



THE AVOCET

The Newsletter of the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society

June-August 1999

Palo Alto Summer Bird Count

by Garth Harwood

On Saturday, June 5, dozens of volunteers will rise before dawn to do their part for local birds by helping out with the 19th annual Palo Alto Summer Bird Count. From the foggy ridgetops along Skyline Boulevard to the wide-open salt ponds and mudflats of the Bay, small teams of diligent counters will tally each and every bird observed over the 24-hour period from midnight to midnight. Although most counters elect to invest a few of those hours in other ways, such as sleeping, eating, and resting, there are always a few who seem to put such luxuries aside completely for the big day.

The Summer Count, an annual survey of local birds modeled after the much better-known Christmas Bird Counts, is the only one of its kind in our area, and was established to provide a better understanding of the com-

munity of birds which breeds along the southern peninsula of San Francisco Bay. Participation is free and open to birders of all levels, and provides an opportunity to pick up a wealth of bird lore from some of our most skilled local birders, including many insider tips on how, where, and when to find uncommon birds. The count is traditionally followed by an informal pizza dinner and "countdown" at the SCVAS office in Cupertino, where the teams report in and compile a master list of species encountered on the day, generally about 140.

For the hard cases among us, it's an over-the-top marathon of local birding, starting shortly after midnight with a grand tour of potential owl habitats, and ending at dusk after as much as 18 hours of continuous birding. Particularly determined individuals, such as the editor of this newsletter, have even

been known to follow up such a gonzo day with another late outing after dark, if a key nocturnal species has been missed.

Most participants take a more relaxed approach, however. A typical team, composed of an experienced lead counter and up to four other counters alternating as spotters and tally-keeper, starts out shortly after dawn, when bird song is at its peak, and finishes up at lunchtime or shortly thereafter. Some routes are mostly urban and are covered almost entirely by car, or even bicycle, an especially effective way to get around the suburbs while noting many hidden birds by ear. All routes require some walking, however, and a few, such as those along the Skyline Ridge, can involve a full day's hiking, although it is left to each team to determine its own comfort level.

Personally, I enjoy any opportunity to immerse myself in the natural world with total concentration. It's amazing,

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Annual Potluck Dinner Wednesday June 16 6:00 PM McClellan Ranch Park, Cupertino

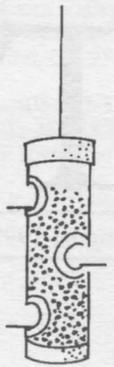
The annual potluck dinner is the time for SCVAS members (new and old), staff and volunteers to get together and celebrate the year's accomplishments with food, drink, and conversation. If you've never attended, why not come out to our McClellan Ranch Park headquarters, mingle with other local birding enthusiasts, and learn more about what SCVAS is all about over a fabulous potluck picnic. There will also be a silent auction of recently donated books (see partial list on Page 11).

And speaking of food, we're trying a new system this year. Instead of assigning dishes by group, we're asking everyone who can to bring a main dish or salad. For the past two years we've actually run out of entrees, while the desserts have piled up! If you're pressed for time, resources, etc., go ahead and bring a dessert or simple appetizer, but if you're able, please bring a main dish/casserole/salad. We'll provide beverages. See you on the 16th!

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VIEW FROM THE OFFICE

by Leda Beth Gray

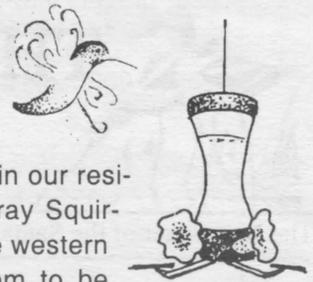


THOSE PESKY SQUIRRELS: I promised to report back on how the safflower worked, supposedly not liked by "most" squirrels. I put it out in a dish style feeder, in fairly easy reach just to see what would happen. Within a few days the feeder had been removed by Ulrike who found a squirrel happily sitting in the feeder, eating away. Of course this doesn't mean all squirrels like it, but it was disappointing. At the same time I had been experimenting with a suction cup feeder that I had affixed to the front window of the shop and filled with hulled, black-oil sunflower seeds. The squirrels helped me center the feeder on the window, as they would take turns shinnying up the window frame and reaching out until sometimes one would successfully grab on to the feeder. I would sneak around the corner with a cup of water and try to throw it on the squirrel, sometimes successfully (usually not), but apparently it wasn't much of a deterrent. Each time one would reach the seeds, I would try to adjust the feeder location until it was smack in the middle of the window. Still an occasional squirrel would get to it, sometimes knocking it off onto the ground.

I have to admit it was entertaining to watch the squirrels, and exciting to grab my "squirrel water," a cup I keep on my desk for such occasions, and go running out, but finally I had a bright idea. I tried putting the safflower in the window feeder and quickly found that the squirrels didn't like it well enough to expend the effort to try to reach it, because I haven't caught any of them trying to reach the window feeder since it was filled with safflower. I still have my squirrel water ready just in case!

Meanwhile the House Finches seem to enjoy the safflower, forced to be uncharacteristically polite and take turns at such a small feeder. I haven't noticed the titmice and chickadees at the safflower, but then they are currently in breeding mode and mostly they seem to prefer an insect diet while they're feeding their young. It will be interesting to see if they select the safflower with so many other choices available here at our McClellan Ranch Park office.

