mar (AME et al.) extending a long tradition for our local Audubon Society (see the 24 Jan 1931 field trip report in the *Wren-Tit*). This bird was found repeatedly through the end of the month (v.ob.). A **Vaux's Swift** over the Los Gatos percolation ponds on 16 Mar (SBT *fide* SCR)

is about a month early unless it wintered somewhere nearby. Two **Lewis's Woodpeckers** were in the San Antonio Valley on 28 Mar (RCi), although none were found there in early March. A **Pileated Woodpecker** was seen flying south along Russian Ridge on 12 Mar (GH)—will they nest once again on Table Mountain? Our **Eastern Phoebe** in Shady Oaks Park in San Jose was last seen on 14 Mar (MJM). A **Red-breasted Nuthatch** was near IBM in South San Jose on 26 Mar (HMCD) for our only report after last fall's moderate invasion. A **Canyon Wren** was seen in Alum Rock Park on 20 Mar (AME et al.). A pair of **American Dippers** has been found more or less regularly in March along Stevens Creek above Mt. Eden Road (m.ob.). **Golden-**

continued next page

Field Notes *continued*

crowned Kinglet reports include singles at Stanford near the Mausoleum on 5 Mar (GH), birds along San Francisquito Creek in Menlo Park on 18 Mar (MD), and one near Pacheco Falls in Henry Coe SP on 30 Mar (JY, AL). A male **Phainopepla** was seen north of San Antone Junction on 6 Mar (AME) and is probably resident. A **Nashville Warbler** found along San Francisquito Creek in Menlo Park on 18 Mar (MD) is a month early and may have wintered locally. A male **Western Tanager** in the same area (MD), is also very early and likely wintered nearby. A **White-throated Sparrow** had continued in March at a Los Gatos feeder (GL), remaining at least through 29 Mar (RWR et al.). A female **Chestnut-collared Longspur** has continued at a valley floor site in northeast San Jose with observations up to at least 22 Mar (SCR). Two **Lawrence's Goldfinches** were found in San Antonio Valley on 6 Mar (MMi) and six were at San Antone Junction on 28 Mar (RCi).

Observers: Bill Bousman (WGB), Phyllis Browning (PMB), William Cabot (WCa), Richard Carlson (RC), Rich Cimino (RCi), Matthew Dodder (MD), Al Eisner (AME), Garth Harwood (GH), Alvaro Jaramillo (AJ), Sue Kruse (SK), Amy Lauterbach (AL), Gloria Leblanc (GL), Rosalie Lefkowitz (RLe), Mike Mammoser (MJM), John Mariani (JMa), Hugh McDevitt (HMcD), Mark Miller (MMi), Bob Reiling (RWR), Mike Rogers (MMR), Steve Rottenborn (SCR), Scott Terrill (SBT), Vivek Tiwari (VT), Frank Vanslager (FV), Ann Verdi (AV), and James Yurchenco (JY).

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

Field Trip Reports

Alum Rock Park March 20

Twelve SCVAS birders took part in an enjoyable and productive field trip to San Jose's Alum Rock Park on March 20. Its success was in large part due to the fact that everyone contributed to the bird-finding, but there was also a little luck.

As we were still milling around the parking area at Rustic Lands, Emelie Curtis heard a Northern Pygmy-Owl calling. Several of us went to see if we could locate it, and Mary Murphy spotted it in a creekside tree. It was perched in plain view, one foot clamped on a small rodent, and it provided us excellent scope views over the next fifteen minutes. This was no doubt the best find of the trip.

Although we started our three-mile walk in the sun, it became increasingly cloudy and somewhat windy. Fortunately we were spared any rain except for a little drizzle. Most of the resident breeding birds apparently didn't feel like singing much, and we wound up with only 46 total species (missing Rufous-crowned Sparrow entirely).

Highlights included an adult Golden Eagle on the ridge above the Sycamore Grove picnic area; a Great Horned Owl perched in an oak at the Youth Science Institute (personnel there told us it is apparently attracted to the area by their captive Great-Horned); a superb view of a perched male Allen's Hummingbird gleaming like a small flame atop its bush just below the North Rim Trail; and a Canyon Wren (presumably the same bird found on the Christmas Bird Count) in Penitencia Creek just before the end of the easternmost parking area.

