



THE AVOCET

The Newsletter of the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society

November 1999

A Community in Transition

Signs of Hope In Santa Clara

by Craig Breon

I was shocked with joy when I heard a Santa Clara City Councilwoman say—toward the end of a recent five-hour Council meeting—“We have a responsibility not only to ensure that our city is fiscally sound, but that we are an example to our region in protecting natural resources.” Two things in particular struck me: 1) that a councilperson in the midst of Silicon Valley’s boom would utter such a statement with complete conviction; and, even more so, 2) that on this city’s council it wasn’t even a minority opinion.

Something’s happening in Santa Clara that we should all pay attention to. To the surprise of many, a local city is taking its first, faltering steps towards a balance of growth and preservation. In a region

formerly known as the “Valley of the Heart’s Delight,” a combination of citizen activists and a compassionate city council can protect and pay homage to our natural history while accepting the realities around us.

Santa Clara now seems to believe in urban open spaces . . . in their value to wildlife and our own peace of mind . . . in the right we should all have to maintain a little wildness around us. Mind you, they haven’t “gone green,” but they are light-years ahead of San Jose, Sunnyvale, Milpitas, and nearly all our valley-level cities. For three years I’ve observed the Council’s transition, and in my poetic mind I almost see it as metamorphosis.

Indeed, it has been a fascinating metamorphosis to follow. I would say it all began with one woman—Clysta Seney, then Vice President of SCVAS—but that bypasses the truth. It really begins with

the feeling so many of us have that it’s simply wrong to degrade our quality of life and the landscape around us for the superficial illusion that growth and wealth bring happiness.

Still, Clysta was the spark, and deserves a place in our chapter’s pantheon for that spark. Parts of this story have been written before; regular readers of *The Avocet*, please bear with the repetition that follows.

In the summer of 1996, a development deal fell through on 40 acres of city-owned land along the Guadalupe River in Santa Clara. Though the land was part of an old golf course grown wild, Clysta’s annual Bird-A-Thon team recognized it as the most bird-diverse spot left in a city grown over with pavement and steel. She came to me and suggested SCVAS mount a campaign to declare the area the city’s first and only nature preserve. Given the land values, I gave us about a 10% chance of saving a portion of the land, but she was persistent, so I said yes.

We sent a letter to the 200 or so Audubon members in Santa Clara, ask-

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**General Membership Meeting
Wednesday Nov. 17
“Raptors of California---
Simplifying Identification”
with Jim Lomax
Palo Alto Cultural Center
Embarcadero & Newell Rds.
7:30 Hospitality 8:00 Program**

Tonight’s presentation features local raptor expert Jim Lomax with an entertaining and informative slide-lecture on the identification of local birds of prey by using only one or two field marks. A former president of Mt. Diablo Audubon, Jim has studied raptors with Golden Gate Raptor Observatory and with the Lindsay Museum raptor rehabilitation program. He has also worked with Mt. Diablo’s Peregrine Project, helping reintroduce Peregrine Falcons to Contra Costa County. He has given over 200 slide shows on birding over the last 10 years. Join us tonight as Jim shares his knowledge and passion for raptors with SCVAS.

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VIEW FROM THE OFFICE

by Leda Beth Gray



I just had a nice vacation to the Olympic National Park and northwest Washington. It is a spectacular place, but unfortunately it is hard to ignore the clearcuts in many areas around the Park. There are no roads across the interior of Olympic National Park, which I think is great—a wonderful reserve for native species habitat and hikers. But this

means that a person who wants to visit different parts of the park by vehicle ends up driving through a lot of forest areas that have been clearcut between the 1920's and today. This was a rather strange experience for me as a National Park visitor. Still, it brings home a very real message about some of the effects that increasing population pressures are having on that area of the west. It also reminds me that I am having trouble entering a new age where it seems that most lands, including public lands, are required to produce something tangible for people. Of course, this is an issue that we wrestle with here at home.

While I was gone, Ulrike and some of our wonderful volunteers filled in at the Nature Shop. Craig also finds the time to assist customers who stop by when he is the only one around. Ulrike has also been helping on a regular basis once a week, as I have not been working full time during my interim position at SCVAS. I just want to say that I am very grateful, as is the Board of Directors, to Ulrike for taking this on to help us out during this interim period. And to Craig, for taking time out of his unbelievably busy schedule, to interact with customers and assist them with purchases—thank you. We are very lucky to have such generous-natured employees.

Speaking of my interim position, at the time of this writing, we are thrilled to have several very strong candidates for the position of Office Manager. We hope to have someone hired by November and, although I will miss working at SCVAS (Craig and Ulrike have assured me that I am welcome as a volunteer), I am very glad that our dedicated staff will soon have full-time support in the office.

The Nature Shop just received a shipment of jewelry—Spear label pins to be exact—and a shipment of Wild Bryde earrings should be here by the time this newsletter comes out. Both Spear and Wild Bryde are known for their wonderful representations of particular species of birds and other animals. Where else can you get Spotted Towhee, or Belted Kingfisher earrings, or find Great Blue Heron and Laysan Albacross pins? We also have insects and butterflies among our new pins, so please stop in and check them out.



VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

by Ulrike Keyssner

I know there are many members who are thinking about volunteering, so don't forget the **Volunteer Pancake Breakfast** on Saturday, November 13th. All potential volunteers are invited to attend this scrumptious event which will begin with a bird walk. This your opportunity to talk to Board members, SCVAS staff, and volunteers about ways you can join our team. Please RSVP to me by Wednesday the 10th.

Now that Autumn is here I'm regularly hearing from the Board and office volunteers, "It's *that* time of year." Ignorant of the meaning (I thought this comment must refer to the Fall birding season), I was enlightened---it's time for our annual Fall Fundraiser, when we *hand-address* 4000 envelopes! Yikes! Luckily, I understand that our volunteers are quite capable of handling this Herculean task, so please regard this as a simple reminder that we need your help again. This is a job you could do at home while watching "The Life of Birds" on PBS, for example. If you're available, please give me a call.

Thanks to Charles Preuss and new volunteer Jerry Kaminski for offering to help us with our computers. Our entire computer system consists of donated hardware and software, some of it quite old and in need of updating to make it more serviceable to our growing needs, so their assistance is gratefully appreciated.