BACK TO THE SQUIRRELS: I just want to say that I'm not a mean person. I feed birds, (native ones, that is) because I want to help compensate for the loss of foraging habitat that most of them suffer as their native landscape is developed and otherwise changed by



humans. The gray squirrels in our residential areas are Eastern Gray Squirrels, and are not native to the western U.S. Their populations seem to be exploding in suburban neighborhoods and feeding them only exacerbates this trend. Like most animals, Gray Squirrels will breed to fit the local food supply, and if it is taken away they will adjust by stripping trees of fruit and eating other crops in residential yards. Offering them their own food supply may temporarily keep them away from your bird feeders. However, after talking to people who have fed squirrels, it appears that eventually they will multiply to the point where they'll be back after your bird feeders and many fruits and vegetables you might want to grow in your yard.

Squirrels compete with other native animals for their natural food supplies as well, including birds, another reason I don't encourage feeding squirrels. On thing I can't deny: They are cute. But beware!

Don't give up if squirrels are getting the better of you. We have a number of styles of baffles that we carry in the Nature Shop that can help. I have found that feeders hung from the eaves of a house with a baffle are impossible for squirrels to reach. Another thing that has worked well for me is hanging a feeder with a baffle at the end of a long tree branch well away from other branches so there is no way for squirrels to jump from the side. I expect to be trying some new feeder styles soon, so stay tuned.

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VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

by Ulrike Keyssner

I was thrilled to field a call from an *Avocet* reader who called within minutes of receiving her May edition responding to my request for volunteers. I could flatter myself and say her enthusiasm was in response to my scintillating column, but I rather think it is a reflection of our readers' interest and commitment to Audubon! I hope you will heed the call to volunteer.

In 1996 Doug Cheeseman kindly donated an illuminated slide cabinet that holds 5000 slides. Until recently it had lain virtually empty, but with a patient volunteer's help it has finally been loaded with our slides. We now need assistance labeling slides and fine-tuning the cabinet's reorganization. This job re-

continued on page 4

June - August 1999 Calendar

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

Wednesday June 2, 7:30 PM. Bay Area Bird Photographers presents Alan Walther with his slide program on the wildlife of Tanzania. Baylands Interpretive Center, E. Embarcadero Rd., Palo Alto.

****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 "unnamed" 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 Gloria LeBlanc, 240 Montclair Rd. Los Gatos (408) 266-0280. Bring a bag lunch and enjoy the birds at 15 feeders. **Note different meeting location.**

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

****Saturday June 12, 8:00 AM.** Half day. Anderson Lake County Park. Leader: Bob Reiling (408) 253-7527. From Hwy 101 in southern San Jose (Morgan Hill) take Cochrane Rd. east; meet at parking lot at base of dam. LO.

****Sunday June 13, 8:30 AM.** Half day. Charleston Slough. Leader: Roxie Handler (408) 730-1745. 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.

****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.

****Saturday July 10, 8:00 AM.** Half day. Charleston Slough. Leader: Nick Yatsko (408) 247-5499. 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.

****Sunday August 8, 8:30 AM.** Full day. Año Nuevo State Reserve. Leader: Mark Miller (650) 967-3429. Coastal specialties such as Black Swift, Bank Swallow, Marbled Murrelet and early returning shorebirds. Limit 20 participants; call leader to reserve space.

****Saturday August 21, 8:00 AM.** Half day. Charleston Slough. Leader: Nick Yatsko (408) 247-5499. Meet at Terminal Way at the end of San Antonio Rd. north off Hwy 101 in Mt. View. Trip geared toward beginning birders, but all are welcome to attend.

Cheesemans' Trips

Gail and Doug Cheeseman, Allen Royer, Aileen Bowden, Jim Danzenbaker and Al Jaramillo are leading a Monterey Bay boat trip for marine mammals and seabirds on Saturday August 28 from 8 AM to 3 PM. The boat will depart from Monterey Fisherman's Wharf, and will cost \$50 per person.

The Cheesemans also have space on their Alaska trip this summer, June 17 - July 2, including the Pribilof Islands, and on their Galapagos trip, which includes two full weeks on the islands. To reserve space on any of these trips call 1-800-527-5330 or (408) 741-5330.

New Nat'l Geographic Field Guide Available

The new 3rd edition of the very popular National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America is now available in our Nature Shop at McClellan Ranch Park in Cupertino. This is the field guide preferred by many birders, and the new edition contains updated changes in species' names, plus revised text and illustrations. Priced competitively at \$19.95; pick up a copy for yourself and perhaps a friend with a casual interest in backyard birds---turn them into a full-fledged birding fanatic!

Summer Bird Count *continued*

the things you find out about your immediate surroundings once you begin paying sharp attention. This spring, for example, some of the most interesting migrant birds have been showing up along San Francisquito Creek on the border of Palo Alto and Menlo Park—hardly a wilderness area, but a high-quality urban oasis all the same, and right in the middle of the count circle, too.

It's the little and ordinary things I often enjoy most about birding, and the vast and fascinating array of bird behaviors associated with the breeding season is especially entertaining. Most of the year, it seems like a great thing merely to glimpse a Brown Creeper or a Black-throated Gray Warbler. But during the first week of June, one may very well witness an entire family of fledgling creepers being tended by their parents on their first forays from the nest, and normally elusive warblers often let down their guard while eagerly foraging to feed their ravenous nestlings. Family groups of many species abound and provide first-rate viewing opportunities.