Spring arrivals included only that Allen's hummer, Violet-green and N. Rough-winged Swallows, and an uncooperative Bullock's Oriole, heard only. Good raptor weather resulted in as many as five Red-tailed Hawks seen circling at once (one a rufous morph)

and two American Kestrels putting on a show, chasing and displaying. Other sightings included some Band-tailed Pigeons, two White-throated Swifts, and three Townsend's Warblers. Plus the human-imprinted Barn Owl and the one-winged Swainson's Hawk at the YSI—neat to see, despite their captive status.

—Al Eisner

Almaden/Quicksilver X 2 March 7

Our first March trip to Almaden/Quicksilver County Park was led by Ann Verdi starting from the New Almaden entrance through oak/laurel woodlands and up to the chaparral at Capehorn Pass. Orange-crowned Warblers had arrived and were heard singing through the oak woodlands. Hutton's Vireos and Spotted Towhees were also calling, and we watched a Chestnut-backed Chickadee inspecting a nest site in a sycamore along Alamitos Creek. The bird-of-the-day, however, was a Varied Thrush found at the base of Hacienda Trail in a deeply wooded gulch. Later, several of us visited Almaden Reservoir where at least nine Wood Ducks were seen in the quiet backwaters upstream of the reservoir. Other birds of note included a Merlin at the O'Day property and newly-arrived Violet-green Swallows in the hill-sides.

March 28

Alan Thomas led the group on a new route at Almaden/Quicksilver. We met at the Mockingbird Hill entrance and followed a loop along the eastern slope overlooking South Almaden Valley up to Capehorn Pass and then down the steep Hacienda Trail---quite a bit of rather steep climbing, but everyone was in good spirits and we persevered. The birds seen were mainly typical of the oak woodlands, including Acorn

continued on page 9

The Albatross of Midway Atoll

by Jim Liskovec

Have you ever been disappointed to set a good book aside, unfinished, for a time, but vowing to return to it and finish the story?

That's how we felt about the story of Midway. Our November 1997 trip was the opening of the tale---breeding albatross were reunited after months alone at sea. A frenzy of dancing, mating, nest building, and egg laying was in full swing when Sue and I arrived to begin our work on the Oceanic Society's seabird monitoring project. All day and all night we listened to the birds and heard their part of this story. They were telling of the life force that is a seabird colony. By the time we left at the end of November, the courtship, mating and egg-laying was mostly completed and half the breeding population of albatross had gone squidding. The breeders were now silent. Three-year-old, non-breeding birds would sing and dance throughout the nesting season, but they had not yet returned to Midway. And so, for the moment, it was SO quiet!

Thus ended the first chapter, but we intended to pick up this good book again for another chapter. Our second visit covered the last days of February 1999, when albatross chicks had hatched and were a few days to a month old.

Newly hatched chicks were small enough to fit snugly underneath a brooding parent. The only way to tell if a chick was present was if the adult stood up---either voluntarily, or through the careful use of a 30" long "Goonie Gooser" to gently lift the adult.

Month-old chicks were fuzzy, black, and downy, about the size of a football. Many were discovering their feet and using them to wander from the nest, making it tough to track which chick belonged to which nest. Wanderers usually headed back to spend the night in their own home, allowing researchers to place a plastic baby band on the wanderer's leg before daylight.

As OSE volunteers, we had many duties. We drew maps of study plots



"Month-old chicks were fuzzy, black, and downy..."

showing nest locations and surveyed these plots to track the progress of nests, eggs, and chicks. Chicks became DFCs---Downy Feathered Chicks---on field data sheets. We transcribed field information onto computer data sheets. All these data will eventually tell the life story of Midway's birds.

We quickly settled into a daily rhythm. Breakfast at 7 and an OSE meeting at 8 to get morning assignments. Lunch at noon, and then afternoon assignments. Dinner at 6 and maybe an evening OSE or FWS program. Then into the sack---to be serenaded to sleep by the Laysans just outside our window.

There was time for other activities as well: a FWS history tour on Sand Island and a boat trip to Eastern Island to see boobies, frigatebirds, and more albatross. We rented a golf cart and drove to the end of the north runway late in the day for a "sundowner" to enjoy the albatross bathed in the warm light of sunset while we sipped a beer and munched on chips.

Superimposed upon this Midway rhythm were high points that stand out vividly in our memory. We can close our

eyes and still see and hear them today.

One stormy day while riding in a cart near the open water of the lagoon, we stopped for a few moments to watch a Laysan doing its "Dynamic Soaring." Almost in a stall, high over the waves, the Laysan turned downwind. Catching the tail wind and losing elevation, it accelerated until it almost touched the churning, dark water. At the last moment, at its highest speed, the bird turned into the wind. Fighting the pressure of the wind and the force of gravity, this skilled flyer used all of its forward momentum and the lift of its long, slender wings to carry it ever higher. Then, for just an instant, as wind and gravity regained the advantage, the albatross seemed to hang motionless before it repeated its downwind run. What a glorious sight!