We have two other projects at Audubon which need dedicated volunteers. Dina Scheel has been reconciling our accounts once a month, and we truly appreciate all her work in keeping us honest. We need someone with accounting experience to replace her. We use Quickbook for Macintosh; 3 to 4 hours a month is all that's required. We're hoping to entice Dina to stay involved with our education programs; she has a lot of passion for this.

Our other job vacancy is that of Library technician. Long-time volunteer Joyce Chang has been running our library for several years and is ready to pass the torch. Joyce has generously offered to train her replacement, so inexperience is not a problem. The time commitment is about 3 to 4 hours every two weeks and, as with most of our jobs, times are flexible. Joyce will be a tough act to follow, but the rewards of this job include being named as a Chairperson of SCVAS. Please call me or Leda Beth if you're interested.

November 1999 Calendar

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

Wednesday Nov. 3, 7:30 PM.

Bay Area Bird Photographers presents Eleanor Briccetti with a slide program on her travels in Bhutan. Lucy Evans Baylands Interpretive Center, E. Embarcadero Rd., Palo Alto.

****Saturday Nov. 6, 8:00 AM**

Palo Alto Baylands Park/Duck Pond. Half day. Leader: Bob Reiling (408) 253-7527. From Hwy 101 take Embarcadero Rd. east to the end, turn left, drive past Duck Pond and park in lot near Baylands Nature Interpretive Center. Gulls, ducks, shorebirds, possible migrants/vagrants. **RC.**

****Sunday Nov. 7, 8:30 AM**

Stevens Creek County Park. Half day. Leader: Frank Vanslager (408) 257-3647. 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. Our chance to see what's in the park in the fall for a change. **LO, RC.**

Tuesday Nov. 9, 9:30 AM

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: Screech Owl.

Saturday Nov. 13, 8:00 AM
Pancake Breakfast Social
at McClellan Ranch Park
for all current and prospective
volunteers. Pre-breakfast bird
walk to build your appetite; then
watch SCVAS Board members
flip flapjacks. RSVP to Ulrike
Keyssner at (408) 252-3747

****Wednesday Nov. 10, 9:00 AM**

Campbell Perc. Ponds/Los Gatos Creek. Half day. Leader: John Arnold (650) 948-4250. From I-280 take Winchester Blvd exit, then east on Hacienda, left on Dell and right into park. Entrance fee; easy 2-mile walk. **LO, RC.**

****Saturday Nov. 13, 8:30 AM**

Charleston Slough. Half day. Leader: Roxie Handler (408) 730-1745. Meet at Terminal Way at end of San Antonio Rd. north off Hwy 101 in Mt. View. Birding geared for beginners, but all levels welcome. Bring your spotting scope.

****Sunday Nov. 14, 8:30 A.M**

Jasper Ridge Biological Preserve, Stanford University. Half day. Leaders: docents. Limit 24 participants by reservation only. Call Bob Reiling at (408) 253-7527 to reserve space. \$5 fee per person. Meet at Preserve gate (not Whiskey Hill gate). Gates open 7:40 to 8:10 AM only. From I-280 take Sand Hill Rd. west 2 miles to main gate on left. Moderately strenuous walking, 2-3 miles. **Trip goes rain or shine.**

****Wednesday Nov. 17, 9:00 AM**

Pescadero Marsh & State Beach. Leader: Sue James (650) 348-0315. Meet at first parking lot south of bridge over Pescadero Creek on Hwy 1. Beautiful estuary offers excellent birding; low tide encourages shorebird activity. Loons, grebes, ducks, terns, marsh birds.

****Saturday Nov. 20, 8:30 AM**

Hayward Regional Shoreline. Half day. Leader: Mark Miller (650) 967-3429. Meet in parking lot at western end of W. Winton Ave. off I-880 in Hayward. Highlights: wintering ducks, shorebirds, larks, pipits, shrikes and sparrows.

****Sunday Nov. 21, 8:00 AM**

Alum Rock Park. Half day. Leader: Al Eisner (650) 364-3686. From Hwy 101 or I-680 take Alum Rock Av. north-east toward hills and into park. Turn left

at entrance kiosk at bottom of hill before bridge; meet in first parking lot near Rustic Lands area. Moderately strenuous 3 to 4 mile walk. Possible entrance fee.

****Saturday Nov. 27, 9:00 AM**

Calero Reservoir, Alamos Creek. Half day plus. Leader: John Mariani (408) 996-9863. From Hwy 85 go south on Almaden Expwy to end, turn right on Harry and immediately left off McKean to boat ramp at Calero Res. Variety of waterfowl, shorebirds, raptors, songbirds.

****Saturday Dec. 4, 8:30 AM**

Ogier Ponds. Half day. Leader: Bob Reiling (408) 253-7527. From Hwy 101 in Morgan Hill take Cochrane Rd. west to Monterey Hwy, turn right and go north 2.6 miles. Turn right toward model airplane park, follow road to gravel lot at bend in road. **RC.**

****Sunday Dec. 5, 8:00 AM**

"2-4-1" short trips. Leader: Gloria LeBlanc (408) 378-1412. First trip, to La Rinconada Park, starts at 8 AM. From Winchester Av. in Los Gatos go west on Wimbledon Dr., left on Wedgewood, then 1.3 miles to meeting place at Granada Way. Second trip, to Oka Ponds, starts at 9:45. From Winchester, go east on Lark Av., left on Oka Rd. and park near end. Lunch at Gloria's back yard among her bird feeders. Easy walking; **RC.**

****Wednesday Dec. 8, 8:30 AM**

Grant Ranch Co. Park. Half day. Leader: Alan Thomas (408) 265-9286. From I-680 take Alum Rock Av. north-east, turn right on Mt. Hamilton Rd., then approx. 9 miles to park. Meet at Hall's Valley Lake parking lot on left, just past park entrance. Freshwater ducks, oak woodland birds, possible Golden Eagle. Moderate 2-mile walk. **LO, RC.**

****Saturday Dec. 11, 8:30 AM**

Grant Ranch Co. Park. Half day. Leader: Alan Thomas (408) 265-9286. See directions under Dec. 8 listing above.