The Summer Count gives us all a reason to really notice these, as teams are encouraged to collect information on all breeding activities observed, by annotating the tally sheets with special breeding codes such as "NB" (nest-

building) of "CF" (carrying food). These will be used to compile formal records of the local breeding habits of local birds, and are useful in a variety of research, planning, and conservation efforts.

Bird counts are good for the birds, as they provide us with the kind of understanding that enables us to do a better job of protecting them. They're good for individual birders because they bring us joy and a great opportunity for learning. But they're good for the birding community, too, because it's a common cause we can all take a public part in.

We hope you'll take part in this year's Palo Alto Summer Bird Count, and become a regular for the next decade or two. To volunteer, or for more information, please call Garth Harwood at (650) 879-0724. Please indicate your ability level in bird identification (beginner, intermediate, advanced); degree of physical stamina; and preferred habitat type (mountain, foothill, suburban, or baylands). Highly-motivated children are welcome in some groups, but please be aware that many kids experience waning concentration after a couple of hours. Finally, last-minute placement may be difficult, so please call as soon as you're able. See you at the countdown dinner!

"We've been fortunate in the past two seasons to have unusually good viewing opportunities for the Pileated Woodpecker in Santa Clara County."

See Garth's column on the next page.

Sketch by Bonnie Bedford-White



Volunteers *continued*

quires some birding knowledge but could be completed by several people over time. An hour here and there is all it would take of your time. This would be a great way to brush up on your bird identification skills.

Do we have any catalogue shoppers out there? How would you like to peruse birding catalogues, choose items for purchase, excitedly unpack and display them, but never have to pay for them or think of where you can store them in your house? Our Nature Shop needs someone to help order and display inventory. This job would probably require a weekly commitment of a few hours minimum. If you are interested please call me (but don't tell Leda Beth, she loves this part of the job!).

Those of us who work at McClellan Ranch know what an enjoyable office it is to work at. After I park my car in the morning I check the top right side of the redwood at the start of the Creek Trail for Red-tailed Hawks. They like to sit there surveying the field for prey, I imagine. I also scan the field for any deer. When we get into the office our first priority of the day is to check the feeders and water bowls. Leda Beth has personalized a water cup for the squirrels, too, though they don't actually get to drink from it! Opening up the shop, checking messages, and kickstarting the computers are rituals that mark the start of another day; I can look forward to helping members of the public enjoy their environment and local birds. If this picture sounds interesting to you then give us a call. We would love to have some more volunteer help in the shop and office. Talking to visitors and answering the phones is always a great help to us and is a wonderful way to see how Audubon reaches into the community.

Of Local Interest

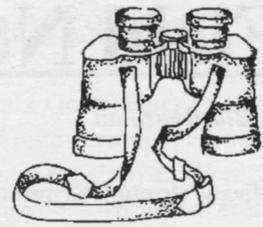
An occasional column on local birds and birders
by Garth Harwood

NOW THAT'S A WOODPECKER! The Pileated Woodpecker is the least common regularly-occurring woodpecker in the Santa Cruz Mountains. It can also be quite difficult to locate—despite a special interest amounting to a personal quest, it took me a couple of years to find a local bird. The effort is well repaid, however, when you finally get a good look at this spectacular species. Crow-sized, it's enormous for a woodpecker, and bears an outrageous peaked crest of fiery red above a boldly striped face and jackhammer bill. As you might expect, its foraging efforts leave behind a distinctive trail of massive excavations, many of which have a rectangular appearance with uncannily well-squared corners. Its favorite food is said to be carpenter ants in downed logs, so signs (or birds!) may be at ground level as well.

We've been fortunate in the past two seasons to have unusually good viewing opportunities for the Pileated Woodpecker in Santa Clara County. A 1998 nest at Table Mountain in the Upper Stevens Creek County Park occasioned a virtual pilgrimage of local birders, and has been immortalized by Alan Walther's spectacular photograph of nestlings jostling for food at the entrance hole on the cover of the most recent issue of *Field Notes* magazine. A couple of recent sightings have been reported in the same area this year. And for those willing to cross county lines for a good bird, there have been several recent sightings in my home neighborhood along Pescadero Creek in San Mateo County, including a pair's noisy fly-over of my house, which even got my unbinocularized family to look up with amazement.

A good excursion for Pileateds might include a stop at the bridge at Wurr Road near milepost 9.75 on Pescadero Rd., under which a pair of American Dippers has been dependable lately, followed by a walk up the Old Haul Road Trail in Pescadero Creek Co. Park. Parking for this trailhead is just a few yards farther up Wurr Rd. from the "dipper bridge". Pileated Woodpecker signs are evident in many places near Worley Flat, about a mile and one wet creek crossing from the trailhead, and you may get lucky much closer to the trailhead, as I did one recent evening when I saw a bird fly in overhead and settle onto a high branch in a dying fir tree and begin to remove bark and scavenge bugs at a rapid clip. Of course, there are other special birds to see as well. Wood Ducks are usually somewhere along the creek, if you are clever or fortunate enough to spot them before they spot you, and this area is also thick with Purple Finches, Band-tailed Pigeons, and Winter Wrens.