During an afternoon of "habitat restoration" (i.e., "weed pull"), I was down on my hands and knees, removing a clump of introduced verbena. Out of the corner of my eye I noticed two Laysans walking over to me. Unafraid, they stopped just within arm's reach. Non-breeders practice their dancing

Albatross

continued

throughout the nesting season, and these two were no exception. One quick look at me, and they were into their dance! And did they dance---sky pointing, mooing, wing tucking, bill clacking, whining, and whinnying---the whole routine. Then one of them let out an ear-splitting whine. I was so much involved for those few moments, I felt like a third bird in their dancing group. Then, when they had ended their performance, they sauntered off, just as calmly as they arrived.

One morning we had breakfast at Clipper House, the only other eatery besides the Galley. From our window table overlooking the beautiful beach we watched albatross flying by, some high overhead, some just skimming low over the sand. Light classical violin music was playing in the background. While watching the birds and listening to the music, I said to myself, "Either the albatross are listening to this music, or the composer wrote this piece with the birds

in mind." These most graceful birds seemed to be flying in time to the music.

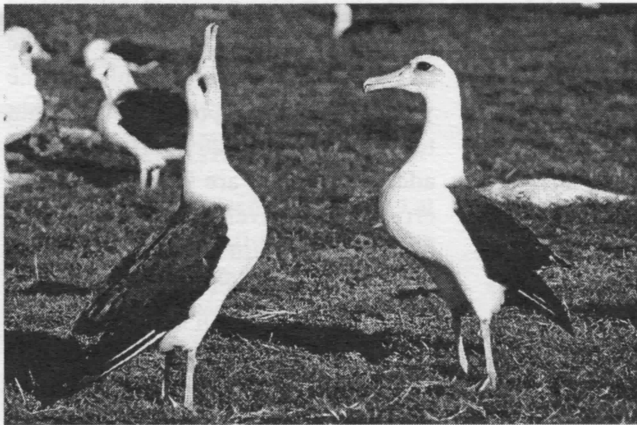
And so ends chapter two. The birds have told us another part of their story, and shared their home with us. The third and final chapter is a long one, one that takes the albatross from DFC to FFC---Fully Feathered Chick---to fledgling. We just might have to pick up this wonderful book again!



A Poem for the Laysan Albatross March, 1999

Bird of the ocean, the sea and the air.
With long, slender wings does he soar.
Light winds give no lift to the albatross
He flies best when mighty winds roar.

---Jim Liskovec



"...And did they dance--
sky pointing, mooing,
wing tucking, bill
clacking, whining,
and whinnying---the
whole routine."

"We drew maps of study plots showing nest locations and surveyed these plots to track the progress of nests, eggs and chicks."

Photography by
Jim Liskovec



Field Trip reports

continued

Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Cooper's Hawk, Anna's Hummingbird, Oak Titmouse, Chestnut-backed Chickadee, Bushtit, White-breasted Nuthatch, Hutton's Vireo, Orange-crowned Warbler, Spotted Towhee, California Towhee, Golden-crowned Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco. One participant found a Hairy Woodpecker. Other highlights included a heard-only Warbling Vireo (first of the season for Quicksilver), several Purple Finches, an Orange-crowned Warbler displaying its orange crown, and a lovely pair of courting Western Bluebirds.

---Ann Verdi

Alamitos Creek April 17

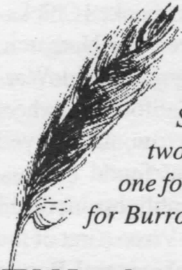
Today's SCVAS field trip to Alamitos Creek was highlighted by a female Great-tailed Grackle at Almaden Lake. Frank Vanslager first spotted it on one of the islands of vegetation in the lake, from which it flew to a pepper tree on the shore. An apparent female Black-chinned Hummingbird was also seen at the park, along the lakeshore near the creek inflow and picnic tables. There were not many ducks at the lake, but two Common Moorhens were still hanging around. Canada Geese have nested, as confirmed by the presence of goslings.