Morgan Hill-Calero Bird Count Kicks Off New Millenium

by John Mariani

This winter heralds the beginning of what will hopefully become a holiday tradition in Santa Clara County. Assuming Y2K doesn't bring the end of civilization, the first annual Morgan Hill--Calero-Christmas Bird Count will take place on Sunday, January 2, 2000.

A few oldtimers may remember the short-lived Morgan Hill CBC, which was last conducted in 1984. The new count circle includes part of the old Morgan Hill circle, but has been re-centered near Calero Reservoir to encompass a wider range of habitats and birdlife.

When Ann Verdi, Grant Hoyt, Mike Rogers and I met earlier this year to plan the new count, one of our top priorities was selecting an area with a good variety

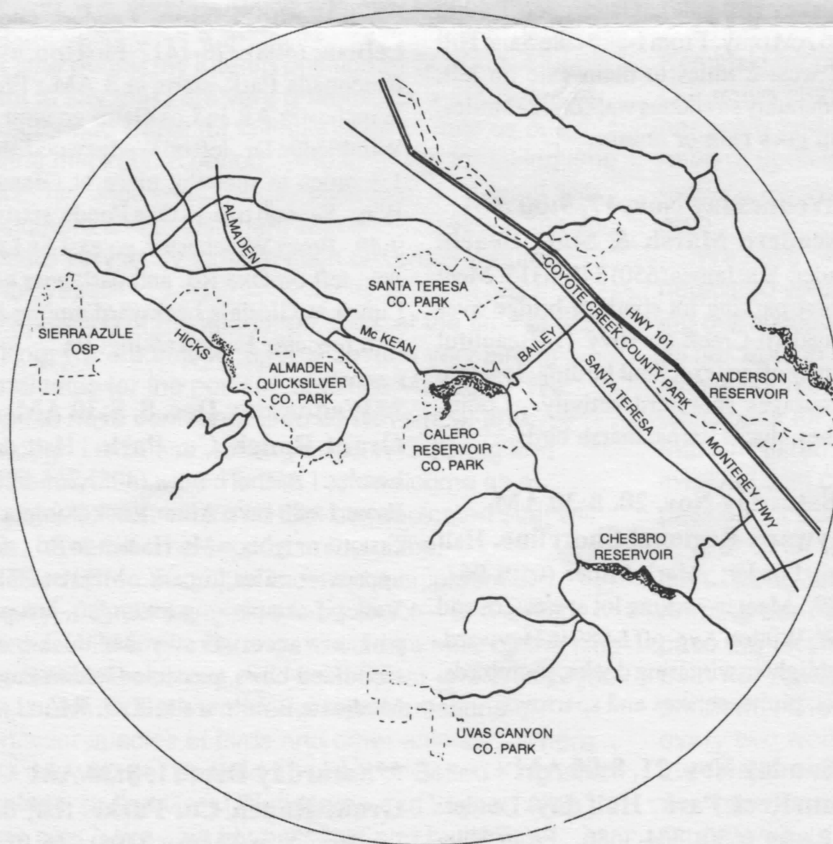
of habitats and bird species. If variety is the spice of life, then this is one spicy count circle! Its range of habitats includes oak savanna, oak-conifer and riparian woodlands, redwood forest, chaparral, grassland, agricultural fields, ponds and reservoirs, and freshwater wetland. Public roads, parks, and trails give us open access to most sites.

Local birders will recognize many of the place names within the new count circle. They include Calero, Chesbro, Almaden and Guadalupe Reservoirs; the northern half of Anderson Reservoir; the Parkway Lakes; Cottonwood Lake, the Ogier Ponds, Almaden Lake and the SCVWD pond; Coyote Creek from Hellyer upstream to Anderson Reservoir;

Alamitos and Llagas Creeks; Shady Oaks Park (hopefully the Eastern Phoebe will come back for another winter!); all or parts of Almaden Quicksilver, Santa Teresa, and Uvas Canyon County Parks; parts of Sierra Azul Open Space Preserve; the summit of Loma Prieta; and the western flanks of the Hamilton Range to the summit of Mt. Misery.

In order to make this count a complete success we need plenty of eyes and ears out there on Count Day—the more the merrier! This is your invitation to join in an event that promises to be both a valuable census of south county birdlife and great fun for all participants. Birders of all experience levels are encouraged to take part, and feeder-watchers are also welcomed. Many areas still need party leaders. For details, and to be assigned an area to cover, contact John Mariani at (408) 997-2066; e-mail at redknot@pacbell.net.

Mark your calendars now for South County's first big birding event of the new millenium!



This map is a close approximation of the count circle for this exciting January 2nd CBC Count! Although some of the smaller details listed in John's article were too small to draw, there are a lot of interesting habitats that need to be covered. Because it is a new area, we could really use some help from not only the experts in our chapter, but from beginners as well. There is something for everybody on a CBC Day!

-BB-W assistant to Ed.



“Scope on Membership” Answers Your Questions

by Debbie Thompson

Do you have a nagging question about our Chapter that you’d like answered? We’re starting this monthly column to help you solve the mysteries of your local Audubon Society. We’ll also use this space to present tidbits of Chapter facts that you may find interesting. Watch for announcements of upcoming members-only programs, too. We’d also like to get out among our members and conduct some interviews to help you get to know each other.

We’ll start taking your questions immediately. Send a question to us via e-mail at scvas.scvas.org mentioning Scope on Membership. Send questions by mail

to Scope on Membership, 22221 McClellan Road, Cupertino, CA 95014. Please leave a phone number where we can reach you. We’ll try to print all questions and responses in the next month’s *Avocet*.

And by the way, we still need volunteers on our Membership Committee. We are sponsoring several different projects that could fit into anyone’s busy schedule. Contact me, Debbie Thompson at (408) 227-4604 if you want more information.

So keep your eye on this new monthly feature. You won’t want to miss any of the surprises we have in store for you!



EAC Needs YOU!