THANKS TO ALL OF YOU who responded to last month's column. I had solicited your input on several matters including reports on what birds are using nestboxes at your homes,



workplaces, etc. I've had an encouraging number of responses and look forward to more of the same for our annual report to be prepared next September. I also requested information on favorite, unlikely birding destinations, but alas, our deadline has arrived before your submissions—so look for them in an upcoming column.

On another matter related to last month's column, I had indicated that a picture of some 30 of our bluebird program volunteers would be appearing in the May/June issue of *Audubon* magazine. Well, it didn't, although I'd been assured that it would. So let's change that to "Keep your eyes peeled," as the piece will no doubt appear in an upcoming issue.

BUTTERFLIES: AN UNEXPECTED DIVIDEND of having finally gotten comfortable with binoculars. This spring I've been rediscovering the bugs I adored as a kid with a net running around in the open fields—yes, really, there were some back then—of Menlo Park. I bring this up because butterflies are even more seasonal than birds, and this is the time to see them on the wing.

The rumors are true: butterflies are much more fun to look at with binoculars, and you don't have to stick pins in them afterwards, either. Even so, your experience collecting field marks of birds will come in very handy. While some species, like the Tiger Swallowtail, are showy and easily identified; others, such as the blues, are the arthropod equivalent of Empidonax flycatchers. The SCVAS Nature Shop sells a very handy laminated folding guide, "Local Butterflies of the San Francisco Bay Area", and has more detailed, book-format field guides as well.

Any creekside area may be good for butterflies, but the best area I've found yet is Henry Coe State Park. While attending the Park's annual Orestimba Weekend in late April I found Sara Orangetips, Anise Swallowtails, Large Marbles, Propertius Duskywing, Green Hairstreak, Chalcedon Checkerspot, California Ringlets, and a number of more familiar species such as Mourning Cloak and Monarch. McClellan Ranch Park in Cupertino is better than average for an urban park, as well, and remains the only place I've yet found the Common Checkered Skipper. Slow birding day? Just adjust your binocs to a close focus and lower your gaze a bit . . .

Garth Harwood, M.A., M.B.S., serves as Santa Clara County coordinator for the CA Bluebird Recovery Program. He can be reached at <GarthHar@aol.com> or at 5901 Pescadero Rd, Pescadero, CA 94060.

Field Notes

by Bill Bousman

Pelicans through Skimmers

Eleven **American White Pelicans** on Salt Pond A1 in Mountain View on 13 Apr (WGB) were unusual for spring. Small numbers of **Cattle Egrets** have been found at the Arzino Ranch this month (v.ob.) with a peak count of five on 14 Apr (KJF). A **Greater White-fronted Goose** found at the Arzino Ranch in March was seen again on 20 Apr (SCR) and was there regularly through the end of the month (v.ob.). The immature **Ross's Goose** that has been at the Coyote Creek Riparian Station (CCRS) pond over the last few months was seen in April (v.ob.) with the latest observation on 25 Apr (MJM). Two pairs of **Blue-winged Teal** were in the Sunnyvale Baylands Park on 4 Apr (SCR) and another pair was in the Palo Alto Flood Control Basin (FCB) 17-23 Feb (m.ob.). A male **Redhead** was found on the CCRS pond on 20 Apr (RWR, FV) for the first observation this year. A male **Hooded Merganser** at the Arastradero Preserve on 3 Apr (GO) was apparently the season's last.

Six reports of **Osprey** near local reservoirs this April was about typical for recent springs (m.ob.). An adult **Golden Eagle** in the Alviso area through 20 Apr (RWR, FV) was late for a wintering bird. One was occasionally seen in this area last summer. The last **Merlin** of the season was a female or immature bird at the San Jose-Santa Clara Water Pollution Control Plant (WPCP) on 23 Apr (SCR). Always rare in the spring, two **Lesser Yellowlegs** were at the Arzino Ranch on 17 Apr (TGr, VT) and one was seen there again on 20 Apr (RWR, FV, SCR) and was seen there at least through 26

Apr (m.ob.). This is the first spring record I have for this rare migrant that is normally found only in the fall. Nearly as rare, a **Stilt Sandpiper** in its breeding finery was found on the San Jose-Santa Clara WPCP ponds on 17 Apr (NL) and remained until at least 20 Apr (RWR, FV). An adult **Little Gull** was found near the San Jose-Santa Clara WPCP on 21 Apr (SCR), apparently in conjunction with the spring migration of Bonaparte's Gulls. The small flock

April brought a plethora of near megararities: Pectoral and Stilt Sandpipers, Little Gull, Blue Grosbeak, and Great-tailed Grackle

of **Black Skimmers** at Charleston Slough has apparently remained through the month (m.ob.).