Other highlights of our walk from the footbridge at Graystone to the lake and back included a pair of Gadwall, Common Merganser, Black-crowned Night Herons, one adult Golden Eagle, Red-shouldered Hawks, all the usual woodpeckers (including a too-brief glimpse of a Red-breasted Sapsucker), Pacific-slope Flycatchers, four Western Kingbirds, a bathing California Thrasher, great views of swallows and Lincoln's Sparrows, a plenitude of Hooded and Bullock's Orioles, one male Black-headed Grosbeak, and two Nutmeg Manakins, a.k.a. Spotted Munia. While enjoying a lengthy look at a Lincoln's Sparrow we flushed a Lesser Goldfinch off its nest, which we had unknowingly been standing directly under. In total we tallied at least 65 species, with most shared by all participants.

---John Mariani

Sometimes, Life Is Good

by Craig Breon
Environmental Advocate



In the space of two nights recently, SCVAS helped achieve two important victories: one for open space, the other for Burrowing Owls.

IBM Lands to Remain Open Space

More than 200 local homeowners and representatives of environmental interests filled to capacity the understated cafeteria of Greystone Elementary School on March 25. Almaden Valley turned out in force to hear from Councilwoman Pat Dando regarding IBM's proposal to sell land previously promised as open space for residential housing (see last month's *Avocet*).

Even before the meeting started, I sensed positive energy. Pulling into a nearly full parking lot for a local conservation issue is a mighty good sign. The buzz in the room was palpable—well-informed citizens ready to give a piece of their mind to the corporation, the developer, and even the politician if need be.

I mingled. Mingling at such events is important for local advocates. Rekindle acquaintances with allies from previous disputes. Meet face to face with people I had only talked to by telephone. Let the people know that Audubon is right there with them. I know it sounds a little schmaltzy, but that's part of the job.

I was ready to deliver a rousing speech. "Lands promised and then taken back . . . sounds like the makings of a tragedy for the stage." "Sacrificing the quality of life in the Almaden Valley on the altar of Silicon profits." Or something like that—in truth, it would have been a little less bombastic. Ironically, fate intervened and I was never given a chance to deliver

one of the great local open space speeches of the 90's.

Here the fates smiled upon us. Pat Dando stood up and, after a brief discussion of other community issues, read a prepared text announcing that IBM would drop their proposal to sell the land. Open space prevails!

The room exploded into applause. Savor the moment, folks, it's a rare one when the environmentalists and a local community succeed in the early stages of such a campaign, long before a city council meeting or lawsuit.

Credit goes to many on this one. First and foremost, Chris Mossing and the great group of dedicated people he assembled in the Almaden Valley. They did the research, media work, council relations, and other important tasks it takes to make a potent foe for development forces. Some credit goes to SCVAS and Greenbelt Alliance, who did what we always do but with better than usual results. Thanks as well to Pat Dando and her staff, who also did the research needed to document IBM's 20 year old promises. Finally, even a thanks to IBM, for realizing that community relations and keeping your word also have value.

Flash Update

Just this Sunday evening in mid-April, as I sat in the office typing my article, I received a call from an Almaden Valley activist. The call could have been titled "Night of the Living Dead." Evidently, an associate of or in the Riding Group—the developers who proposed purchasing IBM's property—still wants to go forward with the housing plan and may be threatening to sue IBM for breach of contract. This is most likely only a minor setback. If the developers want to waste money trying to get approvals for a development now destined to be rejected by the San Jose Council, that's their choice. We'll keep you posted.

Morgan Hill Council Says "Yes" to Burrowing Owls

By a 3-0 vote in late March, the Morgan Hill City Council accepted a proposal to develop a Burrowing Owl Plan for the city. This was done at the request of SCVAS and the California Department of Fish and Game (DFG) and also lays the groundwork for owl mitigation as the city continues development in its "redevelopment zone," which includes the historically most owl-rich lands in the city.

In a survey done three years ago, seven Burrowing Owls were found in open lands near Cochran Road in Morgan Hill. Already, however, some of those lands were marked "Coming Soon . . .," meaning development was imminent. In the intervening years, much of that land has been paved, and owls have suffered as a result.

The new mitigation measure added to an Environmental Impact Report on the redevelopment zone says that the city shall have a draft owl plan in one year and a council-approved plan within two years (better late than never). In addition, if owls are found on a property in the redevelopment zone where building is imminent, the landowners will be asked to set aside one acre of land for every acre of owl habitat they intend to use. If no owls are found but suitable owl habitat is identified, they will have to set aside one acre of land for every two acres developed. The lands set aside need not be on-site; they can be located elsewhere, so long as an agreement is made with DFG. This way, development can proceed in an orderly manner while lands for owls can be preserved.