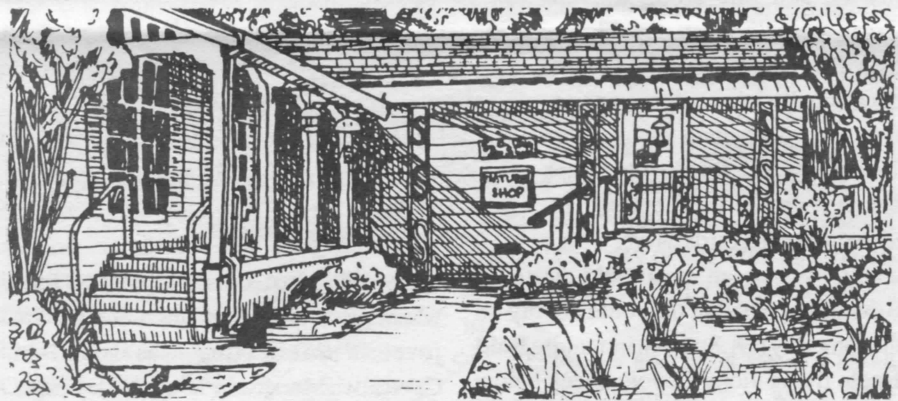
Want to help save bird habitat in the South Bay? The SCVAS Environmental Action Committee is a dedicated group of conservation-minded birders who work with Environmental Advocate Craig Breon on local issues such as protecting wetlands, riparian corridors, and oak woodland from development. And there’s no shortage of “hot spots” in Santa Clara County needing help. If you can volunteer your time and energy to this worthy group, call Craig at the office. Meetings are usually on the second Wednesday of each month at 7:30 in our Cupertino headquarters at McClellan Ranch Park.

Sequoia Audubon Extends an Invitation!

Sequoia Audubon of San Mateo County has invited SCVAS members to their Christmas Potluck and Bair Island Program on December 9th. The program will feature Clyde Morris, Refuge Manager at Don Edwards S.F. Bay National Wildlife Refuge. He will present a slide-lecture on “Bair Island Refuge Update and Docent Program.”

What a great way to meet our Audubon neighbors to the north—learning about their hot environmental issues, favorite birding locations, and, of course, the latest news on Bair Island, site of one of our region’s greatest environmental victories. The potluck begins at 6:30 PM, with a short meeting, then featured program.

Bring your favorite dish to the dinner, with enough to feed 5-10 people, plus your own plates, cups, and utensils. Those with last names beginning with A-F should bring a dessert; G-L a salad; and M-Z a casserole or hot dish.



Drawing of SCVAS office at McClellan Ranch Park drawn by Han-Yu Loo

Just a reminder!
Here is a great place
to begin your
holiday shopping!



Field Notes

by Bill Bousman

Bitterns through Raptors

An **American Bittern** seen on the Ogier Avenue ponds on 11 Sep (RWR et al.) was either a local breeding bird or an early wintering arrival. An adult **Little Blue Heron** on the Alviso salt ponds on 6 Sep (HMcD et al.) was the last of the season. Two **White-faced Ibis** were in wet fields northwest of Zanker and Hwy 237 on 1 Sep (SCR) for only our second record this year. Three female or immature **Blue-winged Teal** on the North Pond of the Palo Alto Flood Control Basin (FCB) on 9 Sep (SCR) were the only ones found this month. Single **Ospreys** found in September included birds seen at the Ogier Avenue ponds on 2 Sep (SCR) and 10 Sep (RWR, FV), one over Santa Clara on 17 Sep (SCR), and one along Stevens Creek near the bay on 23 Sep (MMR). **White-tailed Kites** are occasionally late nesters so an active nest with young first seen on 19 Sep (MJM) on Coyote Creek below Hwy 237 is of interest. Interestingly, 42 birds, a very high count, were seen in a field north of Bloomfield Road in the south county on the same day (DLSu). An immature **Bald Eagle** flying along Coyote Creek below Hwy 237 on 22 Sep (AJ) was a very rare transient. Following last month's surprising **Swainson's Hawk** over Coyote Creek below Hwy 237, a different bird, an immature dark morph, was seen on 22 Sep (AJ). An immature **Ferruginous Hawk** southeast of Bloomfield and Frazier Lake roads on 24 Sep (DLSu) is very early for this rare wintering hawk. Early **Merlins** for this fall included one just over the county line in the Ravenswood OSP on 11 Sep (LCh et al.) and a female/immature in Palo Alto on 20 Sep (DSt).

Shorebirds through Terns

A juvenile **American Golden-Plover** was well seen in the Sunnyvale Water Pollution Control Plant (WPCP) ponds on 2 Sep (MMR). Not well seen, a juvenile "Lesser" Golden-Plover near the CCRS waterbird pond on 12 Sep (NL) was probably this species. The ponds at Spreckles and State in Alviso again held the high count of **Lesser Yellowlegs** this fall with 41 counted on 14 Sep (SCR). Six **Red Knots** were found on the Alviso salt ponds on 2 Sep (NL). Ten to 12 birds were on the Ravenswood OSP 4-11 Sep

September's excitement is often shorebirds and vagrant passerines—this year a Buff-breasted Sandpiper held up the shorebird end, but was outweighed by two Least Flycatchers, a Virginia's Warbler, a Northern Parula, and a Lark Bunting.

(LCh, NL), just over the county line, where they are more often found. A juvenile **Sanderling** was found in Crittenden Marsh on 12 Sep (NL). Single juvenile **Semipalmated Sandpipers** were seen at the Sunnyvale WPCP ponds 2-5 Sep (SCR, ME et al.) and another juvenile was north of the Alviso Marina on 7 Sep (SCR). Unaged birds were reported from the CCRS waterbird pond on 12 Sep (NL) and the Mountain View Forebay on 17 Sep (JAC). Two - four **Baird's Sandpipers** were found on the San Jose-Santa Clara WPCP drying ponds 5-18 Sep (NL). A single bird was in the fields northwest of Zanker and Hwy 237 on 12 Sep (JS *vide* SBT). Another bird, on Calero Reservoir on 21 Sep (JMa) was quite unusual for this inland reservoir.