Roadrunners through Flycatchers

A **Greater Roadrunner** has been found in the Santa Teresa Hills 12 and 24 Apr (JMa, AV) where there are few recent records. Single birds were also found near Coyote Creek above Hellyer CP on 20 Apr and in the vicinity of Blossom Hill Road and Hwy 101 on 21 Apr (both *fide* LBG). The Alum Rock Park **Northern Pygmy-Owl** story unfolded in April as observers found two birds in the Rustic Lands area on 2 Apr (RH) and by 11 Apr it was clear that there was another pair at the other end of the park near the Youth Science Institute (LCh et al.). The normal migration of **Vaux's Swift** occurred later this year and with fewer birds. Three

over Lockheed-Martin in Sunnyvale on 22 Apr (MMi) were both the first birds and a high count. A male **Black-chinned Hummingbird** at Almaden-Quicksilver CP on 14 Apr (RWR et al.) was the first of the season and was likely a migrant. A male found the next day near Coyote Creek above Hellyer CP (MJM) was near the edge of where birds nest. **Calliope Hummingbirds** are truly rare migrants so a male at Henry Coe SP on 2 Apr (BBr) is of considerable interest. The first

Rufous Hummingbird report of the season was a bird at a Los Gatos feeder 2-8 Apr (DBr). Reports of three other males (v.ob.) were quite a bit fewer than recent springs. The report of two **Lewis's Woodpeckers** in San Antonio Valley on 24 Apr (MMi) was good news after a winter when they were absent. A **Red-breasted Sapsucker** along Alamos Creek below Graystone on 17 Apr (JMa et al.) was quite late for this winter resident. A **Pileated Woodpecker**

was seen on Table Mountain on 25 Apr (DL), near where they nested last summer. Two **Hammond's Flycatchers** were found at Smith Creek on 24 Apr (MJM, LCh et al.) and another was found below Coit Camp in Henry Coe SP on the same day (MMR). A tail-less **Say's Phoebe** at Joseph Grant CP on 24 Apr (LCh et al.) was quite late for a wintering bird; they are a rare breeding bird in the Diablo Range.

Nuthatches through Goldfinches

There was a fair spring movement of **Red-breasted Nuthatches** moving through the county. Singles were found at Ed Levin on 2 Apr (FV), in Los Altos on 4 Apr (JLi) and 12 Apr (GHt), along Alamos Creek on 12 Apr (JMa), and near the IBM plant on Cottle Road on 28 Apr (HMCD). At least one **Canyon**

continued next page

Field Notes *continued*

Wren has been found in Alum Rock Park with observations on 3 Apr (TGr, VT, AV), 10 Apr (MJM et al.) and 17 Apr (JM et al.). One to two **American Dippers** have been found along Stevens Creek above Mt. Eden Road in April (v.ob.) and another bird was found upstream from Twin Creeks on 24 Apr (JMa, AV). Paralleling the Red-breasted Nuthatch movement, perhaps, single **Golden-crowned Kinglets** were found at Rancho San Antonio OSP on 1 Apr (JLi) and Alum Rock Park on 11 Apr (LCh et al.) and two were along Coyote Creek below Hwy 237 on 17 Apr (NL) and quite late. A **Nashville Warbler** along San Francisquito Creek on 3 Apr (MD) may have been the bird seen nearby in March. Additional birds were found at Rancho San Antonio OSP on 22 and 29 Apr (JLi) and at Smith Creek on 24 Apr (LCh et al.). The only migrating **Hermit Warbler** found this spring was also at Smith Creek on 24 Apr (LCh et al.). A **Sage Sparrow** was singing north of San Antone Junction on 24 Apr (MMi) in an area where they breed commonly in some years. Seven to ten **Grasshopper Sparrows** were found in the Silver Creek Hills 13-14 Apr (SCR) and one was singing at Arastradero Preserve on 21 Apr (GHa). Wintering **White-throated Sparrows** were last seen at two Los Gatos feeders on 13 Apr (GL) and 20 Apr (JD). Other individuals were seen at McClellan Ranch Park on 18 Apr (AV et al.) and in a San Jose yard on 19 Apr (PB). A 1st-year male **Blue Grosbeak** returned to Ed Levin CP on 25 Apr (MMR, AME). They attempted to nest at this location last spring. A female **Great-tailed Grackle** was a short-time visitor to Almaden Lake Park, being seen there only on 17

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

Field Trip Reports

Del Puerto Canyon/Mines Rd. May 1

On the SCVAS field trip to Mines Road and Del Puerto Canyon we had Western Kingbird and calling Grasshopper Sparrows at approx. 0.3 miles from I-5, a male Costa's Hummingbird, a female Black-chinned Hummingbird, a pair of Phainopepla, a Rock Wren, lots of Loggerhead Shrikes and Bullock's Orioles near a huge rock on the south side of Del Puerto Canyon Rd. (the rock, a known Great Horned Owl nesting site in recent years, showed signs of recent owl occupation), a Green Heron further up the creek, a pair of

Apr (FV, JMa et al.). **Lawrence's Goldfinches** have been found in small numbers with one at Lake Cunningham on 15 Apr (SCR), six in San Antonio Valley on 24 Apr (MMi), and two in Henry Coe SP on 24 Apr (GHa). Three **Evening Grosbeaks** were a surprise at a Morgan Hill feeder in late March and early May (fide PC).

Corrigenda: The six Common Loons seen at Calero Reservoir on 20 Feb should have been credited to AME.

Observers: Peg Bernucci (PB), Bill Bousman (WGB), Barry Breckling (BBr), Deborah Brouwer (DBr), Les Chibana (LCh), Pat Curtis (PC), Matthew Dodder (MD), Jean Dubois (JD), Al Eisner (AME), Karl J. Fowler (KJF), Leda Beth Gray (LBG), Tom Grey (TGr), Rick Herder (RH), Garth Harwood (GHa), Grant Hoyt (GHt), Gloria LeBlanc (GL), Nick Lethaby (NL), David Lewis (DL), Jim Liskovec (JLi), Mike Mammoser (MJM), John Mariani (JMa), Hugh McDevitt (HMcD), Mark Miller (MMi), Joe Morlan (JM), George Oetzel (GO), Bob Reiling (RWR), Mike Rogers (MMR), Steve Rottenborn (SCR), Vivek Tiwari (VT), Frank Vanslager (FV), and Ann Verdi (AV).