We had expected considerable landowner opposition to this plan. While we heard that the city had received numerous hostile questions from the development community, in the end,

continued next page

Audubon, Feds Join in Backing Environmental Bonds

by Naki Stevens
NAS Wetlands Campaign Director

The Clinton Administration is proposing an ambitious new program to combat urban and suburban sprawl, promote "smart growth" plans, and preserve open space such as wetlands and farmland. In the 1998 elections, more than 200 local jurisdictions had growth management initiatives on the ballot, and most of them passed. President Clinton's "Better America Bonds" proposal, which still pass Congress, reflects this tremendous local support for curbing sprawl and promoting land conservation.

To provide communities additional resources to achieve their smart growth objectives, the Administration's proposed budget includes \$700 million over five years for local environmental bonds. This funding will support federal tax credits to enable state, local, and tribal governments to provide \$9.5 billion in bond authority over five years to purchase threatened wetlands and other open spaces. Communities will have access to zero-interest financing because investors

Morgan Hill Owls *cont'd*

none of those opponents showed up at the city council meeting to oppose the plan. This worries me, for it may mean that they have already seen a loophole in the agreement through which they can drive their bulldozers. Vigilance is called for, and any Audubon members in Morgan Hill who wish to help could be of great service. Just call me at the office.

With this council vote, Morgan Hill joins the growing number of cities planning for owls, including San Jose, Santa Clara, Mountain View, and possibly Sunnyvale (depending on the outcome of our current lawsuit against Lockheed's development plans on owl habitat). While we still cannot say that because of our efforts the owls will survive long-term in the Valley, we are doing our best to give them a chance.

who buy these 15-year bonds will receive tax credits in lieu of interest.

Environmental Bonds can be used to:

1. **Preserve and enhance green space, such as wetlands.** State, local, and tribal governments, working alone or in partnership with local land trusts or other non-profit organizations, can protect or restore threatened wetlands, either by acquiring title or purchasing easements.
2. **Protect water quality.** Wetlands and other threatened waters can be restored or protected through measures to reduce polluted runoff, including but not limited to land acquisition, buffer strips, and settling ponds.
3. **Provide environmental remediation.** New resources will be available to assess and clean up brownfields for use as open space or for development.

Environmental Bonds can galvanize a significant amount of new community-based conservation. Citizens and local governments can identify the wetlands and other open spaces they want to save and, using Environmental Bonds, go toe-to-toe with developers to save land. But to make this a reality, we need your help getting Better America Environmental Bonds passed. The Audubon family from chapters to state offices can:

- Formally endorse Better America Environmental Bonds
- Recruit partners who might have a stake in Environmental Bonds
- Use local projects as examples for why we need Environmental Bonds
- Recruit spokespersons and organize a speakers bureau
- Meet with your Congress Members
- Write letters to the editor and seek press attention to the benefits Environmental Bonds can bring to your community.

The Audubon Wetlands Campaign, in close coordination with the Audubon Public Policy Office in Washington, D.C., has begun a grassroots organizing project on behalf of Environmental Bonds. Amy Stock has been brought in exclusively to build a powerful grassroots constituency and broad-based coalition for the bonds



National Audubon Society

program. In coordination with Audubon's Public Policy Office, she will also seek out coalition partners in the business, minority, conservation, local government, and bond investor communities. This grassroots base of supporters will be mobilized at critical points to support the initiative.

Migration *from page 1*

How far do these birds migrate? Well, the Arctic Skua represents one extreme, flying from its wintering grounds on one tip of the globe near Antarctica, to breed on the other end of the Earth in the high Arctic, near the North Pole! On the other hand, the Clark's Nutcracker "commutes" only a few miles from its high elevation breeding grounds in the Sierra Nevada or Rocky Mountains to lower elevations within the same mountain range.

When do they travel? Most long-distance migrants, especially the smaller birds, fly at night and land at sunrise to rest and re-fuel. Conversely, local regional migrants will travel during the day, and usually for only a few hours in the morning. Swallows and swifts do not take layovers, but rather fly non-stop and feed in flight. Some songbirds, such as the Blackpoll Warbler, will lose significant amounts of body weight during their overwater migration from South America to the northeastern U.S. and Canada.

To learn more about the miracle of songbird migration, join SCVAS and local bird-lovers for a day of education and outdoor fun on May 8 for International Migratory Bird Day.

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RARE BIRD ALERT: (415) 681-7422

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

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