Pectoral Sandpipers have had a good flight this fall. The largest concentration has been in wet fields northwest of Zanker and Hwy 237 from 2-23 Sep (v.ob.) with high counts of 47 on 13 Sep (SCR) and 60 on 18 Sep (NL). Smaller numbers have been found in various South Bay locations (m.ob.), including one to four birds inland at Calero Reservoir 9-27 Sep (JMa, AV). It has again been an excellent fall for **Stilt Sandpipers**. An adult was first found at the ponds at Spreckles and State in Alviso on 1 Sep (SCR) and may have been the same bird found at the Calabazas ponds last month. This bird was joined by a juvenile on 12 Sep (JS *vide* SBT) which remained there at least through 20 Sep (SCR). The adult was seen regularly (m.ob.) through 26 Sep (TGr). A bird at Crittenden Marsh on 6 Sep (NL) was probably the one found there in August. Single juveniles were found in the fields northwest of Zanker and Hwy 237 on 8 Sep and in Alviso on 13 Sep (both SCR). Single adults were at the Palo Alto FCB on 9 Sep and the Calabazas ponds on 15 Sep (both SCR). A juvenile **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** found northwest of Zanker

and Hwy 237 on 7 Sep (SCR) is the fifth county record. A **Red Phalarope** in mostly basic plumage was at the Sunnyvale WPCP ponds on 2 Sep (SCR) for an unusually early fall record.

Two 1st-winter **Franklin's Gulls** were found at the Palo Alto Duck Pond on 5 Sep (DLSu). One was found fairly regularly in the pond and the Palo Alto estuary from 19-27 Sep (MDo, v.ob.). Two **Elegant Terns** heard calling from the salt ponds north of Crittenden Marsh on 3 Sep (SCR) were the only ones found so far this summer and fall. Our best year ever for **Common Terns**, one to eight birds were at the Sunnyvale WPCP ponds 2-17 Sep (v.ob.). Most of these were basic-plumaged birds, but single juveniles were found on 6 Sep (JMa) and 8 Sep (SCR).

Field Notes *continued*

On the latter date, seven basic birds were seen as well for a high count for the fall (SCR). A single bird was also on Salt Pond A12 in Alviso on 7 Sep (SCR). A juvenile **Black Tern** on the Sunnyvale WPCP ponds 2-3 Sep (SCR, MMR, NL) closed out the rare tern month for the South Bay. For the first September since the **Black Skimmer** invasion in 1995, none were reported in places they've used in recent years.

Owls through Orioles

A **Northern Pygmy-Owl** was found in Hidden Villa on 11 Sep (GHa), an area where they are resident. A **Short-eared Owl** found hunting in a fallow field north of Bloomfield Road on 23 Sep (DLSu) is the earliest record I have for this rare wintering species. Good numbers of **Vaux's Swift** on their fall migration were found in September, particularly in the vicinity of Alviso (v.ob.). Peak counts were 85 birds in Alviso on 4 Sep (NL) and 60 at Meridian and Coleman on 19 Sep (AV). Fall **Willow Flycatchers** were found through the month (v.ob.), mostly in local riparian areas. A peak count was of eight along Coyote Creek below Hwy 237 on 4 Sep (MJM) and numbers dropped rapidly after that. A single bird in the same area on 24 Sep (MMR) was the last one noted. Honors for rare empid of the fall was **Least Flycatcher**. The first bird was found on 20 Sep (SCR) along Coyote Creek below Hwy 237 and was found again the next day (NL, MMR), but not after that. A second and distinctly different bird was found on 23 Sep (SCR, MJM). An immature **Purple Martin** was found at the Sunnyvale WPCP ponds on 5 Sep (MJM) for an unusual fall record. A **Bank Swallow** was seen at the same ponds 2-8 Sep (SCR, MJM, MW). On 5 Sep a second bird, a juvenile, was observed (MJM).

A **Nashville Warbler** was seen along Coyote Creek below Hwy 237 on 23 Sep (MJM). This western warbler is a very rare migrant locally in the fall. A

Virginia's Warbler was found in the fennel at the Palo Alto Baylands on 13 Sep (SCR) and seen again later that day (MMR, MJM), but not after. This is the second county record for this "western" warbler that breeds in the montane west and southwest. Just as rare, a **Northern Parula** was found along Coyote Creek on Sycamore in Milpitas on 21 Sep (SCR), our third county record and the first for the fall season. The first **Townsend's Warbler** of the season was at the Alviso Environmental Education Center on 16 Sep (SCR). An immature female **Hermit Warbler** at the Sunnyvale WPCP on 12 Sep (MJM) was a rare fall migrant. In the south county, an immature **American Redstart** was found along Llagas Creek below Bloomfield on 24 Sep (DLSu). Another of the eastern vagrants, an **Ovenbird**, was found along Guadalupe River above Montague on 10 Sep (SCR, SBT).

A **Chipping Sparrow** was seen along Coyote Creek at Sycamore in Milpitas on 21 Sep (MMR). An immature **Lark Bunting** was found along Zanker Road, north of Hwy 237 on 18 Sep (NL) for our fourth county record. Fall migrant **Grasshopper Sparrows** are always of interest. This month a single bird was along Coyote Creek below Hwy 237 on 6 Sep (NL) and one to three birds were at Jasper Ridge on 12 Sep (RGJ). A female **Hooded Oriole** with two dependent fledglings lingered late along Stevens Creek above Crittenden with the young seen as late as 16 Sep and the female still there the next day (MMR, WGB).

Observers: Bill Bousman (WGB), Jack Cole (JAC), Les Chibana (LCh), Matthew Dodder (MDo), Mark Eaton (ME), Tom Grey (TGr), Garth Harwood (GHa), Alvaro Jaramillo (AJ), Richard Jeffers (RGJ), Nick Lethaby (NL), Mike Mammoser (MJM), John Mariani (JMa), Hugh McDevitt (HMcD), Bob Reiling (RWR), Mike Rogers (MMR), Steve Rottenborn (SCR), Dick Stovel (DSt), Jeff Seay (JS), David Suddjian (DLSu), Scott Terrill (SBT), Frank Vanslager (FV), Ann Verdi (AV), and Michael Wienholt (MW).