Lawrence's Goldfinches in the creek in the off-road portion of Frank Raines Co. Park, and a Canyon Wren further up the canyon. All of the aforementioned sightings were in Stanislaus County.

The only "good" birds we had in Santa Clara Co. were a pair of Wood Ducks in the pond just east of "the junction" and a single Lewis' Woodpecker just south of the junction. Lots of Golden Eagles and birdwatchers were seen in both counties.

—Bob Reiling

McClellan Ranch Park April 17

On Saturday April 17 Dave Cook led a group of new SCVAS members on a bird walk around the perimeter of McClellan Ranch Park along the riparian corridor of Stevens Creek. We enjoyed a nice combination of resident birds, spring-time migrants, and lingering wintering species.

Orioles were back in force, as we saw several Bullock's Orioles with nests under construction along the creek. A Hooded Oriole was seen as well. Other spring arrivals included Northern Rough-winged Swallow, Warbling Vireo, and Pacific-slope Flycatcher. Soon-to-depart winter birds included Yellow-rumped Warbler, Golden-crowned Sparrow (in handsome breeding plumage), and Pine Siskins at the feeder by the office porch. Resident species were well-represented--Western Bluebird, Nuttall's Woodpecker, Red-shouldered Hawk, Chestnut-backed Chickadee, Oak Titmouse, Belted Kingfisher, and Song Sparrow. Finally, our "bird of the day"---an unexpected White-throated Sparrow seen in the willow shrub.

What a fine introduction to our local birds in just a couple of hours. If there is continued interest, we will offer similar introductory outings for new members throughout the year.

---Ann Verdi

Humdingers on Birdathon Blitz . . .

Once again the intrepid Humdinger team took the challenge of spotting 100 species of birds and then surpassed their goal for the 1999 SCVAS Birdathon fundraiser.

Starting at 6:15 AM at McClellan Ranch Park in Cupertino, we recorded our first bird of the day: a Barn Owl at the water tower. Our list got off to a great start with Western Bluebird, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Black-headed Grosbeak, Lesser Goldfinch, one lonely Yellow-rumped Warbler and both Bullock's and Hooded Orioles. Down by the orchard a Red-tailed Hawk swooped by as a Steller's Jay chattered at us.

On to Stevens Creek County Park. Mark was "all ears" as he identified the songs of many birds tucked away in the dense foliage. Frank kept his amazing Questar Scope hot as we located them. Heather spotted a Merlin, and Frank pointed out a Band-tailed Pigeon. Other finds were: Cassin's Vireo, Warbling Vireo, Yellow Warbler, Western Wood-Pewee, Purple Finch, Pacific-slope Flycatcher, Wilson's Warbler, Western Tanager, Lincoln's Sparrow and an Orange-crowned Warbler. Frank took the team on a seldom-used trail that led us to the dam spillway. We stopped momentarily to admire an oriole's nest made of fish line and green Easter basket grass and then moved on for more birding.

Shoreline Lake offered some Ruddy Ducks, Lesser Scaup, a Surf Scoter and one zillion coots. Our next stop was Charleston Slough where we watched a Northern Har-

rier chase Least and Western Sandpipers as well as some Semipalmated Plovers. A few ducks hadn't started their migration, so we saw Northern Pintail, Green-winged Teal, Cinn-

Now it's time for our sponsors to do their job—send in their pledge dollars to SCVAS. This year's Birdathon proceeds will be dedicated to the Bay Restoration Project, as



Sandy Cortright's digital camera recorded The Humdinger Team: Frank Vanslager (and his fabulous scope), Mark Miller, Heather Rottenborn and Sandy Cortright. They spotted 113 species by 2:30 pm, surpassing their goal of 100 species!

mon Teal, Northern Shoveler and Gadwall. On the tiny island in the bay side there were several American Avocets, Black-necked Stilts, and Black Skimmers. A Western Grebe fished nearby. In the forebay we observed Barn Swallows collecting mud for nests, a lone Western Kingbird, a Virginia Rail and an American Goldfinch.

The next stop was Palo Alto Duck Pond and Baylands. A Wood Duck, Greater Scaup, Greater White-fronted Goose and a Glaucous-winged Gull were added to the list. Sandy spotted a Willet and a White-crowned Sparrow. Across the road, we saw Black-bellied Plovers, Whimbrel and Bonaparte's and Mew Gulls.

Our final stop was near Moffett Field where we saw a Burrowing Owl standing guard over its home. By now it was 2:30 PM and we had surpassed our goal and reached 113 species. A job well done!

well as ongoing SCVAS wetlands education programs. If you haven't made a contribution to the 1999 Birdathon, won't you consider sending a check to SCVAS, 22221 McClellan Road, Cupertino CA 95014? Contributions are tax-deductible. If you've already donated to ours or one of the other Birdathon teams--Thanks!!

---Sandy Cortright, Mark Miller, Heather Rottenborn, Frank Vanslager



... Spiderhunters Prowl the County ...