Field Trip Report

Hawk Hill Sept. 25

I attended Don Schmoltdt's field trip to the Marin headlands and Hawk Hill and enjoyed another incredible birding experience. For those of you who are unfamiliar with "the Hill," here is some background: In the late 1970's, some local birders discovered the presence of thousands of migrating raptors concentrated on the north side of the Golden Gate Bridge throughout the fall season. These birds would funnel down to the tip of the Marin headlands and then zoom over the Golden Gate on their way to various southern climes.

For the past 13 years, the Golden Gate Raptor Observatory has monitored the hawk migration, and numerous birders have enjoyed thrilling views of buteos, falcons, and especially the accipiter hawks, Cooper's and Sharp-shinned. On this sunny Saturday I watched the GGRO volunteers, split into four teams watching the North, South, East and West quadrants of the sky, call out their hawk sightings to a recorder. So we had Don and his terrific knowledge of hawks, surrounded by dozens of other birders and GGRO hawk-watchers, all contributing to a fantastic day of studying and identifying the hawks flying over and around us.

Between 9 and noon we saw about 500 hawks, the majority of which were immature Sharp-shinned. We had a few dozen Cooper's and 30 Broad-winged Hawks, a west coast rarity only seen in these numbers at Hawk Hill in the fall. Also logged were 3 Osprey, 2 Merlin, several Red-tailed and Red-shouldered Hawks and six American Kestrels. The

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

New NGS Field Guide Reviewed

by Grant Hoyt

Birders who are anticipating the publication of the "perfect" U.S. field guide will have to wait. The recently-released third edition of National Geographic's *Field Guide to the Birds of North America* does have some flaws. Having made this acknowledgment, however, I would strongly encourage birders of all levels to invest the \$20 in this valuable and improved bird guide.

The expanded staff of writers, artists, editors, and consultants (including such local worthies as Nick Lethaby and Al Jaramillo) has significantly improved the third NGS edition over the second, a highly-acclaimed and widely-used field guide in its own right. Birders and ornithologists have been busy in the past decade, though, and new taxonomical designations alone warrant the purchase of the 3rd edition. As frustrating as the American Ornithologists Union's name-changing may be to the average birder, we are—grudgingly, at times—obliged to abide by their designations for the sake of consistency. Thus the birds I grew up knowing as White-tailed Kite and Green Heron, both of which changed names in the 1970's, have now reverted to their "original" names. And our local backyard jay is now the California Scrub Jay; the Plain Titmouse is now Oak Titmouse . . . and so on.

The NGS 3rd edition includes nomenclature changes up to 1998. Of course, we birders know that more changes will inevitably come; that's why we keep buying new field guides. With the advent of more sophisticated genetic technology, it's likely that even more startling taxonomical rearrangement will occur.

As birding increases in popularity, active birders make more exciting dis-

coveries of rare, vagrant species showing up in unusual locations. This new NGS guide includes full descriptions and plates of most of these rarities, increasing the book's value to the keen-eyed and energetic chasers and listers among the population of birdwatchers. Remember the Brown Shrike of a few

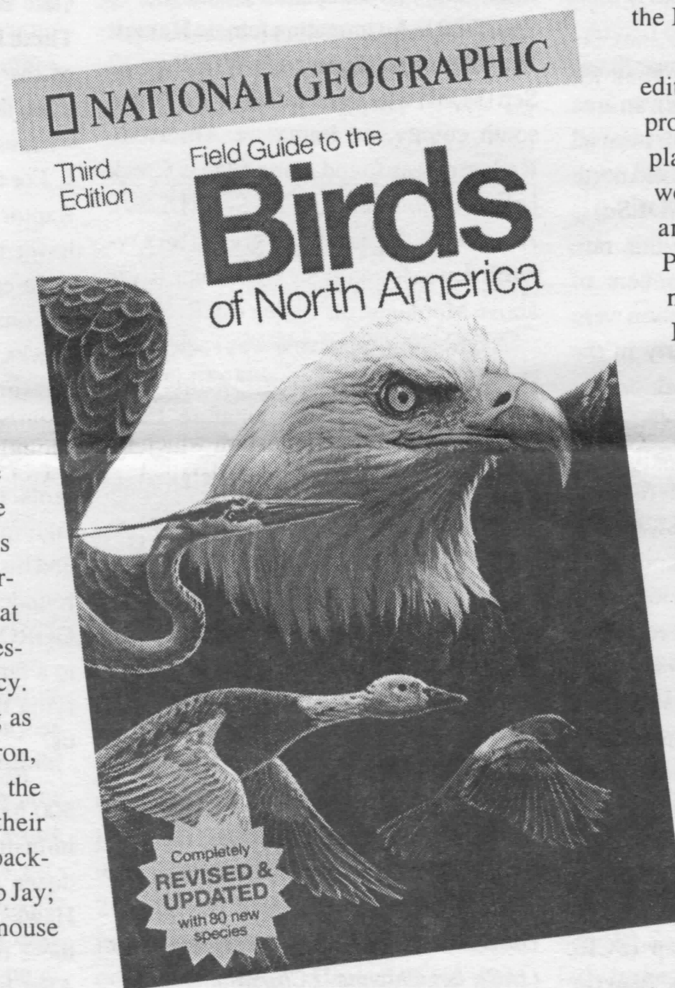
It's probably worth the extra pages (this book is noticeably thicker than the 2nd edition, but can still be carried easily in the field) describing these rarities. You just never know when you'll see a Middendorff's Grasshopper-Warbler in your back yard, and need to compare it to the *kennicotti* race of Arctic Warbler in fall plumage to be sure of the I.D.

The illustrations in this new edition are, for the most part, improved. Many of the 2nd edition plates, such as the ducks and wood warblers, were excellent, and were wisely left alone. Plates that needed improvement, like the Red-shouldered/Broad-winged/Gray Hawk illustration, are noticeably better. I also enjoyed the addition of extra plumage, subspecies, and in-flight illustrations added to some plates. The dowitchers, thrushes, vireos, sharp-tailed sparrows and others have valuable new plates to aid in tricky identifications of "split" species and other toughies.

The color reproduction is different in several plates, and I wonder how much is intentional or a matter of coincidence. The 2nd edi-

tion immature gulls in flight plate has a brownish feel, whereas the new edition's version of the same plate is much grayer. As those of us who enjoy studying subtleties of plumage know, the gray-brown spectrum is often tough to describe, much less paint. That's why it's a good idea to keep your old editions of NGS. After comparing the two editions

continued on next page



years back, seen by hundreds of eager birders? How about the Orange Bishops that popped up in South Bay marshes over the past few years, causing much confusion to those armed with only North American field guides? Now they're covered in the National Geographic.

Field Guide *continued*

and making your own observations, you may conclude that some of the older plates are actually more accurate. In general, I like the color reproduction in the new edition; however, there are always exceptions—the Ruby-crowned Kinglet on pg. 308 is a little too brown, not green enough; the same goes for the Pacific-slope Flycatcher on pg. 292. Again, the green-brown continuum is a tough one to represent in illustrations, but mostly I think they've done a good job here.

The exceptions to the generally accurate quality of the plates are the disappointing tanagers, orioles, towhees, and flycatchers. Just look at the overly chubby Baltimore Orioles on pg. 442 and the porky Spotted Towhees on pg. 398. And the *myiarchus* flycatchers on pg. 296 have a strange feel to them, particularly with regard to posture, head-shape, and slope of neck and back. I frankly can't see how the Spotted Towhee plate got past the editing; the bird just isn't that fat.

Overall I give this new edition high marks for keeping up with the changes in bird identification over the past 10-15 years, and coming out with an improved, field-friendly guide that's a must for anyone with more than a passing interest in birding. If you're a beginner, read the very informative introduction; become acquainted with the families and groups of birds, field identification tips, etc. If you're a veteran birder, compare the plates, range maps, and descriptions with your own observations. For my money, the NGS is still the best overall guide out there, but I still refer to Peterson, Audubon, and other guides. As I mentioned, the "perfect" field guide has yet to be published.



Beginning Bird Class

Metropolitan Adult Education in San Jose will be offering another beginning birding course this winter. This class, taught by John Mariani will meet on Thursday Evenings from Dec. 2 - Jan. 20 (with a break for the holidays) and will also feature at least 4 weekend field trips. Subjects include optical equipment and field guides, local habitats, basic bird identification, difficult species groups, where and when to find birds, and observation techniques. Fee is \$59 plus \$3 for materials. To register call MetroEd at (408) 723-6553.

Hawk Hill *continued*

most unusual raptor was an immature Bald Eagle, apparently the earliest one ever recorded on the Hill.

The most noteworthy non-raptor was a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher that hovered like a hummingbird as we observed it.

Thanks to Don and fiancée Sally for sharing your expertise with us on this gorgeous day. It was very "Brigadoonish" watching San Francisco and the Golden Gate Bridge come in and out of the fog. Our skies were blue all day on the Hill, above the fog.

Central Valley Birding Symposium, Stockton CA November 18-21

In last month's newsletter, we highlighted the Third Annual Central Valley Birding Symposium which is held in Stockton. A more detailed brochure just arrived and here are some of the topics that will be presented.

Thursday evening: John Kemper, who recently authored *Birding Northern California*, will be speaking about his favorite California Birding Hot spots.

Friday evening: Rob Hansen, a refuge manager and wildlife consultant in the San Joaquin Valley, will speak about "Birds of Tulare Lake and Tulare Valley;" including rare footage of the region from over 40 years ago when there was still a lake!

On Saturday, presentations will include the distribution of birds in the Central Valley, Tule Geese, Barn Owls, and a luncheon discussion

between Jon Dunn and Kimball Garrett about *North American Birds* jointly published by the National Audubon Society and The American Birding Association. Later, Jon Dunn will discuss Flycatcher identification and Kimball Garrett will discuss "Exotics" including their challenges to bird identification. Our own Ed Rooks will be teaching a drawing class as well. The day ends with Paul Lehman, a tour leader for WINGS, as the keynote speaker.

This is a great opportunity to hear famous birding experts, see outstanding photography--and even go on field trips ---all in nearby Stockton. After attending last year, my only regret was that it was impossible to attend everything! Call (209) 369-2010 or E-mail ffoliver@ucdavis.edu for more information.

-BB-W, assistant to Ed.

Santa Clara in Transition *continued*



ing them to come to a Council meeting. Only 3 or 4 showed up, but luckily one of those was Paul Barnett, who had some previous organizing experience and quickly worked up a passion for the idea. He and his wife Laura soon founded People for Open Space in Santa Clara, a community group that grew from a few Audubon members to a local political force with a mailing list rivaling our own.

At that first council meeting we won delay, meaning the city agreed to wait awhile before selling the property. We then set in motion a true grassroots organizing effort. Jeanne Leavitt from SCVAS's environmental action committee asked me for a project to sink her teeth into; I suggested Santa Clara. Eventually, she and I and a few others went door-to-door hundreds of times over with a message: "Don't Bulldoze the Trees and Fill the Ponds—Help Create Santa Clara's First Open Space Preserve." Meanwhile, People for Open Space (POS) hosted weekly walking tours of the site, showing up to 40 people at a time the restoration potential of the site

In addition, POS began to get involved with local politics. Due to our non-profit tax status, Audubon had to cease financially supporting POS when they made this decision, but entering local politics turned out to be critical to their long-term success. They interviewed candidates and endorsed those who believed in the preserve. They advertised those endorsements in the local paper. They walked precincts for their candidates and went to almost every public forum held in the city, asking questions about the open space. Two pro-open space candidates were elected, and that gave us a shot at success.

Newsletters were distributed, letter-writing campaigns followed, and allies were sought. Besides such typical allies

as the Sierra Club, a key friend emerged in the American Indian Alliance, who backed the open space preserve because the land had a long history of occupation by the Ohlone people, and because they were looking for a site for a Native American cultural center.

With the groundwork laid, we brought our people to the public hearings. Thanks to the intelligent and passionate words of some 35 open space advocates, to a motion advanced by Councilman and Audubon member John McLemore, to Mayor Judy Nadler's heartfelt speech about her road to politics, and to the last-minute change of mind of Councilwoman Pat Mahan (perhaps thinking of her own young son's surprise at finding a river in their city when she took him to the site), in late January of 1997, at around 11:30 PM, a narrow 4-3 vote created what has since become the Ulistac Natural Area, Santa Clara's first, but not its last, open space preserve.