The Spiderhunters (Vivek Tiwari and me) did a Santa Clara County Big Day on April 20 and managed to see 121 species between 7 AM and 6 PM. No real rarities were encountered, but we tallied a nice cross-section of County birds.

We started, as we traditionally do, at Stevens Creek Park, where we found our first Cassin's Vireos of the year (several singing). We also had Pacific-slope Flycatcher, Wilson's Warbler, and Purple Finch as well as the expected Orange-crowned Warbler and Warbling Vireo. From there we went to McClellan Ranch, where we found Nick Lethaby leading a group. With their tips, we managed to find Hooded Oriole and Pine Siskin; Bullock's Orioles were also present.

On to Ed Levin Park (along I-680 we had White-throated Swift at an over-

pass) where a Tree Swallow was on Sandy Wool Lake and Rufous-crowned Sparrow and House Wren in the sycamore grove up the hill. From there we went up Sierra Road, where the summit provided our best single stop of the day, yielding a Rock Wren, a Horned Lark flock, a couple of Lark Sparrows, Savannah Sparrow (singing), Western Kingbird, and a lone flyover Long-billed Curlew.

We travelled up Mount Hamilton Road as far as Grant Ranch Co. Park, which was very quiet in early afternoon, but with an immature Golden Eagle overhead. We decided to skip Smith Creek, and so missed our chance at the Solitary Sandpiper seen there that morning by Al Eisner. Back down to Alviso, our best birds there were two Lesser Yellowlegs in the Arzino Ranch field next to the church parking lot.

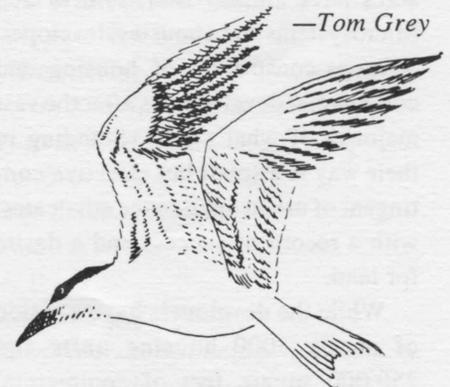
We also had our only Ring-necked Pheasant and a couple of ducks that aren't gimmers at this late date—Northern Pintail and American Wigeon—but no Cattle Egret, no Burrowing Owl, no unusual shorebirds, raptors or gulls.

Onward to Shoreline Park, where the Black Skimmers were on the slough and both Eared and Horned Grebes (many of the former in alternate plumage, and two of the latter in early moult) were on the lake. Two Semipalmated Plovers were in the forebay, where Black-crowned Night Heron used to be guaranteed—no more. And apart from the grebes, the lake was almost empty—no goldeneyes or Bufflehead, for instance.

We ended our day at Palo Alto Baylands, where a late afternoon falling tide produced vast numbers of shorebirds, a great treat. No rarities, but more Semipalmated Plovers and a lone Whimbrel, along with all the expected species, most in good numbers and in alternate plumage. Bonaparte's Gulls, Wood Duck, Greater White-fronted Goose and Glaucous-winged Gull rounded out the day's total.

Noticeable "dips" ['misses' of expected species—Ed.] included Yellow-rumped Warbler, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Hermit Thrush, and both accipiters.

—Tom Grey



A Caspian Tern, the largest of the Terns, was seen by The Wrong Tern Team—*"The saying is true: one good tern deserves another."*

sketch by Bonnie Bedford-White

... Wrong Terns "Retern"

Return of the Wrong Terns — Part VIII

Another great Birdathon day for the Wrong Terns!! It turns out that the Wrong Terns found their way home without too many wrong terns this time. However, we did lose a few Terns to other events and so the challenge was on Elaine, Allen and Bobbie to find 60 species and we did great—we promised to see 60 species and we ended up with 69.

We broke with tradition and birded the hills behind the Handen's house in Los Gatos. Here we were joined by Carl Handen for the first two hours as we climbed the new Open Space-to-be. We saw 26 species including California Quail, Northern Flicker, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Spotted Towhee and Band-tailed Pigeon.

Next we moved on to Lake Almaden where we were joined by friendly Canada Geese who were looking for handouts (we terned them down). We were rewarded at the Water Company with a

wonderful view of a Green Heron—truly magnificent!

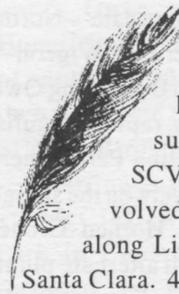
Keeping with tradition we terned to Charleston Slough for our remaining birds and were not disappointed. The avocets were in prime breeding plumage and busy arguing over nesting territory, the Western Sandpipers appeared rufous with the sun kissing their fresh breeding plumage, and the many Black Skimmers that gathered on their little island were a highlight for us. Of course we saw terns! We welcomed Caspian and Forster's Terns to the Wrong Terns' day list.

It terned out to be a beautiful day. The saying is true: one good tern deserves another. We want to thank all of you who have supported our team with your generous donations. Because of your help, we will continue to support existing programs, and will contribute to the new Bay restoration project.

---Bobbie Handen, Elaine Gould and Allen Royer

More Open Space For Santa Clara?

by Craig Breon
Environmental Advocate



As regular *Avocet* readers will know, one of the most successful campaigns SCVAS has ever run involved the old golf course along Lick Mill Boulevard in Santa Clara. 40 acres of open space, worth perhaps \$20 million, were saved from the bulldozers and instead will become the city's first and only open space preserve. In addition to the actual victory on the ground, the campaign spawned People for Open Space in Santa Clara (POS), a local advocacy group formed by Audubon members.