The next key was our decision not to simply declare victory and disband. The activist core we had established kept meeting, with steadfast volunteers like Chris Salander working on the Master Plan for Ulistac, a vision filled with the promise of new wetlands, riparian forests, the cultural center, and a modest trail system. With foresight, POS continued working the local political scene. Another council race came and went, and again pro-open space candidates were elected. On a council of 7, there are now between 4 and 6 favorable votes, depending on the issue.

The group eventually decided to work on other issues—victory tends to inspire ambition. In particular, we are calling for open space on the state-owned Agnews site and, at the urging of newly enthused activists like Jan Hintermeister, decrying the loss of Burrowing Owl habitat in the city. Both issues have been reported on recently in *The Avocet*, so I'll just give a short update here. While we lost a lot of

good owl habitat in a recent development decision, the council agreed to find more replacement land than was legally required of them, and they set up an owl subcommittee to see how much of that land could exist within the city's boundaries. On Agnews, six council members have spoken out for open space, so we're pretty sure that some will be provided, despite the fact that a powerful consortium of three development companies bought the land from the State for \$1.2 million per acre.

SCVAS and People for Open Space have been a consistent presence at council meetings, and that persistence is paying off in statements such as the quote that opened this article. We are now taking on the future development plans of Mission College, which also has Burrowing Owls, and are working with another small community group to try and save a small patch of agricultural land owned by the UC Regents.

The lessons here are strong. SCVAS relies greatly on my work and those of a few dedicated volunteers to tackle development issues across the County. While often effective, we certainly lose more than we should, and perhaps more than we need to. If we could instead help foster local advocacy groups like People for Open Space, and see such groups proliferate and maintain a presence throughout the Valley, the sustained commitment would inevitably bear fruit.

If, in reading this, you feel inspired to start or join such a local activist community in your area, give me a call at the office. My experience in Santa Clara has taught me that from one or two good people, an effective movement can emerge, so I would love to hear from you.

Just in case the Councilmembers of Santa Clara should read this, let me end with these words of encouragement from Mr. Robert Frost:

*"Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference."*

Off-leash dogs? Not in our parks!

by John Mariani

If you've spent much time birding or hiking you have probably had a few unpleasant (or even scary) encounters with off-leash dogs. Virtually all of our parks and public open spaces are under regulation by leash ordinances, but the rules are commonly ignored, even where signs are conspicuously posted. This is not to say that most dog owners aren't responsible. Most are, but there is a sizeable minority that is not.

The problem isn't ignorance of the law. In most cases it is willful violation by individuals who don't think it's such a big deal, and don't believe that anyone will actually issue them a citation. Unfortunately, they are probably right about that. Off-leash dogs are not a law-enforcement priority. Officers are seldom present to issue citations—I have noticed that dog owners who let their dogs roam off-leash usually do so where there is little or no enforcement, and at hours when they know ranger patrols are scarce.

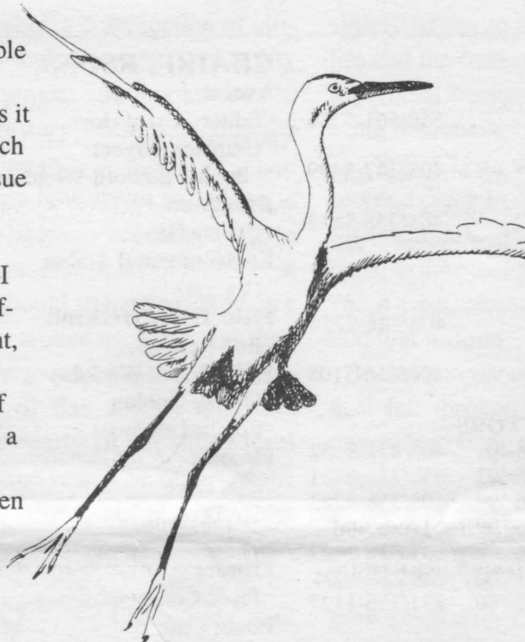
So why should this concern us? There are a couple of issues involved. First and foremost, public safety. Even a good-tempered dog can react aggressively when it feels threatened. A dog bounding around a bend in a trail, when suddenly and unexpectedly confronted by a person, may attack out of fear and surprise (I could tell you a story or two!). Since both birders and leash-law violators often share the same trails, and dogs tend to run ahead of their owners, this scenario is not hypothetical. Our paths do cross; even collide.

Of equal importance, dogs instinctively pursue wildlife, and even when they don't, their unrestrained presence tends to panic other creatures. This past summer, while walking

along the Mountain View Shoreline Park, a fellow birder and I watched a woman repeatedly throwing a stick into the slough for her dog to fetch, oblivious to the alarmed cries of

the terns and shorebirds that had abandoned their nesting island only a few yards away. And the area was clearly posted.

Locally there is also a problem with hunting dogs being trained in our public parks and wetlands. Again, this is usually done in areas where rangers infrequently go, and at times when they are not likely to be on



duty. Those who would like to legitimize off-leash dogs are pressing the city of Mountain View to designate an area near the Bay as a "dog park" which would have serious environmental consequences, threatening a Burrowing Owl population already squeezed by development.

So what to do about it? There's no point in confronting irresponsible dog owners—they are usually fully aware of what they're doing. The answer, I believe, is to gently pressure law enforcement to take the leash laws seriously. When I see a violation, I now make a point of telling the rangers about it. By reporting violations we witness, and making our concern known, those charged with enforcement may be moved to adopt a zero-tolerance attitude toward scofflaws. Only then will irresponsible dog owners finally get the message.

As birders we can use our growing numbers and power to make the outdoors a more pleasant place for ourselves, the wildlife we cherish, and yes, even responsible dog owners. Let's take back our trails!

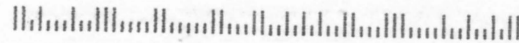
Editor's note---John Mariani is an active, experienced birder, wildlife artist, field trip leader, and birding class instructor. His opinions as expressed here are his own, and do not represent an official position by SCVAS. We welcome your feedback, pro or con, on this or other opinion pieces.



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

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