Well, they're at it again! People for Open Space and SCVAS are now in the early stages of a campaign to see that the Agnews site—the last large open space in the city—~~save~~ some open land while developing for commercial and residential uses. There's 150+ acres being considered, and we've asked that as many as 50 acres be set aside.

Background

The Agnews site is owned by the State of California. Originally more than 300 acres of surplus land, 100+ acres have already been sold to Sun Microsystems and a housing developer. A mega-consortium of housing and commercial developers is after the vast majority of what's left. Standing in their way is a small but effective contingent of urban open space advocates, with a record of success and a desire for land.

While the developers have a vision of nearly 3000 housing units and 250,000 square feet of commercial space, the environmentalists want land near the Guadalupe River and a home for the two or three pairs of Burrowing Owls now inhabiting the site. This

land, unlike most of the Valley, was intended for open space and public uses until 1996, when the state legislature decided to sell it off. Comprised of grasslands and a few areas of larger trees, local residents moved in with the expectation that the land would remain open space amidst the cacophony of Silicon Valley.

The City of Santa Clara is desperate for a shopping center in this region of town, where there are no large grocery or convenience stores. In addition, Santa Clara has far more jobs than housing opportunities, and thus hopes to ameliorate the imbalance. That's understandable, but so is the desire for a little open space amidst suburbia—a small breathing space for local residents, high-tech workers, or even passers by on Montague Expressway who currently enjoy the open vistas—a patch of sanity.

People for Open Space--- Our Heroes

No less than an urban dynamo, this local advocacy group has developed into one of the most effective little political machines in the Valley. Founded to advocate for the city's first nature preserve, the group has gone on to successfully support environmentally oriented candidates in two elections (something which Audubon cannot do due to our tax-exempt status). As a result, the issue of urban sprawl versus urban open space has come to confront the Santa Clara City Council head on.

Formed from a former labor organizer, a member of the Audubon Environmental Action Committee, a few fed up high-tech workers, a local teacher, and a representative of the North American Butterfly Association, People for Open Space seems to carry weight now with the council. In April, the council held a study session on the

preliminary plans for the Agnews site, and a number of council members sympathetically spoke of the need for open space to be part of the plan.

Time to Act

Especially if you're an Audubon member in Santa Clara, but even if you're not, now is the time to weigh in on this issue. The two most important acts you could take are:

- Write to the Santa Clara City Council and let them know that urban open space is vital for our quality of life. Allowing for some open space on the Agnews site would reduce traffic in the area (Montague Expressway is already a horror), enhance the regional trail system along the Guadalupe River, give a little breathing space for the Burrowing Owl and riparian bird species, and offer visual relief from the pavement and metal landscape on the Valley floor. Their address is:
 - Mayor Judy Nadler and Council Members, 1500 Warburton Avenue, Santa Clara, CA 95050. Use this article to form your letter. Even a couple paragraphs, taking only ten minutes, would be of great help.
 - Contact People for Open Space and offer your help, in time or dollars. Call Paul and Linda Barnett at (408) 243-7001. They will be happy to field your questions and get you involved.

The Tag Line

If you've ever wanted to be involved in a local environmental victory, I recommend trying out the Agnews campaign. People for Open Space and SCVAS have a track record of success in Santa Clara, and I'm really hoping we can build on it here.



Reduce, Re-use, and Recycle---at Annual Potluck

by Mary Ann Leer
and Jules Resnick

On June 16, SCVAS members will gather at McClellan Ranch Park for our chapter's annual potluck dinner. There will be good food and good conversation while we celebrate the past year's accomplishments and prepare for the exciting challenges the new millennium is sure to bring. And by the end of the evening, most of us will do some decidedly anti-environmental work.

How? By using the paper plates, napkins, and plastic utensils provided. The paper is a limited resource; the plastic is both limited and nonrenewable. With the possible exception of the utensils, which we can take home, wash and re-use, all these items are put in a plastic bag (another limited and nonrenewable resource) to be dumped in a landfill. Certainly, using these materials briefly and then tossing them in a landfill is contrary to the environmental ethics supported by Audubon and other green groups! The effect may not be large, but it is cumulative, and does affect the environment negatively.

Here's what we do instead: bring our own plates and utensils (real, not plastic), drinking vessels, and cloth napkins. Nothing's perfect---everything needs to be washed, but we save on natural resources and don't contribute trash to a landfill. Two people doing this makes a small difference. All of us at the potluck doing this would make a much larger difference. Everybody doing this at every potluck, no matter where, would make a significant difference.

So come to the potluck, bring your own place setting, leave the trash containers empty, and take home memories of an enjoyable evening.

Silent Auction Book List

SCVAS is holding a silent auction of books from our library. Following are some of the 127 titles available. The entire list is accessible on our website (www.scvas.org), or may be picked up at our office in Cupertino. Books will be available for inspection during regular nature shop hours (10-6 M-Th, 10-5 F, 10-2 Sat) and during the annual potluck dinner on June 16. Top bidders will be determined on that evening and will be able to claim their books at that time. Bids will be accepted by e-mail, regular mail, fax, and in person.

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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

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

1999, Volume 46, Number 6

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